

Revealing the Empowerment at Barnum Circus in *The Greatest Showman*

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Abstrak

Kesetaraan tidak berfokus pada memperlakukan individu dengan cara yang sama tetapi pada bagaimana setiap orang mungkin memiliki kesempatan yang sama untuk mencapai hasil yang sama, sedangkan pemberdayaan mengacu pada tindakan membantu atau mendukung mereka yang membutuhkan untuk mencapai kesetaraan dengan orang lain. Ini terutama terjadi pada populasi minoritas ketika ada perbedaan tertentu seperti etnis, ras, agama, dan identitas kelompok. *The Greatest Showman*, disutradarai oleh Michael Gracey dan diproduksi oleh 20th Century Fox pada tahun 2017, adalah salah satu film drama musikal terlaris sepanjang masa. *The Greatest Showman* menceritakan kisah Phineas Taylor Barnum (P.T Barnum), yang memberdayakan dirinya dengan membangun sirkus dan membiarkan orang-orang dengan kelainan fisik menjadi bagian dari pertunjukan. Berkaitan dengan pemberdayaan yang dilakukan oleh karakter dalam film *The Greatest Showman*, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap bagaimana pemberdayaan yang digambarkan dalam film tersebut dan fungsi dari pemberdayaan pada Barnum Circus dalam *The Greatest Showman*. Pendekatan penelitian ini dibagi menjadi tiga bagian: sumber data, pengumpulan data, dan analisis data. Data tersebut diperoleh dari screenshot adegan, lirik musik, dan pertukaran karakter dari film Michael Gracey *The Greatest Showman* (2017). Makalah, jurnal, artikel, buku, dokumen, dan sumber belajar lainnya digunakan oleh peneliti. Dengan menggunakan data kualitatif, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa *The Greatest Showman* menjadi film yang tidak hanya mendukung perlakuan tidak adil terhadap individu penyandang disabilitas tetapi juga menunjukkan bahwa mereka tidak berdaya di masyarakat sebagai akibat dari kapitalisme yang tak terhindarkan.

Kata kunci: *Pemain Pertunjukan Terbesar, Kesetaraan, Pemberdayaan*

Abstract

Equality focuses not on treating individuals the same way but on how everyone may have the same chance to achieve the same result, whereas empowerment refers to the act of assisting or supporting those in need to achieve equality with everyone else. It mainly happens in minority populations when there are certain differences such as ethnicity, race, religion, and group identity. *The Greatest Showman*, directed by Michael Gracey and produced by 20th Century Fox in 2017, is one of the highest-grossing musical drama movies of all time. *The Greatest Showman* tells the story of Phineas Taylor Barnum (P.T Barnum), who empowered himself by building a circus and allowing people with physical abnormalities to be a part of the performance. By concerning the empowerment carried out by the character in *The Greatest Showman* movie, this study aims to reveal how the empowerment is portrayed in the movie and the function of the empowerment at Barnum Circus in *The Greatest Showman*. The approach of this study is divided into three parts: source data, data collecting, and data analysis. The data was derived from screenshots of scenes, music lyrics, and character exchanges from Michael Gracey's movie *The Greatest Showman* (2017). Papers, journals, articles, books, documents, and other study resources are used by the researcher. Using qualitative data, this research shows that *The Greatest Showman* becomes a movie that not only supports the unfair treatment of individuals with disabilities

but also demonstrates that they are powerless in society as an unavoidable result of capitalism.

Keywords : *The Greatest Showman, Equality, Empowerment*

INTRODUCTION

Changing the paradigm of self-development towards positive change, fostering an awareness of individuals or groups' role in the development process. Empowerment emerges as a word used a lot when discussing about development (Markantoni et al., 2018). However, the importance of empowerment has not been fully understood and implemented by development stakeholders, either by individuals, groups, communities, and their environment. Even among the communities, they are still confused to participate in carrying out every stage of development in their environment. According to Kamruzzaman and White (2018), the empowerment programs require active participation in their implementation, where the individual or group as a determinant of the empowerment success. In the latest, some cases arise due to social inequality that occurs in society related to empowerment. It usually happens in minority communities in which there are some differences such as ethnicity, race, religion, and between groups. Eljaaidi (2016) argues that an inappropriate empowerment process can result in social inequality and injustice within an organization.

As stated by Maynard et al (2012), the role of empowerment, in general, is an effort to give autonomy, authority and encourage individuals or groups in doing their tasks. When viewed as a whole, the concept of empowerment has two distinct inclinations (Samah & Aref, 2011). The primary tendency is a process that provides individuals or communities control, confidence, and capabilities. Then, secondary tendencies highlight the process that provides incentive, empowering or inspiring people to get the potential throughout a process of dialogue.

Empowerment is a person's or a group's attempt to solve issues by implementing skills, understanding things, bolstering potentials that foster the growth of self-rule, and empowering the community in the economic system, lifestyle, education, and sociocultural. Individuals, groups, organizations, and communities can understand and accept their circumstances through empowerment that helps them gain more power. Rappaport (1981) reported that empowerment allows everyone to choose their needs, rights, choices and forms a sense of concern for the incapacities experienced by many people (Jason et al., 2019, p. 184). According to Pratto (2016) empowerment is a process that gives a chance to everyone to think, talk, act, and make a choice related to their job. Referring to Samah and Aref (2011), the concept of empowerment is a process of releasing incompetence, powerlessness, and matters related to weakness. Through this meaning, empowerment can be interpreted as "changing from incapable to capable" or changing from powerless to empowered. Therefore, empowerment must be implemented at all levels to overcome the impotence of groups and individuals. It is multitiered with implications for individuals, communities, and organizations as a key element in community psychology. Under the previous statement, community and psychological empowerment are two main types of empowerment.

First, community empowerment always involves two interrelated groups, namely the community as empowered and the other side as empowering party. Community empowerment prepares the community in terms of opportunities, resources, knowledge, and expertise to increase self-efficacy in determining the future. Bond & Keys (1993) proposed that community members may become empowered as a result of community leaders' assistance (Jason et al., 2019, p. 188). Acts to empower the society could be divided into three phases within this framework: The first step is to create an environment that improve the community's potential. Second, enhancing possibilities through real action such as the implementation of additional components that empower the community. Third, protect the interests of the community concerned. The empowerment approach emphasizes community groups' autonomy in decision-making based on personal resources and democracy.

Empowering the community is an effort to increase the dignity of the society with all their limitations that have not been able to escape poverty and fear, so that community empowerment is not only strengthening individuals but also existing social institutions. The development of progress in society usually occurs between community members and those in power, especially in the government. Community empowerment becomes a link of assistance between community leaders and vice versa.

Second, the term Psychological Empowerment emerges as a result of the empowerment concept. Thomas and Velthouse (1990) described psychological empowerment as the increment of intrinsic motivation towards a task. Continuing the previous concept from Thomas and Velthouse (1990), Spreitzer (1995) strengthens it by interpreting the concept of Psychological Empowerment as an individual's intrinsic motivation towards his/her work which is manifested in four forms of cognition: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Li, 2016). First, the meaning of psychological empowerment in task motivation is the compatibility between the profession and the values believed by the individual. Then, the encouragement of the individual's belief in his knowledge and competence is sufficient to carry out his duties. After being confident in their abilities, individuals will determine how to bring tasks with their authority. The last is the impact of an individual's influence on who has a role in the work environment. In addition, there are 3 classifications of the Psychological empowerment components according to Zimmerman (1995), such as: a). Intrapersonal Component reveals how individuals think about themselves, including self-efficacy, control, and competence. b). Interactional Component discloses an individual's intellectual understanding of norms and values in knowledge or resources to produce change. c). Behavioral Component unveils the actions taken by individuals that directly affect the final result.

Conger and Kanungo (1988) integrated the empowerment approaches that occur in the management and psychology literature comes from the same root, Power and Control (Conger, 2017, p. 143-155). They also defined the Empowerment concept as a motivational construct is the root of Power and Control. However, its concept here is used differently. In the psychological literature, the concept of "Power and Control" indicates the conditions of motivation or expectations that exist within an individual. Individuals are assumed to require power to influence and control others. Based on Bandura's opinion (in Conger & Kanungo, 1988), the definition of power as a motivational construct is the same as belief in self-efficacy. This conceptualization strengthens employee self-efficacy and will make employees feel more powerful. Thus, Empowerment as a motivational construct means creating certain conditions to increase personal motivation in completing tasks by swelling an individual's self-confidence. This explanation emphasizes that empowerment should be viewed from the psychological side as a motivational construct.

Movie studies in literary studies are interrelated with each other. In this study, the researcher uses a sociological approach to literature that occurs in the movie. Literary work is a form of self-expression of a literary creator who does not only want to express his soul. However, it also wants to influence the reader to understand and appreciate the literary works. Literary works are born because of the imagination in which there are many ideas, thoughts, and feelings of an author (Nurhamidah et al., 2019). The power of creativity encourages someone to produce a work. The development of literary works is currently instantaneous by the many literary works created, like songs, novels, and movies. Movie and literature are two different things with the same goal of creating human understanding. Both movie and literary works equally encourage the progress of human enlightenment. They boost the human mind through actions, words and make replicas of human life which be used to criticize and assert cultural practices but also to define histories over time (Sofian & Setiarini, 2020).

Literary works in movies that contain a sociological approach are not a new phenomenon. As evidence, Empowerment is portrayed through the musical drama movie entitled *The Greatest Showman*. It was produced by 20th Century Fox in 2017 and directed by Michael Gracey who is one of the highest-grossing musical drama movies of all time. This

musical drama genre movie was written by Jenny Bicks and Bill Condon. Both of them are movie screenwriters. Bills' several famous works such as *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn Part 1*, *The Twilight Saga Breaking Dawn Part 2*, *Gods and Monsters*, *Kinsey*, and *Dreamgirls*. *The Greatest Showman* is a movie based on a true story. It tells about the journey of Phineas Taylor Barnum (P.T Barnum) who is the founder of a circus in America. The movie is set in the late 1800s, where Barnum (Hugh Jackman) is a young man trying to survive on the streets. He then empowered by building a circus business and inviting people who have body quirks or strange behaviours to be part of the show. Before opening a circus, Barnum finds people who have weird looks and personalities, such as beard women, dwarf humans, an albino, humans with dog hair, people who can do acrobatics, and tall humans. Barnum's circus members didn't feel confident at first but Barnum always supports them, so they finally had the confidence to show themselves in front of many people. Besides, they also try to gain personal strength in carrying out their duties to entertain the audience.

According to the background of the research, this study focused on the following issue: How is empowerment at Barnum Circus portrayed in *The Greatest Showman*? and What is the function of the empowerment at Barnum Circus in *The Greatest Showman*? Furthermore, the concept of empowerment is a rare but unique subject to be analyzed, which is why some researchers use the concept of empowerment in their studies. The previous study about empowerment is written by Zongchao Li (2016) entitled *Psychological Empowerment on social media: Who are the empowered users?*. They analyzed the concept of psychological empowerment from community psychology in the form of social media. Also, the implementation of the intrapersonal and interactional empowerment concepts is used to interpret the empowerment component at the individual level. Another previous study of literary works entitled *The Context Meaning of Deixis in Soundtracks Lyric of The Greatest Showman Movie* by Nisa et al (2020). This journal researches *The Greatest Showman* Movie using a pragmatic approach. The author had used a descriptive qualitative technique to examine soundtrack lyrics from *The Greatest Showman*. The analysis' goal is to identify the types and functions of deixis applied in a speaker's speech.

Several previous studies above are examples that the topic of empowerment and *The Greatest Showman* movie has special characteristics which make it interesting to analyze. But this research is different from these previous studies. The first previous study applied the concept of psychological empowerment only to the social media users, meanwhile, this study uses the concept of empowerment in general toward the main character of the movie. Then the second previous study carries out a pragmatic approach to reveal the deixis applied in *The Greatest Showman* movie's soundtrack lyrics. On the contrary, this study uses a different approach to disclose how the characters apply the concept of empowerment to build self-development.

METHOD

The sociological approach is used by the researcher. It is appropriate for this research since there are different interpretations and perceptions when individuals examine it, and the qualitative technique can link all of the variances in interpretation and perspective. This study's method is composed in the following part, such as source data, data collection, and data analysis. The researcher used some materials that were connected to or assisted the research questions, and also explaining and interpreting data found in the movie. Some screenshots of scene, music lyrics, and characters' dialogues from *The Greatest Showman*'s movie (2017) by Michael Gracey was used as the data source for this study. The researcher uses a variety of sources, including papers, journals, articles, books, documentation, and other research materials. These data can assist a researcher in visualizing the issue. Following data collection, the researcher evaluated the data to better comprehend the data and address the formulation of the problem. To analyse the data, the researcher starts by understanding the movie related to the meaning of empowerment and its theory. Then, examining the data from *The Greatest Showman* and trying to implement the theory toward the movie. After these steps, the researcher recaps all the data analysis and concludes it.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Greatest Showman uncovered two concepts of empowerment and how empowerment encourages someone to believe in their capability to accomplish their career.

The Portrayal of Empowerment at Barnum Circus in *The Greatest Showman*

The analysis of empowerment that occurs in this movie is depicted in two parts, such as community and psychological empowerment. Community empowerment here contains the explanation and what efforts Barnum to build his circus by finding and gathering freak people. Then, psychological empowerment discusses how circus performers gain confidence to carry out their duties.

1. Community Empowerment

Community empowerment in *The Greatest Showman* is depicted when P.T Barnum seeks community resources with their unique appearances and skills to join his circus.

These are the following evidence:

Man: "Hey! You looking for freaks? I know where you can find of them."

Barnum: "Really?"

(Barnum comes to the place the man suggested)

(00:22:43-00:22:52)

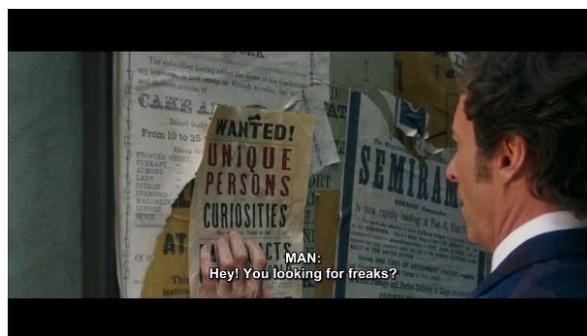


Figure 1. Barnum and His Daughters Adhere the Pamphlet to the Walls and Trees.

(00:22:29-00:22:42)



Figure 2. Posters of Each Circus Performer. (00:24:14-00:25:45)

Figure 1 clearly shows that P.T Barnum makes a pamphlet and pastes it on the wall and tree with his two daughters. The pamphlet contains information that Barnum wants to make a circus filled with odd-looking people. Then, through the conversation, Barnum tries to find the freak person who is a bearded woman. Barnum invites her to join his circus because he is attracted by the woman's vocal abilities and uniqueness. Barnum attempts to gather and interview the registrants before forming a circus group called the Barnum Circus. In Figure 2, Barnum also displays a large poster of each circus performer to introduce their skills and attract the public attention to see the Circus performance. Thus, it is according to Bond & Keys' (1993) theory that the community leaders prepare the community member through their human resources and skill to develop their self-capacity. P.T Barnum in this

movie is an empowering party that composes the formation of the Barnum circus by providing a place, making pamphlets, and gathering them into a circus community.

Psychological Empowerment

In the movie, four cognitions and one component that is a measure of psychological empowerment are represented by each member of the Barnum circus.

Evidence as follows:



**Figure 3. Circus Performers Prepare for The Show
(00:25:57-00:26:28)**



**Figure 4. Circus Performers Show Their Skills in Front of The Audience.
(00:27:38-00:30:16)**



**Figure 5. The audience applauds the circus performance.
(00:30:19-00:30:42)**

Figure 3 shows the circus members preparing by wearing costumes that match their characters and expertise in the circus. They believe in their competence to perform and entertain audiences. Figure 4 presents how the circus performers carry out their duties to amuse, and the results of their shows get praise from the viewers, as illustrated in Figure 5. Therefore, the pictures and previous explanations are related to Spreitzer's theory (1995), namely psychological empowerment as intrinsic motivation divided into 4 cognition,

meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. The members of Barnum's circus understand their work as circus performers by their freak physical and skill. They do their job confidently so that the audience feels entertained, and they are also proud because their existence is finally recognized in the community.

Included in the intrapersonal component, Barnum circus performers in this movie try to defend themselves in front of the guests. Here are the music lyrics and the picture as proof:

Music Lyric 1

*'Cause once you see it, oh you'll never, never be the same
We'll be the light that's turning
Bottle up and keep on shining
(00:25:26-00:00:28:10)*



**Figure 6. Circus Members Sing A Song During Their Performance.
(00:27:27-00:27:34)**

The first music lyrics and figure 6 indicate the circus member become their new version because the different uniqueness and abilities will always shine for themselves and others. When the show starts, they don't want to appear in front of others because of their unusual physique. But their fear turns to confidence when they start cheering and singing Come Alive together.

Music Lyric 2

*I am brave, I am bruised
I am who I'm meant to be, this is me
(00:56:32-01:00:08)*



Figure 7. The Barnum Circus members defended themselves in front of the crowd. (00:58:30-00:58:35)

Figure 7 shows that Barnum's circus performers attend Jenny Lind's premiere concert in America led by Barnum. When they meet Jenny Lind, Barnum forbids them to enter and participate because he doesn't want the guests to be disturbed by the circus members. Finally, through the second lyrics, Barnum's circus performers sing a song that describes

how valuable they are for being who they are meant to be without being afraid of people's opinions. Consequently, the analysis has a connection with Zimmerman's (1995) theory of the psychological empowerment components, namely the intrapersonal component of each circus member who dares to express how they think about themselves and believes in their abilities.

The Function of Empowerment at Barnum Circus in *The Greatest Showman*

The researcher analyses the function of empowerment which is part of the empowerment concept as a motivational construct. It means that the empowerment at the Barnum Circus motivates circus members to be confident and have power.

1. Empowerment as Motivational Construct

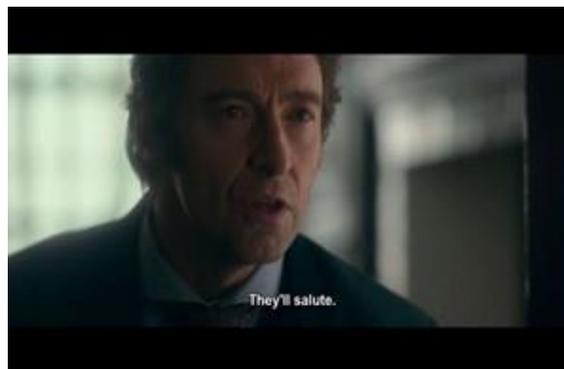
The function of empowerment in *The Greatest Showman* is to build individual self-efficacy in carrying out their duties. The dialogues and the image below are an example:

Dialogue 1

Barnum: "I see a soldier, no, a general riding across the stage with a sword and a gun, and the most beautiful uniform ever made. People will come from all over the world, and when they see him, they won't laugh. They'll salute."

Charles: (smile)

(00:21:57-00:22:21)



**Figure 8. Barnum Motivates Charles To Be Confident
(00:21:57-00:22:21)**

The evidence tells that Charles wants to be a valiant soldier, but he can't get what he wants because of his short stature. However, Barnum still convinces Charles to be confident in achieving his dream because people will stop making him a joke and appreciate his skill.

Dialogue 2

Barnum: Lettie! Lettie! They're waiting!

Lettie: For what?

Barnum: For you. They don't know it yet, but they are gonna love you. Trust me.

(00:26:44-00:26:52)



Figure 9. Barnum Gives Strength Through His Motivational Words. (00:26:44-00:26:52)

The second dialogue and also figure 9 show when Lettie was initially afraid, insecure, and worried about the idea of performing in front of the audience because her physical appearance might startle and scare people. Before joining Barnum's circus, Lettie received a lot of ridicule from society, even her family. However, in Barnum's circus, she has a lot of support from Barnum. She also has the strength and confidence to do her job as a professional circus performer. It is related to the theory of Conger and Kanungo (1988), which explains that empowerment is a motivational construct to increase individual motivation in fulfilling their duties well. Therefore, it is clear that empowerment has a function as a motivational construction through Barnum as a leader who empowers his circus members.

CONCLUSION

In this study, the researcher examines how empowerment is portrayed and the function of empowerment at Barnum Circus in *The Greatest Showman*. The researcher applies a sociological approach to literature to identify how empowerment may lead to increased power and self-efficacy. *The Greatest Showman* revealed two principles of empowerment and how empowerment inspires people to trust in their abilities to succeed in their careers. According to the findings of this study, it becomes a movie that not only supports the unfair treatment of people with disabilities but also indicates that they are powerless in society as an unavoidable consequence of capitalism. In addition, the main character in *The Greatest Showman* performs the function of empowerment.

As a result of analyzing the movie, the researcher concludes that this movie's examination of empowerment is divided into two parts: community empowerment and psychological empowerment. Community empowerment includes an overview of Barnum's efforts to establish his circus by discovering and gathering weird people. It is portrayed when P.T Barnum searches for local resources with unusual looks and abilities to join his circus. Then, psychological empowerment describes how circus artists build confidence in their abilities to accomplish their jobs. It is represented by four cognitions and one component that is a measure of psychological empowerment portrayed by each member of the Barnum circus. Meanwhile, the function of empowerment in this movie is used as a motivational construct. It indicates that empowerment at the Barnum Circus inspires circus performers to be self-assured and powerful. It is stated in the movie that the role of empowerment is to enhance individual self-efficacy in carrying out their responsibilities. Barnum has a lot of supporters. Through Barnum as a leader who empowers his circus members, it is obvious that empowerment has a purpose as a motivating construct.

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