

THESIS

“CAN WE FIX IT?”: *BOB THE BUILDER* AS A DISCURSIVE RESOURCE FOR
CHILDREN

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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY BRIANNA FREED ENTITLED “CAN WE FIX IT?": *BOB THE BUILDER* AS A DISCURSIVE RESOURCE FOR CHILDREN BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ART.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

“CAN WE FIX IT?”: BOB THE BUILDER AS A DISCURSIVE RESOURCE FOR CHILDREN

This thesis examines the discourses and representations constructed in the popular children’s television series *Bob the Builder*—a discursive resource that engages work as its central theme. Through a critical cultural lens, the study uses critical discourse analysis and visual semiotics to explore the constructions of work/er, organization, non-work activities, family, gender, and diversity as they are (re)presented in the show. The study found that *Bob the Builder* distinctly (re)presents values of the postmodern, postindustrial worker of Western, advanced corporate capitalism. Leisure and play are portrayed as activities which, ideally, do not affect work. Family is equally placed in the periphery as family members are either placed entirely outside the organization—as with Wendy’s family—or as contributing members to its operation—as with Bob’s family. Gender representations are problematized by Wendy’s denied occupational identity as a builder equal to her male counterpart. Diversity in the show is problematic with minimal non-White ethnic representation and two overtly stereotypical representations of supporting characters. Directions for future research are offered in the conclusion.

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CHAPTER I: Introduction to Study

“Can we fix it?” *Bob the Builder* as a Discursive Resource for Children

Bob the Builder, a show originating in the United Kingdom, has been on the air for almost eleven years, and has been in the United States since 2001. The show is currently televised to homes in 240 countries and communicates its “can-do” attitude to children in forty-five different languages (“About Bob,” 2008). Even across continents and among a plethora of cultures, the show has experienced miniscule adjustments to its content beyond translation. The most noteworthy change made to Bob in the interest of cultural identity has been in Japan, where he has five fingers rather than the standard four (Jenkins, 2008b). A missing or partially amputated finger in Japan indicates one has been involved with and received punishment from the Yakuza, Japan’s major organized crime group (Bruno, 2009). With such an astoundingly diverse fan base, it is interesting that this is the only notable change made, aside from translation, to reflect culturally specific norms. Despite relative uniformity, *Bob the Builder* enjoys solid ratings across the globe and pulls in an estimated \$4 billion in total worldwide retail sales (Jenkins, 2008b). The show’s popularity, along with its global reach, provide a justifiable consideration of the discourses embedded in *Bob the Builder*, particularly given its treatment of work as its central theme. Even more apparent is the title character’s close ties to occupation.

Work has become an overwhelming contributor to the construction of identity in contemporary society, and much scholarship has been written on the relationships between the two (Cheney, Zorn, Planalp, & Lair, 2008; Kuhn, Golden, Jorgenson,

Buzzanell, Berkelaar, Kisselburgh, Kleinman, & Cruz, 2008; Lair, Shenoy, McClellan, & McGuire, 2008; Kuhn, 2006; Wicks, 2002). Drawing from Castells, Wicks (2002) contends that “identity formation involves a process of social construction of meaning where particular cultural attributes, such as gender or organizational role, are given priority over other sources of meaning” (pp. 309-310). In this sense, career becomes an important indicator of who an individual is. Providing an historical account of the evolution of work, Joanna Ciulla (2000) takes the reader through time, discussing how employers’ interests have shifted from consuming the worker’s body—as in Taylor’s scientific management—to the worker’s heart, and finally, to a time where the organization wants to “tap into the soul” (p. 222). She concludes that while organizations do not have any “moral obligation to provide meaningful work . . . they do have an obligation to provide work and compensation that leave employees with the energy, autonomy, will, and income to pursue meaning at work and a meaningful life outside of work” (p. 227). Thus, Ciulla suggests people should be given the freedom and autonomy to find meaning and identity in activities outside the workplace.

In contemporary times, however, particularly in the United States, work weeks have become longer and employees are increasingly being given the opportunity to work from alternative locations or from home (Ciulla, 2000). Kuhn, et al. (2008) describes such changes in the way we work as one effect of the discourses of impermanence present in contemporary work. The authors point out that impermanence “rarely provides financial security” and “can be a direct benefit to employers who pit laborers against one another in wage and benefit struggles” (Kuhn, et al., 2008, p. 166). This aspect of contemporary work proves particularly detrimental given the current economic crisis in

the United States, a crisis which has undoubtedly impacted the globe as well. With work becoming increasingly—if only temporarily—scarce, examining the ways perceptions of work and its meaningfulness impact the individual becomes even more important. As Ciulla contends, an understanding of how our society has reached such assumptions about the importance and nature of work—regarding it as more important than other areas of life—and how those assumptions are produced and reproduced is also a critical point of examination.

The question “What do you do?” for example,—common in the early stages of relationship building between adults—suggests a person’s career is a relevant indication of who they are. Perhaps even more indicative of our society’s views on work and identity is the question “What do you want to *be*?” This question of identity is more commonly asked of children. Such a question still reproduces societal values of work by strengthening its tie to identity—suggesting an essence of *being* rather than doing—and presuming that people are defined by *what* rather than *who they are*. The question of what one wants to *be*, in regard to career choice, carries a plethora of larger and deeper considerations of class, gender, education level, and personal values. Children become inundated with subtle and not so subtle messages regarding which jobs are appropriate for their gender, which occupations are realistic for their given class and access to education, and what types of work, based on societal standards, qualify as meaningful. Theories and practice on children’s career development, however, are still considered to be severely lacking (Watson & McMahon, 2008). While the matter of childhood development is often left to the fields of psychology and sociology, communication

scholars have much to lend to the understanding of childhood development where all socially (re)produced messages are concerned.

Discourse theory plays a widely accepted and significant role in our understanding of how societies produce meanings. Recently, the call has been made within organizational communication, specifically, to rethink how we (re)produce the meaning of work and whether that meaning is becoming increasingly problematic (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Broadfoot et al., 2008; Cheney & Nadesan, 2008; Cheney et al., 2008; Clair, 1996; Kuhn et al., 2008; Lair et al., 2008; McAlpine, 2008; Medved et al., 2006; Zorn & Townsley, 2008). Through discursive resources, as made available within multiple sites in everyday interactions with our world, people are provided with the tools needed to create/navigate meanings and perform identity work. As work has become an increasingly important contributor to identity formation, it necessarily follows that communication scholars focus attention on the discursive resources available in creating the dominant meaning of work in society. Research has begun to take apart and examine the multiple ways adults—and young adults—engage work discourses in everyday life both with others and with the organization. In the realms of psychology and sociology, there is a need to expand on our understandings of how children reach career aspirations (Watson & McMahon, 2008). Research in the communication field can shed light on how work discourses and discursive resources emerge in alternative contexts. Clearly, an interdisciplinary effort is best in moving toward a more comprehensive understanding.

Exploring these alternative discursive resources will add to the discussion of how dominant societal values of work are (re)produced. Additionally, it will provide some

insight into how work is introduced into the process of identity formation. As with the adult shows mentioned by Cheney et al. (2008), *Bob the Builder* is an informational children's television show that explicitly engages work as its central theme. The title alone has its own implications, as Bob is directly named and associated with his occupation rather than with a unique or otherwise determinable characteristic. In effect, Bob is defined by *what he does*, not by *who he is*. The interest in this research is to look at how *Bob the Builder*, as a media text, offers one of many important channels to communicate societal values of work to children in the early stages of life by uncovering the dominant work discourses, identity formation processes, and other issues pertinent to the meaning of work. Specifically, this study uses a critical lens to analyze the children's television program *Bob the Builder*, a show centered on work, to determine how discourses of work are introduced and repeated to children. Twenty episodes were transcribed and analyzed through critical discourse analysis and visual semiotic analysis. In doing so, I was able to identify the points where societal values of work are communicated and whether those messages contribute to or reconcile the emphasis on work as a main construct of identity. The remainder of this chapter will review literature, present the *Bob the Builder* case study with the four research questions, introduce the methodology and sample, and finally, offer a map of the next four chapters.

Literature Review

The construction of identity is a multi-faceted process occurring both in public and private contexts. The messages we receive in these environments serve as communicative tools from which to perform identity work, and media has become an omnipresent source of these discursive resources. Young children, as some studies

suggest, may be particularly vulnerable to media messages. Thus, research in the areas of work and identity constructions in public discourse, discursive resources and socialization, children's perceptions of work, and the emergence of media as a discursive resource for children are all pertinent to the discussion of television as one channel by which children receive messages about work. Understanding the context in which the discourses of work and organization have come into existence is also valuable in situating the proposed analysis, as the critical cultural perspective relies upon an understanding of context. The literature is divided into six sections: *Contextualizing Western work*, *Discourse theory, work, and identity construction*; *Discursive resources and socialization*; *Media as a discursive resource*; *Children's perceptions of work*; and *Children's career development*.

Contextualizing Western Work

Elements of both modern/industrial and postmodern/post-industrial work and the work environment appear throughout *Bob the Builder* and within its characters. To analyze these elements within the show, it is important to first understand what these elements are, as well as how and why they came about. According to Ciulla (2000), "Over time, work emerged from a morally neutral and somewhat negative idea to one that is rich with moral and social value, and fundamental to how we think of ourselves (p. 35). Further, she identifies religion and ideas about fate as the most notable influences on our social, moral, and personal meanings of work. Casey (1995) also attributes this particular evolution of the meaning of work specifically to Western cultures, stating, "Working hard and continuously enabled one to ease guilt and to lead a good and pious Christian life" (p. 27). Further, she asserts the role of Protestant work ethic in producing

the work force needed to perpetuate capitalist processes. Ciulla (2000) elaborates on the Protestant work ethic, noting its preferences toward social and economic stasis, finding self and salvation through work, and avoiding luxurious consumption. The obvious contradiction was that while the Protestant work ethic encouraged salvation via *any* form of hard work, the capitalist work force it produced became interested in social/economic mobility and consumption (Casey, 1995; Ciulla, 2000).

As society shifted from agrarian into the industrial age, workers became more skilled and semi-autonomous (Casey, 1995). The realization of industrialism's potential and its subsequent fruition took several decades. As workers resisted the shift, wanting only to work enough for sustenance, managers sought to "manipulate workers' attitudes, learning and behavior in the workplace to increase their productivity" (Casey, 1995, p. 76). Outside of socialization processes within the organization, the Protestant work ethic—not inherent in most people—was engrained into modern society through children's stories (Ciulla, 2000). According to Ciulla (2000), "The dual message of hard work and usefulness appeared in textbooks, magazines, and religious sermons" (p. 57). The "Eclectic Readers" by McGuffey told stories repeatedly reinforcing the idea that "children with the right character got ahead, while the morally weak and undisciplined went away empty-handed" (p. 58). This eventually meant minimal manipulation as people transitioned from school to work.

Modern work, then, is identified by a division of labor (i.e., occupational specialization), solidarity, maximum productivity, and the prevalence of capitalist economic rationality over other forms, as well as over human goals and interests. The modern industrial worker is semi-skilled, bound by his/her tasks, and unable to utilize

his/her mind (Casey, 1995). Further, the modern worker's "capacities for enjoyment and meaningfulness in work are greatly limited" leaving the private self alienated from work (p. 42). Wages were the incentive for workers to participate in this shift, as capitalism encouraged both production and consumption.

Advanced industrial capitalist nations began to shift primarily as the result of advanced automated and communication technologies after World War II (Casey, 1995). De-industrialization—proposed by Bluestone and Harrison—became a condition of the United States, Western Europe, and other developed countries in Asia and the Pacific where industrial jobs are shipped off-shore to developing nations, leaving workers displaced in the home country and low-paid workers in the off-shore host country unable to purchase the goods they produce (as cited in Casey, 1995).

Postmodern, post-industrial work attempts to address the voids left by industrialism and the issues raised by deindustrialization. It involves the integration of skills and knowledge in production, centralized control of information, and a reorganization of the workplace. More specifically, the workplace undergoes an alteration of hierarchy, role integration and occupational de-specialization, and workers are displaced and dispersed (Casey, 1995, p. 42). The postmodern worker must be flexible, multi-skilled, as well as aware of and adaptable to the entire process of production. This lack of traditional constraint, it is hoped, allows the worker a renewed sense of work's meaningfulness, as well as empowerment, commitment, and collective responsibility for production within the organization (Casey, 1995). The downside of this shift is the continued drive toward maximum production with minimal costs. As stated, the process of deindustrialization leaves the workers of advanced nations displaced. Therefore,

citizens of advanced capitalist nations are left to cope with and adapt to these changes while still clinging to the role of occupation in identity formation. As the United Kingdom is the producer of *Bob the Builder* and a Western post-industrial nation, it can be maintained that these contextual issues and discursive trends exist within its culture and are reproduced to some extent within the show. Context is key to the formation of discourses in communication.

Discourse Theory, Work, and Identity Construction

Mills (1997) provides a detailed account of the ways the term “discourse,” as Michel Foucault defined it, has branched out in definition within various disciplines. She offers a simplified summary of Foucault’s definition of discourse within a communication context:

A discourse is something which produces something else (an utterance, a concept, an effect), rather than something which exists in and of itself and which can be analyzed in isolation. A discursive structure can be detected because of the systematicity of the ideas, opinions, concepts, ways of thinking and behaving which are formed within a particular context, and because of the effects of those ways of thinking and behaving (Mills, 1997, p. 15).

Mills (1997) gives the examples of femininity and masculinity as discourses which lend to gender-specific behaviors, parameters, and self identifications. Foucault’s theory of discourse is interested in the relations of truth, power, and knowledge and the ability of discourses to effect based on those relations. For Foucault, truth is “something which societies have to work to produce” (Mills, 1997, p. 16). Power is “dispersed throughout social relations . . . [and] produces possible forms of behavior as well as restricting

behavior” (Mills, 1997, p. 17). Finally, a society’s knowledge results from power struggles (Mills, 1997). Foucault’s discourses, then, are the sites of struggle over power—meaning that discourses (re)produce dominant ‘truths’ and knowledge—and are, simultaneously, the very thing which people struggle to obtain (Mills, 1997).

Thus, dominant societal discourses on work contribute to our knowledge of work and determine “truths” about its meaning. Cheney, Zorn, Planalp, and Lair (2008) identify six contemporary trends in work discourses that highlight the need to reconsider the meaning of work: 1) the importance of economic growth and productivity which, in turn, increases anxiety and isolation, 2) shifting organizational forms in search of efficiency and maximum productivity, creating a shift from company loyalty to “branding” the individual to stay ahead of downsizing practices, 3) romanticizing organizational change, 4) the increase in information and communication technologies (ICTs) which can affect the worker positively or negatively and have facilitated organizational change, 5) an increase in work hours and intensity, and 6) a response to capitalism and these previous discourses termed the Simplicity Movement, which challenges present discourses on work (Cheney et al., 2008, pp. 152-158). Specifically, the Simplicity Movement addresses questions of discovering meaningful or fulfilling work while encouraging redirection of consumerist impulses to more responsible spending (Cheney et al., 2008). The authors urge a look at alternative work discourses and a questioning of those discourses currently dominating our understandings of work.

Broadfoot, Carlone, Medved, Aakhus, Gabor, and Taylor (2008) suggest further that a “reconsideration of how individuals communicatively constitute what work is and what kinds of work are meaningful” compels communication scholars to examine

alternative sites of communication labor and work (p. 154). According to Broadfoot et al. (2008), discourses of work operate on a microlevel—individuals creating meanings of work and how those influence identity—and on a macrolevel—societal discursive forces that determine the types of work that are meaningful. As the authors point out, “the consequential nature of discourse lies in the interaction between these societal and individual uses of language to determine what kinds of work and workers are made meaningful” (Broadfoot et al., 2008, p. 157).

These micro- and macrolevel discourses of work communicate to society how work should be incorporated into life and, thus, how it contributes to the formation of identity. In a case study on masculine identity in underground coal mining, for example, Wicks (2002) contends that “the social contexts in which identity formation occurs [i.e., work] contain a set of power relations embedded in discourses and institutionalized organizational practices, shaping how individuals come to define themselves as people and consequently derive meaning from their social relations” (p. 310). Wicks (2002) uses institutional theory to provide insights into how work environments subject workers to very specific practices and behaviors, thereby removing power from the individual in the identity formation process. The study is very much in line with Clair’s (1996) discussion of socialization, arguing that it is in the interest of the institution to meld the individual into the organization’s interests, inducing what Wicks (2008) refers to as “legitimacy-seeking behaviors” from workers (p. 312). Wicks’ (2008) sample is a group of underground coal miners in Nova Scotia, Canada, at the site of a 1992 explosion. The author concludes that the miners engaged in risky behavior due to the organization

granting legitimacy only to workers who adhere to institutional expectations and act consistently with “taken-for-granted norms and beliefs” (Wicks, 2008, p. 328).

In other words, going against the organization put the miners at risk of being terminated and emasculated. As Zorn and Townsley (2008) note, “the question of what work means to people and how such meanings contribute to or detract from a sense of purpose or dignity in people’s lives is important to consider” (p. 147). Such understandings would explain why the miners of Wicks’ study performed risky behaviors to maintain the dignity associated with their identities as miners and as men. These understandings of the miners’ choices can be reached through the examination of everyday discourses occurring between the individual and the organization as well as through the concept of discursive resources.

Discursive Resources and Socialization

Kuhn, Golden, Jorgenson, Buzzanell, Berkelaar, Kisselburgh, Kleinman and Cruz (2008) define a *discursive resource* as “a concept, phrase, expression, trope, or other linguistic devise that (a) is drawn from practices or texts, (b) is designed to affect other practices and texts, (c) explains past or present action, and (d) provides a horizon for future practice (p. 163). Drawing from the scholarly works of Alvesson and Willmott, and Fournier, the authors state that *discursive resources* are the means by which individuals “guide interpretations of experience and shape the construction of preferred conceptions of persons and groups; in so doing, they participate in identity regulation and identity work” (as cited in Kuhn et al., p. 163). Thus, discursive resources can be said to take many forms and be extracted from multiple sites within our daily lives. In addition, these discursive resources hold within them a power of explanation, effect, and

prediction. As Foucault would acknowledge, these resources hold the power in producing societal knowledge and truth. Individuals become aware of this collective knowledge through the process of socialization. As Medved, Brogan, McClanahan, Morris, and Shepherd (2006) acknowledge, this is an on-going process of give and take between the individual and the structures surrounding him or her.

In an attempt to address some of these issues within the “meso” or interactive level of organizing and communicating practices (Broadfoot et al., 2008, p. 157), Clair (1996) examines the ways everyday discourse “reflects and creates occupational order in society” (p. 249). Among these everyday discourses are colloquialisms. In this study, she explores the ways the colloquialism “a real job” works to marginalize the individual and further privilege the organization in the socialization process. The author uses interpretive analysis of personal narratives collected from thirty-four college students regarding recent encounters with the phrase “a real job.” She justifies her sample by referencing the tendency to think of universities as being “outside the real world yet . . . a place where individuals are prepared for life in the real world” (p. 254). This assumption, as Clair (1996) points out, implies that the work students do is not real. The author concludes that the colloquialism carries with it insight into the appropriate characteristics of a real occupation. She further argues that everyday discourse reinforces rhetoric of the past, and these discourses produce meanings that socialize people by promoting “one dominant meaning of work to the marginalization of other meanings” (Clair, 1996, p. 253). Clair’s work sheds light on how, long before entering the working world, young people facing transition into adulthood and entrance into the “real world” are faced with difficult

decisions regarding career choices, largely due to the dominant discourses of work of which they have already become deeply familiar.

Consistently intertwined in any discussion of socialization is the issue of gender. Gender representations in media have been a focus of scholars for decades with early research focused on gender representation in children's books. According to Gooden and Gooden (2001), "Children's books have been around since the early 1500s" (p. 89). Furthermore, the authors suggest these books reflected the values of their given time periods and serve as "a socializing tool to transmit these values to the next generation" (p. 89). Thus, the language within these texts can serve to either encourage or eliminate gender stereotypes within a society (Gooden & Gooden, 2001). To quote Shaw, "these [stereotypes] are assumptions made about the characteristics of each gender, such as physical appearance, physical abilities, attitudes, interests, or occupations" (as cited in Gooden & Gooden, 2001, p. 90). Further research on gender depictions in children's media indicate males outnumber females, and males were twice as likely as females to be in the lead role (Aubrey & Harrison, 2004). Consequently, questions arise regarding what such mediated representations of gender communicate. The key is that various media do indeed communicate.

Kuhn et al. (2008) only address three possible contexts for discursive resources in their discussion: formal organizations, occupational subcultures, and commercial organizing systems. But Clair's (1996) study brings to light that these discursive resources reach the individual long before those constructed by a particular organization. Medved, Brogan, McClanahan, Morris, and Shepherd (2006), however, contend that too much emphasis is placed on context in studies of socialization. They refer to the

understanding of what we do and who we are in our given roles as a “co-constructive process” achieved through language within multiple contexts (Medved et al., 2006, p. 163). Media is one such context.

Media as a Discursive Resource

Cheney et al. (2008) identify cultural media artifacts as sites of (re)production of “widespread beliefs and values regarding the meanings of work” (p. 165). As the authors point out, studies have been done by Conrad on country-western music, by Ashcraft and Flores on popular films, and by Vande Berg and Trujillo on primetime television dramas to analyze the work discourses present (as cited in Cheney et al., 2008). Cheney et al. (2008) further point out that such analyses are even more crucial with the rise of “popular representations that explicitly engage work as a central topic” and not just the context of the stories (p. 165). The authors conclude that such “popular representations serve as discursive resources playing a crucial role in the ongoing processes of work socialization, broadly received” (Cheney et al., 2008, p. 166; Clair, 1996). While the authors acknowledge the necessity of scholarship in relation to adult-targeting entertainment, they make no mention of work as a central theme in *children’s* television.

Multiple studies have been done to recognize the influence television has on children’s behavior, though fewer have been done concerning its influence on children’s communication. Linebarger and Walker (2005) conducted a longitudinal study of fifty-one infants and toddlers to determine how television viewing affects vocabulary development and expressive language. Through hierarchical linear modeling techniques, Linebarger and Walker (2005) produced growth curves to model “relationships between television exposure and the child’s vocabulary knowledge and expressive language

skills” (p. 624). The authors draw from Pruden, Hirsh-Pasek, Maguire and Meyer in pointing out that infants gain new skills and comprehend concepts only through repetition and consistent activity (as cited in Linebarger & Walker, 2005).

Such consistent communicative activities and repetitions produce discursive resources for children, the characteristics of which align with those outlined by Kuhn et al. (2008). Linebarger and Walker (2005) make a series of conclusions about the correlations between content and viewing hours and language outcomes. Among those conclusions is the positive correlation between viewing informational children’s programming and language vocabulary (Linebarger & Walker, 2005). Despite using a sample unrepresentative of the population, the authors were able to conclude that their findings reinforce the idea that the content of television programming matters in children’s linguistic and cognitive development (Linebarger & Walker, 2005). Media, of course, is one discursive resource available to children as they build perceptions of work.

Children’s Perceptions of Work

A recent study by Medved et al. (2006) points out that “parental socialization is an important way we learn about the worlds of work and family” (p. 161). Their study focuses on the memorable messages provided by parents regarding work-life and work-family balance. However, they acknowledge that meaning of work and family life is constructed through communication by family, friends, coworkers, and media (Medved et al., 2006). While the study offers valuable information in understanding how parental messages impact children’s socialization and views of work and family balance, it also has limitations. Medved et al. (2006) point out that data was collected from adults who were asked to recollect messages received from parents during isolated interactions. This

removes the data from its original context and limits itself to just one source of work and family socialization. An advantage to studying media messages is that they can be studied as they were originally presented. In other words, studying the actual text rather than the recollection of that text can provide additional insight into children's socialization processes and the messages they receive, a consideration too often ignored in this area of study.

A great deal of research has also been done to determine children's perceptions of work and their interactions with work. Bazyk (2005) provides a literature review of this research regarding the relationship between children and work "to explore current issues influencing the transition to meaningful adult work for youth living in Western contexts" (Bazyk, 2005, p. 11). Bazyk (2005) identifies several sources of influence in children's understanding of work: social origin (race, class, gender), parents, participation—paid or unpaid—in work activities (at school, home, or an actual work site), and participation in structured leisure activities. Interestingly, Bazyk (2005) concludes not by acknowledging a problem with our current understanding of the meaning of work but, instead, by recommending ways we can better prepare youth to enter the work force. However, television is not acknowledged as a source of influence on children's understandings of work.

Children's Career Development

How and when do children learn or construct career aspirations? Linda Gottfredson (2002) presents her revised developmental theory of occupational aspirations that shows how career aspirations are circumscribed progressively during the development of self-concept. Criticisms of the theory center around its inability to

explain career development in adults but, as Gottfredson (2002) points out, other theories on adult development exist; her interest is in understanding the origins of career interests and determinants. Past studies have shown that occupational prestige, sextype (masculine/feminine career), and traits of job incumbents (i.e., the characteristics generally associated with the given occupation) are similarly perceived regardless of “sex, social class, educational level, ethnic group, area of residence, occupational preferences or employment, age, type of school attended, political persuasion, and traditionality of beliefs, and regardless of the decade of the study or the specific way in which questions were asked” with correlations of sextype and traits of incumbents rating in the high .90s across groups (Gottfredson, 1981, p. 550). She points out children at age six can determine sextype—or which careers are more feminine or masculine. Children can make these determinations because the development of self-concept and occupational aspiration begins at an early age and occurs in four stages of circumscription: orientation 1) to size and power, 2) to sex roles, 3) to social valuation, and 4) to the internal, unique self (Gottfredson, 2002). Each successive stage necessitates a higher level of personal integration and mental development. As Gottfredson (2002) suggests, the age delineations between stages are “arbitrary because youngsters differ considerably in mental maturity at any given chronological age” (p. 96).

The first stage of circumscription, orientation of power and size, is typical of children ages 3 to 5. In this stage, thought processes are intuitive and the recognition of little versus big develops in regard to perceptions of self and others. Children in this stage have not achieved object constancy to form classifications. Understanding of occupations as adult roles also happens in this stage. The second stage in early childhood occurs

typically in children ages 6 to 8 as they develop concrete thought processes and the ability to classify objects, people, etc. into simple groupings. Gender is also perceived in this stage and sex type of occupation is understood, and there is an “active rejection of cross-sex behavior” (Gottfredson, 2002, p. 97). Gottfredson (1981) states, “Occupation is one of the most important and observable differentiators of people in our society, so it is not surprising that even the youngest children use occupational images in their thinking about themselves” (p. 556). To be clear, Gottfredson (2002) does not suggest career aspiration to be solely a product of environment and acknowledges the influences of heredity on the processes of circumscription and compromise in career development.

More recent research—involving gender differences in thematic preferences of children’s literature—suggests that gender differences in book preferences were not present among the youngest children studied, but were apparent by age 4 (Collins-Standley, Gans, Yu, & Zillmann, 1996). This finding supports that children may advance through Gottfredson’s stages more quickly, and that the understanding of children and career aspirations may be either incomplete, outdated, or both. As Watson and McMahon (2008) put forth, literature on children’s career development is “both disparate and lacking in depth” (p. 75), raising the question of how early is too early to begin researching on the topic.

Case Study

Bob the Builder first aired on BBC on April 12, 1999. By the end of 2000, the show had reached the airwaves in 108 countries and generated \$111 million in retail sales (Jenkins, 2008a). The creator of the show, Keith Chapman, first envisioned a “big digger” (now Scoop on the show) as a children’s TV character in the 1980s while

watching a nearby construction site. Over the years, he developed other anthropomorphic friends for the digger before realizing that the machines “needed a human character to control and look after them” (Jenkins, 2008c). In regard to *Bob*’s success, Chapman states, “Timing was a big element. The whole British fascination with property and development was just starting. And I believe we are hardwired to build things” (Jenkins, 2008c, p. 2). Thus, *Bob*’s creation and subsequent success hinged on an observation of and perceived societal fascination with certain elements of work and production.

Given its international success and explicitly work-related themes, it becomes important to understand what *Bob the Builder* offers children in terms of both self-concept and occupational understandings—sextype, prestige, and traits of incumbents. The show targets children passing through the first and, potentially, the second stages of cognitive development, which occur simultaneously with the evolution of occupational aspirations. An examination of *Bob the Builder* provides potential insights into the kinds/types of work and workers portrayed to children as more or less meaningful. Consider *Bob the Builder*’s mission statement and intended discourses, as offered by the show’s official U.S. website:

Bob the Builder and his machine team are ready to tackle any project. As they hammer out the solutions that lead to a job well done, Bob and the Can-Do Crew demonstrate the power of positive-thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, and follow-through. Most importantly, from start to finish, the team always shows that The Fun Is In Getting It Done! (“About Bob,” 2010)

Magnifying the importance of studying such discourses in children’s programming, the words “teamwork” and “efficiency” are two of the three examples of work-oriented discourses Cheney and Nadesan (2008) list in their article. This language is pulled from existing discourses—primarily associated with the “adult” world and organizational

language—surrounding the “true” meaning of work and the meaningfulness of work. The discourses Cheney and Nadesan hash out are arguably, though not exclusively, found in Western, capitalist cultures. Likewise, *Bob* was created in the United Kingdom and may communicate similar Euro-American values of work. Uncovering the discourses in *Bob the Builder* is critical to understand *whose* societal values are being communicated to children in over 240 countries across the globe; though, these same messages will fall under different interpretations in each of those countries. While the mission statement above was found on the Official *Bob the Builder* U.S. website (2010), the same message was found in the “About Bob” sections of the Canadian, U.K., and Australian sites. Having made these observations, the first research question can be posed:

RQ 1: What particular cultural values are (re)presented within *Bob the Builder* regarding work?

Workers and the Organization

Bob the Builder also presents a particularly interesting scenario in regard to discourses between the individual and the organization. Aside from Wendy, Bob’s co-workers are machines rather than people. Given that the show promotes teamwork, it is interesting that all other members of the team must be considered either humanized machines or dehumanized workers, rather than people. In effect, Bob’s colleagues are also his tools. Being an entrepreneur, Bob *is* the organization. The other workers in the Can-Do crew are unequal to Bob and inhuman, making them difficult to identify with. Thus, the young viewer may be void of alternatives and forced to identify both with the organization and with the builder—the superior worker—simultaneously. Therefore, it becomes important to flesh out the messages presented in regard to operations within an

organization—from the interactions between workers to the expectations of work. This brings forth the second research question:

RQ 2: What values of workers and organization are constructed in *Bob the Builder*?

Leisure and Other Non-work Issues

Of course, other messages within *Bob the Builder* must be taken into account in this analysis. In the interest of further understanding socialization as a co-constructed process through which we continually obtain social knowledge about work, family, and life in general, other questions arose regarding the discourses (re)presented. Though work is the central theme of *Bob the Builder*, other relationships and contexts were necessarily explored within the show. In addition to considering work-related discourses, the study was also interested in unearthing messages pertaining to aspects of life outside a work context. Therefore, the study is guided further by a third research question:

RQ 3: How are concepts of leisure, play and family constructed in *Bob the Builder*?

Gender and Diversity

Gender in the work context was also an important focus of analysis. Bob and Wendy are considered business partners in the show and both wear hardhats. Although Wendy's character has evolved from being a male counterpart, Lenny, during initial development, to a "dizzy secretary" to the now "practical business partner and friend" (Jenkins, 2008a), Bob remains the lead character. Stories revolve around him and his position in a stereotypically masculine occupation. Despite their dehumanization, the machines in the Can-Do Crew have distinguishably male and female voices as opposed to

being androgynous. This provided insight into whether their characteristics were gendered as well. Other human characters on the show were considered in regard to their gender and occupations. The study also paid attention to the diversity of characters, though there was initially anticipated to be fewer examples of diversity to draw upon for analysis. Thus, a fourth and final research question is generated:

RQ 4: What gendered or otherwise diversified representations are constructed in *Bob the Builder*?

Methods

The study was approached methodologically from a critical-cultural perspective with an interest in uncovering and explaining the societal/ideological values of work constructed in *Bob the Builder*. As Deetz (2005) states, critical studies are concerned with understanding “relations among power, language, social/cultural practices, and the treatment and/or suppression of important conflicts as they relate to the production of individual identities, social knowledge, and social and organizational decision making” (p. 85). A linguistic turn in the critical perspective has placed communication centrally in the constitution of the self, others, and the world, yet still emphasizing the need to examine the *formation*—rather than just the expression—of identity, experience, and knowledge (Deetz, 2005). According to Lister and Wells (2001), cultural studies “centres on the study of the forms and practices of culture (not only in its texts and artefacts), their relationships to social groups and the power relations between those groups as they are constructed and mediated by forms of culture” (p. 61). Culture in this context is meant to comprise the everyday symbolic as well as the textual practices in the form of material artifacts or representations (Lister & Wells, 2001). In other words, *Bob the Builder* as the

text under study is a cultural artifact that constructs and mediates power. A combination of critical discourse analysis (CDA) and visual semiotic analysis was chosen as the analytical approach for this study because of the flexibility it allows in identifying a variety of messages within the text.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Typically, CDA is employed to uncover sources of social and/or political inequality, power abuse or domination. Broadfoot, Deetz and Anderson (2004) point out that most CDA research aims to reveal the ideological functions of discourse. According to Fairclough (1995), CDA focuses on three dimensions of discourse and discourse analysis: on the *text*, the *discourse practice*, and the *sociocultural practice*. Looking at the text provides a description of the preferred reading of the text. Discourse practice considers the way the text has been produced, disseminated, received, interpreted and used. Intertextuality—the ways texts are referenced to other texts through the discourses contained in them—is also a consideration (Locke, 2004). In other words, CDA reveals any stories (discourses) in *Bob the Builder* in reference to and/or typical of other texts. Such observations allow connections to be drawn between the stories in the show and stories around work, family, identity, etc. children may encounter outside of it.

For sociocultural practice, CDA seeks to explain the situational, institutional and societal conditions that have given rise to the text's production (Locke, 2004, pp. 42-43). As Locke (2004) explains, “analysis at the level of sociocultural practice is aimed at exploring such questions as whether the particular text supports a particular kind of discursive hegemony or a particular social practice” or whether it contains transformative or counter-hegemonic potential (p. 43). An important distinction between CDA and other

forms of textual analysis is its consideration of context in addition to the text itself.

Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) suggest that any critical analysis of discourse “begins from some perception of a discourse-related problem in some part of social life” (p. 60).

The concern lies in drawing the connection between a text and the perceived, broader societal problem (Broadfoot, Deetz, & Anderson, 2004). In regard to *Bob the Builder*, CDA was particularly useful in uncovering and explaining whether the discourses contained support or transform certain hegemonic views of work, family, leisure, and identity. In other words, approaching the text with CDA revealed the ideological forces behind its discourses. Differences in gender were examined in addition to other representations of diversity.

As Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) point out, “CDA takes the view that any text can be understood in different ways—a text does not uniquely determine a meaning, though there is a limit to what a text can mean” (p. 67). Critical discourse analysis, then, does not seek a universal understanding of the text in question but, instead, advocates one particular explanation of it (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999).

Visual Semiotics

In order to offer a more complete explanation of the discourses (re)presented in *Bob the Builder*, the study also employed visual semiotic analysis. As Lister and Wells (2001) note, a cultural studies analysis of the visual is interested in questions of production, circulation and consumption, the medium used, the text’s social life, and also recognizes the subjectivity of the individual providing the criticism. All these aspects of semiotic analysis align with those mentioned for CDA. As van Leeuwen (2001) points out, visual semiotics asks the fundamental questions of representation—what images

represent and how—and of hidden meaning in images—the ideas and values represented in images of people, places and things. Barthes (1977) explains the denotative and connotative meanings of signs in his semiotic approach to visual analysis, stating that the code of connotation is cultural, and “its signs are gestures, attitudes, expressions, colours or effects, endowed with certain meanings by virtue of the practice of a certain society” (p. 27). Semiotics admits the importance of the content of an image and the placement of each element within it in determining meaning (Williams, 2003). Paying attention to the images present in the show allows for a more complete analysis of its discourses. A visual semiotic approach enabled an examination of the socially constructed meanings embedded in *Bob the Builder* beyond language as well as the consequences of the language used by fleshing out the ideologies suggested by the symbols used.

Sample

A sample size of twenty episodes of *Bob the Builder* were examined through critical discourse and semiotic analysis. These episodes were transcribed to ensure a thorough and accurate discourse analysis. The transcripts were inductively coded into thematic categories as determined by the research questions. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), the first step of coding is to examine the data for several instances which seem to relate under a particular category or theme. Codes are then developed to link the data with the categories developed by the researcher and to serve as tools for sorting, retrieving, linking, and displaying data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Thematic categories drawn from the text were: occupation/identity, work instruction/definition, work encouragement/acknowledgement, organizational messages (as in the place of work and its qualities), customer satisfaction, time, money/compensation, charity/giving/sharing,

gender, negative messages (of incompetence, concern, or doubt), education, play/leisure, and family. Categories were coded inductively through a high level of inference, meaning they required knowledge of cultural insider meanings (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

Additionally, episodes were viewed specifically for visual semiotic analysis. Images, symbols, and events in the show were also categorized inductively, though the categories derived from signs differed from those generated by the transcripts. For example, color was used to analyze the clothing of Bob, Wendy, and other human characters to determine masculinity, femininity, and gender neutrality.

The sample was drawn from the 207 ten-minute episodes and three extended thirty-minute episodes reported by HOT Animation on the production company's website (*HOT Filmography*, 2009). Episode guides on four different websites—none affiliated with the production company—report anywhere from 120 (TV.com, 2009) to 268 (AOL.com, 2009) episodes in existence. These websites include TV.com, AOL.com, zap2it.com, and TVguide.com. With a disparity of 58 episodes between the production company's report and AOL's list, it was difficult to determine the actual number of episodes in existence—HOT Animation does not provide a list of episode titles. Despite this disparity, a sample size of twenty episodes—regular and extended—provided sufficient material for ideological criticism. One of the twenty episodes analyzed was an extended episode, “When Bob Became a Builder” (2006), and the remaining were drawn from the population of standard ten-minute episodes. The story of Bob and his becoming a builder contains messages about career aspirations and, thus, warrants analysis. The four feature length *Bob the Builder* films created by HOT Animation were excluded from the study, as the main focus of this research is television as a discursive resource. The

interest of this study is in finding messages (re)produced over ten seasons of a *television* program; a consideration of a very specifically themed feature length special—“A Christmas to Remember” (2001), for example—does not seem warranted. In other words, it is believed that a feature *film* with a very specific and intentional holiday theme will differ from the typical texts found in everyday consumption of the show.

Episodes were selected through non-probability convenience sampling and obtained through the local public library. A purposive sample was originally selected, but the availability of the preferred episodes was extremely limited. Instead, episodes readily available on DVD release were used for analysis. Though risky, a convenience sample can still be a good starting point for research. According to Riffe, Lacy and Fico (2005), convenience sampling is justifiable under three conditions: when the material being studied is difficult to obtain, when resources limit the ability to generate a random sample of the population, and when the researcher is studying an under-researched area. Not all *Bob the Builder* episodes are available on DVD because they are not released by season, nor are they available on any media website (*youtube* or *Hulu*, for example). Instead, DVD releases available are comprised of four to five episodes selected based on their themes. For example, *Dizzy’s Favorite Adventures* (2004) consists of four episodes presumed to be favored by or centered on the character Dizzy.

Four DVD collections, the extended “When Bob Became a Builder” (2006), which also contained two regular-length episodes, and one episode from Comcast On-Demand were used for analysis. The two episodes were “Two Scoops” (2005) and “Benny’s Back” (2005). *Dizzy’s Favorite Adventures* (2004) contains four regular ten-minute episodes: “Scarecrow Dizzy” (2001), “Bob the Photographer” (2003), “Dizzy

Goes Camping” (2003) and “Dizzy’s Statues” (1999). *Lofty’s Favorite Adventures* (2004) contains “Lofty to the Rescue” (2001), “Magnetic Lofty” (2000), “Lofty’s Jungle Fun” (2003), and “Bob’s Big Surprise” (2001). *Bob the builder: Getting the Job Done!* (2005) contains “Wendy’s Big Night Out” (2003), “Travis Gets Lucky” (2003), “Trix’s Pumpkin Pie” (2004), “Molly’s Fashion Show” (2003), and “Pilchard and the Field Mice” (2004). Finally, *Bob the Builder: Digging for Treasure* (2003) contains the episodes “Scoop’s Stegosaurus” (2001), “Bob’s Metal Detector” (2002) and “Scruffy the Detective” (2001). The episode “Bob’s Three Jobs” (2006) was also obtained for analysis from Comcast On-Demand. In all, the nineteen episodes and one extended episode provided an abundance of material for analysis to respond to the posed research questions.

Summary

The call has been made within organizational communication to rethink how we (re)produce the meaning of work and whether that meaning is problematic. Cheney and Nadesan (2008) recommend a “careful, sustained attention to underlying logics and discourses, which can help us not only to position the individual’s experience and representation of work but also to expose our own and society-wide views of work” (p. 186). Through the discursive resources made available through multiple sites in everyday interactions with our world, people find the tools to create/navigate meanings and perform identity work.

As work continues to be an important contributor to identity formation, it follows that communication scholars focus attention on the discursive resources made available in creating the dominant meaning of work in society. Research has begun to take apart and examine the multiple ways adults—and young adults—engage work discourses in

everyday life both with others and with the organization. *Bob the Builder* is one discursive resource for children to begin understanding societal values of work. The show's scope, not just in the United States but across the globe, suggests that it is an object worthy of examination. This study will uncover work-related discourses and themes in *Bob the Builder* as well as its attitudes toward the non-work related aspects of life. Chapter Two will expand on the literature of work and analyze work-related discourses in *Bob the Builder*—drawing on Cheney et al.'s (2008) six identified trends in contemporary Western work discourse—to answer the first and second research questions. Chapter Three will explore discourse about leisure, play, and family to answer research question three. The fourth chapter will discuss more specific issues of gender and diversity representation in *Bob the Builder* to answer the final research question. Chapter Five concludes the project with final observations, limitations of the research, and directions for future research.

CHAPTER II: Work Discourses in *Bob the Builder*

Catherine Casey (1995) contends, “In modern society people have defined themselves, and in turn have been socially defined, by the type of work that they do in the public sphere” (p. 28). *Bob the Builder* is no exception to this rule. As the title character in the United Kingdom’s internationally successful children’s television show, Bob leads his crew as an entrepreneurial jack of all trades, carrying out a vast array of tasks for the citizens of Bobsville and Sunflower Valley with the help of his anthropomorphic employees and his human business partner, Wendy. A CDA analysis of the show reveals distinct trends and characteristics prevalent in actual work environments to answer both the first and second research questions: What specific cultural values are (re)presented in *Bob the Builder*? And what values of workers and organization are constructed in *Bob the Builder*?

A number of areas warrant discussion in regard to work-related messages in *Bob the Builder*. A total of eight work-related thematic categories were inductively generated through critical discourse analysis. These themes were 1) characteristics of ‘occupation/identity,’ 2) ‘congratulations/encouragement’ in the context of work, 3) ‘work instruction/definition/description,’ 4) ‘customer satisfaction,’ 5) ‘time,’ 6) the ‘structure/nature of the organization’ itself, 7) ‘money/compensation’ for services, and 8) messages of ‘incompetence/doubt/concern’—toward oneself or toward another. Throughout the analysis, thematic categories will be specifically indicated by inverted

quotation marks. Table 2.1 breaks down these categories by offering examples of each coded theme as well as their frequency in the sample.

Table 2.1: Work-Related CDA Themes and Frequencies

Work-Related Theme	Work Instruction/Description/Definition	Incompetence/Doubt/Concern	Congratulations/Encouragement	Time
Example	<i>"Let's take this over to the museum"</i>	<i>"You were pulling instead of pushing."</i>	<i>"Can we fix it?" "Yes we can!"</i>	<i>"I don't think I'll have time."</i>
Total No. of Instances	403	279	164	156
No. of Episodes w/ Theme	20	20	19	19
Avg. per Episode	20.15	13.95	8.2	7.8
Work-Related Theme	Occupation/al Identity	Structure/nature of the Organization	Customer Satisfaction	Money/Compensation
Example	<i>"I think this is a job for an expert."</i>	<i>"I think it's time to get more help."</i>	<i>"Everything is so beautiful!"</i>	<i>"I've sold all my tickets for tonight's show."</i>
Total No. of Instances	139	102	33	8
No. of Episodes w/ Theme	19	15	16	4
Avg. per Episode	6.95	5.1	1.65	0.4

The eight themes provided information regarding to answer the first and second research questions. Generally speaking, themes of ‘occupation/al identity’ (for the machines, Bob, and Wendy), ‘incompetence/doubt/concern,’ ‘structure/nature of the organization,’ and ‘work instruction/definition/description’ aided in answering the question of what societal values are represented. The four themes of ‘occupation/al identity,’ ‘structure/nature of the organization,’ ‘incompetence/doubt/concern’ and ‘work instruction/definition/description’ also aided in answering the second research question regarding the value of workers and organization—particularly when juxtaposed with

messages of ‘leisure/play,’ a non-work thematic category. In addition to the eight work-related thematics generated by CDA, observations were made through visual semiotic analysis and will be referenced throughout the discussions to supplement the CDA data.

This chapter will begin by discussing the ways *Bob* occupies both a modern and postmodern position in terms of its treatment of the worker, suggesting a (re)presentation of the contemporary trends in the distinctly Western corporate world proposed by Casey (1995) and Ciulla (2000) and answering the first research question of what—or rather whose—cultural values are being communicated. This discussion will focus first on the machines and secondary characters, and then on Bob. In analyzing Bob’s postmodern characteristics, the chapter will then address more succinctly the second research question of what values of workers and the organization are constructed within this Western frame. The chapter will then present an extended analysis that bridges the conversation between the eight work-related themes as they align specifically with the six contemporary work discourse trends identified by Cheney et al. (2008) to further contextualize the discourses of *Bob the Builder*. The chapter will conclude with a summary bridging both analyses to answer the two research questions explored.

RQ 1: What particular cultural values are (re)presented within *Bob the Builder* regarding work?

Casey’s (1995) book examines the social and institutional practices of work and production on self formation through an extensive review of the history of work, theories of the self, and a field study of corporate culture. The corporate culture of today’s businesses seek to answer the challenges of postmodernism by creating a sense of community that—in Ciulla’s (2000) words—taps into the soul of the employee. The

corporate culture and discourses of *Bob the Builder*, in many ways, reproduce this desire. Upon examining the data, *Bob the Builder* displays very distinct characteristics of both modernism/industrialism and postmodernism/post-industrialism. Certain aspects of the show—particularly the apparent use of a barter system—speak to a sort of pre-industrial condition of society and work. However, Casey (1995) suggests, “In the panic of a prospective epochal shift . . . post-industrial corporate capitalism moves to revive and rehabilitate earlier forms of social organization. It invokes vague, but not disintegrated, social memories of a Protestant ethic that ensures production through self-restraint, rational submission to higher authority, order and dedication to duty” (p. 182). More succinctly, industrial logic attempts to survive postmodernism by initiating a “nostalgic restoration of industrial solidarities, and pre-industrial mythical memories of family and belonging” to stabilize production and maintain the social sphere for the time being (Casey, 1995, p. 137). While Casey’s book might seem slightly outdated, we are still managing the epochal shift she speaks of. A mere six years after its publication, *Bob the Builder* began airing to young television audiences. A closer analysis through visual semiotics and CDA reveals how the show contributes to and reproduces contemporary discourses surrounding work.

Modern and Postmodern Influences on the Worker

The Western influences of modernism and industrialism are not entirely absent from *Bob the Builder*. The most glaring—in terms of viewing the machines as workers—is task specialization. As Casey (1995) notes, division of labor and specialization of function are characteristics of industrial work. Viewing these anthropomorphic machines as workers with individual selves, they are very much constrained by the specialized

tasks they are responsible for. Dizzy the cement mixer, for example, is not equipped to perform digging—a specialized task reserved for Scoop, Benny and Muck. As such, each dehumanized worker is tied to his/her tasks and constrained to a specific sphere of responsibilities. Although there are multiple members of the team who can dig, each is still restricted to his/her individual abilities. Themes of ‘occupation/al identity’ reveal distinct restrictions for the mechanical members of the team. Consider the conversation between Scoop and Muck in “When Bob Became a Builder” (2006) regarding their digging abilities:

Scoop: Good digging, Muck!

Muck: Thanks! I love getting muddy. Hey, look what I can do!

Scoop: Wow, that’s really cool! I wish I could do that.

Muck: Yeah, but you have two diggers. I wish I had two diggers. If I had two diggers, I could dig with them both at the same time.

Scoop: I suppose I am quite lucky.

Muck: Yeah! We can both do really cool things so we’ll make a great team!

Scoop is identified as “the digger” (“Meet Scoop,” 2010) while Muck is described as “the digger dump truck” (“Meet Muck,” 2010). In this dialogue, the two co-workers acknowledge that they are different. Simultaneously, they acknowledge that one will never possess the skills of the other. Scoop receives validation in his ability to dig *more*, where Muck is acknowledged for his ability to *both* dig and haul. Scoop—being restrained from ever forming new skills such as hauling—must assume his position as Scoop *the digger*. Despite these differences, the dehumanized workers place themselves

and their individual skills purposefully within the organization, assuming that each serves a critical role in production.

Task specialization is also a recurrent theme in the show and can be seen whenever a character takes on a task outside his or her sphere of responsibility and, presumably, outside his or her ‘occupation/al identity’. In “Scarecrow Dizzy” (2001), Dizzy the cement mixer is asked to prevent a cement foundation from being disturbed as it dries. At the same time, Spud the Scarecrow unsuccessfully assists in a painting project. The assumption of a new ‘occupation/al identity’ is made clear, particularly for Spud, who exclaims, “Hooray! Spud the Scarecrow becomes Spud the Housepainter!” (“Scarecrow Dizzy, 2001). The violation of traditional spheres of responsibility is later articulated by Dizzy upon Bob’s return to the work site:

Bob: Dizzy! What are you doing?

Dizzy: Oh, hi Bob! I’ve been trying to keep everybody off your cement.

Bob: Well, you’ve done a great job, Dizzy.

Dizzy: (giggles) Thanks, Bob! But I think I’m much better at mixing things than scaring birds.

Though Bob is the one who initially assigns Dizzy to guard the cement, he acts surprised at her method of carrying on this task. Additionally, Dizzy insists that—despite being praised for a job well done—she belongs solely in the identity of *the mixer*. Moments later, Spud admits to Wendy that he, too, may be “better at scaring crows than at decorating” (“Scarecrow Dizzy,” 2001). At this point, Bob and Wendy arrange to switch helpers and set Dizzy and Spud to tasks which align with their identities as a mixer and a scarecrow, respectively.

The notion of task specialization is not specific to the dehumanized workers of the Can-Do Crew, alone. While most minor characters appear primarily in the position of customer, some members of the community outside the organization are equally constrained by the modern, industrial elements of work. Farmer Pickles assumes a very distinct ‘occupation/al identity’ as the farmer and nothing else. Even in his role as a farmer, Farmer Pickles performs ‘incompetency/doubt/concern’ and an inability to adapt to challenges in his own occupation. Bob responds with an example of ‘work description/instruction/definition’ by offering a fairly simple description of the work he will perform for him. In “Scoop’s Stegosaurus” (2001) for example, Farmer Pickles calls on Bob to help him address a problem specific to growing crops:

Farmer Pickles: You see, Bob, it’s all this rain we’ve been having. It’s made my field so muddy, nothing’s going to grow in it.

Bob: No problem, Farmer Pickles. We’ll lay these pipes to drain the water off.

While Farmer Pickles has diagnosed the problem with his field, he either does not know how to solve it, or relies on Bob to execute the solution—a task atypical for someone who builds houses, notably.

In “Bob the Photographer” (2003), Mrs. Percival, the schoolmaster, displays ‘incompetence/doubt/concern’ and must seek assistance in a task as minor as hanging photographs for a competition. Wendy and Bob are called in to repair the damage. Other minor human characters in the show are more often occupationally unidentified, with a few exceptions. Tony the Hairdresser is the only human character—aside from Bob and Farmer Pickles—who is identified specifically by occupation in the episodes analyzed, and appears only briefly (“Wendy’s Big Night Out,” 2003). Even Wendy is not identified

as a builder, though she is Bob's only human employee. Mr. Elliot runs the museum and serves as a scientific/anthropological expert in "Scoop's Stegosaurus" (2001). Mr. Sabatini operates the local pizza parlor ("Trix's Pumpkin Pie," 2004) and a restaurant ("Wendy's Big Night Out," 2003).

In the episodes analyzed, Mr. Bentley is identified as the town's building inspector ("Magnetic Lofty," 2000). While his position within the shows analyzed does not change, it is suggested that he eventually becomes mayor ("List of Bob the Builder characters," 2010), which is supported by his frequently assuming responsibilities of city management and representation one might expect the mayor to perform ("Scruffy the Detective," 2001; "Lofty's Jungle Fun," 2003; "Magnetic Lofty," 2000) and his implied admiration of the mayor's position ("Magnetic Lofty," 2000). Because of his apparent adaptability and potential socioeconomic mobility, however, Mr. Bentley could be considered an exemplar of the Western postmodern worker. Limited data on his character does not warrant an extended analysis or definitive support of this claim, however. Instead, attention will be paid to the lead character, Bob.

While the machines, and even some of the characters outside the team, are constrained by work specialization reminiscent of modern industrial work, Bob embodies the postmodern, post-industrial worker. Even though Bob is blatantly labeled as the builder, the tasks he performs are a clear integration of multiple skills and knowledge. According to Casey (1995), "advanced automation and information technologies . . . provide workers with opportunities in which they can exercise new forms of skill and knowledge, especially critical judgment in managing the new machines" (p. 43). Builder is an 'occupation/al identity' broadly defined. In fact, Funk and Wagnall's (1961) defines

builder as: 1. One who or that which builds. 2. One who follows the occupation of building, or controls or directs the actual work of building (p. 175). A more specific definition might offer the information of *what* a builder builds and what the actual work of building *consists of*. However, in “When Bob Became a Builder” (2006), Bob details the skills he learned from his father—specific to building a house—in order to become a builder. They include: brick laying, carpentry, roofing, tiling, guttering, plastering and painting. Upon completion of the home, Bob’s father Robert proclaims Bob’s ‘occupation/al identity,’ “We did it! Now you’re a builder.” to which Bob replies, “Just like you, dad!” Semiotically, this particular scene illuminates Bob in angelic lighting to further reinforce the significance of the momentous occasion when he *becomes* his occupation. Bob’s account of the summer he helped his father build their new home is affectionately concluded, “And from that day on, I wasn’t just Bob, I was Bob the Builder” (“When Bob Became a Builder,” 2006). Thus, the learning of these skills and the acquiring of the label “builder”—from a figure of authority—effectively bestow unto Bob his ‘occupation/al identity’ at the age of fifteen.

Yet, building in Bob’s world is not restricted to houses, nor are his skills restricted to the ones listed above—as revealed by ‘work instruction/definition/description.’ In “Bob the Photographer” (2003), Bob performs electrical work; “Scoop’s Stegosaurus” (2001) finds Bob doing irrigation, landscaping in “Bob’s Big Surprise” (2001), and in “Bob’s Metal Detector” (2002), his tasks are all plumbing related. The projects Bob and his team tackle are many and varied, so much so that a comprehensive list is not feasible. In the episodes analyzed, the Can-Do Crew erects anything from a catwalk (“Molly’s Fashion Show,” 2003) to a time capsule (“Scruffy the Detective,” 2001) to a crosswalk

(“Lofty’s Jungle Fun,” 2003). These unique jobs are in addition to the typical tasks one might expect from a builder. For example, Bob is hired to replace a wooden beam for Mr. Elliot’s roof (“Pilchard and the Field Mice,” 2004), and to build Farmer Pickles a shed (“Scarecrow Dizzy,” 2001). The work Bob performs integrates the knowledge and skill sets of a variety of more specific ‘occupation/al identities’—plumbers, electricians, and masons to name a few. Considering Bob as the embodiment of the postmodern worker with multiple skill sets can alter the description of his employees from dehumanized workers to humanized machines in need of direction and management. As Table 2.1 shows, the ‘work instruction/description/definition’ theme is the overwhelming front runner in frequency with over 20 instances per episode on average. The view of the machines in need of manipulation and control supports the Western postmodern, post-industrial trend toward fewer (human) workers, as well as the machine-driven displacement of human agency identified by Casey (1995).

RQ 2: What values of workers and organization are constructed in *Bob the Builder*?

Drawing again from Casey’s (1995) statement on what post-industrial technologies hope to offer the worker, Bob is privileged with running an organization that employs his own multiplicity of skills while avoiding the work that can be performed by machinery. Bob manages his machines and works alongside them. So what are the members of the Can-Do Crew—workers or machines? They appear to be a hybridization of the two—both worker and machine. Despite their individual personalities, they occupy very specific spheres of responsibility which never successfully adapt or expand. They appear to think freely and communicate with humans, but they can only perform successfully through direct ‘work instruction/definition/description’ or simulation—as

when Dizzy and Muck mimic Farmer Pickles' dog, Scruffy, to herd his sheep back into their pen ("Dizzy Goes Camping," 2003). They desire the privileges of the human worker, but their lives are solely—and inherently—dedicated to work. This is illustrated in the juxtaposition of 'leisure/play' immediately followed by 'work description/instruction/definition.' For example, in "Dizzy Goes Camping" (2003), Wendy takes a vacation with her sister, prompting the machines to discuss the concept:

Dizzy: Aren't Wendy and Jenny lucky going on vacation? I wish I was going with them.

Muck: Cheer up, Dizzy. We have lots of exciting work to do!

And moments later:

Dizzy and Muck: (singing) Wendy and Jenny are gone on vacation! Sunshine and ice cream all day long!

Bob: Ha! That's very nice, you two, but we're not going on vacation. I'm afraid we're going to be very busy.

Later in the episode, Bob allows the two to stay overnight at the work site—a camp site in progress—and the characters frame it as camping. All of the activities associated with camping—a fire and food—are present only in their imaginations.

In order to highlight Bob's position as the postmodern, post-industrial worker and the associated work values, the machines must provide a contrast. Therefore, they are presented as dehumanized workers/humanized machines in order to illustrate the less desirable and obviously more modern, industrial characteristics of the worker. While the machines may be *likeable* to children, they are inherently *unidentifiable* for children because they are dehumanized. Children can see how teamwork and efficiency play out

in the various adventures and collective efforts of the Can-Do Crew, but the decidedly postmodern—and most desirable—values of the worker are attributed to the human character, Bob. He is flexible, his skills and knowledge of building are integrated and, most importantly, he successfully manages his machines. Now, I turn away from the messages regarding the worker toward what *Bob the Builder* communicates about the organization.

Organizational Formation in *Bob the Builder*

The official title of the organization in *Bob the Builder* is Bob's Building Yard, and is referenced as such any time the office phone is answered ("Dizzy's Statues," 1999; "When Bob Became a Builder," 2006). The history of the 'structure/nature of the organization' is recounted in the extended episode "When Bob Became a Builder," (2006). Picking up from the moment a fifteen year-old Bob is taught the skills of building and given his own tool kit, his future in the organization is discussed:

Robert: I've been thinking. Why don't you join me in the business when you leave school?

Young Bob: Really? You want me to work with you all the time?

Robert: I can't think of anyone better. I'm really proud of you, son. Can we build it?

Young Bob and Robert: Yes we can!

Bob: (Narrated) And from that day on, I wasn't just Bob; I was Bob the Builder.

Bob: [Flash Forward] We had some good times together before dad retired and left me in charge.

At this point, Benny—a curious machine—interjects to fill in the next event on the organization’s timeline: the acquisition of Bob’s first machine, Scoop. During the flashback, which picks up immediately after Bob has acquired Scoop, the townspeople line the streets as Bob seemingly parades his way through the community. The compliments paid by the townspeople reflect praise as well as an expectation of organizational expansion, as when one character states, “Splendid, Bob! And about time, too.” (“When Bob Became a Builder,” 2006)

In a previous flashback, Scoop himself recounts how he “joined” the team—a narrative perhaps expected of an organization’s employee. The narrative, however, does not entirely reflect a human one. Visually, the scene finds Bob observing a line of “diggers” through a fence. As he and the owner of these machines walk along, the prospective “employees” call out to him. Scoop is the last to call out:

Scoop: And I’m lean and yellow and mean! Pick me!

Bob: (laughs) Aw, look at that one.

Dealer: Ah. He’s very young, not long out of the factory.

Bob: And he’s fully trained?

Dealer: Oh, yeah. And he really wants a job.

After further inquiring how Scoop gets along with other machines, Bob says, “Great! I’ll take him!” The statement suggests ownership of an inanimate or inhuman object, similar to how one might indicate the purchase of a new car from a lot or a puppy from among a litter. The conversation between Bob and the dealer and the scene in which it takes place further suggest that—despite Scoop having a personality and the ability to speak—he is incapable of answering interview-type questions. His status as a machine is reinforced by

the reference to his actual manufacturing and semiotically by his position in a line of identical machines. Yet, it is suggested that Scoop did not initially know how to function as a machine; instead, he was trained. This strange combination of details regarding Bob's acquisition of his humanized machines in building the 'structure/nature of the organization' becomes even more confused by the narratives of the other machines.

When the workload becomes too much for Bob and Scoop to handle alone, he calls in Muck (literally, Bob places a phone call to an unnamed source and Muck arrives at the job site where introductions are made). When Bob realizes he alone is ill-equipped to produce enough concrete for a foundation, Muck references her friend Dizzy to Bob. Lofty the crane is recruited to the team once Muck and Scoop realized they cannot lift things. The road roller, aptly named Roley, has yet another type of back story:

Roley: Me? Oh, that's easy. A friend told me there was a job vacancy.

The "friend" Roley speaks of is a bird who had witnessed Bob and the crew struggling to smooth the wet cement for a house's foundation. Roley appears to offer his assistance, performs the needed task, and Bob then asks him to join the team. At this point in the narrative, Bob proclaims, "Now I have machines that can do everything!" The machines name off their respective skills, and the scene flashes forward to the present:

Roley: So that's how we all got together.

Scrambler: Awesome! And Bob won me in the Sunflower Valley competition!

Benny: And Bob's dad hired me to help out, too!

Collectively, the narratives suggest 'structure/nature of the organization' through both the formation of a team and the acquisition of machines necessary for Bob's business to carry out its tasks. Thus, while each machine's narrative implies an 'occupation/al identity' of

an employee, the overall narrative suggests that each humanized machine is the property—obtained through various means—of a successful entrepreneur.

Yet, the back story of the organization is not entirely complete. The final piece revealed in the episode explains how Wendy, Bob's only human employee, joined the team. The ever-curious Benny presses Wendy for her narrative. The flash back scene reveals the extremely busy office of Bob's Building Yard. Indicative of 'incompetence/doubt/concern,' Bob is frantically trying to assist Farmer Pickles, answer phone lines and write in an appointment with a pen that doesn't work. Wendy enters and observes for a moment before answering a line and recording a job in the appointment book. Things settle down for a moment and a conversation results in Wendy being hired on the spot. This conversation—for its implications on gender in the workplace—is explored in more detail in Chapter Four. For the meantime, its importance is highlighting the reinforcement of Bob as the head of the organization.

Wendy volunteers herself for the much-needed position assisting Bob, to which he exclaims, "You, Wendy? But you're not a builder!" Wendy is occupationally unidentified, but asserts that she has developed an interest in building—through watching Bob and his father build—and has been taking evening classes to learn the associated skills. Even after she is hired, Wendy does not gain the label of "builder." Bob the Builder remains at the head of the organization, and continues to possess the skills and occupational identity beyond what Wendy is capable of. The narratives in "When Bob Became a Builder" (2006) provide the back story of how Bob's Building Yard has come to be. Note: no attention is given to the organization as it stood prior to the summer Bob became a builder, nor is any attention paid to how the organization operated when it

consisted solely of Robert and Bob. The organizational team—Wendy and the machines—is acquired only after Bob’s father retires and leaves the business entirely to him.

The themes of ‘occupation/al identity,’ ‘work instruction/definition/description,’ ‘structure/nature of the organization’ and ‘incompetence/doubt/concern’ reveal Western influences on the cultural values of *Bob the Builder*. Particularly, the machines embody characteristics of the modern industrial worker while Bob (re)presents the ideal Western advanced capitalist worker, answering the first research question. Themes of ‘occupation/al identity,’ ‘structure/nature of the organization,’ ‘work instruction/definition/description,’ and ‘incompetence/concern/doubt’ provide evidence that the values of the postmodern, postindustrial worker—flexibility, integration, successful management, and entrepreneurship—are held above others. The values of Bob’s organization—efficiency, teamwork, and growth—allow him to optimally integrate his knowledge and skills as the entrepreneurial leader.

Extended Analysis

To expand on the support of *Bob the Builder* as a Western text representative of Western cultural values—and to further position it in the contemporary context and its discourses—this portion of the chapter extends the analysis as it aligns with the six trends in work-related discourses provided by Cheney et al. (2008). Specifically, the CDA themes and semiotic analysis will be used to explore how the show reproduces and responds to contemporary issues surrounding the organization, particularly those identified by Cheney et al. (2008): productivity and economic growth, the Simplicity Movement, changing organizational forms, the glorification of organizational change,

changes in work hours and intensity, and increased use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). The first two trends will further address the first research question regarding what cultural values are (re)presented in *Bob the Builder* by incorporating additional examples of work-related CDA themes. Specifically, the discussion of productivity and economic growth in *Bob the Builder* will advance the show's position as a Western capitalist artifact by engaging themes of 'occupation/al identity,' 'work instruction/definition/description,' 'structure/nature of the organization,' and 'money/compensation' (and its lack). Exploring the Simplicity Movement through the absence of the 'money/compensation' theme supports the notion that *Bob the Builder* ignores the potential negatives of postindustrialism by elevating work as a means to responsible living.

The four remaining discourse trends add to the understanding of what values of workers and organization are constructed in *Bob the Builder*—the concern of the second research question. Changing organizational forms means the restructuring of the organization in favor of horizontal integration and branding of the individual, as illustrated by 'structure/nature of the organization' and 'occupation/al identity' themes in the show. The next trend, glorification of organizational change, is evidenced primarily by 'occupation/al identity' and to a lesser extent the themes of 'work instruction/definition/description' and 'customer satisfaction' to show how Bob is the highly valued worker and romanticized hero of the organization. Themes of 'work instruction/definition/description,' 'time,' 'leisure/play,' and 'incompetence/doubt/concern' set up the discussion of Cheney et al.'s (2008) fifth trend—changes in work hours and intensity. Finally, the discussion of increased use of

communication and information technologies holds implications for organizational values by examining ‘occupation/al identity,’ ‘work instruction/definition/description,’ ‘time,’ ‘structure/nature of the organization,’ and ‘incompetence/doubt/concern. In identifying these real-world discursive trends in *Bob the Builder*, this section further supports the Western frame—connecting the discourses in the show with those in the contemporary work context—and illustrates how messages about the worker and the organization are portrayed.

Productivity and Economic Growth in *Bob the Builder*

Productivity has been a predominant economic concern of both the modern, industrial and postmodern, post-industrial epochs. The assumption was that maximum production would lead to desirable outcomes—decreased poverty and increased material goods, for example (Cheney et al., 2008). As Cheney et al. (2008) contend, the failed outcomes of economic growth discourses have led to a recent backlash; Promises of social equality and increased leisure have remained unfulfilled, and the increased material goods have failed to satisfy (p. 153). According to the authors, “work has meant and still means a path to the ‘good life’ of wealth and material consumption” (p. 153) despite the recent research and lived experiences which have brought this association into question. At the heart of this issue—and the others discussed—is the meaning of work.

Bob the Builder holds production as a primary concern and the central aim of Bob’s organization and is manifested through the services it provides. The service sector is ever-increasing as a result of the post-industrial shift, according to Casey (1995). While the services provided by Bob and his Can-Do Crew are not “paid for” in the traditional sense (‘money/compensation’ for services is rare), they are distinct from acts of charity

and are clearly marked as ‘work instruction/definition/description.’ For example, in “Magnetic Lofty” (2000), a new park is erected where there was previously a dump, and abandoned railroad tracks are made into a bicycle path. The projects—despite their evident lack of ‘money/compensation’ as evidenced by Table 2.1—are distinctly referred to as work:

Bob: Ok, team, it’s going to be a very busy day today.

Wendy: Yes, but we are doing two jobs to make the town a nicer place to live in.

The ‘work instruction/definition/description’ always provides a service to a member of the community or to the community itself, suggesting the ‘structure/nature of the organization’ works in the interest of community growth as well as organizational growth. The end product of their work is always something tangible—read observable—for the crew and the young audience. Thus, while no means of payment is ever discussed or exchanged in the show, the team continues to work in the interest of producing results. At the same time, the show idealizes economic growth—for the organization and the community—by depicting a perfect, egalitarian society void of corporate competition. Instead, the characters in the show and the community as a whole appear to grow together, assuming economic growth as a natural, unspoken occurrence—again, a narrative of mythic memories and nostalgia put forth by corporate capitalism in response to the anxieties of post-industrialism (Casey, 1995).

Another example illustrative of the ‘structure/nature of the organization’ and its emphasis on production and natural economic growth can be found in “Wendy’s Big Night Out” (2003). The team designs and builds a new restaurant for Mr. Sabatini, who

also owns a pizza parlor (“Trix’s Pumpkin Pie,” 2004). On the opening night, Wendy, the guest of honor, delivers a toast:

Wendy: Ladies, Gentlemen, Bob and the team, it’s a great pleasure to be here at the opening of Mr. Sabatini’s beautiful new restaurant, where I know we’ll be served the very best food in town.

While Wendy is responsible for the designs—and the team for the resurrection of the new restaurant—Mr. Sabatini is acknowledged for opening a new business that is both aesthetically pleasing for the community and a source of quality products. His organizational growth is a gain for the community. Further, it appears to be unthreatened by competition as no other restaurateurs are mentioned in the sample analyzed. In fact, Mr. Sabatini’s own pizza parlor seems to be his only competition.

An intriguing exception to this pattern can be found in “Molly’s Fashion Show” (2003). In this episode, Molly enlists Bob and the crew to build a catwalk for a charity fashion show to raise ‘money/compensation’ for the town art center. The charity event comes to fruition in the following dialogue:

Pam: . . . I need some yellow paint to brighten up my office in the art center. It’s all looking a little bit drab.

JJ: Why is that? An art center’s supposed to be fun, isn’t it?

Pam: Well, it would be if we had the money to finish the building work.

JJ: We should find a way to raise some money. I know! How about a garage sale?

Pam: I like it, JJ! But we need to think bigger—something to get the whole town excited.

Molly: Why don’t you have a fashion show? That’s what I’m taking at college.

A few things are at work in this dialogue; first, Pam—an art center employee—takes it upon herself to brighten up her own work space in light of a clearly stated problem: the lack of funds to complete building of the art center. The stated problem has potential to negatively impact the community and suggests that 1) someone has been paid to build the art center, and 2) the functionality—read productivity—of the art center has suffered because of monetary shortfalls. The ‘structure/nature of the organization’ theme in this dialogue suggests the organization (art center) is in danger. JJ and Molly, members of the community, immediately brainstorm ways to raise ‘money/compensation.’ Pam reaffirms unified economic growth by proposing a large scale solution to involve the entire community, perhaps as a means to lift the fallen art center back into egalitarianism. Obvious questions arise and go unanswered regarding who—if not Bob and the team—was hired to build the art center? And why Bob and the team do not take on the work of finishing the building? Perhaps these questions were never considered by the writers. Regardless, the plot concludes with all the tickets sold as the community unites in what Pam deems a “mega success” to raise enough ‘money/compensation’ to finish the art center.

In this episode, the team’s product assists in a community effort to quickly and painlessly solve a problem of economic stasis. Despite the obstacle, the economic growth and production expected of capitalism are again normalized by the end of the ten-minute show. While discourses of productivity and economic growth have come under fire recently, they remain intact and even fully realized in *Bob the Builder*. Thus, the answer to the first research question can be expanded to suggest the show not only (re)presents Western cultural values, it represents them in their ideal and unfulfilled forms. The

equally idealized organizational form in the show also reflects discourses of the current shifts in Western organizational structure. The discussion will now turn to the discourses of the Simplicity Movement—the second trend in Cheney et al.’s (2008) public work discourses which speaks to the first research question.

The Simplicity Movement

In some ways answering the emerging postmodern trends, groups of people have begun to rethink materialism in a move toward a simpler life, identifying work as a potentially strong obstacle (Cheney et al., 2008). As Cheney et al. (2008) explain, “the simplicity movement also involves redirecting consumerist impulses and discovering choices that allow individuals to use their money in more individually, socially, and environmentally responsible ways” (p. 158). A show explicitly engaged in work, such as *Bob the Builder*, would not suggest work to be an impediment to any sort of good living. Instead, Bob and his Can-Do Crew shift to more responsible *work* practices. Jenkins (2008a) states, “Project: Build It’s catchphrase, ‘Reduce, Re-use, Recycle,’ summed up Bob’s new direction as he became more green and concerned with the environment” (p. 4). The phrase “Reduce, Re-use, Recycle” appears in more than one episode in the sample: “Benny’s Back,” (2005); “When Bob Became a Builder,” (2006); “Two Scoops,” (2005). It is likely that after the launch of Project: Build It, the environmentally conscious phrase appears in most if not all episodes.

Actual consumerist impulses are slim to none in *Bob the Builder*. In not addressing these impulses at all, the show has no need to redirect them. Instead, Bobsville and the lives of the people in it already live a simple existence. Because ‘money/compensation’ is rarely a visible factor in *Bob’s* world (appearing less than once

per episode on average), the redirecting has to occur in work. The tasks Bob and his crew complete are socially and environmentally responsible, suggesting that work is *not* an obstacle, but a means through which to live more responsibly. This supports statements above that *Bob the Builder* not only (re)presents Western cultural values, but that it presents a complex culmination of the ideal end that proponents and opponents of advanced corporate capitalism each hope for. Simple living is obtained without turning its back on the economic growth and production so central to capitalism. The next four trends will address research question two: What values of workers and organization are constructed in *Bob the Builder*?

Changing Organizational Forms, Changing Employees

As Cheney et al. (2008) point out, traditional organizations have sought maximum profit by increasing size and vertical integration. This form was associated with employer loyalty and the potential for an individual to move up in rank within the same company. Since the 1980s, however, new discourses have emerged to position the successful organizational form as “leaner, flatter, disaggregated, and networked,” a state achieved through the outsourcing of non-core competencies, downsizing, and replacing permanent workers with contingent ones (Cheney et al., 2008, p. 153). This means fewer workers, fewer opportunities for advancement within a company, and a forced satisfaction with ones current job.

The ‘structure/nature of the organization’ in *Bob* arguably embodies more so this new form of organization in terms of its strategies for increased growth. More specifically, Bob’s Building Yard appears to hold a monopoly over building (the unnamed builder of the art center mentioned above being the only exception in all the

data) through a horizontally integrated company. This is perhaps best illustrated by an excerpt from Jenkin's (2008a) article, which also explains the organization's evolution and the launch of "Project: Build it!" within the show:

In 2005, Bob's life changed significantly with the news that his old childhood haunt of Sunflower Valley was being offered for development to whomever came up with the best plan. In a special episode, Bob and his gang designed a new eco-friendly town, and, when the plan won, Bob moved out of Bobsville and into Sunflower Valley to launch Project: Build it. He and his team then started to build the new eco-friendly town from the ground up. (p. 4)

Upon moving to Sunflower Valley, Bob seemingly coerces his father Robert out of retirement to take over the office in Bobsville ("Benny's Back," 2005; "Two Scoops," 2005). Thus, as Bob expands his building services to Sunflower Valley, his office in Bobsville continues to serve that community as well. While the special episode involving the actual move to Sunflower Valley and Robert's return to the organization is not included in the data, "Two Scoops" (2005) and "Benny's Back" (2005) take place relatively soon after the transition and pick up with Robert having assumed his position in the Bobsville office as Bob and the team construct the new Sunflower Valley building yard.

The presence of 'structure/nature of the organization' themes in these episodes reflects the new discourses described by Cheney et al (2008). Specifically, the horizontal integration of Bob's business provides a plethora of services at the stage of building—services which have now expanded to another market. This can also be illustrated in the narratives of "When Bob Became a Builder" (2006), as the expansion of Bob's organization (i.e., the acquisition of new machines) is driven by the need to perform multiple building tasks. The reason Bob's Building Yard is not vertically integrated is because he does not manufacture the building materials themselves. Instead, he relies on

other companies—the more predominant and only named supplier is JJ—to supply the materials he needs for building (“Bob’s Big Surprise,” 2001; “Bob’s Metal Detector,” 2002; “Dizzy’s Statues,” 1999; “Pilchard and the Field Mice,” 2004; “Trix’s Pumpkin Pie,” 2004; “Wendy’s Big Night Out,” 2003).

Another feature of the new form discourses is the forced occupational stasis of employees. Drawing again on their very visible occupational identities, the machines are content with their positions in the company and do not foresee promotion to a higher, more meaningful position. Interestingly, there is no data in this example to suggest that Wendy was ever offered the promotion to manage the Bobsville office. In “Two Scoops” (2005), Bob and Wendy share a curious exchange regarding ‘structure/nature of the organization’ without any context:

Wendy: You know, I’m really happy that we’re working together again.

Bob: Me too, Wendy. We certainly missed you. Two pairs of hands can get things done much better than one.

Without a context or elaboration in the data, any scenario could be speculated from this exchange. Whether Wendy temporarily left the organization, found running the Bobsville office undesirable, failed at it, or simply went on vacation, the end result is the same; Wendy is needed but does not come out with the promotion. Instead, Robert is brought out of retirement to resume his position as head of what is now the Bobsville branch of the growing organization.

The flattened organization lends toward a less drastic hierarchy to support occupational stasis. Cheney et al. (2008) examine the changing employee in light of these changing organizational forms. Branding the individual is one way discourses frame the

adaptation to occupational uncertainty. Drawing from du Gay, the authors suggest the worker is cast as an entrepreneur who must project a branded self-image—a move away from the Protestant occupational calling within and toward service to humanity (as cited in Cheney et al., 2008). *Bob the Builder* attempts to reconcile the uncertainty in these shifts by presenting the characters as branded employees necessarily placed in their occupational callings (recall the divine lighting in the moment of Bob’s received calling), providing services to humanity in an organization to which they can still be loyal.

Again, the machines’ occupational identities are inherent to their physical appearances and characteristics. Their individual personalities, however, are also suggestive of a branding of the self. Scoop, for instance, is Bob’s first machine and is the most frequent initiator of the team’s motivational phrase, “Can we fix it?” On the official website, Scoop the Digger is described in three distinct ways:

Loves to dig holes and move dirt.

Is always up for a challenge and is always ready to take the lead on projects

Admires Bob and is the unspoken leader of Bob’s Can-Do Crew (“Meet Scoop,” 2010)

The first “fun fact” about Scoop describes his ‘occupation/al identity’ as a digger; being a digger, this is what Scoop *does*. The second line brands Scoop as a self-motivated worker who is also eager to lead and challenge himself. Despite this branding of image—which sounds a lot like a line from a job resume—the third “fun fact” about Scoop repositions him within the organization and describes his relationship to it. His leadership is unspoken, leaving Scoop no official title or claim to a hierarchal position, though he does at times direct the worksite (“Lofty to the Rescue,” 2001). While placed below Bob and

among the other machines, Scoop retains a distinct admiration for and loyalty to him and the organization without expressing a desire to ever *replace* or *surpass* Bob in the hierarchy. In “Two Scoops” (2005), Bob further articulates Scoop’s branded ‘occupation/al identity,’ “Good old Scoop! He takes his job very seriously, and he definitely doesn’t like missing out.”

Each of the machines is given a list of “fun facts” on the official website. Lofty is another unique example of branding the self, though in a relatively less desirable way. The site provides these “fun facts” regarding Lofty the Crane:

Tall mobile crane with three favorite tools: a grabber, an electro-magnet, and a demolition ball.

Timid at first, but always rises to the occasion and holds up his end of the job.

Fears heights, mice, loud noises and Spud the Scarecrow. (“Meet Lofty,” 2010)

As with Scoop, the first fact describes Lofty’s ‘occupation/al identity’ in the form of tasks he performs. The second fact brands Lofty as a perhaps cautious, quiet individual who is reliable despite his hesitance. This personality description comes across as far more passive than Scoop’s motivated, active one. The site further polarizes the two by highlighting Lofty’s fears as the third “fun fact” rather than positioning him within the organization or even the team. Further depicting Lofty’s branded self as undesirable, the show presents this same dialogic sequence of ‘congratulations/encouragement’ and ‘incompetence/doubt/concern’ in nearly every episode in the sample:

Scoop: Ok team, can we fix it?

Everyone: Yes we can!

Lofty: Uh, yeah, I think so. (“Bob’s Metal Detector,” 2002).

Lofty's voice is timid and uncertain. Visually, his facial features (eyes and mouth) are sometimes twisted into a look of fear or concern. This repeated contrast in images and branding polarize the two workers, positioning Scoop's go-getter attitude as the more desirable of the two—a message reminiscent of the one repeated in McGuffey's readers. Casey (1995) states, "The attitudes of toughness, competitiveness and aggressiveness . . . and to "get" one's enemies, are valued attributes in many organizations" (p. 84). *Bob the Builder* selectively attends to these desirable traits by choosing to highlight toughness and aggressiveness by reframing them as tackling challenges and taking the lead. The more active, desirable attributes are pronounced in Scoop, the unspoken leader of the machines. While machines cannot reproduce the entrepreneurial spirit of the new worker, they can still possess the desired attributes of a valued worker. Bob's entrepreneurial and romanticized spirit as a worker will be the next topic of discussion.

The Glorification of Organizational Change

The discourses around the organizational shift from stability to change and adaptability have forced the trends mentioned above. In lieu of this shift, managers and workers are increasingly "encouraged by the dominant discourses of organizational change to see their work as romantic, heroic quests to achieve corporate 'excellence'" (Cheney et al., 2008, p. 155). Through these discourses, the managers are frequently cast as heroes, and their work has potential to be viewed as meaningful (Cheney et al., 2008). Bob, as manager of the primarily mechanical Can-Do Crew, is undoubtedly the hero of the *Bob the Builder* narrative. The meaning Bob finds in his work is apparent in the narrative of his becoming a builder over the summer working alongside and following in his father's footsteps ("When Bob Became a Builder," 2006). The meaningfulness and

enjoyment he derives from his ‘occupation/al identity’ is advanced through ‘work instruction/definition/description’ in the same episode while discussing a project:

Wendy: Have you had any ideas for the children’s play area yet?

Bob: No, I’m still thinking. I want it to be something really special so the kids will always remember their picnic at the beach.

Bob enjoys creative freedom in his occupation through the production of ideas. Further, he finds meaning in the material products of his work in what they can provide for others. The dialogue romanticizes the work, the site itself, and Bob—components that will together provide children with special memories in the future. A more general statement of Bob’s meaningful ‘occupation/al identity’ is also found later in the episode as Bob proclaims:

Ah! This is the life! What could be better than being outside building!

This time, Bob equates an ideal life to being outdoors in the act of building. The romanticizing of his occupation is blatant.

The scope of jobs he performs for the members of the community has already been touched on. His integrated knowledge and skills allow him to fill multiple positions and perform an array of tasks not necessarily defined as building. Bob and his trusty team are who the community turns to in times of need, whether those needs be a new shelf (“Bob’s Three Jobs,” 2006) or a camp site (“Dizzy Goes Camping,” 2003). The theme of ‘customer satisfaction’ is always expressed at the completion of a job well done. Yet, the most obvious indication of Bob as being a kind of hero for others is the community’s name—Bobsville. No data in the sample reveals how this name came about, nor does the official website provide that background information. Bob is the title character; this limits

any other interpretation than the community is named after him. His calling is to be a builder—an occupation he finds meaning, enjoyment, and identity in. Undoubtedly, these qualities are presented as valuable in a worker. Beyond the meaning of work, the conditions of work for Bob and his crew also deserve attention.

Changes in Work Hours and Intensity

Work in *Bob the Builder* is romanticized for those who perform it. Though these “heroic quests” for corporate success (Cheney et al., 2008, p. 155) are present in the show, the concepts of efficiency and time management are not lost on Bob and the Can-Do Crew. Messages about time at work appear frequently in the sample. Cheney et al. (2008) mention two perspectives on the pattern of average work hours. The first is that the decline leveled off decades ago, but the mean has been sustained by a growing divide between the overworked and the underworked. The second suggests that work weeks in the United States, in particular, have actually increased. The authors note various research attempts to understand the potential impacts longer hours can have on the employees’ lives and personalities.

“Overtime” is not a term mentioned in *Bob the Builder*. Instead, the team works until the job is done without a specified “normal” length of work day or set number of hours. In “Molly’s Fashion Show” (2003), Wendy tells Molly she’s in luck because they “have a quiet day” at the yard and are able to take on the catwalk project. In contrast, a busy day for the crew is often framed by ‘work instruction/definition/description’—the amount of work (intensity)—and ‘time’—the desire to get it done quickly (work hours). The agenda for the day is often discussed in a calm, direct fashion. The following dialogue sets up the day’s work in “Bob’s Metal Detector” (2002):

Muck: What's this stuff for, Bob?

Bob: Well Muck, today you, Lofty and I are going to repair an underground water pipe over at Farmer Pickles'.

Scoop: What about the rest of us, Bob?

Wendy: Well Scoop, you're going to help me build a car wash over at the garage, and Lofty's going to come and help us when Bob's finished.

The tasks for the day and the time frame (today) are clearly outlined. Further, the dialogue suggests that Bob's job will take less time than Wendy's, and that Lofty will be required at both sites. Later in the same episode, Bob finishes the underground repair and decides to go treasure hunting in Farmer Pickles' field. Lofty goes to assist Wendy with the car wash, but Bob does not. Upon completion of his job for the day, it seems that Bob's work is over, at least until more work comes up. In "Bob's Three Jobs" (2006), 'work instruction/definition/description' and 'time' set the day's agenda which appears straightforward and is presented in contrast to 'leisure/play':

Robert: . . . I'm looking forward to spending the day with Bobby.

Bob: I just have three quick little jobs to do first.

The jobs Bob anticipates to be quick and small each turn out to be large and time consuming, extending his work day after dark. Work supersedes his other plans, and the day cannot end until all of his tasks have been completed to the satisfaction of his customers. Again, his extended day is never referred to as overtime; the sole focus is to follow through and get the job(s) done, making Bob's work entirely goal-oriented. As the official website states, "The fun is in getting it done!" ("About Bob," 2010)

Despite the apparent flexibility in work days, there is one episode that stands out because of its clear time constraints and the stress they put on Bob. In “Bob’s Big Surprise” (2001), Bob plans to revamp Wendy’s garden the day she is away on vacation:

Bob: We haven’t got much time, though. We’ll have to start bright and early in the morning.

The end of the day finds Bob in a frantic struggle with ‘time’ and ‘incompetence/doubt/concern’ trying to manage the mess Pilchard the cat has made in the office and get back to finish the garden before she arrives home:

Bob: . . . It’s no good looking all innocent, Pilchard. When Wendy sees this we’ll both be in trouble! How am I supposed to fix this? Oh! Too late, it’s six o’clock! Wendy will be back soon!

And upon returning to the worksite:

Bob: Come on, everybody! We’ve got to get a move on!

Scoop: Well we’re all done, Bob. There’s just the pergola to finish off and the flowers to plant.

Bob: Don’t panic! I’m on the case! Scoop, you better go and meet Wendy! Go on!

A specific time constraint—the time when Wendy will return—puts Bob in a frenzied state trying to get all his jobs done. Having no one in the office that day to answer the phones and place orders, Bob is strained by too many tasks. Although the team finishes Wendy’s garden just as she has returned, the tasks of the office are incomplete and chaotic. Thus, while intensity of work can be managed by the team—even despite occasional snags—the message to the individual is to avoid taking on too much at once. Bob learns this lesson in the previous example, but Trix (in “Trix’s Pumpkin Pie,” 2004),

Scoop (in “Two Scoops,” 2005), and Wendy (in “Wendy’s Big Night Out,” 2003) each fall victim to taking on more than they can handle. In a sense, the show lays out an expectation for intensity in the workplace, but warns the individual against bearing too much of it at once. The team can take on quite a bit of work in any given day. The key is not quitting until the job is done. Thus, teamwork and determination are valued in both the worker and the organization, as is a goal-oriented approach to work (versus time-oriented). Another pattern in new work discourses—and a means to reduce some of work’s intensity—is the increased use of informational and communication technologies (ICTs).

Increased Use of Communication and Information Technologies

Cheney et al. (2008) identify four ways ICTs can impact the worker: through 1) substitution, 2) complementation, 3) debilitation, and 4) elevation. Generally speaking, the use of ICTs can create more meaningful work for people if they elevate or compliment the worker versus being debilitative. Obviously, substituting the worker with ICTs results in the relocation or absence of the worker (Cheney et al., 2008). Technology complements the team as a whole as the use of “talkie-talkies” (in “Two Scoops,” 2005; “Benny’s Back,” 2005) allows instant communication between the crew regardless of geographical location—an important element of the expansion to Sunflower Valley. Even before the “talkie-talkies” Bob and Wendy maintain cellular communication (in “Lofty to the Rescue,” 2001; “Wendy’s Big Night Out,” 2003; “Scoop’s Stegosaurus,” 2001; “Pilchard and the Field Mice,” 2004).

Not all technologies in the show effectively complement the worker, however. In “Bob’s Big Surprise” (2001), Wendy has left on vacation and her office substitute for the

day, Mrs. Potts, has called in sick. Bob resolves to take on the worksite and the office tasks on his own—an unadvisable act—and relies on technology in the office to assist him. His first return to the office finds the phone on the floor with a confused customer on the other line. The attempted playback of messages on the answering machine is incoherent, offering themes of ‘incompetence/doubt/concern,’ ‘time,’ and ‘work instruction/definition/description.’

Bob: Oh! Why do I always have trouble with this answering machine? Where’s that instruction book? Oh, never mind. I’ll take care of it later. I must send this fax to the garden center.

The answering machine fails to substitute what a human worker in the office would provide. Additionally, the visibly outdated technology fails at its only task—to take messages. In this respect, the technology also fails to complement Bob as he attempts to manage two work areas. As the ‘time,’ ‘occupation/al identity’ and ‘incompetence/doubt/concern’ themes illustrate, Wendy was brought into the organization specifically to assist in building, paperwork, and the organization of the office (“When Bob Became a Builder,” 2006):

Farmer Pickles: (laughs) I think you need help, Bob.

Bob: I know! The phone never stops ringing, I can’t keep up with the paperwork, and I keep being late for jobs! I just can’t do all this work on my own anymore.

Where am I ever going to find a builder who’s very organized and doesn’t mind doing paperwork? There’s no such thing!

Wendy: Huh-em. Um, what about me, Bob?

There are other implications to be drawn from this dialogue, but for now the focus lies on the need of someone to perform very specific tasks in the building yard office. In her absence, Bob does not know how to manage this area in addition to his own responsibilities, and he also does not have the satisfactory technology to replace Wendy. As the former example illustrates a failure of technology, it does not rule out the usefulness of technology altogether. Instead, it suggests outdated technology has the potential to fail and that, perhaps, some occupations in the service industry—such as Wendy’s—cannot be substituted by machines. Thus, the organization in *Bob the Builder* values technologies which complement the postmodern worker and the process of organizational growth.

Summary

Speaking to research question one, *Bob the Builder* shows strong evidence of Western cultural values, (re)presenting fragments of work’s Western evolution from modern industrial to postmodern postindustrial as presented by Casey (1995) and Ciulla (2000). Bob is revered as the organizational—and community—hero, the ideal postmodern, postindustrial worker able to integrate his varied knowledge through the management of his anthropomorphic—contrastingly modern—crew. Themes of ‘occupation/al identity’ (for the machines, Bob, and Wendy), ‘incompetence/doubt/concern,’ ‘structure/nature of the organization,’ and ‘work instruction/definition/description’ support this conclusion. The extended analysis further contextualizes *Bob* within the Western advanced capitalist world by showing how the show integrates the contemporary Western trends in work discourse identified by Cheney et al. (2008). Work-related CDA themes of ‘occupation/al identity,’ ‘work

instruction/definition/description,’ ‘structure/nature of the organization,’ and ‘money/compensation’ (and its lack) highlight the trends of production and economic growth and the Simplicity Movement. Production and economic growth and not only valued but taken for granted in the egalitarian society of Bobsville, depicting an ideal (and yet to be obtained) advanced corporate capitalist existence. The show downplays the consumption aspect of capitalism by almost completely removing the idea of monetary compensation, but it keeps (responsible) work at the center. By accepting simple living but rejecting the problematic role of work in reaching that end, the show continues to romanticize work, reifying the possibility of meaning and enjoyment in work. The end result is a show that does not explicitly critique, reject or solicit consumption. It does, however, promote the mythical narrative of corporate capitalism realized: a place without poverty or a shortage of production, void of social ills, where workers can live “the life” and enjoy meaningful, stable work.

Speaking to research question two, very specific qualities and practices of the worker and organization are valued in *Bob the Builder*. Bob is the ideal postmodern, post-industrial worker—a position contrasted by the modern machines and their less desirable characteristics. His skills and knowledge are integrated and he manages his machines as they seamlessly compliment the production and economic growth of his organization, answering the question of *what* values of the worker are (re)presented. Bob is valued as the ideal worker through his flexibility, integrated skills, management ability and entrepreneurship. The values of organization hold the expectation of organizational expansion—evidenced by Bob’s accumulation of humanized machines and the expansion of the organization into a second market, Sunflower Valley. Teamwork and efficiency are

also highlighted by the task specialization of each machine on the crew, as they provide the necessary compliments to Bob's integration of knowledge and skills in building. Themes of 'occupation/al identity,' 'structure/nature of the organization,' 'incompetence/doubt/concern,' 'work instruction/definition/description' and 'leisure/play' support the pronounced exaltation of these values of worker and organization. To push further the definition of these values, the extended application of Cheney et al.'s (2008) four remaining trends reveals a horizontally integrated organization (changing form) that necessarily restricts the dehumanized workers' upward mobility, evidenced by 'structure/nature of the organization' and 'occupation/al identity' themes. Postmodern changes in the organization are glorified by positioning Bob as the hero of both the organization and the community, as shown in themes of 'occupation/al identity,' 'work instruction/definition/description' and 'customer satisfaction.' Themes of 'time,' 'work instruction/definition/description,' 'incompetence/doubt/concern' and 'leisure/play' suggest work intensity and time at work are task-oriented in the show, meaning some jobs are harder than others and the work day can only end when jobs are finished. Finally, the increased use of communication and information technologies provide insight on how the organization utilizes communication technology for production and economic growth, drawing from 'structure/nature of the organization,' 'occupation/al identity,' 'time,' 'work instruction/definition/description' and 'incompetence/doubt/concern.'

Bob finds meaning and enjoyment in the work he does through his organization, assisted by Wendy and his team of anthropomorphic machines. Ideal to the evolution of postmodern work, Bob has created an organization that fully possesses the souls of its

dehumanized workers/humanized machines—presuming they have them. It is now necessary to turn beyond the discourses of the worker and the organization to locate what the show communicates to children about non-work activities—more typical of children’s television. The next chapter will address the third research question: How are concepts of leisure, play and family constructed in *Bob the Builder*?

CHAPTER III: Leisure, Play and Family in *Bob the Builder*

“The reason why leisure is important for everyone is that life would be barren if we could not spend time doing things just simply because we enjoyed them or found them rewarding” (Ciulla, 2000, p. 205). The intrinsic rewards Ciulla speaks of are supported by John Kelly’s (1996) definition of leisure as “the quality of activity defined by relative freedom and intrinsic satisfaction,” a summation of obligation-free or discretionary time, a meaningful or specific form of activity, and the attitude toward or state of being drawn from an experience (p. 22). The key elements to leisure—as put forth—are that the individual expresses choice free of external obligation to engage in some form of activity which will provide intrinsic rewards. According to Kelly (1996), the difference between work and leisure is that work has a predetermined product or outcome where leisure does not. Despite the lack of a predetermined outcome, leisure most often demands learning, reflection, or the development of a skill (Ciulla, 2000). Children are not typically considered to participate in leisure activities; play is often considered the children’s version of leisure (Kelly, 1996). However, the two are not interchangeable. Kelly identifies three elements of play:

1. *Play generally refers to the activity of children or to a “childlike” lightness of behavior in adults.*
2. *Play is expressive and intrinsic in motivation.*

3. *Play involves a nonserious suspension of consequences, a temporary creation of its own world of meaning, which often is a shadow of the “real world.”* (p. 28)

Thus, while play shares the characteristics of leisure, it also involves the creation of its own world of meaning, wherein the child finds satisfaction in doing and intrinsic meaning within its playful context. Play represents or imitates real life where leisure enhances it (Kelly, 1996).

The distinction between play and leisure is important, especially in analyzing non-work related messages in *Bob the Builder*. One might expect play to be a popular and frequent theme in children’s programming. The unique situation of *Bob the Builder* as a show explicitly engaging work as its central theme suggests that play will have an equally unique role. Indeed, because Bob is an adult who works, he should be expected to engage in leisure activities rather than play, as should Wendy and the other adults on the program. An examination of data offers valuable insight into how Bob and the other characters find intrinsic value in their activities in and outside of work. Non-work related CDA themes of ‘charity,’ ‘leisure/play’ and ‘family’ illustrate how activities outside work are treated in *Bob the Builder*, particularly when set against work themes of ‘occupation/al identity,’ ‘time,’ ‘structure/nature of the organization,’ ‘incompetence/doubt/concern,’ ‘work instruction/definition/description,’ and ‘congratulations/encouragement.’ While the theme of ‘friendship’ contributes minimally to the following analysis, its importance will be discussed at the end of the chapter. Table 3.1 provides examples and frequencies of the non-work related themes referenced in this chapter.

Table 3.1: Non-work Related Themes and Frequencies

Non-work Related Themes	Leisure/Play	Family	Friendship	Charity
Examples	<i>"Why don't you sing Dizzy a song, Roley?" "We could have a camping vacation!"</i>	<i>"Thanks, dad!" "I'm really proud of you, son."</i>	<i>"Are we still friends?" "And we've been best friends ever since."</i>	<i>"And that one is for a surprise." "Can I ask you a special favor please?"</i>
Total # of Instances	159	40	11	19
# of Episodes w/ Theme	19	8	5	13
Average # per Episode	7.95	2	0.55	0.95

This chapter will begin by discussing the leisure activities Bob engages in outside of work. The following section of the chapter will focus on Wendy’s non-work activities, comparing hers with Bob’s. These two sections will draw on themes of ‘leisure/play,’ ‘charity,’ ‘occupation/al identity,’ ‘time,’ ‘work instruction/definition/description,’ ‘incompetence/doubt/concern,’ ‘family’ and ‘congratulations/encouragement’ to discuss the concept of leisure in *Bob the Builder*. Play will be the next topic of the chapter, as the machines’ activities will be considered and compared to those of Spud the Scarecrow. This discussion will also pull from ‘leisure/play,’ ‘friendship,’ ‘occupation/al identity,’ ‘time,’ ‘work instruction/definition/description,’ and ‘incompetence/doubt/concern’ themes. Finally, messages about family will draw on themes of ‘family,’ ‘time,’ ‘occupation/al identity’ ‘structure/nature of the organization,’ ‘incompetence/doubt/concern,’ and ‘work instruction/definition/description,’ to conclude the chapter on non-work related discourses and answer the third research question.

RQ 3: How are concepts of leisure, play and family constructed in *Bob the Builder*?

Bob Outside of Building

Bob's identity is very neatly and obtrusively tied to his occupation as a builder. Three episodes in the sample, however, show Bob engaging in activities outside of work and building for a substantial amount of time. These episodes focus on Bob's 'time' outside of work as part of the plot versus as part of a story's conclusion (i.e., when a group gathers at Farmer Pickles' harvest supper in the final scene of "Trix's Pumpkin Pie," (2004). In "Bob the Photographer" (2003), Bob takes the day off to photograph nature scenes for a competition that evening at the school. "Bob's Metal Detector" (2002) finds Bob and Muck in search of treasure. Finally, "Bob's Three Jobs" (2006) focuses on Bob's attempt to spend the afternoon bird watching with his father, Robert. Each of these episodes will be discussed in their treatment of leisure.

In the first episode, "Bob the Photographer" (2003), Bob takes a day off from building to photograph animals and nature scenes in Farmer Pickles' fields. He is not in his usual hard hat and work attire, instead wearing an orange shirt with clouds and palm trees, altering 'occupation/al identity.' His unusual appearance and 'leisure/play' itinerary for the day are discussed in the opening scene:

Dizzy: (Giggles) Wow, Bob! You look different today!

Bob: I'm having some time off to take some photographs, Dizzy.

Wendy: Bob's entering a competition at the school hall this evening.

Bob: That's right. I'm going to Farmer Pickles' farm to take some pictures of the country side.

Wendy: Well you better hurry up, Bob. You don't have long.

Having some ‘time’ away from work suggests Bob has the freedom to choose what he will do with his day. Freeing himself from ‘occupation/al identity’ obligations, Bob has decided to spend a day photographing. However, an important element of leisure is missing in this exchange of information; Bob does not state enjoyment of photography, nor does he connect any intrinsic value to it. Instead, Wendy points out that Bob’s goal is to enter photographs he has not yet taken into a competition. According to Kelly (1996), leisure is “activity that is chosen primarily for its own sake” with a focus on “the experience and its outcomes rather than on some external set of aims” (p. 22). This would suggest that Bob’s activity is not leisure, but a form of work with a predetermined product. Bob is not taking photos for the sake of taking photos; he is taking them to enter a competition. Furthermore, his activity is placed in a strict time frame. Bob is not just looking for things to photograph; he must take photographs in time to enter them competitively.

This predetermined goal is restated when Bob arrives on the farm and seeks Farmer Pickles’ ‘charity’ to take photos to enter the photography competition. Bob’s enjoyment of the activity itself, thus, is likely produced by his desire to compete rather than his love of photographs. The serious—rather than pleasant—nature of his ‘leisure/play’ task is further emphasized by how he handles distractions. Spud the Scarecrow, in particular, offers a ‘time’ obstacle for Bob:

Bob: Easy does it. This is going to make a fantastic picture!

Spud: Hi Bob!

Bob: Whoa! You gave me a scare there, Spud.

Spud: That’s a nice camera, Bob. Can I try it please? Can I please?

Bob: Sorry. Not right now, Spud. I'm in a bit of a hurry today.

Spud: Aw, ohhhh. Well, alright.

Bob: I tell you what, you can be my photographer's assistant.

Bob reasserts the importance of time by turning down Spud's request to try it out.

Further, the photography is framed suggestively as a work task when he appoints Spud as his assistant. Bob gives Spud a superficial role in completing his task and denies him the ability to directly enjoy the activity. Shortly after appointing Spud as his assistant, Bob finds he still cannot complete his task when Spud and Scruffty the dog scare away Bob's target and uses 'time' and 'work instruction/definition/description' to rid himself of the distractions:

Spud: I told you to be quiet, Scruffty!

Bob: Uh, Spud, thanks very much for all your help but I just bet Farmer Pickles is missing you. He must have work for you to do.

Spud: But I like being a topographer's assistant, Bob.

Bob: Well, I'm sure you could help me again another time. Bye now, Spud. I've got to go.

Yet again, time is emphasized by Bob's insistence on leaving Spud behind to finish his task. Spud does not understand the seriousness of the task, apparent in his mistaking topography for photography. Rather than allow Spud to join him in a leisure activity, Bob suggests Spud return to work so that he can no longer distract Bob from his.

Moments later, Bob's afternoon is interrupted by a call on his cell phone, and he promptly reaffirms 'occupation/al identity' and answers, "Hello? Bob the Builder." Bob's mindset is on work and he does not separate himself from his occupational title, even

while engaging in a typically leisure activity on his day off. Wendy, on the other end of the call, informs Bob there is an urgent job and he is needed. He accidentally leaves his camera on the farm where Spud finds it and continues to take pictures until the film is gone. At this point, photography does become a leisure activity—for Spud. Spud has no real intention of entering the photos he takes into any kind of contest. Instead, he takes photographs for the sake of taking them.

As a surprise act of ‘charity’ for Bob—and with the knowledge that he gave up entering the competition—Molly has the film in Bob’s camera developed and enters the photos. Bob and other members of the community look over all the photographs and—prior to the winners being announced—Bob does not recognize any of the photos as his. Bob’s photo wins the competition; he protests, at which point Molly and Spud’s surprise is revealed. Bob is then announced as the winner of the most amusing photograph:

Bob: What? This really can’t be mine, I’ve never seen it before!

Spud: Oh. (laughs) Uh, I took that picture. Sorry Bob, I didn’t mean to use your camera without asking. Uh, I won’t do it again!

Bob: That’s alright, Spud. You better go and get your prize!

Spud: Me? A prize? I’ve never won a prize before, not never ever!

Spud claims ‘leisure/play’ activity which brings him external rewards in ‘congratulations/encouragement,’ but he did not seek them in taking the pictures. Instead, Spud drew meaning from and found enjoyment in the activity itself. Bob does not recognize the product of his work until it is identified by someone else. The episode might suggest that Bob took a day off to enjoy a leisure activity, but the framing of the activity suggests he merely took a day off from his occupation to complete another type

of work specifically for external rewards. The second episode to be discussed reframes leisure in a different way.

Bob and Muck decide to hunt for treasure in “Bob’s Metal Detector” (2002). When Bob’s metal detector arrives, he and the team discuss its role in the day’s work through ‘work instruction/definition/description,’ ‘time,’ ‘leisure/play’ and ‘congratulations/encouragement’:

Bob: I’m going to use it to find Farmer Pickles’ metal water pipe, then I can fix it.

Muck: Hey Bob, you could use it to find buried treasure!

Bob: That’s a great idea, Muck. We can have a look in Farmer Pickles’ fields when we’ve fixed his pipe!

Another presumably leisure activity—hunting for buried treasure—is proposed in this episode and without a time restraint. In this instance, one of the machines suggests Bob use his new tool for a task other than work. Bob likes the idea, but makes a clear distinction between using the metal detector for work—which must come first—and using it for leisure purposes. When Muck, Lofty and Bob arrive on the job site, Muck cannot hide her anticipation in finding *anything*, asking Bob repeatedly whether he has located the water pipe. Once it is found and the job is completed, Bob sends Lofty to help Wendy finish building a car wash. Bob’s work for the day is done, leaving him to pursue leisure.

Bob and Muck receive yet another ‘charity’ from Farmer Pickles to search his fields for buried treasure. Again, Muck is extremely excited and asks repeatedly whether Bob has found anything. Spud comes up on the two as they work to dig up something the detector has found:

Muck: Hi Spud! We're digging for treasure!

Spud: Oh! Can I help?

Muck: Bob! Bob! I found something!

Bob: Oh, it's just a set of handlebars from an old bike.

Spud: (Laughs) Can I have your treasure, Bob?

Bob: (Laughs) Here you are, Spud.

The interaction is lighthearted, but Bob's disappointment in finding "just" a piece of an old bicycle is obvious, particularly in his tone. Muck and Spud do not express disappointment with the find, and Spud even wants to keep the "treasure" they've discovered—which Bob obliges through 'charity.' As with photography, Bob seems to have a predetermined goal in mind in their hunt for treasure, as well as an extrinsic motivation—finding something of value. The two continue their search in a second field and detect something significantly larger. Muck suggests it might be the rest of the bicycle, but Bob thinks it might be a treasure chest. Muck starts digging and the two soon discover they have found—and damaged—the main water pipe on Farmer Pickles' land. Bob takes responsibility and assures Farmer Pickles he can fix it. Instead of spending the afternoon engaged in leisure activity, Bob now spends it working to repair the damage they have done in their hunt. The turn in events frames the leisure activity as something that fails to produce the external rewards anticipated and also creates additional, unwanted work.

Bob finishes the repair and he and Muck prepare to leave the worksite to join Wendy and the rest of the crew at the car wash. First, he lets Farmer Pickles know his water is working again and Farmer Pickles expresses 'customer satisfaction':

Bob: The pipe's fixed, Farmer Pickles. Your water should be back on.

Farmer Pickles: Oh that's great, Bob. Are you going to look for any more treasure?

Bob: I don't think so! I think I've done enough metal detecting for one day.

In this exchange, Bob verbally frames the treasure hunt as an undesirable and perhaps even overwhelming activity of which he has had enough. Again, there is a suggestion that because there was no extrinsic reward, the activity was not worth undertaking. This sentiment is reinforced through 'incompetence/doubt/concern' in the dialogue between Wendy and Bob at the car wash:

Wendy: Oh wow! You two are really muddy! How did the treasure hunting go?

Bob: Oh, it was a disaster! We didn't find any treasure at all!

Bob sees the activity as a failure, in part because it created unwanted work, but also because it did not produce "any treasure at all." He views the experience negatively despite the fact that Muck enjoyed the search and Spud even received an item they found and dug up. To make Bob feel better, Wendy donates a coin—which the crew found at the car wash site and identified as treasure earlier in the episode— through 'charity' and prompts Bob to use his metal detector one last time. Bob finds the "treasure" and everyone congratulates him (even though everyone is in on it but Bob). The compensating act of setting Bob up for success further advocates the need for an external reward to make activity outside of work worthwhile. Additionally, the only real "treasure" anyone finds in the episode is the coin they find on the jobsite in the process of working. Not only is leisure stripped of its intrinsic meaning, but work is elevated as

though it provides rewards beyond expectation. In essence, what good is leisure when work provides the same rewards?

The third episode, “Bob’s Three Jobs” (2006), offers yet another reframing of leisure activity for Bob. Bob has plans to spend the afternoon bird watching with his father, but must get his work done for the day first. As Bob points out, Robert “loves bird watching,” though, he is mostly looking forward to spending the day with his son. In a juxtaposition of ‘customer satisfaction’ and ‘incompetence/doubt/concern’ Bob finds the first job at Farmer Pickles’ to be more serious than he had originally thought, but completes it despite how it might affect his leisure ‘time’:

Farmer Pickles: That looks great, Bob. Sorry it was a bigger job than you were expecting.

Bob: That’s okay, Farmer Pickles. Poor dad, I promised him I wouldn’t be long.

Bob’s afternoon bird watching with his father is not necessarily about the bird watching itself, as Bob determines it to be an activity his father enjoys. Rather, the afternoon is more about the time with his father. As Ciulla (2000) states, “Leisure doesn’t cost money, it can be hanging out with friends or family, reading a novel, or just daydreaming” (p. 206). Certainly, spending time with his father should be considered a leisure activity and something he considers valuable. The text does suggest, however, that this family time is of greater importance to Robert than it is to Bob. The dialogue of the opening scene establishes bird watching as Robert’s leisure activity, and also highlights his anticipation for spending the afternoon with Bob. Bob does not return this sentiment and, in the dialogue with Farmer Pickles, begins to position the activity as an obligation to his father.

Robert seems to be enjoying his time off immensely. He keeps busy by feeding the woodland creatures, sharing coffee and cookies, and telling jokes to the various characters who stop by to chat with him. Meanwhile, Bob encounters another snag in ‘time’ at his second job and runs farther behind:

Mrs. Bentley: Oh thank you, Bob. Now, if you don't mind, I better finish

Bernard's dinner.

Bob: It can't be that time already! Ugh, I better hurry. . . . Oh boy, I hope Dad's okay on his own.

Bob finds ‘time’ to be an issue again at the completion of the job, as illustrated by the ‘work instruction/definition/description’ he provides:

Scoop: We can get going now, can't we Bob?

Bob: Yes, Scoop. It'll be getting dark soon. I have just one last little job at Mr. Beasley's yard.

Bob is distraught with the amount of time his work has taken him so far and is also concerned with how his father is doing in his absence. His concern implicitly assumes that Robert needs Bob's presence to enjoy his afternoon. The two have plans together, but Bob feels some responsibility in providing Robert's enjoyment, rather than sharing in it. This interpretation is supported by the fact that Bob has yet to state any anticipation for the activity itself, only obligation.

Bob arrives late to his third job and finds himself in yet another unexpectedly complicated situation. Once the final job is complete, Bob hastily returns to his father and engages ‘incompetence/doubt/concern’ and ‘time’:

Bob: I feel awful! My dad's been waiting all afternoon! I can't believe it, I'm too late! . . . Oh Dad, I'm so sorry! I was putting up a shelf and the whole wall fell down, and I thought the window was just stuck and I had to redo the whole thing, and then the arrow went through the yurt and well, uh—well, I really let you down.

Robert: (Mumbles as he wakes from a nap) Who's that? Oh, hello son. Just in time.

Bob: Just in time? But I've left you alone all day.

Robert: No, I've had a real good time. It's not often I get to put my feet up these days, being so busy in Bobsville.

Robert knows and appreciates the value in his 'leisure/play' time away from work. Bob, on the other hand, has spent the day viewing their plans as another job that needs to be completed. Bob is no doubt disappointed that he cannot spend the time he planned to with his father, but he views the disruption more so as a failure and a disappointment *to his father*. Feeling an obligation toward one's family is not a bad thing, but it does take away one of the more important elements of leisure—freedom. Kelly (1996) suggests the most important aspect of leisure is the freedom of choice, pointing out that "such freedom may be relative rather than absolute, but at least there is the perception on the part of the participant that the activity could have *not* been done" (p. 22). Additionally, leisure is focused on the self (Ciulla, 2000; Kelly, 1996). Because Bob's perception of their afternoon is that he *cannot* miss it and that his tardiness has disappointed his father and ruined his afternoon, the activity has lost its leisurely quality for Bob.

It is only when Bob experiences genuine ‘leisure/play’—free from obligation—that he finally appreciates its value, as well as the value of ‘time’ with ‘family’:

Robert: Who says it's too late for bird watching? In fact, it looks like just the right time. There, you see?

Bob: Oh Dad! It's beautiful!

Robert: And very rare, too. A bird that only comes out at night, the lesser striped Sunflower warbler. I've waited my whole life to see one of these, son.

Bob: That's fantastic, Dad! I'm really glad I got to see it with you.

Robert. Me, too, son. Me, too. You couldn't help how long things took. I know you wanted to be here with me and that's what's important.

Bob: Aw, thanks Dad.

Robert: That's alright, Bobby. In fact, it's just like seeing the lesser striped Sunflower warbler; good things come to him who waits.

Bob and Robert can finally share in their leisure activity. Once Robert lets Bob know his enjoyment of the afternoon was not solely Bob's responsibility, Bob is free from obligation. Perhaps, once Bob has been freed from that obligation, he is able to re-focus his attention on himself and realize how much *he* values ‘time’ with his father. The two are able to bird watch—a leisurely activity Robert states to have valued his whole life—and they are able to enjoy it together. At the conclusion of this episode, leisure is treated as a valuable and enjoyable experience.

However, the narrative also reaffirms the importance of work over leisure. Rather than be upset, Robert supports and confirms the importance of Bob placing his identity as builder first and son second. While the moral of the story teaches patience, it also

implicitly encourages an understanding that—at least in this case—work obligations must come first. Robert knows Bob *wanted* to be there, and *that* is what’s important in the end. The message is also a problematic (re)production of societal values placing work above other life interests (leisure and family in this case). Robert has come to understand the enjoyment that can come from leisure in life—as does Bob in the concluding scene—but work is prioritized. Likewise, the episode sends a reassuring message that if you work hard, as Bob does, there will still be time to fulfill other life roles. In this sense, the show provides a clear example of its reinforcement of career as a central part of one’s identity and gives it precedence over other obligations. Bob is rewarded with viewing a rare bird at the end of his long work day; Robert is rewarded with the same experience—one he has been waiting for his entire life. Leisure is problematically placed not as something that should be *sought* after but, instead, something that will be *received* in time (i.e., *after* work).

An exploration of Bob’s engagement in leisure activity begins to answer the question of how leisure and family are constructed in *Bob the Builder*. However, Bob’s experiences with and suggested perceptions toward leisure do not carry over to all of the characters in the show. In fact, Wendy’s perceptions of leisure appear far more aligned with what Ciulla (2000) or Kelly (1996) might recommend. Wendy’s treatment of leisure is explored in the next section to further answer the third research question.

Wendy’s Leisure Time

While Bob’s experiences with leisure problematically reframe it, Wendy’s seem to support a healthier and more accurate representation. Two episodes in the sample involve Wendy going on vacation or simply taking off time from work (“Bob’s Big

Surprise,” 2001; “Dizzy Goes Camping,” 2003). Within the data, Wendy spends time outside of work more often than Bob and *seeks* to do so. In the first example, “Bob’s Big Surprise” (2001), Wendy takes a day off to go visit her sister, Jenny. Bob decides to surprise Wendy by fixing up her garden while she is away (after Wendy notes how much nicer Jenny’s garden is than hers). ‘Leisure/play’ is at the forefront in this episode; not only does Wendy seek time away from work to visit family, but Bob and the team make it their job to improve Wendy’s leisurely environment at home through an act of ‘charity.’ When she returns from her trip, Bob and the team are waiting to surprise her with her new garden. Wendy’s reaction provides a list of leisurely activities she can now engage in:

Wendy: Bob! Oh, it’s beautiful! A patio, just right for barbeques! A pergola! I’ll be able to sit outside on summer evenings! Oh! And a lovely flower bed with all my favorite plants! Oh Bob, thank you. Thanks, all of you.

Leisure activity is framed as being of considerable importance to Wendy on a daily basis. Thus, Wendy finds time specifically for leisure by taking off work to visit her sister and by making space at home to engage in leisurely activities.

When Bob asks her if she can come in early to take care of the mess in the office, Wendy reiterates the importance of ‘time’ within her home space:

Wendy: Yes, of course I can. It’s really nice to know I’ve been missed. Anyway, I don’t mind at all, ‘cause I know that when I come home at the end of the day I can just relax, and then I can have—oh! Bob, do you think I should have a fountain?

Bob: (Spits out coffee and coughs) Fountain?! Ugh!

In this dialogue, Wendy suggests it is her domestic sphere that makes a tough day at work worthwhile. Leisure, then, becomes another serious distinction between Wendy and Bob the Builder. Bob finds pleasure in the garden through the *work* he has done to it (repositioning ‘work instruction/definition/description’ as central to the episode). It should be noted that in this particular example, Bob might also find intrinsic reward in providing an act of charity; his work allows him to give something to Wendy to improve her quality of life. However, Wendy’s pleasure comes from the *leisure* she finds in the garden.

Their different experiences with leisure are additionally emphasized by the fact that Wendy is the only employee who lives outside the organization. Bob’s home is in the Building Yard, and the machines also reside there. Where Bob so easily and naturally finds meaning and enjoyment in the work he does (presumably because he is a builder), Wendy finds it outside of work—in her domestic space and with her family—because she is *not* identified as a builder. Leisure from Wendy’s perspective is a positive thing; it is the key to achieving balance and provides her meaning and enjoyment when work does not.

In “Dizzy Goes Camping” (2003), Wendy takes off work again to go on vacation with Jenny. Vacationing as ‘leisure/play’ is a repeated topic of discussion among the characters in this episode and again placed in juxtaposition against ‘work instruction/definition/description,’ as illustrated in the first scene:

Bob: Hello, Farmer Pickles!

Farmer Pickles: Just came by to check that you and Wendy are starting on the new camp site up at my farm today.

Bob: It'll just be me and the team, Farmer Pickles, because Wendy's off on vacation with her sister, Jenny.

Farmer Pickles: Ah! (Laughs) Good for her. Well, I'll see you later then!

Vacation is justly framed as a privilege rather than an everyday occurrence. Farmer Pickles' reaction reaffirms it as a positive experience and is happy for Wendy to be experiencing it. The idea of privilege is furthered by the dialogue between Wendy and the machines:

Dizzy: Oh, Wendy! You look pretty in your sun hat. It must be great going on vacation!

Wendy: (Giggles) Oh, it certainly is, Dizzy!

Dizzy wishes she were going on vacation, too, but she and the team have important work to do. Meanwhile, Wendy is away from work enjoying leisure time with her sister. There is no implication that Wendy has any extrinsic obligations. She is straightforward about vacation being "great" and expresses no remorse in leaving the strenuous job of building a camp site to Bob and the team. Rather than place work first, as Bob does in "Bob's Three Jobs" (2006) and "Bob's Metal Detector" (2002), Wendy again allots herself leisure time away from work (and with family).

Despite Wendy's plot line offering another proactive message regarding leisure, it is not strongly emphasized in the episode. Vacation continues to be discussed throughout the episode as Bob and the team build a camp site on Farmer Pickles' land. Bob tells a very curious Dizzy the types of activities people engage in on a camping vacation. Dizzy and Muck then pretend to engage in these activities when they spend the night on the job

site. After mimicking the real thing, Dizzy and Muck believe they have gone on a vacation:

Dizzy: We had a great time!

Bob: Just think Dizzy, when Wendy and Jenny come home, you'll be able to tell them all about your vacation, too!

Instead of showing Wendy's vacation in any of the scenes, the focus of the show remains on the work being performed in her absence. Allowing Dizzy and Muck to pretend they are on vacation—only between working hours—suggests one might experience a vacation without ever leaving. Wendy's experience of leisure becomes secondary to Bob and the team's experience of building the camp site. Furthermore, while Dizzy and Muck yearn for a vacation of their own, Bob and the rest of the machines do not participate in the overnight stay. It has already been noted that Bob's interest in leisure activity is fairly minimal, especially when compared to Wendy's. A camping trip could definitely fall under leisure activity, as long as the choice to do so is made freely and without any extrinsic rewards. Bob simply needs two days to complete the job and chooses to go home for the night. It is unclear why the other machines do not stay. However, the activity Muck and Dizzy engage in cannot be considered leisure. They are machines built specifically to—and for—work. Even though the act of camping out overnight is not work, it is not a leisure activity. Here again, Kelly's (1996) distinction between *leisure* and *play* becomes important. Play—while equally motivated by intrinsic rewards—involves childlike behavior and the temporary suspension of reality (Kelly, 1996). Dizzy and Muck pretend to camp because they are machines incapable of experiencing leisure. In not participating with them, Bob appears uninterested in leisure or play. At the

conclusion of the episode, Bob suggests Dizzy will be able to compare her vacation story with Wendy and Jenny's. This comparison places Wendy's experience on an even keel with Dizzy's and suggests she, too, may be temporarily suspending reality rather than seeking meaningful leisure.

As seen in this discussion, *Bob the Builder* varies in its treatment of leisure. On the one hand, Wendy's character possesses a noteworthy work-life balance. She freely chooses to spend time with family and doing things outside of work. She finds meaning and enjoyment specifically in activities outside of work; Wendy values leisure. On the other hand, Bob struggles with the concept of leisure. He finds it difficult to release himself from obligation or seeking external rewards from the activities he pursues outside work. Because his identity is so deeply tied to his occupation as a builder, Bob is more comfortable finding meaning and enjoyment in work. According to Ciulla (2000), "it takes a certain talent in life to separate work from leisure." (p. 199); Bob does not seem to possess this talent, though this is not necessarily a bad thing because he enjoys his work. Whether children identify more with one or the other is beyond the scope of this study. Clearly, Bob is the central character and his identification with work and occupation is more heavily emphasized, while Wendy's balance is arguably more a result of her *lack* of identification with work and occupation, making her of secondary importance in a show about building. With the distinction between leisure and work made clear, the chapter now turns to a more detailed discussion of play and its role in the world of *Bob the Builder*, an equally important non-work activity in children's television.

Depictions of Play in *Bob the Builder*

As adults, Bob and Wendy—as well as the other human characters in the sample—do not engage in play. Their non-work experiences, while not all leisure, do not typically involve any childlike behavior or suspension of reality. Only one exception to this appeared in the data; in the concluding scenes of the special extended episode “When Bob Became a Builder” (2006), Bob, Wendy and the team dress as pirates after building a pirate-themed play area for children. The machines, on the other hand, engage in play more regularly as a means to suspend their own realities as working machines, to be “childlike” and enact certain aspects of human life. The machines, as well as Spud the Scarecrow, offer a childlike contrast to the adults in the show, who only engage in work and leisure. Like leisure, play is done for the sake of doing—for the experience (Kelly, 1996). The machines engage in play at times to find satisfaction in the moment and at other times in hopes to experience being human(like). The machines enact play less frequently than another character, Spud the Scarecrow. While the machines’ play is rarely disruptive, Spud’s is often ornery and troublesome. As a result, two very different depictions of play are presented in *Bob the Builder*—one that is constructive and one that is destructive. The section will begin by discussing how the machines engage in constructive play which complements their work and will then turn to how Spud more often enacts destructive play.

Even though work is the central theme of *Bob the Builder*, play does appear here and there within the sample. More often than not, the machines engage in constructive play—constructive in the sense that it is carefully considered and does not cause any nuisance. In addition, the machines only engage in constructive play after they have

finished working. As mentioned above, “Dizzy Goes Camping” (2003) offers a solid example of how play offers the machines an opportunity to suspend reality and replicate human experiences. Additionally, it is acceptable for them to engage in play because they do so outside of work rather than during it. Bob allows them not only to camp overnight for the experience, but also because it does not interfere with getting the job done. In the sample, play is depicted as appropriate only *after* work is done multiple times.

In the final scene of “Scoop’s Stegosaurus” (2001), for example, Scoop receives a gift from Mr. Elliot as a “thank you” for discovering dinosaur bones (not an act of charity because Mr. Elliot has also received something). A brief moment of ‘leisure/play’ results once the toy is revealed to the team:

Bob: Wow! A toy stegosaurus! Woops! (Startles the cat) Oh, sorry Pilchard!

Dizzy: (Laughs) If she’s frightened of that, just think what she’d be like if she saw a real dinosaur! (Giggles) Like a Dizzy-o-saurus! (Laughs, growls)

Lofty: Oh! (Cowers)

Scoop: Or a Scoop-a lot-ocus! (Growls)

Roley: Oh! Oh, look out! Here comes a Roley-dactyl! (Growls)

Muck: And a mighty Muck-a-saurus Rex! (Growls)

The scene closes with the machines chasing each other around the building yard, growling and laughing. Their play is similar to what might be seen on a school yard full of children. The play is drawn from the events of the day—Scoop and Bob discover a stegosaurus skeleton while on a job—and allows them an opportunity to suspend reality and become childlike. Play is not central to the plot; instead, it is saved for the end of the day (episode) when the work is done.

Dizzy—who is more childlike than the other machines—expresses an earnest interest in playing “model” in “Molly’s Fashion Show” (2003). It is a slow day at the yard, so Bob and Wendy take on the job of building a catwalk for Molly, who is arranging a fundraiser for the town art center. Dizzy wonders whether Molly will allow her to be a model in the fashion show and gets to participate in the event that evening. Her participation is different from the other models’ and falls more into the realm of ‘leisure/play’:

Pam: Welcome to our fashion show. And you’re all here to help raise funds for the art center. As well as our fashion designer, Molly, there will be two other special models today.

(Bob and Wendy enter the catwalk.)

Pam: Bob and Wendy are wearing Molly’s colorful new range of overalls.

Mr. Sabatini: Bellissimo! I can wear them in my pizza parlor! Then if I spill any sauce on myself, nobody will ever know! Genius!

Pam: And Molly is modeling the summer beachwear, guaranteed to cause a splash! And our last model tonight is Dizzy! Dizzy’s outfit is by Lofty and Pilchard.

Dizzy is not mentioned initially as Pam introduces the models and sets up expectations for the evening. Instead, Molly is announced as the fashion designer and primary model, and Bob and Wendy are presented as “special” models. It may seem as though Bob and Wendy are suspending reality for the sake of the experience (play), but they are actually participants in a fund raiser with specified goals, enacting a temporary ‘occupation/al identity’ and ‘work instruction/definition/description.’ Molly has asked them to help her

in this way, and so it also falls outside of play or leisure because of the lack of free choice. Dizzy, on the other hand, expresses her desire to model throughout the episode. She is not acknowledged as a legitimate model or a key participant in the fundraiser. Instead, she is presented at the end of the show after all the legitimately named models have had their turn. The catwalk simply provides a context for Dizzy to suspend her reality and “play model.” Lofty and Pilchard also become players as they play “designers.” It is no longer Molly’s fashion show, but the show is permitted to continue as a context for Dizzy’s play because the fundraiser has met its purpose and all other work related to it is complete.

Two brief messages of such an appropriate ‘time’ to engage in play can be found in “Benny’s Back” (2005). Benny has rejoined the organization and desperately wants to visit the team in Sunflower Valley. Scoop and the other machines discuss his return:

Muck: Hey Scoop! How’s Benny?

Scoop: Benny’s great! He can’t wait to see you all!

Dizzy: Is he coming over?

Scoop: Maybe later, Dizzy, when he’s finished his work.

Wendy: Well, we better get started team.

In this interaction, both Scoop and Wendy reaffirm the importance of placing work before play. Catching up with old friends can only be appropriate once work is finished. Scoop states this fact directly, and Wendy supports it in getting the team re-focused on ‘work instruction/definition/description’ and the tasks at hand for the day. The other message in the episode suggests potentially negative consequences—

‘incompetence/doubt/concern’—for play. As the team returns to work in Sunflower Valley, Scrambler enlists Benny’s help to find his talkie-talkie in the Bobsville yard:

Benny: When did you last remember having it, Scrambler?

Scrambler: Last night! I think it must have fallen off when I did a wheelie.

Benny: How many wheelies did you do?

Scrambler: Watch! One here (vroom) one here (vroom) and here!

Benny: Oh! I get the idea! It could be anywhere!

Scrambler may not have been obligated to work when he was playing the night before, but he experiences negative consequences because he has jeopardized a piece of work equipment in the act of playing. The example is brief, but it further divides work from play by suggesting that even objects specific to the realm of work do not belong in the realm of play.

When the machines go out of these bounds and engage in even minor play *during* work, there are immediate consequences. In “Lofty’s Jungle Fun” (2003), Lofty and Skip see Molly painting a jungle mural on their way to the dump. Curious about elephants, Lofty asks Molly a series of questions and then imitates an elephant in a brief act of ‘leisure/play’ which in turn provides the context for ‘incompetence/doubt/concern’:

Lofty: Look at me! I’m an elephant! Look at my trunk! (Laughs, knocks over paint bucket.) Oh dear! I’m sorry!

Molly: Don’t worry, Lofty.

Lofty: I made a mess, haven’t I Molly.

Molly: It’s okay, I have some special stuff to clean it up.

Lofty: That’s lucky, thank you.

Molly: You two can get back to work.

Lofty's playful actions immediately result in an accident that must be cleaned up. Lofty feels extreme guilt and also suggests Molly is able to amend his mistake through some sort of luck, perhaps to suggest that the result could have been much worse. Molly is not angered by Lofty's accident and handles it calmly but at the end of the exchange, she directs them to 'work instruction/definition/description'—presumably to avoid further trouble. Later in the same episode, Lofty and Skip ask Wendy if they might return to see how Molly's mural is coming along. The two are permitted to do so because they have completed their tasks; the two engage in play again, this time without any negative consequences.

There are similarly negative consequences for Dizzy in "Molly's Fashion Show" (2003) when she follows Spud to the jobsite where Wendy and Bob are building the catwalk. As Bob and Wendy continue working, Dizzy plays "model" on the still unfinished catwalk:

Dizzy: Here comes Dizzy the model!

Bob: Look out, Dizzy! I haven't fixed those boards! Oh no! (Paint bucket goes flying, lands on Molly's head)

Dizzy: Oh no! Whoops!

Again, 'leisure/play' creates 'incompetence/doubt/concern' in the realm of work. Bob, Wendy and Molly are all covered in paint, but the accident gives Molly the creative inspiration she needs to design the clothes for the evening's show. Even though there is a positive effect of the mishap, it is a work accident nonetheless, and Dizzy's behavior remains inappropriate because it was enacted in the context of work.

As the machines frequently reproduce messages regarding the types of appropriate play and the times at which such play can be enacted, Spud the Scarecrow more frequently enacts only destructive play. Spud's play is destructive in the sense that it causes trouble and, in some cases, even appears to have the intent to harm. In fact, Spud's destructive play causes mischief—major or minor—in ten of the twenty episodes in the sample. Spud's play often involves him suspending reality by trying to mimic the tasks of specific 'occupation/al identities' (a housepainter in "Scarecrow Dizzy," 2001; a plowman in "Travis Gets Lucky," 2003; a photography assistant in "Bob the Photographer," 2003). Other times, Spud takes others' belongings without permission to enhance his 'leisure/play' experiences ("Bob the Photographer," 2003; "Lofty's Jungle Fun," 2003; "Scoop's Stegosaurus," 2001; "Scruffy the Detective," 2001). In some cases, as in "Lofty to the Rescue" (2001), Spud's play even suggests the intent to harm others. All his destructive behavior is never condoned; in fact, Spud is often berated for his actions.

In "Scruffy the Detective" (2001), Spud steals the town's time capsule believing it to be a treasure chest. Playing "pirate," Spud steals the capsule from its burial site and proceeds to empty its content along the road as he takes it to the farm where he can continue the game and bury his own pirate treasure. Scruffy the dog leads Bob, Mr. Elliot and Farmer Pickles to Spud just in time to stop the scarecrow from hiding the stolen time capsule:

Farmer Pickles: Spud, what have you got there?

Spud: Uh, my treasure chest, Farmer Pickles.

Bob: Spud! That's not a treasure chest! It's Mr. Elliot's time capsule.

Spud: But I found it! It was all full of garbage!

Mr. Elliot: That garbage was all the special things people donated.

Farmer Pickles: Spud, you can't just help yourself to things that don't belong to you!

Spud: I'm Sorry, Farmer Pickles. Sorry, Mr. Elliot.

Spud's incompetence is berated by three adults for his destructive play. Further, Farmer Pickles offers an important lesson for any child: do not take what is not yours. In this example, Spud's irresponsible actions have the potential to harm the entire town. A situation of similar scale unfolds in "Lofty's Jungle Fun" (2001) when Spud "borrows" Molly's homemade stilts in hopes of getting his work done faster. In the process, he tracks paint all through the streets of Bobsville and right through the new crosswalk Bob and the team have built. Again, his destructive play impacts the town on a larger scale. As punishment, Spud is forced to scrub the paint off the crosswalk and all the streets. The message is not only about destructive play; it is about the rewards that come with honest, responsible work and the punishments that come with behaving otherwise. In taking the stilts and becoming "Super Spud" to get his work done faster, Spud finds himself burdened with more work than he originally had. His haste in completing his assigned tasks does not result in good work. In other episodes, his behavior harms specific individuals and also himself.

The most striking example of Spud's malicious form of play is in "Lofty to the Rescue" (2001). Spud follows Lofty to a worksite where he, Scoop and Muck are clearing and repairing a road and bridge. Spud adamantly states he is going to "have some fun" presumably at the expense of the machines. He taunts Lofty by telling him

there is a mouse (Lofty is afraid of mice). As Lofty finishes his job and decides to take the long way around to avoid the bridge, Spud becomes aware of the machine's fear of heights:

Spud: Lofty's scared of heights! Scaredy cat! Scaredy cat!

Scoop: Spud! You leave Lofty alone!

Spud: (Laughs)

Lofty: Yes, leave me alone! All of you!

Spud's teasing, in his mind, is represented as a form of play. He seeks intrinsic rewards in harming others. Only moments later, Spud continues his destructive play by throwing mud pies at Scoop and Muck. He taunts them from the top of a log pile which tumbles, sending Spud over the bridge. A tree branch catches his belt and he dangles helplessly as the machines go after Lofty, the only machine who can rescue Spud. Lofty faces his fear of heights—and Spud—to rescue the scarecrow, and the team return him safely to the farm where his 'incompetence/doubt/concern' is highlighted:

Bob: There you go, Spud. Back home safe and sound. And I don't want any more mischief from you for a while!

Spud: No, Bob. Right, Bob. Uh, thanks Bob.

Bob: Don't thank me, thank Lofty. If it wasn't for him, you might not even be here at all.

Spud: I know. Thanks Lofty. Sorry about teasing you; are we still friends?

Spud is again berated for his actions, and rightfully so. His play is more blatantly disruptive in this episode as it brings 'friendship,' other individuals, and himself into harm's way. The episode offers an additional lesson in regard to friendship: do not tease

your friends. These messages about play are positive; they teach children to avoid destructive play. The more questionable—and less obvious—message to be found in the analysis is again how play should be approached relative to work.

Despite being a very childish and ornery scarecrow, Spud also does work for Farmer Pickles. Not only does Spud take on jobs on the farm, he also seems eager to work at times. Spud is particularly willing to haphazardly take on other occupational roles (as in the above mentioned episodes), but he also approaches his responsibilities on the farm with occasional seriousness. Through examples of ‘incompetence/doubt/concern, ‘occupation/al identity’ and ‘work instruction/definition/description,’ Spud fervently keeps the birds away to assist Travis in “Travis Gets Lucky” (2003).

Travis: Oh no! That did it, I broke the plow!

Spud: Where? Let me see. Oh! It's not broken, it's just stuck.

Travis: Oh. You were supposed to be helping me, Spud.

Spud: Sorry, Travis. Spud the super plowman was busy being a super scarecrow!

Spud is enthusiastic about being both an exceptional plowman and scarecrow, but he can only succeed at being one or the other in the moment, and chooses scarecrow. Spud continues to chase the crows away throughout the episode. In “Trix’s Pumpkin Pie” (2004), Spud also succeeds at keeping the crows away from the pumpkin pie Mrs. Percival has baked for the harvest supper; though, his intentions are to eat it himself rather than protect it for the community. With Spud’s successes also come failures.

In “Scruffy the Detective” (2001), Farmer Pickles provides ‘work instruction/definition/description’ for Spud to very carefully deliver some eggs to the

school, and Spud appears to understand the important distinction between work and ‘leisure/play’:

Farmer Pickles: And try to be careful! Be sure you don't break them.

Spud: Oh, uh, Spud's on the job, Farmer Pickles! Oh! No, Scruffty! I'm not playing, I'm working!

Spud seems to understand the importance of his task and refuses to entertain the dog who is jumping at his feet. The fact that the dog cannot separate Spud from play suggests that he may rarely—if ever—successfully make that separation. Soon after he leaves, Spud is harassed by a crow and drops and breaks one of the eggs. The crow laughs at him, to which he replies, “It’s not funny! I was being really careful, too!” By the time the scarecrow reaches the schoolhouse, Mrs. Percival does not receive a single unbroken egg. Though he does apologize, it is followed by a string of excuses as to why the eggs are broken. It seems that once the first egg broke, Spud lost the drive to be careful. Not only, then, is Spud destructive at *play*, he is also destructive at *work*. Messages about Spud depict him as one who fails. Whatever the relationship between his work and his play, Spud is not a desirable model to follow. While the Can-Do Crew gets their work done and then plays constructively, Spud cannot seem to avoid destruction whether he is playing, attempting to work, or mimicking work through play. Through its messages of play, *Bob the Builder* provides further implications of what a successful worker should be—one who always puts work before play. Thus, the show provides very specific messages about appropriate times and forms of the concepts of leisure and play. More messages about the ideal worker can be found in the show’s treatment of family, the final

piece in answering the third research question regarding non-work concepts constructed in *Bob the Builder*.

Engaging Time with Family in *Bob the Builder*

Family is placed in a supportive role in the context of *Bob the Builder*; supportive in the sense that family members exist on the periphery rather than being central characters. This is especially true for Wendy's family. Bob's father plays a more visible role because of his relation to the organization's history. Of the twenty episodes in the sample, only three regular and the extended episodes take place after Bob and the crew's move to Sunflower Valley and Robert's subsequent return to work ("Benny's Back," 2005; "Bob's Three Jobs," 2006; "Two Scoops," 2005; "When Bob Became a Builder," 2006). In the remaining sixteen episodes in the sample, Robert does not appear at all. In this respect, family is framed in two distinct ways. In the sample, Bob's family is visible in relation to the organization and their role within it. Jenny's family, on the other hand, is placed conspicuously outside the organization—evidenced by the fact that Wendy must leave to spend time with them. The dichotomy created suggests very specific messages about family, work-life balance, and the ideal worker.

Bob's family exists primarily within the organization in the sample. His father plays an important organizational role, particularly in providing the impetus for Bob's building career in "When Bob Became a Builder" (2006). In the extended episode, it is Robert who trains Bob and guides him to becoming a builder; beyond training, Robert brings Bob into the organization and eventually relinquishes it to him completely. When Bob is ready to expand his business, Robert re-enters the organization—and the show—as a key player by coming out of retirement to run the building yard in Bobsville. The

hierarchy of the building yard becomes a bit unclear at this point in the data. Robert has come out of retirement to operate the Bobsville yard, but it is unclear whether he is completely partnering with Bob, or works for him. Despite this gap in information, themes of ‘structure/nature of the organization’ suggest that Bob has retained primary control of the machines. In “Two Scoops” (2005), Robert is scheduled to dig holes and plant trees for Mr. Bentley in the city park. He arrives to perform the task on his own, only to realize the job may demand more than he is capable of, as ‘incompetence/doubt/concern’ and ‘time’ show:

Mr. Bentley: They need to be in the ground by the end of the day, you know. But I'm sure that will not be a problem for an experienced builder such as yourself.

Robert: Well, I—

Mr. Bentley: Splendid! Let's go, Travis, and leave this gentleman to his work.

Robert: Okay, Mr. Bentley.

Mr. Bentley: I'll be back later, Robert, to check on the progress.

Robert: Much later I hope. My goodness! I had no idea the trees would be so big, and so many! How on earth am I going to be able to get it done all by myself? . . .

This is hard work! What I wouldn't give for a mechanical digger right now.

Moments later, Scoop rushes by on his way to perform a task for Bob. Robert hails him and calls Bob to ask if he can “borrow” Scoop. Bob happily obliges, but Scoop insists he is needed more in Sunflower Valley. Robert assures him all will be fine, and through ‘work instruction/definition/description’ and ‘congratulations/encouragement’ the two prepare to plant trees for Mr. Bentley:

Robert: . . . Now come on, Scoop! We've got holes to dig. What's that thing you say again?

Scoop: Can we dig it?

Robert: Yes we can!

The dialogues remove Robert as the organizational patriarch, suggesting through 'incompetence/doubt/concern' that his experience is no longer sufficient for him to be successful in building. When the job is first brought to Robert's attention that morning, he confidently proclaims, "Well, I've dug a few holes in my time, haven't I? Should be as easy as dunking my toast, eh?" But when Robert surveys the job, he is no longer confident it is a task he can handle, even as the experienced builder he is. Instead, he has to "borrow" a machine from Bob. The second dialogue with Scoop further removes him from a position of significance or control within the organization because he is unfamiliar with the team's motivational phrase, "Can we (fix/dig/build) it?" In contrast to the confident, knowledgeable builder who trained a young Bob in the trade, this Robert is older, less capable, and seems to hold a more pronounced identity as Bob's *father* rather than his fellow *builder*.

The sample also shows Bob's mother solely within the 'structure/nature of the organization.' In "Two Scoops" (2005), Robert starts his morning at the breakfast table with Dot, Bob's mother. Acting as mother, wife, and an informal member of the organization, Dot reports the day's 'work instruction/definition/description' to her husband:

Robert: Oh, thank you hun! The best way to start the day, with a nice egg.

Dot: Oh look, Robert. There's a job on the schedule today.

Robert: Oh good! What is it?

Dot: Robert, don't talk with your mouth full dear.

Robert: (Gulps) Sorry, hun.

Dot: Hole digging and tree planting in Bobsville Park, Mr. Bentley.

In the entirety of the episode, Dot does not interact with Bob. In fact, the only contact either parent has with Bob is Robert's brief phone conversation with him. Still, she is clearly integrated into the story as Bob's mother—and contributes on a basic level to the organization. She reasserts her multiple roles as mother/wife/organizational (non)member at the end of the episode when she insists Scoop stay in the yard and rest rather than rush back to Sunflower Valley, insisting he will be “no good to Bob” otherwise. Semiotically, Bob's parents are dressed conservatively. Robert even sports a tie and jacket at breakfast before he goes out to the work site (the tie remains under his coveralls while at work). The only inclusions of Bob's family in the sample occur in relation to the organization. In this sense, Bob's family is not easily separated from work life, further solidifying the importance of work in his identity.

Wendy's family, on the other hand, exists entirely outside of the organization. As mentioned, Wendy takes off work specifically to seek time with her sister Jenny (“Bob's Big Surprise,” 2001; “Dizzy Goes Camping,” 2003). The one time Jenny is shown, she is dressed for vacation in highly gendered clothing and uncommonly colored hair—a stark contrast to Wendy's usual appearance. Again, all of her clothing is pink, and her blond hair is even highlighted with pink. Jenny's youthful—and unprofessional—appearance serves as a contrast not only to Wendy, but also to the appearance of Bob's family members. While Bob's family is integrated in the organization, removing the need for

him to take time away from work, Wendy's family cannot penetrate her work sphere. She was not born into building and so her family must remain in the periphery as well. With limited family representation in the data, it is difficult to make a generalizing statement to all treatments of family in the show. However, the evident lack of family and family-related messages in the sample is an important observation for analysis. Family stays in the peripheral, diminishing its importance relative to other topics in the show.

Summary

Speaking to the third research question, *Bob the Builder* continues to elevate work through its portrayals of non-work concepts to the viewer, as evidenced by the experiences of Bob, Wendy, Spud and the machines. The concept of leisure is treated in two very different ways, appearing difficult for Bob and natural for his more domestic business partner, Wendy. Through themes of 'leisure/play,' 'charity,' 'time,' 'occupation/al identity,' 'incompetence/doubt/concern,' 'work instruction/definition/description,' 'congratulations/encouragement,' and 'family,' leisure is problematized for the main character who cannot separate it from work without feeling obligation or seeking external rewards. Work is elevated as the more natural and favorable option for Bob while Wendy actively seeks leisure and knows she must leave work to do so.

In addition to leisure, the concept of play is presented in two very different lights, as illustrated by 'leisure/play,' 'time,' 'occupation/al identity,' 'work instruction/definition/description,' and 'incompetence/doubt/concern' themes. The machines only engage in constructive play when work is finished first. When they do not wait, there are often negative consequences to their transgression. Spud, on the other

hand, offers a binary to the machines through his frequently reckless play *and* work practices, as well as his play at work. Spud engages in destructive play suggesting not only that his actions are undesirable, but also that his work ethic is equally so. These portrayals of play further reinforce the importance of work for the characters. More problematic is the notable absence of ‘friendship’ in the majority of episodes. As Table 3.1 illustrates, the ‘friendship’ theme only appears in five episodes in the sample. Only one of those episodes, “Lofty to the Rescue” (2001), actually illustrates and corrects the inappropriate treatment of friends. Wendy toasts friends in “Wendy’s Big Night Out” (2003) and Bob refers to Wendy as his best friend in “When Bob Became a Builder” (2006). It may be assumed that the Can-Do Crew members are friends as well as co-workers, but true issues about friendship are minimally addressed in the sample of *Bob the Builder*—a show geared toward young children. The absence of friendship as a topic of discussion and a focus of socialization positions work as being of the utmost importance.

Finally, the equally minimal portrayal of family positions the concept in the periphery as a seemingly less important aspect of life relative to work. Drawing on the themes of ‘family,’ ‘structure/nature of the organization,’ ‘incompetence/doubt/concern,’ ‘work instruction/definition/description,’ and ‘time,’ the treatment of family also amplifies Wendy’s denied status as a builder, suggesting Wendy is less tied to the organization than Bob. As with leisure, Bob finds difficulty in separating work from everything else in life—even family.

Here again, the analysis shows support of those worker and organizational values discussed in the previous chapter. Bob is able to be more efficient and the organization is

able to expand through the support of Bob's parents. Bob finds meaning and enjoyment through his work, which was made possible by his family. Yet, his family does not determine his happiness; his work does. Despite the overemphasized importance of building to Bob's identity, he is the revered hero of Bobsville. In contrast, Wendy is the more domestic business partner, able to separate herself from the organization to experience leisurely and familial spheres. Wendy's enjoyment and meaning in life appear to fall outside the organization. The next chapter expands the discussion of gender representation within and outside the organization in *Bob the Builder* and also explores other representations of diversity to answer the fourth and final research question: What gendered or otherwise diversified representations are constructed in *Bob the Builder*?

CHAPTER IV: Gender and Diversity Representations in *Bob the Builder*

As discussed earlier in this thesis, media—particularly television and books—provide potential sources for young children to learn social values and expectations (Martinson & Hinnant, 2008). Turner-Bowker notes, as sources of these discursive resources, media can provide a site for the encouragement or rejection of socially reproduced stereotypes (as cited in Gooden & Gooden, 2001). Research by Oliver and Green (2001) and others suggests that male stereotypes are more consistently portrayed in children’s media and enforced than are female stereotypes (p. 85). This phenomenon may be explained by Flerx, Fidle and Rogers who assert that females have more to gain in relinquishing their traditional stereotype, where males would have to surrender their perceived superiority in breaking with traditional stereotypes (as cited in Martinson & Hinnant, 2008). Such assertions “contribute to the prevailing idea that males (and, as a result, masculine traits) are valued over females and feminine traits,” resulting in a unidirectional path to equality (Martinson & Hinnant, 2008, p. 7). In other words, the move toward gender equality in society and in media may continue to mean the valuing of stereotypically masculine traits.

Bob the Builder presumably challenges traditional gender stereotypes in its treatment of Wendy, Bob’s adept business partner. While gender is a primary concern in the discussion of work-related discourses in *Bob the Builder*, other representation of stereotypes should also be considered. To address the fourth research question, the first part of this chapter will discuss gender-related issues in the show specific to appearance,

the nature of work performed, the organization, and minor characters in the show, as well as the anthropomorphic machines. Gender is illustrated in themes of ‘gender,’ ‘education,’ ‘work instruction/definition/description,’ ‘occupation/al identity,’ ‘structure/nature of the organization,’ and ‘incompetence/doubt/concern’ as well as observations through semiotic analysis. Finally, the chapter will return to a brief review in literature regarding diversity in children’s television and a discussion of the stereotypical representations of characters in *Bob the Builder* as observed through semiotic analysis. Despite limited examples of diversity, a handful of characters appear who represent non-White ethnicity and even a suggestively and stereotypical homosexual orientation. Analysis of the data shows not only a lack of non-White representation of characters, but also subtle and blatant representations of stereotypes in the world of *Bob the Builder* to answer questions of representation.

RQ 4: What gendered or otherwise diversified representations are constructed in *Bob the Builder*?

Gender and Appearance

Placing Wendy in a more traditionally masculine work role begs a consideration of whether any aspects of her character maintain a stereotypically feminine quality. Semiotic analysis reveals minimal feminine stereotypes/stereotypical signs in terms of Wendy’s appearance at work when compared to Bob’s. Bob’s typical attire consists of blue overalls, a red and orange long-sleeved, plaid undershirt, and a yellow hard-hat. Wendy’s dress while on the job is a green long-sleeved shirt, blue pants, and a blue hard-hat. Despite the lack of stereotypically feminine colors in her dress, Wendy’s hat is not the traditional yellow. This alteration does not place her as distinctly feminine, but it does

mark her as *different* from Bob. While Wendy is minimally feminized in the work space, she is more obviously feminized in other contexts. A striking example of Wendy's increased femininity outside work is her appearance as a child. In "When Bob Became a Builder" (2006), Bob recounts how he first met Wendy. In the flash back, Bob is dressed all in blue. Wendy is dressed in red and wears her hair in pigtails. Through the use of color and hairstyle, Wendy is more distinctly portrayed as young and feminine against Bob's more masculine-colored clothing. Though it isn't a more traditionally hyperfeminine color (such as pink or purple), red is less gender neutral—or perhaps more feminine—than the blues and greens Wendy wears as an adult working in the organization.

As an adult outside of work—in scenarios distinctly not work—Wendy appears to have more of a developed feminine figure. Though she is still clad in less feminine or even traditionally masculine colors (most often blue), Wendy sports more traditionally feminine styles of clothing. Her hair is usually in a ponytail, and red earrings are always in her ears. The continued presence of feminine accessories (*red* earrings) maintains her femininity in the workplace, while her attire outside of it subtly but consistently places her as distinctly female. In "Dizzy Goes Camping" (2003), for example, Wendy again wears blue and fashions a sunhat and white framed sunglasses as she prepares to go on vacation. To contrast the unobtrusiveness of Wendy's femininity, the show presents other women quite differently. Jenny, Wendy's sister, is dressed for vacation in pink clothing, pink sunglasses, and even has pink highlights in her short, stylish blond hair ("Dizzy Goes Camping," 2003). Despite frequent and subtle attempts to avoid stereotyping

Wendy through her physical appearance—perhaps at the expense of over-feminizing other women—there are also times when she is firmly reasserted as feminine.

In “Wendy’s Big Night Out” (2003), Wendy borrows a blue dress from Molly and has her hair done by a professional. Despite the difference in appearance, characters verbally attribute *feminine physical* characteristics to Wendy to reassert her femininity. In “Wendy’s Big Night Out” (2003), this happens on more than one occasion. Upon making an appointment with the hairdresser, Wendy answers Muck’s curiosity about its purpose and ‘gender’ and ‘education’ themes come into play:

Muck: Why do people go to the hairdresser to get their hair done?

Wendy: ‘Cause they want to look nice, Muck.

Muck: But you always look nice, Wendy.

Here, Wendy’s daily appearance is complimented. While the adjective used is not suggestive of gender (as beauty might be to female or handsomeness to male), it is not a compliment one would expect a builder—in a physically demanding job—to receive, further denying Wendy the occupational title and characteristics. In another scene, Wendy tries on one of Molly’s dresses and Molly states, “You’re going to look lovely, Wendy!” This time, the adjective is more feminine. The statement itself is specific to how Wendy *will* look once she gets her hair done and dons the dress, not how she looks holding up the dress over her work clothes. In the final scene of the same episode, Wendy and Bob join each other for a special dinner on the opening night of Mr. Sabatini’s new restaurant:

Bob: Well, you’re looking very nice, Wendy.

Wendy: Thanks Bob. So are you.

Both are dressed up for the occasion and so Wendy reciprocates the compliment. A repeated use of the term “nice” again places the compliment as moderate and unspecific to gender (a more feminized term would risk romanticizing or eroticizing the relationship). Yet, it suggests that Wendy looks “nice” whether she is dressed for a job or a special evening out. Cejka and Eagly (1999) conducted a study on gender-stereotypic images of occupations, placing male and female characteristics on six dimensions. The *feminine physical* lists characteristics such as pretty, cute, petite and beautiful (Cejka & Eagly, 1999). *Masculine physical*, on the other hand, envelopes qualities such as athletic, burly, rugged and muscular (p. 416). The focus on the “loveliness” or “niceness” of Wendy’s appearance reaffirms her *feminine physical* qualities but avoids sexualizing her.

Other women in the show—Mrs. Percival and Mrs. Potts—often wear skirts, also with their hair down. As when Wendy is not in work clothes, these women appear to have a more distinct feminine figure. The only minor character who does not appear in distinctly feminine clothing in the sample is Molly, who wears yellow overalls and a green and white shirt; though, this contrast is speculatively a move to distinguish Molly as younger than the adult characters. The overalls suggest she may be younger, but her demeanor is not childlike. Molly is a young college student, and the other women of the town are presumably older.

Through her appearance, Wendy is positioned as not *too* feminine for building and not *as* stereotypically feminine as other female characters in the show; though, she does share some qualities at all times (her earrings) and many qualities during certain times (a dress and new hairdo). In addition to reinforcing the *feminine physical*, Wendy’s character also possesses characteristics of the *feminine personality* dimension, as can be

illustrated by some of the work-related tasks she performs and the environment in which she performs them.

Gender and the Nature of Work

Cejka and Eagly (1999) provide a list of characteristics specific to both the *masculine* and *feminine personality* dimensions. The *feminine personality* includes qualities like affection, sympathy, nurturing, sentimentality, understanding, and sociability. The *masculine personality* involves being competitive, adventurous, dominant and courageous. The work tasks Wendy and Bob perform reflect to some extent these stereotypical characteristics. As previously mentioned, Wendy does not retain the title of “builder” as Bob does. Nor does she appear to possess all of the same skills as he does. However, Wendy has skills that Bob does not. In Wendy’s narrative of how she joined the team, she recounts her hiring to the company through themes of ‘work instruction/definition/description,’ ‘incompetence/doubt/concern,’ ‘structure/nature of the organization’ and ‘occupation/al identity’:

Bob: . . . The phone never stops ringing, I can’t keep up with paperwork, and I keep being late for jobs! I just can’t do all this work on my own anymore! Where am I ever going to find a builder who’s very organized and doesn’t mind doing paperwork? There’s no such thing!

Wendy: Huh-em. Um, how about me, Bob?

Bob: you Wendy? But you’re not a builder!

Wendy: No, but I’m learning. I’ve been taking evening classes.

Bob: You’ve been having building lessons?

Wendy: Yes! I just loved watching you and your dad build this place! And I just knew it's what I wanted to do!

Wendy enters the organization based on qualities she possesses which Bob adamantly points out do not exist in a builder. She also fulfills a role in the organization which is presumed to be that of a second builder, but also sounds a lot like a receptionist. When Wendy suggests she might help Bob with his business, his initial reaction is to denounce her identity as a builder. As an interesting and extremely telling note, Wendy is also wearing red during this interaction but does not appear in red again after her hire. Symbolically, the changing color of her clothing marks her entry into the masculine occupation of building. The only way for Wendy to obtain knowledge on building is through formal education as the information was not accessible like it was for Bob; Bob was the son of a builder. Thus, a clear distinction is made between Wendy and Bob based on their levels of knowledge and skill. The exchange also suggests that Wendy may still be in the process of learning to build.

The distinction between ability is further illustrated in other episodes. In “Bob the Photographer” (2003), Mrs. Percival hits a water pipe while she tries to hang photographs for a competition at the school. Wendy arrives to assist with the emergency only to find that the damage is worse than she imagined. As Wendy works to repair the pipe and wall, the lights go out. Reaching the conclusion that water must have leaked onto the lights and blown them out, Wendy calls Bob—who is taking a day off—for assistance. Bob comes immediately to help out and the exchange produces the theme of ‘incompetence/doubt/concern’:

Wendy: Sorry to spoil your afternoon off, Bob.

Bob: Oh well, it couldn't be helped. I couldn't leave you to cope with all this on your own.

Wendy: But now you'll miss the photography competition.

Bob: If I don't help you, everyone will miss the competition.

Wendy: Oh, you're right Bob.

Rather than framing the job as being too much for one person, the situation is framed as being too much for Wendy to “cope with” alone. Bob suggests that the interruption of his afternoon could not be helped, again establishing himself as the primary builder and the key to the successful completion of a big job. Wendy, on the other hand, is concerned with spoiling Bob’s afternoon and putting him out of the photography competition—a sentiment soon overshadowed by the need to save the competition for the townspeople. Saving the competition, of course, relies on Bob. This example illustrates in Bob the “dominance” and “standing up under pressure” characteristic of the *masculine personality* dimension, and the “sympathetic” and “sensitive” qualities of the *feminine personality* in Wendy (Cejka & Eagly, 1999). The example also illustrates the importance of teamwork. However, other examples further reinforce the distinctions between Wendy and Bob’s abilities.

In “Dizzy Goes Camping” (2003), Wendy leaves Bobsville for a short vacation with her sister, Jenny. Farmer Pickles is expecting Bob, Wendy and the team to construct a camp site on his property, but Bob informs him it will only be him and the team. The work proves to be too much for Bob to handle in one day, and ‘time,’ ‘incompetence/doubt/concern,’ and ‘work instruction/definition/description’ themes emerge:

Bob: (groans) Well, it's taking longer without Wendy to help. We finished the trench, but we can't pour the cement until the pipes are connected.

Farmer Pickles: Oh, well it's getting late, Bob. Why don't you come back tomorrow?

Bob takes Farmer Pickles' suggestion and finishes the job the following day. Exhausted after its completion, Bob remarks on the intensity of the work. Regardless, Farmer Pickles exclaims that Bob has done a great job. In this scenario, the work is framed as being difficult for one person, but still doable for Bob. Where Wendy needed to call him in for help, Bob simply needs a bit more time to complete his task. There is no question of his abilities, only the suggestion that the intensity of Bob's work was increased by Wendy's absence. Though he is exhausted, Bob's mention of the intensity of his work upon its completion further asserts his *masculine physical* qualities.

A third example illustrates how Bob and Wendy's abilities and tasks differ, this time by emphasizing tasks within the organization that Bob, specifically, cannot perform or manage. In "Bob's Big Surprise" (2001), Bob decides to completely revamp Wendy's garden for her while she is away visiting her sister. Mrs. Potts—Wendy's replacement—calls in sick, leaving Bob responsible for both the office and the job site. Mrs. Potts is not a builder (and in fact has no named 'occupation/al identity'), though she is deemed capable of performing the tasks Wendy normally would. Bob, as the episode shows, is incapable of keeping order in the office. His frantic attempts to fix the answering machine and take messages leave him a bit frantic on the job site. Despite the obstacles of the day and the resulting 'incompetence/doubt/concern,' and added 'work

instruction/definition/description,' Bob and the team complete the job just in time. After Wendy's initial reaction to her new garden, she says:

Wendy: In all the excitement I forgot to ask you, Bob. Did Mrs. Potts manage alright in the office?

Bob: Ah. Well, she couldn't make it. She was sick, and everything's in a bit of a mess. In fact, I was wondering if you could come in early and take care of it.

Wendy: (laughs) Do you mean, can I fix it?

Bob: (laughs) Oh Wendy.

Wendy: Yes, of course I can. It's really nice to know I've been missed.

Rather than take responsibility for the mess, Bob delegates cleaning and reorganizing the office to Wendy. Because he is not capable of organization, nor does he enjoy paperwork (as stated in "When Bob Became a Builder," 2006), these abilities and tasks fall into Wendy's sphere of responsibility. The office is Wendy's domain, not Bob's.

Interestingly, semiotic analysis reveals the office space itself to be the most stereotypically gendered representation within Bob's organization. The office of Bob's Building Yard is adjacent to Bob's home, placing it practically within a wholly domestic space. While the interior of the office is plain and messy prior to Wendy's arrival ("When Bob Became a Builder," 2006), it is extremely clean and organized under her supervision. In addition to being organized, the interior is decorated in a distinctly feminine way. The walls are pink with white daisies. Wendy herself is not coded as stereotypically feminine, but her workspace—the office where she organizes and answers phones—is. In "Dizzy's Statues" (1999), Wendy takes a phone call in the office from Mrs. Potts. Only Wendy's side of the conversation can be heard:

*Wendy: Hello? Bob's Building Yard. Mrs Potts! Oh, did Bob come and see you?
Oh that's good. You have to go to the store? Oh don't worry, Mrs. Potts, I'm sure
the statues won't arrive while you're gone. Bye! (Giggles) Sweet Mrs. Potts.*

As Wendy hangs up the phone and giggles, she returns to her previous task—dusting the desk space. Her task at hand and her verbalization of Mrs. Potts' sweet temperament reaffirm Wendy's domestic and feminine qualities. She is not wearing a hard hat in this scene (such safety equipment would not be needed to answer phones), further distancing Wendy from building in the episode. It is not to say that Wendy does not perform building tasks. Quite the contrary, Wendy assists in and matches Bob's building tasks in a number of episodes. The significance lies in what tasks Wendy performs that Bob *cannot* or *does not*. The office is the context for the tasks a builder does not enjoy, and it is feminized by Wendy's presence. The machines also offer implications of gender within Bob's organization.

Gender and Machines

Research into children's television and literature shows a typical underrepresentation of female characters (Martinson & Hinnant, 2008). As Martinson and Hinnant (2008) propose, this discrepancy in gender representation is even more apparent by the inclusion of personified non-humans in analysis. A study of children's literature by Gooden and Gooden (2001) shows that the divergence between male and female representation is even greater in illustrations when animals are included in analysis. Therefore, a consideration of the humanized machines in *Bob the Builder* becomes necessary in the discussion of gender representation. Determining the gender of each machine required a combination of examining both the CDA produced data (noting third-

person singular references to the machines) as well as information provided on the show's official website. Only machines working in the organization in the sample are included in-depth in the discussion of gender, though several other machines exist on the website and likely in the most recent episodes/seasons of the show. Exploring the gender of the machines provides a notable imbalance of male and female representation within the organization.

According to the show's official website (2010), of the eight new machines not present in the sample episodes, four have an undeterminable gender, four are specifically identified as male, and none are identified as female. It cannot be assumed, however, that all of these machines are members of the Can-Do Crew, but the lack of female representation should be noted. Also according to *Bob the Builder's* website (2010), machines within the organization—and within the sample episodes—are equally unrepresentative of females. Of the seven machines, three are unidentified with gender directly, three are identified as male, and one is identified as female. An examination of the transcripts reveals two of the three undetermined characters—Benny and Scrambler—to be male and one—Muck—to be female. The gender of Benny is revealed in “Benny's Back” (2005) when the machine is referenced as “he.” Muck and Scrambler's genders are revealed in “When Bob Became a Builder” (2006). Clearly, the composition of five males and two females reflects an imbalance in the team.

In examining the machines semiotically, color of the machines does not appear to be gendered in any way (e.g., Benny is a shade of purple and Dizzy is orange). Instead, the team merely represents every color of the rainbow. The data does not suggest the female machines are in any way less capable than the males in performing their

respective tasks. In fact, the ‘incompetence/doubt/concern’ theme toward one’s own abilities is overwhelmingly enacted by Lofty. The number of these messages spoken by Lofty in the sample was more than the total of all the other machines’ messages combined. Table 4.1 shows the distribution of the ‘incompetence/doubt/concern’ theme.

Table 4.1: Total ‘Incompetence/Doubt/Concern’ for Each Machine

Lofty	Dizzy	Muck	Scoop	Scrambler	Benny	Roley
22	6	6	5	3	2	0

Despite having far fewer than Lofty, Muck and Dizzy were still tied—at six each—with the second greatest number of these negative messages. Scoop had the third most with five. An area that did reflect some gendered difference was in questioning. When taking into account the number of questions asked to better understand work, the female machines spoke at a noticeably higher frequency. Questions of ‘education’ were counted in this category when they were specific to learning more about a job or an object (i.e., “What is that?” or “What are you using this for?”). Questions regarding work instruction (i.e. “What are we doing today?” or “What should I do next?”) were not counted. Muck and Dizzy each asked a total of ten questions within the data to better understand something, while the five male machines combined asked a total of ten questions of this nature. Asking questions to gain knowledge can be considered a positive thing, and such an imbalance is open to interpretation. However, the fact that the female machines are more often than not the ones seeking knowledge suggests they are also more often the ones who lack it.

Scoop, the unspoken leader of the machines, is male. He appears to be the more competent of the machines—given his position as the unspoken leader—and even directs

work on job sites occasionally (“Lofty to the Rescue,” 2001). Dizzy—one of the two machines identified as female—is also the youngest member of the Can-Do Crew and “chatters and giggles frequently and is always spinning with curiosity” (“Meet Dizzy,” 2010). Whether these characteristics are attributed to her because she is young, female, or both, is unclear. Dizzy’s youth may be coincidental or an attempt to mask the intentionality of applying said characteristics to a female machine. According to Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary online, dizzy (adj.) informally “describes a person who is silly, especially a woman. Ex: *In the film, she played the part of a dizzy blonde.*” (“Dizzy,” 2010, n.p.) The definition implies a somewhat derogatory meaning behind the character’s name. Not only is the term derogatory, it is specifically in reference to females.

Muck—the name of the other female character—holds multiple potential meanings. According to Bob the Builder’s official website, Muck “loves getting messy” (“Meet Muck,” 2010). Two definitions offered by Cambridge online for muck (n.) are: “dirt or solid animal waste” and “something you consider very unpleasant or very low quality.” (“Muck,” 2010, n.p.) One might expect a dump truck to be dirty. But, again, the potential meaning of the machine’s name is derogatory. Cambridge also offers in its results for “muck” a slang term specific to the United Kingdom (where the show is written and produced). “Lady Muck” (n. informal) is a slang term for “a woman who thinks she is very important and should be treated better than everyone else.” (“Lady Muck,” 2010, n.p.) While it is not suggested that these characteristics apply directly to the machine in *Bob the Builder*, it is interesting that the creator(s) of the character chose a name identifiable with such a disagreeable slang term—again specific to women—used

in the UK. The term “muck-up” (n.) is defined as “a mistake that completely spoils something” (“Muck-up,” 2010, n.p.). Whatever the definition, muck seems to be more negative than positive in the United Kingdom.

The male machines on the team—Scoop, Roley, Lofty, Scrambler, and Benny—do not have names that are negatively denoted. “Lofty” (adj.) can mean “high” in relation to position, or “(formal) of a high moral standard” in regard to ideas (“Lofty,” 2010, n.p.)—most likely a reference to position as Lofty is a crane. “Scramble” means “to move quickly” (“Scramble,” 2010, n.p.). Scoop and Roley’s names are derived from their occupational tasks/skills (i.e., Scoop *scoops* things and Roley *rolls* things flat). Benny’s is merely a name with no relation to a characteristic or occupational skill (much like that of Farmer Pickles’ tractor Travis). In naming, the male machines are presented differently than are the female machines. None of the male names hold the same potentially offensive or negative meanings the females’ do.

Gendered machines add to the understanding of male and female representation in the show and further highlight imbalance. Not only are the female characters underrepresented, they are named in culturally negative terms. Because the terms are specific to the United Kingdom, they may not hold the same meaning for other cultures; though, it would be interesting to know how they are translated in other languages. However they are interpreted, the lack of female representation within the organization—and their suggestively inferior knowledge—speaks to the masculine-dominated nature of building. Other characters in the show offer further stereotyped representations in regard to gender.

Gender Stereotypes and Supporting Characters

Male characters in Bob the Builder take on what would be considered stereotypically masculine occupations. That is to say, the occupations they assume highlight characteristics within the *masculine personality, physical, and cognitive dimensions*. Robert, of course, is the patriarch of Bob's family and the one who provided Bob his position as a builder. Mr. Bentley, as previously mentioned, is also in a position of power as the building inspector—and speculatively as the mayor in later episodes. Mr. Bentley supervises Bob and the team in projects they take on for the city of Bobsville. He also fills in for the unseen Mayor in a ceremony to bury the town's time capsule ("Scruffy the Detective," 2001). Mr. Bentley also displays a number of characteristics within the *masculine cognitive* dimension including an affinity for abstractions and math (Cejka & Eagly, 1999). In "Two Scoops" (2005), Mr. Bentley offers Robert 'work instruction/definition/description' of what needs to be done:

Robert: . . . are those trees for me?

Mr. Bentley: They are indeed your trees, and here is where I'd like them planted, in a circle, perfectly neat. Wouldn't you say?

Robert: Oh yes, perfectly.

In "Scruffy the Detective" (2001), Mr. Bentley's contribution to the time capsule is a model of city hall made entirely from match sticks, which he assures Mr. Elliot is "completely to scale." Mr. Bentley's apparent interest in the mayor's 'occupation/al identity' and all it entails can be perceived as dominance and competitiveness, two characteristics of Cejka and Eagly's (1999) *masculine personality* dimension.

Additionally, the fact that he points out the geometrical perfection of his work to others in both examples also suggests a certain level of competitiveness and subtle aggression.

Mr. Elliot is another male character whose position suggests some form of superiority. He runs the museum and is identified as an expert when Bob and Scoop find bones (“Scoop’s Stegosaurus,” 2001). In the same episode, identifies and assembles the bones into a full dinosaur skeleton. Like Mr. Bentley and Robert (when he is not building), Mr. Elliot wears a suit—connotatively a symbol of professionalism, success, or prestige. It is not to say that Mr. Elliot and other male characters do not possess characteristics of the *feminine personality* or *feminine cognitive*, only that the traits they do possess support their positions in stereotypically masculine occupations. The male characters possess at least a few of both masculine and feminine characteristics—the male characters are also capable of being kind and warm to others, for example—while the women appear to possess entirely feminine characteristics.

Mrs. Percival is the schoolmaster in Bobsville. While she is placed in a commanding position—at the head of the school—the position is in a field typically reserved for women. Pam is another female character who is positioned, unclearly, in a field more conducive to *feminine cognitive* characteristics (Cejka & Eagly, 1999). As an employee of the art center, she likely possesses creativity and artistic abilities. Mrs. Potts, another member of the community, has no identifiable occupation. Molly is another supporting character. The daughter of JJ, Bob’s material supplier, Molly is the only character who is identified as a college student. In “Molly’s Fashion Show” (2003) it is revealed that she is in college studying fashion—another realm demanding artistic ability, imagination and creativity. The other interesting aspect of Molly’s character is that she is

one of two Black characters on the show. It was not anticipated to encounter any minority characters; the sample does not indicate at what point these characters first appear in the show. Undoubtedly, their presence is intended to represent diversity in the community of Bobsville. This chapter now turns to a discussion of diversity and non-gender stereotypes in *Bob the Builder*.

Diversity and Non-Gender Stereotypes

An influential study by Clark and Clark determined that children are “cognizant of race and can establish a hierarchy from their interactions” (as cited in Clark & Perkins, 2007, p. 2). The study showed that Black children had made a distinction between Black and White and placed a higher value on being White (as cited in Clark & Perkins, 2007, p. 2). Clark and Perkins (2007) have noted that, because of children’s high exposure to television and the importance of racial identity in self-esteem processes, researchers should seek to understand how children view portrayals of race on TV. *Bob the Builder* has only two characters who are identifiably non-White—JJ and Molly. Again, it is unclear at what point JJ and Molly entered the show, but they were not present in any of the episodes prior to 2003 within the sample. In their study of 81 children’s television programs, Clark and Perkins (2007) found minority representation to fall into three categories: part of the scenery, leaders of the pack, or one of the gang. Molly and JJ are portrayed as one of the gang in *Bob the Builder*, as they are found “in a group of others—all on equal social footing” (p. 19). Although Molly and JJ appear on equal footing in the egalitarian society, the majority of Bobsville is White.

Only one other character stands the possibility of being non-White, based on semiotic observations of skin color. Pam, the art center employee, appears to have

slightly darker skin than the other White characters. Her hair is also dark, but no clear ethnic identification can be made of her character, if one exists. In the American version of the show, Pam's voice has a slight northeastern accent such as might be found in New Jersey or New York. Because of her ethnic ambiguity, Pam cannot be considered a representative of a non-White ethnicity. Pam only appears in one episode of the sample. Regardless of when JJ and Molly entered the show, the low number of non-White characters reflects a poor representation of reality. Perhaps the positive aspect of Molly and JJ's existence is that there was no indication in the data of any ethnic stereotyping. Aside from their skin color and the obviously ethnic texture of their hair, nothing distinguishes Molly or JJ from the other members of the egalitarian community. JJ runs a successful business supplying building materials and Molly is a college student. Despite the lack of stereotypic representation of the Black characters, other groups are blatantly stereotyped in *Bob the Builder*.

Two characters are presented as palpable stereotypes in the show. The first example, Mr. Sabatini, is a stereotypical Italian male. The three episodes from the sample in which he appears ("Wendy's Big Night Out," 2003; "Trix's Pumpkin Pie," 2004; "Molly's Fashion Show," 2003) portray him as an Italian restaurateur with a heavy Italian accent, large gestures, and a curled black mustache. The second stereotypical representation appeared rather unexpectedly in the sample. In "Wendy's Big Night Out" (2003), Wendy arranges to have her hair done by Tony the Hairdresser. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Tony is one of very few characters who is blatantly identified by occupation—Farmer Pickles and Bob being the other two from the data. Why, then, does the show choose to highlight this particular character's occupation? Visual observations

of the character during his brief appearance in the episode inform that Tony possesses a number of characteristics suggestive of stereotypical homosexuality.

Neither of Tony's two lines in the episode is suggestive of homosexuality. However, a number of his non-verbals are blatantly stereotypical. His clothing is noticeably more fashionable than the other characters; Tony sports a dark, almost shiny button-down shirt in the episode. The most obvious sign of difference is also associated with his wardrobe; Tony the Hairdresser has an earring in his right ear, something which once served as a sign of male homosexuality until it was assumed by heterosexual masculine culture (Reeser, 2010). Upon closer examination of the other male characters—those presumably heterosexual—none have earrings. Taken alone, the earring would not necessarily suggest homosexuality. However, another non-verbal characteristic suggestive of Tony's homosexuality is his limp wrists as he interacts with Wendy. According to Newall (1986), limp wrists are a once secret signal which has been subsumed by culture and applied to the homosexual stereotype. Finally, Tony's wave is distinct from any of the other characters,' even the females. Again, his limp wrist is accompanied by the alternating movement of his fingers with no movement at the elbow. The other characters in the show wave with an unbroken wrist and movement only at the elbow, and were observed to do so in multiple episodes.

Tony is directly identified with a less typically masculine 'occupation/al identity' in the community and displays non-verbal behaviors and appearances characteristic of a stereotypical homosexual male, despite his not technically being an "out" character. Because of limited data on the character himself, it is impossible to go beyond this surface analysis in the present study. However, both Tony and Mr. Sabatini are

constructed with representations that perpetuate highly stereotypical images of specific social groups. Thus, beyond the more subtle perpetuation of gender-based stereotypes related to occupation, *Bob the Builder* lacks sufficient representation of non-White, non-hetero normative populations. The presence of Molly and JJ permit an incomplete representation of reality, as Hispanics, Asians, Middle-Easterners, Eastern Europeans, and other groups are entirely absent from the sample. Even more disturbing than non-representation is the misrepresentation of two very specific groups through stereotyping.

Summary

Speaking to research question four, *Bob the Builder* ranges in its representations of stereotypes from very subtle—as in the gendered stereotyping of Wendy—to quite blatant—as in the ethnicity of Mr. Sabatini and the suggestive sexual orientation of Tony the hairdresser. Wendy, though not hyperfeminized, is not equal to Bob in terms of ability, sphere of responsibility, or ‘occupation/al identity.’ As illustrated by her blue hard hat, Wendy is *different* than Bob (and presumably, the typical builder). Her additional responsibilities in the office are not characteristic of a builder and the space within which she undertakes them is the most stereotypically feminine space in the organization. Thus, semiotic analysis and themes of ‘gender,’ ‘education,’ ‘work instruction/definition/description,’ ‘occupation/al identity,’ ‘structure/nature of the organization,’ and ‘incompetence/doubt/concern’ help reinforce Wendy’s denied identity as a builder equal to Bob in ability or status. These themes and semiotic observations further support the gendered imbalance of the machines in the organization as well as point toward a more heavily gender stereotyped population in Bobsville, where the men take on more pronounced positions of dominance or expertise and the women are

confined to artistic or nurturing occupations *if* they are identified with an occupation at all.

The more troubling issues of stereotyping and diversity exist in the examination of specific community members outside the organization. Semiotic analysis reveals only two Black characters among the predominantly White Bobsville community. Such underrepresentation of ethnic and cultural diversity leaves any number of groups unaccounted for—a significant problem when *Bob the Builder* airs in over 240 countries across the globe. Semiotic analysis and the ‘occupation/al identity’ theme also reveal the pronounced stereotyping of two community members—Mr. Sabatini and Tony the hairdresser. Mr. Sabatini—armed with a dark, curled mustache and thick Italian accent—runs the local restaurant and pizza parlor. Tony is placed in an occupation atypical of the occupations held by the other males of Bobsville. A number of his non-verbals reproduce heavily stereotyped behaviors suggestive of homosexuality. It is a positive step to portray homosexual representations as accepted members of the community in a children’s television show. However, Tony is heavily stereotyped and presumably does not appear often (only briefly in one episode in the sample), making his existence problematic or potentially unnoticed.

Despite the presence of males and females within the traditionally more masculine field of building, they are not treated equally in *Bob the Builder*. Even though Wendy’s position in the building yard is far less stereotyped than the occupations held by other female community members, her denied identity as a fellow builder and delegated feminine space in the office suggest her difference and domestic qualities. Wendy’s stereotyping is subtle; the stereotyping of other individuals is far more pronounced. Their

presence, as well as the absence of realistic ethnic representation, positions Bobsville as an ideal egalitarian society of severely limited diversity and gender equality.

CHAPTER V: Conclusion

When I look at the historical big picture, I am perplexed at the domination of life by paid employment at a time when life itself should be getting easier. We live in extraordinary times, in which a majority of people in postindustrial societies have an unprecedented array of choices about how they live, where they live and work, and what they buy. Machines are our slaves, and the basic necessities of life are, for the majority of people, relatively easy to obtain. This is an era when life should be filled with all sorts of rewarding activities. Yet, many find themselves caught up not only in long hours of work but in debt, and suffering from stress, loneliness, and crumbling families. (Ciulla, 2000, p. 234)

The meaning of work is a concept with a rich history, particularly in Western cultures.

The Greeks believed work was a curse from the gods; by the third century, Clement of Alexandria had introduced the concept of “good work” to Catholicism (Ciulla, 2000, pp. 35-40). Today, the implied and anticipated calling of work has led individuals to “create meaning out of work or act to make work meaningful for them” (Broadfoot et al., 2008, p. 157). Socialization to work as well as an understanding of how society comes to (re)produce its values of work and the organization warrant continued close study.

I find this type of work to be particularly important in a time of economic and occupational uncertainty. With the trends and shifts inevitable of postmodern work, people will continue to find themselves struggling for permanent work and, if or when they do find it, struggling to find meaning in it. Children, adolescents, and adults alike are led to believe that work is a calling capable of providing deep meaning and enjoyment in life. This close occupational tie to identity can create frustrations and feelings of inadequacy turned inward to the individual when he or she does not find such ends—or in this day and age, cannot even find a steady job. Understanding the messages we

(re)construct socially about what values we hold and how we value work/ers and the organization becomes imperative in understanding how we might begin to reconcile them. While other research has examined how young adults are socialized to work and its meaning (Clair, 1996), others have looked toward children's socializations to work through parents (Medved et al., 2006) and some forms of media (Cejka & Eagly, 1999; Gooden & Gooden, 2001; Oliver & Green, 2001). This study continues the discussion by applying critical discourse analysis and visual semiotics to the popular children's television show, *Bob the Builder*. Through a critical cultural lens, the analysis aimed to uncover the work discourses (re)presented and (re)constructed in the show.

The remainder of the final chapter will review the research questions posed in Chapter One. Then, implications of the study will be addressed. The chapter will conclude with suggestions for future research and last remarks.

Research Questions

RQ 1: What particular cultural values are (re)presented within Bob the Builder regarding work?

Keith Chapman was inspired to create Bob and his anthropomorphic team by watching a construction site in the 1980s, at a time when Britain was realizing its fascination with property and development. Written and produced in the United Kingdom, *Bob the Builder* (re)presents the values of a distinctly Western culture. Elements of the modern and postmodern are carefully intertwined to present a community driven by the value of production, yet strangely void of currency. Nostalgic values of wholesomeness, equality and mutual economic growth in a free market are also (re)presented. The egalitarian community presented in *Bob the Builder* is an illusory

concept of an ideal postmodern society void of social ills or poverty—of capitalism unrealized. Production remains the central drive within the organization in the ideal postindustrial community of Bobsville, and the challenges of postindustrial (advanced) capitalism are strategically absent.

RQ 2: What values of workers and organization are constructed in Bob the Builder?

Bob is the ideal, flexible postmodern worker; his skills and knowledge are integrated as he embraces the identity of builder. Bob is framed as the hero of Bobsville, carrying his organization forward and contributing to the sustainment of a perfectly egalitarian society. Not only does Bob successfully integrate his multiple abilities into his work, he also successfully manages his yard of machines. His ability to perform as a builder, entrepreneur, and manager is supported and enabled by Wendy, who carries on the more domestic and feminine aspects of organizational work. Wendy's knack for organization and paperwork keeps Bob outside the more feminine sphere of the office and Wendy outside the occupational identity of builder.

Messages about the organization itself (re)produce the six contemporary trends presented by Cheney et al. (2008), further suggesting the show's representation of Western culture. The community in *Bob the Builder* grows economically as a single unit, emphasizing the role of production while ignoring its very real societal drawbacks. The second trend, the shifting of organizational forms, creates the need to brand the individual in a time of occupational uncertainty. The variation of this trend presented in Bob supports branding, but reestablishes historical tendencies toward loyalty to the organization thereby ignoring the increasing occupational uncertainty of the postmodern condition. Organizational change is also romanticized through the messages present in

the show. Information and communication technologies are also present in the show, as are elements of the Simplicity Movement—though, not to the extent that they would deny the importance of capitalism or production. The organization is presented as an entity not to be questioned, but to be embraced. The ideal worker is one who stays loyal to the organization and meets the integrative demands of contemporary work.

RQ 3: How are concepts of leisure, play, and family constructed in Bob the Builder?

Two separate approaches to leisure are put forth in the stories of *Bob the Builder*. First, Bob is seemingly unable to experience leisure separate from work. That is, he cannot engage in leisure because he either expects extrinsic rewards, sets a predetermined goal for the activity, or places it as an obligation—or additional job—rather than an act of free choice. Conversely, Wendy actively seeks leisurely activities away from the organization. She takes off work to spend time with her family, rather than placing work as a non-negotiable top priority. The treatment of leisure further positions Bob as the ideal worker—able to intertwine work with other life aspects to remain consistently productive. Wendy’s distance from the identity of builder is punctuated by her seeking meaning and enjoyment in activities outside of work, halting her ability to produce.

Play is equally dichotomized as either constructive—compatible with work—or destructive—hindering work. The childlike machines sometimes engage in play and are encouraged to do so in a constructive manner. The machines enact play to suspend their realities as humanized machines and mimic human experiences, and it is only acceptable for them to do so when work has been finished. Destructive play is illustrated in the actions of Spud the Scarecrow. Spud’s play offers a visible contrast to the machines’ and almost always results in him being scolded and/or punished by the human adults. Where

the machines—who engage in constructive play—always succeed in work, Spud often fails at whatever task he takes on. The correlation between approaches to play and the success of work become clear through these representations.

As with friendship, family is given a minimal role in *Bob the Builder*. Much like leisure and play, family is treated as it relates to the organization. Bob's family appears more often within the organization, suggesting that the ideal worker might incorporate this aspect of life into the work sphere as well. Wendy's family exists wholly outside the organization. She is unable to incorporate family into her work sphere and, instead, must take time away from work to see them. By keeping Wendy's family separate and portraying Bob's as primarily visible in the work context, *Bob the Builder* minimizes the importance of family in work-life balance.

RQ 4: What gendered or otherwise diversified representations are constructed in Bob the Builder?

Wendy performs building tasks at Bob's side, suggesting she is on an equal plane. A closer look reveals that Wendy is situated as too feminine to be a builder as evidenced by her hyper-feminized work space in the building yard office and the verbal reinforcements of her femininity by other characters. Certain scenarios in the sample also place Wendy in contrast to Bob's more masculine characteristics. Although Wendy is not as feminine as the other female characters, she is still feminized in the realm of building and does not hold the title of builder. Similarly, other women in the community are placed in more stereotypically feminine occupations if they hold any occupation at all.

Representations of diversity in *Bob the Builder* are minimal; only two Black characters appear in the show and were not present from the show's beginnings, but

incorporated later. One regular character within the community portrays a highly stereotyped Italian male. In a significantly smaller role, Tony the hairdresser is quite suggestively presented as a stereotyped homosexual. The lack in ethnic diversity and heavily stereotyped peripheral characters—paired with gender stereotypes—problematizes representations of diversity and equality in the community of Bobsville.

Implications

An analysis of the globally successful children's television show *Bob the Builder* reveals the many messages communicated to children regarding the ideal worker and organization. By engaging work as a central theme, the show offers a rare opportunity to directly view some of the messages being made available to children in the complex process of socialization—where other sources might not be directly observable. These messages become problematic when gender, ethnicity, class, and other identities are stereotyped, represented, or underrepresented. The show ignores class issues by removing class entirely. Non-White ethnicities are flagrantly lacking in representation, particularly for a show that reaches so many countries and cultures. While the show steers clear of ethnic stereotyping, it does go so far as to present—albeit briefly—a suggestively stereotypical representation of homosexuality. Stereotypical representations of gender are cleverly masked behind Wendy's atypical occupation and masculine-colored clothing. In truth, she is consistently represented as the more domestic, feminized, and occupationally unidentified member of the organization—separate from the organization both in title and in the very way she lives.

Not only does *Bob the Builder* provide messages about work(ing) and organization, it also solicits—at a significantly lower frequency—the appropriate ways to

engage in non-work activities, though always in relation to work. Leisure is presented in two very different ways. Bob struggles with the concept of leisure as Wendy seems to seek and embrace it. Similarly, Bob's family seems to exist within the organization while Wendy's is plainly separate from it. While Bob is so closely tied to the organization in every aspect of his life, Wendy is distinctly separate and possesses qualities and performs tasks uncharacteristic of a builder. Although the show does not explicitly value one of these portrayals over the other, it can be deduced that Bob, generally speaking, is the more revered character.

Undoubtedly, *Bob the Builder* can provide positive messages about teamwork and work ethic. However, the portrayal of an egalitarian community void of any problems is not realistic. Perhaps children's shows are not always motivated to incorporate harsh realities in their plotlines, but work is a very real part of everyday life. If children as young as three are to be introduced to work identity, ethics, and organization, then it most certainly must be approached responsibly. The importance of occupation to Bob's identity suggests that a definitive life-long career within a single organization is common to our postmodern condition. As many can contest, that is not the case. Advanced corporate capitalism has its drawbacks, but *Bob the Builder* abandons these by romanticizing the organizational forms and changes and exalting the postmodern worker—an easily adaptive entrepreneur with unquestioned job security. Even more telling of the expectations of the postmodern worker is his mastery of machinery. Bob is inherently superior to his mechanical co-workers. Teamwork is an interesting concept when the "team" consists of dehumanized workers/humanized machines. In a show about

work, cooperation among human co-workers to achieve a mutual goal *within* an organization is extremely limited.

Furthermore, the show does not represent gender equality in its treatment of Wendy. She is not Wendy the Builder; she is simply Wendy. In order to truly represent Bob and Wendy on an equal plane, Wendy must hold the title of builder or Bob must relinquish it. The differences in their non-work lives elevate Bob's work-centered approach to family and leisure over Wendy's more balanced approach. If Bob cannot create a healthier balance—presumably because he is able to find meaning and enjoyment in his work—then at the very least, Wendy's lifestyle must be recognized as equally valid—a judgment not easily made in light of their gendered differences. As Medved et al. (2006) point out, media messages, like those found in *Bob the Builder*, “contribute to meaning construction about work and family in contemporary society” (p. 162). It is problematic to communicate to children that meaning and enjoyment will inevitably and inherently be found in occupational identity, as it is for Bob. It is equally problematic to suggest that leisure is undesirable and family time outside work is unneeded. Some people do live in this way, but it is not attainable for everyone. In some ways, the inherited nature of Bob's organizational position limits children's aspirations as they later determine what occupations are reasonable for them. In light of these observations, Wendy's approach to work and life must be presented as equally valid rather than less desirable *because* she is a woman and not a named builder. Likewise, there are issues with portraying females in a stereotypically more domestic role guised as a position of equality. The language in *Bob* is used to encourage stereotypes when it suggests it might eliminate them.

Future Research

The present study suggests future research in a variety of directions. A more purposive sample can reveal in greater depth the nature of the messages in *Bob the Builder*. In order to study messages about family and leisure, it was thought that a very intentional selection of episodes that explicitly focus on those themes would be best. The episodes originally selected for the sample proved extremely hard, if not impossible to come by. Four episodes from the purposive sample were located and included in the convenience sample, as were the other episodes on those DVD collections. A convenience sample is not always ideal, but sometimes researchers must adapt and generate knowledge from what is available. There were messages and (re)presentations in the convenience sample that may never have appeared otherwise (Tony the hairdresser, for example). The sample provided an abundance of data for valuable analysis. Certainly, drawing data from a convenience sample is not always generalizable, but the present study proves more than sufficient as a starting point in highlighting and understanding the discourses at work about work.

An expansion of research to those episodes with very explicit treatments of family, leisure, and work identity would likely add to what has already been found and could also potentially contradict it. Another potential direction of this research would be to examine how these messages translate cross-culturally. This study examines a television show produced in Western Europe, viewed in the United States, and analyzed from a Western perspective. The analysis can only offer insight on how the show appears to Western, English-speaking audiences and cannot make any meaningful observations about how it is perceived in the other 54 languages and hundreds of countries across the

globe. Despite the limited perspective on a global artifact, the study does shed light on the Western, post-industrial views advanced about work that may be encouraged and romanticized for children in every corner of the globe, regardless of language. There is a possibility that *Bob the Builder* has continued to evolve in its treatment of diversity within the last four years. Because the United States version is dubbed with new voices, there is a possibility that other ethnicities are represented through voice in the U.K. version, and an analysis of that text may add to the discussion. It would be valuable to analyze the text in other cultural contexts. When translated into other languages, do the messages retain their meaning? Or do they amend themselves to the culture? Such questions are worth exploring.

Cultural Studies is also interested in effect—a concept difficult to measure and beyond the scope of this study. The discourses in this analysis were uncovered in an inherently subjective manner. Also outside the scope of this study is an understanding of how these discourses are interpreted and internalized by its audiences. What discourses resonate and how they resonate with children should be a continued concern for scholars in understanding the processes of identity formation and socialization, both generally speaking and in regard to occupational aspirations. Studying children and their reactions to media is a difficult task to undertake—particularly for *Bob the Builder*'s target audience of 3 to 5 year olds—and was beyond the scope of this project. As only one of many sources for discursive resources for children, media exists as a site of reproduction of discourses and social values. This analysis of the sample merely highlights these reproductions, but it must stop there. It cannot tell us what the audience chooses to do with them. A more objective approach to these messages would be to begin exploring

how the audience interprets these messages. Young children often come up with creative or surreal answers when asked about their occupational aspirations. It would be of interest to note whether *Bob the Builder* could impact these very early aspirations toward more realistic or potentially (non)gendered careers.

Yet another direction of research could examine how discourses in *Bob the Builder* compare to those of other children's shows which engage work as a central theme. *Handy Manny* is one such show. Seemingly less popular, *Handy Manny* may offer a very different portrayal of work, organization, non-work and diversity. From the title alone, it is observable that Manny's identity is not as deeply or explicitly tied to an occupation. Such a comparative study might also offer insight into why *Handy Manny* may or may not reach the same scope of viewership and popularity *Bob the Builder* has enjoyed over the last decade.

The importance in understanding how we are socialized into work is undeniable, particularly in the current occupational and economic landscapes. Even in a healthy economy, people are doomed to struggle in finding full time work and financial security in advanced corporate capitalism. Tying identity and meaning so closely to occupation can be problematic for those who find themselves struggling with familial roles, financial issues, and, especially, unemployment. Not only does *Bob the Builder* socialize children to understanding work as it might relate to their own experiences, it also provides them with resources in understanding how work functions for their parents. Suggesting that work should always come first devalues the concepts of friendship, leisure, play, and most importantly, family. Seeing Robert acknowledge Bob's wanting to be there with him during his extended work day might ease children's own feelings toward their

parents for missing events—from an important school or sports function to a simple meal—because of work, but it does not reconcile the prioritization of work over family. Understanding what children enjoy about *Bob* and what discourses they take from his various occupational adventures seems an important quest to undertake. Perhaps it is the promise of productive and meaningful work within a wholly egalitarian society and a neatly defined identity that children find so appealing. Or perhaps it is the talking machines.

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