

# DISCOVERIES-THROUGH-PROSE

## THE PERILS OF VOICE VENEER: THE CASE OF DISNEYLAND PUPPETEERS' UNIONIZATION EFFORTS

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**Workers' voice efforts play a critical role in improving working conditions and fostering more equitable workplaces. Managers can either facilitate or delay changes by addressing or silencing workers' concerns. When changes are agreed upon—as evidenced, for instance, by the signing of a labor contract—it is often assumed that they then are enacted. However, in our study of a unionization drive among California Walt Disney Parks and Resorts puppeteers, we discovered a perplexing process we call the adoption of “voice veneer,” in which an employer appears to address the concerns voiced by workers but simultaneously limits the impact of voice by decreasing its dependence on those voicing concerns. Our analysis shows how Disney negotiated and signed (though reluctantly) a labor contract with puppeteers, yet simultaneously reduced opportunities for them to work, making the negotiated agreement impossible to enact. Our findings underscore the need to pay close attention not only to whether and how workers voice concerns, but also to how managers handle voice efforts *after* concerns are voiced and change is agreed upon. We argue that our contemporary world might increasingly give rise to the adoption of voice veneer, and we discuss its perils for all involved: workers, managers, and society.**

Workers' ability to voice their concerns—individually and collectively—is a critical way for them to engage with managers and to plant seeds of change in their workplaces. Many workers use voice as an “attempt ... to change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs” (Hirschman, 1970: 30); they express their grievances rather than leave their job or neglect their work, and, in the process, can initiate beneficial outcomes for all (Baron & Kreps, 1999; Hirschman, 1970). As such, understanding how managers handle voice efforts within their organizations can help us identify what aids or stands in the way of improving employees' working conditions.

How managers enable and respond to employees' voice efforts has been a recurring theme in the study of

organizations (Morrison, 2023; Mowbray, Wilkinson & Tse, 2015). Managers can create a supportive and trustworthy culture to make workers feel they can safely voice their concerns (e.g., Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit & Dutton, 1998). Conversely, employees might remain silent when they perceive that raising concerns is risky or undesirable (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Recently, scholars have documented how the impact that individuals perceive they can have when voicing their concerns shapes whether they express their concerns or not (Sherf, Parke & Isaakyan, 2021). Hence, studying what happens *after* workers voice their concerns is crucial to advance our understanding of voice.

In our research, we discovered a process we call adopting “voice veneer.” In this process, an employer appears to give workers voice but limits the impact of these voices. In November 2014, a group of puppeteers at the California Walt Disney Parks and Resorts attempted to gain union representation and secure a new labor contract over low wages and worker safety. That month also marked the start of a slow and multifaceted process that, to this day, has yet to come to a close. After initial attempts to keep the puppeteers silent and two subsequent years during which Disney appeared to negotiate with them, a labor

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We thank all the former Disneyland puppeteers who shared with us their often-painful experiences of the events we analyzed in this article, Aeson Feehan for his assistance with the linguistic coding, Ann Goodsell and Tobias Ryan for their editorial suggestions, and Fabienne Sedneff for her help. We also thank Erik Dane, the *Academy of Management Discoveries* reviewers, Bill Kahn, Sanaz Mobasseri, Jenna Myers, Daniel Newark, Camille Pradies, Vanessa Pouthier, EGOS participants, and HEC Paris Brownbag participants for their thoughtful suggestions.

Accepted by Erik Dane



agreement was reached. Simultaneously, however, Disney created the conditions for puppeteers' work opportunities to disappear, ultimately decreasing its dependence on puppeteers and making the agreement obsolete.

Our analysis of interviews with Disney puppeteers and of their private Facebook page reveals their hopes and disillusionment as they sought to have their voices heard. By negotiating with puppeteers and agreeing to a labor contract, Disney helped them feel that their voice efforts had been worth it. Yet, by gradually reducing its dependence on puppeteers, Disney also undermined the impact of puppeteers' voice efforts by forestalling any lasting change. Our study (a) spotlights a unique form of resistance to voice that arises when traditional attempts to silence workers fail, (b) calls researchers to further examine how voice can be uncoupled from impact, and (c) illuminates the perils of voice veneer for all involved.

### PUPPETEERS' LABOR CONCERNS

The *Disney Junior—Live on Stage!* show (initially named *Playhouse Disney—Live on Stage!*) started running in 2003. Year after year, 30 puppeteers assumed coveted roles as Mickey Mouse, Minnie Mouse, Donald Duck, and other beloved characters. (Illustration 1 depicts characters, such as Tigger and Pooh, played by puppeteers in this show.) Performing complex yet effortless-looking choreography underneath the stage, they created emotionally resonant scenes from *Handy Manny*, *Little Einsteins*, and other series, for audiences young and old, “mak[ing] sure all of that emotion [could be] read from the furthest seat in the house, and tell[ing] stories cleanly, beautifully, and perfectly, show after show after show,” as Reese

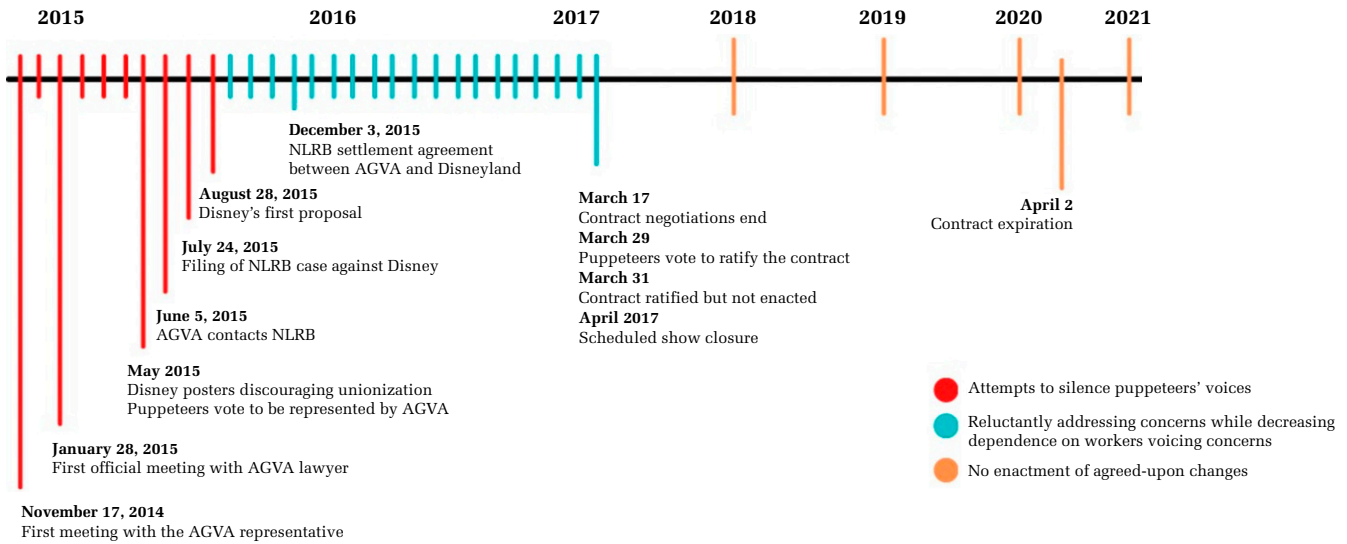
#### ILLUSTRATION 1

#### Pooh, Darby, Tigger, and Roo at *Playhouse Disney—Live on Stage*



Source: Jeff Christiansen (uploaded on June 26, 2008; taken on June 25, 2008), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/jeffchristiansen/2611803489/in/photostream>. Creative common license CC BY-SA 4.0 DEED: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en>. The picture was not altered in any way.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Timeline of Events Surrounding Disney's Handling of Puppeteers' Concerns**



explained.<sup>1</sup> (See Appendix A for a presentation of our study's research methods.) After years of honing their craft, they waved, danced, and roused audiences from a shimmering stage.

Most *Disney Junior—Live on Stage!* puppeteers, raised, like many American children, on the fantasies and allure of The Walt Disney Company's television programs, books, movies, toys, and amusement parks, initially viewed their employment as a dream come true. "It was one of those Disney magical moments," Reese added, recalling his hiring. "We want to make magic. We like making people smile, making their days, and giving that extra spark of something magical," he explained. Though great fun, the shows were both physically and mentally strenuous; puppeteers routinely performed four to six shows a day, and sometimes as many as eight, each lasting 20 to 25 minutes. "Like voice actors who have to act with just their voice, we have to learn how to act with just an arm," Reese noted. In "very tiny alcoves" beneath the stage, puppeteers rolled from one position to another, maneuvering around trapdoors, to perform intricate choreography while lip-syncing to recorded song tracks, holding one arm aloft for minutes on end, to convey the expressive actions and adventures of beloved Disney characters. In these confined spaces for extended periods of time (rehearsals and shows), the puppeteers were regularly prone to back, head, and shoulder injuries.

The year 2014 marked a turning point for puppeteers' working conditions. (See Figure 1 for a timeline of events.) Alongside long hours and increasing physical demands, Disneyland discontinued its contract with the Jim Henson Company to produce the puppets used in its park shows. The Jim Henson Company specialized in creating puppets that were wearable and sustainable (i.e., sufficiently lightweight and flexible for repeated use); it was known for designs suitable for even the most difficult working conditions. By transferring its business to a props company whose puppets were less wearable and sustainable—to cut costs, in the opinion of many puppeteers—Disneyland increased its puppeteers' vulnerability to back and shoulder injuries: one puppeteer was diagnosed with spinal injuries, while others described stress fractures, hernia surgery, and shoulder separation stemming from repeated injuries.

In an effort to prevent injuries, Disneyland provided athletic trainers to "make sure you're OK," said Reese, "but even that wasn't enough to keep us from getting hurt." Keyla recalled that the physical therapists provided by Disneyland "were great, and the trainers did what they could, but they couldn't do everything." The new puppets were, in one puppeteer's words, "heavier and made out of two-inch-thick foam rubber, not built for the human body, especially not in those positions. You were not supported." Reese noted that he and his colleagues made their work look "good and easy," but that, in reality, it was "like holding an encyclopedia in your hand." According to another puppeteer, higher-ups had "no idea how hard the labor was. [New] puppets were designed to look good, not to be easily

<sup>1</sup> We rely on pseudonyms to protect puppeteer anonymity. The pseudonyms do not always reflect the gender of puppeteers, to further protect them.

manipulated ... They hurt you.” Despite the programs Disney provided, the combination of overexertion and unsuitable puppet design resulted in several puppeteers needing multiple surgeries and extensive physical therapy.

At the time, puppeteers did not belong to a union, though their “human counterparts” (the costumed live actors who narrated parts of the show and interacted with the audience) were unionized. Given mounting injuries, unequal pay vis-à-vis the live actors, and Disney’s apparent agenda to develop new shows and new venues, puppeteers wanted to (a) be more involved in the puppet-design process, (b) urge improvements in equipment and safety measures, and (c) seek higher compensation. In 2015, their pay ranged from \$12.59 to \$17 per hour, depending on seniority, with the exception of the most highly paid one earning \$23.07 per hour (Miller, 2017). Many puppeteers who had worked on Broadway or for renowned entertainment companies were paid lower hourly wages in their capacity as live, stage puppeteers compared to performers employed in the same or similar roles at other amusement parks and arcades—wages that could not cover medical expenses for treatment of workplace injuries. Some puppeteers even lived in their cars and relied on food stamps.<sup>2</sup>

All these frustrations fueled the puppeteers’ desire to gain more voice and representation. “The expectations for us were higher than what we were being compensated for and to how we were being treated,” Keyla recalled. “We were still being treated as though we were just like little pawns or minions—to be told what to do, as opposed to the actual skilled people we had become.” The puppeteers thus decided to explain to managers why they believed they were skilled performers and needed more recognition. Their requests for more input and better working conditions were first denied. Making a telling distinction and relaying their collective frustration, Tiffany summarized, “We loved working at Disney. We hated working for the Disney Corporation.” This unrest set a unionization drive in motion.

The puppeteers began the process of unionization in November 2014, meeting with union representatives from the American Guild of Variety Artists (AGVA) in the hope of codifying more protection

from injury and increasing their wages, not only to better cover medical costs but also to be comparable to the wages earned by entertainers at other amusement parks and arcades. The puppeteers’ specific demands ranged from strength training and conditioning customized for their profession to mandated input on puppet design, the removal of protruding nails and bolts on puppets, and additional time for warm-ups. Their wage demands included full pay for rehearsals and for shows cancelled with less than 48 hours’ notice, a minimum of four hours’ guaranteed pay for part-time puppeteers regardless of scheduling, and overtime pay for shifts longer than eight hours. By April 2015, 85% of puppeteers at Disneyland had opted to sign and submit unionization authorization cards, beginning the process of formally voting for a union.

### FAILED ATTEMPTS TO SILENCE VOICES

Almost from the start of their unionization efforts, puppeteers began to experience pushback from Disneyland representatives. Intimidation involved posters and targeted letters discouraging unionization, elimination of shifts from workers’ schedules, and scheduling additional mandatory meetings with management. “The company spent a lot of time doing a lot of propaganda to try to discourage us from voting ‘yes’ to the union,” Avery recalled. “A lot of posters, a lot of managers coming in and having conversations with us to discourage us, to tell us to say ‘no’ [to unionization].” In April 2015, corporate posters started appearing almost daily in the puppeteers’ greenroom (the space where performers gather before and after performances), insinuating that a union would not live up to the puppeteers’ hopes and could even backfire. Puppeteers shared these on Facebook. Some posters posed such questions as “Is the grass really greener on the other side?” and “Do you want to invest in the Union or in yourself?” Others made declarations like “There is no easy exit from union representation once AGVA is voted in” and “Everything is negotiated for you.” Though the posters did not explicitly discourage unionization, their frequency and tone, in addition to management’s accompanying actions, made Disney’s message unmistakable: “Don’t unionize.”

Disneyland representatives also sent personalized letters to puppeteers’ homes urging a “no” vote on unionization. “All Cast Members can vote how they wish and signing a union authorization card does not mean you now need to vote ‘yes,’” one letter stated. “You have every right to vote ‘no.’” The letter continued, “Everything that has happened over the past two weeks might seem overwhelming, and please know that we will continue to be here to answer any

<sup>2</sup> The puppeteers’ conditions at Disneyland were not unique at the park: nearly 75% of Disneyland employees were unable to afford “basic living expenses” without a second job (Dreier & Flaming, 2020). Compared to the nationwide mean hourly wage of \$21.02 earned (at that time) by “entertainers and performers, sports and related workers” (many employed by amusement parks and arcades) according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), Disneyland puppeteers earned a median hourly wage of only \$16.74.

questions you may have as we go through all of this together.”

Intimidation provoked fear among those willing to unionize. Activity on Facebook, filled with anger, anxiety, and sadness, peaked in May 2015 as puppeteers discussed what to do (see Appendix B for a description of our linguistic analysis). Some puppeteers began to fear “surprise meetings” with management—meetings scheduled as little as an hour and a half in advance, often while the puppeteers were performing or rehearsing. “Being called into HR and not knowing why is a nerve-wracking thing,” Jarren remarked, recounting the Disneyland manager simultaneously providing a pen and anticipating a near-immediate response to a new contract. As the meeting continued, the puppeteer later noticed that “there were some things that they said that sounded, for lack of a better word, ‘shady,’” including a refusal to provide a copy of the document they were asked to sign. Another puppeteer, called to a similar meeting, suspected “this was an intimidation tactic.” A third one recounted being called by a manager and told that, despite ongoing negotiations, the puppeteer had until 4 p.m. that day to decide whether to accept a new hourly rate and position. (He declined.) Efforts to hinder unionization were palpable.

### Moving Forward Despite Fear

Despite the frequent success of efforts to undermine morale, Disney’s campaign to silence puppeteer voices did not halt the process. By May 2015, 29 of the 30 puppeteers eligible to vote cast ballots; 20 voted in favor of unionizing (Miller, 2017). As intimidation persisted well into the year, puppeteers ramped up their collective voice efforts. As reported later in the press:

Soon after [the start of the organizing drive], AGVA filed [in 2015] an unfair labor practice complaint with the National Labor Relations Board [NLRB], alleging that year that Disney had reduced their [puppeteers’] work hours and took other retaliatory actions. (Eades, 2017)

The same year, AGVA filed a second complaint having to do with how Disney’s nomenclature defined and classified the position of puppet specialist. The union’s complaints with the board were combined and settled in December 2015, with Disney agreeing to pay the puppeteers about \$167,000 in back pay. Positive emotions on Facebook slightly increased in January 2016 as puppeteers’ hopes that their voices would be heard strengthened. The puppeteers thus overcame Disney’s first attempt to silence them. But they would soon face more effective silencing efforts.

## (RELUCTANTLY) ADDRESSING WORKERS’ CONCERNS

When puppeteers first started to organize their collective voice efforts, Disney resisted their unionization efforts. After a failed attempt to silence them, however, Disney agreed to negotiate and sign, even if reluctantly, a labor contract with the union, thus seemingly addressing its workers’ concerns.

### Reluctant Negotiations

In September 2015, official contract negotiations between Disneyland puppeteers and their employer began. When AGVA initially offered to fold puppeteers into the contract that it had negotiated for other live performers at Disneyland, company representatives declined. Instead, they opted to negotiate a new contract specific to puppeteers. At a second official meeting, the puppeteers gave Disneyland representatives a three-page proposal. Less than four hours later, the Disneyland representatives presented a counterproposal that several puppeteers described as “generic for any role in the park.” Some interpreted this response as a “kind of refusal to want to do anything about [their labor concerns] and to acknowledge some of those problems.” Others were more hopeful and willing to negotiate. The negotiation process consisted of 28 meetings with lawyers and management over the course of almost two years. Typically, meetings were held twice a month, during the puppeteers’ breaks and days off. Many puppeteers described the process as overextended; Reese also called it “traumatic.” Yet, they also saw the potential benefits of bringing these discussions to a conclusion.

Most puppeteers recalled the repeated attempts to minimize their grievances during these meetings. At one meeting, in an effort to refute their claims of unsafe working conditions, Disneyland representatives tried to demonstrate the ease of manipulating the post-Henson puppets by holding the standard Mickey puppet on their arm while the puppeteers described the necessary tasks and movements. Due to the puppet’s weight and the amount of physical exertion required, the Disney representatives reportedly could not sustain the necessary position for more than 15 seconds. “You could see sweat coming down their face after 12 seconds,” Tiffany recalled, “because they hadn’t built up this skill—putting your arm above your head with an eight-pound weight ... and making that eight-pound weight dance and do all this other stuff.”

Despite their inability to refute claims of unsafe working conditions, Disneyland representatives continued to deny the puppeteers’ unique skills and the



physical strain and risk of injury they endured. This denial and silencing functioned to further erode the puppeteers' tolerance for tiresome contract negotiations. Some puppeteers acknowledged that, as Caelum put it:

“[Managers] were put in a really hard place where they had to be yes-men even though they actually cared about how we felt and wanted to help us. There was so little they could do within the system to actually help us, and I could see that struggle within them.”

Yet most puppeteers felt that Disneyland representatives “purposely tried to make it [the negotiation] difficult or impossible. It was like they were dragging their feet purposefully so that nothing could get pushed through.” Dragging one's feet, however, still suggested a potential finish line.

Meanwhile, the payment of the NLRB settlement also seemed to stall. In early January 2016, in response to the NLRB settlement, Avery posted, “Hopefully we'll start seeing things happening very soon.” At the end of the month, however, some puppeteers were still inquiring as to if and when they would be read the settlement. During this entire period, activity in the puppeteers' private Facebook group slowed. Postings expressed growing unease about meetings with management, and there were an increasing number of Facebook enquiries on when they would receive information about the settlement, back pay, and updates about the contract negotiations. Referencing the dearth of information, Wendy wrote, “I doubt we'll know for another few months, knowing Disney.” Puppeteers' frustration intensified, though they still hoped for a positive outcome.

### Ratifying a Labor Contract

An outcome came at last when the new labor contract was ratified on March 31, 2017, a full 698 days, or nearly two years, after Disney was first notified of the case filing for union representation. Seventeen members voted “yes” and three voted “no.” Mid-February 2017, just weeks before the ratification of the new contract, a few puppeteers also finally received back pay from the NLRB settlement.<sup>3</sup> Puppeteers expressed heightened positive emotions on Facebook as they felt their voices were finally being heard. A deal and some apparent closure had finally been reached.

In Reese's words, the mobilization of the puppeteers and the ironing-out of the contract was “the

most necessary thing” and proved “validating as a professional” since they discussed their worth as performers and as employees who deserved better safety and fair compensation. Some workers grew stronger in the process, even if they felt ambivalent about their employer's ultimate intentions. At the same time, improvements to the workers' wages and working conditions—the reason they voiced their concerns initially—were never enacted. Behind the apparent success of negotiations and contract ratification, other dynamics were also unfolding.

### LIMITING IMPACT

While Disney seemed to be addressing puppeteers' concerns by negotiating a new labor contract, efforts to silence those voices had continued despite the onset of negotiations. Throughout the negotiations, puppeteers faced difficult working conditions and saw opportunities for work disappear. Many left, and those who stayed saw their hours drop. In addition, puppeteers learned that their show was to close. Behind the scenes of what looked like typical labor negotiations, Disney was gradually limiting the impact of voice by decreasing its dependence on puppeteers and removing opportunities for the agreement to be enacted.

### Pushing Puppeteers Out

The two-year long official negotiation process between 2015 and 2017 had taken a toll on the puppeteers' morale despite union organizers' efforts to maintain optimism. After each meeting, puppeteers debriefed with one another, sharing takeaways, and encouraging each other to remain resilient and resolute. But as the negotiations trudged on, expressions of frustration and anxiety proliferated, often in the form of memes and articles about their situation and other ongoing union cases against The Walt Disney Corporation posted on their private Facebook group.<sup>4</sup> Several participants recalled that “it was like talking to a brick wall,” and that “we could have come up with a bloody stump of an arm and they [would say that they] don't know what you're complaining about.” Tiffany captured the tone of the negotiations in a Facebook post by depicting a drawing of Mickey Mouse physically abusing a Disney entertainer.

<sup>3</sup> A year after the elections, the NLRB also determined that three workers had been illegally fired for their union activities. The Walt Disney Corporation was ordered to pay each of them compensation (NLRB, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Throughout the unionization drive and the negotiation process, puppeteers frequently shared information about ongoing legal actions against The Walt Disney Corporation within their Facebook group. Three of the cases reported in 2016 and 2017, and shared among the puppeteers, cited contentious relationships and attempted sabotage of contract negotiations between labor unions and the Disneyland in California and Florida.

Puppeteers' frustration heightened over time. Despite lengthy negotiations, the puppeteers felt that their claims were not being heard. "What they are offering and not willing to move on is honestly completely insulting," Avery wrote amid negotiations in February. Disneyland representatives had proposed an initial hourly rate of \$10 and a maximum of \$15.25; the union had proposed \$28 in 2016, with a 5% yearly increase (to \$29.40 in 2017 and \$30.87 in 2018). The persistent, stark difference left many puppeteers feeling disheartened. Puppeteers later recalled the tears of a few performers who professed their love of their jobs and of Disney while testifying to their crushing medical expenses and low wages.

By the end of labor negotiations in 2017, nearly half of the initial puppeteers were no longer employed at Disneyland. According to Reese, the park "lost about 14 or more people. [Out of 30] we ended up being only 14 people strong towards the end [of 2017]." Puppeteers left due to exhaustion or the pursuit of alternative employment opportunities. By the end of 2020, none of the 30 puppeteers who participated in the unionization drive remained employed at Disneyland as puppeteers. Only a few remained, but in other positions (e.g., parade characters) not covered by the new labor agreement.

### Fading Out Work Opportunities

Exhaustion pushed puppeteers out, as did fading work opportunities. Early in the unionization process, several puppeteers who were part-time, and thus had few shifts at best, left Disneyland due to the inability to support themselves. As Jeurys recounted:

"Disney removed us from all our roles [at Disneyland] when no [union] vote had even happened yet ... If you were part-time, you were essentially cut off. There was one year where I barely worked because I was not scheduled."

Disney's intimidation practices led many puppeteers to suspect that they were being denied working hours because of their involvement in the unionizing drive. In parallel to their hours being reduced, several puppeteers started to leave. In emotional messages to their colleagues, puppeteers continued to express the widely shared sentiment that "Disney" and "The Walt Disney Corporation" were two different entities. One departing puppeteer anticipated missing Disneyland, but not the corporation, because safety was never a priority and the corporation "doesn't care one bit about their employees."

The puppeteers' opportunities to secure work at the resort—even under difficult conditions—were further reduced in December 2016 when they learned that

Disneyland had decided to close their show. After the announcement, a company spokesperson explained: "We constantly evaluate our entertainment offerings and make changes to provide compelling reasons for our guests to visit time and time again." According to this spokesperson, a new version of the "show [was] expected to return without puppets. The puppeteers could audition for roles in this new show, which [was] expected to include technology upgrades that would allow Disney to more quickly refresh content." (Miller, 2017). They were given no guarantees, however, that these new roles would involve actual puppetry and therefore be covered by the new contract.

### Precipitating the Ratification

Not only did the announcement that the show would close reduce the puppeteers' opportunities to work, it also precipitated the ratification of an elusive agreement. A few months after the announcement, in March 2017, final negotiations on a union contract commenced. At that point, the contract would provide a starting rate of \$12.25 per hour, vacation, sick days, holidays, arbitration, and access to the greenroom for rest and recuperation before, during, and after their physically strenuous shows. However, it ignored a large proportion of the puppeteers' asks, including their calls for a pay level recognizing their skills.

Puppeteers debated whether the contract presented was worth further negotiating. Among the final rallying cries, Avery wrote:

"We have of course hit a wall with Disney regarding wages. I know that all this might feel like it's not worth your time anymore, but it can be. We want to make sure we leave this contract in a good enough state so that, when a new show happens in the future, we and those after us will be safe and taken care of."

One puppeteer suggested extending the already prolonged negotiations. Another puppeteer pushed back: "One thing that everyone needs to understand is that finish[ing] the contract now, before the show closes, [is] to protect the contract." At this point, the puppeteers' goal was to "make the last two years of rough time worth it," more so than to push the negotiations further.

Time was of the essence. Without a show, puppeteers said, there would be no one to continue negotiating the contract. Avery posted on Facebook:

"By trying to negotiate a contract past the show closure, we were in danger of Disney pushing to stop negotiating because there weren't [any] puppeteers to negotiate a contract for. That was a very real possibility, and all our work would have just gone away."

At last, an agreement had been found. Announcing its ratification on Facebook, Sean shared hopes for

the future implementation of the agreed-upon changes: “This is just the start for future shows,” he noted. Yet, while the contract established a basic consensus, the fading out of puppetry work had made the contract’s enactment unlikely.

**AN AGREEMENT BUT NO ENACTMENT**

With the ratification of the labor contract, the puppeteers felt their concerns had been addressed. Posts, comments, and likes on their Facebook group starkly declined, eventually reflecting both the shared sense that their goals had been partly reached and the fatigue the puppeteers felt about the process. (See Figure 2 for the plotting of postings, comments, and likes.) Apart from some communication among puppeteers relating to the amount of severance checks (following termination of their employment due to the show closing), little activity took place online. In April and May 2017, both Tiffany and Jeury's asked for clarifications on the amounts: “any word?” and “still no reply from Disney?” Another answered, “We only have 120 days before the check needs to be cashed. [AGVA representative] said Disney hasn’t gotten back to him. He said we should just cash our

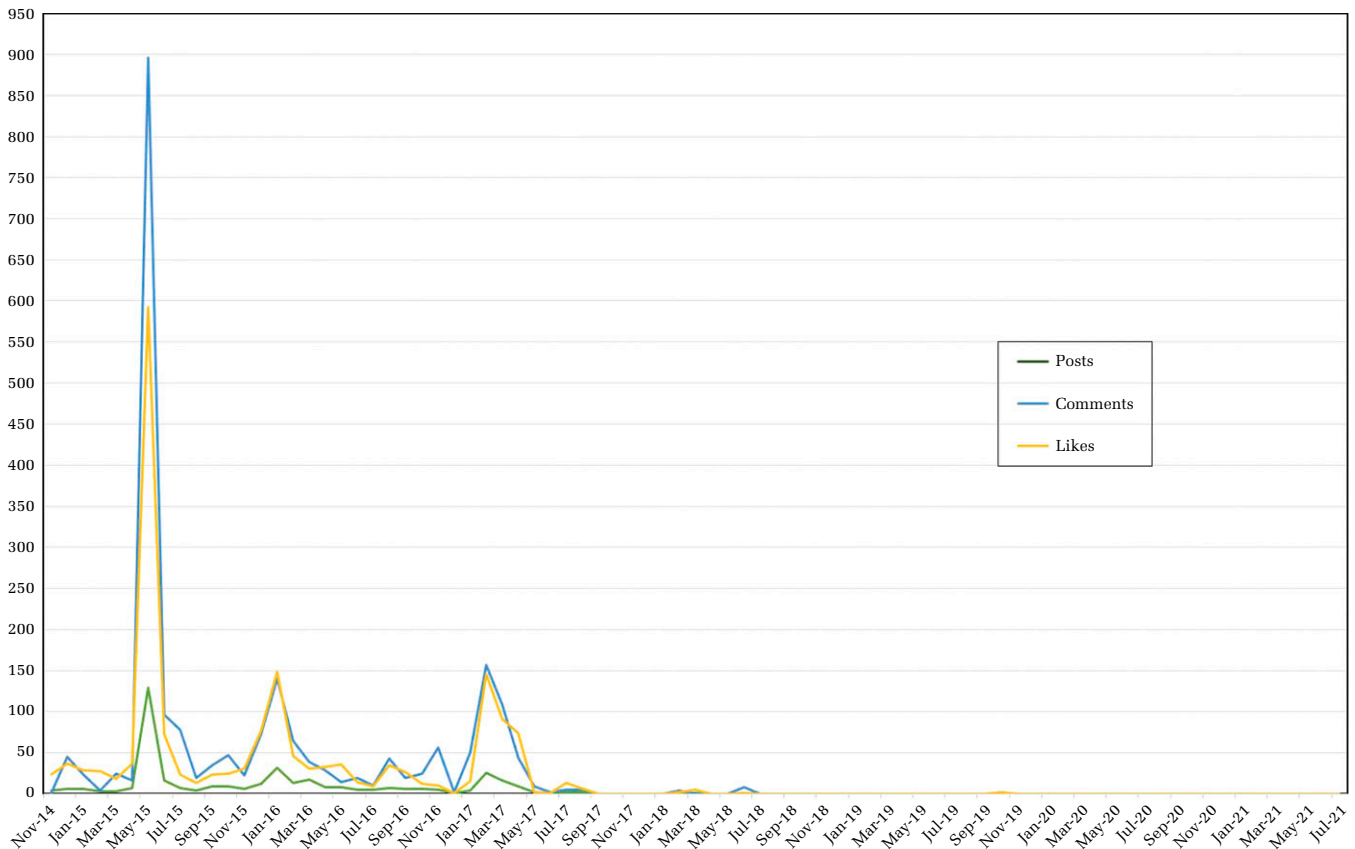
checks, since we obviously need the money.” As if prophesizing the last step of the process, one puppeteer wrote, “My guess is that Disney isn’t going to change anything at this point.” These words were prescient.

**From Contract Agreement to Expiration: Puppeteers’ Disillusionment**

The show closed in April 2017, sending the remaining puppeteers into a tailspin. Many had already left, and those who had stayed were increasingly frustrated. In light of the show’s cancellation, the puppeteers were unable to strike. “If we still had a show, we could have at this point gone on a strike ... but since we no longer have a show, those options are no longer viable,” Jarren commented. No longer having a show that involved puppeteers meant there was no longer anything to negotiate for. Additionally, the negotiated contract would only be enacted if the resort decided to create a new show with puppeteers.

The ratified labor contract officially expired on April 2, 2020, and, to date, no puppeteers remain employed in Disneyland’s shows. With few to no puppeteers left, those most involved with the negotiation

**FIGURE 2**  
**Plot of Puppeteers’ Activity in Facebook Group**





of the new contract could no longer monitor its implementation. There was no one left to keep Disney accountable. Close to five years after the contract's ratification, Avery remarked that "there's possibility for change, but I don't think there are people who are willing to ... push that anywhere anymore. They lost a lot of the people who would be the champions for [change]." The contract could form, at best, the basis of a new one to be negotiated upon the hiring of new puppeteers. But few puppeteers were hopeful that such hiring would occur. With no puppet shows having been created since *Disney—Live on Stage!* closed in April 2017, the hiring of new puppeteers was indeed unlikely. Disney had deployed efforts to sign a new contract while simultaneously ensuring that the chances the contract would be enacted were slim.

For many puppeteers, the expiration of the contract "[felt] like a purposeful decision." Many puppeteers believe the suspension of their concerns to have been a long-planned decision, especially since, from the start, there "was very much the attitude of—'no, this problem doesn't exist. This is not a problem. You're making it up. You should be fine. There's not an issue.'" As Reese said, once the contract was signed, "they hushed it [under the table] as quickly as they could ... so we couldn't talk [about it] anymore." As Keyla noted, "Disney management ... seems they were trained to make you feel better ... But we wanted it fixed ... and Disney is good at doing nothing!" She speculated that the entire negotiation had been "simply for show" all along, and who better than Disney knows how to put on a show?

We realize that it is very difficult to establish whether Disney executives negotiated in good faith. On the one hand, throughout the unionization process, Disney appeared somewhat receptive to the puppeteers' concerns, attempting to find an agreement. Massive layoffs and hiring freezes due to the COVID-19 pandemic and nationwide lockdowns at the end of the labor contract may also have halted efforts to develop new puppetry shows. On the other hand, however, another reading suggests that Disney may have ratified a labor contract knowing full well that it would never be implemented. Indeed, silencing efforts had started well before the signing of a labor contract when Disney had tried to contain workers' voices, and we saw no sign of Disney being willing to develop a new show in the three years that followed the contract ratification. Though intent may be hard to qualify, the outcome remains that, regardless of the time and effort invested by workers to unionize and deployed by Disneyland to ratify a new contract, puppeteers at Disneyland have yet to see their voice efforts yield their full benefits.

## VOICE VENEER

Understanding the adoption of voice veneer matters because it is a process through which voices can seem to be heard *without* producing intended changes. Some benefits of voice might still exist—employees may feel a sense of self-worth, for example. Yet, while expressing concerns and even seeing their concerns addressed by managers might help workers feel valued at work (Morrison, 2023), the enactment of agreed-upon changes in response to workers' concerns can make or break the impact of voice efforts, and hence aid or hinder future efforts as a result (Sherf et al., 2021).

To fully understand how managers handle voice efforts in organizations, we need to look not only at what kinds of environments enable or limit employee voice, but also at what happens *after* managers agree to address concerns, and what processes occur around—but not directly in relation to—voice efforts. Indeed, here, decisions were made outside of the typical bargaining process, yet directly inhibited implementation of the ratified contract. We suspect that this process exists at different scales and in other forms of worker voice; for example, when an employer agrees to promote someone without acting on it, or when a promise is made to improve wages but no changes ensue.

Adopting voice veneer might seem like a short-term "winning" strategy from the corporate perspective. Yet, it is not without risks for organizations as well. It can create long-term resentment among entire categories of employees (and former employees) that managers will find very difficult to assuage. Our analysis reveals the emotional roller coaster that comes with the unfolding of voice veneer. While negotiating an agreement fueled the puppeteers' hopes, the negative sentiment they experienced post-agreement hints to the disappointment workers experienced when realizing their concerns had been set aside. The deceptive nature of voice veneer might in turn lead to distrust and disengagement (Katz, 1964; Robinson, 1996). Learning from Disney's experience, employers might want to seriously consider the possible long-term risks of these apparent short-term victories.

Additionally, the adoption of voice veneer also carries broader societal perils. Collective voice in the form of unionization helps create change and build more equitable workplaces: not only does it provide unionized workers with increased opportunities to improve their income (Farber, Herbst, Kuziemko & Naidu, 2021), it also sets norms of equity across union and non-union workers in the same region or industry (Western & Rosenfeld, 2011). By failing to address workers' concerns in a given workplace, we

also fail to potentially benefit many others in proximate ones.

Integrating voice research across disciplines (Morrison, 2023; Mowbray et al., 2015), our findings open new pathways for management scholars to study how organizations handle voice efforts. To date, management scholars have studied collective voice in the context of labor relations by establishing why and how workers join and stay in unions (e.g., Bamberger, Kluger & Suchard, 1999), how unions bargain with management (e.g., Ferguson, Dudley & Soule, 2018), and what kind of resistance workers encounter during union bargaining (Kochan et al., 2023). Scholars have also suggested a need to pay closer attention to what happens after a labor contract is signed, noting that “real change will not occur if you stop working for change upon the ratification of a new contract” (Korshak, 1995: 129). We echo this call and encourage scholars to carefully study what happens—or fails to happen—after agreements are signed.

To be sure, voice veneer can prove quite difficult to identify. Indeed, a central characteristic of this process is the difficulty workers have recognizing that their issues are being set aside as they voice their concerns. In the flurry of activity that surrounds negotiations, positive outcomes appear within reach. Why would a company come to the table and expend efforts on hammering out an agreement if it did not genuinely seek a resolution? Even when everything points to indefinite postponement, those voicing their concerns can still convince themselves that their efforts are worthwhile. The “solace” that the Disneyland puppeteers originally took from the prospect that a contract could still apply to future hires (Miller, 2017) attests to this persistent hope. The belief that success is around the corner, and that future generations will pick up where past participants left off, is what renders this process so insidious.

In today’s increasingly fractured economy, ever more reliant on temporary contracts and freelance workers, voice veneer may prove increasingly widespread. The more frequently workers change jobs, the easier it becomes for employers to suspend the enactment of agreed-upon improvements. Indeed, when high turnover rates decrease the number of people to whom employers remain accountable, employers may become more likely to present formal agreements that are never implemented in practice. Voice veneer can also easily occur when workers lack power, are physically and socially isolated, and are out of sight; for example, when hidden in distant call centers or remote warehouses. Our current labor market, we suspect, thus provides a rich breeding ground for it. As organizations are increasingly called upon to live up to their employees’ hopes,

a closer look at how worker voices are handled may be key in understanding the perils of voice veneer for all involved.

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## APPENDIX A SETTING, DATA, AND METHODS

We decided to focus on the case of Disneyland puppeteers after we learned of their struggle for recognition during a previous research collaboration on the evolution of puppeteers' careers in the United States. We were intrigued: an interviewee shared the contentious closing of Disneyland's puppetry show, pointing to unionization efforts as a possible reason for the show's shutdown. However, in another interview with a puppeteer who was part of the unionization effort, it seemed that all parties involved in the unionization negotiations had come to an agreement. Drawn by this paradox, we sought to understand the unfolding of events.

### Data Collection

We collected online archival materials related to the unionization process and conducted interviews with Disneyland puppeteers. Ultimately, we gained access to all the puppeteers' exchanges from their private Facebook page during the unionization period, and were able to analyze them alongside our interview data. This approach enabled us to document our surprise and puzzlement through memos, and to focus our analysis on Disneyland's tactics and the puppeteers' experiences during the unionization process.

The archival data consisted mainly of exchanges on the Facebook page that served as the primary hub of communication among the 30 Disneyland puppeteers engaged in the unionization effort. Access was granted to us by a group administrator; we informed all participants of our study's intent and offered them the choice to opt out (none did). The study's design was approved by Boston University's Institutional Review Board. Via these data, we were able to construct a timeline and document activity from the outset of events (November 2014) to date. The exchanges on the Facebook page, spanning close to seven years, consist of 398 unique posts, 2,228 comments, and 1,780 likes.

Of the 30 members of the Facebook group, we contacted 26 via publicly accessible emails, Twitter accounts, and LinkedIn accounts; we secured interviews with eight puppeteers. All interviews but one (whose subject declined) were recorded and transcribed. (No Disneyland representatives that we contacted via email, Facebook, and LinkedIn to provide added contextual information responded to our request for an interview.) In keeping with interpretive research traditions, our main goal was to capture in-depth accounts of the puppeteers' experiences of the unionization process. Workers' fears of retaliation can typically make capturing such

accounts challenging. Added to the small number of puppeteers involved, this convinced us to move forward with our analysis with the puppeteers who had agreed to share their stories (one fourth of the total employed puppeteers), and to strengthen our understanding of the situation through an in-depth analysis of the puppeteers' Facebook posts. Additional ethnographic fieldwork prior to data collection for this project also enhanced our personal understanding of the physical strain puppeteers experienced and their requests for safer working conditions. Table A1 further details our data collection efforts.

### Data Analysis: Analysis of Interviews and Facebook Posts

To get a better sense of the unfolding of events, we read all the Facebook posts, paying particular attention to peaks of activity and the main discussion issues. We triangulated those peaks and issues with key events that interviewees shared with us, media coverage of the events, and the official negotiation

documents and timelines collected during interviews and on Facebook (see Table A1). The identification of distinct stages and temporal bracketing of events (Langley, 1999) that ensued allowed us to construct an overall timeline. We validated it with a participant to ensure our proper understanding of events.

Iterating between data and existing scholarship, we then moved from a broad understanding of our data as a case of unionization to a specific understanding of the different stages and tactics in the unionization process, including what we eventually called “voice veneer,” a tactic that seemed absent from existing theories. Reading through the puppeteers' recollections of negotiating with Disney, we first identified different corporate resistance tactics that had been discussed extensively by others: intimidation and stalling. We used these tactics as codes while going through interviews and Facebook posts, identifying different instances of each. Facebook posts of flyers meant to dissuade the puppeteers' unionization efforts were clearly coded as “intimidation,” for example. The many instances of delaying negotiations and the overall

**TABLE A1**  
**Data Sources and Their Use in the Analysis**

Data sources	Number	Role in analysis
<i>Interview and Facebook data</i>		
Interviews with puppeteers	8	Understand how puppeteers' requests for improved working conditions were handled, and what emotions arose in the process
Facebook posts	398	Understand the timeline of the negotiation process, content of discussions between puppeteers and Disney, and emotions associated with different events
Facebook comments	2,228	
Facebook likes and emojis	1,780	
<i>Documents</i>		
Disney “Know the Facts” flyers	12	Triangulate intimidation efforts by Disney, and date of union vote
AGVA “Know the Facts” flyers	2	Inform our understanding of AGVA's position in relation to the puppeteers' efforts to unionize
Communications from Disney to puppeteers	3	Triangulate puppeteers' perceptions that Disney was expressing both an understanding of puppeteers' concerns and intimidating them in their unionization efforts
Official notices of union vote and labor agreements	4	Triangulate dates and content of milestones such as union vote, AGVA agreement, and final settlement
Casting descriptions for <i>Disney Junior—Live on Stage</i> (December 2014 and May 2015)	2	Triangulate job description and salary information shared by puppeteers during interviews
Cast schedule	2	Triangulate puppeteers' accounts of scheduling issues
News clips from <i>Los Angeles Times</i> and <i>OC Weekly</i>	3	Triangulate the timeline of the negotiation process and show closure, and understand steps in the negotiation process
<i>Contextual data</i>		
Media about <i>Disney Junior</i> show (podcast, YouTube videos)	3	Inform our understanding of <i>Disney Junior—Live on Stage!</i> show
Ethnographic interviews with U.S. puppeteers (Disney and non-Disney puppeteers)	69	Triangulate our understanding of the broader characteristics of puppetry work, its history, and the labor market for puppetry
Ethnographic observations of U.S. puppeteers' work and training (Disney and non-Disney puppeteers), including Disney puppetry workshop	150 hours	Understanding the physicality and expertise involved in puppetry work, including those specific to Disney stage shows

understanding of the extended duration of negotiations helped us identify “stalling” as another distinct form of corporate resistance.

Our review of the literature helped us identify some of Disney’s practices during the unionization process, but there was something striking about the case of the Disneyland puppeteers. Through our analysis of online archives and interviews, we had identified that an agreement was reached between the puppeteers’ union and the resort, and that the puppeteers were frustrated by the lack of the agreement’s implementation. As we sketched a chronological outline of the different stages in the negotiation process, we were puzzled by the surprising contrast between the seemingly successful ratification of a contract and the disappointment puppeteers expressed during interviews and in the Facebook group. We realized that, while the negotiations were happening, other actions were being taken that ultimately led the final contract having nowhere to be implemented and no one to enact it. As we examined the unfolding of events, we identified multiple accounts of Disney closing shows, removing puppet masters, and of puppeteers leaving their jobs because of the intense physical strain, lack of progress in negotiations, and reduced workload. As we returned to the data to understand what had led to this lack of implementation, we noticed that the people and places that would have allowed the agreement to be enacted had gradually disappeared. The puppeteers’ concerns, seemingly addressed, had in fact been set aside as Disney decreased its dependence on puppeteers.

By reviewing scholarship on corporate resistance to unionization, we confirmed that the gradual decrease of an employer’s dependence on workers who voiced their concerns differed from other forms of corporate resistance to unionization, such as intimidation or stalling. We also noted that

understanding “voice veneer” as a form of corporate resistance could open the door for future research to examine the conditions that impact the outcomes of workers’ unionization efforts. We went back to the data to deepen our understanding of this process and examined the puppeteers’ accounts of Disney’s handling of their voice efforts, as detailed in the three stages depicted in Figure 1. We then engaged in the linguistic inquiry described in Appendix B to assess how the puppeteers’ discussions reflected these three stages. Seeing voice veneer as an important component of understanding how social inequalities persist in organizations, we examined broader management scholarship on what triggered or limited change in organizations. Because labor organizing has previously been documented as a form of collective voice, we revised our theorizing to account for broader understandings of both labor organizing and voice. This helped us gain new analytical insights into how worker voices can be handled, which we defined as “attempts to silence voices,” “reluctantly addressing concerns,” and “limiting impact.”

Finally, we questioned the boundary conditions of our findings and identified that the invisibility of the puppeteers’ work likely made it easier for Disney to avoid addressing their concerns. We noted that Disney had possibly managed to rearrange the structure of the organization such that concerns could slowly be shelved because puppeteers were small in number and low in visibility. This helped us generalize to broader contemporary contexts in which workers are unlikely to remain in their jobs long enough to ensure that a union agreement can be implemented and are often invisible to others within the organization. Table A2 presents illustrative data from our qualitative coding.

**TABLE A2**  
**Additional Illustrative Data of Key Themes**

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**Initial concerns: Workers request better compensation and safer working conditions**

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Puppeteers initiate unionization efforts because of physical strain:

“We were pretty unhappy when we started this process and very physically in pain, emotionally, unhappy feeling that we were underpaid.” (Avery, interview)

“We also thought it [unionization] would give us more leverage in negotiating things like puppetry safety.” (Jeury, interview)

Change of supplier heightens work strain and work is underpaid:

“[As] the show has changed and grew and different scenes got switched out, the puppets became heavier and less moveable and less—like, you couldn’t perform them. And we were still getting compensated, like, the same amount as we were, when we had the easier puppets, even though the show was getting harder, and more was being demanded of us.” (Keyla, interview)

The show generates physical strain:

“Head all the way to the side, arm all the way up, wrist bent all the way over, sliding and running around spinning stools, fitting into tiny alcoves ... [Name of puppeteer] eventually left the job, and ‘quit dancing and puppeteering’ because of the physical strain.” (Jeury, interview)

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**TABLE A2**  
**(Continued)**

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**Phase 1: Attempts to silence voices—Disney openly fights worker attempts to unionize**

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“We were discouraged to go through the process by all management and the rest of the character department was jealous because they wanted to unionize as well.” (Rafael, interview)

“It got super crappy when they pulled us out of our other [shows and parks]. We all continued to call them out on it, [saying] ‘You can’t do this until a new agreement is ratified.’ They just said ‘Nope’ ... That led to a lot of people quitting because they could no longer afford rent. So they had to go find new jobs ... if you only have two days at Playhouse and three days in the parade and all of a sudden you’re not allowed to do parades anymore, that’s not enough money to live on.” (Reese, interview)

“As puppeteers, we were always intimidated” ... “Higher-ups would list all the reasons not to unionize.” (Jeury, interview)

“They [already] had the looming threat over you at all times. Either we’re all fired or we’ll all eventually get fired at the drop of a hat ... They would fire people when I was working, and they fired the wrong people all the time.” (Tiffany, interview)

Parade jobs replace puppet jobs:

[We were] “taken out of all of our smaller shows” [resulting in one or two days a week of puppetry only, and the rest of the week] “parade dancing.” (Jeury, interview)

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**Phase 2: Disney reluctantly addresses concerns, delaying negotiations between union and employer**

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They met the company representatives one or two days per month—during their off-days. On some days, the company team would leave, saying that they would reconvene after lunch. They instead left the puppeteers to wait. One puppeteer recalled, “We just sat in a room having our time mistreated, disrespected. It was horrible.” (Keyla, interview)

As negotiations went on, posts increased by lead organizers around February 2017 to attend negotiations with Disney representatives. One puppeteer wrote: “It would be really great to have as many veteran Puppeteers here in the room. Even for an hour! So if you can come during a show off, that would be wonderful. At lunch? Great! If you think someone else should be here instead of you and want to give up a show off so they can be here for extra time, we would be very grateful! We need to be just as supportive of ourselves.” (Avery, Facebook)

During negotiations, puppeteers “want[ed] to keep working for Disney but [were] not sure if things will work out” (referring to negotiations). (Charlie, Facebook)

They also expressed love for their work: “IM COMING BACK TO SEE THE FINAL SHOW! 🥰👩👧👦”

I’m so excited I’ll be there to support you all. Is anyone filming the last show? We should all get a copy.” (Charlie, Facebook)

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**Phase 3: Limiting impact—puppeteers reflect on Disney’s handling of their voice efforts**

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Show cancellation:

“And, towards the end of the contract negotiations, [our union representative] caught wind that [the Disney corporation was] canceling our show, maybe four or five months before we finished our contract negotiations. And so, we finished our contract negotiations, and then, a couple months later, they closed their show. *There was nothing to do because we didn’t have a contract and we really couldn’t strike. We had already signed an agreement.*” (Avery, interview)

Disney ignored issues raised by the puppeteers:

“And it was just kind of this refusal to want to do anything about it, to do about it and to acknowledge it in certain points, because I think acknowledging some of those problems, uh, meant that somebody was at fault.” (Avery, interview)

“Puppet design—some of the puppets were too heavy, too large to be used over and over. And those were not just changed. There was just ... they did what they could easily, but, if anything costs money or was difficult, they didn’t. And was that ever brought up to them, and they just sidelined it ... There was a huge disconnect of the needs of the puppeteers versus what they were actually willing to give.” (Avery, interview)

Disney stopped providing quality training, signaling that they no longer were invested in this group:

“[The new trainer] then began teaching us the art of puppetry, which he wasn’t as good as the other two guys that were teaching us. So we, like, even though the puppetry expectation went up, the teaching went down ... [we] were having to basically teach the new people because they weren’t getting the caliber [of training] that we got.” (Keyla, interview)

Many puppeteers eventually leave:

“One of those things, where it piles on top and, *eventually, we cracked.*” (Keyla, interview)

Multiple comments and posts on Facebook asking: “So who’s staying and who’s leaving?” (Charlie, Facebook)

“I don’t think there’s people who are willing to kind of push that anywhere, that anymore ... they basically lost a lot of the people who would be the champions for that.” (Avery, interview)

Puppeteers express their disillusionment:

In July 2017, responding to a repost of an article about other current Disney employees seeking unionization, current and former puppeteers internally wrote, “Have fun hearing that you’re replaceable and worthless over and over!” and “Yeah good luck!,” signaling their collective distrust and pessimism regarding Disney’s cooperation in the unionization process. (Garret, Keyla, Avery, Facebook)

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## APPENDIX B SENTIMENT LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

To analyze the sentiments expressed by puppeteers in each phase of the labor negotiation, we conducted a linguistic analysis using LIWC-22 (Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count) online software. The three phases we identified (also see our timeline; Figure 1) were as follows: Phase 1—containing concerns (before August 28, 2015); Phase 2—reluctantly addressing concerns (August 28, 2015–March 30, 2017); Phase 3—limiting impact (March 31, 2017–April 2, 2020). These three phases lasted, respectively, 289, 581, and 1,580 days, and each yielded, respectively, 33,295, 20,768, and 2,447 words of posts and comments on the puppeteers’ private Facebook group page.

For each of the phases, the text from all the posts and comments was aggregated into one long text. Each text was then analyzed to calculate the number of words in each of the software’s proprietary dictionaries (e.g., the “positive emotion” dictionary contains words, word stems, and phrases like “happy,” “pretty,” “good,” etc.), as a proportion of the total number of words in the text (Boyd, Ashokkumar, Seraj & Pennebaker, 2022) (LIWC dictionaries are created by human judges). As a proxy for the sentiment expressed in a text, variables related to sentiment were standardized, then added together as three composite variables: *positive\_sentiment\_indicator* (codes for positive sentiments), *negative\_sentiment\_indicator* (codes for negative sentiments), and *overall\_sentiment*. The components of these variables were mostly taken directly from the software’s standard libraries. Additionally, because LIWC-22 does not treat emojis beyond simply counting them, we added a variable indicating the average emoji sentiment.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> We coded the sentiment of emojis in line with past scholarship that used 83 human annotators to rate the sentiment of emojis in 1.6 million tweets (Kralj Novak, Smailović, Sluban & Mozetič, 2015). Emojis were coded for their “negativity” (the number of times a given emoji was rated negatively by an annotator, divided by the total number of occurrences of that emoji) and “positivity.” These emoji characteristics make up the “sentiment” of an emoji, which is defined as the difference between positivity and negativity and has values between –100% and 100%. In our text data, we defined the *emoji\_sentiment* variable as the average of the sentiments of all the emojis it contains. The *emoji\_sentiment* variable was added to the *positive\_sentiment\_indicator*; it is also a component of the more general *sentiment\_indicator*. Because some of the emojis in the data were not previously rated, the characteristics of an emoji with a similar meaning were used in those cases. For example, the hug emoji was not rated, so the sentiment of the blowing-a-kiss emoji was used

Below, we detail the LIWC-22 variables used in each composite variable. As the examples of words below demonstrate, two LIWC dictionaries can have words in common. Some variables are even subdivided into their components (e.g., negative emotion is equal to the sum of anxiety, anger, and sadness) and subcomponents. Here, the only variables used are the ones at the lowest level of the hierarchy, to avoid counting the exact same variable twice.

### Positive Sentiment

For the composite variable coding for positive sentiment, the LIWC variables used are *emo\_pos*, *tone\_pos*, *achieve*, and *assent*. *emo\_pos* contains 337 words used to express positive emotion, such as “good,” “love,” “happy,” and “hope.” *tone\_pos* contains 1,530 words more broadly showing a positive tone, like “good,” “well,” “new,” and “love.” *achieve* contains 277 words related to achievement, like “work,” “better,” “best,” and “working.” *assent* contains 50 conversational words used to acquiesce, like “yeah,” “yes,” “okay,” and “ok.”

### Negative Sentiment

For the second composite variable, which codes for negative sentiment, the LIWC variables that are used are *emo\_anx*, *emo\_anger*, *emo\_sad*, *tone\_neg*, *swear*, *lack*, and *differ*. *emo\_anx* is made up of 120 words related to anxiety, such as “worry,” “fear,” and “afraid.” Similarly, *emo\_anger* is made up of 181 words expressing anger, like “hate,” “mad,” and “angry.” *emo\_sad* has 134 words commonly used to express sadness, such as the smiley “:(,” “sad,” and the word stem “disappoint.” The negative equivalent of *tone\_pos*, *tone\_neg* contains words that give a sentence a negative tone, such as “bad,” “wrong,” “too much,” and “hate.” Although swearing is relatively rare in the text (less than 1% of words), the *swear* variable is also used, containing 462 curse words. *lack* has 89 words, like “don’t have,” “didn’t have,” and the suffix “less.” Lastly, *differ* is a set of words related to differentiation, like “but,” “not,” and “if.”

### Overall Sentiment

For the third composite variable, which is used as an indicator of overall sentiment, the negative sentiment indicator is subtracted from the positive sentiment indicator. For example, if the positive sentiment is 3 and the negative sentiment is –1, the overall sentiment will be  $3 - (-1) = 4$ .

instead. Twenty-one of the 174 emojis were initially unrated in the data (12% of the emojis).

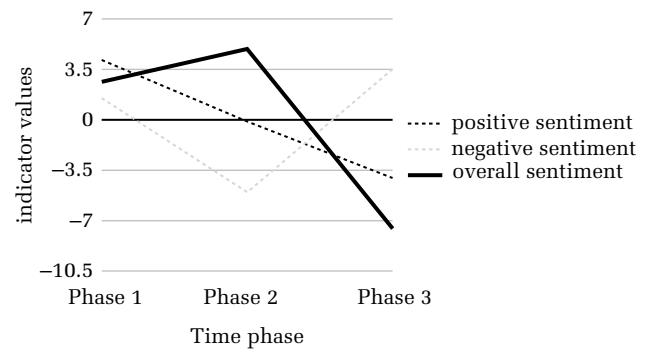
**TABLE B1**  
Sentiment Variables and Their Values in Each Phase

Variable	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
emo_pos	0.97	0.87	0.74
tone_pos	2.91	2.82	2.7
emoji_sentiment	0.35	0.31	0.22
achieve	1.23	1.23	1.02
assent	0.53	0.38	0.49
emo_anx	0.08	0.07	0.08
emo_anger	0.09	0.06	0.08
emo_sad	0.06	0.05	0.0
tone_neg	0.88	0.77	0.94
swear	0.1	0.08	0.25
lack	0.15	0.22	0.41
differ	4.43	4.32	4.45

The values across phases for each of the variables used are shown in Table B1.

Overall, the variables coding for positive sentiment decrease, while the variables coding for negative sentiment decrease, then increase. As indicated in Figure B1, positive sentiment decreases fairly regularly, while negative sentiment decreases between Phases 1 and 2, then increases between Phases 2 and 3. As a consequence, the overall sentiment increases slightly between periods 1 and 2, then decreases strongly between periods 2 and 3. These results suggest that, during Phases 1 and 2, puppeteers most likely believed in the possibility of

**FIGURE B1**  
Changes in Sentiments in Facebook Group across Phases



Note: "Overall sentiment" is defined as the difference between the "positive sentiment" and the "negative sentiment."

a positive outcome for their negotiations with Disney, while Phase 3 signals the negative sentiment triggered by the uncoupling of the negotiated agreement.

Finally, to better understand variations in emotions throughout the negotiation process, we examined qualitatively specific emotions of anger, sadness, and anxiety as they unfolded in distinct comments and posts in relation to specific events in our timeline.