

4-30-2015

The Double-Sided Message of The Lego Movie: The Effects of Popular Entertainment on Children in Consumer Culture

Jordan Treece

Cedarville University, jtreece@cedarville.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/english_seminar_capstone

 Part of the [Art Education Commons](#), [Child Psychology Commons](#), [Children's and Young Adult Literature Commons](#), and the [Literature in English, North America Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Treece, Jordan, "The Double-Sided Message of The Lego Movie: The Effects of Popular Entertainment on Children in Consumer Culture" (2015). *English Seminar Capstone Research Papers*. 28.

http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/english_seminar_capstone/28

This Capstone Project is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Cedarville, a service of the Centennial Library. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Seminar Capstone Research Papers by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Cedarville. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@cedarville.edu.

Jordan Treece

8 April 2015

The Double-Sided Message of *The Lego Movie*: The Effects of Popular Entertainment on
Children in Consumer Culture

One of the most popular and highest-rated films of 2014, *The Lego Movie*, directed by film powerhouse duo Phil Lord and Chris Miller, has entertained billions of viewers in the past year. With nonstop humor, impressive use of computer animation technology, a clever story-line, a cast of famous actors, anticipated sequels, and the nostalgia of a familiar toy brand, *The Lego Movie* is bound to be one of the most influential children's films of the decade. Although it has already proven itself to be a favorite of adults, *The Lego Movie*'s targeted audience is children who will identify with the imaginative and fun characters that take the form of their favorite building toys. Such a strong platform that provides excellent age-appropriate entertainment to the world's most impressionable generation gives *The Lego Movie* a prime opportunity to communicate to children in an unusually powerful way. For decades, researchers have explored the way entertainment media influences children's view of their world. It will not be too long until concerned moviewatchers and parents begin to wonder exactly what message *The Lego Movie* communicates to the children it is so intentionally geared towards.

The Lego Movie does have an apparent basic lesson for its audience to receive. The story follows main character Emmett, the most ordinary guy in the Lego city of Bricksburg. Emmett (voiced by Chris Pratt) goes on an extraordinary journey to stop the evil plans of Lord Business, the character with the most interestingly charged name in the history of children's film. Lord Business (voiced by Will Ferrell) is the President of a

company called Octan, which provides and sustains all of Bricksburg's consumer production, including food, media entertainment, and law enforcement; or, as Emmett puts it early in the film: "Octan, they make good stuff: music, dairy products, coffee, TV shows, surveillance systems, *all* history books, voting machines . . . Wait a minute..." Lord Business is cruel, selfish, and obsessed with making sure everyone in the Lego world stays perfectly normal. He is already President of the Lego world - in control of Bricksburg's entire infrastructure and culture with an infinite army of robots at his bidding. But Lord Business still wishes to control every individual directly. In this way, *The Lego Movie* makes a villain out of big business, name brands, and the consumer culture they create. But representing the forces of good is Emmett and his friends, the Master Builders, who resist Lord Business through their whimsical and intelligent creativity. In the end, Emmett realizes that every person in the world is special and unique - everyone is "the most talented, most interesting, an most extraordinary person in the universe, and are capable of amazing things." *The Lego Movie's* script is fairly clear as to its desire to teach children the value of their own individuality and creativity.

But the script is not the only factor that contributes to how children are likely to find meaning in entertainment such as *The Lego Movie*. There is contextual information that can make big changes to the meaning of the film's script. The most significant piece of real-life context that determines the message of the film is its namesake: the Lego brand. Over the past several decades, Lego has proved itself to be a classic favorite building toy for enthusiasts of all ages. Aside from its regular building kits, The Lego Group produces video games, clothing, theme parks, and miscellaneous accessories from key chains to alarm clocks. The Lego brand has also become affiliated with some of Hollywood's most

popular entertainment franchises, such as *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter*. There is no doubt that The Lego Group's business is worth billions of dollars, and so this is where the message of *The Lego Movie* becomes complicated. The text of the film denounces big business that dominates influential industries and exploits consumer culture, but *The Lego Movie* in itself might be the largest example of product placement advertising in film history. The film's protagonists urge the audience to be creative, thoughtful individuals who are not fooled by consumerism's "one size fits all" facade, but the implication of the brand's usage is that in order to be a creative individual, every child should buy Lego products. Through Lord and Miller's work, The Lego Group is already experiencing amazing increase from sales of new toys and video games specifically for *The Lego Movie*'s characters and story. The relationship between the script's claims and the film's sure commercial effect makes for ironically contradictory implications from *The Lego Movie*.

With such a complicated and self-contradicting mixture of messages in *The Lego Movie*, the question stands as to what message child viewers will really take from the film. Will children hear Emmett's lesson and learn from Lord Business' folly, or will they fall victim to a Lego marketing campaign with good intentions? Most of all, what should concerned parents and movie fans do about the message that *The Lego Movie* really communicates to children? In the following pages, I will explore evidence from various sources including the comments of Lord and Miller, the opinions of professional scholars in child development and children's entertainment, and the text of the film itself to discover exactly what message is truly being portrayed from this beloved film and what children really learn through engaging *The Lego Movie* as a piece of popular

entertainment. But the answer is obviously not simple. As I hope to show, *The Lego Movie*'s script is much more complicated than Emmett's assertion that everyone is special; there are many intricacies within Lord Business' character and the actions of the resilient Master Builders which complicate the meaning of the film's script. Taking all things into consideration, I shall argue that context wins over text in children's entertainment such as *The Lego Movie*. Although *The Lego Movie* displays a message of individualism and creativity, when the marketing advantages and subtle ironies found within its script are examined through the ways by which children find meaning in entertainment media, the film is seen to communicate a message that encourages consumer culture more than it does individuality and creativity. The subtle implications of the film can be potentially unhealthy to children's view of popular entertainment, themselves, and their role in their world. Nevertheless, popular films like *The Lego Movie* can still be a helpful tool for parents to use in teaching children how to correctly address consumer culture and its influence on their thinking.

With such a complicated story line, a significant first source to discover the meaning of *The Lego Movie*'s script is through the film's creators, Phil Lord and Chris Miller. Strangely, the writers of such an intricate script do not take much of a stance on their film. Instead, they claim that their movie is just a fun piece of entertainment meant only to exercise their incredible talent for computer animation and to provide enjoyment for audiences. Regardless, the obtuse characterization of Lord Business and his evil corporation has attracted attention from viewers. The directors are aware that adult audiences see a commentary on consumer culture and the way entertainment media affects people, but they deny that the script really critiques consumer culture in such a

way. On their DVD commentary, the topic arises between Lord and Miller as they watch Lord Business unleash his robots to freeze all the citizens in their ‘normal’ positions. When they mention that some people consider *The Lego Movie* a “Marxist children’s movie,” they make the idea out to be unwarranted and absurd, claiming simply that “people see what they want to see.” Their dismissive attitude towards the implications of their story is concerning. It is quite clear that, whether it is intentional or not, the film makes statements about consumer culture’s devious and restricting effects on people. Lord and Miller seem to be ignorant of the of any possible effects their film could have on viewers.

While the directors do not see the important influence their film may have on its young audience, the script proves to make a strong argument on how popular entertainment can be influential and even destructive. Lord Business owns every piece of entertainment available to the people of Bricksburg. As he struts through Octan headquarters, he checks-in on his hoards of comically mindless robots. The robots are seen doing everything necessary for Lord Business to maintain his power without the people suspecting there is anything wrong with their manufactured culture. The robots drive police cars, sit as board members for the Octan corporation, write pop songs, and direct television shows. The robots’ only purpose is to serve Lord Business’ system, and they do a very good job since they are incapable of perceiving any negative repercussion their actions might have on their audiences. Their work is extremely effective and strategic. The film’s theme song, which has apparently been written and produced by the robots as they are seen playing it in a studio, is called “Everything is Awesome,” and is used to distract Emmett and other workers as they carefully follow the established

directions to build skyscrapers for Octan.

The nefariousness of the way people are mindlessly subdued is stated quite directly in the film's opening scenes. When the audience is introduced to Emmett, he is obsessed with following Octan's directions to "fit in, have everybody like you, and always be happy" (Emmett does not seem to notice that the "always be happy" rule is accompanied by a picture of a cheerful man being eaten by a shark - comical, but frightening). None of Octan's directions are bad - they are actually perfectly fine advice for any person to follow, but they only bring Emmett shallow relationships with his neighbors and coworkers. When a plant is the only thing he has to spend his morning with, he turns on the television before he can realize that he might feel lonely. Immediately, he sees President Business giving a speech on how "rule-following citizens will earn awards and my love," but he also quickly whispers that anyone who does not follow his society's directions will be put to sleep. Emmett is momentarily shocked by such a threat, but immediately forgets it when the network transitions to a popular sitcom called "Where are My Pants?" Afterwards, Emmett goes to work and stops by a coffee shop to buy an "awesome" thirty-seven dollar drink from an Octan-owned coffee shop. Everything Emmett does to follow the directions goes right back to pay Octan and Lord Business. The danger of living under Lord Business' rule is very clear: people must either comply to repressive rules or become a targeted outcast, but entertainment provides a perfect distraction to keep Emmett, or anyone else, from taking action.

As the film gives such a direct and impressively accurate critique on the way popular entertainment fuels consumer culture and makes for boring and simple people, it encourages its audience, composed mainly of children, that creativity and individualism

can overcome conformity. Emmett almost accidentally joins the Master Builders, who want to thwart Lord Business' evil plan to freeze the world with glue. They try to teach Emmett how to use his mind to creatively solve complex problems, but he is so brainwashed by the robot-produced culture that he has "never had an original thought in his life." His only creative idea is for a double-decker couch, which is unanimously agreed to be the dumbest idea anyone has heard. Ironically, Emmett thought of this idea when he wanted people to come to his house to watch TV together, which would only aid in their conformity to the norms society has built for them as consumers of entertainment. The double-decker couch turns out to be a bad idea when he tries to fit it into Lord Business' culture, but when he builds it for the Master Builders to float across the ocean when their submarine is destroyed, it saves the day. The Master Builders continue to use their uniqueness and creativity until Emmett is able to show Lord Business that his plan to freeze the world is wrong and the movie ends happily.

The Lego Movie's intended lesson for viewers to take away is clear: mindless conformity is unhealthy and individual creativity is a value that should be encouraged. In the script, the two are pitted against one another: cultural conformity versus creative thinking. Lord Business' control leads to complacent people who unnecessarily waste their money on commodities and live stagnant lives, but individualistic creativity brings people together to accomplish great, meaningful things. However, the difference between the two are not that simple. In children's real lives, it is hard to differentiate the mass amounts of entertainment from their own personal creativity. Just like Emmett, it is hard for them to shun influences that give them suggestions on how to act and what to buy.

The Lego Movie is quite honest in its depiction of how conformity to pop-culture,

which is manufactured by media entertainment and name-brand products, creates an unhealthy environment for those who willingly and thoughtlessly allow it to influence them. Lord Business' ultimate goal is to subdue the world with an attractive products of entertainment until he is able to render them frozen in whatever position he wants. If Lord Business' plan comes to completion, every Lego person will be lifeless accessories owned by him. There is an accurate parallel between Lord Business' strategy and the way real-life consumer culture and popular entertainment ensnares real audiences. But in the real world, Lego is a consumer name-brand product, and *The Lego Movie* is a piece of popular entertainment that perfectly accompanies it. The film seems to be participating in the same evils it warns against, making it self-defeating to its "everyone is a special individual" message. Yet this ironic contradiction is not directly obvious. Therefore the ways in which consumer culture and popular entertainment hide their implicit messages from children so effectively needs to be examined.

Before jumping in to the intricacies of how the consumer market relates to children, it is only fair to note that *The Lego Movie* is not necessarily supposed to be a marketing ploy to sell Lego products. In an interview with *Express* newspaper, Lord and Miller explain how they actually had trouble getting the rights to use the Lego name for their film. Lego was already a hugely successful business and did not need a feature film to maintain popularity or sales. Lord and Miller chose Lego because they knew the familiar toys would make for an interesting, diverse, and fun movie; or, in their own words: "it would be really cool." In another interview with *The Guardian*, Miller claimed that they wanted to make a film that used "Lego as a medium to tell a story, rather than a story to sell Lego." The skilled filmmakers knew that their movie would not succeed if viewers

felt like they were watching a commercial. Their script does not immediately make viewers believe they are trying to be convinced to buy toys, but viewers do recognize a creative, funny, and heartwarming story where characters learn the value of individuality and teamwork. The goal of this film is not to maliciously, deliberately sell Legos. An honest examination of consumer culture cannot pin blame on Lord and Miller or The Lego Group; this problem is really the result of a faceless component of the consumer culture found in nearly every corner of modern society.

The disconnect between messages is not unique to *The Lego Movie* but is actually found in many major films. A book by Ian Wojcik-Andrews titled *Children's Films: History, Ideology, Pedagogy, Theory* explains how most film's targeted towards children textually argue a liberal, revolutionary message to mask a basic, less exciting message that defends a more conservative ideology. Wojcik-Andrews uses the 1992 film *Ferngully: The Last Rainforest* as an example for his point. This film stages a liberal environmentalist message through common environmentalist cliches as humans must be stopped from bulldozing the last rainforest. But *Ferngully* undermines its own message in the way it romanticizes the environmental conversation by implying that good will magically conquers destruction whether or not people really take action against the dying of the rainforest. The film therefore, according to Wojcik-Andrews, promotes inaction and apathy in its child audience about the important issue it claims to defend. Wojcik-Andrews calls *Ferngully* disturbing in its seemingly ignorant hypocrisy; the movie portrays a thriving primitive culture that does not need the luxuries of technology because technology is destructive to their rainforest environment. Yet the resources that went into making the film itself are quite technologically advanced, which usurps the

claims of the film itself. A liberal message helps a film commercially, but a conservative complacent one is easier for children to swallow and enact.

The same trend is found in *The Lego Movie* where the characters preach the idea of individualistic creativity as a revolutionary concept that changes the world, but beneath the surface, the film serves as an elaborate advertisement which participates in the regular consumer culture. *The Lego Movie* is new, funny, and exciting, but may not have the originality that viewers initially believe it to have. When *The Lego Movie*'s textual message is filtered through its commercial implications, it may not really promote the individualism it claims to have. The encouraging story where ordinary Emmett learns he is special is shouted loudly for viewers to pick up easily, but the market advantages of purchasable Lego characters and props, which draws the audience to participate in the culture that made Emmett suppress his originality in the first place, is softly whispered to be unnoticed by children. *The Lego Movie* becomes just like Lord Business as he proclaims his love to his constituents, but slyly whispers that they can only participate if they adhere to the consumer culture's rules. *The Lego Movie* claims to promote individual creativity, but quietly suggests that everyone should uniformly be purchasers of the Lego brand.

The Lego Movie's message of individualistic creativity is not just a blatant contradiction to the underlying commercial advertisement, it actually serves as the attraction to pull audiences to the subtle advertisement. Since the consumer culture is centered on capitalist competition, and since creativity is so valued in today's culture, cooperations do well to market creativity to child audiences. An article by Amy Ogata titled "Creative Playthings" traces the history of toy production throughout the Twentieth

Century as companies began to sell toys specifically designed for educational or creative purposes. Toys were advertised to parents as educational, and to children as fun; parents could feel good about buying their child a healthy and stimulating toy, and children could have hours of enjoyment. This marketing strategy has proved to be effective and is still used in toy advertisements. When navigating Lego's official website, it does not take long before one will encounter a few short paragraphs of why playing with Legos stimulates creativity among children. It is almost completely undisputed by scholars that building toys such as Legos do indeed cultivate creativity in children who play with them, but selling creativity as a product through a popular piece of entertainment like *The Lego Movie* changes the equation.

Creativity is marketed because it is such an important aspect to children's healthy development. A creative thinker is able to view situations from multiple sides and transform things to give it a new usage outside of its normal purpose (Howe et. al. 383). This kind of dynamic thinking is known to be valuable in many ways. Employers search for creative minds that are able to solve dynamic problems and perform a variety of tasks. Creativity is also useful in earning scholarships, working through problems, and interacting socially. In a culture where creativity holds such significance, *The Lego Movie* wishes to tell children that they all have unique and valuable creativity. Children can relate to Emmett when their individual creativity is undervalued by their society and peers, but it is popular culture and entertainment that keeps Emmett's creativity stifled in the first place, and it is entertainment surrounding a brand of pop culture that Emmett provides.

It is mostly agreed that creativity is useful to children's development, but whether or

not media entertainment is useful to children's creativity is more debated. This ongoing debate is summarized in an article by Patti M. Valkenburg and Sandra L. Calvert called "Media and the Child's Developing Imagination." Some in the childhood development field believe that participation in popular entertainment media provides kids with more material for them to creatively handle. Children will incorporate characters from films and television shows into their creative play and will have the opportunity to understand their culture better through these well known pieces of entertainment, thus children are more able to make distinct contributions to their culture. That is the side of the debate that *The Lego Movie* seems to defend as it provides and incorporates pieces of pop culture into a script that advocates creativity. The script readily includes popular characters such as Batman into its story. But the majority of scholars and professionals believe that media hinders creative development. This side argues that children spend more time consuming entertainment than they do forming their own creative scenarios, and when given toy characters that already have prescribed characteristics, children are bound to those preexisting traits in their own creative narratives. According to this more widely accepted view, a child playing with an Emmett toy is generally tied to the personality *The Lego Movie* has already given them; children are unable to invent a new character for themselves, and therefore are unable to practice genuine originality and creativity.

Both sides of the "Media and the Child's Developing Imagination" debate contains truth. The influence of entertainment can hinder children's originality, but the influence of popular culture will not simply be escaped. Children will have to interact with it. The influence of popular culture seems to keep children in a double bind as they receive different messages from their environment. But the contrary nature of the messages are

often hidden by the consumer culture that is so involved in creating them.

The marketing of creativity is not the only way in which *The Lego Movie*'s text contradicts its context; the idea of individual uniqueness is also incorporated into the advertisement of the film's text. In an ironic mixture, conformity is sold in a package that claims to be individualistic. Several instances in the film suggest that individualism is actually inseparable or identical to the conformity of consumer culture. One of the Master Builders, WyldStyle (voiced by Elizabeth Banks), shuns everything associated with Octan's illusive marketing schemes. She hates every aspect of pop culture and how it fools people into following a restrictive system. But strangely, she is dating Batman (voiced by Will Arnett), who, in real life, has been one of the most popular figures in entertainment for decades. Unbeknownst to her, her nonconformity is tied to pop-culture icons. Likewise, the evil Lord Business is quite subtly equated to the noble Master Builders. Lord Business uses devious "relics" (which are just non-Lego objects like super glue or band-aids) to represent his evil persona, but the leader of the Master Builders, Vitruvius (Morgan Freeman) carries a half-eaten lollipop (relic) as a walking stick. A more relevant example is in the song "Everything is Awesome," which is used to keep the Lego people comfortably happy in Lord Business' society, but is later played over the closing credits and sold to the real-life audience as a pop song. In the same film, the song is both mocked and celebrated; it both brainwashes and unifies people in fictional Bricksburg and in real life. There are a number of other examples, but what they all show is that *The Lego Movie*'s claim about conformity and creativity might not be quite so simple or honest as viewers are meant to believe.

The deepest mixture of these polarities is in the realization late in the film that Lord

Business and the Master Builders literally have a father-son relationship. It turns out that Emmett's entire adventure is really the invented drama of an eight-year-old boy named Finn (played by Jason Sand) as he plays with Legos. Everything the audience watches is the story Finn has created with the huge collection of Legos in his basement. But the Legos do not belong to him, they belong to his father, who has built the city of Bricksburg to be perfect and normal. The Lego city is surrounded by "Do Not Touch" signs to keep Finn away. When Finn's father comes home from work, the audience sees that the character is played by Will Ferrell, the same actor who provides voice of Lord Business. Finn has created Lord Business as a caricature of his own father, who has forbidden him from using the Legos and thus stifled Finn's creative outlet. The Father is stern with his son and begins gluing down the Lego figures while, in the Lego world, Lord Business unleashes his evil plan to freeze the city and end the world. Soon, Emmett confronts Lord Business while, simultaneously, the Father realizes how creative his son is with the Legos. Finn explains Emmett's story to his father, who apologizes, along with Lord Business. The happy ending ensues. But this complicates the narrative that has set up a divide between Lord Business' repressive consumer culture and the Master Builder's cause for creativity and freedom. Now the evil, world dominating, corporation is a father figure to be reconciled with.

In this way, *The Lego Movie* is able to blend the difference between independent creativity and the cultural mandate that encourages children to buy the name-brand products of consumerism. As Emmett presents the emotional climactic speech to Lord Business, he refers to the citizens who have created innovative machines to fight off Lord Business' robots, and says "Look at all these things that people built. You might see a

mess, but what I see are people inspired by each other and by you, people taking what you made and making something new out of it. . . . You don't have to be the bad guy.” *The Lego Movie*'s script becomes slightly clearer. There are still evil corporations that create mind-numbing media and wish to control people's lives, but when given Lego products, children are free to be creative individuals. Other companies might be soul-sucking, but Lego is not the bad guy. Lego can be a creative outlet. Lego can renew a strained relationship between a father and son.

Therefore, the marketing appeal of *The Lego Movie* is targeted directly to the needs and wants of its child audience, but the commercial aspect of the story is likely to go generally unnoticed by viewers, both child and adult, thanks to the basics of the advertisement strategy known as product placement. Product placement has been used in film and television for decades. A company pays film producers a certain sum of money to have their product appear in the the production so that viewers will see the product and potentially be more likely to purchase it. Sometimes a character will be seen drinking a Pepsi, or sometimes a character will talk about how much she loves to drink Pepsi. Sometimes a character will be made of Lego pieces and will himself be a toy the audience can buy and own. Big brand-name companies spend great amounts of money for such advertisements every year. Interestingly, as shown above, in the case of *The Lego Movie*, it was not Lego who went to Lord and Miller but they that asked Lego's permission to incorporate the product. Lord and Miller did not even use original substances to invent their Lego world but instead limited themselves to use Lego pieces that already existed and were produced in Lego's factories. Even the dust thrown up from the Lego vehicles are real Lego pieces. Lord, Miller, and their team from Warner Bros invented over a

dozen new Lego kits that are now sold in toy stores around the world.

Product placement is so effective because viewers often barely notice it is in their entertainment. The dynamics of product placement are thoroughly explained in *The Psychology of Entertainment Media: Blurring the Lines Between Entertainment and Persuasion* edited by L. J. Shrum. If a character drinks Pepsi during a scene, the audience may notice and recognize the product but will not realize that it is an advertisement. The same effect is common even if the character begins to talk about how much she likes Pepsi. The writers of *The Psychology of Entertainment Media* share that the audience will only view it as part of the story, as long as the writers have not made the marketing aspect of the dialogue too obvious. Studies have shown that the majority of audience members prefer product placement to be used in entertainment; the alternative is for the filmmakers to invent a fictional product, which usually interferes with the viewer's ability to see the show as believable. If product placement is used correctly, the viewer will not recognize the appearance of the Pepsi as an ad, but will still be slightly more inclined to buy Pepsi later. In keeping with this trend, *The Lego Movie* does not use the word "Lego" once, aside from the title. The brand is integrated into the story so intricately that it is hard to view the film as an advertisement for Lego, which was Lord and Miller's exact intention. Nevertheless, the advertisement aspect is present in the film, and it is even harder for children to recognize it with the use of product placement.

While product placement is usually unnoticed, many people tend to be apprehensive of it and view it as a form of deception and exploitation. Some countries have laws that require media productions to display a specific product placement logo in any show that utilizes product placement, but citizens of these countries have become so used to the

logo that it also goes unnoticed. The results of a research study in the *Journal of Business Ethics* by Hudson, Hudson, and Pelozo showed that the majority of parents are not comfortable with product placement being used to advertise to their children. Although the study mostly paid attention to the placement of ethically charged products like alcohol or guns, parents expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of awareness media producers provide to show when product placement is being used.

Even though the film's use of product placement suggests a consumerist takeaway, the real meaning of *The Lego Movie* is chiefly dependent on the audience's view of it; if children who watch the film believe it to have a message that assures them that they are unique and special in their own creative and imaginative way, then that is the message that should receive the most attention. Even if there are portions of *The Lego Movie's* script and brand that seem to be deceptive advertisement, the portions of the film that children actually absorb and apply to their behavior are the ones that are most important to any conversation about the film. After all, most pieces of art have deeper implications that can be interpreted to form a questionable result for their audience, but that does not actually make the art itself harmful. *The Lego Movie* argues quite blatantly that everyone is unique, special, and holds valuable creativity, but the aspect of the film that advertises and supports consumer culture is more subtle. It seems that Emmett's uplifting message speaks louder than the underlying propaganda for consumer culture, so the most direct inference is that children, who will most likely not notice the subtler message, will hear and follow the louder, more positive one. That is what the directors' intention was; perhaps they were correct.

This question calls for an investigation of how children find meaning through both

their entertainment and the personal experience of their everyday lives. Quite a bit of research has been done to find out what messages children learn from the entertainment they consume. One study that is very helpful to this topic is titled “Be Kind to Three-Legged Dogs: Children’s Literal Interpretations of TV’s Moral Lessons” by Marie-Louise Mares and Emily Elizabeth Acosta. The researchers surveyed a large number of American children who watched an episode of *Clifford the Big Red Dog*, a children’s television show. To an adult viewer, the episode’s moral message is quite clearly one of accepting those with uncommon handicaps; in this case, the characters meet a dog with only three legs. After watching the episode, children were questioned on what they believed was the moral of the story. Mares and Acosta’s study discovered that only a small minority of the children accurately comprehended the moral lesson of the show. Even though the point of the story was stated clearly by the characters’ actions and words, most children watched the episode and concluded that it was simply a show about dogs playing together. If the discoveries of this study are carried over to *The Lego Movie*, then children do not perceive much meaning just from the film’s storyline. Other factors need to be investigated in order to deduce exactly what children learn from consuming entertainment, if they learn anything at all.

While the textual interaction of the children in the *Clifford* study is telling, the interaction between a child and his culture occurs on a more pragmatic level; therefore, we require more pragmatic information on the way children receive and interpret the branded characters of consumer culture. A survey from 2005, reported by Kristen J. Anderson and Donna Cavallaro, asked children who they considered their role model. The research was specifically geared to weigh the importance of parents versus pop

culture figures in the minds of children. The results of the survey showed that more often, a child will identify a parent or teacher as a role model rather than a media figure, but entertainers such as actors or athletes were a close second. In the case of this survey, it seems that children realize the inferiority of pop culture figures in relation to real-life relationships. But children's ability to form thoughtful, dynamic answers when asked to explain why they had chosen their role model was not as impressive. Children picked role models for quite simple reasons; parents were chosen for their parental qualities while athletes were picked for their athletic abilities and superheroes for their superpowers. The statistics gathered from this survey shows that a child will most likely give the answer he or she believes is expected, rather than form an original perspective on an issue. This strategy of making decisions and giving answers about preferences is not really uncommon for children - it makes them feel normal, it takes unwanted stress or pressure away, and it keeps them from having to think too much. From this basic dynamic, it can be seen that (one) children feel pressure from their culture to conform, and (two) children are therefore likely to choose the path with the least amount of original thought, much like Emmett at the beginning of the film. Most children do not appear to think dynamically (creatively) about pop culture icons.

This reluctance or inability to articulate the effects and impressions that consumer culture entertainment has on children shows that more than verbal testimonies are needed to truly see how children come to understand meaning. The marketing strategy of product placement inherently assumes that child audiences are generally unable to distinguish the deeper implications of a film or show. Children's voices on situations like this are vitally important and must be heard, but they cannot be the only source since misunderstanding

of subtle cultural effects must be assumed. Children have a very real need to be accepted by others and by their culture, which helps advertisers and entertainers sell their products under the guise of heartwarming stories. So a young fan of *The Lego Movie* might be able to recite Emmett's inspiring speech and conclude that everyone is special and holds valuable creativity, but whether or not the lesson has fully registered is something entirely different. In order to see what messages children really learn from their entertainment media, the norms of children's actions and behaviors need to be observed. The question must be approached in a less direct way than asking kids what is the moral of the story. Therefore, research that examines children's creative practices and their responses to marketing is needed to discover which aspect of *The Lego Movie* reaches children more effectively.

In trying to uncover the true thoughts and feelings scholars of child development and psychology actually look to the same area of children's lives that *The Lego Movie* highlights: playtime. Just as Finn plays with his toys and constructs a narrative that communicates meaning to his father, scholars have spent much energy researching how children naturally use their imaginative play to reveal their inner thoughts and feelings. Specialists in child psychology even employ play into therapy to gain a better understanding of how children really feel and think (Lin Shi). Many believe that playtime brings children to their basic originality in a way that is natural to them, thus revealing their genuine thoughts and feelings. In play, children are given the opportunity to create their own environment with their own rules; while their creations will inevitably be informed by certain influences they encounter in their lives, they do not have to speak on adult terms the way they are asked to in verbal surveys. This kind of research has the

possibility of uncovering a different layer of children's ability to form meaning from the influences they take in from pieces of entertainment like *The Lego Movie*.

One of the most recent studies on children's means of communication through imaginative play was published in *Early Childhood Education and Development* journal and has the abbreviated title, "Everything's Upside Down." The researchers, Abuhatum and Chang-Kredl, observed seventy pairs of siblings with a toy set specifically designed to cultivate creativity, much like Lego toys are meant to be. Without intervening in the children's play, researchers gathered data on how children communicate ideas and display creativity. The final argument was that a creatively-minded child will be able to think of certain objects outside of their usual context or uses. A creative child, for instance, might pick up a block and call it a piece of pizza. It is also quite normal for children to form certain narratives with their toys, much like Finn does with his Lego characters. But the creativity observed in the children of "Everything's Upside Down" is partially due to the nature of the toys which the study provided. The toy kit was a neutral, farm themed set. While the toy was probably produced by a major toy company, it was not tied to any pop-culture icon to enhance its appeal. As the majority of scholars believe, it is the addition of entertainment figures in pop culture that hinders creativity more than cultivates it. Children's creativity can be found in a neutral toy like in the "Everything's Upside Down" study. They already have the qualities that make them special, showing that individual creativity cannot really be sold to children. This suggests that the true message of *The Lego Movie* is more connected to adherence to consumer culture than to an inspirational message of individuality.

While the film has major commercial advantages, Lord, Miller, and The Lego

Group do not share Lord Business' maliciousness; they genuinely want to celebrate creativity and provide quality products that promote healthy imaginations in their customers. The film is an excellently produced piece of entertainment and art that hopes to emotionally inspire children to embrace their own form of individuality. But while the "everyone is special" message is told in a way that makes it seem new, it is really a tired theme in children's literature that has not been shown to truly change the way children use imagination and creativity. Lord and Miller do not need to be harshly blamed for any contradictory implications in the film since the kind of binaries in this film happen everywhere. But while these self-contradictions are common, many viewers, especially children, are not very aware of them. While Lord and Miller satirize Lord Business' repressive, robotic, consumer culture, they themselves do not seem to be able to escape participating in the consumer culture they work in. The film's efforts to expose the problems of popular entertainment are undone by its association with such entertainment, and its attempt to expose consumer culture are undone by its association with a popular consumer brand.

Nevertheless, the marketing advantage of *The Lego Movie* works and The Lego Group has experienced huge amounts of sales; the power of entertainment media is truly influential to children within a consumer culture, but concerns lie within the way entertainment media influences the way children perceive their world. *The Lego Movie* is bound to make thousands of children want to have Lego products. They will watch the movie, see the fun colorful images, and want to have their own Emmett figure complete with a double-decker couch. Hardly anyone would say that it is wrong for kids to want the toys that appear in their favorite films, but certain problems could arise when children

are too strongly encouraged to buy specific products. For instance, Lego kits are not cheap. An average-sized Lego kit will usually cost thirty dollars or more. Finn's father must have spent thousands of dollars in order to accumulate the vast Lego collection in his basement. Even though children do not have jobs and therefore rarely have money of their own, marketing specialists have targeted children more and more over the years. In today's consumer culture, children are marketed to with the same strategies and fierceness as adults. *The Lego Movie* is no exception. It may not have been the filmmakers' intention for the film to meet the needs of a consumer culture that aggressively teaches children the importance of consuming entertainment and brand names, but *The Lego Movie* carries the effects of consumer culture as much as every other form of popular entertainment in the modern world. Scholars and researchers have begun to look into the ways children view their world living in consumer culture. When children are encouraged to buy products geared specifically for them, they are invited to participate in the consumer market in order to fit into the pop culture created by the media. The large scope of the consumer culture touches their creative abilities, as already discussed, but more importantly, it effects their view of family, and their view of themselves.

Many scholars of child psychology are worried how advertisers and entertainment media affect children's ways of viewing both themselves and their position in their world as participants of consumer market. Children are placed on an equal level as adults in the consumer culture, they are marketed to as buyers of certain products. Because of this, the difference between child and adult is less distinguishable to children who are too young to view their lives under very many different dynamics. There is then the possibility that

children receive the impression that they are perfectly equal with adults or that they need to become more like adults. This urgency to adult has been examined by many scholars, but a good representation of this theory is found in an article by Iris Shepard titled “Representations of Children in Pixar Films.” Shepard’s study directly pertains to children’s relationship with their entertainment media as she examines the films of Pixar, a popular film studio that exclusively creates family-friendly movies. Most often, Pixar films (and children’s films made by other studios as well) portray protagonists with adult-like characteristics and struggles. The characters may be animals or cars, but they are almost always distinctly adult and face troubles that relate to finances or parental responsibility. These movies still carry themes that teach children important truths about things that they may deal with in their own childhood contexts, such as love, teamwork, jealousy among peers, or creativity. But Shepard believes that the adult protagonists may cause children to resent their childhood. According to her, these films might marginalize children for whom and what they really are as children; they may feel pressure to grow up as quickly as possible, which, for a young child is not a realistic or necessary feat.

In a book titled *Kinderculture: Mediating, Simulacraizing, and Pathologizing the New Child*, Shirley Steinberg further analyzes the way modern culture has begun to pull children further away from childhood as they expect it to be and brings them closer to a premature and unattainable adulthood. In explaining the book’s theory of “Kinderculture,” Steinburg shows how today’s consumer culture specifically markets to children with childlike objects such as toys or children’s films. But in being treated like a consumer capable of making decisions about cash purchases and cultural popularity, they are pushed towards a type of adulthood that doesn’t quite mix with the societal image of

childhood. Children are told to be a kid but are still pulled towards a pseudo-adulthood. The message is subtle and confusing, but sells products of pleasure and entertainment.

Shepherd and Steinberg's theories may seem rather harsh on the children's films that are widely known to be fun, entertaining, and uplifting, but it still holds truth, even when used to examine *The Lego Movie*. Finn is actually the only child to appear in the film; the other Lego characters, which he invented, are all adults. Emmett has his own apartment, car, and job as a construction worker. Given the better developed Lego characters' attraction as hilarious and fun, children are more likely to want to identify with them, which means they are more likely to want to own Lego Movie figures of their own. They want to buy the products seen in *The Lego Movie*, so they want to have money like adults. The normal societal position for a child does not have the same benefits that lead to a direct ability to acquire consumer goods. While the film teaches a message of individual creativity, which is something children can already achieve, the message is taught under the context of Lego products. Finn is a believable child with childlike concerns surrounding his toys, his relationship with his father, and his ability to think creatively. But Finn has access to more Lego blocks than most children (and adults) would ever be able to acquire. Finn is allowed to be creative and childlike, but he can only do so with his father's vast collection of Legos. In *The Lego Movie*, creativity is not achieved by any resource other than Lego.

Many scholars, critics, and parents who fear that the consumer culture has exploited childhood and created unhealthy identities for children. As far as the audience sees in *The Lego Movie*, Finn's entire identity is based on the Lego products in his basement. They are his creative outlet, his means of communication, the center of his relationship with his

family, and the occupants of his spare time. While it is Finn's mind that invents Emmett's need for a self-determined identity and make Lord Business see the value of letting people be unique individuals, Finn can only practice such ideals for himself if he has Lego. In the end, The actual implication is contrary to true individualism. *The Lego Movie* claims to be in support of individuality and creativity, but equates imagination and creativity with Lego toys.

Just as Finn's creative ability only functions in the context of the Lego brand, so does his relationship with his father. This is an even greater concern to be considered when analyzing the deeper implications of *The Lego Movie*. Because Finn uses his creativity to communicate to his father his discontentment with the way the Legos are monopolized, their relationship is repaired. The entire father-son relationship hinges on the way the Legos are used in their household. Before the father learns of Finn's resentment towards him, their relationship is rather cold. The Father speaks to Finn gently enough, but is stern about how Finn is not to play with the expansive collection of toys in the basement. Finn tries to directly tell his father that his rules are unreasonable, but his voice is not heard. Finn's Father only realizes that his behavior is wrong when he sees Finn's imaginative creativity. After they reconnect, they play with the toys together like friends. The restoration of their relationship is only possible with the use of Lego toys. Here *The Lego Movie* implies another message about children's identity while it offers just a bit more advertisement for the Lego brand. The implication is that parents who do not let their children play with Lego products are mean and cold; an implication that child audiences are subject to when they watch the film. Finn's father does not redeem himself until he gives Finn full access to the collection of Legos that had to have cost thousands of dollars

and took years to accumulate. This type of representation of family is what professionals child development find the most alarming in popular entertainment. According to scholars like Joel Bakan, studies have recently been showing that children's images and expectations for their parents and families are formed by portrayals in the media rather than being based on real, truthful parent-child roles. Bakan believes that as entertainment has been marketed specifically for children and sequentially formed their ideas of their lives and parents, children now "expect everything to customize around them, including parents" (51). Finn needs Lego to be creative, but he also needs Lego to have a good relationship with his father.

The split between *The Lego Movie's* encouraging, heartwarming story, and its implicit marketing raises real concerns once it is understood how the film really communicates to children. The ultimate object of value is Lego since it is the medium of creativity, individuality, good relationships, and fun. But this compliance to consumer culture's agenda does not make *The Lego Movie* unsuitable for children; it is still a remarkable film with excellent animation, humor, and story development. The problem of *The Lego Movie* is so unsettling because it has features that are really great for child viewers, but other aspects are potentially unhealthy. And as discussed previously, children are unlikely to notice this division. Therefore, some kind of action must be taken to make children more aware of the entertainment they consume for themselves. In order to make *The Lego Movie* meaningful to its child viewership, the subtler sides of the story need to be addressed by people who are able to communicate to children on a more direct and intimate level than the film is able to by itself. For this to work properly, children need to be worked with and taught by people whom are trusted by individual children and by

whom the children are well known. Scholars and artist are able to communicate dynamically and creatively, and teachers can educate children for certain amounts of time, but the requirements needed to suitably help children understand an honest view of their world are best filled by parents.

More specifically I would like to argue that Christian parents need to put forth efforts to teach their children how to properly assess the implications of entertainment media. Christians should be especially mindful of these things for two reasons. Firstly, Christian faith is the one means of coming to the eternal truth that is necessary for any effective solution. Without dedication to the truth of the God who created this world, an approach to the subject will be less effective. Secondly, Christians are often known to be inept at approaching cultural issues in a reasonable way. While this stigma is partially a stereotype, it holds some truth, and so it becomes the responsibility of Christians to approach the culture with reason, understanding, and dedication to truth when introduced to problematic aspects of culture.

Christian parents must seek to approach the difficulties of entertainment media in a way that is realistic in regards to both the culture and the teachings of scripture; that is, without unnecessary judgment or fear. Too often, Christians, and concerned parents in general, are wary of the effects of entertainment media for the harmful subjects that it sometimes portrays. Parents are extremely worried about taboo themes, such as violence and sex, that quite often dominate pop culture and media. In these cases, the most common reaction by a careful parent is to practice censorship of such media. Limiting children's access to certain pieces or types of entertainment media has its place, especially when mature subjects are exploited in media. But censorship cannot be the

only solution for problems within entertainment media. Not all films that are targeted towards children are ethically charged with violent or sexual content. *The Lego Movie* has such slight traces of these subjects, that no reasonable parent would consider keeping it from their children. *The Lego Movie*, and many other children's films, are perfectly wholesome and age-appropriate; there would be no reason to censor it from child audiences. But *The Lego Movie* could still confuse children with its inverted messages, and it could still promote an unhealthy attachment to the appeal of material goods rather than concepts of more edifying and important substance. The damaging implications of *The Lego Movie* are subtle. It is important for parents to realize that there are problems outside of big taboos and that not all problems can be solved by teaching children to fear the popular culture that they will inevitably live in for the rest of their lives.

In many cases, it is quite rare for Christian parenting books to assess appropriate ways for parents to teach their children about the portions of entertainment and pop culture that aren't so black and white. Too often, books and articles, Christian and secular, that address parenting in relation to popular media focus mainly on the stark extremes in regards to harmful or deceitful content; they only focus on the "big" issues rather than subtle, complacent ones like are found in *The Lego Movie*. They want parents to know how culture influences their children, but all of their scenario and examples focus on the dangers of things like alcohol and drugs. Parents want to protect their children, it is no wonder that these dangerous trends receive so much attention. But what is usually given less attention that not all cultural influences are loud and purposefully exploitive. There are parts of popular culture that are good when handled correctly, but will quietly invade the ways children fundamentally view themselves and their world, like what is seen in

The Lego Movie. The dangers of media that unhealthily promote sex and violence are obvious; parents already know why they should be concerned about them. The “little” issues of media deception and materialism need to be addressed just as much as taboo issues.

However, neither can Christians be complacent about what subtle messages their children might absorb through their entertainment. Christian parents need to assess everything involved in their lives and the lives of their children. Even though *The Lego Movie* is a good film, it is not exempt of careful scrutiny by each person who views it. The cultural aspects of entertainment and consumerism are everywhere and it is not wrong for Christians to participate in them, but they still need to be careful about letting certain things take too much precedence in their lives. Everything people view sends messages of some sort; as Jerry Solomon, a Christian writer who is concerned with the way people interact with entertainment and culture, says, “the Christian is free to make entertainment a part of his life with the understanding that evil resides in people, not forms. But caution and discernment must be applied. We must be alert to the importance of our minds and what they can absorb through entertainment.” (136). Parents need to be mindful of what information is being consumed by their family, even in a cute, fun film like *The Lego Movie*. Parents must be aware of what pieces of media their children are participating in and what implications it might have, even if the implications are subtle. Parents must calmly and carefully scrutinize the movies and shows their children watch. The surface of *The Lego Movie*’s “everyone is special” message is not the only message being communicated. Deeper, unintentional messages are likely to be received by children, such as “Legos are needed in order to be creative” or perhaps even “everyone is

special and valuable because *The Lego Movie* declares them to be” (as opposed to “because God declares them to be”). No child is going to learn to take illegal drugs from watching *The Lego Movie*, but they could learn to hold Lego or the characters to a higher importance than the brand deserves.

Once a biblical opinion has been formed by a parent on a piece of entertainment, parents need to be able to share their beliefs of the film or show with their children, whether or not the judgment is favorable. However, with films that are thematically very good but have outwardly unnoticed implications, it does not help to censor the film or to lay down an unexplained “no” to a child. It would not teach a child much if his parents told him “I don’t want you watching *The Lego Movie* because it might make you want to have Lego toys.” That would make no sense because it is perfectly fine for children to have Legos and to watch *The Lego Movie*; they are perfectly wholesome forms of enjoyment for children. Instead, children need to be taught how to think about the way their culture influences them. If a child is properly trained so that he or she can recognize a little bit of how their world is filled with implicit and controlling binaries, then they will be more likely to grow with a proper understanding of consumer culture and media entertainment. If they are able to learn these things as they participate in a culture that is impossible to escape, then much of the danger is eliminated as children gain a healthy view of themselves and their entertainment. This can only be accomplished by intentional and wise teaching, and it will be most effective if the teaching is done by the parents who do so throughout their child’s entire upbringing.

There is no one step-by-step process that parents can follow to accomplish this; if parents want their children to grow to be perceptive and discerning about the way the

culture influences people, they need to show their children how this kind of discretion properly works. One of the best writings on this type of education is in a secular article about children's films titled "Children's Films as an Instrument of Moral Education" by Monique Wonderly. The author describes how children can be taught to comprehend their world better through their entertainment. Wonderly admits that most children will often be unable to recognize the implicit messages of films, even messages that are good for them to apply to their behavior. Wonderly's argument is that parents and educators should use entertainment to children's advantages by discussing films and shows in a way that will amplify the moral lessons within the stories. Children feel close to the characters and stories they see in entertainment, so entertainment is an excellent medium for teaching children deeper truths about their world. If a parent can recognize that *The Lego Movie* is a fantastic film for children, but that it also feeds a consumer culture that subtly traps children's ways of thinking, then that parent can use *The Lego Movie* as an object lesson in itself. Parents can help their children take a closer look at *The Lego Movie* and Lego toys so that children can recognize both the good and bad sides of their pop culture. As child development scholars such as Wonderly repeatedly emphasize, children will learn best when they are spoke to in their own language. Parents can use children's films, toys, and characters to show children the messages that are otherwise hard to notice. Ultimately, the goal should be to raise children that know how to actively and thoughtfully participate in the culture they live in, not just be passively and implicitly influenced by it.

I realize that this strategy is a bit vague and is hard to carry out since the difficulties in children's entertainment and pop culture are so subtle and hard to closely monitor. Approaching the problem has to come on a case-by-case basis with variables depending

on the parent, the child, and the piece of media in question. While it is impossible to account for all these possibilities in one paper, I feel that my study would be incomplete without some example to point to. To do this, I'd like to share a story from my own childhood that is very pertinent to the issues I've discussed.

When I was probably seven years old, I had a Luke Skywalker action figure. Luke Skywalker is the main protagonist of the original *Star Wars* series. Like Emmett, Luke serves as the face of an entire brand that sells films, toys, video games, and countless other commodities. The name of Luke Skywalker is surely worth millions of dollars as it has been immensely popular for decades; so as my seven-year-old self held the figure, I proclaimed to my Dad that "I love Luke!" My Dad recognized the slight, implicit danger in what I had said, and decided to show me something about popular media characters and their true importance in relation to my life. He didn't wring the toy from my hands in fear that it had taught me idolatry, because that would be completely outrageous. It's fine for little boys to enjoy their action figures and participate in *Star Wars* fandom. But neither did he ignore my statement with a "it's just something kid's say" attitude. He merely responded my exclamation by saying, "Just remember that Luke isn't real. It doesn't make sense to really 'love' Luke. You should focus on loving God, because he actually loves you back." My Dad spoke to me about something that was actually very important to my life on a level that I could understand. He didn't need to explain culture to me or delve into theology, but he still showed me something about my mentality that wouldn't have occurred to me otherwise. For years afterwards, that small exchange greatly influenced the way I thought about name-brand characters, the way I thought about the word "love," and the way I thought about God. Obviously, this is just one example, but it

is a good one for showing how parents can correctly guide the way children view their worlds and cultures. It takes parents who are willing to carefully watch out for the subtle dangers, not just the taboo ones, and who are willing to gently guide their children into a way of thinking that is not fully determined by the agenda of popular media and consumer culture.

Works Cited

Anderson, Kristin J., and Donna Cavallaro. "Parents or Pop Culture? Children's Heroes

and Role Models.” *Child Growth and Development*. 12th ed. Ed. Ellen N. Junn and Chris J. Boyatzis. Dubuque, IA: McGraw-Hill/ Dushkin, 2005. Print.

Bakan, Joel. *Childhood Under Siege: How Big Business Targets Your Children*. New York, NY: Free Press: 2011. Print.

Barnes, Henry. “*The Lego Movie* Writer/ Directors Interview.” *TheGuardian.com* The Guardian, 12 Dec. 2014. Web.

“Commentary with Filmmakers and Cast.” Dir. Phil Lord and Christopher Miller. *The Lego Movie*. Warner Bros., 2014. DVD.

Fitzherbert, Henry. “*The Lego Movie* Interview.” *Express.com*. Express, 30, Nov. 2014. Web.

Howe, N., S. Abuhatum, and S. Chang-Kredl. ““Everything’s Upside Down. We’ll Call it Upside Down Valley!” Sibling’s Creative Play Themes, Object Use, and Language During Pretend Play.” *Early Childhood Education and Development* 25.3 (2014): 380-98. Web.

Hudson, Simon, David Hudson, and John Pelozza. “Meet the Parents: A Parent’s Perspective on Product Placement in Children’s Films.” *Journal of Business Ethics* 80.2 (2008): 289-304. Web.

Mares, Marie-Louise and Emily Elizabeth Acosta. “Be Kind to Three-Legged Dogs: Children’s Literal Interpretations of TV’s Moral Lessons.” *Media Psychology* 11.3 (2008): 377-99. Web.

Otaga, Amy. “Creative Playthings.” *Winterthur Portfolio* 39.2 (2005): 130-56. Web.

Shepard, Iris. “Representations of Children in Pixar Films: 1995-2008.” *Portrayals of Children in Popular Culture: Fleeting Images*. Ed. Vibiana Bowman Cvetkovic and

- Debbie Olson. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013. 169-82. Web.
- Shi, Lin. "Facilitating Constructive Parent-Child Play: Family Therapy with Young Children." *Journal of Family Psychotherapy* 14.2 (2003): 19-31. Web.
- Shrum, L. J., ed. *The Psychology of Entertainment Media: Blurring the Lines Between Entertainment and Persuasion*. 2nd ed. San Antonio, TX: University of Texas, 2012. Print.
- Soloman, Jerry. *Arts, Entertainment, & Christian Values: Probing the Headlines that Impact Your Family*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2000. Print.
- Steinberg, Shirley R. "Kinderculture: Mediating, Simulacraizing, and Pathologizing the New Child." *Kinderculture: The Corporate Construction of Childhood*. Ed. Shirley R. Steinberg. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2011. 1-53. Print.
- The Lego Movie*. Dir. Phil Lord and Chris Miller. Perf. Chris Pratt, Will Ferrell, Elizabeth Banks, Liam Neeson, Jason Sand, Morgan Freeman, and Will Arnett. Warner Bros., 2014. DVD.
- Wojcik-Andrews, Ian. *Children's Films: History, Ideology, Pedagogy, Theory*. New York, NY: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000. Print.
- Wonderly, Monique. "Children's Film as an Instrument of Moral Education." *Journal of Moral Education* 38.1 (2009):1-15. Web.
- Valkenburg, Patti M., and Sandra L. Calvert. "Media and the Child's Developing Imagination." *Handbook of Children and the Media*. 2nd ed. Ed. Dorothy G. Singer and Jerome L. Singer. Yale University: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2012. 157-70. Print.