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Abstract

Scholars across various disciplines, specifically specialists in psychology and literature, have noticed an uprise in the encouragement of consumerist behavior in children's outlets. This has led to a shift in thematic focus in all forms of media, revealing the pervasive influence of consumerist practices in today's popular culture. This paper examines the transformation of consumerism in Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* as it transitions from the novel to Mel Stuart's 1971 film adaptation, *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. To support these findings, the paper examines the novel's characters and plot points, uses secondary sources providing information on the historical context of both the novel and film, and showcases instances of reverse product placement after the film's release. Through this analysis of the *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* franchise, insight is provided into the presence of consumer culture in children's media and how it has changed over the years as consumerism becomes a larger part of everyday life.

Keywords: Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Quaker Oats, reverse product placement, Roald Dahl, Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory, consumerism

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory by Roald Dahl, a children's classic, follows the story of Charlie Bucket and several other children as they find the five Golden Tickets, which grants them permission to tour Willy Wonka's chocolate factory. Throughout the novel, the children's impulses take over, and one by one each child is disqualified from Wonka's "contest" until Charlie is the only one left, and in turn for winning, is rewarded with ownership of the entire chocolate factory. Through the eyes of a child, the consequences for the mischievous acts of the other four children might just seem like valuable life lessons about patience and integrity, but with further examination, one can realize the ties the novel has to capitalism. By using these ideas of consumerism to view the novel, it becomes clear that Roald Dahl's intentions for the novel were to question the morality of consumerist behaviors and how these behaviors can have an effect on children. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* addresses consumerism through the characters Augustus Gloop, Violet Beauregarde, Veruca Salt, and Mike Teavee to draw the reader into its addictive ways, while also heavily advising against it through the novel's protagonist, Charlie Bucket.

To recognize the significance of consumerism in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, there must be an understanding of the development of children's marketing and its control of children. The heavy influence of consumerist behavior in children's media outlets has been prevalent since the early twentieth century. When newer technologies started being introduced into society, consumerism began to be viewed as an essential part of everyday life. Marketing strategies changed because of this shift, leading companies to view children as future members of society, thus making them future consumers (Druker para. 1). Since the mid-twentieth century, when television started to become an ordinary household item, corporations have capitalized on children's vulnerability and lack of critical thinking skills to influence early expressions of materialism through outlets such as television and children's books (Franz 16-17). Early exposure to these messages can create a false sense of reality for children in which they believe material goods equate to happiness, feeding into consumer culture. Through targeted marketing strategies in children's media, children represent over a trillion-dollar global market, in which they participate by acting as consumers themselves, pestering parents into buying products, and establishing long-term brand loyalties prematurely (Franz 14-15).

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory was a product of a cultural shift from pre-World War II sensibilities of hard work and deferred gratification to one post-war, which celebrates consumerism and instant gratification (Rudd 1). Charlie's family signifies those still stuck in pre-war cultural norms while the other children display excessive qualities, such as overindulgence and impatience, correlated with post-war norms. While Roald Dahl does portray capitalism in a traditional way, he also displays consumption through the symbolism of food. In Susan Honeyman's "Gingerbread Wishes and Candy(land) Dreams," she describes the role of food as an essential contributor to portray the story's themes: "Willy Wonka lures, tests, punishes, and rewards through candy, in the end modeling moderation, obedience, and willingness to work as a good child behavior through Charlie's example" (210). Food is the backbone of the storyline; it not only portrays the Bucket family's problem with poverty, but also represents the other children's temptations that they fail to resist, further exemplifying the lessons within the story.

The Golden Ticket contest is the novel's formal introduction to the tie between consumerism and food. The contest proves to be a success due to demand and packaging, since not only are they buying a chocolate bar, but the consumer is also given a small chance of

winning entry into Wonka's coveted chocolate factory (KPMG Spark). It sends the entire world into a frenzy to get their hands on the five tickets in which adults and children alike can indulge, buying as many candy bars as they possibly can (Dahl 23). The contest succeeds in targeting people of all age groups to buy chocolate bars, not for the purpose of eating them, but for a golden piece of paper. Even the Bucket family, who can see through Wonka's contest as a strategic marketing campaign to skyrocket sales, still reads the newspaper every night to keep up with the Golden Ticket winners. The family gathers together and waits in anticipation as Charlie opens his single birthday present, a Wonka's Whipple-Scrumptious Fudgemallow Delight, but as soon as there is no ticket to be seen they quickly dismiss the contest and tell Charlie to be grateful for his chocolate bar (Dahl 28-29). Later in the story, Grandpa Joe feeds into the intrigue of the marketing campaign, giving up his only 10 cents to buy a candy bar for the slim chance to win, telling Charlie "I'm just as crazy as you are to find that ticket!" (Dahl 35). These examples Dahl has provided in the story not only give the reader a sense of how obsessive the contest is, but they also display the classist undertones within the novel; those who have more money are able to buy more chocolate bars, while those who are less fortunate have less of a chance of winning the contest. Even Charlie falls for the instant gratification provided by consumerism when he finds a dollar buried in the snow. Rather than bringing it back to his family, Charlie instead buys two chocolate bars to test his chances of finding the last ticket. When Charlie does finally obtain the Golden Ticket after his fourth try, people crowd around and bribe him with monetary and material means just to get their hands on the ticket (Dahl 45). Instead of taking these offers that could greatly benefit his family, he keeps the ticket for his own advantage so he can feed his hunger for chocolate. Dahl also uses the Golden Ticket contest to introduce the other four children and their flaws that later lead to their dramatic downfalls in the Wonka factory.

Augustus Gloop is the first of the five children to find a Golden Ticket, as well as the first to be removed from Wonka's factory tour. In contrast to Charlie, Augustus is fed copious amounts of candy bars every day, to the extent that the novel describes them as the only thing he is interested in. His mother feeds into his overconsumption, justifying it by comparing him to other children's hazardous interests and the suspected "health benefits" of chocolate, arguing that "[i]t's all vitamins, anyway" (Dahl 22). Mrs. Gloop's support of these unhealthy habits heightened the severity of them to the point that they consumed the boy's life. Augustus repeatedly uses his mother as the consumer to get himself extremely unhealthy amounts of candy, arguably to the point that he becomes addicted to it. Dahl creates and utilizes this greediness to show how a child can behave when their parents do not set boundaries to prevent overconsumption. Augustus' greed reaches new extremes when the children are first led into the factory's chocolate room. While the other children take single pieces of candy, Augustus takes a huge handful; this greed eventually leads him to scoop handfuls of melted chocolate from the chocolate river into his mouth. Mr. Wonka and Mrs. Gloop advise him to stop, "[b]ut Augustus was deaf to everything except the call of his enormous stomach" (72). This greed leads to his demise as he eventually falls into the river of chocolate and gets temporarily stuck in a pipe until he is violently sucked up and taken to the fudge room (72). The Oompa-Loompas' catchy tune describes Augustus' time in the fudge room as they "boil" away all the greed and gall (Dahl 80). While not technically accurate, by the end of the novel, it is revealed that the pipe did make Augustus extremely thin to the point that he has to hold his

pants up as he walks out of the factory (Dahl 148). Through Augustus' consequence for his gluttonous ways, Dahl symbolizes being cleansed of his past ways of excessive consumption.

Violet Beauregarde, the gum-chewing addict, uses her competitive nature to score a Golden Ticket for herself. Her love for competition pushes her gum addiction to new heights, even to the point that she chews on the same piece of gum constantly for three months just to beat her best friend's record. Violet equates her self-worth to her record of gum chewing, further worsening the severity of the habit. Her reliance on this piece of gum even impacts her mental health; she tells the newspaper interviewers, "[t]o tell you the honest truth, I simply wouldn't feel comfortable if I didn't have that little wedge of gum to chew on every moment of the day, I really wouldn't" (Dahl 31). The only reason Violet gives up chewing gum and switches to chocolate bars for an attempt at a Golden Ticket is so she can get a lifetime supply of gum (Dahl 32). On the tour of the chocolate factory, when they arrive at the Inventing Room, Wonka shows the children the world's first chewing gum meal, but he informs the children that it is still under testing (Dahl 94-95). Violet ignores Wonka completely and grabs the gum out of his hand; as she starts to chew, her parents encourage her behavior instead of telling her to stop chewing the hazardous gum. Her parents' approval of her arrogant actions shows that they do not only support her gum addiction, but take pride in it, her father going as far as to comment, "[t]his is a great day for the Beauregardes" (Dahl 96). The family's outlook on objects and their correlation to a person's worth is evident through her parent's response. The Beauregardes rely heavily on material goods to fuel their ego, even conforming their whole personality to a product. Violet soon has to pay for her selfish actions when she gets to the dessert portion of the gum; she begins to turn blue and swell up like a blueberry, but as this is happening to her, she still keeps chewing the piece of gum (Dahl 97). While Violet certainly does feel the effects of turning blue and swelling, she is so dependent on chewing gum that she does not stop, even if it is for the sake of her own health. Dahl creates this punishment for Violet to communicate to the reader what can happen once a product consumes a person and their identity.

Veruca Salt demands her parents to buy her everything she wants to keep her happy. If they do not comply with Veruca's wishes, "she would lie for hours on the floor, kicking and yelling in the most disturbing way" (Dahl 24-25). This is her exact strategy for getting a Golden Ticket; her father goes so far as to halt his factory's operations to unwrap "hundreds of thousands" of candy bars (Dahl 24). Veruca has learned through manipulating her parents, that they will soon give in to her absurd demands, further worsening the behavior. From the time Veruca sets foot into Willy Wonka's factory she wants everything she lays her eyes on from an Oompa-Loompa to a boat that floats along a chocolate river, to a trained squirrel. To comply with his daughter's demands and to avoid any extreme tantrums, Mr. Salt attempts to buy one of the walnut-shelling squirrels, but when Wonka refuses, Veruca takes matters into her own hands by entering the room herself to get one of the squirrels (Dahl 111). This extreme materialistic idea that money can buy happiness eventually leads to her being described as a bad nut, and she is then pushed by an army of squirrels down the factory's garbage chute, along with her mother and father (Dahl 112-113). Dahl creates this ironic punishment for Veruca's materialistic behaviors to show the parallel between a spoiled child and spoiled food: both of them end up in the same place: the trash. Her parents soon meet the same fate as their daughter, paying for their involvement in spoiling Veruca. The Oompa-Loompas' song describes the effects of excessive consumerism on a child, with the lyrics: "[a] girl can't spoil herself you

know…[w]ho are the culprits…[h]er loving parents" (Dahl 118). Dahl exaggerates the extent of the immense power parents hold in determining their child's behavior towards consumer products through Veruca's dynamic with her parents.

Mike Teavee is the only child, aside from Charlie, left in the tour after Veruca's dramatic fall down the factory's garbage chute. In his interview, little is said about how Mike actually got his hands on a Golden Ticket, and instead focuses more on his annoyance towards the interviewers interrupting his television show. Mike watches various TV shows, his favorites being ones with excessive violence. He says, "[t]hey're terrific, those gangsters…[e]specially when they start pumping each other full of lead" (Dahl 34). His interest in violence, especially gun violence, heavily dictates his actions and wants. Dahl indicates this through Mike's massive collection of toy guns which he holsters all over his body (33). He even goes as far as to wear all of his toy pistols into Willy Wonka's factory, showing just how much he takes pride in his collection, a related hobby to his addiction to violent television shows (Dahl 56). Throughout the tour of the chocolate factory, Mike experiences "withdrawal" symptoms from his lack of constant television, saying every now and then, "I want to watch television" (Dahl 118). Even during the once-in-a-lifetime event to meet Willy Wonka and tour his infamous chocolate factory, Mike still wants to lounge and fuel his obsession. Willy Wonka slightly grants Mike's wish once the group gets to the television room. While there, Dahl uses the character of Wonka to insert his own beliefs on avid television use, saying "I don't like television myself… children never seem to be able to take it in small doses" (125) Mike ironically follows Wonka's statement with "[t]hats me!" (125). Mike's statement is proven as Willy Wonka introduces the invention that is kept in the highly dangerous television room. Mike is mesmerized by the "amazing television set," which takes an object, pixelates and shrinks it, and transports it to the viewer's television set (Dahl 125-127). Before thinking about the consequences, or listening to Willy Wonka and his own parents, Mike jumps in front of the machine, essentially becoming one with his addiction. His rebellious actions lead him to become pixelated for an extended period of time until he is then transported to the television set where he is shrunken. After Mike is shrunk, his mother finally stops feeding into Mike's addiction, saying "I'm throwing the television set right out the window the moment we get home" (Dahl 134). Mike throws a tantrum because of this, showing that even after he is shrunken, he still is obsessed with the object that harmed him. The Oompa Loompas comment on this, singing, "[t]hey sit and stare and stare and sit…[u]ntil they're absolutely drunk" (Dahl 139). Even after being shrunken, Mike is completely hypnotized by the television; Dahl uses Mike's character to describe the harms of excessive television use and how it can heavily influence one's behaviors and consumption practices.

Through the story's eccentric events that reveal the character's personalities and flaws, the novel demonstrates the harmful effects of excessive consumption. Augustus and Veruca's parents help feed their greed for food and commercial goods. This completely erases the thin line between rewarding a child and feeding into their destructive habits. These two children capitalize on their parents' actions that push them to the extreme so they are able to get the most products they can out of them. Violet and Mike both have an obsession with a product. Their parents do little to nothing to correct the bad habit, and in some instances, even encourage it. Charlie is the only child admitted into the chocolate factory who does not feed

into this overarching theme of overconsumption. His strong moral compass, which later helps him inherit the chocolate factory, may only be due to his family's inability to afford this lifestyle.

Although all these children—Augustus, Violet, Veruca, and Mike—have evident flaws shown through destructive habits, which Dahl heavily warns against in the novel, the 1971 movie adaptation, *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, actually dismisses their faults to advertise sugary sweets. The origins of the movie and its subtle marketing practices work alongside the movie's examples to reveal the producers' true intentions. Television and films have been known to heavily influence viewers' beliefs and the purchasing of products. In Thomas O'Guinn and L.J. Shrum's "The Role of Television in the Construction of Consumer Reality," the two study how effective this marketing practice actually is. Their conclusion shows that "television programming is a significant, yet overlooked, source of consumption-related social perceptions'" (O'Guinn & Shrum 291). Quaker Oats understood this concept when deciding to fund the silver screen classic, which cost them $200,000 just for the rights to the book, and a total of $3 million to finance the film (Young & Stuart 8). The company did not only jump at this opportunity because of the heavy use of chocolate and other candies in the film, but also since Mel Stuart, the director of *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, anticipated the film to cater to both children and adults (Young & Stuart 3). Having both target audiences allowed Quaker Oats to advertise their new candies, specifically their new chocolate bar, to twice as many people. Although in the end, their chocolate bar did not come into production until after the film's release, the company still branded many of their new candy products as "Willy Wonka's," the most popular being Willy Wonka's Gobstoppers and Willy Wonka's Nerds (Cronin). Even when Nestlé acquired Quaker Oats' candy subsidiary in 1988, it still maintained the Wonka brand image until 2015, and even now select products are still being associated with the *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* franchise. This branding, as well as the film, influences viewer's perceptions to associate an actual candy factory, like those of Quaker Oats and Nestlé, with the one in the novel and film.

Dahl's theme of questioning the morality of consumerism in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* is sacrificed in its film adaptation, *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, in order to advertise Quaker Oats' products. Once the film's history and its ties to the large food company are recognized, the subtle advertising and reverse product placement become increasingly blatant. From the introductory credit scene, which details the multi-step chocolate-making process and its product consumption through children in a candy shop, it is evident that consumption is an essential part of the storyline, and also the Quaker Oats marketing strategy (Stuart). Although the use of chocolate and other candies, as well as examples of overconsumption, are very heavy in the film, this is not much different than the novel itself. It is not until the introduction of Mr. Slugworth, a character created for the film, that the plot of the movie begins to diverge from the one in the novel. As all the children begin to find the Golden Tickets, Slugworth mysteriously appears and whispers into each of the children's ears; once Charlie discovers the last ticket, it is revealed to the viewer that he is bribing the children financially in an attempt to steal one of Wonka's Everlasting Gobstoppers. Instead of focusing on the children's flaws due to overconsumption and product reliance, this new antagonist is what the majority of the plot revolves around (Stuart). During the movie's rising action, when only Violet, Veruca, Mike, and Charlie remain, Willy Wonka reveals the Everlasting Gobstopper and gives all the children one, making them promise not to tell anyone about his invention, to

which Veruca, in reply, crosses her fingers behind her back before receiving hers (Stuart). As the tour goes on, Mike comments on Slugworth's deal saying, "[y]ou think Slugworth would pay extra to know about this?," speaking about Wonka's other wacky inventions (Stuart). These instances in the film imply that almost a majority, if not all the children, plan to break their promise to Wonka in exchange for the $10,000 bribe. Soon after the children receive the Gobstoppers, Charlie and Grandpa Joe break Willy Wonka's rules, drinking the Fizzy Lifting Drinks that cause them to float up to the factory's ceiling. This breaks Charlie's role model manner, which is concrete in the novel, and replaces it with characteristics closely related to those of the other children. This hiccup in Charlie and Grandpa Joe's normal behavior later prohibits them from reaping the other benefit of finding the Golden Ticket, the lifetime supply of chocolate. But, when Charlie returns the Everlasting Gobstopper to Wonka, he exclaims that he disguised one of his assistants, Mr. Wilkinson, as Mr. Slugworth to test the children's moral compass. Charlie won, concluding that Wonka's secret contest for finding a new heir was not based on levels of consumption, like in the novel, but instead lessens the theme to trustworthiness. This creates no motive for viewers to self-reflect on their own capitalistic actions. The film changes the initial plot to divert the viewers' attention from considering the effects of overconsumption, which was Dahl's original intention, and instead centers on a more low-risk theme to advertise candy.

Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory was one of the first, and most successful, corporate product placements. The movie introduced an entire candy empire, producing classics like the Everlasting Gobstopper, Nerds, and the Wonka Bar, and later, when Nestlé acquired the candy sector, Laffy Taffy and SweeTarts also came into production under the Willy Wonka name. Reverse product placement, an approach for product exposure, can be credited for Quaker Oats' initial success in the candy market. This strategic marketing practice uses the products in the novel and film to make the consumers less conscious that they are being marketed a product, and creates a positive effect on consumer's attitudes towards a brand. In "When Fiction becomes Fact: Effect of Reverse Product Placement on Consumer Attitudes," Hemant and Padmini Patwardhan describe the managerial implications of this strategy. They describe the marketing tactic, saying it "may strategically accelerate product adoption by stimulating awareness, interest, and involvement before the product is made commercially available." In the situation of Quaker Oats and *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, this approach introduced the audience to the candy products before they were even released and associated the brand name with the extravagant factory seen in the film. However, the overall success of the candy empire is not only due to the film's main objective being reverse product placement, but also through feelings that a consumer might have towards the novel, or the film. Memory and nostalgia play a major role in selling the candy after an audience is well acquainted with the brand. In "Assessing Varying Intensities of Personal Nostalgia on Emotions," Christopher Marchegiani and Ian Phau describe how emotions can influence consumers to buy products that resonate with their past, saying "advertising can create feeling states that ultimately influence attitudes and purchase behavior" (2). Increasing the level of personal nostalgia also increases positive emotions, which allows companies to influence a consumer's emotions more easily than before (Marchegiani & Phau 6). Many of those who have bought Wonka-branded products have likely read the novel as a child, or have at least seen either of the two film adaptations, giving some level of nostalgia when they have seen the

product's packaging. Many of the marketing campaigns used for The Willy Wonka Candy Company, and the 2005 film adaptation, capitalize on using experiences from the novel and earlier film to entice consumers through personal memory as well. Despite Nestlé discontinuing the Willy Wonka Candy Company in 2015, products with the Willy Wonka name are still in production today, showing just how effective using nostalgia for product marketing is.

Topics of consumerism in children's literature have been prominent since the introduction of modern marketing. Today, the *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* franchise is 60 years old, and still, it is a favorite amongst children and adults alike. Yet, even though the novel and the 1971 film adaptation are within the same franchise, the themes are extremely different. The vast difference between Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, which focuses on overconsumption, and Mel Stuart's *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, which deals with trustworthiness, shows the influences of consumerism in children's media, and how an author's theme can be edited to cater to a consumerist world. By dismissing the faults of the children, Quaker Oats, and later Nestlé, are able to successfully market candy products. This reverse product placement strategy continues to be successful through consumer's nostalgia of both the novel and film.

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