

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

The Walt Disney Company is an American film industry that is famous for its animated movies based on fairy tales. Founded in 1923 by Walter Elias Disney, or Walt Disney, this company produces animated films based on classical fairytales such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Pinocchio* (1940), *Alice in Wonderland* (1951), and many more. Each animated films brings huge success to the Walt Disney Company by winning various awards such as the Golden Screen and Oscar awards (IMDb, n.d.), and being known all over the world even after Walt Disney's death in 1966 (D23, n.d.).

However, in 2000, the Walt Disney Company faces a crisis in which most of its younger audiences do not enjoy watching Disney animated films movies because of its outdated cartoon forms. They struggle to understand the deliberate pacing of the films' plot as well as enjoying the old-fashioned animations (Wood, 2017). Therefore, to gain back the audiences' admiration on Disney stories, the Walt Disney Company decides to create a trend in remaking all of those animated films into live-action ones. It starts with *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) and uses real actors to portray their characters instead of animation. With the help of Tim Burton as the director, the Walt Disney Company succeeds in presenting a live version of their animated film that became a huge success, gaining 1 billion dollars in the global box office as well as gaining 6,5 out of 10 ratings (Billington, 2010). After this success, the Walt Disney Company then keeps on using this trend to remake other animated movies into live-action ones.

Another interesting trend the Walt Disney Company uses to entertain its audience is by retelling its animated films' stories from the villain's perspective. In 2014, this company produces *Maleficent* as a way to retell the story of *Sleeping Beauty* through the villain's point of view. It uses Maleficent, the evil fairy in *Sleeping Beauty*, as the main character and focus the story on her reasons to hate the princess and her family. This unique movie is considered as something new since

the film reverses the role between the good royal families and the evil villains. It also provides a good side of the Disney villain as if emphasizing evil creatures are not truly evil, but can be good in their own way. Once again, the movie turns out to be a huge success as it gains 7 out of 10 ratings (IMDb, n.d.), and \$758,539,785 in the global box office (Boxofficemojo, n.d.). With all of these creative ways in producing its movies, Walt Disney Company succeeds to entertain its audience from all ages. Therefore, I choose to analyze Walt Disney Company's film because of its ability to create two new trends, which are the 'live-actions' and 'villain's perspective' trends, to retell its animated stories in a more interesting way to amaze its audience.

Walt Disney Company also combines these two new trends and debuts them in their American cable network, which is Disney Channel. Originated in 1983, Disney Channel is created to maximize Disney's assets by showing both live action TV series and animated cartoons to the audience. It begins its successful debut with *Golden Girls* (1985) before continuing with *Disney Sunday Movie* (1986) (D23, n.d.). From then on, Disney Channel produces lots of interesting animated TV shows like *American Dragon: Jake Long* (2005-2007), *Phineas and Ferb* (2007-2015), and *Girl Meets World* (2014) (EW.com, 2016). Not only so, this popular TV channel also shows various original movies like *High School Musical* (2006), *High School Musical 2* (2007), and *High School Musical 3* (2008), *Camp Rock* (2006) and *Camp Rock 2: The Final Jam* (2008), and *Descendants* (2015) and *Descendants 2* (2017). From all of the TV shows and movies, Disney Channel becomes one of the most popular TV Channels in the world. In fact, Disney Channel outnumbers Nickelodeon's rating by receiving 822,000 ratings while Nickelodeon receives 804,000 (Kisell, 2014).

Although Disney Channel tends to launch TV shows and movies that offer stories related to everyday life such as high school romance and friendship, it has not forgotten its origin with classical Disney characters like princesses and princes. Therefore, on July 31, 2015, Disney Channel releases *Descendants*, an original movie, that uses the classical characters of princesses, princes, and evil villains as well as combines the two Disney trends: 'live action' and 'villain's perspective' in the story (IMDb, n.d.). The movie becomes popular, gaining 6,4 out of 10 ratings

that Disney Channel decides to make two sequels, which are *Descendants: Wicked World*, an animated TV series that is released on September 18, 2015, and *Descendants 2*, an original movie that is premiered on July 21, 2017 (IMDb, n.d.).

In this study, I choose to analyze *Descendants* because of its unique use of the villains' children as the movies' main characters. Usually Disney movies always use princesses and princes, which have perfect qualities like beautiful and kind, as their main characters. It also often makes the princes and princesses encounter and defeat evil villains who would do anything to harm them. However, in this movie, Disney Channel does not stick to the perfect princes and princesses as their important characters. Instead, they use the children of Disney villains as their main characters as they adventured in a kingdom full of princes and princesses who despise them. Also, in this study, I will limit my analysis only the movie's narrative script without discussing the visual language of the film.

The story of *Descendants* begins with four children of Disney villainous characters who grow up trapped in the Isle of the Lost because of their parents' crimes in harming the royal families. Their names are Mal, daughter of Maleficent who is the evil fairy in *Sleeping Beauty*, Evie, daughter of the Evil Queen in *Snow White*, Carlos, the son of Cruella De Vil, the crazy fashion designer in *101 Dalmatians*, and Jay, the son of Jafar who is the evil sorcerer in *Aladdin*. One day they received an invitation from Prince Ben, Princess Belle and King Beast's son, to live in Auradon, a kingdom where all of the Disney princes and princesses live in peace. They receive this invitation because of the prince's pity toward the villains' children who are innocent, but are forced to live miserably in the prison island. Soon afterwards, the four children leave the island and enter the kingdom of Auradon.

What is interesting in this movie is that the four villain children are completely despised by some of the princes and princesses' children like Prince Chad, Cinderella and Prince Charming's son, as well as Princess Audrey, daughter of Princess Aurora and Prince Phillip, because of their status as the villains' children. They talk bad things behind the villainous children's backs and criticize their behavior in school. However, despite all of those bad treatments the four children received, they are still welcomed by some of the royal families children like

Prince Ben himself and Doug, son of Dopey who is one of the seven dwarfs in *Snow White*. They teach good qualities to the four children such as fair play, bravery, and love which then influence them to be good and to forget their evil behavior.

The story of the interaction between the villains' children and the royal children of Auradon raises an issue of labeling good and evil as well as its impacts to the children's lives. This is apparent through the fact that the royal children are labeled as good children who deserve everything good because they are born from Disney princes and princesses. This then cause the royal children to be seen as good children even though they may have behaved badly. In contrast, the villains' children immediately receive the label of evil since they are born from Disney evil villains. The label of evil then expects the children to be evil like their parents without giving them the chance to be different.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In this analysis, I am interested to know how good and evil are instilled. I am also interested to know how good and evil affect the royal and villains' children.

1.3 Purpose of the study

This analysis aims to reveal the ways that 'good' and 'evil' are instilled through labeling. This analysis would also discuss that the label of good and evil affect the royal and villains' children by making them seen as good or evil children and expecting them to live up to their label.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Of all Disney movies, both animated and live-action, always provide entertainment through its interesting plot and characters. Yet, I find out that those films also offer morality to its audiences. In other words, no matter how entertaining the stories are, Disney films always offer the same moral message, in which good is

always rewarded while the bad are punished. Usually the moral message is applied in Disney films by having the good characters rewarded by happy-endings, like marrying their true love, while the bad characters are punished by death or isolation in the dungeon. When the villains' perspective trend is released along with the story of *Descendants*, it may have seemed that Disney has changed its side toward evil since the villains are given second chance to be better. However, I find out that through this trend, Disney offer two different perspectives regarding good and evil. This means that Disney still sticks to the morality that good is always rewarded while the evil is punished by making the evil characters convert to good before they could live happily. On the other hand, Disney also shows that even though being good gains advantages, it shows that being evil makes the villains able to live life freely according to their own will without concerning others' opinions and expectations.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

In order to analyze the labeling of good and evil between the royal and villain children, I will use labeling theory, social identity theory, and self-concept theory.

1.5.1 Labeling Theory

Labeling theory is often used as approach to analyze criminal and deviant activity by sociologists since its appearance in the 1930. It is a theory of how a person's self-identity and behavior are influenced by the terms or words that are used to describe them. According to the book *Labeling Theory* written by Johannes Knutsson, labeling theory is first founded by Frank Tannenbaum who introduced his "dramatization of evil" concept, which stated that an act defined as evil would also cause the actor to be seen as evil too. In other words, when the behavior of individuals has been labeled as evil, the definition is transferred to the individuals themselves, causing them to be described as evil (Knutsson, 1977).

Another sociologist who elaborates on labeling theory is George Mead, the founder of symbolic interaction, who suggests that a person's character is not determined by his actions. Instead, the society itself shapes the person's character. Mead's labeling theory focus more on the internal process of how a person's mind constructs his self-image through his interaction with the society. This means that a person's behavior actually reflects how others treat him. If the person is treated in a certain way, his mind would unconsciously accept the image conveyed through that treatment and therefore causing him to act according to the image (Knutsson, 1977).

In addition, labeling could also be passed down from parents to children. According to the book *Like Godfather, Like Son: Exploring the Intergenerational Nature of Crime* written by Randi Hjalmarsson and Matthew J. Lindquist, parents could transmit the label they possess to their children through genetics, which means that if the parent bears a certain label, the child would immediately inherit the parent's label. Also, the labels could be transmitted through the parents' conscious act in passing down his label's values to the children. Particularly, parents could transmit their label through the power of example, by instilling norms, and by providing access to high-quality social and professional networks and positive neighborhood environments (Hjalmarsson, Lindquist, 2012). As an example, based on the book, children may be introduced to their father's network for obtaining and selling drugs in order to make them a drug seller as well. If their father is a thief, the children could also learn from their father's real action in stealing a car to make them thieves (Hjalmarsson, Lindquist, 2012). Moreover, parents could be viewed as the children's role model and pass their norms and behavior to them.

Labeling theory would be applied in the analysis by revealing the ways the children gain their label of 'good' and 'evil' from their parents as well as how it determines their behavior and perception toward each other.

1.5.2 Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory is a theory that states that people define who they are depending on the groups that they belong. According to Henri Tajfel, a Polish social psychologist, social identity begins with the premise that individuals define their

own identities depending on social groups (Islam, 2014). He also proposes that social groups are important to the persons' self-esteem because it gives them a sense of belonging as they socialize with others in the society. Therefore, people then tend to increase their self-image by enhancing the group's status that they belong to as well as discriminating and holding prejudice views against other groups. This activity would then divide the world into "them" and "us" (that is also known as the in group and the out group) based through the process of social categorization, a process of putting people into social groups depending on their own sense of belonging.

After the division is created, those in the in-group would seek any negative aspects from the out-group only for the sake to make their own group look good. According to Henri Tajfel, there are two ways to enhance the in-group better than the out-group. The first one is through prejudice, which is labeling other groups according to personal opinions. The other one is stereotyping, which is the tendency to group things together by exaggerating the differences between groups. This then cause people to see their own group as different since it compares their group's good quality with other group's negative qualities based on opinions.

As soon as a person identifies himself as a member of a certain group, he is expected to behave according to the group's expectations. Based on the book, *Identity Change* by Peter J. Burke, for each identity there is a standard that indicates the level of each dimension of meaning, which defines the person's identity: what it means to be who one is (Burke, 2006). The meanings that define an identity are the identity standards of any group, role, or person-based identity (Burke, 2006). Moreover, not all members of the social group could exactly fulfill the group's standards or expectations on how he should behave or believe in. This happens because there are some changes in the meanings within the identity standard (Burke, 2006). Specifically, each member of a certain group could have different definitions regarding the group's beliefs or expectations depending on their personal understanding and opinions. This then causes the members' to change the meanings within the group's standards, and thus they become different.

Social identity theory would be helpful in providing answers to how the children of the villainous characters shape their identity depending on the social groups they live in. When the children of the villainous characters live in an evil environment, they become evil. Moreover, as soon as they move to a good environment, their interactions with the people there influence them to be good.

1.5.3 Self Concept Theory

Self-concept is a theory on how a person sees himself as a living, experiencing, and functioning human being as he interacts with the world around him. According to the book *The Self Concept* written by Viktor Gecas, self-concept is defined as the totality of an individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object (Gecas, 1982). In other words, a person's activity in defining who he is through thoughts, feelings, abilities, and unique characteristics provide a mental picture or concept of himself as a unique human being. Self-concept is defined through the process of self-evaluation that is also known as self-esteem. This process refers to the evaluative activity a person does to see himself according to how much he values himself.

Apparently, the way a person values himself could be affected by two factors. The first factor is called reflected appraisals where a person's self-concept reflect the responses and appraisals of others (Gecas, 1982). Particularly, a person could construct his self-concept through his opinion about himself based on what he thinks other people's opinion about him. The opinion a person has about how people see him is usually a form of assumption about himself that could be wrong. Yet, when the person has perceived or believed that assumption as true, he could act according to that assumption.

The second factor in defining self-concept is called social comparison where self-concept is formed through how the person is compared to other people. If the result of the comparison resulted in the person is perceived as a better individual than others are, then the person would develop positive self esteem. Yet, when the comparison resulted in the person being viewed as having less good quality than the other person do, then he would develop negative self esteem. Self-concept theory

would be helpful in analyzing how the label of good and evil shape the children's perspective and behavior toward themselves. In addition, it would also provide the ways how the children of the villainous characters shape their identities through other people's opinions toward them.

The labeling, social identity, and self-concept theories would connect with each other by enabling me to see how the label of good and evil could affect the royal and villain children's behavior and perception about each other. Specifically, the label given to the children would determine in which group they belong. As soon as the children are placed into a certain group, their interaction with the people in the group would influence their self-concept. Therefore, the children's self-concept would emphasize their label.

1.6 Organization of the Study

This thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter is the thesis' introduction that consists of the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, theoretical framework, and organization of the study. The second chapter is divided into two subchapters. The first subchapter discusses how good and evil are instilled through labeling. The second subchapter contains the analysis of how the label of good and evil affect the children's perception and behavior. Lastly, the third chapter contains the conclusion of my analysis.