WHY NEMO MATTERS: ALTRUISM IN AMERICAN ANIMATION

by

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Abstract

This study builds on a small but growing field of scholarship, arguing that certain non-normative behavior is also non-negative, a concept referred to as positive deviance. This thesis examines positive behaviors, in the form of altruism, in the top 10 box-office animated movies of all time. Historically, studies focusing on negative, violent, and criminal behaviors garner much attention. Media violence is targeted as a cause for increasing violence, aggression, and antisocial behavior in youth; thousands of studies demonstrate that media violence especially influences children, a vulnerable group. Virtually no studies address the use of positive deviance in children's movies. Using quantitative and ethnographic analysis, this paper yields three important findings. 1. Positive behaviors, in the form of altruism, are liberally displayed in children's animated movies. 2. Altruism does not align perfectly with group loyalty. 3. Risk of life is used as a tool to portray altruism and is portrayed at critical, climactic, and memorable moments, specifically as movies draw to conclusion. Previous studies demonstrate that children are especially susceptible to both negativity and optimistic biases, underscoring the importance of messages portrayed in children's movies. This study recommends that scholars and moviemakers consciously address the appearance and timing of positive deviance.

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Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my family for showing me unconditional love. Despite trials and tribulations they just keep swimming. I wish to thank my friends. They have been there through thick and thin. A person could not have any better. I also wish to thank my thesis committee. Without their guidance and support, this paper would not be possible. And, very special thanks to my committee chair, Dr. L. Susan Williams. She contributed countless hours to this process and taught me valuable lessons every step of the way.

Dedication

This Thesis is dedicated to the loving memory of Samantha Haskew. In her brief life she touched everyone who knew her, lived her life to the fullest, and taught those who knew her best to seek the positives in life.

CHAPTER 1 - Introduction

"Just keep swimming. Just keep swimming. Just keep swim-ing, swim-ing, swim-ing."
Anyone who is familiar with Walt Disney and Pixar's 2003 blockbuster, *Finding Nemo*, knows
that this line is sung by Dory, a lovably cheerful Blue Tang fish as she playfully swims into a
dark, dank, deep crevice in the open ocean. Dory suffers from short-term memory loss. As the
animated feature plays out, the line feels as if the character is nothing more than a short-minded
fish, a blissfully ignorant protagonist carrying on as she would on any other day, during any
other given situation. By animating Dory in such a way as to have her swimming slow circles as
she is singing, it is fairly evident to the audience that the scene is supposed to be lighthearted and
entertaining. However, one has to wonder, just what is the underlying message? Why is this
question important to ask?

As we will see, though Dory is portrayed as simple-minded, she exhibits extraordinarily
selfless acts – viewed as positive events. This thesis examines animated movies in the top 100
grossing films of all time, searching for examples of positive deviance, generally defined as
behaviors that violate norms in a positive fashion. Many of these behaviors are defined
differently dependent on context and interpretation. That is, the same behavior may be
interpreted as positive in one instance and negative in another. First, a brief appraisal of media
significance is appropriate.

In America, many people believe that violence in the media (notoriously, violent video
games) is teaching today's youth how to become more violent. A quick search of Amazon.com
for "media violence" reveals a glimpse into the present world. A plethora of book titles support
this supposition; a few examples include: *Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill: A Call to Action
Against TV*, *Movie & Video Game Violence*; *Media, Sex, Violence, and Drugs in the Global
Village*; and *Killing Monsters: Why Children Need Fantasy, Super Heroes, and Make-Believe*. Is
the media really powerful enough to create killing monsters? While this claim seems ludicrous,
it is an area that continues to be covered in depth.

A long list of empirical studies supports the link between violence and aggression. For
instance, Johnson et al. (2002) conducted a longitudinal study of 707 families over a period of
seventeen years. Looking specifically at exposure, via television, to aggressive behaviors such

as assault and robbery, Johnson et al. (2002) argue that there is a relationship between children's television-watching habits and aggression as adults. Using the National Television Violence Study (1998), Anderson and Bushman (2002) argue that Johnson et al. actually underestimate the impact.

One of the strongest statements about media violence and children comes from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). At the Congressional Health Summit in 2000, the prestigious organization issued a Joint Statement on the Impact of Entertainment Violence on Children, arguing that children may not know that media is largely fantasy. Basing their argument on over 1,000 studies, conducted over a 30-year period, the AAP states that a causal relationship exists between media violence and aggressive behavior in some children. Cognizant of the influence of external factors, AAP also acknowledges variable influence on individual children.

While scholars debate the level of influence, most agree that media are influential, especially when discussing children. If this is the case, the idea that media can in some way be a teacher, then what else is available for children to learn? Our society obsesses over criminal behavior (often for very good reasons), leading to an understandable focus on negative behavior and violence. Undeniably, media portrays violence to our youths; however, positive behaviors are also displayed.

Big budget animated films provide an instructive place to turn for an examination of influential messages directed to children. These films are written and produced on several different levels. First, with vibrant colors, surreal characters, and strange unknown worlds, these films directly target children. However, these films are also written on a second level. Animated films increasingly are marketed to an adult audience who spends more money at the box office. So, these films, in many ways, target two entirely separate groups. In order to accomplish this, stories must carry a message simple enough for children to understand, but also convey deeper meanings to attract adults. Boundaries between the two levels may not be firm and clear.

It is because of these multiple levels and diverse audiences that major motion animated movies are intriguing. A simple look at worldwide earnings demonstrates that they are popular; parents and their children are watching them. It can be argued that studios making these films come under pressure to make messages as positive as possible (most parents, we assume, will not take their children to watch dark or negative cartoons). If, as the AAP claims, media have the

power to teach children negatively deemed actions, one wonders where available positive messages are being lost. Why is the negative so powerful?

As Dory blissfully swims into the depths of the ocean, one must question what is being portrayed. The intended message could be that in our deepest, darkest hours, we must set aside fears and worries and "just keep swimming" ahead. The message may root deeply in the American Dream, or the idea that anyone can dig themselves out of deep, dark, dank lives by righting his or her mind and forging ahead regardless of the situation. Or, the filmmakers may only intend for this scene to move the film forward, with no particular underlying message other than simply to demonstrate Dory's playful, carefree nature.   Is it important to decipher exactly what the filmmakers intended? Or, if perception is reality, do filmmakers' intentions matter?

Given the malleable minds of the target audience, coupled with the increasing rise of technology as a babysitter and the explosive worldwide profitability of animated movies, I argue that it is critical to understand all aspects of what is projected to youth. According to Mojo (2008), the top 53 animated movies of all time (all but four have been released since 2000) combined to gross $6,436,133,179. While this is an incredible sum, it only takes into account domestic box office income. When one factors in worldwide box office results and adds DVD sales, the top 10 movies alone surpass $6 billion. For example, *Finding Nemo* alone jumps from an already impressive total of approximately $340 million to nearly $860 million. Obviously these films attract very large audiences.

It would be shortsighted to state that we, as a society, do not care about what we show our children. Obviously, we attempt to understand what media bombard our children with on a daily basis. In fact, a simple search of the Sociological Abstracts for "media AND violence" returns over 1,700 peer-reviewed articles. For example, with the perceived rise in violent school shootings comes a reinforced focus on the violent and negative messages in video games. In American culture the negative is everywhere -- in the nightly news, on front pages of our daily newspapers, in video games, in our daily lives.

We have become so enamored with the negative that it is difficult to see the positive. We, as a society, claim that we do not like negative campaigning by our political candidates, yet those negative campaigns often result in victory. We characterize candidates who discuss such things as hope, love, equality, and fairness as idealistic and out of touch. We often claim to hate

the negative, yet news coverage, television shows, and other forms of media largely base their endgame on violence, ratings, and profit.

Undeniably, media are influential. Research shows that media influence exerts its most powerful hold on young, malleable youth. Throughout history, scholars perceive this weight as negative. Due to large amounts of money at stake in animated movies and the tender age of its targeted audience, animated movies optimize opportunities to locate positive influences. Finding ways to identify and enhance positive messages may potentially change the way science views media influence. The idea that we, as a society, tend to focus on the negative is not new. In 1954, Pitrim Sorokin wrote of our gravitation towards downbeat thoughts and behavior:

> In the atmosphere of our Sensate culture we are prone to believe in the power of the struggle for existence, selfish interests, egoistic competition, the fighting instinct, sex drives, the instinct of death and destruction, all-powerful economic factors, rude coercion and other negativistic forces. Yet we are highly skeptical in regard to the power of creative love, disinterested service, unprofitable sacrifice, mutual aid, the call of pure duty and other positive forces. The prevalent theories of evolution and progress, of the dynamic forces of history, of the dominant factors of human behavior, of the "how" and "why" of social processes unanimously stress such negativistic factors as the above. They view them as the main determinants of historical events of the individual life courses (Sorokin, 1954).

Liazos (1972:45) also speaks to the attention of sociology towards the negative. "By the overwhelming emphasis on the 'dramatic' nature of the usual types of 'deviance' – prostitution, homosexuality, juvenile delinquency, and others – we have neglected to examine other, more serious and harmful forces of 'deviance.'" Even in Liazos' statement, one can see the emphasis in not only studying the negative, but also in pressing further to examine the "more serious and harmful" negatives. While the study of negatives has become interesting, it does have some serious implications, not the least of which is shifting the focus away from a large part of the everyday world, the positive. In many ways, it is equivalent to looking at the world with one eye closed. The same society that is producing the much-studied negatives is also producing positives.

For the entirety of the film, our friendly fish Dory exhibits purely altruistic behavior by helping Marlin brave numerous dangers as they cross the open ocean in search of Marlin's son Nemo. Dory had never before met Marlin or Nemo and had nothing to gain from this encounter. So, why does she risk her life to help a fish that she does not know? More importantly, how are her actions perceived? The filmmakers achieve many laughs with the introduction of this fun-

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loving character. But, in doing so, they may risk losing the wonderful message that it is laudable to help others even when there is no personal gain.

Positive Deviance

Between 1985 and 1991 scholars from two schools of thought waged an intense debate over the concept of positive deviance. In this debate, two camps arose; those who resisted and argued against the inclusion of positive deviance as a concept (Sagarin, 1985; Goode, 1991) and those who argued for a paradigmatic shift in the field of deviance study (Ben-Yehuda, 1990; Dodge, 1985; Heckert, 1989). While both sides shared some similarities, their thoughts on how the field should move forward differed greatly. Sagarin argued vociferously against the usefulness of the entire notion of positive deviance:

> The concept of 'positive deviance' is and should remain an oxymoron or self-contradicting phrase, because it would obfuscate rather than clarify, would collapse into one group two ends of a continua that have nothing in common except that do not meet in the middle, and would deprive social analysts of the opportunity to determine why and with what consequences people depart from the normative in a manner that elicits dire consequences… (Sagarin, 1985:98).

The other side of the debate contended that while positive deviance and negative deviance are different, they exist on opposite ends of the same continuum.

Are all things not positive, negative? Are all things not negative, positive? This has been a keystone in the debate of positive deviance. Couple this with the negative stigma associated to the word "deviant" (Bendle, 1999), and it is easy to understand why a debate has taken place. However, a dichotomous view is not the most appropriate way to view deviance. Deviance, like life, is a fluid concept. For example, Jones (1998) discusses the main goals of studying deviant behavior. According to Jones, society has come to view deviant individuals in an ethnocentric manner. By developing an understanding about how deviance is created and defined, a course in deviance can help remove potential bias. Positive deviance can be viewed as the culmination of ethnocentric removal. For, when positive deviance is accepted, the "presumption of negativity" (Jones, 1998) is removed, and the stigma attached to the word inevitably will become altered.

I would argue that behaviors exhibited in certain settings can be, and are, interpreted very differently. The same behavior performed in an alternative setting will evoke an entirely

different reaction. In the *Nemo* movie, Bruce (a great white shark) is one of the founding members of a three-member "fish-eaters anonymous" club. Among his club, stating the mantra of "fish are friends, not food" is a perfectly normal behavior. To Dory and Marlin, this same behavior, although met with apprehension, is positive, as they are not going to be eaten (like they normally would, had they met any other shark). If Bruce were to exhibit this behavior among his peers, another group of normal fish eating sharks, he would certainly be viewed as deviant (in the negative fashion as it is not normal for a shark to not eat fish). When the exact same behavior is labeled differently depending solely upon the context of the situation, it is difficult to understand how the two behaviors are not part of the same continuum.

While the sociology of deviance continues to focus somewhat on the "nuts, sluts, and perverts" (Liazos, 1972), other fields have not only progressed, but also instituted entire fields around the study of the positive. Psychology has come forth with a sub-field aptly named "positive psychology." And, the positive is popular. A course in positive psychology offered at Harvard had over 800 students enrolled (Moyer, 2007). This, according to Moyer and the *Boston Globe,* was more than any other course on campus. Positive psychology focuses on a pleasant life, an engaging life, and a meaningful life. Positive psychology studies what causes these to occur and how to build them (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). However, even the field of psychology is not without fraught when it comes to the study of the positive. "Within the larger history of psychology as an academic discipline, a growing breach now exists between the proponents of a so-called positive psychology and those who have identified themselves as humanistic psychologists" (Taylor, 2001:14). In Taylor's (2001) response to Seligman, the complexities of the current debate are explored.

Despite the dissent over the inclusion of the positive, numerous medical studies show that, in essence, happy is healthy (not the other way around). For example, despite the enormity of the American medical delivery system, many medical doctors push towards holistic medicine, or treating both mind and body. This is evidenced by Dr. Hunter "Patch" Adams and the thousands of healthcare professionals who have expressed interest in leaving their private practices (and large salaries) to "volunteer" at the *Gesundheit! Institute*, a several hundred acre hospital-like facility in West Virginia, if/when it is open (Adams, 1998). Adams has a vision for cheap, holistic medicine, devoting his entire life to achieving this vision. Adams believes the American medical delivery system is not only overpriced and inefficient, but also inadequate.

Treating the body and mind cheaply, efficiently, and positively is Adams' answer. Thousands of medical practitioners agree and have offered to leave their practices to join Adams' facility. The positive is powerful, even for those who profit from the opposite.

Altruism as Positive Deviance

As the previous sections establish, deviance historically has been an area of sociological study of the negative. In the 1980s a new understanding of deviance was presented. This new position argues that the violation of a norm can also be a positive, typically centering on positive norm violations, one of which is altruism. Jeffries et al. (2006) argue for the establishment of altruism as a field of study in sociology. They continue to argue that doing so would make a major contribution to not only the field of sociology, but also to society at large. "In the broadest sense this field focuses on those aspects of personality, society, and culture that benefit the lives of individuals and ennoble social life" (Jeffries et al., 2006). Statements and arguments like the aforementioned are plentiful and found throughout the literature on deviance. Since the debate was waged in the late 1980s, the question becomes, where has the field of positive deviance gone?

A quick search for "positive deviance" in the social psychology and medical literature reveals a plethora of research. One area of particular interest concerns volunteering. Ronel (2006) examined the impact of altruistic volunteers on at-risk street youths. Ronel's potential findings, that interaction with altruistic volunteers may actually open new avenues for at-risk youth, is extremely interesting and holds great potential. An important aspect of Ronel's study rests on the idea that the altruistic actions need not be real, only perceived as real. At-risk youth idolized and gave respect to those who they perceived as volunteers. Some of the "volunteers" were actually paid employees, but this fact did not matter, only the perception of volunteering. Coming into contact with volunteers led the at-risk youth in the study to want to volunteer themselves.

Hamilton and Fenzel (1998) examine the other side of volunteerism and find that youth who participate in community service "show significant gains" in social responsibility. Moore and Allen (1996:231) find essentially the same, stating: "Volunteering relates to reduced rates of course failure, suspension from school, and school dropout, and improvement in reading grades;

to a reduction in teen pregnancy; and to improved self-concept and attitudes toward society."
The aforementioned research is just a small sampling of the available research, but it is an
important sample. Much research on positive deviance deals with the idea of helping others.
Altruism is rooted in the idea of placing others before one's own interests.

Heckert and Heckert (2004) argue that altruism is the "positive deviance form of group
loyalty" in their typology. For Heckert and Heckert (2004), altruism is over conformity that can
be positively viewed. They provide relatively extreme examples such as Kamikaze pilots,
Mother Theresa, martyrs, and daring rescues. These examples evidence the fluidity of deviance,
demonstrating that from one point of view a Kamikaze pilot may be viewed as a villain, but from
another he or she is participating in an altruistic endeavor.

By implementing Heckert and Heckert's typology and examining altruism as a form of
positive deviance, the potential to learn is great. When considering the context within which an
action takes place, a significant broadening of the field of deviance occurs. By examining these
phenomena as deviance, instead of purely rational, individual agency, structure is being drawn
into the equation. Crime can be deviant because society deems it as such. By the same token,
altruism can also be labeled as deviant. However, very often the difference between an action
being labeled as criminal or as altruistic is dependent upon the situation within which the action
occurs. Numerous theories of criminal behavior have been developed. These theories account
for agency, but also focus attention on social structures. By recognizing positive deviance as a
legitimate field of study, a much broader and more complete understanding of social life can be
developed. Complex, contextual theories can be developed. Empirical, quantitative studies can
be produced. And, policy could potentially be influenced. The potential benefits of recognizing
positive deviance as a legitimate field of study are immense.

Implementation

Heckert and Heckert's typology identifies altruism as the positive deviance form of the
group loyalty norm. Using altruism as an indicator, I will use a combination of quantitative and
ethnographic content analysis techniques (Altheide, 1996) to analyze a sample of major motion
animated movies that target children. The working assumption is that acts of altruism are present,
and vary at any given time in children's animated movies. That is to say, an identified action is
not always portrayed and/or perceived as altruistic. Depending solely upon the context of the

situation, an action may be perceived as positive or negative. In the *Nemo* movie, the Dentist performs numerous "other" benefiting actions. Despite his admirable desire to surprise his niece with a fish for her birthday, nearly all of his actions are perceived as negative. Sometimes good actions are deemed bad.

Animated movies provide ample opportunity to find positive deviance in the target media. I expect to find a plethora of examples, both in the animation and the narrative, of positive deviance (using altruism as the identifier). I expect to find many instances where behaviors may be the same action, but elicit different responses depending upon the context within which that the characters find themselves. Chapter 2 follows with a review of the literature, tracing back to Durkheim's concept of social solidarity. An examination of the field of deviance studies then follows, specifically targeting the concept of positive deviance. Focus then shifts to the field of media studies and social psychology in order to provide an understanding of the impact of media on society. Chapter 3 provides a discussion of methodology, followed by the crux of this research – a quantitative characterization of ten animated films and an ethnographic content analysis of two movies selected to illustrate a range of positive deviance acts. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses findings and concludes with implications for extending this research and posing policy recommendations.

CHAPTER 2 - Literature Review

Everywhere that societies exist there is altruism.
-- E. Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*. (1984:145)

The historical understanding of altruism is fraught with difficulties, but one constant is the idea of putting others before oneself; group loyalty. Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist who is considered the father of sociology, understood this idea. This chapter begins with an appraisal of the use of altruism, followed by an examination of the field of deviance. A review of the power of media and a foray into social psychology completes the chapter. As will become evident, the study of the negative is powerful. The study of positives is emotionally charged and often leads to great debates. However, Durkheim understood the power of placing others before oneself; for him it is a necessity.

In Durkheim's (1984) organismic view of society, all members of society are inextricably linked together, functioning as individual parts that are constantly dependent upon each other. For Durkheim, even in the most simplistic societies, social solidarity is the glue that binds. For Durkheim, as the division of labor changes, the dependence upon society also changes. As the division of labor becomes more specialized, more dependence is placed upon others. Durkheim states,

> (N)o individual is sufficient unto himself, it is from society that he receives all that is needful, just as it is for society that he labours. Thus there is formed a very strong feeling of the state of dependence in which he finds himself: he grows accustomed to valuing himself at his true worth, viz., to look upon himself only as a part of the whole, the organ of an organism (Durkheim, 1984:173).

The social glue hypothesis explains that group identification leads to group loyalty. As stated by Van Vugt et al. (2004), the strength of one's identification with a group is an important determinant of one's group loyalty. One's identity is partly shaped by the groups to which they belong. High identification with one's group leads people to see themselves has group members; low identification with a group leads people to see themselves as unique individuals (Van Vugt et al., 2004). Van Vugt et al. (2004) test the social glue hypothesis and find evidence to support high group identification leading to greater group integrity.

For Durkheim, altruism, the pinnacle of group loyalty, is a key in social solidarity. While Bellah (1985) states that Americans often reserve true altruistic acts for family members (the closest of groups), Durkheim believes that it is the fundamental basis of society. "How indeed could we ever do without it? Men [*sic*] cannot live together without agreeing, and consequently without making mutual sacrifices, joining themselves to one another in a strong and enduring fashion" (Durkheim, 1984:173). Despite the importance of altruism to Durkheim, it remains a difficult term to define.

The functionalist perspective, led by Durkheim, has long occupied one corner in the altruism arena. Among other ideas, this perspective holds that an action or behavior, be it good or bad, is functional for society. For Durkheim altruism is real and something he would refer to as a "social fact," or, a way of acting that has an existence of its own, independent of its individual manifestations (1958). As such, altruism becomes an objective and measurable concept.

Altruism is a concept that has been defined differently in different fields of study. Simmons (1991) succinctly conjoins cross-field definitions by stating, "Although scholars' definitions differ, most would agree that altruism (1) seeks to increase another's welfare, not one's own; (2) is voluntary; (3) is intentional; meant to help someone else; and (4) expects no external reward" (definition adopted from Baston, 1987; J. Piliavin and Charng, 1990). Piliavin and Charng (1990) verbalize this definition in a sociological context, "Altruism (is) behavior costly to the actor involving other-regarding sentiments; if an act is or appears to be motivated mainly out of a consideration of another's needs rather than one's own, we call it altruistic. The actor need not have *consciously* formulated an intention to benefit the other for an act to qualify, however" (emphasis in original, Piliavin and Charng, 1990). While definitions of altruism vary, all of the aforementioned characteristics have been used in research.

Despite falling behind other areas, such as psychology and social psychology, some sociological research has taken place. Simmons (1991) believes that part of the reason for this is that sociological research on altruism is designed to produce theory rather than test theory. Numerous studies evidence this belief. In an effort to understand relationships between personality characteristics and prosocial behavior, and thus help identify if an altruistic personality exists, Piliavin et al. (1981) examined impulsivity in bystander intervention. Piliavin et al. (1981) found that the same factors related to helping are also related to "bystander arousal." Oliner and Oliner (1988) searched for personality differences between 231 Jew saving gentiles and 126 non-rescuers. Oliner and Oliner (1988) found rescuers exhibited higher levels of empathy, higher ethical values, and a greater view that all people are equal. Schwartz (1970) and Schwartz and Howard (1984) believe that personal norms affect helping behavior. Piliavin et al. (1990:32) argue that attribution of responsibility (AR) measures how likely individuals are to act on personal norms. Schwartz (1970) found that individuals who scored high in AR were more likely to donate bone marrow. Briggs et al. (1986) confirmed these findings. Zuckerman et al. (1977) also obtained similar findings when examining blood donation. In Simmons et al. (1977) study, one's level of faith in others was the only difference between kidney donors and non-donors. All of these authors focus their research on one or more aspects of the previously mentioned definition of altruism.

Numerous aspects of social life provide opportunity for empirical research on the positive. Despite sociology's historical focus, some areas have been explored. A few examples

of areas of research found in the literature include: The altruistic personality and sociocultural sources thereof, (Jeffries et al., 2006; Oliner, 1998; Sorokin, 1954; Jeffries, 1998), volunteerism (Jeffries et al., 2006; Gillath et al., 2005; Penner, 2002; Piliavin, 2007), social institutions (Jeffries et al., 2006; Rushton, 1980; Sorokin, 1954; Staub, 1992; Rosenhaun, 1970; Oliner and Oliner, 1988), culture (Staub, 1978; Sorokin, 1941 and 1947), gender (Piliavin and Charng, 1990; Smith, 2003), and social stratification (Sorokin and Lunden, 1959; Oliner, 2003). While the amount of research on altruism is far more extensive than the aforementioned list, it pales in comparison to its level of importance to society. Piliavin et al. (1990) argue that the search for an altruistic personality is futile. One potential avenue for expanding research on altruistic behavior is to examine it as deviance.

Deviance

If criminals are deviants falling below the legally prescribed norms of moral conduct, "good neighbors" are also deviants, but above the level of moral conduct demanded by the official law. […] It is necessary to distinguish between two kinds of so-called "social deviants": the subnormal types – criminals, psychotics, and other pathological types, and the "supra-normal" – or the positive creative innovators in all fields of culture and social life.

-- Pitrim Sorokin, Altruistic Love: A Study of American Good Neighbors and Christian Saints. (1950:81-83)

Thirty-five years after Sorokin, the founder of the Sociology Department at Harvard University, wrote those words, the debate over the validity, or viability, of the concept of positive deviance rose to a boil. Despite vehement objections by Sagarin, several scholars now study positive deviance; although in many cases it is not referred to, or named as such.

The basis of the positive deviance debate waged in 1980s hinges on the historical definition of the term "deviance." Sagarin (1975) examined historical definitions of deviance in previous literature and found "about forty definitions" of the term. Of these definitions, Sagarin found that only two instances existed where the term "deviance" (or the closely linked term "deviant") was used in anything but a negative way.

Despite the historically rooted definitions that Sagarin discusses, other noted social scientists laid the foundation for the debate that would be waged. West (2003) draws attention to

Durkheim (1951, 1958, 1960) in discussing the functionality of deviance for "reaffirming moral boundaries." Smith and Alexander (1996) also discuss Durkheim for his address of the "duality of social forms" (West, 2003). The functionalist perspective has been used to examine and explain both altruism and deviance. While this perspective is powerful and explains numerous phenomena of the social world, other perspectives have arisen to both augment and challenge the viewpoint.

West (2003) also introduces Simmel's (1971) discussion of "the stranger," and Weber's (1963) discussion of "charismatic authority." To build on West's discussion, one might also consider introducing Robert K. Merton's (1949) work on manifest and latent functions and Howard Becker's (1963) labeling theory. Appelrouth and Edles (2007) point out that Merton extended Durkheim's position that positive social institutions have unintended negative consequences by showing that negative social institutions have unanticipated positive consequences.

Sagarin's categorical understanding of the term deviance as purely negative accounts for unintended consequences but dismisses it as something categorically different. According to West (2003), Dodge (1985) initiated the debate over the inclusion of positive deviance as a field of study. Dodge (1985) urged scholars to recognize that actions can be evaluated as superior when they exceed conventional norms. Sagarin dismisses Dodge's claim by stating that positive violations of norms are deviations, not deviance; these are two entirely different terms that should not be confused. For Sagarin, violation of a norm in a negative fashion is deviance, since, historically, deviance has been defined in a negative manner. Deviation is a quantifiable differentiation from the norm. This differentiation can be positive or negative; however, when it is negative, Sagarin deems it deviance. Despite Sagarin's vehement objections, he believes positive behavior should be studied, just not as a form of deviance.

Instead of dismissing the concept of positive deviance, Heckert and Heckert (2002) introduce a typology that integrates normative and reactivist definitions. A normative definition of deviance is any behavior that violates normative rules (Heckert and Heckert, 2002; Cohen, 1966; Merton, 1966). The reactivist camp believes that an action is deviant if it is evaluated and labeled by a social audience as deviant (Heckert and Heckert, 2002; Becker, 1963). Tittle and Paternoster (2000) offer an integrated definition that bridges the gap between the two definitions; however, Heckert and Heckert believe that it ignores conditions or states of being. They also add

that this definition ignores positive behaviors and positive responses. To fill the gaps and build upon the understanding of deviant behavior, they offer a four part typology that includes negative and positive deviance, as well as two new categories, rate-busting and deviance admiration:

> "Negative deviance is any type of behavior that the majority of a given group regards as unacceptable and that evokes a collective response of a negative type or would evoke a collective, negative response if detected. […] Rate-busting refers to overconformity that is negatively evaluated. […] Deviance admiration connotes the scenario whereby underconformity or nonconformity is positively evaluated. […] Positive deviance refers to any type of behavior or condition that exceeds the normative standards or achieves an idealized standard and that evokes a collective response of a positive type" (Heckert and Heckert, 2002:459-467).

This new typology not only bridges glaring gaps in the definitions of deviance, but, by challenging the prevalent dichotomous view, it also moves the debate forward.

In 2004, Heckert and Heckert put their typology to use via applying it to each of Tittle and Paternoster's (2000) documented ten middle-class norms. Group loyalty is identified as one of the ten normative behaviors. Heckert and Heckert identify an example of each part of their typology for each of Tittle and Paternoster's middle class norms. Such examples as discretion, properness, pacifism, and gentility are given. For the group loyalty norm, Heckert and Heckert identify altruism as the example of positive deviance. Altruism is group loyalty carried to the positive extreme.

Recalling how deviance historically has been viewed, focus of research has generally been directed towards the negative. However, some scholars challenge this stance. Jones (1998) stated that a behavior, and the reaction to that behavior are different. She continues to state that a behavior may be received in a variety of ways, dependent upon the social audience. Jones conducted a class assignment revolving directly around this idea. She notes that her "random acts of kindness" assignment produced numerous examples of reactions to a behavior being dependent on the social audience. Jones specifically points to one scenario when a black male student offered to carry the groceries of an elderly white woman. Jones notes that the elderly woman adamantly declined the help and walked as quickly as possible to her car. "The negative label placed on these young men by most of our society created a situation where his act of positive deviance is viewed in a negative light" (Jones, 1998:183). This is just one example of context mattering discussed by Jones.

Irwin's (2003) study of elite tattooists confirmed Jones' findings. During a five year ethnographic study, Irwin directly confronted the idea that social context matters. For elite tattooists in Irwin's study, depiction as elite artists or outsiders depended upon the social context that they were in. Hughes et al. (1991) studied elite athletes, performance enhancing drug use, and overconformity. Ewald et al. (1985) studied non-elite long distance runners and body builders. Zeitlin et al. (1990) examined child nutrition. Cameron (2003) extends positive deviance scholarship by studying deviance at an organizational level via organizational virtuousness. Adler's (1985) look into the lives of drug dealers also supports the fluidity of deviance and the reaction there to. Despite a historical focus of research on the negative, research on the positive is occurring at different levels, from individual to organizational.

Becker (1963:72) believes that "social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders." As positive deviance scholarship is demonstrating, deviant "outsiders" need not be negative in their actions or behaviors, only labeled as such. However, the research also evidences the fact that positive actions and behaviors can be perceived (and labeled) as both positive and negative, depending upon the social circumstances within which they arise. While the focus of deviance study still sides with Sagarin, a shift is occurring.

Media Influence

A media culture has emerged in which images, sounds, and spectacles help produce the fabric of everyday life, dominating leisure time, shaping political views and social behavior, and providing the materials out of which people forge their very identities.

-- Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture*. (1995:1)

Society credits media for a perceived increase in actual violent behavior. According to the AAP (2000), television, music, movies, and video games are highly influential media and powerful learning tools. The AAP states that the average American youth watches 28 hours of television per week. Altheide (2002) examines the undue construction of fear created in the media, arguing that a "discourse of fear" has been created. Todd Gitlin (2001) adds that the indiscriminate fear of television displaces justifiable fears of actual dangers. Examples of how the media enhances the perception of a rapidly increasing violent society are numerous. The

AAP (2000) states that well over 1,000 studies have been conducted over the last 30 years and these studies reveal that a causal relationship exists between media violence and aggressive behavior.

Sternheimer (2003) attacks this from the opposite side and views media violence as the scapegoat. She believes that focusing attention on media removes attention from the overwhelming majority of other factors that lead to violence. Sternheimer expounds upon the "imitation hypothesis," or the idea that children will imitate what they see. She also argues media receives blame to deflect away from adult failures, both in parenting and in developing better solutions for aiding troubled children. Sociologically, Sternheimer offers a valid point when asserting that media plays only a small role in teaching children how to become violent. Shifting focus away from other, potentially more important, social issues could hinder the quest for solutions.

The AAP (2000) recognizes that media violence is only one factor contributing to youth violence and aggression; however, the belief that media is the single largest contributor to increased aggression, violence, and anti-social behavior is very difficult to overcome, especially when reinforced from the most powerful position in our country. In 1991, President Bill Clinton lamented that children are being provided with large doses of violence on a daily basis. He states that by the time a child reaches the age of 18, they will witness over 200 thousand dramatized acts of violence and 40 thousand dramatized murders and that half of the videos games that seventh graders play are violent. Former President Clinton argues that this leads to a numbing effect in which the boundaries between fantasy and reality become blurred.

While scholars disagree over details or degree, 30 years of research demonstrate media influence. President Clinton's beliefs that the entertainment industry needs to consider the consequences of what they create and how they advertise are admirable. Zengotita (2005) argues that the media shapes our world and Postman (1985) argues that we are amusing ourselves to death. Kellner (1995) points out that media culture in the United States is disbursed as a commodity and as such, the culture industry will create profitable forms of media. Since the industry is consumer driven, Kellner (1995:16) is correct in pointing out that culture industries must resonate with social experiences, attract large audiences, and incur profit. If President Clinton is correct that the average 18 year old has witnessed 200 thousand dramatized acts of violence, it is largely because this is the form of media that society desires. Media creates

displays of violence, and these types of media are very profitable. However, it is difficult to imagine any form of media that is 100 percent violent (negative). Positives exist everywhere.

Social Psychology

Social psychology focuses on the human tendency to concentrate on the negative. The term "negativity bias" is used (Baron et al., 2006:57) and is defined as: "A greater sensitivity to negative information than to positive information." The belief is that human evolution has necessitated a need to receive and interpret negative information. Baron et al. (2006) argue evolutionarily, a negativity bias makes sense. As humans evolved, survival depended upon the ability to recognize negative threats to safety. Social psychology research (e.g. Kunda, 1999) demonstrates that this may be an evolutionary trait that accounts for present day probabilities of negative information being more readily influential. Ohman et al. (2001) conducted experiments with 20 participants from the University of Stockholm. During their experiments, nine faces were shown on a computer screen. Participants were asked to identify a "discrepant face in a matrix of faces." Participant's reaction times were measured, and the findings reveal that threatening faces are more readily identified than friendly faces. Research by Ito et al. (1998), and Cacioppo et al. (2003) in areas of social cognition and brain imaging suggests that identification of negative information is part of the structure and functioning of the human brain. However, research also demonstrates that as an individual ages, the susceptibility to negativity decreases.

Social psychology also discusses an "optimistic bias" (Baron et al., 2006:58). This bias "refers to a predisposition to expect things to turn out well overall." Individuals believe that they are more likely to experience positive events than those around them. So, according to social psychologists, we as humans expect our futures to turn out well, but, for historically applicable reasons, live our lives recognizing the negatives. Shepperd et al. (1996) conducted research on the optimistic bias by examining college student expectations of wages upon graduation, estimated exam scores, and the impact of self-esteem on feedback. They found that considerable evidence for the existence of the optimistic bias. However, similar to the negativity bias, as people age optimistic bias also decreases.

Negativity bias may explain the plethora of studies on effects of media violence and far fewer studies on positive behaviors. The optimistic bias may also be used to explain why a

preliminary glance at the list of movies to be studied reveals not one single movie that stands out as a negative or violent movie. At first glance, children's movies that provide hope for the future seem to sell. Due to research showing that younger people are more susceptible to both the negativity and optimistic biases, the demonstrated influence of media on youth, and the perception of an increasingly violent society, it is vitally important to understand what media targeted at youth are portraying.
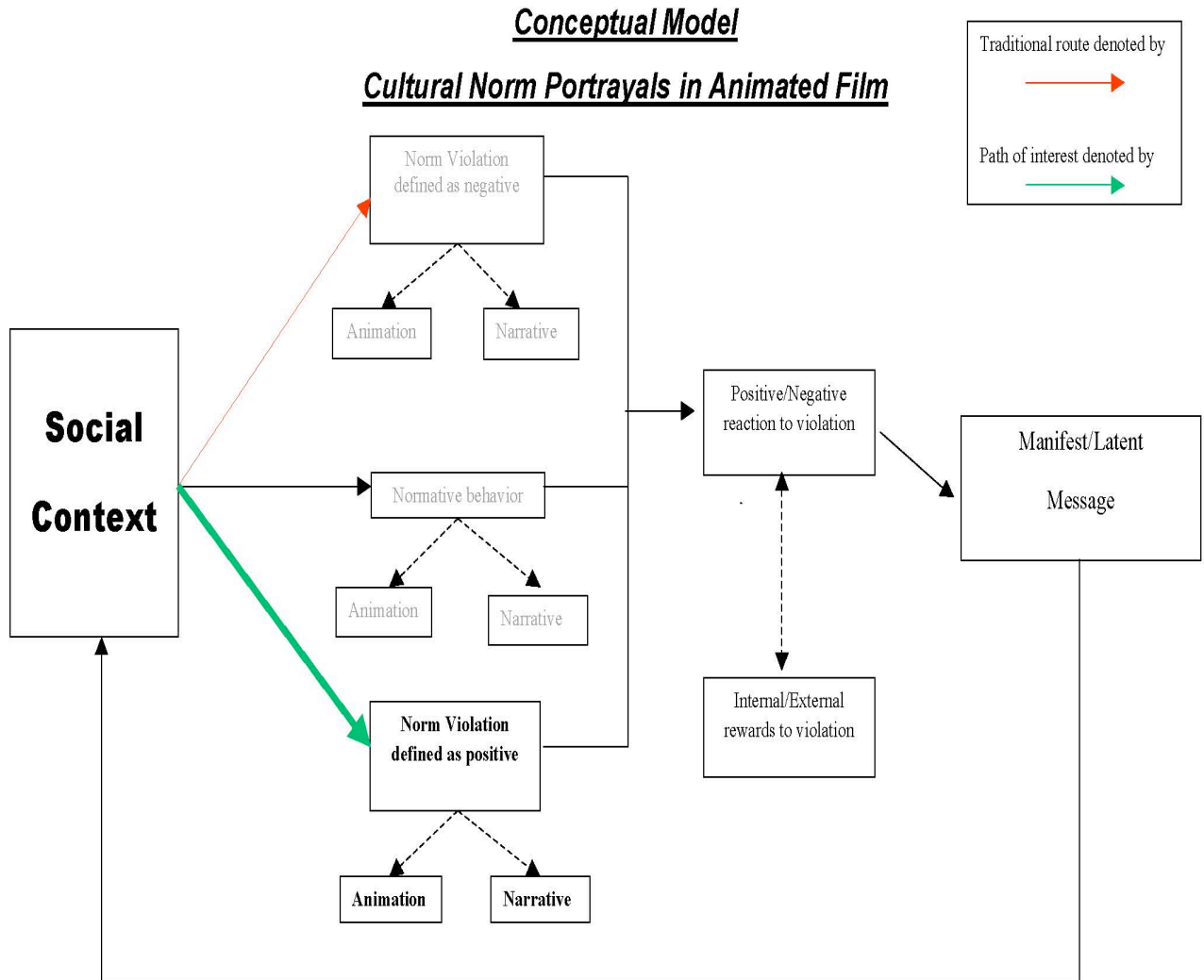
This literature review examined research on altruism, deviance, media influence, and social psychology. A common theme is that the interpretation of behavior largely depends on social context. An altruistic action may or may not be perceived as such. The study of deviance historically has focused on negative and criminal behaviors at the expense of the positive. Thousands of conducted studies also demonstrate that media is influential. This influence is strengthened by what social psychologists term as negativity bias. Research demonstrates that youth are much more susceptible to negative information. This review establishes the need for a better understanding of positive messages conveyed through media. Chapter 3 discusses how this paper will examine animated movies targeted at youth, in an effort to uncover potentially positive messages.

CHAPTER 3 - Methodology

This paper uses multiple methods of content analysis to examine the movie sample. Altheide (1996) compares and contrasts quantitative content analysis and ethnographic content analysis. Drawing from a functionalist definition of altruism, a quantitative analysis is used to determine the objective content in the movies. Predetermined categories are designed to quantify instances of certain actions (in this case, other-benefiting behavior). While this provides verification, a reflexive ethnographic approach is also used to examine meaning and context. An ethnographic approach, while still structured, is more reflexive, researcher oriented, and open to the development of new themes and concepts. The use of both methods should result in a more valid and reliable study that examines the target objective as designed by the predetermined categories, but also is flexible enough to allow unexpected themes and concepts to arise. Beginning with a quantitative analysis, a conceptual model was designed at the outset of this

research. The structure in conceptual model (Figure 3.1) aids in the organizational process of the quantitative analysis.

Figure 3.1 Conceptual model of cultural norm portrayals in animated film

Conceptual Model

Cultural Norm Portrayals in Animated Film

The conceptual model (Figure 3.1) is used as a guideline. The traditionally studied path is delineated with a red arrow. Beginning with the social context provided in the film, this path tracks through the traditionally studied concept of deviance, as negative. Violations of norms in a negative manner appear in this category. While acknowledging that negative actions (in animated behavior and narration) are important, this paper examines the equally important and less studied route (delineated by a green arrow). This route examines behaviors that violate norms in a positive fashion. Between negative and positive norm violations, normative behavior appears. Normative behaviors account for the majority of day-to-day life. The analysis of animated movies will focus not only on actions (animation) of the characters, but also in their words (narratives). As the model shows, reactions to behaviors are examined. Rewards are examined indirectly in the model, as rewards are part of the definition and measurement of altruism. Reactions and rewards not only reinforce each other, but also re-create (through the manifest and latent messages) the social context of the films. Last, manifest and latent messages are examined; the latent and manifest messages aid in the re-creation of social context within the movies. This creates the loop that then leads back to redefining normative behavior.

Sample

Data are drawn from a stratified purposive sample. The International Movie Database contains a listing of the top one hundred domestic box office grossing films of all time. Sixteen animated movies are on this list. From this list of sixteen, the top ten grossing animated movies are selected. Due to the intensity of ethnographic methods used, a purposive sample of the two films to be analyzed is used. Based upon the results of the quantitative analysis, two films are selected for more analysis. Based upon the theme of risk arising, a third film is also examined. Justifications for the selected films are discussed in Chapter IV. It is nearly impossible (or at least extremely labor intensive) to draw a purely random sample from all of the animated movies in history. It is recognized that drawing upon films in the top one hundred list eliminates many influential films throughout history. These films are eliminated based on factors such as inflation and higher ticket prices (as is evident by nine of the ten films having been released since 1999); however, this is partially due to a large push on big budget, major motion pictures in the last fifteen to twenty years. Advances in technology have led to a tremendous leap in the

capabilities of movie producers. This is evident by the tremendous sums of money generated by these films.

Table 3.1 lists the ten films, their year of release, historical rank, and domestic box-office gross. The first column lists the name of the movie to be studied. The subsequent columns denote the year of release; the movies' rank on the all-time list, and the final column denotes the domestic box office gross.

Table 3.1 Top 10 Domestic Box Office Grossing Animated Moves

Movie Title	Year of Release	All-Time Rank	Domestic Box Office Gross ($)
Shrek 2	2004	4	436,471,036
Finding Nemo	2003	15	339,714,367
The Lion King	1994	18	328,423,001
Shrek the Third	2007	19	320,706,665
Shrek	2001	38	267,652,016
The Incredibles	2004	40	261,437,578
Monsters, Inc.	2001	44	255,870,172
Toy Story 2	1999	49	245,823,397
Cars	2006	50	244,052,771
WALL-E	2008	65	223,806,889

As Table 3.1 shows, *Shrek 2* is the highest grossing animated movie of all time. *Finding Nemo* is nearly $100 million behind in second place. However, when DVD and merchandise sales are figured in, *Finding Nemo* has earned nearly $1 billion. *Wall-E* is last on the list with over $223 million in earnings. The average gross of the top ten movies is over $315 million; a tidy sum for animated movies that target children.

All movies in the sample are available on DVD, allowing multiple viewings and review of certain segments. After a familiarization viewing, the films are systematically coded. For future reference, the DVD counter is used to delineate locations in the movies where events occur. Notes are used to identify behaviors that occur within the context of each film. Based upon these notes, two movies are selected to be part of a deeper analysis. Once selected for ethnographic analysis, the films are viewed again for in-depth note taking. When necessary, additional viewings supplement the analysis.

Analysis

According to Altheide, verification and confirmation of hypothesized relationships is a major goal of quantitative analysis (1996:16). By placing behaviors into predetermined categories, the use of quantitative analysis in this paper yields confirmation of the existence of positive behavior and altruism in animated movies. To better understand meaning of these categorical behaviors, ethnographic analysis is used. The constant comparison process in the ethnographic analysis yields findings in this paper that would otherwise have been missed.

Heckert and Heckert (2004) identify altruism as the positive deviance example of group loyalty. Using Heckert and Heckert's example, this paper examines a sample from the top ten grossing animated movies for displays of altruism. A code sheet (see appendix A), delineating the characteristics of altruism, is used. Bar-Tal's (1985-1986) psychology-guided definition and Piliavin and Charng's (1990) sociological definition differ in their categorization of altruism. The difference between the two definitions is the discussion of premeditated intent. For the purposes of this analysis, characteristics of both definitions are used.

The analyzed films are examined in three parts: Introduction, body, and conclusion. Actions and behaviors exhibited by the lead characters, and main supporting characters, are examined. Displayed actions are scored on a low, medium, high scale as they pertain to the altruism characteristics.

The quantitative analysis begins by observing actions and behaviors of the main and main supporting characters of the ten selected animated movies. When an action appears to be performed for the benefit of another character, the action is denoted and examined deeper. The action is scored (0 = low; 1 = medium; 2 = high) for five characteristics of altruism. The five characteristics are: is the action guided to benefit another (other); is the action voluntary (voluntary); is the action intentional (intentional); does the action carry some cost/risk to the actor (cost/risk); is there some reward for the action (reward). Ideally, to be purely altruistic, an action will score high in the other, voluntary, and intentional categories. It will score medium to high in the cost/risk category. And, it will score low in the reward category. After all other-benefiting actions are scored they are reexamined to determine if they are altruistic.

To exemplify a sequence of events presented in the movies, one needs to look no further than *Finding Nemo.* As the movie reaches its climax, Nemo enters a large trawling net full of

fish to save Dory's life. Nemo's action scores high in the "other," "voluntary," "intentional," and "cost/risk" categories. His action is guided towards another, is voluntary and intentional, and it carries great risk to his own life. Nemo's action receives a low score in the "reward" category. While it could be argued that saving the life of another is a reward, the reward does not outweigh the cost of one's own life. Despite the ability to know the outcome of an event, when coding, actions are assessed at the moment that they occur. That is to say, at the moment that Nemo decides to enter the trawling net, the question of does the potential reward outweigh the potential cost is asked. In the presented example, Nemo's action is certainly other-benefiting. After further assessment, it is also determined to be altruistic. Quantitatively, Nemo's action is placed into a predetermined category. However, when other factors are considered, actions are more complex than a simple categorical understanding.

In conjunction with a quantitative content analysis, an ethnographic analysis of two selected films is also performed. Altheide states the aim of ethnographic analysis "is to be systematic and analytic but not rigid. Categories and variables initially guide the study, but others are allowed and expected to emerge" (Altheide, 1996:16). As per Altheide, "ethnographic content analysis is more oriented to concept development" (1996:17). This analysis is "reflexive and highly interactive" (1996:16). While the quantitative portion of analysis maintains predetermined coding characteristics throughout, the ethnographic analysis is in many ways designed to challenge pre-existing categories.

An ethnographic analysis generally refers to a description of people and their culture (Denzin et al., 1994; Schwartz et al., 1979). In the simplest sense, it is the study of people being people. Or, as Altheide (1996) succinctly states it is a study of humans engaged in meaningful behavior. Using ethnographic analysis to study media is complex. Instead of determining categories, observing behaviors, counting the frequency of events that fit the predetermined categories, and statistically analyzing the results, the researcher becomes involved in all phases of the research. Due to researcher involvement, subjectivity and interpretation bias are both dangers. However, the stress is placed upon discovery and theory development.

The process is highly interactive. "Ethnographic content analysis follows a recursive and reflexive movement between concept development-sampling-data, collection-data, coding-data, and analysis-interpretation" (Altheide, 1996:16). Guided by some preliminary categories that initially guide the research, other categories are allowed to develop. The researcher develops a

category, collects, analyzes, and interprets data. The results may develop a previously unknown concept. The process continues by returning to the sample, collecting, coding, and analyzing more data. The process is circular and stresses discovery and verification.

One of the primary findings of this research directly results from the use of ethnographic analysis. While coding data, preliminary notes were taken. These preliminary notes identified certain aspects of each event being coded. These events were predetermined by the quantitative analysis. After quantitative coding was completed, the notes were revisited and compared between the movies. This initial comparison revealed numerous interesting similarities, such as similar actions being interpreted differently, the use of colors and music to depict events in a certain way, and an inordinate amount of risk of behalf of the characters. The initial similarity of risk was intriguing and deserved more analysis.

Using risk as a new category, movies were revisited and reanalyzed. The second analysis revealed that the finding was deeper than expected; the inordinate amount of risk was actually revealed as risk of life. Using risk of life as a new category, notes were revisited to determine how many risks of life were evident in altruistic act, and at what points in the movies did these actions occur. This is one example of how this circular process was used in this research; more discussion is presented in the following chapters.

According to Altheide, "the meaning of a message is assumed to be reflected in various modes of information exchange, format, rhythm, and style – for example, the aural and visual as well as the contextual nuances of the report itself" (1996:16). It is the responsibility of the researcher to physically (mentally) place his or her self within the media source and decipher the meaning of the message.

Using quantitative and ethnographic analysis techniques allows this research to develop a deeper understanding of what animated movies are presenting. Quantitatively, the frequencies of other-benefiting and altruistic actions are identified. Ethnographically, other interesting findings are uncovered. These findings are discussed in-depth in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4 - Findings

As established in Chapter 2, historical definitions of altruism are challenging. However, one common thread exists – the simple idea of placing others before oneself. To encapsulate psychological and sociological characteristics of altruism, this paper uses a combination of Bar-Tal's (1985-1986) and Piliavin and Charng's (1990) definition.

Beginning with the common thread of altruism, the top ten grossing animated movies are examined for actions that appear to be performed for the benefit of another. Table 4.1 shows the prevalence of other-benefitting actions found in the top ten movies. The table shows that 239 actions are identified, providing a mean of 23.9 other-benefiting actions per movie. *Toy Story 2* contains the highest number of instances that meet the preliminary criteria with 33 actions that are "other" driven. One would assume that a movie that depicts a family of "do-gooders" would contain numerous instances of other benefiting actions and this assumption holds true for *The Incredibles*, a movie about super heroes.

Table 4.1 Prevalence of Other Benefitting Actions

Movie	Beneficial Actions
Toy Story 2	33
The Incredibles	29
Finding Nemo	28
Monsters, Inc.	26
The Lion King	24
WALL-E	24
Cars	22
Shrek	20
Shrek 2	18
Shrek the Third	15
TOTAL	**239**

Ironically, while all three episodes of the *Shrek* trilogy find a place in the top ten, all three fall below the average of 23.9 beneficial actions per movie. Interestingly, the frequency of actions that benefit another also decreases with each subsequent episode of *Shrek*. As the trilogy progresses, groups become more well defined. Counter-intuitively, this leads to a lower

frequency of other benefiting actions. While opposite of what would be predicted, it is an interesting finding.

Every movie on the list contains a sequence (usually near the end of the movie) where a series of "other" benefiting events occur. These sequences are strongly rooted in the benefit of others within the developed groups. An example of this can be found in the *Lion King*. Near the end of the film a large fight ensues. The fight includes two well-defined groups battling to determine who will be the king of the land; a battle between "good and evil." During this sequence, six instances of other benefiting actions occur. These instances occur on both sides of the battle. Every action in this sequence involves a risk of live for another (a message that will be revisited soon). Group loyalty is not only very strong, but also very well defined. However, the single most altruistic action during this sequence (and possibly the entire film) goes completely against group loyalty; Simba allows Scar to live. Earlier in the movie, Scar killed his brother, king Mufasa. Scar also attempted to kill Simba, the son of Mufasa and expected king-to-be. Despite this, and despite the best interest of his group, Simba gives Scar the opportunity to "leave and never come back." In the end, his own group of "friends kills Scar," however the action of letting him live cannot be ignored.

While placing third on this initial list, *Finding Nemo* is distinctly different than the other films. In each of the other nine films, groups are either very well defined at the outset, or become very well defined through the course of the film. *Finding Nemo* is full of changing groups. It is true that Nemo and Marlin (son and father) are a well-defined group from the beginning of the movie. It is also true that the majority of the movie is Marlin trying to find Nemo (group oriented). However, during this search for Nemo (the vast majority of the film) groups are constantly changing and evolving. This is believed to lead to more pure altruistic behavior, but do the numbers confirm this? Despite *Finding Nemo* containing a fairly high number of beneficial actions, Table 4.2 below will show the number of truly altruistic acts only makes up a little over half of those actions.

Table 4.2 Prevalence of Altruistic Actions in Animated Movies

Movie	Beneficial Acts	Altruistic Acts	%
Toy Story 2	33	21	63.6
The Incredibles	29	21	72.4
Finding Nemo	28	15	53.6
Monsters, Inc.	26	20	76.9
The Lion King	24	18	75
WALL-E	24	14	58.3
Cars	22	17	77.3
Shrek	20	9	45
Shrek 2	18	13	72.2
Shrek the Third	15	9	60
TOTALS	**239**	**157**	**65.7**

As previously discussed, for an action to be considered altruistic it must meet the 5 criteria set forth in the combination of Bar-Tal's (1985-1986) and Piliavin and Charng's (1990) definitions. The action must be beneficial to another (other), performed voluntarily (voluntary), be intentional (intentional), involve some cost to the actor (cost), and have little to no reward (reward). In coding, the other, voluntary, and intentional categories score high, the cost category scores medium to high, and the reward category scores low for an action to be considered altruistic. Table 4.2 shows that 157 of the 239 beneficial actions (65.7%) are altruistic.

Finding Nemo was believed to demonstrate numerous altruistic actions. However, with 53% of other benefiting actions revealed as altruistic, this is not the case. Again, in shear number of instances, *Toy Story 2* and *The Incredibles* top the list with 21 each. While *Cars* ranks seventh on the initial list, it tops Table 4.2; over 77% of the beneficial actions are purely altruistic. Interestingly, while all three episodes of the *Shrek* trilogy are in the top five grossing animated movies of all time, all three round out the bottom of Table 4.1. While *Shrek 2* ranks next to last on the initial list, the percentage of acts that are altruistic is very high. It is also the only episode of the trilogy that surpasses the mean for all movies. However, with only 45% of other-benefiting action considered as altruistic, *Shrek* ranks last.

While coding the movies, a theme of danger and/or violence continued to arise. The amount of danger present in these movies is surprising. During quantitative analysis, episodes of risk, danger, and/or violence were not counted. However, while taking notes for qualitative analysis, instances in which an altruistic action involves risk of life to the actor were counted. Table 4.3 reveals the number of instances in which an altruistic act involves the risk of life. Of the original 239 other-benefiting actions, 157 are altruistic. Of the 157 altruistic actions, 57 involve the risk of life. This number (57) represents 36.3% of all altruistic actions.

Table 4.3 Prevalence of Risk of Life in Animated Movies

Movie	Altruistic Acts	Risk of Life	%
The Incredibles	21	14	66.7
Toy Story 2	21	4	19
Monsters, Inc.	20	6	30
The Lion King	18	11	61.1
Cars	17	0	0
Finding Nemo	15	6	40
WALL-E	14	4	28.6
Shrek 2	13	4	30.8
Shrek	9	4	44.4
Shrek the Third	9	4	44.4
TOTALS	**157**	**57**	**36.3**

Three surprising results are evident in Table 4.3. While an action must bare some cost or risk to the actor, over one-third of the time in the examined movies this involves a risk of life. *The Lion King* and *The Incredibles* both nearly double the mean. *Cars* is the only movie containing zero risks of life. One must wonder if the numbers represented above are the appropriate message to send to children. These numbers do not represent the totality of danger or risk of life in the analyzed movies, only the instances that occur during the performance of an altruistic action. The message portrayed to the audience when 36% of all altruistic acts, and 24% of all acts that benefit another, involves at least some risk of life is one that demands further exploration.

Ethnographic Analysis

Justifying selections for in-depth ethnographic analysis (as discussed in chapter 3) revolves around the concept of risk of life. The first movie selected, based partly on the fact that it is the oldest movie on the list and has thus withstood inflation and a rise in ticket prices, and partly because it is an interesting case, is *The Lion King*. As the oldest movie on the list, it is believed that some themes may arise that may also present themselves in the later movies. The second movie selected is *Cars*. *Cars* is the only analyzed movie that does not contain risk of life. This substantial difference warrants further examination. Due to the unexpected theme of risk of life, and one movie exhibiting a large quantity of risk of life, *The Incredibles* is also examined.

Good Versus Evil: The Lion King

The Lion King begins with the birth of Simba. Simba is a lion cub and the son of Mufasa, the current king. Although just a cub, Simba is the king-to-be. As the movie progresses, it is revealed that Mufasa has a brother, Scar. For all of the good and innocence that Simba represents, Scar represents the antithesis. However, while Scar is set as the evil character, it is never revealed as to why Scar is evil. Or, for that matter, it is never revealed why Mufasa, Simba, and the rest of their group, represent the good. In short, and tautologically, Simba is good because he is the son of Mufasa; Mufasa is good because he is the king; Simba will become the king because he is good and the son of Mufasa; and, becoming king is what good people do. Scar is bad/evil because he is the bad/evil brother of Mufasa; Mufasa wants to become king, which is bad; bad people cannot become kings because they are bad. In essence, the creators of the movie have set the groundwork that Simba and Mufasa are good and Scar is evil, simply because they say so. But, do the actions of the characters support this given?

The latent message in *The Lion King* deals directly with the concept of power. Who has power, who desires power, who deserves power, and how does one come into/gain power. Mufasa is a powerful king. He is powerful because he has garnered the respect of those he leads. He is also powerful because he is physically strong. While it is never directly revealed during as to why or how Mufasa became king, it is subtly revealed in a discussion with Scar when Scar states that, "as far as brains go, I got the lion's share. When it comes to brute strength, I'm afraid that I am at the shallow end of the gene pool." This sends the message to the viewer that brute strength (especially for males) is more important than intelligence. This message is supported

throughout the movie, as when Scar kills Mufasa, it is not until Simba is physically strong enough to beat Scar that he returns to gain the throne.

Many of Scar's actions can be deemed as evil. It is widely accepted that killing another is bad. To gain power, Scar uses the love of a father against him by placing Simba in a dangerous situation (a stampede). Scar knows that Mufasa will come to rescue his son, and believes that he will be killed while doing so. However, to aid in depicting Scar as evil, the writers allow Mufasa to escape to a position that places Scar in direct control of Mufasa's life. Hanging by his paws on a cliff, Mufasa is in need of help and calls to Scar, "Brother, help me!" Scar responds by burying his claws into Mufasa's paws and stating, "long live the king," as he allows him to fall to his death. Scar did not save Mufasa's life. Would Mufasa have survived if Scar were not there? The answer is purely speculation, but Mufasa's situation was very precarious so his survival was highly unlikely. After Mufasa's death, Simba believes that it was his fault that his father is dead. In a play to become king, Scar tells Simba to, "run away Simba, and never return." When Scar assumes the throne, the rains cease to fall; animals migrate away; fire scorches the land; death, hunger, and a cloud of darkness ensue. Evil is in control.

Many of Simba's actions can be deemed as good. Near the end of the film, Simba and Scar find themselves in the same situation that Scar and Mufasa were in. When Simba escapes, he finds himself in the position of power. In an act of pure altruism, he gives Scar the opportunity to live by telling him to, "run away Scar, and never return." Despite his offer, the battle continues and culminates with Simba allowing Scar to fall to his death. Simba's heroic defeat of Scar allows him to assume his rightful place as king. The rains fall; life returns to the land; food is plentiful. Light, color, and joyous music also return; good is in control again.

The Lion King contains three key events that shape the entire movie. First is the birth of Simba. When Simba is born, Scar is no longer the successor to the throne. This sets the stage for Scar to become the evil villain (and conversely for Simba to become the good hero). The second key event is the death of Mufasa. By allowing Mufasa to fall to his death, and leading Simba to believe that he is responsible for his father's death, Scar is able to assume the throne. The third key event is the return of Simba and his allowance of Scar to fall to his death; thus allowing Simba to reclaim the throne.

The first key event is extremely important; it sets the context for the second and third key events; context is everything. There is little doubt that Sagarin (1975) would view Scar's actions

as deviant. Allowing one's brother to fall to his death is not normative. However, it becomes rather difficult to understand how Sagarin would claim that Simba's actions are substantively different. In each situation, a character allowed a family member to fall to his death. One is viewed negatively and one is celebrated; one is evil and one is good. The same action, with the same narrative, is viewed entirely different, based solely upon the context of the situation. Is it really substantively different when Simba's friends risk their lives to help Simba than when Scar's friends risk their lives to help Scar? While there are numerous instances of positive behavior, and altruism, the main thrust of this movie is in the three key events discussed.

The theme of good versus bad does reveal itself in most of the movies on the list. However, in most instances the traditionally defined "good" and traditionally defined "bad" are reversed, obfuscated, and confusing. Ogres are bad, but in the *Shrek* trilogy, ogres are good. Monsters are traditionally defined as bad, but in *Monsters, Inc.* monsters are both bad and good. In *The Incredibles*, good behavior comes to be defined as bad. Society no longer wishes to have superheroes doing good deeds, and thus define their behavior as negative. Ultimately, the evil villain in the movie evolves from probably the purest good that there is, a child who is admiring his hero. In *Finding Nemo*, there are no "bad," as traditionally defined, characters. *Cars* also does not contain any traditionally defined "bad" characters. In fact, short of a couple race competitors, there really are no "bad" characters in this movie. Also, unlike *Finding Nemo*, (or any of the other movies on the list) none of the altruistic actions in the movie contain a risk of life.

More than Just a Road: Cars

Cars is a movie with a message much larger than itself. And, it attempts to get this message across in a fashion very different than every other movie that has been analyzed. *Cars* is a story about Lightning McQueen. McQueen is a self-absorbed rookie racer. For him, life is about achieving goals and going fast. When the final race of the season ends in a three-way tie, a playoff race is announced. In an attempt to be the first to the racetrack, McQueen ends up getting caught speeding in Radiator Springs, a small city that is on the verge of dying. In his haste to get away, McQueen tears up the main road in town. After spending a night in impound, McQueen is sentenced to fix the road before he can leave. During his punishment of fixing the road, the town members come to accept McQueen as a part of their group. Group loyalty is

strong in Radiator Springs, as the survival of the town depends on it. While accepting McQueen is part of the goal, inadvertently, the town is also teaching McQueen that life is much more than a race to the finish. In an effort to fix the road and leave quickly, McQueen quips, "It's just a road." This statement is met with a quick reply of, "no, it is much more than a road." When one of the town members begins to take a liking to McQueen, she offers to "go for a drive" with him. This is something that McQueen has never done before. During his drive, McQueen actually begins to see the world in its full splendor. It is during his drive that he learns that Radiator Springs used to be a booming town on Route 66; that is until the new highway was built that bypassed the town.

McQueen's time in Radiator Springs taught him that life is much more than a race. During his time in Radiator Springs, McQueen learns to let others into his life. Earlier in the film he was allocated 20 tickets to the upcoming race for his "closest" friends. When pushed for names, McQueen realized that he did not have any friends. His time in the small town changed that. Upon finishing the road, McQueen refused to leave until he helped every member of the town (a sequence of altruistic actions).

However, it is upon his return to the track that the true altruism fully shines. Having alienated his previous pit crew, McQueen did not have one. During the race, members of Radiator Spring arrived to help him. On the final lap of the race, King (an old race car that was about to retire) crashed. Instead of winning the race, McQueen stops just short of the finish line, and goes back to push King across the finish line. In effect, McQueen gave everything that he had been working toward away to help another. It is an action that is the epitome of altruism. The action did carry a cost with it, but unlike every other film that has been analyzed, the cost did not involve any risk to his life.

When analyzing animated movies, *Cars* represented the expected findings. However, instead of being an exemplar, *Car* is an outlier. Danger, violence, and risk to life are very low in this movie. It delivers a potent message in a positive fashion. Help others, slow down, enjoy the beautiful place in which we live; life is not a race to the finish, it is not "just a road." However, one must wonder if the latent message in this movie is beyond the understanding of the viewing audience? In order to understand the true message being delivered, one must have some life experience. The story of Route 66 is a great history lesson, but can a child truly appreciate the depth of the story being delivered if they have not witnessed firsthand the effects of a bypass on

a small town? With that said, life has become, in essence, a race. It is a race to see who can do the best, accumulate the latest and greatest, and do it faster than those around you. Maybe the message to slow down, appreciate what is around you, help others is exactly the perfect message for the target audience. *Cars* is more than just an animated movie.

In many ways, the two chosen movies represent the extremes of this sample. One has the classic "good versus evil" tale, chock full of danger. Ironically, this story is also the oldest of the analyzed movies. The other movie has no violence in it whatsoever (short of fender rubbing which occurs during racing). The message is simple, but deep. With the exception of *The Incredibles,* the remaining films on the list are a combination of these two. *Finding Nemo* leans more towards the *Cars* example. While there are several instances of danger, including six where life itself is at risk, the good versus evil storyline is non-existent. Groups within the story are ever changing as a father travels across the open ocean in search of his son. Despite the ever-changing group loyalty, altruism is present through out. However, the single greatest act of altruism in the movie involves Nemo endangering his life to save a fish that he barely knows.

The *Shrek* trilogy leans much farther towards the traditional fairytale story. In the trilogy, the good versus evil tale is evident. However, the traditional roles are reversed. The traditional fairytale would exhibit the ogre as evil. In *Shrek,* the ogre is good. It is a wonderful example of context mattering. In the traditional fairytale, an ogre-hunting mob would be seen as normative. The same action in *Shrek* is viewed entirely differently. The *Shrek* trilogy is a story of acceptance. While altruism in this series is limited, it is still evident.

Risky Business: The Incredibles

The Incredibles is an interesting case. It falls right in the center of the previously discussed good versus evil continuum. The good versus evil storyline is evident. However, the evil in the film is created from good. The evil character is a spurned hero admirer. Ironically, while the viewer sees the evil character (Syndrome) as evil, within the movie, Syndrome is not necessarily seen as such. In the beginning of the movie, Mr. Incredible saves the life of a suicide jumper. This action results in a lawsuit against Mr. Incredible. The monetary reward of the lawsuit results in numerous lawsuits against the superheroes. The final result is that society deems the heroic actions unnecessary and stops the superheroes from performing their actions. Again, this is another example of context mattering. The simple act of saving a person from a

burning building is deemed heroic (and altruistic) at one point, but the exact same action is later deemed criminal. The substantive nature of the action did not change, only the context within which the action occurred. While watching the movie, Syndrome is viewed as evil. After all, he is trying to kill all of the superheroes. Within the movie, while it is not explicitly displayed, he could be viewed as a hero. He is trying to kill all of the superheroes that society has deemed unnecessary.

Where *The Incredibles* becomes an extremely interesting case is in the risk of life category. Over two-thirds of the altruistic acts in *The Incredibles* involve a risk of life. Given the likability and idolization of superheroes, this movie may be more influential than many others on the list. This influence is demonstrated within the movie itself when the eventual villain in the movie is a young boy who idolizes his hero, Mr. Incredible. The question is, is the risk of life an appropriate message to send to youth? Some may argue that superheroes are far less likely to be hurt during an event, such as rescuing someone from a collapsing, burning building, or jumping in front of a train to stop it from falling off of the tracks. However, as mentioned in chapter 2, research has shown that for youth the line between fantasy and reality is often blurred. A movie about superheroes is inherently going to exhibit many cases of risk; however, when two-thirds of all altruistic acts incur a risk of life, the portrayed message becomes: in order to be good, one must be willing to risk everything. When one-third of all altruistic actions examined incur a risk of life, the message becomes far more powerful. Nemo is not a superhero when he risks his life to save Dory's. Wall-E is not a superhero when he risks his life to save every human in existence. Shrek, Donkey, Fiona, Buzz, Woody, Pumba, Timone, Dory, Marlin, Gil, Mikey and Sully are not superheroes either, yet each of these characters risk their lives in their respective films.

As predicted, 239 instances of other benefiting actions are present in animated movies. Nearly 60 percent of these actions are altruistic, 157. Also, as predicted, actions are dependent upon the context within which they occur. As demonstrated in *The Lion King*, the same action is often presented differently. When a good character performs an action, it is likely looked upon as good. When a bad character performs the exact same action, it is likely looked upon as bad. Each of the top ten movies carries an important, and relevant message to youth. However, the risk of life theme may be clouding these messages. Risk of life is an unexpected finding that

needs to be examined deeper. Chapter 5 follows with a further discussion of findings, policy implications, and areas for future research.

CHAPTER 5 - Discussion/Conclusion

The world is hungry for goodness and it recognizes it when it sees it –and has incredible responses to the good. There is something in all of us that hungers after the good and true, and when we glimpse it in people, we applaud them for it. We long to be just like them. Their inspiration reminds us of the tenderness for life that we all can feel.

-- Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness.* (1999:263)

Nobel Peace Prize winning Archbishop Desmond Tutu will forever be remembered as a humanitarian. He is often referred to as the moral voice for global issues. His work against the apartheid, poverty, global disease, and inequality is admirable and reflective of his recognition of goodness in humans. One hopes that while Archbishop Tutu will be remembered as a great historical figure, the context from which he arose will never be forgotten. Archbishop Tutu argues that the world recognizes goodness when it sees it. However, goodness itself is context dependent. What is often good for one group is not beneficial for another. While on a whole I agree that "we" long to be good, I do not agree that we always recognize goodness.

Recognizing goodness is a latent goal of this paper; it uses altruism to examine a small but important aspect of positive behaviors displayed in modern media. Near the beginning of *Finding Nemo* Dory playfully sings, "Just keep swimming." As the movie reaches its climax, these words are yelled by Marlin. Marlin is ordering a net full of fish to keep swimming down, as his son performs the greatest act of altruism. Initially defying his father, Nemo risks his own life in an attempt to save Dory's. While the words yelled by Marlin are exactly the same as those sung by Dory, the meaning behind the words is completely different. The perception of the two actions is also completely different. As discussed in Chapter 2, while Nemo's negative defiance and altruistic risk of life only spans a few moments, it is more likely to stick with the audience than Dory's altruistic action that spans the entire length of the movie. While both actions have positive results and exhibit goodness, they are not recognized equally. Understanding both is vital. This is the first study to examine the use of positive deviance in animated movies.

Summary of Findings

Using altruism as a key, this paper examines a small but influential portion of media. While often debated, altruism is a powerful measure of humanity. The concept of placing another before oneself is vital in the evolution of civilization; for Emile Durkheim, it is existent and necessary in all societies. Drawing upon Heckert and Heckert's (2004) introduction of altruism as the positive deviance ideal for the norm of group loyalty, this paper examines influential media targeting youth; animated movies.

Among the top 100 box office grossing films of all-time, there are 16 animated movies. Drawing from a stratified, purposive sample, this paper examines the top 10 animated movies. As shown on Table 3.1, these films have generated over $3 billion in domestic box office revenue. When foreign revenue and DVD and memorabilia sales are factored in, the revenue generated by these films more than doubles.

A preliminary examination of the top ten movies revealed 239 other-benefiting actions (see Table 4.1). Six of the ten films contained more than the mean of 23.9. *Toy Story 2* contained the most (33) other-benefiting actions, followed closely by *The Incredibles* (29) and *Finding Nemo* (28). While each episode of the *Shrek* trilogy ranks in the top five animated movies of all time, all three contained fewer than the 23.9 average. The number of other-benefiting actions also decreased with each subsequent episode, *Shrek* (20), *Shrek 2* (18), and *Shrek the Third* (15). This preliminary examination does not represent the totality of positive behaviors, only one very small subsection that revolves around actions that benefit others.

Using five characteristics from combined definitions of altruism, other-benefiting actions are then examined to determine if they are altruistic. Altruistic actions contain five characteristics: they beneficial to others, they performed intentionally, they performed voluntarily, they incur some cost to the actor, and they return little to no reward. Coding these characteristics on a low, medium, high scale, two-thirds of other-benefiting actions are determined to be altruistic (see Table 4.2). While *Toy Story 2* and *The Incredibles* contain the most altruistic actions (21 each), over three-fourths of the other-benefiting actions in *Cars* and *Monsters, Inc.* are altruistic. Again, *Shrek, Shrek 2,* and *Shrek the Third* are at the bottom of the list with 9, 13, and 9 altruistic acts respectively. However, nearly three-fourths of other-benefiting actions in *Shrek 2* are altruistic.

During coding, a recurrent theme of risk arose. While risk itself was not analyzed quantitatively, each altruistic action that involved a risk of life was analyzed. Of the 157 altruistic actions, over one-third involved some risk to the actor's life (see Table 4.3). When examining risk of life, three movies stand out. Approximately two-thirds of altruistic actions in *The Incredibles* and *The Lion King* involve risk of life. *Cars* is the only movie on the list with zero altruistic actions involving risk of life. While many of the previously discussed findings are expected, risk of life is completely unexpected and is used as justification for deeper qualitative analysis.

The Incredibles reveals that risk of life is inherent in superheroes. In the opening and ending scenes of *The Incredibles* numerous instances of risk of life occur. However, in the opening scenes, altruistic actions are not portrayed as life or death scenarios. These actions are portrayed as a superhero saving the day. What *The Incredibles* also reinforces is the importance of context. While actions remain the same, society comes to define the actions of superheroes as unnecessary and unwanted. Actions once considered heroic come to be defined negatively.

The Lion King reveals a good versus evil theme. Actions performed by members of the well-defined "good" and the well-defined "evil" sides are identical. However, these actions are portrayed and perceived very differently. Good is good, because it is good. Evil is evil, because it is not good. The producers of *The Lion King* use every device to convince the viewer both sides are fundamentally different. However, when viewed closely, the actions and words performed and spoken by Simba and Scar are identical. Again demonstrating that context matters.

Cars is fundamentally different than each of the other nine movies. *Cars* contains zero altruistic actions that involve risk of life. One characteristic of altruistic actions involves cost to the actor. *Cars* demonstrates that cost does not involve risk of life. A prime example occurs toward the end of the movie when the protagonist, Lightning McQueen, chooses not to leave Radiator Springs until performing a beneficial action for each member of the town. This gesture does have a cost to McQueen and his career, but not his life.

Cost/risk is a component of altruism. For an action to be considered altruistic, it must contain some cost or risk to the actor. While the cost/risk of individual actions are not coded in this paper, each altruistic action involves some cost/risk. Numerous examples exist of cost/risk not involving risk of life. In *Finding Nemo*, Dory incurs a cost when she stops every aspect of

her normal life to trek across the open ocean with Marlin to find Nemo. In *Monsters, Inc.,* Mikey and Sully risk their jobs to return Boo home. In *Toy Story 2*, Woody risks being discovered to save his friend. In *Monsters, Inc.,* Mikey risks his friendship with Sully to help Boo.

However, incurred costs such as risking loss of job, risking discovery, risking friendship, and putting one's life on hold are all too often over shadowed by actions that involve the risk of life. Over one-third of the altruistic actions examined involved a risk of life. Often, these risks occurred at crucial and memorable points in the movies. The large battle at the end of *The Lion King* involves a series of altruistic events in which both groups (good and evil) risk their lives to help their friends. *The Incredibles, Monsters, Inc., Finding Nemo, Toy Story 2, WALL-E, Shrek, Shrek 2, Shrek the Third* also contain events during their climaxes that involve risk of life; arguably at most memorable portions of the movies. Nemo risks his life to save Dory; Wall-E and the Incredibles risk their lives to save the world; Princess Fiona's father dives in front of a lightning bolt; Gil (an angelfish) launches himself out of a fish tank to save Nemo; and Boo (a small child) attacks Randall (a monster) to help Mikey and Sully. All of these actions are much more noticeable than Donkey and Dory helping Shrek and Marlin in their quests. So much so that even when looking for altruistic actions, the actions of Donkey and Dory are nearly missed. Social psychologists, and the negativity bias, suggest that negatives, violence, and danger are more powerful than positives. Overcoming this bias is exponentially more difficult when dangerous behaviors are displayed at critical, climactic, memorable moments in children's movies.

Issues and Difficulties

Numerous difficulties arose during this study. Most of these difficulties revolve around the defining of terms and explication of concepts. Ideas and terminology such as rewards, groups, group loyalty, context, and motivation appear simple on the surface. However, when one engages and begins to use them, one begins to appreciate the complex state of the field.

What is the driving motivation for altruistic behavior? Some scholars argue that for altruism to be pure, the motivation must also be pure, or simply put the helping of another is in itself a reward. The idea of reward becomes a sticking point. To borrow from Sir Isaac Newton, every action has some reaction. Helping an elderly person cross the street may yield nothing

more than an internal feeling of goodness, but some scholars will argue that this feeling is the reward. Other scholars will argue that one's self image or reputation is at stake. While it is certainly appropriate to argue that one may consider public response to an action prior to, or during the act, this assumes that there is an audience. What about the individual who receives too much change back at the convenience store and returns it? One assumes the absence of an audience in this case. On the other hand, some scholars argue that reciprocity is a key motivator. However, it is difficult to reciprocate with a dead kamikaze pilot. There appears to be something much larger at play when discussing altruistic behavior. Heckert and Heckert draw upon Tittle and Patternoster and argue that the larger issue at play is group loyalty. In turn, the concept of group loyalty begs the question, how does one define the group?

The introduction of group loyalty brings forth an entirely new set of problems. Heckert and Heckert (2004:26) state, "Loyalty describes the necessity of a group to survive over individual concerns." However, the definition of group may vary over situations and across time. One could discuss primary groups, secondary groups, or tertiary groups. Bellah (1985) states that Americans reserve the most altruistic acts for family members, primary groups. However, the findings of this research reveal that altruism is not that clear cut. In the animated movies examined, groups are fluid and ever changing, yet the films with the most well defined groups often yield the least amount of altruistic actions. At least preliminarily, it appears that altruistic behavior is something above and beyond group loyalty, or at least that altruism may exist in other forms. Perhaps at times there is a consideration of the "larger" group at play (as in survival of the species), but altruistic acts can and do manifest in different contexts. Tagging altruism only as group loyalty misses the fact that altruism can and does occur on the individual level. It is difficult to argue that finding a wallet and turning it in to the police is vital to group survival. Though beyond the scope of this thesis, different manifestations of altruism appear to be an inevitable question for future research.

Theoretical Considerations

Astute scholars will note that numerous theoretical positions are touched upon in this thesis. It was never the purpose of this paper to challenge a centuries old theoretical debate. The functionalist perspective is a powerful explanatory device and very useful in describing altruism. However, labeling and conflict theories do challenge the categorical and relatively inflexible

definitions of altruism. As demonstrated in this thesis certain situations and instances of altruism reach far beyond the singular connection to social solidarity. Too often we as scholars draw firm lines in the theoretical sands, failing to fully acknowledge that the theories we support are every bit as constructed as the phenomena we are using them to explain.

From one perspective, expected findings arise. Altruistic actions (157) are present. And, in some instances, in can be argued these actions occur based upon group loyalty. However, this does not always hold true. Throughout the examined movies, there are numerous instances where group loyalty and altruism appear to be inversely related; the closer and better defined the groups, the lower the incidence of altruism. Recall that Nemo only knew Dory for a matter of moments before risking his life to save her.

When a researcher is quantifying and measuring actions and behaviors, it is useful to create categories of understanding. In this case, it might be inferred that altruistic is synonymous with "good," and the absence of altruism is "bad." This is certainly not the intended idea. And, it is demonstrated throughout the research that this is not an effective way to view altruism. An actor's referent system certainly comes into play when discussing behavior. An action may be altruistic, but the perception of that action being altruistic largely depends upon the reference group. Both situational context and the actor's perspective affect the construction of altruism.

Drawing from several theoretical perspectives, this paper has shed light on altruistic behavior in children's movies. Altruism may or may not be functional for societal survival. However, at some level we must cooperate and help each other. Altruism may or may not be labeled as such. Much of this depends upon the situation, the actors within the situation, and an audience that may be present or imagined. In many ways altruism is subjective, but so is context. Altruism may arise out of conflict. However, this conflict can certainly lead back to a stronger sense of group solidarity. And, depending upon the audience, this conflict can be seen as constructive or detrimental to society.

The objective of this thesis is not to resolve this theoretical debate. Instead, it is to acknowledge that certain behaviors do exist but meaning is constructed. In a certain light, these behaviors are viewed very positively. When positive, these behaviors are rarely studied. And, in animated movies, a media that targets the most vulnerable among us, this behavior is being displayed liberally and deserves the attention of social scientists.

Other Discussion and Conclusions

This research has three important findings. First, animated movies liberally display other-benefiting, positive behavior. Nearly two-thirds of other-benefiting actions displayed represent altruistic acts. Second, this research finds that risk, and more specifically risk of life, is a larger component of altruistic behavior than expected. Third, this research finds that in 90% of the movies examined, risk of life is portrayed at critical, climactic, and memorable moments in the movies, specifically as the movies draw to a conclusion.

With a target audience of children, and the necessity to produce movies with multiple dimensions to attract parents, animated movies prove to be an instructive place to examine positive behaviors. As the movies demonstrate, actions and behaviors are not inherently positive or negative; depending upon context, the same action can be positive, negative, or both. Examining deviant actions as purely negative and positive behaviors as something substantively different misses this fact. Deviant behavior can be positive or negative; studying behaviors as such will broaden the field of study. While a study of animated movies may seem simplistic, it is important. Findings from such research are relatable to bigger issues.

Despite vehement objections from some scholars to the inclusion of positive deviance as a part of deviance studies, research is occurring and is important. While some argue that positive and negative actions are fundamentally different, other scholars show that often the same behavior evokes different responses. Irwin's (2003) ethnographic study evidences this by demonstrating how social context influences perception of elite tattooists and tattoo collectors. Research on physical attractiveness also demonstrates the importance of cultural standards when defining positive and negative behaviors (Byrne, 1971; Dion, 1972; Krebs and Adinolfi, 1975; Depboye et al., 1975; Benson et al., 1976; Reis et al., 1982). Physically attractive people, or those who exceed the cultural norm for attractiveness, are advantaged in numerous ways. Physically attractive people in one culture may not be deemed equally in other cultures. These studies and others demonstrate the critical influence of context and perception, but traditional deviance studies have not consistently analyzed these elements in a systematic way. In particular, the field has suffered from the neglect of positive deviance.

As the analysis of movies in this study confirms, often the same behavior is viewed as both negative and positive. When Scar tells Simba to run away and never return it is viewed as an evil power grab. However, when Simba returns and gives Scar the same ultimatum, it is

viewed as sympathetic and good. Similarly, when Mr. Incredible saves the world, it is viewed as admirable; however, when Syndrome attempts to do the same, he is viewed as evil. In the same vain, when Shrek's friends risk their lives to help Shrek during a fight, it is not viewed the same as when Prince Charming's friends risk their lives to help him. It is difficult to argue that two actions are substantively different when the only difference between the actions is the context of the situation. Even the most widely accepted negative, killing is context dependent; suicide bombers are viewed as evil terrorists in the United States but altruistic liberators in their homeland. The strong theme represented in these examples underscores the idea that context matters.

Understanding that a given behavior does not have to be qualitatively different to be seen as different does not obfuscate; it broadens. The meaning attached to a behavior depends upon the audience and social context. The findings of this research demonstrate this point. If research studies crime, it must also take into consideration what makes a particular action criminal. To examine deviance as purely negative clouds understanding. When one discusses drug usage, the criminalized aspect of drug usage is envisioned. However, an enormous industry also revolves around the use of legalized drugs. Using drugs is not illegal. Using illegal drugs is criminal, but the act of consuming drugs is not inherently deviant. All to often society at large does not question. An action or behavior is negative or positive simply because it is and/or always has been. This is demonstrated and reinforced consistently in the movies examined in this research.

Research on criminal behaviors is necessary for effective policies to be enacted. However, often an action defined as criminal is far less harmful than legal actions. If deviance were defined as such based upon harm, white-collar crime would receive far much more attention. One must consider who defines crime, and whose interests these definitions benefit. However, it is important to note that not all deviant actions are criminal. By including a broadened discussion of deviance, a better understanding can be developed. Policies that deter crime can be augmented with policies that promote certain positive behaviors.

As the discussion of laws about criminal acts conveys, research often reveals underlying and surprising issues that previously were overlooked. In the current study, we see that more than one-third of these actions examined in this paper involve the shocking finding of risk of life. One would not argue that helping a friend is a bad behavior. However, what is the message being sent when one-third of the time helping a friend involves endangering one's life?

Studies show that children are receptive and malleable. While altruistic behavior is a valuable and important lesson to teach children, using risk of life, especially at the climactic points in movies may not be the most appropriate method to deliver the message.

In the end, modern media are profitable and seductive. This is true because consumers respond to tantalizing and usually negative messages; in particular, violence sells. While producers do shoulder some of this burden, consumers share in the responsibility. An adult choosing to view a particular type of media is one thing. A parent choosing to expose or allow their children exposure to this type of media is an entirely different issue. However, *Cars* is a perfect example of how positive messages can be transferred without the use of violence. In a quick straw poll of my niece and nephews, of the ten examined movies, *Cars* is the favorite. *Cars* is also a perfect example of how animated movies are written to attract multiple audiences. The manifest message in *Cars* is one that I feared most children would not understand. Out of curiosity I also asked my oldest nephew, Justice, what is the message of *Cars*. His response of, "if you get lost someone will help you," confirmed my suspicion; the intended storyline is about the loss of community and anomie.

This research examines one small but influential area of media, animated movies. Additional research on positive behaviors is certainly possible. Also, the AAP argues that additional research on video games needs to be conducted. While this research does not examine violence per se, it does uncover that even in most positive behaviors, risk of life is prevalent. Research on how to decipher these messages and provide parents with a better understanding of how to manage them could occur. Do the producers of these media understand the messages their movies present? Do blockbuster hits share similarities movies that do not become blockbusters lack? If so, what accounts for the success of *Cars*? Broadening the list of examined movies to all animated movies within the top one hundred could reveal more necessary information. Studies on how animated movies relate and differ from other top one hundred movies can be conducted. Examinations of gender and race portrayals have been conducted; they can be expanded to include altruism and/or positive behavior. Research on how to overcome the negativity bias and how to make the idea of context more transparent can also take place. While certainly not a comprehensive list, these are all areas within which additional research is possible.

A more comprehensive understanding of what movies that target children contain can lead to a better rating system. The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) currently rates movies on areas such as: language, nudity, sex, violence and theme. While MPAA claims not to "provide a certificate of approval," many parents use these ratings as a guide. While the MPAA does a good job of rating movies, it does so from a negative standpoint. That is to say, the aforementioned categories are deemed negative. And, ratings are based upon how much adult language, nudity, sex, and violence is evident. Instead of providing a rating that reports that there is "X" amount of adult language and/or violence present, ratings can be developed to include how many positive behaviors are present. Doing so could help provide a much more comprehensive understanding of media. That is not to say that the MPAA ratings should be scraped. Overall, the MPAA ratings are an valuable asset. With minor tweaking it would become a more powerful tool that would allow parents and media organizations to become even more proactive.

This research adds to the literature by demonstrating that positive behaviors, in the form of altruism, are present in movies that target children. Historically, deviance is defined negatively. This paper adds to a growing field of research that demonstrates behaviors are not inherently positive or negative; context is key. Within and between movies, similar actions are defined and labeled differently. This leads to confusion for younger viewers. This research also uncovers the use of risk of life as a tool for demonstrating positive behavior. While movies in this study are not as violent as other forms of media, risk of life is high. It is a message potentially leading children to believe that in order to be good, one must be really good.

Media are influential, but previous research neglects the fact that deviance is not inherently negative. Given that youth are especially impressionistic, this study of animated movies underscores the importance of understanding, harnessing, and directing the use of media. Instead of remaining a scapegoat, media can become a tool. In the process, analyzing deviance for what it is, we can offer a fuller understanding of human behavior. Understanding how children are targeted and taught is not only a goal; it is a responsibility. It is in this way that *Nemo* matters. In the words of Dory, society will "just keep swimming." The challenge becomes to swim against the historical stream, elevating positive deviance to a subject worthy of research.

Let me reconsider the real message in *Cars*. Perhaps Justice has it just right: If you get lost someone will help you – that is the perfect message.

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Appendix A - Coding Sheet

Movie:
Key: 0=low; 1=medium; 2=high
Location: I=introduction; B=body; C=conclusion

Event/Loc.	Actor	Benefic.	Other	Volun.	Intent.	C/R	Reward
Counter/Comments:							
Event	**Actor**	**Benefic.**	**Other**	**Volun.**	**Intent.**	**C/R**	**Reward**
Counter/Comments:							
Event	**Actor**	**Benefic.**	**Other**	**Volun.**	**Intent.**	**C/R**	**Reward**
Counter/Comments:							
Event	**Actor**	**Benefic.**	**Other**	**Volun.**	**Intent.**	**C/R**	**Reward**
Counter/Comments:							
Event	**Actor**	**Benefic.**	**Other**	**Volun.**	**Intent.**	**C/R**	**Reward**
Counter/Comments:							
Event	**Actor**	**Benefic.**	**Other**	**Volun.**	**Intent.**	**C/R**	**Reward**
Counter/Comments:							
Event	**Actor**	**Benefic.**	**Other**	**Volun.**	**Intent.**	**C/R**	**Reward**
Counter/Comments:							
Event	**Actor**	**Benefic.**	**Other**	**Volun.**	**Intent.**	**C/R**	**Reward**
Counter/Comments:							
Event/Loc.	**Actor**	**Benefic.**	**Other**	**Volun.**	**Intent.**	**C/R**	**Reward**
Counter/Comments:							