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Pixar's Magic Touch:

A look at the computer animation studio's reputation and mold for successful friendship-focused films

In 1994, John Lasseter, one of Pixar's pioneers and now chief creative officer at Pixar, said, "It is the thinking that gives the illusion of life. It is the life that gives meaning to the expression. As (Antoine de) Saint Exupery wrote, 'it's not the eyes, but the glance- not the lips, but the smile'" (Price 1).

Pixar Animation Studios has created award winning, record breaking, and highest-grossing films since their first feature-length production in 1995, *Toy Story*. In our society, you can ask almost any child, even adult, who Buzz Lightyear, Lightning McQueen, Nemo, or Sulley is and surely they will be able to identify them as characters of Pixar movies. Pixar is recognized for the crucial role that friendship plays in their storylines. This animation powerhouse is "a place that enables storytellers to create tales of friends and foes who share great adventures in enchanting lands" (Capodagli ix).

Animation films are generally regarded as enjoyment for children, but Pixar films are able to consistently attract an adult audience. As Robert Velarde says in his book, *The Wisdom of Pixar*, "Pixar movies and their themes resonate with kids and adults alike because of the attention-grabbing animation, but that is not the sole factor. The stories told in Pixar films are also a key element of their appeal, as are the characters" (Velarde 9). The reason Pixar finds success in their films is not solely because of their graphics or effects, but rather because they are able to depict values and themes that all ages can relate to- one of these being friendship. In

market research done by Disney in 2005, results showed that mothers with children under the age of twelve rated Pixar's brand higher, on average, than Disney's (Price 252). It is evident that Pixar has a way of doing things, and it appears to be the right way. Bill Capodagli identified that the "big bang" of Pixar's creativity has been evident since film one- "looking at the world through the eyes of a child or a child's toys" (Capodagli 1-2).

Pixar's brilliance and achievement in the animated film industry can be analyzed through the lens of displays of friendship within their films. Pixar's patterns of friendship-focused films will be made evident through a variety of ways, such as the break-down of the creation and establishment of a creative corporate environment. Their patterns will also be evident through analyzing the use of particular values, plots, themes, and characters in their films. In applying Pixar's patterns as well as friendship themes and research to these films, Pixar's treatment of the friendship theme and how it has contributed to their success will be revealed.

In 1972, Ed Catmull created a method of digitizing a three-dimensional model of his hand and showing it on a TV monitor (Kanfer 228). George Lucas got word of the experiment and brought Catmull and his team to Lucasfilm in 1979. Recently let go from Disney, John Lasseter, respected for his knowledge in animating characters, joined on in December of 1983. Catmull became a special effects expert and Pixar was later sold to Steve Jobs in 1986 for 10 million dollars.

In 1985, Lasseter put together a short film featuring a Luxo lamp, the one visible in their logo today. He devised a basic plot line which featured two characters- Luxo lamp and Luxo Jr. The two lamps would be playing with an inflated ball, when Luxo Jr. would hop onto the ball and bounce on it until it eventually popped from under him, showing dejection as the parent lamp looked on. To conclude the short, Luxo Jr. would emerge feeling excited as he was

presented with a larger ball (Price 90). The short premiered at SIGGRAPH where Lasseter was asked if the big lamp was the mother or the father. Lasseter then realized that, “It was true proof that he had succeeded in applying the Disney touch of thought and emotion to his characters” (Price 92).

After a variety of short films, including *Tin Toy*, which won the 1988 Academy Award for best animated short film (Price 106), Pixar began making commercials and brief television specials. Disney was intrigued by the Pixar computer programs and their potential, and in the spring of 1991, Pixar and Disney signed a co-production agreement for three pictures. Pixar would produce the films and Disney would distribute them (Paik 70). In March of 1991, John Lasseter gave Jeffery Katzenberg the pitch for a film to be called *Toy Story*. Despite numerous script changes and shutting down production at one time, *Toy Story* experienced immediate success, reaching “192 million in U.S. box-office receipts and 357 million globally” (Price 154).

Since the take off of *Toy Story*, Pixar Animation Studios has been on a whirlwind of achievement. Creating twelve 3-D full-length animation films, the first ten feature films, through Up (2009), Pixar has garnered 35 Academy Award nominations, nine Oscars, six Golden Globes and numerous other accolades (“Pixar Animation Studios”). Pixar has formed themselves as one of the, if not the, most trusted brand in animation movies.

In order to analyze Pixar’s success, it is essential to look at their work environment, as work relationships can affect and come through within animation. Pixar in itself is a community. In their Emeryville office, Pixar has an area called the atrium, which is designed to act as the company’s town square. It is a place for employees from different areas to meet and interact with one another (Paik 171). As Joseph Epstein says in his book, *Friendship: an Expose*, a community is “a cohesive group within the larger society where a cooperative spirit reigns and each person

feels the glow of good feeling and concern for everyone else” (Epstein 163). Not everyone who works at Pixar may be friends, and some are bound to have closer relationships than others, yet they are all part of a community and closely connected in a sense of loyalty to one another.

Pixar maintains a balance between “childlike dreamer and task-driven doer” (Capodagli 11). This is noticeable in the way they produce their films as well as their offices. At their Point Richmond offices, members of the Pixar team were given free rein to decorate as they pleased. There were offices decorated as a tiki hut, a circus tent, a cardboard pagoda, and offices with bunk beds, a barber’s chair, and even a saloon (Paik 167). When Pixar made the move to their Emeryville building, that same office creativity went with them. Animator Andrew Gordon created a space called the “Love Lounge” in his office. The secret place was dazzled up with lights, animal upholstery, a bar, and even a chandelier (Paik 171). When Gordon had to move to another office, he then created the “Lucky 7” casino (Paik 172). Through the use of creativity, Pixar is able to fulfill dreams, create magical moments, do the impossible, and make their films unique, memorable, and engaging (Capodagli 17).

When looking at Pixar’s success in terms of the friendship theme it is best to start with their first feature film, *Toy Story*; the first depiction of looking at the world through the eyes of a child. Woody was inspired by Lasseter’s favorite toy as a child, a pull string Casper the Friendly Ghost talking doll (Burr 3). Buzz Lightyear was inspired by the astronaut Buzz Aldrin. The original plot for *Toy Story* was tossed out multiple times and underwent a significant number of changes before it was deemed acceptable.

Initially, the plot involved an abandoned toy at a gas station meeting up with a toy in a similar situation, and together they find happiness in a kindergarten classroom. Jeff Katzenberg told the animation team that the lead characters were too much alike; they wanted the same

things. Production was shut down at one point due to the fact that Woody's character was too mean, self-centered, and a jerk, which made him very unlikeable. Katzenberg told Lasseter to "reshape *Toy Story* as more of an odd-couple buddy picture in the mold of *48 Hours* and *The Defiant Ones*" (Price 124).

The department screened a series of buddy films to derive their character base from, including *Midnight Run* and *Thelma & Louise* (Price 127). Viewing buddy films with strong displays of friendship allowed for Lasseter and his team to rework the two characters in order to make their story work. As Stefan Kanfer mentions in his book, *Serious Business*, Lasseter saw the film as the two beginning as enemies: wary, jealous, hostile, then being thrown into a life-and-death situation and learning the meaning of friendship (Kanfer 229).

In the opening scene of *Toy Story*, Randy Newman's song, "You've got a friend in me" plays while Andy, a young boy, is shown playing with his cowboy doll, Woody. With lyrics such as "we stick together and we see it through" and "as the years go by, our friendship will never die," Pixar's incorporation of song over action effectively establishes Andy and Woody's relationship, and later underscoring the friendship between Buzz Lightyear and Woody. It is important to establish Woody and Andy's relationship so that the audience does not view him in a negative way once Buzz appears in the film. After establishing the existing friendship between Woody and Andy, Buzz's character is introduced. Buzz slowly starts to take the place of Woody with Andy and the other toys over time and Woody's emotions are depicted in the song, "Strange things are happening to me" with lyrics such as "now all my friends are gone" and "You think you know someone well, it turns out a stranger." The song depicts Woody watching as he slowly loses his best friend and other friends around him and the feelings of sadness and betrayal he is feeling.

Toy Story has elements of the Western genre incorporated into it and the journey of friendship in Western's is similarly depicted in the film. In many Western films such as *True Grit* (1969), and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) as well as buddy-films, man goes on a journey which often involves a life-or-death situation. Through this journey, friendship is established. Woody and Buzz follow this pattern as the two become stranded at a gas station and end up making their way to Sid's room, who is an evil boy that takes his toys apart. As they find themselves in Sid's room, the two toys are forced to set their differences aside and work together in order to make it back to Andy's. In the process, the Buzz and Woody develop a friendship and are able to provide for one another.

In *Toy Story*, friendship is all about development. Their friendship formation is environmental; they are in the same place at the same time (Fehr 43). Woody and Buzz certainly do not start out as friends, but their relationship develops over time. As Epstein writes in *Friendship: An Expose*, "and so many friendships are, it would seem, made by accident, or near accident" (Epstein 35). In the case of Woody and Buzz, this friendship is completely by accident. It is through their struggle and need to survive that they are able to become friends.

Buzz Lightyear has a problem with understanding his identity. Buzz believes that he is a real "Space Ranger" and can fly, when in fact he is just a toy. In a number of instances, Woody mockingly tries to convince Buzz that he is just a toy, and becomes exasperated in doing so. Woody makes fun of Buzz and shows annoyance throughout the film when trying to explain to him that he is just a toy. When a television commercial causes Buzz to realize that he really is just a toy, Buzz becomes defeated, lost, and depressed. Buzz dives off a ledge attempting to fly and when he crashes into the ground, breaking his arm, he just lays there. Despite Woody's multiple comments about the matter throughout the movie, Woody chooses to be there for Buzz

and is able to lift his spirits back up (Velarde 35). Woody talks to Buzz and is no longer mocking or making fun of him, but instead sympathizes and attempts to encourage him. Woody makes the comment, “You’re Buzz Lightyear- you’re a cool toy!” This depicts how Woody is attempting to help Buzz find his identity. In a chapter on childhood development titled identities, friendships, and peer cultures, Liz Brooker discusses the importance of identity in friendship. She mentions that developing friendships offer children new opportunities to explore and modify their identity (Brooker 35). Brooker also notes that having friends is an important resource for developing identities. In *Toy Story* Woody is about to help Buzz in finding his new identity through his positive encouragement and through this experience, their friendship is able to really develop.

Through this critical moment in their friendship, Woody and Buzz are able to courageously escape and work together to break free and rejoin Andy and the rest of the toys. By the end of the movie the two are shown embracing one another and joking, a depiction that a genuine friendship has been created.

Joseph Epstein writes of how Montaigne wrote that equality among friends was fundamental and quotes Cicero in saying that “Such only are to be considered friendships in which characters have been confirmed and strengthened with age” (Epstein 27). Moving from *Toy Story* to *Toy Story 2*, there exists a better balance of equality between Buzz and Woody and their friendship bond continues to strengthen.

In *Toy Story 2* (1999), the friendship of Woody and Buzz strengthens and new friendships arise. When Woody devises a plan to rescue a fellow toy from the yard sale, he is taken by a toy collector named Al McWhiggin. Buzz and the rest of the toys are witness to this and immediately start to devise a plan to save him. While most of the toys such as Mr. Potato Head and Rex are hesitant to go rescue him, Buzz says, “Woody once risked his life to save me;

I couldn't call myself his friend if I weren't willing to do the same." Joseph Epstein writes in *Friendship: An Expose* that true friendship must have good character and that it calls for a selflessness that requires no less than nobility of character (Epstein 13). Based on Buzz's response to Woody being taken and his willingness to go after him, it depicts his character and his true goodness in his friendship for Woody.

Throughout their journey back to Woody, Mr. Potato Head complains about his feet hurting and all of Andy's toys are ready to back out when they are forced to risk their lives crossing the road. Buzz forces everyone to continue and refuses to leave without Woody. Loyalty is a key component of a true friendship and Epstein writes that one of the obligations of friendship is loyalty, or at least the absence of betrayal (Epstein 70). Although Woody has a good group of friends, Buzz is the one who is truly loyal and dedicated to saving Woody.

Woody discovers that he is part of a rare collection called the Roundup gang. Along with him are Jessie the Cowgirl, Bullseye the horse, and Stinky Pete the Prospector. Woody becomes intrigued with his newfound fame and his Roundup gang and decides not to escape and stay with his new friends. Woody is able to immediately bond with these three characters. The main reason that the Roundup gang is able to achieve a sense of closeness so quickly is that they have a strong similarity. Beverley Fehr states in her book, *Friendship Processes*, that based on Aristotle's observations, "We tend to form friendships with people who are similar to us" (Fehr 57). She continues to discuss that similarities are the basis for friendship and also the factor for making friendships close. The Roundup gang all have a similar past and background. They understand one another in that sense and share the similarity that they were all a certain status of celebrity at one time. With this common ground and depiction of friendship in their show, Woody is able to connect with Jessie, Bullseye, and the Prospector almost immediately.

Woody's relationship with Jessie the Cowgirl grows throughout the movie, almost solely on the fact that she becomes emotionally intimate with Woody. In the movie, *The Love Guru* (2008), they identify intimacy as "into-me-I-see." This concept can be applied to intimacy as a whole, and specifically to this example. Jessie shares her story of the girl who played with her and how she was abandoned and left broken-hearted. Epstein defines intimacy as "being permitted to be unashamedly, confessionally yourself" (Epstein 73). When one is intimate with another, they share things that they do not share with others and allow someone to look inside them and their deepest thoughts. Jessie breaks down and confesses her emotions about her abandonment, allowing her to look inside herself and reveal herself to Woody. Jessie is a tougher, more direct character and in revealing her emotions to Woody, you see their connection and the formation of a closer bond. In the documentary, *The Pixar Story*, Tom Hanks recalls that he and Tim Allen watched the film together and at the part of Jessie's song where this intimacy occurred, "We were just two 40 year old men crying our eyes out over this abandoned cowgirl."

When Buzz, Rex, Mr. Potato Head, Hamm and Slinky Dog eventually meet up with Woody, he is forced to choose which friendship is worth more, and initially decides to stay with the Roundup Gang. Buzz tries to convince him to come back by saying "Woody, stop this nonsense and let's go...you're not a collector's item, you're a child's plaything. You are a toy!" Woody forgets what he taught Buzz and realizes it when a scene from *Woody's Roundup* plays on the television and he has a change of heart. To him, friendship is more important than standing behind glass in a museum (Velarde 51). Reluctant to leave his new friends, Woody decides to invite them back to Andy's.

Throughout the film Buzz and Woody's friendship strengthens and their loyalty to one another increase. At the end of the film Woody says to Buzz, "When it all ends, I'll have Buzz

Lightyear to keep me company. For infinity and beyond.” This emphasizes the true friendship that they have and how dedicated they are to one another. Beverley Fehr discusses the term “closeness in doing” (Fehr 136), and this holds true in the *Toy Story* films. Woody and Buzz’s friendship evolves and they achieve closeness based on the fact that they have shared experiences with one another. Their depiction and establishment of everlasting friendship is a reason that *Toy Story 2* was able to land among the select few of successfully recognized sequels.

The film, *A Bug’s Life* (1998) is a story about a colony of ants that are oppressed by a gang of grasshoppers led by one named Hopper. One ant in particular, Flik, is determined to make a difference and sets off to find help for the colony. Coming across a group of out-of-work circus bugs, Flik mistakes them for warriors and brings them back to the colony. The circus bugs realize the mistake that has been made and are eager to leave the colony, yet a series of events convinces them to stay. Despite their true identity being revealed, the bugs fight alongside the ants and together they are able to achieve justice for the colony (Velarde 138).

Within this film, friendship can best be studied through communities. The friendship to be studied within *A Bug’s Life* is centralized around the achievement of community. The main friendship to be analyzed in *A Bug’s Life* is the one that arises between the circus bugs, Flik, and the ant colony and how Flik’s actions develop the friendship within the colony as a whole.

A community has a state of shared existence. In the opening scene, the ant colony is shown putting together food for the grasshopper. Everyone is aiding in this effort for the same purpose. Flik is attempting to contribute in a more effective way through his inventions, but the rest of the ant colony does not feel that he meets the needs of the group. When Flik’s invention causes the ant colony to lose their entire food gathering for the ants, he feels it is his obligation to serve the community by solving the problem. In a communal relationship, devotion and selfless

loyalty are a critical component. Flik shows his loyalty and devotion to the colony by going on a journey for warriors to fight the grasshoppers.

Flik encounters the circus bugs, which can be considered sub-par. Delivering poor performances and with their quirky imperfections, the circus bugs have an established a work-based friendship among them. A close-knit group, they are a small community with relationships established. They all have very different personalities, their differences complement one another, and they are equal in the sense of their low social status. Lepp states that, “It is quite possible in such communities that love will follow upon friendship in some cases” (108) as we see between Manny, the praying mantis and Gypsy, the butterfly and this eventually develops between Flik and Princess Atta by the end of the film. The main way that the group has established their friendship is through their common interest and activity of entertainment.

Flik’s friendship with the circus bugs is based on utility, the idea of being attracted to someone because of what they can do for the individual (Fehr 18). Epstein also discusses how English philosopher Michael Oakeshott, states that the tie of friend to friend is familiarity, not usefulness (Epstein 45). This initially holds true in *A Bug’s Life*, as Flik needs the circus bugs, or warriors, in order to gain a place in his community and save them from the grasshoppers, and the circus bugs need Flik for a circus gig.

Flik does not fit in with his ant colony, and his only ant friends are the young ants in the colony. He seems to find a way to fit in with the circus bugs, also considered rejects for their lack of circus potential. He becomes closer to them and is able to identify with them based on the fact that he finds more similarities towards them. He shares the same creative ambitions as the circus bugs as the circus bugs live to entertain and Flik has aspirations of entertaining through his

creative inventions. When Flik is exposed for getting circus bugs instead of warriors, he chooses to go with the circus bugs, as he identifies with them better.

The friendship among the circus bugs and the colony in the sense of community morphs over time. Becoming involved with a community through action and experiences is a critical component in becoming a part of a community. Francis, the ladybug, becomes the den mother of the blueberry troop in the colony. At one point in the film he states, “Those little raisins sure do grow on me.” The bugs engage in various conversations, recreational activities, planning for the grasshoppers, and even partake in celebratory parties. As discussed earlier with *Toy Story*, Pixar’s main source of creating friendship is “closeness in doing” (Fehr 136). In their involvement in devising a plan to defeat Hopper and his grasshoppers, circus bugs become connected to various ants in the colony, and feel a sense of loyalty to them. When Flik tells them they are free to leave after they fight the grasshoppers, all of the bugs indicate that they don’t want to leave Ant Island. When exposed for what they really are, circus bugs rather than warrior bugs, they choose to remain loyal and fight against the grasshoppers as a result of the loyalty and sense of community that they have developed. Their decision to fight shows that they identify themselves as part of the community.

Among the ant colony, the circus bugs are able to bring them together as a community. Ignace Lepp indicates that a critical component of a community is the concept of common action. Common action “must be positive action, and is, in effect, the first condition for the formation of a community of friends (Lepp 108). The ant colony shows common action in their plot towards achieving justice and becoming free and they are able to do this with the aid of the circus bugs. Their action of standing up to the grasshoppers can be considered a political action, which is also an element existent among communities.

As stated in *The Ways of Friendship*, Lepp says, “In friendship we discover and reveal what we are and, perhaps still more, what we are capable of becoming” (Lepp 119). Despite their often mediocre performances and struggles to be entertainers, the circus bugs are able to use their talents to distract Hopper and other grasshoppers and allow the attack to occur. Once the fake bird attack occurs, the circus bugs use their theatrical nature to depict gore and death. The ant community unites for justice when Flik stands up to Hopper in saying that “Ants are not meant to serve grasshoppers. It’s you who need us! We’re a lot stronger than you say we are- and you know it, don’t you?” Flik’s words inspire the community and the circus bugs and ants scare off the grasshoppers. These acts reveal who the circus bugs and Flik really are as well as show what they are capable of doing, which allow them to achieve a true sense of community worth.

Pixar took a stretch in 2001 with the creation of *Monsters Inc.* Many monster/horror films that were previously done were geared towards an older audience while this film was designed to appeal to children as well (Booker 84). The story is one of two friends, James P. Sullivan, also known as “Sulley,” and Mike Wasowski. The two have a job to scare children and their lives are changed when a child named Boo follows them back into the monster world.

Mike and Sulley’s friendship is best analyzed by looking at best friendship, their sense of team, and the closeness and intimacy that they share. The concept for the existing buddy element was based on the fact that Sulley’s character would have someone to talk to about his predicament (Price 197). Sulley and Mike are introduced at their apartment, where they live together. Immediately, a sense of best friendship can be recognized. Unlike other Pixar creations up until that point, the two main characters in the film are already established friends, best friends in fact. In looking at their relationship as best friends, one cannot analyze how they became best friends, but merely acts that identify them as this.

Mike and Sulley are the classic definition of a team. Sulley is the top scarer and Mike is basically his “trainer” and support system. The two live together and the opening scene features Sulley being put to work by Mike with push-ups and various “monster-scaring drills.” In the closest of friendships, friends are able to use slang, joking, and teasing informally (Fehr 88). In this opening scene, Mike makes a joking comment calling Sulley a “marshmallow-boy.” This immediately establishes that the two have carefree attitudes towards one another and have a close friendship. Mike also holds a conversation with Sulley’s mom over the phone, indicating that they have been friends for some time and shows how comfortable they are with one another.

A key component to best friends is that a significant portion of their lives are shared together. In *The Ways of Friendship*, Lepp states that “Life is shared between friends, each living not only his own life but also that of his friends” (Lepp 115). The audience is able to see that these two characters work, live, and hang out together in first opening scenes.

Mike’s physical appearance is that of a short stubby ball while Sulley is a strong and sturdy square shape. Sulley is cuddly and furry while Mike has this element of plasticity to him. Sulley appears to be more laidback in his personality while Mike is more on the frantic side. Despite a few opposites that the characters have, the two are equal in their friendship and they display the same level of virtue. At a point in the film Sulley says to Mike, “You and I are a team, nothing is more important than our friendship.” This demonstrates that even though Sulley may be the top scarer, he would be nothing without his best friend Mike. The two are dependent on one another in their lives and need one other in order to get through various obstacles.

After the little child, Boo, appears in Sulley’s life, Sulley develops a parental love for Boo (Paik 185) and will not rest until she is safe in her door. Mike is not so quick to be accepting

of Boo and continually criticizes Sulley and his decisions. Despite Mike's disagreement, Sulley knows that he can confide in Mike and that Mike will keep his secret safe. Epstein identifies a critical element of best friendship in saying that "A best friend is that person who gives you the most delight, support, and comfort, often in those realms where family cannot help" (Epstein 23). In Sulley's struggle to keep Boo a secret, he counts on Mike as a source of comfort and support.

Throughout the course of the film, Mike and Sulley's friendship being tested, but at no time do they betray one another. The two confide in one another, comforting and supporting their decisions, and are able to strengthen their relationship as best friends as a result of remaining loyal.

Finding Nemo (2003) is a film that depicts friendship across a journey. *Finding Nemo* is an emotion-filled movie which centers around Marlin the clownfish and his son, Nemo. As a result of his wife being killed, Marlin is an over-protective father towards Nemo. Nemo is captured by a diver and Marlin sets out on a journey to rescue his son. In the very beginnings of his journey, Marlin encounters a childlike clownfish named Dory (Velarde 140). Though Marlin doesn't favor Dory very much, their encounters change the view that Marlin has on Dory.

The adventures that Marlin and Dory experience develop a strong bond between them and together they are able to learn from one another. When Marlin and Nemo are finally reunited, their relationship has changed and Marlin's over-protectiveness has developed an understanding and created a slight friendship between them. People commonly analyze the friendship theme in *Finding Nemo* from the perspective of Marlin and Dory, but it is worth noting the changed relationship and appearance of friendship between Marlin and his son. In

discussing Pixar's use of the friendship theme in the film, the changed relationship between father and son will be analyzed in the development of Marlin and Dory's friendship.

It is by complete accident that Marlin and Dory come across each other and in many ways, unlikely that a friendship forms between them. This accidental occurrence is primarily based on the fact that the two characters have essentially nothing in common, do not involve themselves in similar activities, and are extreme opposites in many facets. In the theme of friendship, opposite and differing characteristics are frequently common among personalities, but vast differences among virtue and value of friendship often cause a friendship to fail. Pixar was unique in *Finding Nemo* in that Marlin and Dory are opposites and it reflects in their view of friendship.

Marlin is nervous and overprotective while Dory remains the playful, adventurous, and childlike one (Velarde 57). Marlin's traits cause him to be weary of newcomers and develop the sense that he does not need anyone. Dory's traits cause the character to be spontaneous when developing friendship. Upon first meeting, Marlin says, "Something's wrong with you, you're wasting my time." Marlin immediately writes Dory off, but Dory's persistence and adventurous nature keeps her following Marlin. Epstein writes that "Devotion and selfless loyalty are required of a hold-my-coat or best supporting friend" (Epstein 142). Marlin and Dory are not best friends along their journey, but Dory displays devotion and loyalty that Marlin's dominance between the two does not reciprocate. Together they encounter obstacles such as almost being eaten by sharks, being severely stung by jellyfish, and being swallowed by a whale. It is through their obstacles that they are able to develop their friendship, as Dory brings realization to Marlin and changes him for the better. When the two are swallowed by a whale, Marlin refuses to listen to Dory when she says the whale is telling them to go to the back of its throat, saying that the whale

merely wants to eat them. Marlin continues to bicker with Dory and she calmly says, “The whale says it’s time to let go” and Marlin replies with “How do you know? How do you know something bad isn’t going to happen?” In the moment that Marlin lets go and allows the whale to blow them out through his spout he realizes that he has to trust people and not be so afraid. Dory helps Marlin to overcome fear just in her carefree and adventurous attitude. In changing Marlin through their journey, Dory also helps Marlin come to the realization that he needs to trust Nemo. Dory’s childlike innocence is a substitute child for Marlin on his quest. As David Price recognizes that, “dealing with her would force him to learn patience and tolerance for her risk taking, preparing him to be a better father when he finds his son” (Price 210). Finding Nemo’s friendship is also unique in the sense that Dory’s take on their friendship is not clear until an ending scene. Dory yells at Marlin to wait up and says, “Please don’t go away. Please. No one’s ever stuck with me for so long before...I look at you, and I’m home” (Velarde 58). Prior to this, the audience is unsure of Dory’s motives behind her long-lasting journey with Marlin. In that particular scene, it is evident that Dory views Marlin as her only true friend and the one that she is able to confide in and be most herself around, a necessary component of friendship.

The time that Marlin and Nemo spend apart, allows parent and child to mature. “Marlin learns that he can’t control every aspect of Nemo’s life, but instead has to learn to give his child room to enjoy life. Nemo, learns that even though he has a gimpy fin, he is still capable of accomplishing much” (Velarde 129). Over the course of Marlin’s journey, he learns faith from Dory, that it’s best to let children have an adventure and to overcome challenges on their own from Crush, and not to see everything as a potential danger when on an adventure on his own (Velarde 102). The change in Marlin and Nemo’s relationship is clear in the final scenes of the film. In *The Pixar Story*, a documentary style film by Leslie Iwerks, animator Doug Sweetland

discusses the scene where the father and son relationship strengthens. He indicates that Nemo's small fin is the symbol of the movie. When Marlin takes Nemo's fin after he thought he had died, it shows that he is accepting of his son and letting go of the past. The fin hold indicates a new relationship which is one where they are more equal and better friends. Their conversation in the scene is casual which establishes a closeness, the distance between them indicates respect, and the quietness represents Nemo and Marlin being emotionally active.

The friendship in *Finding Nemo* is one that allows for Marlin to better himself through experiences with Dory which improve his relationship and start a friendship with Nemo. Dory is given a one of a kind friendship with Marlin which she cherishes.

Another type of journey film with a similar friendship development is *Cars* (2006). The plot centers around a cocky rookie race car named Lightning McQueen and his obsession with winning the Piston Cup. When McQueen is separated from his tractor-trailer, he finds himself lost in the deserted town of Radiator Springs. McQueen is unable to leave the town at first and worried he will not be able to get to the Piston Cup, causing him to be very unpleasant. Over the course of his time at Radiator Springs, he learns to enjoy the town and its community and his experiences pay off in the end (Velarde 140). As said in *To Infinity and Beyond: The Story of Pixar Animation Studios*, John Lasseter wanted the movie "to be about a fast car that learns to slow down" (Paik 259).

The friendship existent in *Cars* is between a community of friends in the town of Radiator Springs and the development of the friendship between Lightning McQueen and Mater, a rusty old tow truck. The friendship that takes place between Lightning McQueen and Mater along with the other cars of Radiator Springs is one among different cultures. McQueen is from a

fast life society that is all about the glamour while Mater and his friends are from a town that appreciate the slower things and are not consumed in society.

Considering the main idea behind the film, “the protagonist would learn the value of friendship and slowing down to enjoy life from day to day” as stated by David Price (Price 244), the friendship in *Cars* can be looked at in the sense that two characters are able to develop a close relationship despite them being from different cultures and lifestyles. Mater offers kindness to McQueen and a genuine interest in friendship and through the development of their relationship, McQueen is taught lessons of the true meaning of friendship such as identity, courage, and misplaced ambitions (Velarde 98).

Piston Cup race car Lightning McQueen literally lives life in the fast lane. His purpose in life is to win races, not to cultivate friendships. He briefly realizes this when his agent offers him twenty free tickets to a race to pass on to friends. McQueen pauses, unable to think of anyone. The adventures that McQueen finds himself in while in Radiator Springs lead him into an unexpected friendship with Mater and a changed mindset (Velarde 53).

When McQueen gets lost, he speeds all over town, causing him to be impounded. The next morning when he arises, Mater is the first one to greet him. In *The Meaning of Friendship*, friendship is recognized as affection, receiving assistance, reliable alliance, and shared activity (Fehr 7-8). Mater immediately provides all of these things to McQueen. When he steps up to be Lightning’s lawyer, barely knowing him, Mater displays his pure heart early on and demonstrating assistance.

This immediate acquaintance that Mater and Lightning McQueen form is a predictor of their future relationship. As Ignance Lepp states in *The Birth of Friendship*, certain friendships,

“transpire like a bolt from the blue” (Lepp 27). “We meet so and so for the first time; we know little about him; we scarcely know what he thinks or what his tastes are; but we immediately become very sympathetic towards him” (Lepp 27-28). This initial spark is present within Mater in his kindness to McQueen and his light-hearted attitude filled with fun. McQueen has already established himself as a cocky jerk, but Mater is able to win the hearts over of the audience. The film’s main character is Lightning McQueen, but audiences are exposed to the virtue and kindness of Mater at the beginning, which sets the stage for a potential friendship.

McQueen quickly learns that he is not cut out for this town as many things he tries do not come easy and given that none of the cars are aware of who he is, his identity is practically stripped. The initial bonding experience between the two comes when Mater takes McQueen out for a night of tractor tipping, where they share a laughable experience and their relationship is visibly closer afterwards. Mater lightly jokes with McQueen and shows him how to drive backwards. When McQueen promises to take Mater in a helicopter after his racing success, Mater says, “I knew it. I knew I made a good choice.” When McQueen asks about what Mater says, “My best friend.”

A quick friendship that develops instantly, Mater and McQueen’s friendship has a childlike essence. At a young age, children view friends as people who play with you or do nice things for you (Fehr 16). In its most simplistic way, this is what Mater and McQueen are to one another. Their friendship has innocence, partly due to the fact that McQueen does not know friendship.

McQueen quickly befriends the cars of Radiator Springs, and as his personal character changes, the once cocky race-driven car becomes more focused on the better things in life. In the

Piston Cup Race, one of the cars, Chik, takes out the reigning champ, The King, just before the finish line. Only a second away from finishing in first place, McQueen makes a courageous decision to go back and push The King to his final finish. McQueen's adventures with Mater and the rest of Radiator Springs change him for the better and allow for the growth of his character. Friends have the ability to significantly influence us and through *Cars* this theory reigns true.

The final film that will be looked at through the lens of Pixar is *Up* (2009). *Up* tells the story of an elderly man, Carl Fredricksen, and his fascination as a child with adventure hero Charles Muntz. Fredricksen spent many years married to his childhood sweetheart, Ellie, and since she passed away Carl has become a grumpy and miserable man. Carl ties thousands of balloons to his house and takes off on an adventure to South America. Not long after taking off, Carl discovers that a young wilderness explorer named Russell is out on his porch. With no choice but to come on the trip, Russell joins Carl for an adventure which includes many obstacles.

In looking at the depiction of friendship in this film, it can be made clear how holding onto one friendship can inhibit the creation of a new one. Once Carl is able to let go of the friendship no longer in his life, he is able to live the life he wants and establish a new friendship with Russell.

Carl's journey is entirely motivated by his love for his wife and his desire to honor the memory of his wife who has passed away (Velarde 126). Carl begins on his quest with the intention of fulfilling Ellie's dream of adventure. Carl is not looking to gain a friendship, but merely to relive the one him and Ellie had.

Epstein identifies friendlessness as “one of life’s sadnesses” (Epstein 232). Carl finds himself feeling very saddened and disgruntled without Ellie. The two began a friendship as young kids and developed an enlightening romantic relationship. Without Ellie, Carl displays a sense of hopelessness. Epstein also writes, “The dead, if they made a strong impress upon us when they were alive, never leave us, not really, not finally” (Epstein 231). The death of Ellie weighs heavy on Carl, once a happy and exuberant man, as he has no one else to confide in.

Carl brushes Russell off and refuses to make a connection. Russell is an anxious young boy who is looking to do just about anything in order to explore with a friend. A young boy who associates friendship with play and pro-social behavior (Fehr 9), going on an adventure is Russell’s prime idea of developing a friendship.

Carl’s true adventure comes up unexpectedly as he flips through Ellie’s adventure book. He notices pages that he hasn’t seen before, pages that are memories of their adventures together. At the end of the book is a note that says, “Thanks for the adventure- now go have a new one!” Through this realization and closure with Ellie, Carl is able to have his own personal adventure and becomes willing to befriend Russell. They clearly have differences and really aren’t equal on many levels. However, Russell is able to fill the void of Ellie in a way and represents the adventures of Carl’s childhood.

The friendship between the Carl and Russell “leads from individual living to a state of shared existence” (Lepp 115) as recognized by Ignace Lepp. The two characters reach a point in the film where they no longer are meandering around uninvolved with one another, but join together on their journey. Beverly Fehr identifies four kinds of factors necessary for friendship to occur: environmental, individual, situational, and dyadic (Fehr 65). Prior to Carl accepting

Russell as a friend, the two were environmentally involved. They were in the same area but the interest to be friends was non-existent. When Carl realizes that he can let Ellie's adventures go, he makes himself available, which puts the relationship at situational. As Carl and Russell experience their adventure, Carl is able to experience himself. *The Ways of Friendship* state that "It is in and by friendship that we experience ourselves. Through friendship we become aware of our transcendence in relation to the meanness and misery that was our lot when we were a solitary self" (Lepp 114). In embracing his friendship with Russell, Carl recognizes his dissatisfaction with life and is able to look inside himself and remember the happiness associated with the childhood adventures he once had. Through Russell, he realizes that he can experience them once again.

The ending scene closes out with Russell receiving his "Assisting the Elderly" badge where Carl supports him in his achievements. Carl awards him the highest honor he can bestow, the "Ellie" badge, for assisting the elderly and for performing above and beyond the call of duty. Carl provides Russell with the badge as a means of displaying his appreciation for Russell's adventurous mindset and being able to take Carl back to his childhood adventures. Russell is overjoyed with the award, understanding its significance and importance to Carl. The friendship in *Up* is not the most common, but it draws an audience in the way that it is able to tie the theme of childhood friendship with the struggles that friendship among the elderly face.

In breaking down a number of Pixar's films to analyze individually for their friendship themes, many common occurrences began to arise. When looking at some of the Pixar films analyzing their different components in terms of friendship themes, some common values, plot schemes, types of characters and types of friendship, similar trends have become evident within

the Pixar industry. By combining the creative nature of Pixar and the theme of friendship, four main components of friendship have been identified for Pixar films:

1. Friendships are made by accident.
2. There is closeness in doing.
3. Each friendship experiences a realistic conflict within friendship.
4. Each friendship experiences a realistic resolution which further strengthens the relationship.

With the exception of *Monsters Inc.* and sequel films, the main friendships in Pixar films are made by accident, or near accident. In *Toy Story* Buzz is thrown into Woody's perfect life, causing a wrench in the system. In his plot to get rid of Buzz and return to his normal life, the two are put in a life and death situation, where in surviving, they end up becoming friends. Their friendship is unintentional as they are forced into a situation which makes them friends. In *A Bug's Life*, the purpose of the warrior bugs, or circus bugs, is to come in, help defeat the grasshoppers and leave. Flik and the circus bugs have a mutual understanding and a friendship based on utility. The actual friendship that transpires is a mere coincidence as the circus bugs become emotionally attached to the colony. Marlin and Dory of *Finding Nemo* become friends in one of the most accidental ways, by running into each other in traffic. Marlin attempts to rid Dory after he gets what he needs out of her, but the two end up continuing on their journey together, and a friendship starts. Lightning McQueen has no intentions of ending up in Radiator Springs in *Cars*. It is through bad luck that McQueen ends up there and Mater just so happens to friend him. If Kevin had never gone to Carl's house asking to do an elderly service, most likely never would have even met. The chance of Russell still being on Carl's doorstep by the time his house takes off is a complete accident.

It is through accidental friendships that the audience can sense how pure and authentic the developing friendships are over these movies. A forced friendship or a friendship that occurs through the involvement of another friend takes away from the real value of a friendship developing over time and characters being forced to accept one another's differences and flaws.

As mentioned multiple times, friendships are strengthened in a way called closeness in doing. This term was used by Beverley Fehr in her book *Friendship Processes* as a way of describing intimacy between men and originated from Huyck. Closeness in the doing refers to existing friends or individuals capturing intimacy through shared activities and/or self-disclosure.

In terms of Pixar, closeness in doing is related to the experiences and activities that characters go through within a film, and through those experiences and activities, the characters' friendship develops or becomes closer and it defines their friendship. In the friendship of Buzz and Woody from *Toy Story*, their survival of Sid's house and Buzz's rescue of Woody in *Toy Story 2* are defining moments in their friendship, and those experiences are what defines their close friendship. When the circus bugs and the ant colony in *A Bug's Life* team up to plot against Hopper and his gang, specifically in building the fake bird, they are having shared experience which causes the community to become closer as a result of their common activity. The whole experience of Mike helping Sulley conceal Boo in *Monsters Inc.* and their devised plan brings them closer as they are involved in withholding secrets and breaking monster law code. Marlin's experience of traveling through the sea with Dory to rescue Nemo in *Finding Nemo* offers a significant closeness in doing as they travel through all depths of the ocean, and there are many other smaller experiences within their journey that aid in developing their friendship and closeness.

It is evident that the close bonds formed in these films as a part of closeness through doing are a critical part of the plot. When Pixar sits down for storylines, they have to decide what it is that will take their friendship to the next level, and it has to be something dramatic. These experiences are not always positive, but they are critical in identifying the friendship among characters. Shared experiences create lasting memories, regardless of whether they are good or bad. These shared experiences that are part of the closeness in doing are major events, and that is what makes them defining moments in friendship.

A third key component of Pixar's display of friendship is that each friendship is exposed to a realistic conflict within their friendship. A realistic conflict is something that creates a significant problem for the characters and for their friendship. When Sulley and Mike of Monsters Inc. are banished to the Himalayas upon the discovery of Boo, their friendship is put in a serious conflict. Sulley mopes around and shows little emotion regarding the matter as he only cares about Boo being safe. Mike, on the other hand, is furious with Sulley and wonders how they will ever get out of their predicament. The tension between the best friends rises and while bickering, Mike says, "What about me? I'm you're pal, I'm your best friend-don't I matter?" (Velarde 55). Sulley apologizes but is still consumed in Boo's safety. Sulley faces the conflict of choosing between fixing his wrongs and helping to get him and Mike out of the situation and trying to save Boo. This is a realistic conflict in that many friendships are forced to balance things such as marriage, kids, and even other friends, and when one is unable to do so properly, a friendship can potentially wither.

As said in Robert Velarde's *The Wisdom of Pixar*, this does not mean that Pixar avoids challenging topics; rather, the studio handles them in such a way as to leave hope intact" (Velarde 23-24). Pixar picks difficult topics and relatable conflicts to incorporate in their plots,

but simplifies them in a way that children can understand and in a way that can be solved within the constraints of a film. Continuing onto the final concluding point, Pixar not only has realistic conflicts, but the conflicts are solved realistically.

Something worth noting is that within Pixar films, there is no magic. As Kyle Munkittrick identified in his analysis on the hidden message in Pixar films, “No problems are caused or fixed by the wave of a wand” (Munkittrick 1). Many DreamWorks, Disney, and other animated films deal with problems and conflicts in an unrealistic way. To resolve Mike and Sulley’s conflict, Mike and Sulley go their separate ways as Sulley seeks out Boo. Sulley rescues Boo from a “scream-extractor” machine and is being choked by Randall, who is currently invisible. Mike shows up tossing snowballs at Sulley and apologizing by saying, “I’m sorry I wasn’t there for you, but I am now” (Velarde 55). The snowballs eventually reveal Randall’s outline, and Sulley is able to break free. This is a comical way of solving the issue among Mike and Sulley, but it is realistic.

A key point of the realistic conflict is that it strengthens the friendship. If Pixar were to solve the problem with a wave of a wand, then the friendship really would not be able to truly grow. Conflicts within Pixar films often involve “having a big relationship talk” (Fehr 183). Big relationship talks take the form of apologizing, acknowledging the importance of the relationship, arguing, and setting ground rules. In solving problems realistically, Pixar remains true to its audience of both children and adults. The ways that Pixar characters go about solving problems show the virtue and morals instilled in these characters. Their depictions of problems even have the potential to serve as a model for children growing up.

The magic of Pixar can be found in a multitude of ways, but especially in their displays of friendship. Since Pixar’s first film in 1995, they have reigned at the top of animation. Despite

the increased amounts of competition, Pixar remains the centerpiece of the children's film industry. As mentioned in *Disney, Pixar, and the Hidden Messages of Children's Films*, "each Pixar film now draws a huge audience simply because it is a Pixar film" (Booker 92). In watching Pixar films, people are able to see stories come to life not only from a graphics standpoint but also because audience members are able to relate themselves to at least one character. Pixar films are able to move and entertain us whether the characters are ants, monsters, or toys. These movies touch people deep down and their friendships within the film display an array of strong emotions.

In Pixar's delicate treatment of the friendship theme, they have been able to establish long-lasting friendships in their films and their own friendship themes have resonated with adults and children. On the surface, Pixar friendships appear simplistic. In reality, if one attempts to look into the motives, imagination, and reality of the friendships, they are much deeper. Pixar depicts a variety of friendships ranging from elderly to best friends which allow everyone to identify with various concepts. Pixar uses the reality of friendship in the real world and applies their knowledge to animation in order to create adventure-driven friendships based on goodness and growth. In combining this and a focus on producing films of the utmost quality, Pixar has and will continue to make incredibly successful films with a focus on friendship that touches all.

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