

## **Judy Hopps and the Power of Motivation: A Semantic Analysis in *Zootopia***

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the role of motivation in the character development of Judy Hopps in *Zootopia* (2016), utilizing a semantic analysis approach to explore how her intrinsic motivation is conveyed through both verbal and non-verbal communication. By focusing on Judy's dialogue, body language, and interactions with other characters, the research investigates how her drive to break societal stereotypes and achieve personal growth serves as the central force driving the narrative. The study highlights how Judy's repeated mantra "Anyone can be anything" reflects her internal desires for justice, fairness, and equality, while also addressing broader themes of overcoming prejudice and societal expectations. Using semantic and semiotic theories, the research uncovers the significance of language and visual cues in expressing motivation, contributing to a deeper understanding of character portrayal in animated films. The findings also address a gap in existing literature by offering a nuanced analysis of motivation through both verbal and symbolic elements in animated narratives, showcasing how *Zootopia* uses motivation to explore themes of social change and moral growth.

**Keywords:** character development, intrinsic motivation, Judy Hopps, motivation, semantic analysis, *Zootopia*

### **Introduction**

*Zootopia* 2016, an animated film directed by Byron Howard and Rich Moore, presents a complex society in which anthropomorphic animals coexist while facing issues related to prejudice, identity, and social expectations. One of the central characters in the film is Judy Hopps, a young rabbit who becomes the first of her kind to join the *Zootopia* Police Department. Judy's strong motivation to prove her capability in a profession dominated by larger animals drives her actions throughout the narrative. Her journey reflects themes of self-determination, persistence, and the struggle against societal stereotypes, making her character particularly relevant for analyzing motivation in narrative development.

In narrative analysis, motivation is a fundamental concept that explains why characters make certain decisions and how those decisions shape their development over the course of a story. Motivation functions as the psychological force that propels characters forward and provides

emotional depth to the narrative. According to Merdeka (2023), a character's motivation forms the emotional and moral backbone of a story, guiding actions and conflicts within the plot. In the case of Judy Hopps, her desire to make a difference and challenge societal limitations represents intrinsic motivation, which plays a crucial role in understanding her character development in *Zootopia*.

Previous studies have examined motivation in film characters across various genres. Putri et al. (2022), for instance, analyzed character motivation in action films, emphasizing how personal goals and emotional struggles influence decision-making. Similarly, Cahya (2019) explored motivation in animated characters, highlighting how such motivation often aligns with universal values such as justice, bravery, and friendship. However, these studies tend to focus on general psychological traits and narrative goals, rather than examining how motivation is conveyed semantically through language, symbolism, and behavior.

Despite the growing body of research on character motivation, limited attention has been given to the semantic construction of motivation in animated films. Few studies have explored how motivation is expressed through linguistic choices, symbolic actions, and non-verbal cues. Judy Hopps offers a compelling case study, as her motivation is communicated not only through dialogue but also through body language, repeated expressions, and interactions with other characters. This gap in the literature highlights the need for a semantic analysis that examines how motivation is represented beyond psychological interpretation alone.

Motivation is especially significant in animated films, which often aim to convey moral values and social messages to audiences of different ages. Salsabila and Fitriyanti (2023) emphasized that animated characters express motivation through a combination of dialogue, visual symbolism, and emotional expression. In *Zootopia*, Judy's repeated statements such as "anyone can be anything" symbolize her belief in equality and her resistance to societal constraints. Her motivation is closely tied to broader themes of identity, social justice, and personal growth, reflecting how animated films address complex social issues in accessible ways (Alam, 2022).

Several scholars have discussed *Zootopia* as a film rich in social commentary, particularly regarding discrimination and equality. Septiani et al. (2019) viewed Judy Hopps as a symbol of empowerment and perseverance. However, while these studies examine her psychological and thematic significance, they do not specifically analyze how her motivation is semantically constructed through language and symbolic representation. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by focusing on the semantic portrayal of motivation in Judy Hopps' character.

## **Method**

This study employed a qualitative research design using a semantic analysis approach to examine how motivation was portrayed in the character of Judy Hopps in *Zootopia* (2016). A semantic approach was chosen because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of how meaning was constructed through language, symbols, and non-verbal elements within the film narrative. This design was appropriate for understanding how Judy's intrinsic motivation to prove herself as a capable police officer was communicated through dialogue, actions, body language, and interactions with other characters.

The data for this study consisted of selected dialogues, scenes, and visual representations involving Judy Hopps that reflected her motivation. These data were collected directly from the film *Zootopia*, with particular attention given to scenes that depicted decision-making, emotional struggle, and moments of challenge or achievement. The analysis examined both verbal expressions, such as Judy's dialogue, and non-verbal cues, including facial expressions, gestures, silence, and interactions with other characters. The broader narrative context of the film was also considered to understand how Judy's motivation related to themes of justice, societal expectations, identity, and personal growth.

The analysis was guided by two main theoretical frameworks: psychological theories of motivation and semiotic theory. From a psychological perspective, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) proposed by Putri et al. (2022) was used to distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Judy Hopps' actions were analyzed primarily through intrinsic motivation, as her goals were driven by personal values such as equality, justice, and self-belief rather than external rewards. From a semiotic perspective, the study drew on Pratama (2025) and Wardaniningsih and Kasih (2022), who argued that meaning in film is constructed through both verbal language and visual signs. This framework enabled the analysis of how Judy's motivation was reinforced through symbols such as her police uniform, framing in key scenes, and visual contrasts between characters.

The research followed a systematic analytical procedure. First, the film was viewed multiple times to identify and select key scenes in which Judy's motivation was most clearly expressed. These scenes were transcribed to capture relevant dialogue, while non-verbal behaviors were carefully observed and noted. Second, both verbal and non-verbal data were examined to identify how motivational meanings were conveyed, particularly in moments where dialogue was minimal but visual cues were prominent. Third, the data were coded thematically based on recurring patterns of motivation, including personal growth, resistance to societal stereotypes, justice, and self-empowerment. This coding process helped trace the development of Judy's motivation throughout the film.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis to identify patterns and relationships in the semantic and semiotic elements of the film. The findings were then compared with existing literature on character motivation in animated films to contextualize Judy Hopps' motivation within broader portrayals of characters facing societal constraints. To enhance validity and reliability, the study applied clear criteria for scene selection, transcription, and coding, and the film was reviewed multiple times to ensure consistency and depth of analysis. The interpretations were also triangulated with relevant scholarly sources to strengthen analytical credibility.

As this study analyzed publicly available film content, no ethical concerns were associated with participant involvement. Nevertheless, proper academic citation was maintained for all referenced theories and previous studies. The analysis aimed to respect the complexity of the film and its characters by providing a nuanced interpretation of Judy Hopps' motivation rather than oversimplifying her role within the narrative.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Use of Language to Express Motivation**

The analysis of Judy Hopps' dialogue in *Zootopia* reveals a profound use of language that reflects her intrinsic motivation. Throughout the film, Judy frequently repeats the phrase "Anyone can be anything," which encapsulates her motivation to break free from the societal stereotypes placed upon her as a rabbit in a male-dominated profession. This mantra not only expresses her personal desire to prove herself capable but also reflects the broader theme of self-empowerment and equality. The semantic analysis of this phrase shows how Judy's motivation is rooted in her belief in justice, fairness, and her intrinsic desire to achieve personal growth despite the obstacles she faces.

Judy's dialogue is often short and to the point, avoiding excessive verbosity. This minimalist approach mirrors her determination and single-mindedness, emphasizing the importance of action over words. For instance, in the scene where Judy confronts her superior about her ability to handle the missing mammals' case, her directness and confidence in her abilities are reflected through her straightforward and assertive speech. This contrasts with other characters in the film who engage in more elaborate dialogue, showcasing Judy's unique approach to challenges and reinforcing her character's motivation to prove herself.

### **Non-verbal Communication and Motivation**

In addition to her dialogue, non-verbal communication plays a significant role in expressing Judy's motivation. Her body language, particularly her posture and facial expressions, frequently conveys determination and resilience. A key example is seen when Judy faces rejection from her colleagues and mentors. In these moments, her body language—standing tall and maintaining eye contact—demonstrates her refusal to back down. This physical manifestation of motivation is in line with Merdeka (2023) concept of the "filmic signifier," where non-verbal signs are used to convey deeper meanings about a character's internal state.

One particularly telling scene occurs when Judy is working late at night to solve the case, and her exhaustion is evident in her slumped posture. However, despite her physical fatigue, her decision to push forward, evidenced by her straightened back and determination in her gaze, illustrates how her motivation transcends her physical limitations. This contrast between physical weariness and mental fortitude highlights the resilience and persistence that define Judy's character. Through such visual cues, the film effectively uses non-verbal communication to reinforce Judy's inner drive, showcasing her unwavering commitment to achieving her goals.

### **Thematic Exploration of Motivation: Overcoming Societal Expectations**

Judy's motivation is not just personal; it is deeply intertwined with the film's social commentary on overcoming societal expectations and stereotypes. As the first rabbit police officer in *Zootopia*, Judy constantly faces doubt and prejudice from her peers, who question her abilities due to her size and species. Her motivation to prove herself is therefore not only a matter of personal achievement but also a challenge to the societal structures that seek to limit her. The film's use of motivation as a tool for social critique resonates with broader societal discussions about overcoming bias and discrimination.

The semantic analysis of Judy's dialogue reveals how her words and actions challenge the expectations placed on her. When Judy is dismissed by Chief Bogo, she responds by taking on the most difficult case, demonstrating that her motivation is fueled not only by a desire for professional success but also by a commitment to proving that anyone, regardless of background, can succeed. This theme is further emphasized by the way Judy's motivations evolve, from simply wanting to make a difference to embracing the responsibility of challenging injustice within Zootopia.

The film's narrative structure also aligns with Putri et al. (2022) Self-Determination Theory (SDT) differentiates between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Judy's motivation is primarily intrinsic, driven by her internal values of justice and fairness rather than external rewards. While the film presents external challenges—such as societal stereotypes and professional obstacles—Judy's internal drive remains the key factor in her perseverance and ultimate success.

### **The Role of Motivation in Character Development**

Judy's motivation serves as the backbone of her character development throughout the film. In the early stages of the film, her motivation is primarily focused on proving herself capable, which reflects her initial desire to break free from the constraints of societal expectations. However, as the narrative unfolds, her motivation evolves to encompass a deeper understanding of justice, fairness, and empathy, particularly as she grapples with the complexities of the case she is working on and her interactions with Nick Wilde.

The transition in Judy's motivation is highlighted through both her dialogue and non-verbal cues. For example, in a pivotal moment when Judy acknowledges her biases toward foxes and apologizes to Nick, her words and the sincerity in her tone mark a significant shift in her character's understanding of justice. This moment of self-reflection highlights how Judy's motivation has matured, moving from a desire for personal validation to a broader, more inclusive sense of justice. Through this development, *Zootopia* portrays motivation as a dynamic force that not only drives the plot but also fosters emotional growth and moral awareness in its characters.

### **Comparative Analysis with Other Animated Films**

When compared to other animated films that also feature characters overcoming societal obstacles, such as Elsa in *Frozen* (2013) and Simba in *The Lion King* (1994), Judy Hopps' motivation stands out in its focus on intrinsic values of justice and equality. Elsa's motivation is initially driven by fear and isolation, while Simba's motivation centers on his responsibility as king. Judy, however, is driven by her desire to break societal norms and achieve personal growth, making her a unique character in terms of motivation in animated films. The comparison highlights how *Zootopia* uses motivation not only as a personal journey but also as a tool for social commentary, setting it apart from other films that focus more on external, familial, or royal expectations.

In summary, the semantic analysis of Judy Hopps' character reveals the complex interplay between verbal and non-verbal elements in expressing motivation. Through her dialogue, actions, and body language, Judy's intrinsic motivation is portrayed as the driving force behind her personal growth and the narrative's progression. The film's use of motivation is not only a tool for character development but also a means of addressing broader societal issues, such as overcoming prejudice and societal expectations. By analyzing Judy's character through a semantic lens, this study sheds

light on the powerful role that motivation plays in shaping both character arcs and thematic depth in animated films.

## Conclusion

This study provided a detailed semantic analysis of the character of Judy Hopps in *Zootopia*, focusing on how her motivation is conveyed through both verbal and non-verbal communication. The research has shown that Judy's motivation is not merely a driving force behind her actions but also a central element in her character development and the broader narrative of the film. Through her dialogue, body language, and symbolic actions, Judy's intrinsic motivation to prove herself as capable and to challenge societal stereotypes is consistently portrayed throughout the film.

The findings highlight how Judy's motivation is deeply rooted in her personal values of justice, fairness, and equality. Her repeated mantra, "Anyone can be anything," encapsulates her internal drive to break free from the limitations imposed by society, making her journey one of self-discovery and empowerment. Moreover, the use of non-verbal cues—such as Judy's determined posture and facial expressions—reinforces her commitment to her goals, illustrating the significance of motivation beyond mere speech.

This study also examined the thematic dimensions of motivation, showing how Judy's personal drive challenges societal norms and serves as a commentary on overcoming prejudice and discrimination. Her evolution from wanting to prove herself to understanding the complexities of justice reflects the film's broader message about moral growth and societal change. By applying semantic analysis and semiotic theory, the study has illuminated how *Zootopia* uses motivation not just for character development but as a tool for social critique.

Furthermore, this research has addressed a gap in the literature on the semantic analysis of character motivation in animated films, particularly in action-packed narratives like *Zootopia*. By examining both the linguistic and non-linguistic elements of Judy's motivation, this study has contributed to a deeper understanding of how language and symbolism work together to convey complex psychological and moral themes.

In conclusion, *Zootopia* stands as a compelling example of how animated films can use motivation to create rich, multi-dimensional characters and to engage with larger societal issues. Judy Hopps' journey is not only one of personal triumph but also an exploration of how intrinsic motivation can drive meaningful change. This study opens avenues for further research into the role of motivation in animated films, encouraging an exploration of how language, action, and symbolism collaborate to form narratives that resonate with both children and adults alike.

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