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**Fantasy at Work:
Representations of Labour and Economy
in Children's Animated Films**

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Abstract

Popular media play a significant role in a child's socialization process, having the ability to transmit important messages about how the world functions, to promote certain traditional values, and to shape what is considered to be acceptable and expected social behaviour. How popular children's media portray ideas and concepts related to labour and the economy is one area that has been largely under-researched. This paper will examine how work and capitalism are represented in four Disney Pixar and DreamWorks animated films. It will be argued that the messages contained within these films – the moral virtues of hard work and private ownership, and the legitimacy of the power of bosses over workers – reinforce dominant values and ideologies which support and legitimize the capitalist economic system. The internalization of these messages and discourses work to shape and influence children's understanding of and attitudes towards work which are carried throughout their developmental lifespan and into their role as future workers.

Introduction

How children learn about the world of work, how our economic system functions, their future role and place within this system, along with an array of other cultural values, social norms and behaviours expected and required of them in order to function properly in society, is the process known as 'socialization' (Denhardt and Jeffress 1971). The sources which transmit these messages are referred to as 'agents of socialization'. While primary agents of socialization, such as parents, remain critical in influencing children's education and shaping their attitudes and beliefs, popular media are playing an increasingly powerful role in exposing children to new ideas and concepts which contribute to children's understanding of their social reality.

Although considerable research in the field of critical media studies has been conducted in areas such as the effects of media exposure to violence on children, and the representations of gender and/or race in television and film, there has been little research on how labour and the economy are represented in popular children's programming. The objective of this research paper is to uncover how concepts of work and capitalism are portrayed in children's feature length animated films. A qualitative analysis of four recent Disney Pixar and DreamWorks animated films was undertaken. Films were selected if they were released in the year 2000 or after, and if the principal film character(s) were engaged in an identifiable work-related occupation and/or the film centered on a specific workplace, company or corporation. While an inductive approach was used to analyze these films, certain broad key concepts and themes which define and characterize work in a capitalist economy were pre-identified to assist in the

analysis process. These concepts and themes include: the role and representation of bosses, managers, and workers; presence of labour unions; private property and private ownership; work ethic; divisions of labour; production and consumption; wages and profits; social and economic inequality and social/organizational hierarchy. It will be argued that popular culture is, in essence, replicating a cultural, economic, and political hegemonic discourse and that these films are simply reinforcing and legitimizing values and notions which favour the dominant capitalist class and support the maintenance of the economic status quo.

Exposing children to work and the economy

While formally child labour has been banned in many industrialized countries, such as Canada and the U.S., the concept of working is not foreign to children. Children often perform work around the house, as parents/guardians are quick to instil in children notions about hard work, independence, and responsibility (or use children as a form of replacement labour to perform household chores in dual-earning households) (Blair 1992). Youth are also encouraged to take on part-time paid employment as a way to prepare them for a lifetime of working, or they may be pressured to take on paid employment out of necessity if they come from low-income households. Sometimes parents will exchange work children do around the house for nominal amounts of money, or provide them with a small monetary allowance – again, as a means of introducing children to the concept of a wage labour economy and familiarizing them with spending/consumption, or saving money (Furnham and Thomas 1984; Furnham and Cleare 1988). Parents, for the most part, have jobs and careers as well which they share and inform their children about through conversation (Paugh 2005). Parents, therefore, are the primary

sources of socialization for children about the world of work and the economy (Denhardt and Jeffress 1971). While children may not have the capacity or maturity to fully appreciate the complexities of labour, they are still capable of absorbing the values associated with work that are transmitted by such parties and become shaped by them.

According to researchers, the formation and understanding of economic concepts in children occur in stages throughout the developmental process (Berti and Bombi 1988; Goldstein and Oldham 1979). Starting as early as age three, children begin developing rudimentary knowledge of basic economic principles – for instance, being able to identify that shops are where people buy things, recognition of money/currency, identifying work activities performed by adults, and being able to differentiate between ‘yours’ and ‘mine’ (Berti and Bombi 1988). As children grow older and cognitive functions become more enhanced and developed, their understanding of work and the economy broadens. More advanced and complex economic conceptions, for instance, take hold once children have fully developed their reasoning abilities, at approximately eleven years of age (Furnham and Cleare 1988). Young children, by the time they start school, have also been shown to reproduce notions relating to the gendered nature of work, wherein certain occupations are designated to be performed by boys and others by girls (Liben, Bigler, and Krogh 2001). Further, jobs performed by males were accorded higher levels of social status by many children compared to work performed by females.

Research by Furnham and Cleare (1988) found that as children grow older, they are better able to interconnect specific economic concepts to form a more comprehensive understanding of how the economy operates – for instance, being able to make the connection that company profits and exchange of labour for wages are not separate conceptions. In their interviews with

children aged between eleven and sixteen, the authors found that older children had a better understanding of notions such as wages, investments, and strikes than younger children; however, even some older children had difficulty in fully grasping certain terms or had poor knowledge of them. For example, many of the fifteen and sixteen year olds believed that it was the government or manufacturers that decided upon the price of goods in shops instead of the shop owners. Additional findings included nearly all respondent age groups identifying investing 'unneeded money' into company shares or banks in order to accumulate extra funds and older teens being just slightly more likely to be able to define what a strike was compared to the younger age groups. Regarding the question of why workers go on strike, respondents between the ages of thirteen and sixteen were more likely to identify union leaders as the main reason, rather than the decision being made by both union leaders and workers together. Furham and Cleare (1988) suggest the reason is because union leaders are frequently the ones appearing in the media announcing a strike action rather than the workers.

While researchers have examined and documented the progression of children's understanding of work and economics, a related field of inquiry emerged around children's attitudes towards them, where and how these attitudes originate, and how they change over time. While a child in the fifth grade, for example, may have a better grasp of what labour unions are or reasons for engaging in strike action, how children feel about unions or strikes (i.e. positive or negative) can shed important light on how social and political ideologies formulate.

A research study conducted by Cummings and Taebel (1978) on the economic socialization of children, surveyed 370 U.S. students in grades three, six, nine, and twelve to determine their

overall understanding and attitudes towards labour and capitalism. They questioned children on concepts such as: the role of unions and government, private ownership, socialism and communism, and state intervention in private economic affairs. Based on their survey and interview findings the authors concluded:

Overall, the data clearly suggest that social learning experiences are a form of economic socialization progressively inculcating in the minds of children political value orientations favorable to corporate capitalism... the data do suggest the progressive development, in individual consciousness, of political ideals endorsing and legitimating some of the more important features of capitalist economic thinking: private ownership of the means of production, individual striving and meritocratic explanations of inequality, and limited state intrusion into business affairs. Conversely, children appear to develop explicitly anti-collective, anti-union, and anti-socialist sentiments. (208)

The authors' findings, similar to those by Furnham and Cleare (1988), also suggest that children are unable to connect how the economic system interacts with or is directly related to other broader social issues. For instance, many children in the study expressed enthusiasm for more government intervention to help those living in poverty; however, there was no connection made in identifying capitalism and low employment incomes as the main sources of poverty. Rather, some children identified persons' internal 'character flaws and motivational deficiencies' (207) as the chief reason for people living in poverty.

While enlightening, these studies rarely focus on the sources of children's understanding (or lack thereof) of the working economy. Although parents play a critical role, secondary sources

of socialization, such as peers, culture, mass media, and the education system, are just as influential (Levine and Hoffner 2006). Despite the fact that schools are institutions which help children prepare for the world of work, it is rare to find an education curriculum that will go beyond simple 'career education' (i.e. exposing children to a variety of career path options and occupations), to one that teaches children about their rights at the workplace, labour laws, the role of labour unions, how a capitalist economy functions, or the origins of social and economic stratification (McDonald 2009). It is assumed that such lessons will be taught by parents, or "first-hand" at the workplace when children and youth get their first jobs.

In instances when basic economic education is taught in schools, it is mostly in broad, generalized terms, with no deeper understanding or critical discussion of larger macro issues. Without a critical approach, we are simply reinforcing in children the idea that our economic system, and our roles within it, are part of a 'natural order', and anything that may threaten or oppose its operation is to be negatively viewed. As Denhardt and Jeffress (1971) state:

It is obviously quite difficult to explain economic behavior under a capitalist system without instilling in the student a bias toward this mode of resource allocation. As a result the person becomes slightly aware of and receptive to certain aspects of the system, elements often brought to mind by a key word or phrase. For example, there is little doubt that most Americans respond with favor to such phrases as 'the profit motive' or 'the free enterprise system.' On the other hand, the mention of certain other topics such as 'deficit spending' or 'union influence' may immediately evoke an unfavorable response. (117-118)

As such, children and youth possess a generally weak understanding of the economy, or develop a skewed and biased perspective influenced largely by socializing forces which aim to

reproduce dominant capitalist ideas. The next area to explore is how economic and labour ideas are shaped in children through mass media.

Not Just Entertainment: Media & Socialization

The proliferation of electronic media today in a variety of digital formats – from television, CDs, DVDs, Blue-Ray discs, video games, and the internet – has allowed recent generations of children greater accessibility to video images than ever before. With electronic devices such as laptops, tablets, cell phones and smartphones, and even video screens inside of automobiles becoming increasingly more portable and inexpensive, children are exposed to and are consuming media at a record rate. According to U.S. figures, children between the ages of two and eighteen spend, on average, 5.5 hours a day using various forms of electronic media (Dotson and Hyatt 2005). In a 2003 media use survey, it was found that 70 percent of kids two years of age and under spent an average of two hours a day watching videos or television (Moscovitch 2007). Many children watch an average of three to four hours of television a day, equating to approximately 1,500 hundred hours per year – compared to just 900 hours spent in the classroom (Moscovitch 2007). In light of such statistics, it is evident that electronic media plays a significant role in a child's upbringing. In addition, with the number of dual-earning households increasing, as well as the number of hours parents spend at work, families are having less time to spend with each other, leaving children with more time to spend in front of electronic screens. According to a 2007 Statistics Canada study, the average worker in Canada spent approximately forty-five minutes less per day with his or her family compared to 1986 (Moscovitch 2007).

With ownership of media outlets becoming increasingly concentrated into fewer and fewer hands, with only a handful of large and powerful multinational corporations, such as News Corp, Disney, AOL Time-Warner, and Viacom, creating and controlling the majority of entertainment content produced, children and adults alike are exposed to a smaller number of opinions, viewpoints, and ideas (Dotson and Hyatt 2005; Gamson et al. 1992). Moreover, these corporations understand the importance of reaching children at a young age through aggressive advertising in order to mould their economic habits, attitudes, and behaviours both as current and future consumers (Denhardt and Jeffress 1971; Dotson and Hyatt 2005).

Animated or non-animated children's programming can be enjoyed by viewers of all ages, but it is primarily created and targeted towards children. Considered first and foremost as a source of entertainment, such programs can also function as an educational tool, capable of teaching children about the world they live in, 'normal' and socially acceptable behaviour, and transmit important ideas, morals, and values which can be internalized and reproduced in society (Gökçearslan 2010; McDonald 2009). According to Social Cognitive Theory in the field of behavioural psychology, it has been suggested that children can both learn and model their behaviour by watching television (Thompson and Zerbinos 1997). Likewise, in the realm of communication studies, Cultivation Theory posits that "people acquire conceptions about the social world as a result of frequent exposure to the consistent and repetitive images of television" (Wright et al. 1995, 1706; Baker and Raney 2007). This is noteworthy since young children, who often prefer animated shows and films, tend to watch their favourites repeatedly until the point of memorization. The ability then for a handful of large corporations to transmit their stories and images, embedded with their socially constructed perspective and worldview,

to a substantial portion of the global population, make these animated films an extremely influential tool of socialization. As Lugo-Lugo and Bloodsworth-Lugo (2009, 166-167) state: “In a basic sense, the narratives embedded within these recent stories provide children (their primary target audience), and even adults, with audio-visual reinforcement of ideologies concerning gender roles, the importance of conquering one’s fears, the rewards of hard work, or the benefits of team effort, making these stories powerful agents of socialization.” Adults are often more ‘active’ consumers of media, being able to scrutinize or critically engage with what they are viewing, or the ability to differentiate between humour, satire, and irony. However, young children have not fully developed their cognitive functioning, nor do they have the same level of life experience or education that would enable them to deconstruct the images they are exposed to.

Animated films then cannot simply be perceived as a harmless and innocent form of entertainment (Giroux and Pollock 2010). As Gamson et al. (1992, 374) states: “The lens through which we receive these images is not neutral but evinces the power and point of view of the political and economic elites who operate and focus it. And the special genius of this system is to make the whole process seem so normal and natural that the very art of social construction is invisible.” Furthermore, while animation is considered to be an unrealistic form of fictional work, featuring anthropomorphized objects, animals, or make-believe creatures, children at a very young age are usually unable to differentiate between fiction and reality, believing that characters are real and alive and story lines and situations to be realistic (Gökçearslan 2010; Thompson and Zerbinos 1997; Baker and Raney 2007). It is usually only by

the age of ten or eleven when children can discern between fiction and reality on the screen in the same manner adults do (Wright et al. 1995).

It is in recognition of the power and influence television and film media possess in shaping children's values, identities, and behaviours that political figures, media commentators, and advocacy groups have frequently been vocal in their criticism of the images and messages children are exposed to. Social conservatives, for instance, have often pounced on children's programming they feel threatens 'traditional' family, religious, or political values. For example, the children's television show *Teletubbies* was accused by some of promoting 'homosexuality', while the 2012 animated film *The Lorax* was recently criticized for promoting radical environmentalism and supporting the Occupy Movement (Bodnar 2006; Lugo-Lugo and Bloodsworth-Lugo 2009; Judkis 2012). Social progressives have also denounced how children's films and programs often promote traditional gender roles or under represent women; provide insufficient roles for people of colour or people with disabilities; or often times include stereotypical and racist portrayals of certain ethno-cultural groups (Comstock and Sharrer 2007). Research analysis of cartoon films and television programming has revealed, for instance, that male characters largely outnumbered females, and that female characters were predominantly represented in subservient, weaker, or secondary roles or held fewer positions of responsibility, thereby reinforcing notions of patriarchy and male domination in many spheres of life (Gökçearslan 2010; Baker and Raney 2007).

Representation of Work in Animation and Films

"If adults don't like their jobs, they don't go on strike. They just go in every day and do it really half-assed. That's the American way" – Homer J. Simpson, The Simpsons

There is a rich history when it comes to the representation of the working-class and working-class politics in film. In the U.S., the 1900s to the 1930s was an era especially renowned for the proliferation of films depicting the labour movement, work-class struggles, unions, and social democracy – some progressive and militant in nature, some balanced, and others more hostile (Ross 1998; Bodnar 2006; Zaniello 2003). With the political, economic, and social landscape undergoing rapid transformations during the post-war 1940s, the U.S. entering into the Cold War and the rise of McCarthyism, the shifting composition of movie audiences from working-class to middle-class, technological advancements and rising costs associated with film production, and the emergence of the Hollywood film industry characterized by wealthy and powerful movie studios, the nature of American films dramatically shifted in tone. Films increasingly espoused pro-capitalist and conservative thinking which vigorously rejected any criticism of American traditions and values, where labour unions were vilified as being unpatriotic, and where class conflict was stigmatized (Bodnar 2006; Ross 1998).

A number of research studies on representations of work in popular media have focused predominantly on how occupations are portrayed in television – e.g. the gendered nature of work, the characteristics people engaged in such professions exhibit, the over-representation and glamorization of ‘prestigious’ occupations over more labour intensive, routine, or repetitive ‘blue-collar’ type jobs, etc. – and how these images impact children’s career aspirations and thoughts about occupational roles (Wright et al. 1995; DeFleur and DeFleur 1967).

Research findings on occupational portrayals on television by DeFleur and DeFleur (1967) found that television was a source of “incidental” or unplanned learning for children regarding adult occupational roles. The authors went on to state:

It can be suggested that TV provides children with much superficial and misleading information about the labor force of their society. From this they acquire stereotyped beliefs about the world of work. Given the deep significance of occupational roles for both the individual and his society, any learning source which distorts reality concerning this aspect of the social structure...may be laying the foundations for difficult personal and social problems. (789)

In regards to employment in animated films, women are often represented as being unemployed, or engaging in strictly reproductive labour in the household (Gökçearsan 2010; Baker and Raney 2007). Those female characters employed outside the household were largely represented in stereotypical occupational roles such as nurses, secretaries, teachers, or waitresses. Despite such skewed and negative messaging, research studies on cartoon movies throughout the decades have noticed some minor improvement in creating more equal representation and less stereotyping of traditional gender roles; however, the authors conclude that substantially more progress needs to be made.

Research conducted by McDonald (2009) expanded upon past studies which focused exclusively on occupational depictions to examine how adult paid work was represented in forty-two children’s feature length films. Some of her key findings included: an over representation of males in paid work who also predominantly held positions of power and authority; a disproportionate number of women represented in ‘traditional’ women’s

occupations or performing unpaid domestic work; conflict between work interfering with home life and leisure time; individuals deriving satisfaction from working; bosses bullying or being overtly abusive to workers; lack of representation of unions; the possession of a strong work ethic, and developing better relationships with employers as a means to escape routine, low-paying, repetitive work. McDonald (2009, 32) remarked: "...the films examined were not neutral, but offered certain positions such as reinforcement of gender stereotypes and the normalization of existing organizational power structures."

Disney

"When hearts are high, the time will fly, so whistle while you work" – Snow White, Snow White and the Seven Dwarves

When it comes to the critical examination and deconstruction of popular children's films, the first target invariably becomes the Walt Disney Corporation. Disney is no stranger when it comes to criticism of its film content, and has been extensively studied and scrutinized over the decades by numerous critical media academics. Although many film and animation studios in the business of children's entertainment now exist, Disney's corporate power, wealth, and influence has not waned, and its popular characters are widely recognized by children and parents alike the world over. Through its acquisition and control of large film, television, music, literature, and media companies, including toys and merchandising, hotels, and theme parks, its power, pervasiveness, and global reach enables Disney to not only shape popular culture but regulate it as well (Giroux and Pollock 2010). As a means to assert its dominance over the children's film industry, the Disney Corporation purchased rival animation studio Pixar from Apple's Steve Jobs in 2006 for \$7.4 billion dollars (La Monica 2006). Today, while other large

studios, such as Universal Pictures for instance, have also entered into the fold of producing children's animated feature films (especially to profit off the growing popularity of 3D movies), it is perhaps only Steven Spielberg's DreamWorks Animation studio that has had the ability to rival Disney in the amount of films released and profits generated. These two production juggernauts have managed to dominate the animated film industry, releasing a series of highly successful films and spawning competing film sequel franchises (e.g. Disney Pixar's *Toy Story* series versus DreamWorks Animation's *Shrek* series) viewed by millions of children around the world.

The founder of the Disney Company, Walt Disney, understood very well the impact that his animated films could have on children and how such a medium could be used not only for entertainment purposes but act as an educational tool as well to transmit certain American middle-class ideals of the nuclear family, Protestant values and ethics, consumerism, and a pro-market economy (Giroux and Pollock 2010). Disney himself remarked: "I think of a child's mind as a blank book. During the first years of his life, much will be written on the pages. The quality of that writing will affect his life profoundly" (Giroux and Pollock 2010, 17). Particularly relevant to the domain of labour studies is Walt Disney's personal political beliefs towards labour and production. Disney was greatly influenced by the Fordist method of production and essentially replicated Henry Ford's Model-T car assembly plant in his animation studio, wherein a once skilled artistic craft was divided and broken down into a series of smaller lesser-skilled tasks to increase productivity (Byrne and McQuillan 1999; Schlosser 2001). Disney was also a staunch and vocal anti-communist and anti-unionist. During a bitter labour dispute between the Disney Company and its animators' union in 1941, Walt Disney later testified in 1947 before the U.S.

House Un-American Activities Committee, declaring that labour unions had been infiltrated by communists (Dorfman and Mattelart 1971).

Methodology

The following paper will expand upon McDonald's (2009) research by analyzing a specific genre of children's film that was intentionally left out of her sample: animated films.

Further, while McDonald focused primarily on identifying how adult work was portrayed in her sample of films, this study aims to identify broader concepts related to the capitalist economy and labour as a whole.

The sample of films selected for this study was based on certain criteria: 1) they were strictly animated full-length feature films; 2) films were produced by either Disney's Pixar or the DreamWorks Animation company; 3) films were recent, released in North American theatres in the year 2000 or onwards; 4) the film's main character(s) were engaged in an identifiable work-related occupation and/or centered around a specific workplace, company, or corporation. While a number of Disney Pixar and DreamWorks Animation films released in 2000 or after were listed for consideration and viewed during the selection process, the process was not exhaustive (i.e. every single film from these studios was not viewed). Only the first four films that satisfied the sample criteria were selected.

Four animated films were selected for this research: *Bee Movie* (DreamWorks Animation, released 2007); *Monsters Inc.* (Disney Pixar, released 2001); *Ratatouille* (Disney Pixar, released 2007) and *WALL-E* (Disney Pixar, released 2008). Due to the small sample size, a quantitative

content analysis of the films could not be performed. Instead, a detailed case study analysis of how work and the economy are represented in each film was undertaken.

Although an inductive approach towards analyzing these films was utilized, wherein economic and labour concepts and themes were derived directly from the movies themselves, certain broad themes which define and characterize labour and capitalism were pre-identified to assist in the analysis process. These included: the role and representation of bosses, managers, and workers; presence of labour unions; private property and private ownership; work ethic; divisions of labour; collectivism versus individualism; production and consumption; wages and profits; social and economic inequality, and social/organization hierarchy.

Results

Bee Movie

*“Most bee jobs are small ones, but bees know that every small job, if it’s done well, means a lot”
– Honex Industries Tour Guide*

Bee Movie tells the story of Barry B. Benson, a young honey bee who, along with his friend Adam, had just completed university and was about to begin his working career. Unlike typical recent graduates, bees do not really have any choice about where they can work. They have all been in school training in preparation to work in the beehive making honey. The hive, represented as a large corporation owned by Honex Industries (a division of Honesco and part of the Hexagon Group), is a large honey production facility. Here, the concept of bees working to make ‘honey’ is effectively a metaphor for people working to make ‘money’. Similarly, honey is the backbone of the entire bee economy; it is consumed for food, fuel, and other household items. Likewise to the bees in the film, the time individuals spend in school is meant to prepare

us for the working world, to eventually sell our labour to a corporation or other workplace organization. In the film, the hive education system holds multiple graduation ceremonies an hour, a commentary on how our education system is similarly churning out thousands of potential workers into the labour force on a continual basis.

The hive (or factory) relies heavily on a special class of workers known as ‘pollen jockeys’ who go out and collect nectar from flowers, which is then brought back to the hive and transformed into honey. The work of pollen jockeys is considered risky and dangerous, since it requires braving the elements and the threat of being potentially killed by humans. Because of their important role and risks involved, they hold a high and prestigious position within the hive and easily earn the respect of the other bees.

Although Barry is initially excited to start working, his excitement quickly dissipates during the workplace orientation session, when he finds out that whichever job the bees decide to pick, they will have to stick with that position for the remainder of their lives. Whereas the concept of a ‘job for life’, or even full-time, permanent work, may have been a reality in earlier decades, today, with the changing nature of the labour market, such jobs are on the decline, as we now see a steady rise in part-time, temporary, and contractual work. It is also apparent that the workers have little power in regards to determining their work arrangements. When they start working for the company, it is expected that they will dedicate their entire lives to the job. The Honex guide proceeds to inform the new recruits that bees have not had a day off in over 27 million years. Upon hearing this Barry exclaims: “So you’ll just work us to death?”, wherein the guide responds: “We’ll certainly try!” While tongue-in-cheek, this statement does not

necessarily depart from reality, as many workers are forced to work well past their retirement age due to low-incomes or lack of a pension.

During the tour of the production facility, we notice how all the worker bees are thoroughly enjoying their time at work, even though many of the job duties depicted look menial and repetitive. The factory is also made to resemble a large theme park – it is colourful, has slides, and some of the machinery production equipment are designed to bear resemblance to amusement park rides and games. Earlier in the film, Adam remarks how he loves that the hive incorporates an amusement park into their regular day. Barry believes that is the reason why bees do not need a vacation. The incorporation of games and recreational items such as slides, gyms, and videogames in the workplace is a tool often used by employers to make their workplaces seem more enjoyable, and as a means to boost morale and productivity so that their employees have less reason to take time off work.

Barry, who yearns for excitement and change in life, finds the thought of making one career choice that will impact his entire life a frightening prospect, and begins questioning the ‘status quo’ and how bees have functioned for millions of years. Barry asks his father, who was a honey stirrer for Honex, if he ever got bored of doing the same job every day. His father dismisses this, claiming that a routine task such as stirring can be a beautiful thing. This is a similar line many parents with children who are entering the labour force for the first time use – any job is a good job.

When it is time for Barry and Adam to finally choose their jobs with Honex, they arrive at the giant job placement board which lists the type of occupation, shift number, and total number of company positions available. Adam tells Barry to hurry and make a choice before all the ‘good

jobs' are taken. The types of jobs available at Honex are diverse, yet characterize the factory's rigid division of labour. Jobs range from front desk, restroom attendant, chef, regurgitator, pourer, stirrer, hair removal, and many others. None seem particularly appealing except to the bees. One new worker becomes ecstatic when he is able to secure the job of 'crud picker'. Throughout the film in scenes depicting working life in the honey factory, we find that it is predominantly males who are profiled working (with the notable exception being the female company tour guide). Even the high status pollen jockey posts are all held by male bees. Conversely, in a real beehive colony, worker honey bees are predominantly female, while drones are male and have no function other than reproducing (Campbell, n.d.). Further, although the hive in the film is a corporation, there is no depiction of any type of management structure, bosses, or other authority figures (aside for a military-type figure who commands the pollen jockeys). Since honey making is a collective enterprise the corporation could be a type of cooperative, however, this is never explicitly stated. Bees normally have a rigid social structure, with the queen bee on top of the social hierarchy. However, the queen bee is never actually shown in the movie and only passing references are made to her existence.

Barry's parents also represent the more traditional male breadwinner household. Although Barry's father is now retired, there is no mention of his mother ever having worked outside of the home. When Barry is caught sliding down the banister his mother remarks: "Barry, why don't you use the stairs? Your father paid good money for those!" – reinforcing the fact that the father is the one who earned the family income. His parents also become increasingly concerned when Barry is not working and making honey, since for them working is an integral part of the bee identity and a way to contribute to the functioning of the hive.

Barry eventually starts exploring life outside of the hive and begins developing a relationship with a human florist named Vanessa. One day Barry notices jars of honey for sale inside of a grocery store. He immediately becomes appalled at the fact that humans are stealing honey from bees for their own personal consumption. Barry tracks down the source of the bottled honey to a company called “Honey Farms”, where humans have built hundreds of artificial bee hives in order to extract the bees’ honey. The workers of Honey Farms are depicted as villains, making statements such as: “They make the honey and we make the money.”

Barry decides to take legal action and sue the humans – more specifically the heads of the five major food companies – for illegally procuring and profiting off the labour of bees. He makes a passionate plea to his parents: “Nobody works harder than bees! Dad I remember you coming home some nights so overworked your hands were still stirring, you couldn’t stop them! What right do they have to our hard earned honey? We’re living on two cups a year, they’re putting it in lip balm for no reason whatsoever!” A strong parallel can be made between Barry’s arguments and arguments for greater income equality and proper redistribution of wealth for workers. In Barry’s world, such as our own, it is considered an injustice that a more powerful group exploits the labour of another for their own personal gain, without fair and adequate compensation.

Although the lawyer for the honey industry argues that it is “man’s divine right to benefit from the bounty of nature God put before us” and that we should not have to negotiate with creatures responsible for producing them, the court nevertheless decides the case in favour of the bees. As part of winning the lawsuit, all the honey taken by humans is returned to the bees. Barry is pleased with the outcome and the fact that bees now no longer have to work so hard.

Adam, however, is concerned with what this might mean for the bee way of life, since making honey is all they have been doing for the past 27 million years. With the hive now overflowing with honey, the factory shuts down its operations. Since bees now have enough honey to live off of, they proceed to live a more leisurely lifestyle free from work, with their days spent sleeping in and lounging by the pool. However, outside the hive, we find that the environment is starting to die off, as a result of bees not performing their pollination duties. Without pollination, plants, trees, and flowers cannot grow, and the human race will be at risk. The message relayed is that if people had everything they needed to live on and did not have to work, this would result in potential disastrous consequences for society as a whole. Working, then, is a part of our nature. Even jobs that may seem small and insignificant have an important role to play in our society in order to function properly.

Realizing the importance of their work to the world, the film ends with the bees returning to their honey making jobs and allowing humans to now purchase ‘bee approved’ honey. Barry, who at first couldn’t decide on what job he wanted, is depicted now having two jobs, as a pollen jock and a lawyer, which he seems quite happy undertaking.

Monsters Inc.

“This company has been in my family for three generations. I would do anything to keep it from going under” – Mr. Waternoose

The story of *Monsters Inc.* revolves around two central characters, James Sullivan and Mike Wazowski. Both Sullivan (nicknamed ‘Sulley’) and Wazowski are workers at the *Monsters Inc.* factory located in the city of Monstropolis. *Monsters Inc.* is an energy company providing power

to the residents of Monstropolis. However, this power is unique, in that it is derived from the screams of small children (hence their corporate slogan: “We Scare Because We Care”).

Children’s screams are collected by a specific type of worker called ‘Scarers’. These specialized workers frighten children by way of closet bedroom doors that are capable of traversing from the monster world into the human world. Once a child screams, the sound is harnessed via energy capsules. It is through these capsules that energy is generated throughout the city, providing everything from electricity to fuel for automobiles. The city of Monstropolis, however, is in the midst of an energy crisis, as noted by the headlines of the city’s newspaper which read: “Scream Shortage Looms” and “Rolling Blackouts Expected”. Such headlines parallel the energy crisis which gripped the state of California in 2000-2001 – the same time the film was released (Downey 2001). The principal factor contributing to the energy crisis in the film is that productivity in the factory (i.e. screams collected) has substantially decreased. The owner of *Monsters Inc.*, Mr. Watnoose, blames this on the fact that children today have become much harder to scare than in the past.

The factory floor, called ‘the scarefloor’, is comparable to an industrial assembly line. Closet doors are placed at individual workstations by means of a conveyor system, and once a scream has been collected, a new door is automatically brought directly to the station and the process is repeated. The work is relatively fast-paced, yet routine and repetitive. However, the workers show no sign of feeling bored, unchallenged, or alienated from their work. Quite the opposite, throughout the film workers are always shown to be in a very pleasant mood, smiling and greeting each other cordially. During an early working scene montage, where we see employees

hard at work, the scene is accompanied by happy and upbeat music, emphasizing how factory work is a fun activity.

The factory floor is characterized by a rigid division of labour, where work is divided between 'the scarers' who scare the children, and their assistants who perform more manual labour by collecting the screams in canisters and replacing them once they are filled. The position of scarer, just like the pollen jockeys in *Bee Movie*, can be viewed as a high status and prestigious position within the factory, since their work is essential in providing energy to the city. They are, in essence, high-skilled jobs. Although the scarers need to have the necessary physical attributes (i.e. be large and scary looking) for the job, they also need to ensure they are capable of scaring children. If a child does not scare, the door is declared 'dead' and is destroyed, resulting in lost productivity. The scarers' assistants, on the other hand, possessing smaller physical traits, are low-skilled jobs, as they perform most of the physical labour as well as the end of shift reports.

The work of scarers is also risky and hazardous. Children, in the monster world, are considered to be toxic and dangerous; any exposure to a child or a child's personal belongings, such as clothes or toys, is feared to cause death. If a worker becomes exposed to a child, the supervisor pushes an emergency button to stop the line and the factory proceeds to go into lockdown and members of the 'Child Detection Agency' (CDA) swoop in to contain the hazardous material. The CDA likely represents a government agency, such as the American Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Although it is never confirmed if they are indeed associated with the government, the employer, Mr. Waterhouse, dreads the very sight of them, since factory operations are halted while they clean up or perform an investigation. In one

scene, a scarer becomes exposed to a child's sock. He is obviously distressed and is quickly surrounded by CDA agents who proceed to remove the sock and decontaminate the worker by shaving him down. Mr. Waternoose, witnessing the incident, shows little sympathy or concern for the worker's well-being. Instead he expresses his annoyance at the accident and delay in production, remarking: "An entire scare floor out of commission! What else can go wrong?" Despite this risk to a worker's health and safety, scarers perform their jobs without any protective equipment. All other factory workers though are provided with hard hats, while the CDA agents are all wearing hazmat suits.

The nature of work in the factory is also significantly gendered, as males are disproportionately represented in work roles throughout the company, especially on the factory floor. The few female monsters shown performing work are portrayed doing stereotypical 'women's jobs', such as working reception, daycare work, and office administration (the office administrator, however, turns out to be a high-level undercover CDA agent later in the film). Such images reinforce the concept of the male breadwinner model. Early in the movie, we also witness a brief scene where a wife kisses her husband and wishes him a good day as he flies off to work, lunchbox in hand.

As a means to foster friendly competition amongst workers (while simultaneously attempting to boost productivity), a giant 'scare leaderboard' is profiled on the factory floor. Being able to break the all-time scare record and attain the title of 'top scarer' is one that is highly sought after among the workers, even though no material rewards are associated with it. Again, this is a similar tactic often used by employers, particularly in the sales industry, as a

means to increase productivity, monitor workers' output, and create a more 'engaging and fun' work environment.

The boss of *Monsters Inc.*, Mr. Waternoose, who inherited the factory through his family, is frequently portrayed throughout the film as an intimidating and brusque character. His status and power is represented not only by his physical attributes (i.e. constantly looking grim and angry), but his suit and tie dress as well. He is the only person in the factory (aside from the few female workers depicted) who wears clothing. Mr. Waternoose makes the factory rounds, appears during the training sessions for new scare recruits, as well as checks in on the factory/scare floor to supervise the workers and get updates on the day's productivity. He is portrayed the way many bosses are usually thought of: carrying the heavy burden of responsibility of making sure the company is running smoothly and efficiently, while keeping the board of directors, to whom he is accountable, content (even though he is never shown to be doing any actual work himself). Even when things are seemingly going well, the boss is never satisfied. For example, when the floor supervisor informs him that he thinks they will be able to make their quota for the day, Mr. Waternoose responds exasperatedly: "First time in a month!" Mr. Waternoose is often verbally abusive to his workers, especially to new recruits. The only time he expresses any kind of happiness, is when he is around Sulley, the company's top scarer and producer.

Sulley is the personification of the capitalist work ethic: he trains in preparation for work the moment he wakes up; he is eager to please the boss and curry his favour; he is loyal to the company and willing to do whatever it takes to save the company from going under; and he is willing to stay past his shift to cover for his co-worker (Mike) who forgets to submit his end of

shift reports. Individuals on the street also congratulate him on his hard work, making references to his near breaking of the all-time scare record. His role as a worker is what primarily defines him and his identity and how others view him as well. Sulley even takes his work life home with him. When asked by Mike what his plans for after work are, Sulley responds that he will go home to train some more, wherein Mike promptly tells him that “there’s more to life than just scaring”.

During the course of the film, it is discovered that Mr. Waterhouse, in collaboration with another employee named Randall, are secretly working on a new piece of machinery that is capable of extracting screams directly from children thus rendering the position of scarers obsolete. Children would simply be taken from their bedrooms and their screams sucked out by force. Mr. Waterhouse justifies his actions by stating that it is “for the good of the company” and asserts: “I’ll kidnap a thousand children before I let this company die and I’ll silence anyone who gets in my way!”, while Randall expresses his desire to attain a position of power and authority in the factory and have people working for him. Such actions demonstrate a grim reality of work, wherein employers are often willing to engage in illegal activities in order to boost production or keep their company from going under, while some employees will do whatever it takes to move up in a company to the ranks of management.

Mike and Sulley eventually expose Mr. Waterhouse’s plot and he is taken into custody by the CDA. Although workers become concerned that the boss’s arrest will lead to the closure of the factory resulting in massive layoffs, Sulley realizes that power can alternatively be harnessed by children’s laughter instead of screams. The company restructures itself and the job of the workers shifts from scaring children to making them laugh. This again parallels to real world

debates on the need for alternative, renewable, and sustainable forms of energy (Sulley also remarks that “children’s laughter is ten times more powerful than screams”). Although this is a positive message, there is little emphasis in the film on energy conservation. Rather, it promotes a position that investing in alternative forms of energy is the optimal solution that will allow people to continue their habits of over-consumption. At the end, Sullivan becomes the new CEO of *Monsters Inc.* Having now attained the rank of management, he now is shown wearing a tie to differentiate himself from the other workers. While Sulley as a boss may seem like a major improvement over Mr. Waternoose, Sulley did not attain this position from his previous hard work and dedication, but rather through his innovative idea to change the factory’s method of production. This promotes the notion of possessing an entrepreneurial spirit in order to get ahead, rather than the traditional belief of promotion through hard work and sacrifice.

Ratatouille

“I’m tired of taking! I want to make things! I want to add something to this world!” - Remy

The film *Ratatouille* centres on the character Remy, a rat with a gifted sense of taste and smell and passion for fine food and cooking. Remy lives with a colony of rats led by his father, whose sole purpose is to ensure the survival of the colony from one day to the next. Although Remy’s dad is depicted as a single father, his responsibility as head of the colony to make sure everyone gets fed is similar to that of the male breadwinner model. A theme that surfaces early in the movie, and that is repeated frequently throughout, is that of stealing. Remy believes that all rats do is steal food from people’s garbage. He argues that since they are stealing from people anyway, why not go into their kitchens and snatch fresh food instead? Remy’s father,

who does not share in Remy's passion for fine food, does not think what rats do is stealing, since people already threw it out. He thinks of food as merely fuel for the body; as such, thrown out food should suffice and warns Remy against being near humans who are constantly trying to kill them.

Remy idolizes a famous French chef by the name of Auguste Gusteau, who, before passing away, ran a successful fine dining restaurant in Paris. Gusteau's well-known philosophy was that 'anyone can cook'. One day Remy becomes accidentally separated from his colony and ends up in Paris. Starving for food he attempts to steal a bit of bread from a kitchen, where he is promptly stopped by Gusteau (who appears as a figment of Remy's imagination). Despite Remy's hunger, Gusteau states: "Remy you are better than that. You are a cook! A cook makes, a thief takes! You are not a thief!" Taking something that does not belong to you without having worked for it, or contributed towards producing it, is a message that is continuously reinforced in the movie.

Later in Paris, Remy finds himself in Gusteau's restaurant. At the restaurant we are introduced to the kitchen and wait staff. All the workers in the restaurant are males, apart from a single female cook. They are also mainly white, with the exception of one of the kitchen staff and the restaurant's head chef. The restaurant's current owner and head chef, Chef Skinner, is a very short man who is frequently portrayed as being highly ill-tempered in nature. In one scene, he enters the kitchen and is greeted cordially by his staff. He completely ignores their greetings, focusing instead on reading the mail. He is also a person who does not like having his authority undermined. When Skinner finds out a new staff member – a young man by the name of Alfredo Linguini – has been hired without his approval, he becomes visibly agitated and

begins yelling at the person responsible. He quickly calms down when he finds out that Linguini has been hired as the restaurant's new garbage boy, a position he regards as unimportant.

With Remy outside observing the kitchen in service, Gusteau appears and begins to quiz Remy around the various work positions in the kitchen. Remy correctly identifies the various positions, starting with those highest in command – i.e. the head chef followed by the sous-chef, followed by other positions, such as saucier, chef de partie, and commis – all, according to Remy, having key functions to play in the kitchen and food preparation. When Gusteau asks about Linguini's role, Remy responds, "Oh, him? He's nobody", referring to the low-skilled, low status, and menial work position the plongeur (or garbage boy) holds in the kitchen. Gusteau, however, corrects him stating that he is still part of the kitchen team and that he could still cook (i.e. create great things) if given the opportunity. This exercise demonstrates that, despite the fact that all workers are dressed uniformly, restaurant kitchens have a rigid and hierarchical division of labour where job duties are strictly defined.

Linguini, never having cooked before and not being very skilled, attempts to secretly cook a soup during a dinner service, which Remy helps to prepare and make edible. When the soup is a hit with a local critic, the boss demands that he make the soup again, or else be fired for having stepped beyond his work duties and cooked without permission. Linguini, who is depicted as being a clumsy and inexperienced worker, confides to Remy that he desperately needs this job, having lost many others in the past. This is a stereotypical representation of young workers as being reckless, inept, possessing little skill, and often getting into trouble at work. He even makes a comment: "I'm not ambitious, I wasn't trying to cook!" Remy, feeling sorry for him, but seizing the opportunity to be able to cook in a gourmet kitchen, agrees to

help Linguini. They develop an intricate plan where Remy hides under Linguini's chef's hat and controls Linguini by the strands of his hair like a marionette. Chef Skinner has no respect for Linguini as a worker and is frequently verbally and physically abusive towards him.

Furthermore, Skinner continuously refers to Linguini not by his first name, but calls him by his work title 'garbage boy', in a demeaning manner.

Chef Skinner decides to put Linguini under the guidance of the cook Collette who is to provide him with an orientation regarding how the kitchen operates. She is reluctant to take on this responsibility but does so because she had spoken up in his defence against Skinner who was threatening to fire Linguini over making the soup. Interestingly, Collette acknowledges her position as one of the few women working in a largely male dominated industry and the barriers she continuously encounters. She angrily tells Linguini:

How many women do you see in this kitchen? Only me! Why do you think that is? Because haute cuisine is an antiquated hierarchy build upon rules written by stupid old men! Rules designed to make it impossible for women to enter this world! But still I'm here! How did this happen? Because I'm the toughest cook in this kitchen! I have worked too hard for too long to get here and I am not going to jeopardize it for some garbage boy who got lucky!

Collette, however, eventually warms up to Linguini and accepts him as an equal member of the team.

Convinced that Linguini is a fraud (i.e. not a real cook), Skinner continuously places challenges and obstacles in front of him to watch him fail. Even though Linguini is now a part of the cooking team, Skinner still demands that he work overtime in order to perform his cleaning

duties as well, essentially doubling his workload. Linguini feels powerless to refuse Skinner's request. Exhausted from being overworked, Linguini ends up falling asleep on the kitchen floor until the next morning. Furthering Skinner's representation as a malicious and greedy employer, it is revealed that he is profiting off Gusteau's name by releasing a line of cheap ready-made frozen dinners under the Gusteau brand. Furthermore, we find out that Linguini is actually Gusteau's son and the proper heir of his father's restaurant. Chef Skinner is troubled by this news as this would result in him losing the restaurant and the money he is making off his side business. Skinner is purely motivated by profit rather than honouring the name of his former colleague.

Although none of the workers in the film (or even *Bee Movie* or *Monsters Inc.*) are ever seen actually getting paid for their work, Linguini provides Remy with food in exchange for his cooking services. In one scene, Remy is seen enjoying his simple meal of grapes, bread, and cheese after their shift, with an expression of deep satisfaction, both for a job well done and because he had earned his food rather than stealing it.

When Remy reunites with his brother, who he finds rummaging through the restaurant's trash bins, Remy decides to take some food from the kitchen for him. Once again Gusteau appears chastising Remy for stealing food from the kitchen, stating that Linguini trusts him and that stealing food from the restaurant could result in Linguini being fired. The concept of private ownership is quite compelling in this film. Earlier as well, when Remy makes breakfast for Linguini, we find out that Remy had taken some herbs from a neighbour's garden to make an omelet. Linguini tells him that it is wrong to steal and offers to buy the herbs that he needs.

When Remy's father finds out he is still alive, he thinks that Remy will rejoin the rat colony. However, Remy becomes torn between choosing his new life as a chef or his family. Yearning for independence and wanting to contribute something to the world, he decides to stay with the humans. According to Remy's father, the world above the sewers is full of snobs, a place where rats do not belong, and as such, they should stick with their own kind. Although rats and humans are two different species, the parallels between upper and lower classes is still prominent – wherein those of the lower classes just take without contributing anything, while the upper class produce, are creative and refined, and enjoy the good things in life.

As soon as staff members discover that Linguini is the true heir to the Gusteau restaurant, Skinner is relieved of his position and Linguini becomes the new boss. As was seen in *Monsters Inc.* as well, businesses are frequently inherited or passed down to family members. With his new prestigious position as head chef, Linguini quickly moves out of his small, cramped apartment into a bigger and more luxurious one. Despite the accolades and wealth that comes with being the head chef of a fine dining restaurant, it is not all positive as Linguini quickly realizes. The job is stressful, full of pressure, and becomes especially complicated since his rise to fame was on the back of Remy's work. On the restaurant's opening day under new management, Collette tells Linguini that he should say something to the staff: "You are the boss, inspire them!" However, the kitchen quickly falls into chaos under Linguini's leadership, where he is forced to reveal that it was Remy who was the true chef all along.

With nearly all the staff walking out on the job at the news, the only person who decides to return is Collette. With the help of Remy's colony, though, the evening ends in a success. However, the restaurant eventually gets closed down by health inspectors at the news of rats

being in the kitchen. A local critic who loves Remy's food decides to help out by investing in a new restaurant named '*La Ratatouille*', where both human and rats can dine – however, in separate sections, continuing to reinforce divisions between the two groups.

Wall-E

"Buy N Large: Everything you need to be happy" – Corporate slogan

The film *WALL-E* takes place in a futuristic dystopian version of Earth. The planet has become inhabitable due to years of over pollution, garbage, and waste, forcing a total global evacuation. Responsible for facilitating this culture of hyper-consumerism is the Buy N Large Corporation. In the film, Buy N Large has become a powerful monopolistic corporate force, controlling not only the retail industry, but gasoline, energy, food, banking (complete with Buy N Large currency), transportation, and the media as well. As Giroux and Pollock (2010) note, it is difficult not to make the association between the power and influence of Buy N Large and that of the Disney Corporation and its corporate partner Walmart. Billboards and ads for Buy N Large paint the city landscape with slogans such as: "Keeping power in our hands", "Do your part, fill your cart", and "Buy, Shop, Live".

To address the global garbage crisis, Buy N Large has transported people off the planet and into space in luxurious star ship cruisers. These completely automated robot controlled cruisers are comparable to resort-type cruise ships, built specifically for relaxation, leisure, and entertainment, with every personal need taken care of. The company's objective was to send people on a five-year long cruise while they sent robots to undertake a large scale cleanup of the planet (profiting off the creation of their own crisis, one of the Buy N Large stores also had an 'Evacuation Sale'). This army of robots, called Waste Allocated Load Lifter – Earth Class

(*WALL-E*), scoured the earth to compact the trash into cubes and proceeded to erect large skyscrapers made of garbage. Despite the efforts of the company to clean up their mess, the mission was a failure, with the CEO declaring the planet had become too toxic to return to, forcing people to remain on the cruise ships for 700 years. During this time, only one of the *WALL-E* units managed to continue operating on Earth while the others eventually broke down. Perhaps most troubling about the film is that amidst this global pandemic, there are no governments or political leaders depicted. Reinforcing the power corporations have acquired over time, the Buy N Large Global CEO is represented as having complete control and sole decision-making powers over the crisis. In a couple of scenes he is even shown in video recordings speaking in front of a U.S. White House presidential style podium and backdrop.

Although *WALL-E* is a trash compacting robot, he is, nevertheless, represented as a dedicated hard working employee. Even while being the last worker of his kind remaining, he continues to obediently perform his daily trash compacting and construction related duties – a job which is largely routine and repetitive in nature. He also imitates many of the same tasks an ordinary human worker would do. He wakes up in the morning at the sound of an alarm, groggily puts on his tread wheels, recharges his battery (his equivalent to a cup of coffee), retrieves his work carrying case (in which he collects various objects he finds interesting in the piles of trash), and proceeds to the work site.

During the course of the movie, *WALL-E* encounters another robot named EVE (Extraterrestrial Vegetation Evaluator), who had been dispatched to Earth by Buy N Large to detect and retrieve any evidence of organic life growing on the planet. Such evidence would be used to determine whether it was safe or not for humans to return home and ‘recolonize’

Earth. *WALL-E* develops a romantic attachment to EVE and, upon showing her the plant he had discovered growing inside of a broken down refrigerator, EVE and *WALL-E* are brought back to one of the cruise ships, called the Axiom. Inside the Axiom we find that 700 years aboard a luxury space cruiser, and an excess of leisure, has left a dramatic physical impact on humans. People have become obese due to a combination of an inactive lifestyle and the effects of gravity on bone density. People are completely dependent on robotic automation for all their needs: they are transported around the ship via hover chairs they never need to get up from, and even if they fall robots will pick them up; food (all in liquid form) is brought to them directly; and instead of conversing with each other face-to-face, people communicate through screens right from their chairs. Although surrounded by others at all times, people live very isolated lives, and any resemblance of a family structure has been completely eroded. Children are separated into daycare facilities under the supervision of robot instructors. In one scene, the robot instructors are teaching young children the alphabet using a Buy N Large style curriculum: “A is for Axiom, your home sweet home. B is for Buy N Large, your very best friend”. Again, this closely parallels reality, with the proliferation of Disney educational toys and the encroachment of corporations into the public education system (Giroux and Pollock 2010).

On board the ship, the only human to hold any kind of actual job is the ship’s captain, Captain McCrea. However, with McCrea portrayed as being lazy, naïve, and playing a secondary role to the ship’s autopilot (which actually controls everything), the position of ship captain is largely symbolic. It is also noteworthy that the only job in the film is held by a white male (as were all the previous captains of the Axiom over the past 700 years). It is only near the end of the film where McCrea asserts his power over the ship’s autopilot that refuses to return the

cruiser back to Earth, based on orders received by the Global CEO of Buy N Large. McCrea realizes that Earth is still capable of sustaining life, but requires people to go clean it up and take care of it. He goes on to tell the computer: “Out there is our home...and it’s in trouble. I can’t just sit here and do nothing. That’s all I’ve ever done, that’s all anyone in this blasted ship has ever done, nothing!...I don’t want to survive, I want to live!” At the end of the film, the ship finally returns to Earth where humans, with the help of robots, begin the process of cleaning and rebuilding their world.

Despite the fact that the film describes the negative consequences of unfettered corporate power and unrestrained consumerism, there is virtually no direct criticism made of how Buy N Large has contributed to the environmental destruction of the planet, or any mention of corporate responsibility and accountability. The underlying message is far more problematic: that no matter how badly we abuse the planet and environment, nature will (eventually) find a way of regenerating and healing itself. Furthermore, excessive amounts of leisure coupled with our over reliance on technology and automation can produce equally disastrous consequences – making people dependent, lazy, unintelligent, and anti-social. Although humans return to Earth, regain a sense of agency in their lives, and begin redevelopment based on an agrarian economy, it is unknown whether any lesson has been learned in terms of over-production and materialistic consumption, and if any future Buy N Large type corporation would return to recreate the cycle once more. Rather, the movie emphasizes personal relationships, avoiding technological dependency, and being actively engaged in producing and creating which can lead to a more fulfilling life.

Discussion

The films selected for this study are all obvious works of fiction, depicting anthropomorphized animals, insects, robots, and monsters. Nonetheless, the parallels and similarities to the human working world and economy are apparent. Overall, these films provide a biased and glamorized portrayal of work, while simultaneously promoting values and traits which favour a capitalist economic model. In films such as *Bee Movie* and *Monsters Inc.*, which focus more on labour intensive production work, working is represented as a fun and exciting experience, where job stress, boredom, and alienation are largely non-existent. Those individuals who primarily bear the brunt of work stress are bosses. Although many of the jobs portrayed in these films are considered relatively low-skilled, routine, and repetitive, they are nonetheless emphasized as important, since what they produce is not only good for workers, but society as a whole. These findings stand in contrast to other research studies that have found that media representations of occupations focus predominantly on high-skilled professional jobs, while largely neglecting more blue-collar or 'low-skill' work. It is possible that it is an attempt to emphasize the 'any job is a good job' work ethic philosophy, instead of one that singles out and promotes more 'prestigious' well-regarded occupations. Furthermore, in films such as *Bee Movie* and *Monsters Inc.*, those with jobs that are considered high-risk or dangerous (i.e. the resource extraction types of jobs performed by the scarers and pollen jockeys), are revered, and hold a prestigious, high-ranking position within their respective workplaces and societies. In the real world, high-risk professional jobs, such as firefighters or

police officers, are often highly respected professions, but high-risk manual jobs, such as resource extraction work like mining, are not held to similar high standards.

Workplaces in *Bee Movie*, *Monsters Inc.*, and *Ratatouille* are also characterized by a rigid division of labour, where job duties and tasks are clearly defined and separated. The division of labour is also highly gendered. Although these are mostly anthropomorphized characters, they are still depicted as having clear identifiable sex/gender – distinguished by a combination of long or short hair, body image, type of dress, the actor's voice, or the personal pronouns used when they are being addressed. Overall, there are far more male characters represented in employment than female, and women workers typically occupy 'traditional' occupational roles, such as secretaries, daycare workers, and office workers. Women also are less likely to hold management positions or positions of authority – the exceptions being the head of the CDA in *Monsters Inc.* and the self-employed flower shop owner Vanessa in *Bee Movie*. Additionally, many of these films reinforce the concept of the 'male breadwinner model', despite the fact that many more women are entering the labour force than ever before and contributing to family household incomes. Younger workers are also negatively portrayed, as being clumsy, inexperienced, unskilled, and not deserving of respect from employers or fellow co-workers.

Employers and bosses in these films are at times depicted as angry, malevolent, and deceitful characters, who oftentimes verbally or physically abuse their workers (perhaps a subtle commentary made by the film's writers who work for these large entertainment companies). In some instances, as seen in *Monsters Inc.* and *Ratatouille*, bosses eventually lose their position due to their own greedy and selfish quest to increase profits or productivity. Ironically, considering Disney and DreamWorks are in the business of making money, profit

making is seen as a corrupting and immoral endeavour. In spite of their negative traits and abusive behaviour, employers have complete authority in the workplace and workers must obediently comply with their demands. Since their positions are demanding and stressful their attitudes can be largely excused, yet it is best not to aspire to reach their ranks as being a worker is fulfilling enough. While all this may seem to contradict the overall support for capitalist management, the films would suggest that immoral or illegal behaviours are the result of faulty characteristic traits, rather than a critique of workplace management structures. For instance, when Mr. Waternoose in *Monsters Inc.* is taken away by the authorities, Sulley assumes his role. Similarly, when Chef Skinner in *Ratatouille* is removed from his position, he is replaced by Linguini. In each case, workplace organizational hierarchies remain firmly intact. Further, as McDonald (2009) suggests, bosses are the ideal antagonists in such films as they carry great power and authority over others, and stand in direct opposition to the film's protagonist – reinforcing the dualistic nature (i.e. good vs. evil) that is common in children's film storylines.

Despite the fact that teamwork and 'the collective good' are emphasized in these films, none of them make any reference to labour unions who can counter unreasonable employer demands. In the *Bee Movie*, justice is obtained through the courts, and comes about as a result of a charismatic leader. Lastly, absent are any scenes showing employers actually paying their workers; working in itself becomes its own reward.

Possessing a strong work ethic is also a trait highly valued in films such as *Monsters Inc.*, *Bee Movie*, and *Ratatouille*. An excess of leisure time and dependency, as seen in *WALL-E* or *Bee Movie*, or getting something without working for it as seen in *Ratatouille*, is cast in a negative

light and contrary to our 'inherent nature' as productive human beings. Rather, everyone must be equal contributing members in order for society to function smoothly. Since these animated films are produced and distributed by large corporate entities such as Disney, who profit directly from sales of their films and related merchandising, it should come as no surprise that the theme of consumption and production is so prevalent.

Another defining feature of capitalism is the concept of private property and private ownership. In many of these films, private ownership of companies is shown to be concentrated in the hands of a single individual, reinforcing the myth of small firm capitalism. Notions of private property and ownership also come through in lessons against theft, both in the moral and 'ethical' sense, such as stealing bread if you are starving, or legal and economic sense, which can lead to severe repercussions, such as possibly getting fired for stealing from your employer – both examples from *Ratatouille*. *Bee Movie* also exhibits this theme by showing how legal action can be taken against those who profit off of the labour of others, or steal a product made by others for their own consumption. Again, since these films are products of powerful corporations, which rigorously defend their intellectual property, trademarks, and copyrights, these messages should come as no surprise; Disney has been especially aggressive in protecting their works from unlawful reproduction (Bell, Haas and Sells 1995; Dorfman and Mattelart 1971).

Finally, in none of these films was there any strong sense of a functioning government or democracy, aside from passive references, such as the CDA in *Monsters Inc.* and the court system in *Bee Movie*. The omission of governments is perhaps an indication of many people's beliefs of their increasing irrelevance in today's world. Instead, large and powerful

corporations, like Buy N Large in *WALL-E*, are prevalent and emphasized as the true political decision-makers who have a profound impact and influence on our society and well-being.

As mentioned, film stories, characters, and narratives are not neutral in their representations, but rather are shaped by the ideologies of those individuals and organizations involved in their development. Diversification of images and ideas are hindered when only a handful of people are charged with writing scripts, screenplays, or story ideas. In Disney's Pixar movies for instance, there are often similar people involved in the development of multiple movie projects. Andrew Stanton, for example, was the writer and director of *WALL-E*, but also wrote the screenplay for *Monsters Inc.* (along with other popular children's films such as *Finding Nemo*, *Toy Story*, and *A Bug's Life*). Stanton is also Christian, and has stated in interviews how his religious views have helped inspire his story lines and characters (Basham 2008). This is not to say that Christians should not be involved in filmmaking; rather, either directly or indirectly, writers are influenced by their personal, religious, and political values, morals, and beliefs, which find ways into their writings. A handful of film writers then are communicating their works and messages to millions of children around the world who are consuming them at a tremendous rate. As such, it is imperative that we view these works through a critical lens, and as much as possible, ensure that a broad range of perspectives and alternative viewpoints are involved in their development.

Conclusion

The results from this research largely support and complement the findings made in McDonald's (2009) study. In sum, children's films are reproducing dominant themes and

ideologies regarding labour and the economy which serve to reinforce pro-capitalist corporate values, while poorly reflecting or misrepresenting workers' interests, and skewing perceptions about the nature of work in today's economy. These findings are particularly relevant for social justice, labour, and union advocates. Since working towards social change requires challenging the status quo, activists often struggle in both effectively communicating their messages to a wider audience and garnering support for their positions from a largely antagonistic or politically apathetic general public. Capitalist and neo-liberal philosophies have become firmly entrenched within our social, economic, and cultural fabric and have become internalized and accepted by many as 'the norm' or 'common sense', even when they run contrary to people's best interests.

Given that the ideological battle for people's 'hearts and minds' begins at a young age, it is important for social justice advocates to identify the sources of socialization (e.g. the family, peers, education system, media) that are reproducing and reinforcing this capitalist hegemonic discourse and work to intervene or counter such messages early on. This is by no means insinuating that children's perceptions or ideologies remain rigid over the course of the developmental lifespan; however, they do become the starting point from which future social learning of work and economics takes place. Since children are exposed to and begin learning about work and the economy at a very young age, it is imperative that they be engaged in critical economic education early in their school-age years, by both parents and teachers alike, and be exposed to an array of alternative economic and political views. As Furnham and Cleare (1988, 477) point out: "Many studies have shown that children can be taught economic understanding at school, often to levels thought beyond their development capability, by

means of role play, class discussion, or just by presenting the correct relevant information.”

Since employment and the economy will impact the future of children over the course of their lives as they transition into working-age teens and adults, substantial intervention in the education process must be accorded to ensure that children are equipped with the necessary tools to confront a dominant capitalist class.

Finally, it is imperative the film industry recognize its power and influence in shaping the consciousness of young people. As McDonald states: “Movies with very large viewing audiences have huge potential to promote a fair and equitable society by providing alternatives to traditional themes that can be internalized and reproduced by their audiences” (32). Parents need to critically examine the content and messages being promoted through these mediums, and converse with their children about the images they are exposed to, utilizing helpful strategies such as those promoted by Comstock and Scharrer (2007) of the three M’s – moderation, mediation and media literacy.

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