

Modern Mythology and Predator Discrimination in *Zootopia* (2016): A Barthesian Semiotic Analysis

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 19 November 2025	This research analyzes the animated film <i>Zootopia</i> (2016) as more than just children's entertainment. It is examined as a cultural text that communicates ideological meanings through its story, characters, dialogue, and visual symbolism. The study applies Roland Barthes semiotic theory of myth to explore how the film constructs and naturalizes the idea of predators as a collective threat. Through a qualitative descriptive method, the analysis focuses on key scenes, selected dialogues, and symbolic representations within the film. The findings reveal that <i>Zootopia</i> promotes a hidden narrative of fear and social control by repeatedly associating predators with danger through signs such as sharp eyes, muscular bodies, and aggressive behavior. The film also employs rhetorical strategies including inoculation, which admits minor faults to distract from deeper problems; ex-nomination, which makes the dominant group appear neutral and unnamed; and quantification, which uses statistics to rationalize fear. These strategies work together to disguise discrimination as a natural social response. The research contributes to the study of literature and film by offering a semiotic approach to understanding how ideology operates in popular media. It emphasizes the importance of critical media literacy and shows how myths in film can influence public perception of identity, power, and social order. In conclusion, <i>Zootopia</i> serves as an example of how modern myths are formed and how they function ideologically in contemporary cultural texts.
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1. Introduction

The animated movie *Zootopia*, released in 2016 by Walt Disney Animation Studios, is more than just a fun story for families. It also talks about important social problems like discrimination, stereotypes, and unfair treatment (Sharma & Bhambri, 2024). In the movie, animals live together in one city, but they are divided into two main groups: Predator and Prey. The film's setting in a cosmopolitan city reflects contemporary global issues of diversity and inclusion, portraying a society where physical and metaphorical borders both separate and unite its inhabitants (Fuentes, 2021).

Even though they try to live in peace, predators are still seen as dangerous just because of their nature (Moleón & Sánchez-Zapata, 2022). This shows how people in real life often judge others unfairly based on group identity, not their actions. The movie uses this idea to show how fear and control can be used to keep certain groups in a lower position in society (Heo, 2025). The film was widely received by audiences and achieved major commercial success, grossing over 1 Billion US dollars at the global box office (Lolowang et al., 2024). Moreover, *Zootopia* won the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature in 2017, reflecting its universal appeal and the relevance of its themes of tolerance and diversity (Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, 2017).

Several previous studies have analyzed *Zootopia* by focusing on topics such as racism, prejudice, and social conflict. For example, Muljadi (2019) explained that the division between predator and prey in the real world. Anugerah et al. (2022) also found that the strongest type of prejudice in the movie is structural, where predators are often excluded from public roles. These studies show that *Zootopia* contains many messages about inequality. However, most of the research only used social psychological theories. There is still a lack of studies that see *Zootopia* as a form of modern myth based on Roland Barthes' theory (Muqoddas & Hasyim, 2016). This research fills that gap by using Barthes' ideas about myth and semiotics to uncover the hidden messages behind the film's images, dialogue, and storyline. According to Lolowang et al. (2024), the use of film scripts as primary data allows researchers to explore character development and ideological meaning embedded in dialogue and scenes. Thus, this study treats *Zootopia* not only as an animated film, but as a cultural text that builds modern myths and subtly legitimizes inequality through its semiotic and rhetorical structures (Cramer, 2020). "*Zootopia*" uses metaphors extensively to convey complex social issues. The city itself is a metaphor for a multicultural society, where different species represent various racial and social groups, highlighting issues of prejudice and discrimination (Yilana, 2022). The narrative of "*Zootopia*" is imbued with moral values such as trustworthiness, respect, and fairness, which are presented through the actions and development of its characters. These values are integral to the film's message of social justice and equality (Masayitah et al., 2023). The new contribution of this study is in showing how *Zootopia* does not just tell a story, but also builds a myth that makes discrimination seem natural and acceptable (Crewe, 2017).

This study uses Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, which explains how signs can carry deeper meanings beyond what we see or hear. First, there is denotation, which is the basic meaning, and connotation, which adds emotion or cultural meaning. When these meanings are repeated many times, they can turn into myths, or beliefs that people accept as normal. In *Zootopia*, the word predator does not only mean a meat-eating animal, but becomes a symbol of danger (Cormier & Rossi, 2016). Barthes also explains how myths are supported by techniques called rhetorical figures. For example, inoculation is when a small problem is admitted to hide a bigger one. Ex-nomination hides who really has power, like how prey animals in the film control society but are never called powerful (Millar, 2026). Tautology repeats ideas without proof, like predators are dangerous because they are predators. Quantification uses numbers to make fears seem logical. Neither-norism pretends to reject two sides but still support one (Bornmann & Marewski, 2024). Anchorage uses words to control how we see an image, while relay adds meaning through dialogue or scenes that guide our

feelings. Although some researchers have discussed discrimination in *Zootopia* most of them do not explain how these meanings is built (Beaudine et al., 2017). This study fills that gap by showing how *Zootopia* creates modern myths using semiotic and symbolic processes.

The purpose of this study is to examine how the the film *Zootopia* (2016) creates the myth that predators are collective threat in society. This research uses Roland Barthes theory of modern mythology to explain how the film gives deeper meaning to certain signs, such as words, images, and actions. By analyzing these signs, the study aims to show how the film presents discrimination in awaythat looks natural or reasonable, even though it is based on fear and stereotypes. The goal is to help the audience understand that *Zootopia* is not only a story about animal, but also a story that carries hidden messages about power, identity, and social control (Muqoddas & Hasyim, 2016).

This study holds both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it contributes to literary and cultural studies by applying Roland Barthes theory of modern mythology to a modern animated film. It shows that myth still functions as a tool of ideology in today's mass media, especially in childrens entertainment (Oidinino & Souza, 2020). It also expands the use of literary theory into film analysis, treating film narratives as cultural texts that deserve serious academic attention. Practically, this study helps studens of English literature and cultural studies develop media literacy by understanding how discrimination and social bias can be hidden in stories and signs. It provides a useful example of how to analyze films that look neutral or moral on the surface, but may actually carry deeper ideological messages beneath the surface. This is important because media can influence how people see others in real life. By understanding this, viewers can learn to question the deeper meanings behind what they watch.

2. Method

This research uses a qualitative case study approach to analyze the film *Zootopia* (2016). A case study is a method used to explore a specific subject in depth within is real life context. In this study, *Zootopia* is treated as a cultural text that reflects and constructs social meanings. The case study approach helps the researcher focus on how one film can represent larger ideas about identity, power, and discrimination. By looking closely at scenes, characters, dialogue, and visual elements in *Zootopia*, the study aims to understand how the film builds a myth about predators and social fear.

The primary data of this researcher is the film *Zootopia*, including its script, visuals, and narrative structure. Secondary data includes theories from Roland Barthes and other scholars in the fields of semiotics, mythology, and meaning is formed and how certain ideas become accepted as normal in society. The analysis follows Barthes model of signs, which includes three levels of meaning. Denotation the basic or literal meaning, connotation additional meaning shaped by culture or emotion, and myth as a meaning that becomes accepted as normal by society. In the film *Zootopia*, for example, the use of the word predator and darl visual tones are repeated to make viewers believe that predators are dangerous. Because these meanings are repeated, they start to seem true and go unquestioned.

3. Result

To understand how *Zootopia* builds modern myths, this study analyzes several scenes using Roland Barthes theory of myths and rhetorical figures. These rhetorical strategies help hide ideology inside stories that appear neutral, funny, or emotional. Instead of directly showing discrimination, the film repeats certain signs like language, visuals, and situations to make feel normal. By doing this, *Zootopia* makes the idea of predators as a threat seem natural, not constructed. Each rhetorical figure described by Barthes can be seen in different scenes of the film, working together to support a hidden message about fear, control, and identity.

The table below presents the key findings from the analysis, including the rhetorical

figure used, a quote or description from the film, the approximate time it appears, and how it functions as myth in the story.

Table 1. Rhetorical Figures of Myth in *Zootopia* (2016)

No	Rhetorical Figures of Myth	Quotation
1	Inoculation	Scenes 36, minute 00:52:30 "It may be biological. In their DNA"
2	Ex-nomination	Scenes 44, minute 01:20:00 "Fear always works! And I'll dart every predator in zootopia to keep it that way"
3	Tautology	Scene 5, 00:11:20 "Oh, that's not a real predator face. That's like a bunny pretending to be tough"
4	Quantification	Scene 36, minute 00:45:30 "Predators. They may be reverting back their primitive savage ways...It's possible. So far all the victims have been predators"
5	Neither-Norism	Scene 38, minute 01:14:46 "We cannot let fear divide us. Please, give me back the zootopia I love "
6	Anchorage	Scene 37, minute 01:13:46 "The threat returns to our streets"
7	Relay	Scene 35, minute 01:05:00 "We have to trust the data...but something just doesn't add up"

The table 1 summarizes how rhetorical figures proposed by Roland Barthes appear in *Zootopia* and contribute to the construction of modern myths about predators. Each rhetorical figure works subtly to turn ideas that are socially constructed into something that feels natural. Below is a deeper explanation of how each of these figures plays a role in shaping the film's ideological message.

Inoculation is shown in the press conference scene where Judy Hopps mentions that predator behavior may be biological. This line gives the impression that the film is being honest and balanced, but in reality, it plants the idea that predator violence is natural. This creates a small admission that distracts the audience from the larger issue: systemic discrimination. The idea that danger comes from biology becomes a way to avoid asking whether the fear of predators is socially constructed. This strategy makes the myth harder to challenge, because it hides behind what appears to be scientific language.

Ex-nomination is reflected through the character Bellwether. She is the assistant mayor, belongs to the prey group, and controls major decisions, including those that lead to mass fear of predators. But she is never presented as someone who holds real power. Instead, the film shows her as small, soft, and underestimated. Her power is never discussed directly, and neither is the structural dominance of prey animals. Because the film does not name who controls the narrative, the audience is led to believe that discrimination happens naturally and not through social planning. This makes structural inequality seem like a normal part of life in *Zootopia*.

Tautology is seen in casual phrases like that's not a real predator face or in how the film repeatedly shows predators going savage without exploring deeper causes. The repetition of predator violence across multiple scenes builds a strong emotional impression, even when there is no clear proof. This reflects how myths function not through logic, but through repeated images and language that become familiar and eventually accepted. The audience begins to believe in predator danger because it is shown again and again, not because it is explained or proven.

Quantification uses numbers and statistics to make fear look logical. When Judy says so

far all the victims have been predators, it sounds like a fact. But the film does not question the data or explore alternative explanations. This kind of framing gives more strength to the myth that predators are reverting to violence. Numbers can sound neutral, but in this case, they are used to support a one-sided narrative. This reflects how numbers are used in real life to justify policies that target certain groups, such as racial profiling or immigration bans, based on incomplete or biased data.

Neither-norism appears when Judy later says we cannot let fear divide us. This sounds like a message of peace, but it comes after the damage has already been done. The film avoids fully blaming anyone, but the suspicion toward predators remains. This rhetorical figure helps the film look balanced, while still keeping the audience aligned with the dominant groups perspective. By pretending to take a middle ground, the film hides its bias and protects the status quo. The solution becomes individual kindness, not structural change.

Anchorage is clearly used in the way the news headlines control how images are read. When a wolf appears alone in a dark street, the scene is framed with the line the threat returns to our streets. Without this line, the image could mean many things: loneliness, sadness, or even misunderstanding. But the caption tells the audience exactly what to think, turning the wolf into a symbol of fear. This strategy prevents alternative interpretations and reinforces the myth that predators are the problem, even when they have done nothing wrong.

Relay combines image and dialogue to guide audience interpretation. When Judy looks at rising predator statistics and says: we have to trust the data... but something doesn't add up, the audience is offered a brief moment of doubt. However, the visual design red colors, sharp graphs, anxious music reinforces the idea of danger. The dialogue seems to question the data, but the visuals confirm it. Relay here does not open real space for critical thinking. It simulates it, but ultimately leads the viewer back to the same fearful conclusion. Together, these rhetorical figures shape the films myth: that predators are a danger to society, not because of social bias, but because of who they are. This message is never said directly. Instead, it is communicated through repetition, careful framing, and emotional cues. The myth becomes invisible because it is delivered through a story that feels moral, emotional, and entertaining.

4. Discussion

Myth is not only formed through the relationship between signs and meanings at the level of denotation and connotation. From (Barthes, 1972), myth also operates through a set of discursive mechanisms that he refers to as Rhetorical Figures that is, language strategies that disguise the presence of ideology within a text. These figures soften the delivery of ideology so that it no longer appears as a social construct, but rather as part of an objective reality that is difficult to question. Some of the main strategies proposed by Barthes include inoculation, ex-nomination, tautology, quantification, and neither-norism. In *Zootopia*, all of these rhetorical figures are used to strengthen the symbolic narrative of discrimination against the predator group, while at the same time disguising social inequality as a form of natural and acceptable order.

a. Inoculation

One of the rhetorical strategies of myth used in the film *Zootopia* is Inoculation, a method in which those in power admit to a small mistake or partial truth in order to appear open and honest, while actually concealing a much larger injustice. According to (Barthes, 1972), this strategy allows dominant systems to maintain control by appearing transparent while covering up structural problems. He states that inoculation works by "admitting the accidental evil of a class-bound institution in order to conceal its principal evil", emphasizing how ideology functions not by denying reality but by managing the public's perception of it. This strategy is clearly visible in *Zootopia* during the press conference scene, when Judy

Hopps says: "It may be biological. In their DNA." (Scene 36, minute 00:52:30).

On the surface, this line sounds like a neutral or even scientific explanation for why predators may go savage. However, symbolically, the statement reinforces the idea that predators are inherently dangerous. It constructs a connotative meaning that predators have an innate violent tendency that can resurface at any time, thus justifying the ongoing fear and discrimination toward them. As (Fairclough, n.d.) explains, ideology operates subtly within discourse through language that appears objective but actually maintains power relations. In this way, the film appears to acknowledge a problem (that predators have gone savage) but avoids discussing the deeper social causes. The narrative instead shifts focus to a biological explanation that reinforces old stereotypes. This aligns with (Van Dijk, 2017) notion that discourse can be used to obscure dominant actors and shift structural responsibility onto individuals or natural causes. The small admission of guilt helps conceal the larger myth: that predators are naturally more dangerous than prey.

This inoculation strategy is not limited to fiction. In real life, it can be found in media and institutional practices. When acts of violence are committed by authorities, the response is often framed as the action of a rogue individual rather than a reflection of systemic failure. Similarly, narratives claiming that racism is decreasing based on the success of a few minority figures ignore the persistence of discrimination in areas such as education, employment, and law. Similarly, the use of the term *oknum* can separate individual wrongdoing from institutional responsibility. As-Syarqawi (2025) explains that the euphemistic use of *oknum* can isolate individual misconduct from institutional accountability, thereby making systemic problems within institutions less visible. This linguistic strategy demonstrates how discourse can obscure institutional power by framing wrongdoing as an individual rather than structural problem.

In Zootopia, this dynamic is reflected in how predators are allowed to live within society, but are still distrusted, monitored, and excluded from positions of authority. The fear surrounding them is intensified through visual cues like sharp stares, panicked media coverage, and scientific-sounding but biased language. As (Chandler, 2007) points out, signs in media are never neutral they are always loaded with ideological meaning that shapes how we perceive social reality. Therefore, the inoculation strategy in Zootopia successfully delivers symbolic discrimination, by conveying inequality through language and visuals that appear neutral. This strategy operates subtly and effectively by influencing the audiences beliefs without explicitly blaming or criticizing any group. This is how myth in the film is made to appear natural and unquestionable, while in fact it is deeply ideological and plays a role in maintaining social imbalance.

b. Ex-nomination

In Roland Barthes theory of mythology, ex-nomination refers to the way dominant groups maintain power by remaining unnamed in discourse. When power is not openly identified, it becomes invisible and unquestioned. This silence allows control to appear neutral and natural, rather than ideological or political (Barthes, 1972). In Zootopia, this can be seen clearly in how prey animals, who make up the majority and hold institutional authority, are never labeled as the ruling class. Instead, they are consistently portrayed as peaceful, fearful citizens. Predators, by contrast, are framed as inherently dangerous. The film avoids directly stating that prey animals dominate positions in law enforcement, government, and media. This silence supports the illusion that social control is being exercised fairly. One powerful example is the character Assistant Mayor Bellwether, a prey animal who appears weak and harmless but is revealed as the true antagonist. In Scene 44 (01:20:00), she declares: "Fear always works! And I'll dart every predator in Zootopia to keep it that way (Howard & Moore, 2016). Here, Bellwether openly admits using fear as a method of control. Yet, her identity as part of the majority group shields her from suspicion. She never names her power or

leadership role, and the film avoids depicting the prey group as oppressive. This is classic ex-nomination: domination without acknowledgment.

As (Fairclough, n.d.) and (Van Dijk, 2017) explain, power often operates through what is left unsaid. By omitting references to the controlling group, media and narratives protect existing hierarchies. A similar strategy is found in real-world discourse, such as when perpetrators are labeled as individuals or *oknum* in Indonesian media (Rahmawati & Wahyudi, 2021), which hides institutional responsibility. *Zootopia* uses ex-nomination to make structural power look harmless. While predators are consistently shown as threats, prey animals are positioned as innocent. In reality, they hold systemic control. As (Barthes, 1972) states, myth works by turning history into nature making inequality seem like a normal part of life.

c. Tautology

In Barthes theory of mythology, tautology refers to the repetition of an idea without explanation or justification. Rather than proving a claim with logic or evidence, tautology relies on stating the same message repeatedly until it feels naturally true (Barthes, 1972) In *zootopia*, this strategy is used to reinforce the belief that predators are inherently dangerous not through facts, but through symbolic and verbal repetition.

A clear example appears in scenes 5, minutes 00:11:20. When clawhauser jokingly says, "Oh, that's not a real predator face. That's like a bunny pretending to be tough." (Howard & Moore, 2016) Although humorous on the surface, this line reinforces the myth that only predators can look truly threatening, while prey like Judy are naturally harmless. The idea is repeated throughout the film: Predators are shown going savage with glowing eyes, claws, and aggressive growls. The cause is not questioned. It is simply assumed. Later in the story, Judy herself echoes this belief by saying, "They're dangerous because they're predators," a line that demonstrates circular logic with deeper reasoning.

This rhetorical figure reduces complex and erases individuality. It links danger to identity rather than behavior, turning fear into something that feels reasonable. As (Marchin & Mayr, 2023) explain, repetition without proof can make false ideas appear true through familiarity. In this way, *zootopia* uses tautology to support symbolic discrimination, shaping audience perception by presenting stereotypes as unquestionable truths. This discursive strategy plays a key role in maintaining the film's underlying ideology. By attaching fear to the identity of predators through repeated language and imagery, the film removes the need for critical engagement from the audience. Viewers are not encouraged to ask why predators are feared; they are simply shown the same symbolic cues over and over until those associations feel natural. As (Barthes, 1972) argues, this is how myth works: it transforms history and social constructions into common sense. In *zootopia* tautology contributes to this process by simplifying complex social dynamics into easily digestible categories: predators as threats, prey as victims, thus reinforcing appearing emotionally neutral and morally justified.

d. Quantification

In Roland Barthes theory of myths, quantification is a rhetorical strategy that uses numbers or statistics to give the appearance of objectivity, even when they carry ideological meaning. In *zootopia*, this strategy supports the belief that predators are inherently dangerous by presenting selective data that encourages fear while suppressing context. A key example appears in scenes 36, minute 00:45:30, when Judy hops states during a press conference, "Predators. They may be reverting back to their primitive savage ways...it's possible. So far all the victims have been predators". (Howard & Moore, 2016). Though Judy frames her statement cautiously, the statistical framing of all the victims having been predators equates equal danger. The film does not provide full context or explanations about these cases, instead it repeats this association in news reports and public discourse, reinforcing fear as if it were

based on neutral facts.

As (Marchin & Mayr, 2023) note, numbers are often used to persuade rather than inform. Judy's line becomes a turning point in the film, public panic grows, predators are discriminated against, and segregation policies are enacted. The number becomes not just information, but a symbol of crisis. (Barthes, 1972) explains that myth works by removing the need for explanation, the number alone becomes evidence that does not require proof. By presenting incomplete data as scientific truth, *Zootopia* shows how quantification can naturalize discrimination. The audience, like the citizens in the film, is not invited to question the statistics but to accept fear as common sense. Thus, quantification functions as a powerful myth-making tool that turns perception into policy, and ideology into fact.

The pattern mirrors real-world practices where statistics are selectively framed to justify exclusionary policies, especially against minority or marginalized groups. In media, crime rates, immigration numbers, or public health data are often reported without sufficient context, allowing dominant ideologies to turn social fear into regulation. As (Fairclough, n.d.) notes, statistical discourse becomes powerful not because it tells the full truth, but because it appears neutral while silently supporting existing power structures. In *Zootopia*, the quantifications of predator behavior not only construct a myth of natural threat but also reinforce a social order where surveillance, separation, and distrust become acceptable responses all legitimized through numbers that are never questioned.

e. Neither-Norism

Neither-norism is a rhetorical strategy that creates the appearance of balance by rejecting two extremes, while actually favoring one ideological position. According to (Barthes, 1972), this strategy disguises power by presenting bias as reasonableness. It avoids confrontation by using emotionally neutral language that seems inclusive, yet subtly maintains the dominant order.

In *Zootopia*, this strategy is most visible in Scene 38 (01:20:00), when Judy Hopps says during a press conference: "We can't let fear divide us. Please, give me another chance. We have to work together." (Howard & Moore, 2016) While the statement promotes unity, it comes after Judy had earlier suggested that predator aggression might be "biological... in their DNA" (Scene 36). By the time she asks for cooperation, fear and distrust have already been socially embedded. Her second statement does not undo the damage, but instead works as a rhetorical cover projecting calm while the dominant narrative of predator suspicion remains intact. This is the core of neither-norism: the film avoids blaming any group openly, yet still frames predators as the underlying problem. As (Marchin & Mayr, 2023) explain, such discourse appears neutral but functions ideologically. The absence of direct accusation makes the narrative more acceptable, but the visual and narrative cues of fearful citizens, segregation, and predator exclusion guide the viewer toward accepting control measures as necessary. Through this framing, *Zootopia* transforms social control into a moral response, reinforcing structural inequality while avoiding explicit conflict. By rejecting fear and division, the film offers a false middle ground that justifies the surveillance and marginalization of predators under the guise of social harmony. As (Barthes, 1972) notes, myth works by presenting constructed meanings as natural truths. In this case, peace is made to seem possible only through controlling those marked as biologically different.

f. Anchorage

In Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, anchorage refers to the use of text such as captions, headlines, or dialogue to control the meaning of an image. Visuals are naturally open to multiple interpretations, and anchorage works to guide the audience toward a specific reading that reflects dominant ideology. It reduces ambiguity and transforms complex visuals into messages that appear obvious and acceptable. This strategy is clearly illustrated in *Zootopia*,

particularly in a news scene showing a lone wolf walking quietly through the city at night. On its own, the image could be interpreted as a moment of reflection, loneliness, or alienation. However, the onscreen text immediately frames the scene with a single interpretation. The caption reads: “The threat returns to our streets.” (Howard & Moore, 2016)

The word threat activates fear, and returns implies that this danger is recurring. Together, the text instructs viewers to interpret the silent wolf not as a neutral figure but as part of an ongoing social crisis. The predator becomes a symbol of instability, not because of its actions, but because of how the media frames it. This is how anchorage functions ideologically. It does not allow the audience to reflect or question what they see. It replaces possible interpretations with a fixed meaning. As Barthes argues, anchorage is part of how myth transforms constructed meaning into natural truth. In this case, the caption reinforces the myth that predators are inherently dangerous. The fear is not based on what predators do but on how they are shown and labeled. Anchorage turns language into a tool of perception control, shaping public emotion while appearing merely informative.

g. Relay

In Barthes semiotic theory, relay refers to the interaction between text and image that builds narrative meaning through their interplay. Unlike anchorage, which limits interpretation, relay appears to open space for reflection. However, this openness is often controlled by the structure of the visual narrative itself. (Barthes, 1972) notes that relay can suggest freedom of thought while subtly guiding viewers toward a preferred ideological reading. In *Zootopia*, relay is effectively used in the scene where Judy Hopps reads a statistical report on her tablet. The screen displays graphs and rising numbers about predator aggression, while Judy’s voice-over states: “We have to trust the data... but something just doesn’t add up.” (Howard & Moore, 2016)

At first glance, her words introduce doubt, inviting viewers to think critically about the information. Yet visually, the data appears polished, urgent, and official—red alerts, sharp lines, and Judy’s concerned expression all frame the numbers as credible and serious. The result is a relay structure that feels dialogic but actually reinforces one message: predators are a rising threat. Although Judy voices uncertainty, the scene does not visually support her skepticism. Instead, the visual language of scientific data and emotional cues closes the space for alternative interpretations. This reveals how relay can simulate critical thinking while directing the audience toward a fixed conclusion. As (Barthes, 1972) explains, myth hides ideology by making its message appear natural. In this case, relay creates the illusion of doubt, only to reaffirm the dominant fear-based narrative.

5. Conclusion

Based on the semiotic and mythological analysis presented in the previous chapters, it can be concluded that the animated film *Zootopia* functions not merely as a form of entertainment for children and families, but as a sophisticated cultural text embedded with strong ideological content. Behind its colorful visuals and humorous tone, the film constructs and circulates a series of symbolic messages that shape the viewer’s perception of social dynamics, particularly regarding fear, power, and difference. These messages are conveyed subtly, operating beneath the surface of the narrative through rhetorical and semiotic mechanisms that naturalize certain social hierarchies. As such, *Zootopia* serves as an example of how popular media can become a vehicle for reinforcing dominant ideologies and myths about society.

The first key finding from this study is that Roland Barthes semiotic theory is effective in revealing how the film transforms literal signs into mythic meanings. Through a two-level system of signification denotation and connotation simple representations such as the term predator, the appearance of glowing red eyes, and scenes of uncontrolled aggression are not

just depictions of character traits. They function as signs that are repeatedly associated with danger and instability, gradually building a connotative structure in which predators are symbolically framed as threats to societal order. When repeated consistently across the films visual and narrative elements, these signs solidify into cultural myths. In Barthes terms, these myths operate by making historically constructed ideas appear natural, inevitable, and unquestionable. In the world of Zootopia, the idea that predators are biologically dangerous is presented not as a belief system, but as an obvious fact, thus masking its ideological roots.

Second, the film employs a variety of rhetorical strategies that Barthes identifies as tools for sustaining myth. Techniques such as inoculation (admitting small problems to cover up larger ones), ex-nomination (avoiding the naming of dominant groups), tautology (repeating statements without explanation), quantification (using ambiguous statistics), and neither-norism (rejecting two extremes to appear balanced) are used throughout Zootopia to reinforce ideological positions in a way that feels neutral and commonsensical. For instance, phrases like It may be biological or statistics such as “Predators make up only 10% of the population” serve not only to provide exposition, but also to frame predators as inherently different and potentially dangerous. These rhetorical choices guide the viewer to interpret social tension as a natural outcome of biological difference rather than as the product of systemic bias or cultural prejudice. Thus, the film does not overtly advocate for discrimination, but it enables discriminatory logic to circulate under the guise of scientific reason and emotional logic.

Third, the theoretical framework provided by Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes allows this study to uncover how language, images, and narrative function together in film as systems of signification. In this case, the myth of predator-as-danger is produced not only through what characters say, but also through what they do not say, how scenes are framed, and how emotions are coded visually and aurally. The relationship between signifier and signified is shown to be not static or universal, but culturally constructed and ideologically loaded. Through this lens, Zootopia is revealed to be a text that participates in the construction of social meaning, one that subtly educates its audience on who is to be feared, who is to be trusted, and what kind of social order is considered normal or acceptable. In effect, the film becomes a myth-making machine that naturalizes inequality by embedding it within emotionally resonant storytelling.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the importance of viewing popular media texts particularly those targeted at young audiences not only as sources of entertainment but also as ideological apparatuses that can shape public consciousness. Films like Zootopia demonstrate how easily ideological discourse can be masked by engaging narratives, anthropomorphic characters, and humor. Therefore, it is crucial for viewers, scholars, and educators to develop critical media literacy that enables them to question what seems natural or neutral in media representations. Only by being aware of the myths embedded in everyday cultural texts can we begin to resist the normalization of stereotypes and contribute to a more reflective and inclusive understanding of society.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Authors' Contribution

Christina Anastasya Onibala: Conceptualization, Investigation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Visualization, Writing-original draft, Writing-review & editing.

Imelda S. Lolowang: Supervision, Methodology, Validation, Writing-review & editing.

Sabrina W. J. Husain: Supervision, Validation, Methodology, Writing-review & editing.

Statement of the Use of AI

AI tools were used for translation and language assistance during the preparation of this manuscript. The authors remain fully responsible for the accuracy, originality, content, and conclusions of the manuscript.

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