



The method of exploring racism in Zootopia (2016)

Rafly Pratama Putra ✉, Universitas PGRI Madiun

Aris Wuryantoro, Universitas PGRI Madiun

Vita Vendityaningtyas, Universitas PGRI Madiun

✉ rreptilemadiun@gmail.com

Abstract: This research attempts to find out kind of racism and the method used to explore racism in Zootopia Movie. This research is conducted in order to answer the research questions, “How does *Zootopia Movie* exploring racism?”, and to analyze the method of exploring racism in *Zootopia Movie*. The subject of this research movie entitled Zootopia (2016) produced by Disney, directed by Byron Howard and Rich Moore. The researcher using qualitative method for the research. The data are collected from the movie Zootopia as a primary data and related journals as a secondary data by using Documentation technique. The researcher using sampling technique and content analysis technique to analyze data. The result of analysis the data confirmed that Disney use transportation imagery model, representation, theory of mind, and reception to explore racism in *Zootopia Movie* that are applied from the beginning of the movie to the middle of the movie, *Zootopia Movie* manages to convey the message quite well, this is proven by the response from the *Zootopia Movie* audience who understands the content of the message.

Keyword: Racism, Movie, Animation, Zootopia



BACKGROUND

Movie is one of the media for entertaining and educational media for the community. It is undeniable that movie also have its own platform as a media to convey a message or even as a media for communication. Movies are not only for entertaining purposes, but also for conveying social issues that occurred at that time or history, but this is inversely proportional to the fact that animation for children should contain joy and happiness.

Disney always raises social issues in their animation, even Disney clearly warns its viewers about negative portrayals, and persecution of people or culture in their old movies such as *Dumbo Movie* 1991, *Peterpan Pan* 1953, and *Aristocat* 1970. Meanwhile, racism in *Zootopia Movie* can be seen from the injustice for minorities in there, because the majority are described as prey who are protected by institutions, which triggered predators to take action or resistance movement to ask for equality from the government.

There are several previous studies related to Racism in *Zootopia Movie*. The first is "Discrimination In Zootopia: A Critical Reading" by Muljadi (2019) The aim of this study was to dicover the inconsistencies in *Zootopia Movie* regarding the equality messages between species. The method used by the author in his research is qualitative and interpretative methodology by gathering the data qualitatively and presenting them descriptively. Results of research show that *Zootopia Movie* reflects real events that exist in the real world and racism is one of them.

Another study is "An Analysis Of Moral Values In Zootopia Movie" by Humaira (2018). The purpose of this research is to find out which moral values are most dominant in *Zootopia Movie*. The method used by the author in his research is a qualitative method. Results of research show that one of the moral messages in *Zootopia Movie* is respect and the media has an important role in providing information and the media is a tool to convey messages to society.

In this study, the researcher analyzes and discusses about how Disney explores racism in *Zootopia Movie*. In general, there are several types of racism, such as discrimination against certain races, and racist against certain religions. Racism itself has often been brought up on a movies. Researcher using 4 theory for analyzed the way Disney explore racism in *Zootopia Movie*.

The first is representation theory. Representation is the production of meaning from concepts that exist in our minds through language which has two principles, namely to interpret something in the sense of explaining or describing it in the mind with an imagination to place this equation beforehand in our thoughts or feelings. Meanwhile, the second principle is the representation used to explain (construct) the meaning of a symbol. So, we can communicate the meaning of objects through language to others who can understand and understand the same language conventions (Hall, 1997). Therefore, the representation process cannot be separated from the terms reality, language, and meaning. This is the relationship between concepts and language that describes real objects, people, or even events into fictional objects, people, or events. Representation uses language to say something meaningful, or describe a meaningful world to others.

The next is reception theory. Stuart Hall's "encoding-decoding" model of communication essentially states that meaning is decoded by the audience according to their own views and ideas, with the aim of creating values and messages for them (Hall, 1993). The Encoded messages usually contain common symbols and the producer has a duty to ensure the audience receives the message. On the other hand, decoding occurs when the message is successfully conveyed to the audience. This is when the audience agree with the messages and the ideology behind it. The point of this theory is a movie, book, or game event though it has none/some inherent meaning, the audience who watch or experience it make a meaning. The audience comes into an understanding of everything that is happening there and everyone has their own views and reactions in response to the messages conveyed. The producers cannot judge every single individual perspective. Everything that the audience thinks about will be true in all situations, because the perspective can change at any time.

The third is transportation imagery model theory. The initial narrative of a movie is the primary means of influencing the audience to get the audience interested in the movie to be seen. Based on the theory of communication sciences, this theory is the main key that, in addition to influencing, can also change the attitude of the audience (Green, Strange, & Brock, 2002). By using transportation imagery model the role of the initial narrative in the formation of the audience's attitude produces a form of identification and parasocial interaction, which is a concept that talks about how the audience is absorbed and involved in the movie and how to process the messages contained in it from their own perspective, to the extent of melding audience attention, imagery, feelings, and they may also show effects of the story on their real world belief.

The last is theory of mind. Extracting events to make sense of movie scenes requires more than simply retrieving real-world event schematics. The fact that an idea is presented to you is reflected in your understanding. It has been argued that understanding movie scenes and especially their characters, actions, plans, and goals requires what is called Theory of Mind (Levin, Hymel, & Baker, 2013). Using the Theory of Mind Levin et al., explained that a basic understanding of every action, behavior and feeling experienced by the characters in the movie. For example, the character's body gestures and tone of voice make the audience feel what the character wants to convey. Understanding between occurrence that are more complex in the movie requires a schema theory that controls what the audience does, does, relates to, and feels. Levin et al., explain that through movie analysis, audiences can build their own perspectives or thoughts based on the point of view of different characters in the movie, other audiences and even from the narrator or moviemaker himself. However, the perspective of the audience and the characters in the movie may be different, this happens because the narrator or moviemaker can make wrong beliefs or perspectives about the events that occur in the movie.

Based on the explanation above. These theories are used as a method to help researchers in describing, concluding the results of research from the data obtained by the researchers. The use of those theory is based on the object of this research, namely movie.

METHOD

The method used in this study aims to analyze the kinds of racism in *Zootopia Movie* and how Disney exploring racism in *Zootopia Movie*. The researcher uses a qualitative approach in his research to help develop assumptions or hypotheses in the process of finding an answer for the research problems.

In this research, the researcher uses documentation to collect data. Documentation is a record of information in the form of a book or document (Sugiyono, 2015) Documents can be in the form of writing or images. The researcher uses this data collection technique because this technique can be used to support the research more optimally by studying the data related to this movie "ZOOTOPIA (2016)" and related articles to uncover problems in research.

This research uses the sampling technique and content analysis technique to analyze the data. In this research the data obtained from the movie "ZOOTOPIA (2016)". This technique is used because the researcher will be able to explore and get a deep understanding of the phenomenon in the research.

RESULTS

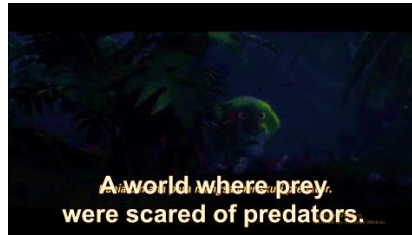
In this analysis the researcher analyzes the method used to explore racism in *Zootopia Movie*. By using sampling and content analysis. Researcher found there are four methods used in order to explore racism in *Zootopia Movie*. Problem statements were analyzed based on transportation imagery model by Green et al (2002), representation theory by Hall (1997), theory of mind by Levin et al (2013), and reception theory by Hall (1993).

1. Transportation Imagery Model

According to Green et al (2002) the purpose of the transportation imagery model is to make audiences interested in the movies. In addition to attracting attention, the transportation imagery model can also change attitudes of the audience which can be seen before and after they watches the movie.

Audience attitudes create identification and parasocial interaction. Parasocial interaction is a process of imaginary interaction between a character personality and attitude on the screen with audiences, which means that audiences can identify, absorb and participate in the process of movie interpretation through their own perspective. It can cause changing attitudes in viewers perceptions and their beliefs about real world.

The footage on picture 1 show scene accompanied by an interesting timpani crescendos background sound where a predator attacks its weak prey. It ends with a phrase that describes the predator's cruelty and brutality towards its prey.



Picture 1: In this scene, scary music is played and a tiger is about to pounce on a rabbit. (performed 00:01:00-00:01:23)

It is in line with the transportation image model by Green et al (2002). Showing a tense and scary scene at the beginning of the movie, it can arouse interest and influence the emotions of the audience in this movie so that the audience has the same thought that the predators are a cruel and ferocious race against prey race.

The footage in picture 2 show about events in thousand of years ago, the world is ruled by predators, this can be seen in the part where the narrator says “Thousands of years ago, these were the forces that ruled our world. A world where prey were scared of predators.” the viewer is clearly told that the world in this movie is divided into two sides between the vicious predators and the weak prey.



Picture 2: Shows a rabbit looking for food. (performed 00:01:06-00:01:14)

This scene emphasizes the initial scene that has changed public perception and stigma towards the predatory race. In line with transport image theory by Green et al (2002) the presence of a scene that supports/reinforces the previous scene is needed for the audience to absorb and become more involved in the events in this movie to the point of affecting their belief in the real world which belief that there are indeed two sides on society in the real world, between the strong and the weak.

The footage on picture 2 shows the police officer in stage who says “But just 211 miles away stands the great city of Zootopia! Where our ancestors first joined together in peace, and declared that anyone can be anything! Thank you and good night!”. This scene where accompanied by fun, energetic, and happy music, in contrast to the two scenes in the spooky, spooky, and scary that happened in the forest before.



Picture 3: Young Juddy is explaining the history of Zootopia. (performed 00:02:57-00:03:00)

Through a long evolutionary process this spooky situation changed to positive vibe. This change is seen in the form of evolution that causes changes in the habits and behavior of prey and predators in the movie. Before the evolutionary process, we can see the predators and prey in the in this movie behave like animals in general.

Predators were originally savages and only thought of hunting and preying on prey only as food, but after a long evolution this behavior changed. The predatory race that was originally savages turned into someone who already had a purpose other than hunting and eating prey.

After going through a long evolutionary process they change, starting from walking on two legs, dressing, and having goals/dreams as shown in the movie, the tiger cub when he grows up dreams of becoming a stockbroker. Until in the end they made peace and made Zootopia City where the two races could live together in peace. They can also be anything they want regardless of race, gender, and physique in Zootopia City.

Different from the two data given by the researcher, in this scene there is a very clear difference between the two races influenced by a long evolutionary process. However, this is also in line with the transportation imagery model Green et al (2002) that explains that the audiences can process messages in a movie from their own perspective. At the beginning of the movie, the audience was led to the thought that the predator race was a savage and cruel race, but now that has changed and the two races have coexisted, this distinction can change the mind of the audience or can't changed the audience mindset at all, depending on the thoughts of the audience itself.

2. Representation

According to Hall (1997) representation is a concept that aims to interpret something in the sense of explaining or describing it in the mind with an imagination to place this equation beforehand in our thoughts or feelings. Representation is also used as a tool to explain the meaning of a symbol in the movie. So that the audience can know the meaning of objects through symbols in the movie.

The footage show in picture 4 show the officer of ZPD, Juddy Hopps looks across the street to see a red fox entering an ice cream shop. Hopps looked at him suspiciously. Here viewers can see that a fox it symbolizes something that cannot be trusted and that is why there is also a misunderstanding by officer Juddy Hopps in this scene.. Fox as an animal that is represented as a symbol of mistrust and distrust has existed for a long time ago and is found in many mythologies and legends spread throughout the world. Like in Africa, where the fox is known as the trickster god of

the desert, in Europe more precisely in Bulgaria and Russia the fox is also known as a trickster named Kuma Lisa. In China (Huli Jing), Japan (Kitsune), and Korea (Kumiho) are spirits known for their highly mischievous and cunning nature.



Picture 4: Juddy Hopps watching suspiciously. (performed 00:17:59-00:18:19)

Based on representation theory by Hall (1997), the use of the fox as a symbol in the *Zootopia Movie* is an interpretation of a thought that the fox is a symbol of disbelief/distrust. This is shown by the tracking and sneaking behavior of officer Juddy Hopps that he did to the red fox in the movie.

3. Theory Of Mind

According to Levin et al (2013) theory of mind is used because this is needed to make the audience understand the ideas in the movie. It takes more than just taking samples of events from the real world.

The audience's understanding of the ideas presented in the movie can be obtained from the characters actions, messages, and goals in the story and this requires a theory of mind. Understanding actions (gestures) and emotions (voices) are interpreted and experienced of the characters in the story. The movie can make the audience feel what the character wants to convey.

With this understanding the audience can come up with their own thoughts or views based on the perspective of the characters they see in the movie, or through other viewers. The audience's view of the characters in the movie can also vary depending on their ideas and point of view themselves.

The footage on picture 5.1 shows a shopkeeper refusing to serve a fox customer. the audiences are shown discrimination due to racial differences. This can be seen when the shopkeeper says “Oh come on, kid. Back up. Listen, buddy, what? There aren't any fox ice cream joints in your part of town?”



Picture 5.1: This scene shows an ice cream cafekeeper refusing loudly when a fox wants to buy ice cream from the café. (performed 00:19:06-00:19:10)

The racial discrimination experienced by Fox was caused by the difference in race between the shopkeeper (prey) and Fox as the buyer (predator). This is also supported by the next scene, in picture 5.1 which shows that a shop keeper can refuse a fox in his shop. This is shown when the shopkeeper says “You probably can't read, fox, but the sign say. We reserve the right to refuse service... to anyone. So, beat it.”. here we can see that they can refuse anyone who wants to buy their ice cream, but in the other hand they have the right to choose anyone who can buy their ice cream.



Picture 5.2: This scene shows an ice cream cafekeeper read the board that says about the prohibition policy to sell to certain parties (performed 00:19:27-00:19:33)

Events that occur in *Zootopia Movie* also often occur in the real world, there are many traders who choose customers in their stores just because of differences in race/skin color. One of them can be seen in picture 5.3 The incident experienced by Oprah Winfrey. As Oprah Winfrey said on her show, when Oprah Winfrey was about to buy a bag the shopkeeper said “no no no no no no no no, this bag is for the Italian people it's only for the Italian people and perhaps you can go to your country and you can find the bag in your country”.

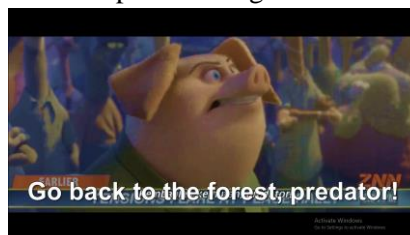


Picture 5.3: Oprah is talking about her experience in Italy. 3 September 2015 (performed 00:00:50-00:01:19) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGbfjv1ia7c&t=9s>

This discrimination happened because of racial differences. There is discrimination due to racial differences. Here it is shown that a shopkeeper refuses to serve Oprah Winfrey and instead tells Oprah Winfrey to buy a bag in her own country, this happens only because Oprah Winfrey is black.

In line with the theory of mind by Levin et al (2013) the existence of negative stereotyping, stigmatization, and prejudice that exists and occurs between the two races (prey & predator) in *Zootopia Movie* is also happened in the real world. This has the aim that the audience can relate more to the scene, because the scene also happened to the audience, or maybe the audience has heard of similar events that happened in their real world, such as the incident experienced by Oprah Winfrey

The footage show in picture 6.1 it shows that the Pig as a protester is screaming and committing acts of racism by yelling “Go back to the forest, predator!”. This shows that the prey race wants the predators race to return to their place of origin.



Picture 6.1: Shows an angry pig asking predators to return to their origin. (performed 01:14:00-01:14:05)

This happened because the protestors did not agree with the current predators in the city of Zootopia. It is only causing the atmosphere to become unsafe and uncondusive like the old Zootopia city.

Events that occur in in this movie also often occur in the real world, this can be seen in picture 6.2 which shows the events that occurred when there was a demonstration of Black Lives Matter in British town, which was held on Monday 8 June 2020. When the demonstrators were carrying out their action there is one white man shouted "Why don't you go back to Africa Then?!" to black people who were demonstrating.



Picture 6.2: Shows a demonstrator cursing racistly. (performed 00:00:01-00:00:08) 10 Juny 2020
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Nhy3jfjjs8>

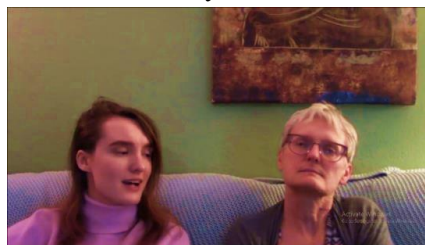
This it in line with the theory of mind by Levin et al (2013). The use of hate speech is a manifestation of acts of racism, racial discrimination between two races (prey and predator) in in this movie. It also aims to bring audiences closer to the events in this movie, as it deals with the intolerance that the black race face in the real world. Incidents in which make the black race struggle against acts of violence, racism and abuse by the white race in their area.

4. Reception

According to Hall (1993) reception means that the meaning in the movie is formed by the audience themselves based on their own point of views and ideas, with the aim of creating their own messages and values. The main point of this theory is that movie makers can successfully convey the messages in the movies to the audience.

Viewers can interpret the meaning or messages in the movie differently because viewers have their own opinions, ideas and reactions in order to respond to the messages. Movie makers cannot judge every viewer's perspective. All that the audience considers true, even though their own perspective may change over time.

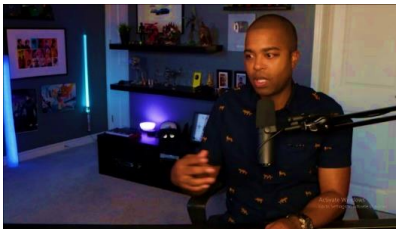
The footage on picture 7 show there are some people reviewing the *Zootopia Movie*. One of the two viewers who said “That this movie the kinda of was like like prejudice, racism” and “So they're in the minority, so they're the ones getting tired, I get it of course minorities and our (mumbling) get targeted so it's like wow it's really reflective of I think our society”.



Picture 7: Shows two audiences reviewing Zootopia Movie on their youtube account. 24 November 2021. (performed 00:12:26-00:13:05) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cu8w84II1Hc>

From the perspective of these two audiences, the researcher can see that the audience can feel that in *Zootopia Movie* there is a message that represents prejudice especially racism in society. This is in accordance with the reception theory by Hall (1993) used by the researcher, that the meaning received by the audience is consistent with their views and ideas. The purpose of the movie maker using this technique is so that the audience can get meaning from the scene that the audience sees. The meaning of racism that the audience sees in the *Zootopia Movie* is the result of using reception theory.

The footage on picture 8 show has another viewer reviewing the *Zootopia Movie*. The audience said “I think that what they also were trying to show is like second chances”, “I think that what this movie shows is like forgiveness”, and “I like the message that they were saying in there and um stereotypes & how you kind of have to like go beyond the stereotypes”.



Picture 8: Shows another audience is reviewing *Zootopia Movie* on his youtube account. 28 October 2021. (performed 00:41:39-00:43:08) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LyGAf3GEO7Y>

From these statement we can see that the audience responded well. The audience's point of view in this review is more towards seeing from the moral side presented in *Zootopia Movie*. The moral side seen from the audience is second chances, forgiveness, and how do we pass the boundaries that already exist in our, regardless of how bad or racist people are to us.

The second data that the researcher found is also in accordance with the reception theory by Hall (1993), but with differences in the meaning of the former subject. In this second data, the audience sees the meaning in the *Zootopia Movie*, not only on the stereotypes but also on the moral values that the movie maker wants to convey. There is nothing wrong with either meaning because the reception theory explains that the audience are free to draw conclusions based on their respective points of views and ideas.

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the researcher explain and compare with previous research on how Disney explored racism in *Zootopia Movie*. In *Zootopia Movie* the researcher found there are four elements (transportation imagery model, representation, theory of mind, and reception) that have a function to help the director in incorporating/exploring elements of racism.

The first is the use of transportation imagery model theory by Green et al (2002) for brainstorming to direct the perspective and mindset of the audience, the movie maker show that in this world there are two very different camps (prey and predators), different in from their food, actions, and habits. This is also supported by the previous research entitled “An Analysis Of Moral Values In *Zootopia Movie*” by Humaira (2018). The messages are received by the community can be either good or bad depending on the audience.

The second is the use of representation theory by Hall (1997) is also seen in *Zootopia Movie*. Starting from the fox which is represented as something that cannot be trusted This is the same as the discussion from previous research entitled “discrimination in zootopia: a critical reading” by Muljadi (2019).

The next is using theory of mind by Levin et al (2013) in *Zootopia Movie*. In line with the Theory of mind which says that by presenting events that occur in the real world into movies. The *Zootopia Movie* was also reflects real events that exist in the real world and racism is one of them.

Last is reception theory by Hall (1993). The different perspectives are also found in this analysis. Disney represents a lot of real life events in *Zootopia Movie*. As shown by the results of the analysis from reception theory.

CONCLUSION

The results of this analysis have answered the research questions. That’s about Disney’s is exploring racism in *Zootopia Movie*. Disney uses various ways to explore racism in *Zootopia Movie*. The first is using transportation imagery mode for brainstorming to direct the perspective and mindset of the audience, the movie maker show that in this world there are two very different camps.

The second method Disney uses representation to explore racism in *Zootopia Movie* Starting from the fox which is represented as something that cannot be trusted and we must always be aware of him, and the need for the use of tools to defend himself from a predator, which even after evolving is still positioned as something dangerous and cruel, assuming they are born like this.

The next method is the theory of mind the audience can interpret the meaning of these two scenes for themselves, because there is no limit to the perspectives that the audience can create or think about. The *Zootopia Movie* was also reflects real events that exist in the real world and racism is one of them. As for the events that occur in several scenes in *Zootopia Movie*, the example is an incident that occurred at an ice cream shop and Oprah Winfrey.

Disney's fourth method to explore racism is reception. In the first data, the perspective of audiences is more towards the racism that is also happening in their society. In the second data the perspective of audiences is more towards seeing from the side of the moral message what audiences can get when they see *Zootopia Movie*.

By using this theory Disney frees audiences to interpret by themselves the message and meaning in *Zootopia Movie*. In here we can see that racism still exist in society, it proved by the third data in this reseach. The researcher hopes that this research can add to the reader's insight about racism. The researcher also hopes that the next researchers can study further and in depth about the process of racism that occurs in *Zootopia Movie* or the other movies, novels and poetry.

REFERENCES

- Green, M. C., Strange, J. J., & Brock, T. C. (Eds.). (2002). *Narrative impact: Social and cognitive foundations*. Mahwah, N.J: L. Erlbaum Associates.
- Hall, S. (1993). The Cultural Studies Reader Second Edition. In S. During (Ed.), *Encoding, Decoding* (pp. 508–517). 11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE: Routledge.
- Hall, S. (Ed.). (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage in association with the Open University.
- Humaira, M. (2018). *An analysis of moral values in zootopia movie*. Ar-Raniry State Islamic University, Darussalam-Banda Aceh.
- Levin, D. T., Hymel, A. M., & Baker, L. (2013). Belief, Desire, Action, and Other Stuff: Theory of Mind in Movies. In A. P. Shimamura (Ed.), *Psychocinematics* (pp. 244–266). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199862139.003.0013>
- Muljadi, H. (2019). Discrimination in Zootopia: A critical reading. *Journal of English Education, Literature, and Culture*, 4(2), 236–246. <http://dx.doi.org/10.30659/e.4.2.236-246>
- Sugiyono. (2015). *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan (Pendekatan Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan R&D)*. Bandung: Alfabeta, cv. Retrieved from www.cvalfabeta.com