

## Representations of Children in the Pixar Films: 1995-2009

by Iris Shepard

Pixar, a highly successful animated film subsidiary of Disney, has produced and distributed ten highly popular and entertaining animated films from 1995 through 2009. Even though Pixar is now owned by Disney, there seems to be a conscious attempt to distinguish Pixar films from the animated films of Disney proper. In 2006 when Disney purchased Pixar, Pixar retained its brand identity. Each Pixar film is a major cinematic event, and upon release Pixar's films have become instant children's classics. Pixar's eleventh film *Toy Story 3* will be released in May 2010. *Newt* and *The Bear and the Bow* are planned for 2011. The most significant distinction between Pixar and many Disney films is that the protagonists in Pixar films are typically older than the main characters of the majority of Disney films. Pixar has dramatically reduced the number of children in their films. Russell, the boy in *Up*, is Pixar's most fully developed child character in all of Pixar's films as of this writing, but he serves primarily as a sidekick to the film's protagonist Carl who is sixty or seventy years old. Pixar films feature very few anthropomorphized children. The tremendous financial success of the Pixar films undoubtedly indicates that depictions of children—whether human or anthropomorphized animals or objects—are not a necessary component of successful children's films.

In Pixar films, child protagonists are replaced with primarily adult anthropomorphized characters including toys, ants, fish, cars, rats, and robots. Between the ages of three and nine, the target age for Pixar films, children's experiences involve primarily their roles in their family and school, and their relationship with their peer group. Though the anthropomorphized protagonists of Pixar's films experience situations that the young viewing audiences may be able to identify with, the solutions the protagonists develop are not transferable into the viewing child's life experience. Janet Wasko in *Understanding Disney* states that children's films allow viewers to "escape from an everyday reality that is not always pleasurable or fun, and my well pose challenging dilemmas" (224). Pixar films contain very few depictions of child protagonists navigating the world that the child viewers inhabit. Henry Giroux, in *The Mouse that Roared*, states:

It is within the drama of animated storytelling that children are often positioned pedagogically to learn what subject positions are open to them and what positions are not. Hence, the struggle over children's culture should be considered as part of the struggle over the related discourses of citizenship, national identity, and democracy itself. (10)

The replacement of child protagonists by anthropomorphized animals and objects causes Pixar's films to forfeit the opportunity to offer constructive narratives about children navigating the precarious terrain of childhood. Through Pixar films, children may be learning that the best thing for them to do is to grow up as quickly as possible.

In Pixar's films, unlikely animals and machines including rats, fish, and cars are anthropomorphized to replace the children in children's films. In *Cars*, for example, the

town of Radiator City is populated with adult cars instead of people—cars that sell and buy tires, cars that manufacture and drink organic fuel, even cars that care about the preservation of the town, located on historic Route 66. Each car in the film serves as a stereotyped small town character. In a moment directly referencing films nostalgic for the 1950s such as *American Graffiti* and *Grease*, references directed towards adult viewers, the cars are shown cruising down the main strip and hanging out at the diner, but there are no humans anywhere. When traffic is diverted from Radiator City by the construction of the new interstate, the cars living in Radiator City have no revenue. The plot revolves around Lightning McQueen, a racecar who is textually drawn as masculine, who accidentally finds himself in Radiator City after he gets lost on his way to the Piston Cup. McQueen ostensibly learns to value community above individuality and helps get Radiator City back on the map. Here are no characters that can be understood as literal or metaphorical representations of children.

Initially *The Incredibles* seems to focus on the difficult childhood of Violet and Dash, but the family struggles, sibling rivalry, and school problems, real world problems that viewing children may experience, are minimized and deemphasized by the family's actual identity as superheroes. Ash and Violet are having these problems because they are superheroes trying to fit in to human society by hiding their superpowers. As superheroes with the ability to run really fast and make protective shields around themselves and their loved ones, they are separated from the viewing audience, and the strategies they use to find their place in society, like rescuing their dad and destroying Syndrome's huge machines that are threatening their parents and life on Earth, are not accessible to viewers. Dash and Violet are successful because they are not really human children.

Additionally, the lack of child protagonists in children's films may indicate a shift in American's construct of childhood. Pixar films, like all texts produced by adults for children in English, are influenced by America's understanding of the "the child." Nicholas Sammond, in *Babes in Tomorrowland*, asserts that our American definition of "the child" emerged from a specific location of class and race. The ideology that influences American viewers and filmmakers about children and childhood stems from a generic understanding of white, male, middle class children that developed out of the 1950s. Sammond asserts that the concept of the child continues to be limiting, but "that truth may be easily swept aside in the intense affect that the figure of the child inspires" (384). Childhood in America is an externally created phenomenon that developed out of a particular period in American history. Texts created by adults for the consumption of children are directed at the concept of "the child" not actual children. Many of Pixar's films reflect a change in the idea of the imagined viewer. Children viewing Pixar's films may be expected to identify with the adult protagonists. In *The Hidden Adult*, Perry Nodelman asserts, "Children's literature is what adults want children to want... One of its defining characteristics may well be its imagining of a fictional child as its reader—a fictional child who it proposes as a model for the actual children who read it" (160-161). Since the "Classic" Disney films of the 1940s and 1950s there has been an aging of the protagonists in children's films while the age of the viewing audience has remained the same.

## **Building on the Disney Tradition**

Pixar films are building on the tradition of American children's film which has been dominated by Disney for over seventy years. Begun in the 1920s by brothers Walt and Roy Disney, the Disney company became known for its quality animation and innovative use of sound and color. By the 1930s Disney's Mickey Mouse was known globally. Through an aggressive marketing campaign, Disney secured its place as the major producer of children's film, but, at the same time it has maintained its reputation as producing safe, wholesome entertainment. The Disney corporation now dominates the entertainment business, including but not limited to children's programming. In addition to its media entertainment, Disney has created a "self-contained universe which presents consistently recognizable virtues through recurring characters and familiar, repetitive themes" (Wasko 2-3).

*Snow White*, produced in 1937 by Disney, was the first feature length animated film. It established numerous conventions for future animated films including stereotypical gender roles in which the female character is passive and dependent on the male character. Giroux states: "Disney's negative stereotypes about women and girls gain force through the way in which similar messages are consistently circulated and reproduced, to varying degrees, in many of Disney's animated films" (100). Wasko asserts: "The Disney version present an Americanized Snow White and might be said to have fully established the Classic Disney formula...Childlike behavior is featured, as cute characters abound, including Snow White herself, the animals, and dwarves" (131). *Snow White* also established a certain level of acceptable violence into children's film. Richard Schickel in *The Disney Version* asserts that the violent scenes may be "recalled with a kind of delicious shudder" (221), indicating that violence may be part of the pleasure in children's film. Including violence has become a well established convention of children's film. The nuances of the texts for children are typically expunged, and high contrast dualities are created. Characters, for example, are either good or evil; there is little ambiguity in the Disney character personality. Wasko states: "Classic Disney is very emphatic in its depiction of good triumphing over evil" (132).

*Snow White* marked the beginning of Disney's "classic" period, the period of film production when Walt Disney was alive. This period includes *Pinocchio* (1940), *Fantasia* (1940), *Dumbo* (1941), *Bambi* (1942), *Cinderella* (1950), *Alice in Wonderland* (1951), *Peter Pan* (1953), *Lady and the Tramp* (1955), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* (1961), *The Sword and the Stone* (1963), and *The Jungle Book* (1967). Wasko asserts that Classic Disney, instead of being open-ended and imaginative as the Disney corporation asserts is "neatly tied into a conservative vision of the world and linked directly with consumer culture" (224).

Throughout the seventies and early eighties, animated films were less popular than live action children's film, and Disney was in financial trouble (Schweizer 3). The "New Disney" period of the eighties and nineties signaled the renewed popularity of animated films and an aggressive marketing campaign under the direction of Michael Eisner. Giroux states: "Eisner took the failing Walt Disney company in 1983 and produced record revenues for the company partly by waging aggressive advertising and

licensing campaigns for merchandising children's culture" (33). The most popular "New Disney" films include *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), *The Lion King* (1994), and *Pocahontas* (1995). These films assume, like most texts produced for children, that "children can, indeed must, change and become adults" (Nodelman 31). In "New Disney" films the protagonists grow up through the course of the film and become either powerful adult leaders (in the case of Aladdin and Simba) or marry powerful adult leaders (in the case of Ariel, Belle, and Jasmine.) Ariel in *The Little Mermaid*, for example, transitions from being a daydreaming, disobedient mermaid daughter in her father's kingdom under the sea to being the wife a powerful human prince by the end of the film.

Pixar provided a challenge to Disney's position as the lead producer of children's entertainment from its release *Toy Story* in 1995 until 2006 when Disney bought Pixar. Beginning in 1995 with *Toy Story*, Pixar produced the first completely computer generated animated film. Several critics speculated that the use of computer generated graphics instead of hand-drawn illustrations meant the end of animated children's film, but Pixar's technological inventiveness partly explains their films' huge success. Keith Booker states, "*Toy Story* (like all Pixar films) is all about the animation and about the ability of Pixar's animators to produce impressive, convincing computer generated visuals that are full of warmth and humor" (122). Many Pixar films textually emphasize technology over magic. In Pixar films, animals can talk, but their linguistic abilities are not attributed to magical intervention. In Pixar's most recent film *Up*, the dogs' ability to talk is the result of an innovative collar that translates their barking into several different languages, a technological, instead of a magical, justification for talking animals. In many Pixar films, the protagonists are adults from the onset of the film. The imperative to become an adult is conveyed in Pixar films by representing adult anthropomorphized characters; in Pixar films there is a tendency to expunge the child characters.

### **Gender Roles in Pixar Films**

Pixar films rely on conventional gender stereotyping. Pixar has moved away from the passive princess motif of earlier Disney films in an attempt to offer more inclusively gendered films with more complex female characters, but just how much progress has Pixar made? The characters of Pixar films, whether they are fish, ants, rats or robots, remain highly gendered in stereotypical ways that conform to the norms of a patriarchal society. Emma Cornell asserts, "In order to be economically successful, cinema must concern itself with the subjectivity of the spectator, who, in a patriarchal culture is constructed as male...the conservatism of the cinema is based on its economic dependence on a male dominated culture" (35) A possible effect of the encoding of the imagined viewer as male may be the perpetuation of gender stereotypes in many Pixar films. Little Bo Peep and Mrs. Potato Head stay at home in *Toy Story 2* when Buzz heads up a rescue search party for Woody. Bo Peep give Buzz a kiss on the cheek to give to Woody; Mrs. Potato Head helps Mr. Potato Head pack, but neither female character is actually involved in the expedition. Jesse, Woody's female counterpart in the Round-up Gang, desires to impress and please Woody by showing him fetishized images of himself,

images that include episodes of a TV show starring Woody, a lunch pail sporting his face, and various other consumer products that portray his image. Her life happiness depends on Woody's decision. If he leaves her, she will return to storage, her greatest fear. She is animated only by his presence. Dory in *Finding Nemo* accompanies Marlin, Nemo's father, on his ocean quest to find his lost son. She is loyal and nurturing, but she suffers from short term memory loss. Much of the humor in the film results from Dory's disability. The only other female character in the film besides Nemo's mother, who is dispatched minutes after the film begins, is the blue fish in the aquarium who talks to her reflection. The female characters in *Finding Nemo* behave stupidly and provide comic relief. Mike's girlfriend Celia in *Monsters Inc.* is possessive and abusive. In *A Bug's Life* the anthill is governed by a matriarchy, but the Princess is dominated and bullied by male grasshoppers and ultimately rescued by a male ant. The female characters of Pixar's films are "marginalized within the very narratives they dominate" (Wojcik-Andrews 173). The most surprising instances of gendering occur in *Cars* and *WALL-E* because the protagonists are machines. The "girl cars" in *Cars* are given distinctive qualities that accent their femininity, such as long, thick eyelashes and luscious lips. *Cars* adheres to stereotypical notions of gender. The girl cars seem most interested in nurturing and serving while the "boy cars" are out enjoying tests of physical prowess.

In a limited way, Pixar's *WALL-E* seems to take steps away from gender stereotyping. WALL-E is unmistakably gendered male, and Eve is gendered female though not in such stereotypical ways. WALL-E, gendered male, is shown pining for Eve, a robot who is gendered female. He engages in romantic fantasies in ways reminiscent of Disney's Snow White, Ariel, and Pocahontas: pining, sighing, and daydreaming. Eve seems more powerful than WALL-E; her arm is a powerful gun, and she frequently goes on shooting sprees. She seems primarily focused on her mission, while WALL-E devotes his energy to building a home. Even though the robots' behavior does not immediately identify WALL-E as male and Eve as female, young viewers easily recognized WALL-E and Eve as gendered characters. I asked my sons William (age eight) and Robin (age four) how they knew that WALL-E was a boy and Eve a girl. William said, "I could tell by their voices. Also, Eve was prettier. And cleaner." Robin added, "I could tell by her shape that Eve was a girl. It looked like she was wearing a dress." Though Pixar might be making some attempts to question dominant gender stereotyping, there are some problems with this reading because the characters do remain gendered, and film does not consistently depict Eve as self-determining. At one point, Eve is shut down, becoming totally unresponsive to external stimuli. While she is shut down, WALL-E wraps her in a string of Christmas lights and carries her to a sunset viewing vantage point. As the sun is setting, WALL-E forces his hand into Eve's impassive hand, acting out one of his favorite romantic fantasies after watching *I Love Lucy*. By this point in the film, Eve was fully anthropomorphized into a self-determining female character. Having WALL-E act out his romantic fantasies with her while she was unable to participate or resist, undermines the earlier reversals of gender stereotypes.

Excluding the first twelve minutes of *Up* which consists of sequences of nostalgic flashbacks about Carl, the crusty sixty-something protagonist, and his dead wife Ellie, who always dreamed of traveling to South America but was never able to, there are no

female characters. Throughout the film Carl talks to Ellie; she is a haunting female presence, embodied by Carl's house. In order to affect positive changes in his life, Carl has to let his attachment to that feminine presence go. Russell's mother is shown only once, in the audience at Russell's graduation ceremony to senior wilderness scout. In addition to the exclusion of female protagonists throughout the film, *Up* is problematic as a children's film because the child Russell serves as a sidekick for Carl who, throughout the course of the film, adopts "childlike" qualities such as enthusiasm and renewed vitality. *Up* was advertised as being about Russell's experiences, but the film primarily focuses on nostalgic images of Carl's childhood in the 1950s and his renewed love of life as an adult. Carl is Pixar's oldest protagonist to date.

### **Why Are There So Few Children in Pixar Films?**

Pixar's decision to move away from child protagonists is motivated by numerous factors. Profit motivation behind Pixar's filmmaking partially explains anthropomorphism in the Pixar films. Cute clown fish, snuggly robot dolls, and plush Lightning McQueen pillows become an avenue for children to continue enjoying the film after the movie is over, and "Pixar is in the business of making money off of the fantasies of children" (Booker 149). The most dramatic example of creating a movie of marketable characters is *Toy Story*; the protagonists are all toys. Creating a film about the adventures and exploits of these toys conditions a young viewing audience to desire replicas of these toys creating, a "dramatization of the fascination with manufactured objects that Marx referred to as the 'commodity fetish'" (Booker 124-125). Interestingly, the toys in the *Toy Story* films are all adults. Their owners, the children, exist on the margins of the story. Having such a diverse array of protagonists and the worlds they inhabit from an anthill in *Bug's Life* to the racetrack in *Cars* and the toy chest of *Toy Story* creates the opportunity to manufacture and market a wide array of products and make the release of a Pixar film an event felt in a wider arena than just the movie theaters. The protagonists in many Pixar films model consumption. Many characters are actually humanized through the acquisition of consumer goods. *Ratatouille's* Remy, a rat that is actively and viciously discriminated against by humans throughout the duration of the film, is fascinated by cookbooks, televised cooking shows, recipes, and restaurants. He becomes more endearing throughout the film as he watches TV shows and acquires cookbooks. WALL-E's home is a museum of human artifacts. He takes a lunch pail to work everyday, and as he is compacting garbage, he keeps certain objects—lighters and Christmas lights, rubber duckies, rubrics cubes, and spare eyeballs. WALL-E is humanized by his acquisition of human artifacts. His association with things the audience will recognize instills in him a type of human-ness. These marginalized characters display their desire for acceptance into the dominant culture despite the abuse and neglect some of these characters experience. Giroux's description of the Disney corporation extends, in this case, to Pixar:

Disney uses its much-touted commitment to wholesome entertainment to market toys, clothes, and gadgets to children... Disney's view of children as consumers has little to do with innocence and a great deal to do with corporate greed and the realization that behind the vocabulary of family fun and wholesome entertainment

is the opportunity for teaching children that critical thinking and civic action in society are far less important than the role of passive consumer. (158)

The act of acquiring consumer goods humanizes Pixar's characters, but equating humanness with consumption is a highly problematic quality of children's films. Repeatedly children are shown the image of a marginalized character gaining a supportive community through the act of fetishizing consumer goods. When viewed in conjunction with Pixar's extensive co-marketing, attaching acceptance with consumption is a dangerous message to convey to viewing audiences, regardless of their age.

Children's literature and film is created by adults for consumption, ostensibly, by children, but Pixar is aware that children's films need to appeal to two distinctive audiences: children and their parents. Children's ability to view movies and interact with popular cultural texts requires the involvement of the parents. Few children have the money or the transportation at their disposal to view a movie without parental involvement. Entertaining a dual audience has become an increasingly essential quality of children's film. If Pixar's films were situated firmly in the realm of childhood, there would be fewer opportunities to appeal to adult audiences.

Pixar builds on Disney's long tradition of animating characters with appealing cuteness by extending the cuteness beyond young bunnies, bluebirds, and fawns. Pixar takes some of the most unlikely adult anthropomorphized characters and makes them endearing; in *WALL-E*, for example, even an adult robot looks cute and cuddly. When Pixar films do include anthropomorphized children, the most notable examples being Nemo, a young clown fish from *Finding Nemo* and Dot, a girl ant from *A Bug's Life*, the adult characters, Nemo's father Marlin and Dot's friend Flick, are still at the center of the story. There is a didactical quality in the interactions between adult and children characters. The children characters are developed in accordance with traditional views about childhood. For example, Flick in *A Bug's Life* gives young Dot a lecture about how even small creatures can achieve great things. Using the metaphor of a seed growing into a mighty tree, he attempts to explain Dot's potential to affect change. The seed to tree metaphor, however, illustrates that children are widely valued not for their current state as children but for their potential greatness as adults, the very message that Pixar's exclusion of child characters is sending to viewers. *Up*'s Russell, the main child character of Pixar films, is shown having to outgrow childishness. Instead of having a mentor who directly lectures him on how to be an adult, his observation of Carl, Pixar's oldest main character, give him a negative example of how to act. The ideal human, *Up* asserts, isn't a child or an elderly adult, but rather a conglomerate of the two. Russell outgrows his childishness, and Carl outgrows his age. Carl loses stereotypical props of old age by walking upright without a walker, and the film stops referring to his "prune" smell and denture cream.

Pixar films explore the relationship between the individual and his or her community, presenting characters that are somehow different from society either because of their longings or because of a physical disability. Pixar films frequently lack a child character for the children viewers to identify with, but children respond to and identify with characters that are small and marginalized throughout the film, even though the

predominant protagonists are usually adult characters voiced by adult actors. Booker writes, “American children’s film sanctions acceptance of the Other and celebrates the potential achievements of the lowly and the different” (171). For example, Remy in *Ratatouille* longs to create delicious food, but his predilection for cooking is seen as a threat by his family. He leads a double life throughout much of the film, feeling torn between his ties to his family and his passion for cooking. This dichotomy is reconciled when, towards the end of the film, his entire rat clan rallies in support of him and creates, under his direction, a fantastic meal. The toys in *Toy Story* exist in marginalized spaces such as dusty bedroom shelves and toy chests. They can only assume their true nature when no humans are around, yet all of their heroic actions are performed on behalf of their owner Andy. Jesse, the cowgirl from Woody’s Round Up gang in *Toy Story 2*, illustrates the plight of toys that are abandoned by their owners. Jesse’s owner “outgrew” her interest in playing cowgirls and became interested in lip gloss and boys. Jesse was forgotten under the bed for several years and finally donated to a secondhand store. Despite Jesse’s negative experience with her first owner, she and Woody decide that their natural role as toys is to be constantly available to their owners as long as they are wanted, even though they will eventually experience neglect and rejection as their owners grow up. *Finding Nemo* provides another example of difference. Nemo has a disabled fin because of the barracuda attack that resulted in the death of his mother and siblings. Despite his disability, he longs to be regarded as normal, especially by his overprotective father. He risks his life twice to prove that he is overcoming his disability. The main focus of the film, however, is Nemo’s father Marlin’s search for his son. Pixar films prove successful because children and adults are able to identify with the struggles of the protagonists, be they cutened, primarily adult rats, ants or fish. These films emphasize the individuality of the characters as they strive to find an accepting community for themselves. Even though viewers can identify with the struggles of the protagonists, the solutions that the protagonists employ in creating an accepting community are not available for the audience. Through the use of anthropomorphism, rather than a child protagonist, Pixar’s exploration of difference resonates with the audience without affecting any real change. While Pixar’s films do delve into some serious topics, the film’s presentation of topics such as ostracization from a peer group and disability provides only a surface treatment of social realities that children experience.

The Pixar films do portray marginalized characters being accepted into the dominant culture, a longing which is a key component of children’s film. Richard Dyer states: “Entertainment offers the image of ‘something better’ to escape into... Alternatives, hopes, wishes—these are the stuff of utopia, the sense that things could be better, that something other than what is could be imagined and may be realized” (20). These films extend to children the promise that they, too, will become powerful, celebrated members of their society. These stories may pacify children as they grow towards adulthood, because becoming an adult is the only method children have for entering the majority. This promise of successful integration into the dominant society must resonate with children’s desire to be older and have more freedom. When children are given stories where the marginalized character succeeds in becoming integrated into the dominant culture, what do children learn about their own marginalized status?

Upon closer viewing, however, it becomes apparent that several of Pixar's films offer only conditional acceptance into the dominant culture. In *The Incredibles*, for example, superheroes have been banned from society and are forced to relocate and live undercover. After the Incredible family saves the world, they successfully integrate into a previously hostile society. Their acceptance into the dominant society, however, seems conditional. After demonstrating their usefulness, they are re-admitted. Still they are forced to modify, though not totally suppress, their superpowers. Dash makes the track team, but his parents tell him not to run his fastest at the meet; he has to come in second. After Remy and his family prove themselves as cooks in *Ratatouille*, a new bistro opens where rats are actually welcomed. The rats and humans, however, have separate dining areas, so while rats are not being actively persecuted in this one safe location, they are not completely integrated into human society: rats are separate but equal. Though Pixar's films seem, upon initial viewing, to portray the acceptance of "the other," some of these films, most notably *The Incredibles* and *Ratatouille*, offer their protagonists only a conditional integration into the dominant culture.

### **The Bad Kids**

Kathy Jackson in *Representations of the Child in American Film* interprets the way children are depicted in films as the cultural shorthand for how American feels about its future since children are so strongly associated with the future. In her study of the history of American cinema, she observed that after WWII, America's confidence in its golden future was shaken, and the images of children became darker and more ambivalent. The family horror film including *Rosemary's Baby*, *The Omen*, and *The Exorcist* emerged from this ambivalence and darkening vision. Jackson states: "Traditionally, children have been the symbol of innocence and confidence in a hopeful future...evil children became a filmic representation of much larger social and political problems" (149). Three Pixar films the "demon child" trope. *Toy Story*, *Toy Story 2*, and *Finding Nemo* have demon or monster children, antagonists who attempt to harm or destroy the protagonists. The inclusion of the "demon child" is fascinating since there are so few representations of any children in this body of films. Having a child figure as the main antagonist is a major deviation from Disney's films. In both Classic and New Disney film, which feature numerous representations of children, the antagonists are typically adults, most frequently wicked stepmothers, witches, and greedy men. Though there are some negative children characters, the step-sisters in *Cinderella* for example, the negative children are always portrayed as the opposite of the good child protagonist. In *Toy Story* and *Finding Nemo*, however, demon children figure as the primary antagonist without the inclusion of a strong positive representation of a child protagonist. Pixar's participation in the demon child narrative and their simultaneous avoidance of positive representations of children may highlight the changing view of children in American and their increasing marginalization. Penelope Leach in *Children First* asserts: "Children are the largest minority group in society and the most subject to discrimination" (12). Pixar's films illustrate one type of discrimination experienced by children as children are unable to participate in the creation of these film texts that they consume. Joseph Zornado in *Inventing the Child* asks, "Whose interests are served when one group determines what another group will read" (or watch)? (42). The "demon child

narrative” is a narrative told by the dominant culture (in this case, adults) about the oppressed minority (children) to an audience of children. The Pixar film texts for children’s consumption portray primarily negative representations of children.

Sid, Andy’s next door neighbor in *Toy Story* and *Toy Story 2*, is Pixar’s first depiction of the child-as-demon. Sid strikes fear into all the toys’ hearts because he dismembers toys and reassembles them in bizarre forms, drowns them in mud, burns them, and attaches them to fireworks. Compared to Andy’s well-lit room full of happy, normal toys, Sid’s room is dark, messy, and filled with toys that have been re-assembled in bizarre forms. Woody and Buzz are terrified by Sid and, at first, the strange toys he makes from bits of dismembered toys. His room reeks of torture and sadism. He *enjoys* abusing toys. Andy’s character as the positive child is not as fully developed as Sid’s character. Andy is only in a few scenes of the movie. He is mainly depicted leaving his room, having just finished playing with his toys.

The dentist’s niece in *Finding Nemo* strongly resembles Sid. Both children are unattractive. They have braces, wide, cruel smiles, and seem completely absorbed in pursuing pleasure that directly result in pain and death for the film’s anthropomorphized characters. The dentist’s niece has killed several fish, and Nemo, at one point in the film, looks like he’ll be her next victim. Zornado asserts that the “vast majority of children’s stories invite children to identify with the adults’ idea of what a child should be” (xv), and in Pixar’s case, this identification involves children seeing themselves not as the scary child antagonist but instead as the adult protagonist.

*Monster’s Inc* provides a thoughtful revisioning of both the “child as demon” tradition and presents a constructive image of reconciliation between groups whose previous interactions have been based on fear and exploitation. *Monster’s Inc.* wittily references this tradition of the “child as demon” (or monster) by creating a world of monsters who are afraid of human children. Their fear results in the “othering” of human children, allowing the monsters to exploit children’s fears and nightmares to power their city. Boo (a human child) and Sully (the monster known as the best scarer) are able to overcome their mutual fear and develop a loving relationship. Their friendship directly results in the restructuring of the monsters’ energy source, so that children’s laughter instead of their screams power the monster city. One possible criticism of *Monsters Inc* is, however, that it simplifies the process of reconciliation between two groups. Can we really believe that one friendship between a child and monster will cause such dramatic changes? This objection, however, could be easily dismissed by asserting that children’s films are created for children, so of course the messages need to be simplified.

## Conclusion

When I was watching *Toy Story* with William and Robin, they argued about who got to “be” Buzz Lightyear, an adult space ranger toy. They were not able to identify with the children characters in the film, Sid or Andy. Zornado states, “The child is already faced with an adult reification of the world presented as ‘neutral’ and ‘obvious’... If we want to understand the way in which a culture envisions itself, we might look no further

than the stories adults tell and retell their children” (3). Pixar seems to be telling children that being a child is something to grow out of as quickly as possible. Even the earliest animated Disney movies emphasized the importance of adult-like qualities, but Pixar films give children adult protagonists to relate to. Pixar’s films have very few representations of children characters, but these films do investigate the experience of being outside the dominant social group. Children are encouraged to identify with the marginalized characters of Pixar’s films. A major shortcoming of Pixar’s films, however, is that the solutions employed by the anthropomorphized characters are not viable solutions for the young viewing audience. These films illustrate the experience of marginalization, a theme that resonates with children, without offering strategies for children to use when coping with being outside the dominant culture. Many of the strategies that several of the protagonists in Pixar films use are not available to younger viewers. For example, young viewers cannot organize to preserve a historic town like the adult anthropomorphized characters do in *Cars* or save the world through their superpowers as in *The Incredibles*. As our culture begins to develop awareness about the marginalized status of children, hopefully more texts will be created that adequately reflect the position of children in our society and the strategies they use to navigate the adult dominated world.

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