

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

FOLLOWING THE MOUSE:
A HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE
DISNEY FAN COMMUNITY

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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Dedication

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ABSTRACT

FOLLOWING THE MOUSE: A HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE DISNEY FAN COMMUNITY

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The purpose of this thesis was to investigate the structure and traditions of the Disney fan community. More specifically, the aim of this study was to research how Disney fans build solidarity and form attachments. In addition, this studies in depth how fans share fan narratives, the importance of these fan narratives, and the role that these narratives play in mediating sacred and profane elements.

The thesis examined Disney fans through participant observation and content analysis of Disney fan forums. In addition, twenty five individuals were recruited and interviewed through a convenience sample.

The results of this thesis indicated that Disney fans use a variety of rituals and narratives to build solidarity with other fans and to mediate their relationship to Disney and the Disney parks. In addition, it was discovered that while Disney fans argued that Disney fans are unique, in many ways they are similar to other types of fandom. However, in some ways, it was found that Disney fandom was extraordinary. Finally, it is noted that the Disney fans examined in this thesis form an example of a postmodern community.

Keywords: fandom, Disney, fans, community, solidarity, ritual, symbols

CHAPTER 1: IT WAS ALL STARTED WITH A MOUSE: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DISNEY FAN COMMUNITY

“I only hope that we never lose sight of one thing - that it was all started by a mouse.”

~Walt Disney¹

Introduction

The story of the Disney Company, like any good story, is full of mystery, rumors, trickery, and even betrayal. However, despite Walt Disney’s claim “that it was all started by a mouse,” the history of the Walt Disney Company, and its fans, is much more complex. While much of the modern Disney Company is a result of the success of Mickey Mouse, Mickey would never have existed without the trials and tribulations of Laugh-O-Gram films and, later, the Disney Brothers Studio. Similarly, the Mickey Mouse cartoons, Disneyland, and the Disney Company would not exist without the support, encouragement, and efforts of Disney fans, which have existed since the beginning of the Alice Comedies. The goal of this thesis is to understand and explain the genesis and workings of the Disney fan community. I focus in particular on the *meaning* that modern Disney fans apply to the topic of their fandom, as well as the activities through which these fans engage, such as: Disney traditions, pin trading, Disneyana collecting, theme days, trivia, and Hidden Mickeys. In addition to these activities and their meaning, I will discuss communication amongst Disney fans, as well as shared fan narratives. This thesis is theoretically significant because it sheds light on issues of community, solidarity, and mass culture.

Just as in other communities, Disney fans share rituals, symbols, meanings, and narratives that hold the community together. In this thesis, I explore this process in detail. I show that symbols, such as Mickey Mouse and the Disneyland park take on a sacred quality, whose meanings are shared across groups of fans; as a world of fantasy and magic, the park boasts special effects in its rides and attractions that many people do not understand. Fans have created or participated in a wide variety of rituals, such as food rituals, marathons, and pin trading. Thus, Disney fan communities, like fan communities in general, provide a case study that demonstrates how solidarity, meaning, and the sacred and the profane, can bring very different groups of people together, across large distances.

In addition, this thesis sheds light on the needs generated by the “culture industry.” Marcuse (1964) argued that the needs generated by the culture industry, such as the “need” for a new product or to watch a season finale to a favorite show are false and only further advance the needs of the culture industry. Fulfilling these momentary needs allow for a temporary escape from reality and the drudgery of everyday life, through television commercials, the music industry, or even the latest fashion. However, this escape is only a temporary respite filled through standardized products. From a critical perspective, Disney fans are not creatively engaging the object of their fandom; they are zombies or empty vessels playing with symbols and standardized objects created for mass consumption. In addition, as these symbols that hold meaning for Disney fans are a product of the culture industry, used to sell products, it may also be suggested that the solidarity and meaning in the Disney fan community are an illusion. This thesis will explore these “needs,” as well as fans’ abilities to creatively engage with the material. In

addition, this thesis will consider whether fans' efforts at resistance are effective, or if they merely reinforce the efforts and message disseminated by mass culture.

Finally, this thesis examines how technological advances inform community in the postmodern world. As technology advances, new tools have allowed humans to disseminate large amounts of information through time and space. In addition, modern technology allows for the proliferation of mass media through which fans can share not only the same cultural products, but also the same historical moments, such as televised presidential debates or the attacks on 9/11. Just as these moments being televised allow people to share in a cultural moment, to be a part of the mourning or celebration, new media allows individuals to connect in new ways. Not only can one fan post a blog that millions can access instantly; individuals have begun to form online communities. I examine online fan boards and postings and explore how this technology has allowed fans to contribute to shared systems of meaning, through online texts and interactions.

General Overview of Chapters

In this thesis on Disney fandom, I will proceed first by providing a short history of the Walt Disney Company and its fan community. This history is important because it explains not only how the Disney fan community has evolved over the years, but also demonstrates the strong role that fans have had in the community since the beginning. This history demonstrates that fans are not merely mindless consumers duped by the culture industry, but rather they are active and creative players in the fan community. In addition, I will provide an explanation of my methodology.

Just as a shared history creates a common sense of identity among fans, activities that fans participate in together can contribute to a shared feeling of community. In Chapter 2, I will discuss common fan activities, such as collecting Disneyana and attending meetings, and fan activities such as pin trading and theme days. This chapter also discusses how these activities strengthen ties among fans and how fan-run activities differ from the clubs and events designed by Disney. Chapter 2 demonstrates how having a “place” to engage with the object of fandom increases the range of activities for fans. Disney fans do not simply engage in activities suggested by Disney, they create new activities and re-imagine Disney objects in creative ways. These activities allow fans to demonstrate “insider status,” share narratives, and build solidarity with other fans.

These narratives created by fan activities are also reflected in the mythology shared by Disney fans. In Chapter 3, I will discuss how the shared interests among Disney fans form a complex network of history and mythology, verbally and online. This shared knowledge unites fans through a common history, giving them a shared identity. Just as the history tells fans where the community came from, the collective sources of information shared among Disney fans tell them where it is now and where it is going in the future.

Another way that fans strengthen their shared identity is through symbols and tradition. Chapter 4 discusses the traditions that fans engage in, and how these acts are important to fan experience and strengthen community ties. The traditions of Disney fans serve as an example of emerging new types of rituals. Secular in nature, these rituals allow fans to engage a shared symbol in new ways, while building community.

However, even while fans may share symbols or meaning, Disney may appeal to fans for different reasons. Chapter 5 will discuss what the appeal of Disney is to fans, how they become fans, and how Disney fans find meaning in the subject of their fandom. The chapter will also discuss different ways that fans are critical of Disney as a corporation. This chapter demonstrates that fans are able to re-imagine and creatively engage the object of their fandom to create shared meaning.

One of the most important aspects of this thesis is that fans are not just individuals who happen to share likes or a favorite cartoon character. The fans in this study are creative individuals that communicate across time and space, sharing history, values, and meanings related to Disney products. Chapter 6 concludes my analysis of Disney fandom by examining to what extent Disney fans are “like minded individuals” rather than an actual community. In addition, the conclusion will discuss how being a Disney fan is different from being another kind of fan. Finally, the conclusion will also discuss the ramifications of this project for theory and for future fan or community studies.

A Brief History of Disney Fandom

In September of 1929, Walt Disney accepted an invitation to visit the Fox Dome Theater, in Ocean Park, California (Gabler 2006; Holliss 1986; Watts 1997). Harry Woodin, a young theater manager, had invited Walt Disney to one of the meetings of his weekly Mickey Mouse Club matinees. Walt Disney said that he got “quite a kick to see about one-thousand kids cheering for Mickey Mouse” (Gabler 2006: 139). However, Woodin’s club was more than simply cheering for a cartoon character. Woodin’s weekly Mickey Mouse Club activities included a Mickey Mouse pledge, an impromptu Mickey

Mouse band, Mickey Mouse cartoons, and other activities for the children. The Mickey Mouse Club was more than a Mickey Mouse matinee; it was one of the earliest Disney fan clubs. Less than one year had elapsed between the release of “Steamboat Willie” and Walt Disney’s discovery of the fan club. It is of interest to note that it was theater manager Harry Woodin, not The Disney Company as many believe, who had organized this early Disney fan club. Walt Disney only became involved at Harry Woodin’s insistence once the fan club was established.

As Gabler notes, Woodin, like Walt Disney, had larger aspirations and was able to convince Walt Disney that the Mickey Mouse Club could be done on a national level (2006: 139). With the support of Walt Disney, Harry Woodin launched a national Mickey Mouse campaign for the Disney Brothers Studio. For twenty-five dollars, theaters could buy a charter from the studio to run their own Mickey Mouse Clubs, which entitled them to run special Mickey Mouse matinees and various related activities, such as a Mickey Mouse band, stunts, contests, and games (Gabler 2006; Holliss 1986; Watts 1997;). However, as Holliss (1986) notes, these meetings were not simply showings of a Mickey Mouse cartoon, but rather included club passwords, secret handshakes, and elaborate rituals that were observed at every meeting. These elaborate rituals would include a gathering of the Club’s elected officers, a reading of the Mickey Mouse Creed and Club members responding by saying the Mickey Mouse pledge, cartoon screenings, and a sing-a-long of the Club’s theme song, “Minnie’s Yoo-Hoo” (Holliss 1986). It was through these rituals that Harry Woodin sought to fulfill the two basic functions of the Mickey Mouse Club. Firstly, Woodin stated that the Club served to “provide an easily arranged and inexpensive method of getting and holding the patronage of youngsters” ; and

secondly, it guided the spirit of children, “through inspirational, patriotic, and character-building activities related to the Club, to aid children in learning good citizenship” (Holliss 1986: 80). These goals demonstrate the importance of the Mickey Mouse Club in increasing the popularity of Mickey Mouse and other Disney Brother’s Studio cartoons, and to assist in the character building of young children.

While these chapters operated independently, the Mickey Mouse Clubs were also an economic tool for the Disney Studios. The cultivation of these Clubs was designed not only to increase the sale of Mickey Mouse merchandise and the popularity of Mickey Mouse films, but also to popularize the Mickey Mouse Clubs themselves. As Watts notes,

It offered the Mickey Mouse Idea, a travelling show that featured comedy, music, dancing, and clothing, and other merchandise. It forwarded advertising packets plugging “the magnetic pulling power of the world-famous Mickey Mouse Clubs” and breathlessly promising “ACCESSORIES! TIE UPS! A CAMPAIGN BOOK!” It also managed the national network in part through the publication of the *Official Bulletin of the Mickey Mouse Club*, a missive that appeared regularly from the Hyperion studio. (1997: 147)

It was through the advertising efforts of individual chapters, Harry Woodin, and the Disney studios that the Mickey Mouse Club campaign continued to gather members. Theaters often boasted over one thousand members, with the Fox Excel Theater in Syracuse, NY and the Fox MacDonald Theater in Eugene, OR signing up 1,300 and 1,500 members respectively (Gabler 2006: 140). According to Gabler, “At their peak, Roy estimated there were over eight-hundred chapters in the country with, by another

estimate, more than one million members- more, according to *The Motion Picture Herald* than the combined membership of the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts of America” (Gabler 2006: Holliss 1986).

The popularity of Mickey Mouse and the Mickey Mouse Club created a demand for Mickey Mouse merchandise. As noted by Holliss (1986), Walt Disney had had previous experience with character licensing and merchandising, as Oswald the Lucky Rabbit had appeared on button badges, Frappe chocolate bars, and a child’s stationary set. In 1929, Walt and Roy Disney set up Walt Disney Enterprises, to handle a variety of activities supplemental to film making, including marketing and licensing (Holliss 1986). It was through Walt Disney Enterprises that Disney was able to release Mickey Mouse merchandise on a broader scale through licensing, including in 1929, rights to put Mickey Mouse on school tablets (deCordova 1994). Just as the school tablets were the design of an outside entrepreneur, the first Mickey Mouse toy was the product of Charlotte Clark, a woman who earned a living making and selling novelties. Seeking to capitalize on Mickey Mouse’s appeal, and with the help of her nephew, Charlotte Clark produced the first Mickey Mouse doll (Holliss 1986). Shortly after, in February of 1930, the Disney Company signed a contract with George Borgfeldt for the international licensing, production, and distribution of Mickey Mouse merchandise. It was through licensing that Mickey Mouse merchandise was able to be released on a national level and in a variety of forms.

Children could, with enough money, have the image of the mouse on almost all of their possessions- their underwear, pajamas, neckties, handkerchiefs, and jewelry;

their toothbrushes, hot water bottles, and bathroom accessories; their silverware and china; their toys and games; and their school supplies (deCordova 1994: 205).

For Disney, the widespread licensing of Mickey Mouse raised revenue and led to the increased popularity of Mickey Mouse and his films. Walt Disney viewed toys as an advertising tool that had a constant presence around the home; this constant presence, Walt Disney theorized, would lead to an increased consumption of films. In turn, Borgfeldt viewed the films as an advertising tool for merchandise. The two approaches were strategically linked: Disney's production of films and Borgfeldt's licensing of merchandise were mutually beneficial forms of advertising. Richard deCordova argues that the network created by this mutual beneficial relationship created a "a path that connected the worlds of the film exhibition and retailing, and therefore (in its ideal form at least) from the movie store to the department store and back" (1994: 205). However, even while licensing and filmmaking provided a mutually beneficial relationship, Walt Disney was dissatisfied with the quality of toys that were being produced. Arguing that the appearance of the toy was more important than "the mere royalties it produced," Walt Disney Enterprises shifted its contracts for character licensing over to Herman Kamen (Holliss 1986). After the expiration of contracts with other licensors, including Borgfeldt, Kamen became Disney's sole merchandising representative in 1933 and adopted stringent measures to insure the quality of all Mickey Mouse merchandise, including cancelling all contracts with manufacturers that would not comply with Disney's standards (Holliss 1986).

In addition to the advertising efforts by the Disney Studios and local chapters, the Mickey Mouse Club and Mickey Mouse merchandise were frequently promoted by

outside interests. One of the most important ways that Mickey Mouse and Mickey Mouse merchandise was promoted was by department stores. As Richard deCordova (1994) explains, Mickey Mouse became a star in the toy department, in window displays or by serving as a "Master of Ceremonies" at events. While Borgfeldt helped organize some of the publicity for these events, such as having Charlotte Clark make costumes for Mickey and Minnie to appear live in stores, deCordova asserts that "much of the impetus for these extravagant promotions came from the stores themselves" (1994: 206). The eagerness of department stores to promote Mickey Mouse is primarily the result of the stores' desire to shift the toy business from a seasonal status, centering on Christmas and other holidays, to a more year-round status. As Richard deCordova notes,

The trade struggled to find ways to overcome this problem. For the toy industry to flourish, the child's consumption patterns had to be modernized, wrested from the stranglehold of the yearly ritual and connected to other rituals and, particularly, to the flux of everyday life (1994: 206).

By promoting Mickey and Minnie Mouse, department stores were able to tie toys to movies or films, and thus tied the consumption of toys to daily rituals, rather than seasonal gift giving (deCordova 1994). Some of the events hosted by department stores for children included meet-and-greets with Mickey Mouse and Mickey Mouse birthday parties.

The importance of using Mickey Mouse events to encourage year-round consumption is demonstrated by *Playthings*, a trade paper for the toy industry that urged stores to hold Mickey Mouse birthday parties. "It specifically encouraged stores to cooperate with local movie theaters and to offer to dress up their lobbies with a display of

Mickey Mouse toys. Here the theater became quite explicitly an extension of the department store" (deCordova 1994: 207). This was a tactic frequently used by department stores and theaters and demonstrates a mutually beneficial relationship. The theater was able to dress up their lobbies with the merchandise and have events that increased the consumption of films. In exchange, department stores benefited by an increased demand for merchandise as Mickey's popularity increased and as children saw this merchandise in the theaters. Similarly, in 1932, United Artists published a 48-page campaign book that showed theater managers different ways to promote Mickey Mouse films by cooperating with local merchants distributing Mickey Mouse merchandise (Holliss 1986: 75). As Holliss (1986) notes, the campaign book and seven Kamen merchandising catalogues produced from 1934 to 1949 were distributed to thousands of exhibitors, manufacturers, and traders, and show the staggering variety of Mickey Mouse merchandise that was available.

In 1974, Cecil Munsey published a book on Walt Disney collectibles called "Disneyana," a term which has been traditionally used as a descriptor for "all things Disney," including art and merchandise. According to Tomart, the term "Disneyana" can be traced back to the 1960s and 1970s, when it was used in a mail order catalog by Malcom Willits' Collector's Book Store to describe Disney merchandise. Today, a wide variety of merchandise and collectibles falls under the category of Disneyana, including statues, pins, plates, and clothing.

While Disney fans have been buying and trading "Disneyana" since at least the 1960s, as evidenced by Malcom Willits' catalog, Disney opened its first "Disneyana Shop" on Main Street in Anaheim, CA, on January 9th, 1976. The shop, which remained

open until March of 1986, sold a variety of Disneyana merchandise, including vintage collectibles purchased through secondary buyers. However, when it reopened in May of 1998, the Disneyana Shop sold park-exclusive or limited edition merchandise, rather than vintage Disneyana (Mouse Treasures)

In 1979, twelve collectors of “Disneyana” merchandise formed a club in Anaheim, CA, named the “Mouse Club” to share their appreciation of Walt Disney and his legacy. The leaders, Ed and Elaine Levin, had a strong interest in Disney collectibles and owned a Disneyana shop, which they operated from their home, called “Nickelodeon.” Expanding from frequent meetings to discuss Disney history and Disneyana in 1980, the Mouse Club began publishing a newsletter, and in 1982 held the first-ever unofficial “Disneyana Convention”. The convention, which was held at the Jolly Roger Inn across from Disneyland, was inspired by the growth of “Disneyana collectors” after the continued exposure of Munsey’s 1974 Disneyana book (Mouse Treasures).

As the Mouse Club continued to grow, differences in opinion arose among members of the club, and in 1984, after no compromise could be found, fourteen members created a new club named the National Fantasy Fan Club (NFFC) (Mouse Treasures; NFFC 2009). Differences in opinion included a desire for the club to have more chapters, more common meetings, a greater emphasis on the history of the Disney Company, and a larger leadership team (NFFC 2009). The NFFC, later renamed the Disneyana Fan Club, boasts thousands of members worldwide and a variety of activities for its members, including chapter meetings, national meetings, an annual convention, newsletters, and special events.

Both the Mouse Club and the Disneyana Fan Club are similar to the structure and spirit of the Mickey Mouse Club due to their organizational structure and the relationship that they maintain with the Disney Company. The Mickey Mouse Club, the Disneyana Fan Club, and the Mouse Club were all founded by fans or entrepreneurs outside of Disney. The structure of the Disneyana Fan Club is also similar to the Mickey Mouse Club, with a central leadership structure but independently operating chapters. While these chapters report to the national Disneyana Fan Club, sharing some events and materials, the chapters are run independently and fans participate at a local level. These individual chapters meet on a monthly basis and have their own newsletters, leadership structure, and events. In addition, the Disneyana Fan Club and Mouse Club have positive relations with the Disney Company, which aids the fan clubs in setting up special events, getting behind the scenes information, and for obtaining Disney speakers for the conventions and banquets. For the first convention of the Mouse Club, the one day show-and-sale was believed to be the largest collection of Disney memorabilia and merchandise that had ever been assembled in one place (Mouse Treasures). As Mouse Treasures notes, the convention also attracted prominent guests, including legendary Disney animators Ward Kimball, Ollie Johnston, and Frank Thomas, as well as archivist Dave Smith, and Clarence ‘Ducky’ Nash (original voice of Donald Duck). For the NFFC’s first convention, positive relations with Disney allowed other prominent names to make an appearance. For the convention, held at the Grand Hotel in 1985, 250 guests attended to see speakers including Ward Kimball, Tommy Cole of the Mousekateers, and animators from *The Black Cauldron* (NFFC 2009).

While the Mouse Club has become defunct, two offshoots continue to thrive today- the Mouse Club East and the Disneyana Fan Club. Thousands of Disney fans are members of these clubs and continue to gather for annual conventions, which showcase Disney speakers, history, and memorabilia. In addition, the invention of the internet has allowed for a new and more accessible era of Disney fandom. Web portals such as Mouseplanet.com, Mouse Treasures website, Doombuggies.com, Micechat.com, and Laughingplace.com allow fans to communicate with other fans about their particular interests within Disney fandom. These web portals also allow for the dissemination of information among fans including fan narratives of experiences, history, trivia, urban legends, memorabilia pricing and trading, and personal information. Modern fans also use the internet as a tool to arrange meet-ups, such as theme days, simple meet-ups in the parks, or club meetings.

Methodology

I uncover the essence of Disney fandom by utilizing historical texts (Holliss 1986; Gabler 2006; Tumbusch 2007) and by gathering data through qualitative methods. After I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) from California State University Northridge, I was able to begin the collection of my data on human subjects. For this project, I utilized participant observation at Disney fan-run events, interviews with fans, and a content analysis of four major web portals. Using these different methods, I studied Disney fans and attempted to uncover not only the history and structure of the fan community, but also the ways in which fans creatively engage with the object of their fandom- Disney. This included how Disney fans engaged with Disney products and the parks, but also

how fans reacted to Disney lore and common symbols, and the meaning fans assigned to these objects. I collected and analyzed fan narratives that explain not only how the community has been formed, but also why.

Methodology- Participant Observation

For my participant observation, I attended fan-run events at Disneyland and in Anaheim, CA, between October 2010 and May 2011². On April 16, 2011, I attended a board meeting and discussion panel for the upcoming Disneyana convention at the Anaheim Crowne Plaza Resort, at the invitation of Gary Schaengold, Disneyana's president. I was introduced by the club present as a graduate student researching Disney fans and the Disney fan community. They invited me to listen in on the meeting and to ask any questions if I did not understand something. During the meeting, I acted as an observer, taking notes of the club's business, structure, purpose, and anticipated plans for upcoming events, including the Disneyana fan convention. After the meeting, I was invited to mingle with the club members and was later able to interview a club member named Brian at length³. After the meeting, the Disneyana fan club mailed me a DVD that documented the history of the club. My interest in the Disneyana Fan Club is that it is considered to be one of the oldest and largest Disney fan organizations in the United States (Korkis 2012). Founded in 1984 as a sub-chapter of the now defunct Mouse Club under the name "National Fantasy Fan Club," the Disneyana Fan Club still operates today with more than two dozen chapters (Korkis 2012).

In addition, I observed fans engaging in pin trading in the parks and in Downtown Disney on four occasions between January and May 2011⁴. On each of these trips, I

visited the areas where fans trade pins and observed their interactions for approximately three hours. I was overt in my purpose, and informed the pin traders that I was observing them for a project on Disney fans. These days did not hold any particular significance⁵, but were a mixture of weekdays and a weekend. Each time, I visited during a different time frame to meet a mixture of fans. This was effective because many of the pin traders would stop by the parks before or after work. By altering the days and times of my visit, I was able to meet a variety of fans who all worked different schedules. While visiting the trading tables, I engaged in natural conversation with the pin traders and traded pins that I had brought with me for this purpose. During this time I primarily observed how the traders interacted with other adult traders, children, and guests who were curious about pin trading. I took notes about what I heard, and asked questions if I did not understand something that was said. After a trade had been completed, I would ask the trader to explain the exchange to me from his or her point of view. I also had a few topics that I asked pin traders about if they did not come up in the course of normal conversation, such as how they got into pin trading, if they had a favorite pin, the meaning the pin had for them, the appeal of pin trading, and if they attended any pin trading events. I often found however, that I did not need to ask many questions, because these questions were frequently answered by observing trades, as pin traders also enjoyed swapping stories. The most common topics of conversation at the tables included stories surrounding specific pins, how individual pin traders began trading, and why individuals choose to trade.

I also participated in four theme day events between October 2010 and May 2011. Theme days are events run by fans that are planned and publicized online and through

word of mouth. These events center on a specific theme, often an identity, and are a chance for fans to gather on a specific day in the Disney parks for a day of special events and mingling. The days that I attended for this thesis were: Bats Day (Sunday May 8th 2011), Dapper Day⁶ (February 2nd 2011), Gay Day (October 2nd, 2010), and Rock a Billy Day (November 14, 2010). With the exception of Dapper Day, which is new, each of these events are well-known in the fan community, and were referenced by Disney fans in the interviews.

For each of these gatherings, I participated in the main event, as well as many of the day's pre-planned and spontaneous activities. The "main event" is the overall theme of the day and includes showing up to the park as a part of the group⁷, mingling with other theme day guests, and dressing up to show support. For example, I wore red to show solidarity on "Gay Day," dressed up in a nice shirt and skirt for "Dapper Day," and a Steampunk costume for Bats Day. This allowed me to be easily recognizable as a part of the day's group.

In addition, each of the theme days included other planned and spontaneous activities, including photo shoots with the theme day group, organized dinners and concerts in nearby hotels, and meet-ups in various places in the park. For example, Gay Day includes a wide variety of activities for its guests including a time for "Bears" to ride the Grizzly River Run, organized dances in the hotels prior to theme day, lunch in the park for LGBT teens sponsored by the Trevor Project, and a photo shoot with Gay Day guests wearing red shoot to show support. As a guest on theme days I participated in many of these activities with other theme day participants, such as waiting in line for the group photo shoots, riding the Mark Twain Riverboat with other Gay Day participants,

and watching Billy Hill and the Hillbillies on Rockabilly Day. As with my experiences pin trading, I talked to other participants in line for the photo shoot, in ride lines, and in other places within the park. Topics of conversation included why a fan chose to attend a specific event, how many times they had attended before, what they thought of the event, and if they felt that they were part of a group. As with my experiences pin trading, many of the participants volunteered answers for my questions before I had a chance to ask, but I also had several open ended questions that I would use if a question had not been answered. These questions focused on how a fan had heard of a theme day, who they came with, why they decided to come, what events they were participating in, if they had done anything special for the theme day (such as dressing up), and what the appeal of the theme day was. Even while I participated in many of the smaller activities planned for theme days, the focus of each of these days remained coming to the park as a part of the larger visible group and socializing with theme day fans.

During my visits to the Disneyana Board meeting, theme days, and observing pin trading in the parks, I participated not only as a researcher taking notes, but also as a fan. As a fan who has been reading Disney fan boards and participating in fan events for over ten years, I am familiar with Disney history, the Disney parks, and the fan community. For example, I am familiar with lingo used by Disney fans, including Hidden Mickey, Cast Member, and many other terms which are listed in Appendix A. In addition, I am familiar with much of the history, urban legends, trivia, and Hidden Mickeys mentioned by fans in our conversations and interviews. My familiarity with Disney and its fan community has facilitated natural conversation with fans during my participant observation. Rather than simply talking to a researcher with little knowledge about the

subject, Disney fans were able not only to tell me some of their favorite stories, but also discuss intricacies of history and stories that might escape someone unfamiliar with the subject. In addition, as I was familiar with much of the basic information surrounding the study, I was able to ask more probing questions and some questions that outside researchers might not consider. Finally, some fans were more willing to talk to me due to my fan status than they would have to an outside researcher.

Methodology- Interviews

In addition to participant observation, I interviewed twenty-five individuals about their participation in the Disney fan community. I posted a notice on six online fan boards: MiceChat, WDW Boards, DoomBuggies, MousePlanet, DeadMenTellNoTales, and LaughingPlace. In my post, I identified myself as a Disney fan and graduate student conducting research on Disney for my Master's thesis. I noted that I was looking for fans to participate in online or in-person interviews about their experiences with Disney and provided contact information for interested parties. In addition to my posts online seeking participants, fans reposted the message in other places online⁸, such as on message boards and Twitter feeds, and some fans found the notice on several different message boards. As such, it is difficult to determine where each fan found the notice. Of those interviewed from the boards, twelve fans responded and showed an interest in participating in an interview detailing their Disney experiences. An additional twelve fans were referred by participants from previous interviews and one fan was recruited from the Disneyana Board meeting. Finally, I obtained permission from the Disneyana Club to interview one of its members about Disneyana activities and the club itself.

Three of these interviews were conducted face to face, and twenty-two were conducted online in private chat sessions, such as AOL Instant Messenger and Google Chat. The Disney fans I interviewed were spread out over a wide geographic area and many were not available for face to face interviews due to geographical locations or conflicting schedules. The interviews ranged in length from one hour to four hours, with the average interview lasting two and a half hours. Three of the interviews included follow up interviews for an additional hour. For each of the interviews, a schedule was used which included open-ended questions about a person's experiences as a Disney fan and the meanings generated by fan related activities. An interview schedule detailing the questions asked of Disney fans can be found in Appendix B. Some of the questions from this interview schedule were also used to guide conversations for my theme day participant observation where applicable.

The fans come from different racial backgrounds, economic backgrounds, geographical areas, and lifestyles. Participants included men (32%) and women (68%) and varied in age from 18 to 72, with an average age of 39. Fourteen of the fans were from California (56%), one was from Canada (4%), and nine lived in other states, including North Carolina, New Mexico, South Dakota, Massachusetts, Connecticut, while Florida and Illinois were home to two fans each. The fans that were interviewed included a wide variety of incomes, including four fans that were currently unemployed and four fans that had incomes of over \$100,000 per year. The median income among fans was \$50,000. When asked to state their ethnicity, fans identified as Caucasian (72%), African American (4%), Asian (4%), Hispanic (4%); and four declined to state their ethnicity (16%). Finally, one fan preferred not to answer any demographic

questions, and six preferred not to answer any questions about income. All of the identifying information linking participants to their interviews was destroyed, except for one case in which the participant is well-known in the community and preferred to be known. For many of the fans that were interviewed, anonymity was necessary because some of the individuals were former or current Disney cast members.

It is important to note here that even while different geographical locations, races, and incomes were represented in this study, the diversity is severely limited. For example, 18 of the 25 participants in this study identified themselves as Caucasian and the median income for the study was \$50,000. This is interesting because it is typical of what I noticed while visiting the parks. This racial and financial divide may be due to one of many possible factors- men and women of minorities do not feel represented in Disney culture, as the majority of Disney human characters are Caucasian; that the messages transmitted in Disney films do not translate well into some cultures; or that Disney fandom may be considered expensive with the relatively high cost of movies, merchandise, and theme park tickets in comparison to similar products. In addition, 17 out of 25 of the interviewees were women, more than twice the number of men. With its emphasis on family and “Happily Ever After,” it is possible that Disney appeals more to women in general than men. Further analysis is needed to determine if these demographical trends are representative of the larger Disney fan culture and what factors may contribute to these trends.

In addition to in-depth interviews, I analyzed content of four of the Disney fan community’s major web portals: Laughing Place (1,504,878 posts)⁹, Mouse Planet (1,606,429 posts/ 24,548 members)¹⁰, Mice Chat (3,995,050 posts/ 46,326 members)¹¹,

and Doom Buggies (539504 posts/4083 members)¹². Each of these posts in turn belongs to a thread within the fan forum, which may include only one post or may have thousands. With the exception of Doom Buggies.com, each of these fan portals is a general forum for Disney fans, including sections on the Disney theme parks, upcoming construction, movies, collectibles, trivia, Hidden Mickeys, and pin trading. In contrast, Doom Buggies is focused solely on the Haunted Mansion. In addition to these subjects and other general Disney fandom, these forums also have places for fans to socialize and talk about other subjects, including game threads and threads to talk about life in general. As any user can create a thread about almost any subject, threads can vary widely in their content. These web portals were chosen for two reasons. Firstly, these sites are among the largest Disney fan portals online, and provide much of the information that is disseminated among fans in the Disney fan community. Secondly, fans frequently mentioned these web portals in interviews when discussing their online activities.

While Doom Buggies is one of the smallest of the major fan portals, it was included among the other major fan portals for two reasons. Firstly, even while a fewer number of fans participate on DoomBuggies.com, a great number of fans visit the site to read posts and gather information about the Haunted Mansion. While only 4,803 members post (small in comparison to the other forums analyzed), the forum has had 11,360,821 visits (Doom Buggies Community Statistics). Secondly, fans interviewed for this project frequently discussed their activities on DoomBuggies.com. Of the fans interviewed, eight fans mentioned their experiences on DoomBuggies.com, including posting, participation in meet-ups, and Christmas gift exchanges. An analysis of at least fifteen different threads was conducted in each of these web portals.

Each of these fan forums operates independently, and has their own members, even while there is some overlap as fans might be registered for more than one fan portal. Even while fans might be registered on more than one fan portal, there are also fans called “lurkers” who read the forums for information and entertainment but do not register or participate.

For each forum, I chose the fifteen threads of an acceptable length with the most recent posts.¹³ Some of the threads were as short as fifteen responses, and many of the threads exceeded hundreds of responses, and in one case, over three thousand. In addition to the content analysis of the major web portals, a content analysis was also conducted on threads that were referenced by fans in their interviews, such as threads from the website StupidGuestTricks.com. The threads were analyzed to identify and explore recurring themes, differences in opinion, historical data, what level of community was present, and meaning assigned to objects, actions, and symbols.

Limitations and Benefits of Self Selection

As fans responded to this posting of their own will, there was an element of self-selection present. Self-selecting participants might be more motivated to take part in interviews or show more passion for the subject(s). In addition, fans recruited through this method might have been able to better articulate their thoughts, feelings, and experiences than other Disney fans. Many of the members who responded to the post were often well known active members in the Disney fan community, including owners of websites, moderators, and active bloggers. These active members gain notoriety for being able to effectively communicate their view on Disney fandom to others, and might

have answered similar questions in the past. This limits my study, because the responders tended to be more active than some fans, which makes it unrealistic to draw generalizations about patterns of behavior. Even while fans who responded to the request for participants tended to be fairly active in the Disney fan community, the notice also yielded less-active participants, including lurkers¹⁴.

However, even while self-selecting samples are limiting, this sample also created many unexpected benefits. For example, fans who own websites, record podcasts, and run fan clubs have access to different experiences. Owners of well-known websites and fan clubs are more well-known in the fan community and are able to participate in a greater number of fan events and better communicate with other fans.

These “super fans” also have a great deal of knowledge about Disney and the Disney fan community, including access to rare texts and lived experiences. Individual fans may have their own collections of rare books and memorabilia or may have access to an organization such as the NFFC with their own archives. As much of the information about the Disney fan community is not readily available, these participants were invaluable in creating a timeline on the history of the Disney fan community. These fans provided information from their own memory and from archives that were created by recording fans’ memories.

“Super fans” who own their own websites or who are members of a large organization may also have different lived experiences. As Ricky notes, as a “super fan” he entered and won a contest sponsored by Disney and CareerBuilder.com for a Disneyland vacation to be a butler in the Haunted Mansion, as a part of their “Dream Job” Sweepstakes. Large fan organizations and websites can also get Disney’s

cooperation for events, such as booking guest speakers or hosting events within the Disney theme parks. As Brian noted in his interview, cooperation with Disney allowed both Disneyana and the Mouse Club to secure Imagineers, artists, and other Disney employees as speakers for their annual conventions. Another example of this that even while theme days are not officially endorsed, Disney cooperates with theme days to provide services, such as setting up group photo shoots or reserving space in the park for events. One example is that on February 25, 2008, Disneyland hosted a party for Doom Buggie's 10th Anniversary, which included an exclusive dinner for guests in the Blue Bayou with a special menu, free admission to the park after 6 pm, Imagineers who acted as guest speakers for the event, and an after-hours ride through of the Haunted Mansion (Swinging Wake). From the special menu, which included dishes such as "Bride's Beating Heart Red Pepper Bisque" and "Graveyard Chocolate Coffins" to the after-hours ride through, the Doom Buggies' cooperation with Disney allowed their fans a different experience.

¹Walt Disney. 2001. *The Quotable Walt Disney*. Ed. By Dave Smith. New York: Disney Editions Page 41.

² For all of my participant observation, at the board meeting, on theme days, and visiting with Pin Traders, I visited these groups alone, so that I could talk with fans directly without distractions.

³ Brian was not able to conduct his interview in person on the day of the Disneyana meeting due to personal reasons. He was kind enough to arrange a time at a later date to be interviewed online.

⁴ Specifically, I visited the parks on January 28th, 2011; March 2nd, 2011; May 20th, 2011; and May 21st, 2011

⁵ There are some days, such as pin trading gatherings, conventions, and meet ups where pin traders gather together in an assigned place and time. The days that I visited with pin

traders were ordinary days in the park, so that I could observe their everyday interactions with other traders and guests.

⁶ Dapper Day celebrates the days when people used to dress up to go to Disneyland, which is seen in most of the Disney concept art for new attractions. Dapper Day guests dress up in skirts, dresses, and suits for this event.

⁷ By saying group here, I mean those specifically attending a theme event, which may mean thousands of guests.

⁸ I did not ask fans to repost the message in Twitter feeds or on other online boards, but was thankful for the additional support that these actions generated.

⁹ Laughing Place does not post its number of members. "Laughing Place.com Discussion Boards". *Laughing Place* WEBSITE. Retrieved July 14, 2011. <http://mb.laughingplace.com/MsgBoard.asp>

¹⁰ "Mousepad Statistics". *Mouse Planet* WEBSITE. Retrieved July 14, 2011. <http://mousepad.mouseplanet.com/forum.php>

¹¹ "MiceChat Statistics". *MiceChat* WEBSITE. Retrieved July 14, 2011. <http://micechat.com/forums/forum.p>

¹² "DoomBuggies Community Statistics". *DoomBuggies* WEBSITE. Retrieved July 14, 2011. <http://disneyhauntedmansion.yuku.com/>

¹³ I only chose threads that exceeded fifteen posts, as threads with fewer replies would not yield much data.

¹⁴ Lurker is a common term used to describe an internet user who reads articles and posts by others, but who rarely chooses to participate by posting or responding to comments.

CHAPTER 2: FROM BATS DAY TO HIDDEN MICKEYS

CREATING MEMORIES THROUGH FAN ACTIVITIES

Introduction

Disney fandom has a long and rich history, in which fans have taken an active role in creating their own community. Whether in conventions, fan clubs, or online, Disney fans converse about a wide variety of Disney subjects, and participate in a wide variety of activities. These activities, which include pin trading, collecting, theme days, and even marathons, result in collective memory and social solidarity. Through these activities and events, fans are able to communicate and in some cases form complex support networks. This chapter will talk about many of the ways that Disney fans engage with the object of their fandom, the ways that they engage with each other, and the meanings behind these activities. It will discuss activities found in the Disney fan communities, and the role that these activities play in the creation and maintenance of the community as a whole.

The Sociological Significance of Fan Activities

The activities of Disney fans demonstrate the ways that communities can be created and maintained in modern society. More specifically, these activities show ways that individuals can come together to form communities based upon the object of their fandom. One of the oldest ways that individuals have expressed fandom has been through collecting. For thousands of years, individuals have collected historical relics, cultural artifacts, and personal mementos. More recent efforts by fans to collect pieces of popular culture have been met with disdain, as these objects are frequently products of

the culture industry rather than products of individuals. Even while these fetish objects are the products of the culture industry, many of them have special meaning for fans and take on sacred elements.

This chapter will explore how objects mass-produced by the culture industry can take on sacred elements and how these elements transform simple cultural products. More specifically, I explore how collecting may be viewed as a continuum, along which fans engage in collecting objects that range from sacred to mundane. In addition, this chapter will discuss a form of collecting that Disney fans engage in called pin trading. With pin trading, fans are able to compare, discuss, and trade small collectibles in the park with other fans. During pin trading, fans also exchange trivia, history, and anecdotes connected to the pins.

While the section on collecting will explore themes of the sacred and the profane, the other fan activities explored in this chapter demonstrate how fans build solidarity in a fan community. While fan communities lack many of the traditional structure, prohibitions, dogma, and doctrines shared by religious and ethnic groups, they are nevertheless fan *communities*. They share ideals, collective narratives, and feelings of solidarity. In this chapter I explore how Disney fan activities such as theme days and marathons can be considered rituals that generate systems of meaning that build solidarity and a sense of community.

In addition, many of the activities discussed in this chapter and the thesis in general will explore themes of status among Disney fans. Status is the position that an individual holds in a community relative to other members. An individual's status includes not only how well known they are in a community, but also for what they are

known. “Status is an important feature of many such communities, but achieving that status may be difficult and may involve material aspects... amount of time spent in the community, or connections to other high-status individuals” (DeMello 2000: 42). Disney fans can gain status within the community by participating in meetings, participating in leadership roles for clubs like Disneyana, owning Disney memorabilia, contributing to magazines, having or sharing large sums of Disney knowledge, or writing books. For example, a Disney fan may have status as an author, but may have more or less prestige depending on how many people have read his or her book. In addition, the responsibility of building or maintaining of community knowledge may increase a fan’s status. A fan may act as a moderator for one or several sites, write online articles or blogs, or even record podcasts that disseminate information. Rarely, some fans run large web portals or create large-scale events such as Gay Day or Bats Day. Disney fans who participate online may be more well-known than those who only participate in offline interactions, as they are able to connect with a much larger population on the internet.

Each of these different activities is important because they build *communitas* in different ways. For example, fan meetings and gatherings are important because they allow fans to meet new people and engage them on a regular basis. It is through fan clubs and meetings that Disney fans are able to form close relationships with other fans and even take a leadership or creative role. These fan meetings and gatherings frequently feature rituals and celebrations that build solidarity among members and feelings of goodwill. Another important activity in the Disney fan community are theme days in the parks. Theme days provide fans with an opportunity to meet other Disney fans from around the world, thereby generating feelings of solidarity. So too, marathons are important

occasions and opportunities through which fans have the chance to push their own limits and encourage others. Disney marathoners support each other online and on the course, running together and cheering each other on from the sidelines. These marathons serve as a celebration not only for individual fans that have succeeded, but are also a celebration of community.

Finally, this chapter compares and contrasts fan-run events and events created by the Disney Corporation. It will investigate how fans and Disney have different purposes for fan clubs and events, as well as how these different structures affect group membership and feelings of solidarity in the community. This section is of significant because even while previous works have explored company mediated or fan-mediated cultures, these different influences have not been compared. Disney, in contrast, has a fan community that is directly affected by the efforts of the Disney Company, as well as by its own fans. This chapter will explore this theme contrasting company clubs and events, such as D23 and Destination D, with fan-run events, such as Disneyana and theme days.

Meetings and Fan Clubs

One of the largest Disney fan clubs in the United States is the Disneyana Fan Club, with thousands of members worldwide¹ (NFFC Video). According to the official Disneyana Fan Club website, the club is “a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving and sharing the rich legacy of Walt Disney. Our common goal is to provide Disneyana enthusiasts of all ages from around the world with news, information, and events that enhance their experience with, and love of, all things Disney.” Since 1984,

the Disneyana Fan Club has been holding frequent meetings for chapters, national board meetings that members are invited to attend, special events, and annual conventions. In addition to these events, the Disneyana Fan Club also supports various charities, including Ryman Arts to promote art for teens and Give Kids the World to grant wishes for children with life-threatening illnesses. In addition to these charities that are supported by the Disneyana Fan Club at the national level, individual chapters support their own charities at a local level.

The Disneyana Fan Club has different options for membership, depending on a fan's needs. Fans can register for free on the Disneyana Fan Club website to participate in the forums, comment on different parts of the club website, receive club news via email, and attend some special events. Fans who want to take a more active role in the Disneyana Fan Club can purchase an annual family membership, which gives them the same benefits of registered guests, plus they are able to view and print "The Disneyana Dispatch Newsletter," participate in all Disneyana Fan Club Events, and join a local chapter (Disneyana Fan Club)².

While the Disneyana Fan Club as an organization is quite large, individual chapters are much smaller. For example, Brian, who is a previous chapter president and now a member of the Disneyana Fan Club Board, estimates that the Los Angeles chapter has only 35-40 members, of which only about a dozen regularly show up for meetings and are considered "active." These meetings are held at various locations and typically host a variety of speakers who are associated with Disney.

However, while members find the meetings and speakers to be enjoyable, this is not the meeting's primary purpose. As Brian notes,

At our core, though, the meetings and events are a chance for a bunch of people who might not otherwise have a lot in common to get together and have some fun together. Whatever else we do or we're interested in, we know we all share in our love of Disney, so we know we have something in common we can share.

Disney, as a common interest provides a conversation starter and a reason for fans to get together. Other Disney fan clubs, such as the 1313 Club and online meet-up groups share similar reasons for their meetings. As members of a fan group, fans share similar obligations to the group (paying dues and sharing duties for the upkeep of the group), a sense of inclusion, and common experiences; these allow fans to build solidarity within their smaller clubs and within the community as a whole. These feelings of solidarity are further cemented by collective energy generated at larger gatherings and celebrations, such as yearly conventions and other special events.

Even in cases where members are unable to make it to chapter meetings or events, participation in fan clubs such as Disneyana or the 1313 Club has potential benefits including access to information and the ability to socialize online. For example, Mark is a fan of Disneyana, but all of his interaction with other members has been online through the forums, website, and online newsletter. As a part of the virtual Disneyana community Mark is able to review upcoming events, see what items are being sold, hear stories from other members, and “keep up” with what is going on with Disney through the Disneyana Fan Club website and forums. Even though Mark has not been able to attend any events or meetings, he plans to become more involved with Disneyana and hopes to join the National Board in the future. This year, Mark applied for a position with the Disneyana Fan Club as a web publisher because the position would have many benefits, including

access to additional information and late-breaking news. Moreover, he feels like “it would be another venue to interact with other fans and learn more about what is going on.”

Finally, Mark notes that “when you are in a community like that, you tend to learn tips and tricks about visiting the parks, where to buy merchandise, what discounts are available, etc.” Even as an online participant, Mark is able to take advantage of many benefits to which he would not otherwise have access. According to Mark, the two most important benefits were the ability to socialize within the community and access to the community’s shared knowledge.

From Disneyana to meet-up groups found online, Disney fans seek out fan groups to meet other Disney fans who share their interests. However, these fan groups are not simply a place for fans to talk about Disney. Disney fan groups have been around since the beginning of Disney animation. As demonstrated in Chapter 1, Disney fan groups have altered the Disney Corporation in unexpected ways. Without the first Mickey Mouse Club or the first Mouse Club for Disney fans and collectors, it is difficult to imagine Disney reaching where it is today. Fan groups have been around since Disney’s early development, designing their own products and events, and causing Disney to rethink its relationship with its fans. One way that Disney fans have reshaped Disney’s relationship with its fans is through demand for insider information. This demand is visible in the Mouse Club’s invitation to Imagineers to attend special events and conventions.

Disney fan clubs also demonstrate one of the most basic ways that Disney fans are able to build community. Disney fan communities build solidarity through building a

community history and creating new memories. For example, an important part of Disneyana conventions includes recounting the history of the Mouse Club and the Disneyana Fan Club. In addition, fan clubs distribute other information to its members, including interviews with cast members and Imagineers, and previews for coming rides and animated features. This information builds solidarity among fans by demonstrating where the fan club comes from, denoting a shared history and its shared future. The chapter meetings, conventions, and other special events also build community by creating shared memories and by building solidarity and familiarity among members.

D23 and Expo

While Disney fan clubs and special events have existed since the Mickey Mouse Club was founded in 1930, the first Disney-run fan clubs and expos are much more recent. While the first Mouse Club Convention was held in 1982 in Anaheim, California, it took Disney an additional ten years to hold its first convention. In 1992, Disney launched its first Disneyana Convention, which was held in the Contemporary Resort in Walt Disney World (Disney Memorabilia; Mouse Treasures). The event, which was created in response to the growing fan base of Disneyana collectors, became an annual event featuring auctions, limited edition merchandise, informational seminars, banquets, and other entertainment (Mouse Treasures). Even while the conventions drew thousands of guests, many guests had complaints including “long lines for merchandise, too little or too much merchandise, and facilities management difficulties” (Mouse Treasures). In 2003, the doors of the Disneyana convention closed for reasons that were not publicized.

Disney would not have another convention for Disneyana collectors until 2009, when it launched D23 and its first Expo.

In 2009, the Walt Disney Company launched its “Official Disney Fan Club” called D23. The name D23 is a combination of two abbreviations that pays homage to Walt and Roy Disney. It includes the abbreviation D for Disney combined with 23, for 1923, the year that the Walt Disney Company was founded. Its website includes articles, merchandise, and general information about the club. Another source of information about the club is *Twenty Three*, a quarterly magazine for its fans including information on new movies, attractions, history, and other stories associated with the Disney Company. As the official club of the Walt Disney Company, D23 also holds special events for members and fans including scavenger hunts and tours of Disney property. When asked why he chose to join the club as a charter member³, Brian responded,

D23 puts some emphasis on history and sharing an "insider perspective" on the Company. It has the advantage of being able to put on events at places the fan community wouldn't normally get to go to or have people who work for the Company come out to talk to the fan, and that interests me. It was also kind of fun to be on the "ground floor" of a fan club - one of the first people to join.

For Brian, D23 provides an insider perspective on the Walt Disney Company that is difficult to find, even in Disney fan clubs like Disneyana. While Disneyana is able to have guests come to events and meetings to discuss past works or to give sneak peeks, it is still limited in the information that it can give to fans. Disney, in contrast, has access to confidential information on upcoming movies, new attractions, and special events that it is able to share with its members. One of D23's first events for fans and members was

the D23 Expo, which premiered in August of 2009 (D23: The Official Disney Fan Club). Carol, who attended the 2009 Expo, argues “The Expo seemed like an event that was long overdue in coming. Until then, fans have been arranging their own smaller events and have been limited in receiving official information from books and websites.” The Expo featured a wide variety of activities for guests, similar to the older Disneyana conventions, as well as special exhibits of items from the archives, a greater emphasis on history and the parks, and previews of parks and attractions that are still a work in progress.

For many fans, the Parks and Resorts pavilion, at the D23 Expo, gave them a “sneak peek” that was difficult to find anywhere else. As Brian notes, “My favorite thing about Expo was the Parks and Resorts pavilion -- I really enjoyed getting a ‘sneak peek’ at some of the things that were coming to the parks and at some of the things the Imagineers do.” While the *Twenty Three* magazine discusses upcoming rides and movies, the Expo granted the fans access to see the 3D models and prototypes used by Imagineers. The Expo also gave fans the chance to talk to the Imagineers who were building the rides. Carol, who was able to attend, discusses the different opportunities that were presented at the Expo:

The Expo allowed fans to engage in face-to-face dialogues with the actual "movers and shakers" of Disney (Imagineers, artists, producers, actors, designers, etc.) during panel discussions as well as just by wandering throughout the halls...I visited a few panel discussions (two Imagineering panels, and one on fairy tale dress designs), visited the merchandise booths, and saw a huge multi-room exhibit on upcoming theme park and resort additions. The latter was my favorite, not

only because of the beautiful scale models that were everywhere, and the interactive animatronics section (which was fantastic), but because the artists and Imagineers responsible were actually present, wandering throughout. As a result, the rides, resorts and other creations felt personally accessible. I could ask any question I wanted to! I talked to the architect for the new Hawaii resort and one of the designers of California Adventure's Cars Land.

Similar to Brian, Carol's favorite part of the Expo was the Parks and Resorts pavilion. Even while Carol enjoyed the scale models and audio-animatronics that she was able to interact with, her favorite part was being able to talk to the Imagineers who were responsible for the attractions. With the Imagineers and artists present, Carol argues that the Expo felt more personally accessible than trying to looking information up on the Disney blogs or sneak a glance behind-the-scenes. Normally she could only read what was released on the Disney website or rumors about coming attractions and construction on MiceChat. The behind-the-scenes view presented at the Expo, however, laid the changes out in a more visually pleasing format, where guests could explore the area at their leisure. If a guest wanted more information on how a ride was built or other changes, she could simply ask someone with expertise. Carol noted in her interview that she felt like she was being invited in to learn more and explore.

More recently, D23 hosted Destination D, an event at Disneyland which included panels of speakers giving presentations focused on the history of Disney, followed by other special events. Brian, who is a member of D23, was able to attend Destination D. As Brian notes, "Destination D is a 2-day event with a series of seminars. The event at Disneyland focused on the 55th anniversary of the park, with seminars on TV shows and

commercials about the Park, [and] long-closed and never built attractions”⁴. Like the D23 Expo, Destination D shows a tendency towards providing entertainment to fans, in the form of behind the scenes information and history from the Disney Company. In addition to the panel presentations, Destination D provided other forms of entertainment, such as a scavenger hunt in the park where fans hunted for clues and competed to demonstrate their knowledge of Disney history. The scavenger hunt, which included questions relating to obscure Disney trivia, was designed to challenge Disney fans who were familiar with the parks and provide positive memories. Just as with fan-run events, D23 events create solidarity among members of the Disney fan community by building positive shared memories and feelings of collective accomplishment and joy. In addition, both types of newsletters and events have similar content, highlighting Disney history, Imagineering, and collecting.

D23 is different from other Disney fan clubs due to its air of exclusivity. In exchange for an annual fee, members receive access to its website, quarterly magazine gifts, member only events, and special “insider information.” As Brian notes, D23 is special because it gives fans an insider perspective through its publications and special events to which non-members do not have access. Its exclusive nature, where only D23 members are a part of the action, makes fans feel special, as if they are part of an elite group.

As Brian notes, even more exclusive is the “Charter Membership,” offered to fans who joined during the inaugural year⁵. Charter status, which was the same cost as a regular annual membership, has certain benefits for members getting in on the “ground floor,” including special merchandise and a special members only lounge at D23 expos.

Even more important to fans like Brian is the elite status implied by Charter Membership. It is impossible to get Charter status if you did not join in the first year, and the number of charter members continually dwindles as members forget or choose not to renew.

However, even while D23 and fan-built clubs have similar events and publications available, the fundamental nature of these products are different. For example, while Disneyana fans are reading monthly newsletters from their chapters, written or edited by a member of the chapter, D23 fans are reading a quarterly newsletter from the Disney Company to all D23 fans. Monthly newsletters from fan run clubs include birthday wishes to members, advertisements for members, information on the next meeting, and recognition for members for contributions. None of this content that connects individual members or chapters will be found in an issue of *Twenty Three*. Fan publications are different from D23 publications for two primary reasons. Firstly, as D23 magazines are written for millions of fans, they lack an element of familiarity. Fans who read chapter newsletters may know the contributors personally, attend the events discussed, and know the people whose birthday is mentioned in the newsletter. Receiving a birthday congratulations from a chapter newsletter is much more personal than a D23 magazine. Secondly, Disney fan publications illustrate a distinct sense of ownership. Fans, not Disney executives, decide the content of these publications. This means that fans are responsible for its creation from beginning to end and can include information that they, rather than Disney would prefer to, including criticisms and reviews of the Disney Company without constraints of profit-minded marketing. It is fans who write, edit, and distribute the newsletters, exploring their own creativity, offering their own critiques, and asserting ownership of their fandom.

Events also differ between D23 and fan run organizations. For example, fan-run organizations have frequent meetings to discuss business on both the national and chapter level. These meetings, which will have small numbers of people who see each other on a regular basis, may include a discussion of history, dinner, a movie night, a trip to one of the Disney parks, or some special event. In contrast, D23 events are planned months in advance, occur much less frequently, and may have thousands of fans in attendance. At D23 events, many of these fans never see each other again, and socialization occurs primarily among fans who attend in groups, such as family or friends. Due to these differences in how information is disseminated and how events are structured, a very different dynamic has arisen out of these different types of fan club. D23, as the Official Disney Fan Club, is able to offer its fans a different experience and sneak peeks into the future of the company. In contrast, fan run fan clubs have higher levels of participation and are able to build much stronger community ties through repeat socialization.

While Disney fan clubs such as Disneyana and the Mouse Club build bonds among fans through frequent meetings, self-leadership, and communication, D23 chooses instead to foster relationships between the Walt Disney Company and fans. At its core, D23 is a part of the Walt Disney Company, and its purpose is to generate excitement about Disney products and sell merchandise. In contrast, fan-run organizations share no profit with the Disney Company. Fan-run organizations profit (financially or through gaining status) by pleasing Disney fans and building solidarity. In some cases, this occurs at Disney's expense. These important differences between these two different companies demonstrate how a large company such as Disney can create feelings of being "in-the-know" or part of the Disney "experience," while fan run

organizations instead concentrate on creativity, building solidarity, and their own self interests.

Collecting

Another traditional way of individuals expressing their fandom has been through collecting. As Fiske (1992) notes, collecting is an important part of fan culture. Even while many fan collections tend to place emphasis on quantity rather than the quality of items, the distinctiveness of the collection lies in the completeness of the collection and its size. Other fans, who can afford pricier items, may also collect unusual authentic objects, such as a costume worn by a particular star in a movie or a collectible autographed by the artist (Fiske 1992).

Just as fans of movies or television shows collect memorabilia, Disney fans around the world have collected and sold various products, including plush dolls, toys, books, comics, and pictures. Catalogs of various Disney merchandise dating back to the 1930s, such as a 1932 United Artists' Campaign Booklet, discussed in Chapter 1 demonstrate the popularity of merchandise in this early period. In addition, the concept of collecting Disney merchandise (Disneyana) can be traced back to the 1960s and 1970s from the mail order catalog by Malcom Willits' (Tomart 1989). However, it was not until 1974 that Cecil Munsey's book *Disneyana* provided a collector's guide for Disney merchandise. As Disneyland's "Disneyana Shop" did not open until 1976, the history of Disneyana demonstrates the role that fans have played in the evolution of Disney collecting. The term Disneyana, which was coined to describe collectibles, was invented

by fans; and all of the catalogs and stores were run by fans, prior to the “Disneyana Shop.”

For some fans, collecting Disneyana merchandise is similar to collecting merchandise from any other type of fandom. For these fans, it is useful to examine collecting into the Neo-Durkheimian concepts of the “sacred” or the “profane.” As mentioned in Chapter 1, sacred objects are considered above the mundane reality of everyday life, and have symbolism or meaning for its owner. These objects have a specific meaning for fans. Sacred objects might represent a favorite character that represents an ideal, or the object may be attached to a particular memory. These items, due to their meaning, are sometimes handled more carefully, may be part of a ritual for the fan, or might even not be touched at all. Each individual fan has their own collections that hold their own meanings and rituals. Even while objects collected by fans are of an artificial nature, the meaning assigned to them by fans is quite real. As Chidester (1996) notes, even such artificial religious constructions can produce real effects in the world and generate genuine enthusiasm and meaning. This has been seen throughout history, such as during World War II with Coca Cola, when Coca Cola developed a significance akin to a rare religious relic for many soldiers and civilians, and were hidden away unopened after the war as sacred mementos (Pendergrast 1993).

In contrast, fans also collect other objects that are more mundane or “profane.” Fans may collect these objects because they like a specific character or they might have the hope to resell it later. In addition, some fans collect objects simply because they like a specific character or the object makes them smile. Most of the collecting done by fans interviewed in this thesis contains both sacred and profane elements.

For this paper, I will begin my analysis of collecting by starting to discuss items that fall along the profane or mundane end of the spectrum. One example of a more mundane collection is described by Marie whom enjoys collecting comics and Daisy merchandise. She collects comics as a fan of Marvel, and Daisy as a fan of that particular character. As she notes,

I buy almost all Daisy merchandise I come across that is the main thing, unless we're now also counting Marvel comics as Disney collecting, I have a lot of comics as well. Both are things that I started in my childhood and both make me feel like a kid. The function of the items are different, comics are for reading, much of the Daisy stuff is for wearing, but both are fundamentally the same. If I have to say I identify with one more I guess comics because I work as a comic book inker so it's a bigger part of my life, but I don't love comics more than I love Daisy.

From a neo-Durkheimian perspective, Marie's hobby occurs primarily at the level of the mundane or profane. While Marie identifies with comic book heroes and with Daisy, her relationship to them is not reverential in nature. While they make her feel like a kid, they are not attached to any particular memories or ideals. In addition, this lack of reverence is apparent in the way that Marie treats the items that she collects. Marie collects Daisy clothes for wearing and comic books for reading. They are simply for her enjoyment. This is further supported when later in the interview, she labels her collecting of Daisy and comic merchandise as a hobby. Her merchandise is quite simply collected because she "likes it."

Just as Marie collects comics and Daisy merchandise, Anna chooses to collect Pooh and Lumpy the Heffalump merchandise. Anna, a Winnie the Pooh fan, is attracted to the character's personalities and appearances. As she notes,

I'm also addicted to Lumpy the heffalump. Anything with the little guy I grab. We don't even have kids but I have a mobile with him sitting in a drawer that is ready for this unforeseen baby's nursery. (Anna 2011)

Like Marie, Anna collects any merchandise with Lumpy that she can find. Part of this willingness to buy almost anything with a Daisy or a Lumpy may come from the scarcity of these characters. In both of their interviews, Marie and Anna both assert that it is difficult to find Daisy and Lumpy merchandise, and that they wish more was available. Like Marie, Anna chooses to collect Lumpy merchandise for mundane reasons and is willing to use items in her collection, such as clothing. She enjoys the character's personality and appearance, but no particular memory or meaning is attached to her collection.

However, even while both fans are willing to invest in merchandise with their favorite characters, Anna has chosen not to simply wait for Disney to release merchandise that she likes. Instead, Anna has chosen to reimagine the object of her fandom and create her own Lumpy merchandise. As Anna notes, "I always joke with my husband that Lumpy needs a better agent because he's not on enough stuff for me. I actually had to create a shirt on Zazzle.com with him for our last trip. It says 'Got Rumpledoodles' on the back." For her Lumpy T-Shirt, Anna has engaged in not only fan consumerism, but also in fan productivity. She has taken a Disney character and superimposed him on a piece of clothing, with a slogan of her own invention, "Got Rumpledoodles." This

phrase, in addition to being a reference to Lumpy, the object of her fandom, is also a commentary on the popular slogan “Got Milk,” which has been altered and reused frequently in popular culture. This demonstrates a way that fans can reimagine the object of their fandom and engage it creatively. In the case of Anna’s “Got Rumpledoodles?” shirt, Anna has taken two different pieces of popular culture that she enjoys and has superimposed them on each other. In addition, the shirt functions as Anna’s critique of Lumpy’s lack of visibility.

In some cases, the objects or their origins might have special meanings for a fan. These special meanings have sacred qualities and go above and beyond the mundane world in which we currently live. For example, one fan collector named Mark claimed in his interview that he collected a wide variety of collectibles, such as toys, plush, and framed pictures, to name only a few of the items. Mark asserts:

I have collected for as long as I remember. I just love the characters and the stories they are from. The Disney movies, which I collect also, always have a great message and happy endings. I guess I am someone who always wants to focus on the positive and the happy ending.

For Mark, the items that he collects serve as a reminder to think positively, because happy endings are possible. Mark’s example of Disney’s happy endings as an idea has sacred elements. While Mark’s collections represent an ideal and have special meaning, the objects that he collects are still considered mundane.

However, while Marie, Anna, and Mark’s collections are primarily mundane in nature, other collections have more sacred qualities. For example, on Doombuggies.com, one fan engaging in a Secret Santa exchange noted that he had a Haunted

Mansion/Nightmare Before Christmas shrine on his desk (Rabbi; 12/30/2010). On this small shrine, Rabbi placed items that had special meaning. In pictures posted in the thread, the special meaning held by these objects, and the careful way that Rabbi cared for them, are evident for two reasons. Firstly, the “shrine,” as he calls it, is carefully ordered, so that items are in a specific order and grouped together. Secondly, many of the objects remain in their original box unopened. For Rabbi, while it was okay to look at the objects or touch them, but a certain level of reverence had to be maintained.

For Marie, Anna, and Mark, collecting serves as a way of connecting with their favorite character. This is similar in many ways to how fans of other movies, television shows, and sports teams collect merchandise. While the collecting of merchandise such as toys, shirts, books, and other collectibles may be similar to fans in other genres, another type of collecting, called pin trading, is found in the Disney parks.

Pin Trading

In 1930, the Disney issued its first pin for the Mickey Mouse Club, which held its weekly Saturday meetings in movie theaters (Tomart 2007). Even while the studio released a number of pins copyrighted W.D Disney, Walt E. Disney, or Walter E. Disney, most pins up until the 1950’s were made by licensees for sale (Tomart 2007). The first of these licenses for pins was by Cohn and Rosenberger of New York from 1931 to 1936 (Tomart2007). Most of these pins were very crude, like the other merchandise being created for Disney during this time, up until Kay Kamen took over licensing for Roy and Walt Disney in 1932 and started to design all Disney merchandise (Holliss and Sibley 1986; Tomart 2007). In addition to being crude, most pins were marketed as children’s

jewelry rather than as collectible items (Tomart 2007). Once Kay Kamen became Disney's sole merchandising representative in 1933, he demanded higher quality merchandise and cancelled all contracts with manufacturer's that failed to comply with Disney standards (Holliss and Sibley 1986). From the 1930s to the 1970s, Disney pins were manufactured by a variety of companies, for a variety of purposes, including hand painted wood pins for *Fantasia* in 1940; Mickey, Minnie, and Donald pins by Cohn and Rosenberger from 1933-1936; and jeweled pins for Mickey and Friends by Tiffany's (Tomart 2007).

In 1975, two major developments would alter the history of Disney pins. The first of these changes was that the first cloisonné pins since Cohn and Rosenberger's in the 1930s were released, effectively ushering in the modern age of cloisonné pins (Tomart 2007). In addition, a team of people, under Jack Olsen, Vice President of Disneyland merchandising, moved to Florida and established the Walt Disney Distributing Company to channel merchandise to both parks (Tomart 2007). Even while the pin line was very small, with only six pins available by the time the Walt Disney Distributing Company was dissolved in 1976, it marked the first time that pins were sold within the parks. Selling pins continued in the park, with a wider variety of pins, and each park being responsible for developing its own pins (Tomart 2007).

The success of pin trading in 1984 for the Olympic Games around Los Angeles prompted Disney to begin selling pins again, and the number of styles increased (Tomart 2007). In addition to a wider variety of styles, the 1984 Olympic Games inspired pin give-aways, such as the "GiftGiver Extraordinaire" machines in the Disney parks, which dispensed gifts to every 30th, 300th, 3000th, 30,000th, 300,000th, and 3 millionth visitors,

such as free trips, toys, pins, and cars (Tomart 2007). As Disney increased the number of styles of pins being released, pin collecting was becoming a more popular hobby, and many guests began to pin trade with each other.

As a part of the Walt Disney World Millennium Celebration, the Walt Disney Company began pin trading in the parks in October 1999 (Pin Trading Basics). Due to the popularity of pin trading in Walt Disney World, pin trading was extended to Disneyland and the Disneyland Hotel in 2000, to Tokyo Disneyland in January of 2001, and to California Adventure, the Paradise Pier hotel, and Grand Californian hotel at their opening in February of 2001 (Pin Trading Basics). With the ongoing success of pin trading, Disney announced in 2000 that pin trading would continue beyond the millennium celebration, and that it would become a continuing theme park tradition (Tomart 2007).

In 2002, Disney released the Cast Lanyard Program at Walt Disney World (now called the Hidden Mickey collection), which allowed guests to trade with cast members for special pins. Due to the small Mickey shape on the front of the pin, denoting it as part of the Cast Lanyard series, Disney changed the name of the Cast Lanyard series to the Hidden Mickey series in 2007. Disney noted that the name change was a reference to an existing theme park tradition. “‘Hidden Mickeys’ are also incorporated into many attractions and locations at Disney Theme Parks and Resorts. We felt this change would compliment something fun many Guests were already seeking” (Hidden Mickey Pins)⁶. Hidden Mickey pins are only available on cast member lanyards, from other traders, and in rare instances after a pin has been released for a while, by purchasing mystery pouches. Because Hidden Mickey Pins cannot simply be purchased by traders, guests

need to trade with cast members and other guests to complete their collections⁷. As hundreds of different Disney pins may be found floating around the Disney parks at any given time, pin traders frequently find that it takes time to complete a collection of pins, particularly ones like Hidden Mickeys that are only obtained through trade. In addition to the Hidden Mickey pins on cast lanyards, hundreds of designs are sold in the stores, online, and in the Disney parks⁸. These pins include representations of villains, attractions, characters, events, lifestyles, flags, and even thoughts. A guest walking into a pin trading store can buy a pin with a classic “Steamboat Willie” Mickey, a sassy Tinker bell, the Yeti from the Matterhorn, or a pin to celebrate the opening day of the new Star Tours ride or Friday the 13th.⁹ In addition, flag pins are sold with U.S. flags for patriotic guests, other flags (for home country or a country recently visited), and rainbow flags (frequently worn by LGBT guests).

Due to the wide variety and quantity of pins now offered in Disney stores and in the Disney parks, pin trading and pin collecting is an affordable way for many fans to collect and interact with other fans. However, as with many different types of hobbies, people choose to approach pin trading and pin collecting in different ways, and in many cases these experiences will hold different meanings for fans. For example, while some guests enjoy pin trading, other guests simply enjoy pin collecting and focus on pins that represent specific visits, holidays, experiences, rides, and their favorite characters. Carol notes that she only has a few pins in her collection, whereas Marissa and Brian have amassed much larger collections. As with the comments above about collecting, a fan’s level of involvement with their pins may be explained along a continuum, from the

sacred to the profane. Mundane pins, like other collections, are frequently collected as a hobby or because fans enjoy a particular pin or character.

The more mundane aspects of pin collecting and trading are demonstrated by fans who simply collect pins that are appealing to them. Similarly, they view collecting simply as a means to complete collections or to obtain a pin that would otherwise be difficult to find. As Marie notes, “I have in the past traded pins, but it's just an occasional thing I do if I see a Daisy pin. No serious interest. More often than not I'll just buy them if they are Daisy but I have on one or two occasions seen someone with a Daisy pin and traded for it.” Carol has similar feelings on pin trading, that it is just useful when they have a specific pin she has not been able to purchase. Carol remarks,

I'm personally ambivalent about pin trading. I appreciate the designs of the pins, and the way the system works. I collect certain pins that I particularly like, either because they represent a favorite ride or a particular experience (like visiting Disneyland Paris, being in a park on New Year's Eve, etc.). I'm not really sure why I don't ever feel inclined to do actual trading. I've even been given a pin specifically so I could trade it, and it went through two visits of non-trading and it still sits in the car.

Unlike many other pin traders who buy their trader pins in advance and are ready to trade, Marie and Carol enter the park with no intention to trade, unless something sparks their interest. While Marie and Carol prefer not to pin trade, many fans noted that they enter the parks with the intention to pin trade. This intent to pin trade is demonstrated by Marissa and Mark, who buy pins on Ebay prior to their visit. Buying pins online on Ebay, in Disney warehouses, or at the cast exclusive warehouse Company D, allows pin traders to save money and be prepared for any trading when they enter the park. While

Disney pins typically run from \$6.95 or more each in the parks, buying the pins through alternative sources allows the fan to buy pins for as little as a dollar each, making pin collecting much more affordable. While many pin traders choose not to advertise that they bought their pins on Ebay or through these other methods, they frequently admit to the practice when asked outright. Of the avid pin traders who were interviewed for this study, over half of them participated in this practice to save money.

For many fans, pin trading serves a variety of functions, including allowing them to complete or improve their collections. Like Marie and Carol, these fans collect and trade pins in a primarily mundane way. Pins are handled as a part of a hobby and do not have any particular meaning. For example, Marissa pin trades as a way to improve her collection, which she calls “trading-up”:

Pin trading is like another treasure hunt and when you give something good, you get something good in return. Some are for special occasions; some are your favorite characters. I pin trade with cast members. It is fun finding something you can trade-up such as cast member pins or that special one you've been seeking.

Marissa primarily chooses to trade with cast members, and with an occasional guest. Even while pin trading with other fans provides interaction, Marissa primarily pin trades to find her favorite characters or to celebrate special occasions. Trading with other fans, Marissa asserts, is difficult because you have to provide a trade that is considered valuable for both traders- guests in the park are not obliged to trade with each other. In contrast, cast members are required to accept valid trades with fans. According to pin trading rules, as long as the guest is trading a valid Disney pin that the cast member does not have displayed on the lanyard, the cast member is obliged to trade the proffered pin

for one of the guest's choice. This allows fan, such as Marissa, to obtain hard to find pins for their collection and "trade up," by searching for it on a cast lanyard. Some of the most sought after pins are Hidden Mickey pins. However, Hidden Mickey pins are difficult to identify. Hidden Mickey pins are mixed with normal pins and sets on cast member lanyards, and are of the same size and shape as many other pins. The only distinguishing feature visible to guests on a Hidden Mickey pin is a small Mickey shape on the pin, approximately a millimeter in size. From more than a foot or two away, this makes Hidden Mickey pins very difficult to distinguish from other purchasable pins.

Trading Hidden Mickey pins expresses feelings of being "special" or "in the know" among collectors, and collectors of Hidden Mickey pins enjoy the rarity of their collections. As Marissa noted in her interview, "My favorite types of pin to collect are the cast member pins [Hidden Mickey pins]. Finding them is like a special treasure hunt where you have to know what you are looking for." Only fans who have read the websites on Disney pin collecting, talked to other pins, or asked cast members specifically know what a Hidden Mickey pin is. For these fans, like Marissa, finding Hidden Mickey pins is like a treasure hunt, where many fans don't even realize what the true treasure is. By knowing about unusual pins fans feel like they are "in the know" and know what to look for, placing them at an advantage.

While many fans choose to pin trade as a means of improving collections, some fans choose to pin trade to interact with other guests. For many fans who wear pin lanyards or carry their collections, each pin has a story. As fans begin to assign pins meaning, they take on sacred qualities such as memories, stories, or ideals. For example, one fan I met while pin trading in the park was wearing a castle pin on her hat. The fan

explained to me that she wore the pin as a reminder to herself of the Disney ideal “Happily Ever After”; even when times were tough, she could look at the pin and remember to think positively because dreams come true. This is an example of how even while the physical object itself might not be sacred, the memory that it represents may have sacred qualities. Brian argues,

Collecting is a way of capturing a moment in time or having a physical reminder of something you like about Disney, or a way to show others how much you like it. A good example is that I collect a lot of monorail and railroad pins. I don't have to tell anyone how much I enjoy the trains and monorails when I can open my pin bag and show them, or trade for a monorail or train pin I like. I kind of feel like I have a little piece of Disney to enjoy or to share. I don't think I have specific memories as much as I remember experiences and feelings associated with whatever the pin or collectible's about.

For Brian, his pins demonstrate his affection for monorails and trains. By opening his bag of pins, he is able to not only explain what these forms of transportation mean to him, but he is physically able to show other fans what trains and monorails mean to him. Even while not all of his pins represent specific memories, the pins do represent specific aspects of the monorails and trains, as well as experiences and feelings, including the exhilaration of riding them or the sense of adventure. Mark notes that his pins share a similar function, “When I show my pins to anyone, I always tell them the story behind where I got it and where I was.”

By attaching memories and stories to pins, they take on a sacred quality, where they are no longer simply an everyday object. For many fans, these pins transcend their

simple metal construction, and speak to something much deeper in fans. I especially saw this when pin trading with collectors in the park. Each of the collectors had at least two sections of pins, usually organized into different binders. They had trading pins, which may have stories attached to them, or not, and special pins that were not for trading. While other traders were free to touch the trading pins, collectors tended to be very protective of their specialty pins, asking that traders not touch them, or enclosing them in plastic so that they could be seen but not touched. When traders touched these special pins, the touch was more reverential and the pins were handled much more carefully. Some of the specialty pins were also considered more special than others. For example, one trader was very protective of one pin in particular, a rare limited edition Chernabog pin, that was one of the first that he collected. Another trader was very protective of her Mr. Scrooge Hidden Mickey pin, and would kiss it for good luck. These pins are more “sacred” in nature than other pins, because these pins are not simply reminders of a memory, they are also a part of it. As pins take on sacred elements, fans begin to see and treat them differently, handling them with more care or including them in small rituals, such as stroking it or kissing it for luck.

Pins’ relatively small size and low cost allow guests to collect a variety of pins, or take home a pin as an inexpensive souvenir. In addition, collectors can carry or wear a variety of pins throughout their day. As Mark notes, “There isn’t any other collectible that will allow interaction and shared experiences among Disney guests and cast members. Even the Vinylmations¹⁰ are not traded in line for Toy Story Mania. Pins are unique in that way. You can trade them at any point in your Disney experience.” In fact, there are few collectibles in the world that allow for interaction and shared experience in

the same way as pins. Can you think of an object, other than a pin, where you can walk up to another fan, who is wearing it around their neck, and simply trade? Can you think of many objects that you can collect from your travels that are so inexpensive, but that tell such a story? Indeed, pins with their small size and inexpensive price provide a different opportunity for fans. As pin trading is now encouraged among fans in the park, more fans are wearing lanyards to trade stories and pins with other guests and cast members. In addition, once a fan buys or obtains a single pin, they can continue to trade it for free to cast members and other guests as long as they wish. There is no limit on the number of times a single pin can be traded.

What is most interesting, however, is how the meaning of pins can be transformed as these stories are transmitted from fan to fan. As a fan is informed of a pin's significance or rarity, it is treated much more carefully and comes to be viewed in a new light. While watching pin trading, I noticed on several occasions that a fan would pick up a fan and examine it as if it was just an interesting piece of metal. When the pin trader informed the guest of the meaning behind the pin or any special memories associated with the pin, they were much more careful and began to see the pin in a new light. This is because the pin is no longer seen as a profane object. To the new fan, it now becomes representative of something more than just its metallic shape. As these meanings spread, so do the stories that connect fans and the value that are placed on particular pins. These stories, whether they are about the first time that a young boy rode a particular ride or of a favorite character, which reminds the owner of his own struggles as an orphan, can create dialogue in different ways. These dialogs between fans also create ties, whether they are bonded by a favorite character, a sub culture, a favorite ride, a lifestyle choice, or even

similar life circumstances. Even while these pins may only start a brief conversation, sometimes these conversations turn into life-long correspondences and friendships that would never have been found if two men hadn't crossed each other in Disneyland and noticed each other's lanyards.

For many parents, pin trading is an integral part of visiting Disneyland with children. As Mike notes,

We started both my boys on Pins. For the older boy, he got a Pin every time he rode a new ride. We don't really trade the Pins. Each boy probably now has about 20-25 pins... I think they are a relatively inexpensive souvenir that doesn't get destroyed when we get home. Each one - especially for my older son - carries a story with it.

For Mike, pin collecting is a good way for his children to remember their vacation. Each pin, he notes, is a relatively inexpensive souvenir that will not be easily destroyed and holds a specific memory for each child. Over time, his children can look back at the pins and remember the first time they rode a specific ride, or share these stories with other people. For Mike and his family, pin trading has allowed his family to make a new tradition. Whenever one of his sons rides a new ride or tries something new, they can get a pin commemorating the occasion. These pins are reminders of physical memories and even allow for the creation of new memories through trading stories with other traders. Just as how adults can trade stories and pins, children often begin to enter the Disney fan community through trading. Pin trading is important because many children do not have the time and experience to learn the amount of knowledge and trivia held by older fans. In contrast, pins hold different stories, and a child's story of how they received their pin is

just as valid as an adult's experience. This allows children to be experts and to share their own stories and memories, interacting with other children and adults in the Disney fan community.

While pin collecting is one way that parents help their children create specific memories, in some cases, pin trading can help children learn to interact with the Disney fan community or with other people. For example, I observed an interesting interaction between a pin trader and a child when visiting the park. The pin trader, who wanted to assist future generations of pin traders, had set up a trading board and let any of the children trade for their choice of pin, like any cast member would do. When asked why he had such a system, which gave the advantage to the child, he responded that he wanted to give children a positive experience in pin trading so that they would trade more in the future. He also hoped that one day when the children were older that they would extend similar courtesies to children who were just starting out. In this interaction, the child was participating in a positive trade with another fan, was able to discuss why they liked certain pins, and in some cases could "trade up" for a better pin. As Hannah notes, pin trading is a "great thing for the little ones to be able to take part of the vacation and control it."

Some parents also use pin trading as a way of teaching their children how to interact with other people and proper manners. For these children, pin trading was a way to talk with adults that they did not know, without any fear of getting in trouble. As long as the child was polite and used proper manners, such as asking to see the pins, using "please" and "thank you," and did not touch other people's property without permission, the child

was allowed to trade for the pin that they wanted. If the child misbehaved, then the child was not allowed to trade, or was not given any free trader pins for the trip.

With their cost and variety, pins are a cost effective and useful tool in socializing children, as well as a fun way to become involved in the fan community. Through this process, children become socialized to reflect many of the values prized by parents and in the community. For example, as adult pin traders talk to children about their pins, they demonstrate how pins can have meaning and their actions express the values of community, such as closeness and shared purpose. These trades also convey to the children messages of good behavior and respecting other peoples' belongings. This is seen when children approach a pin trader and nicely ask to see pins and then respect the pins with how they handle them. Even while these requirements for pin trading are codified in the Disney's pin trading policy, they are also basic behaviors and courtesies that pre-date Disney's involvement in trading.

Marathons

When most people hear the term marathon when relating to an entertainment company or a television show, they frequently think about back-to-back movies or television episodes. However, the term marathon for Disney fans often has another meaning. One of the most unusual activities engaged in by Disney fans are the marathons and half marathons run at Disneyland and Walt Disney World. Introduced in 1994, the Disney World Marathon was the first of the Disney Marathons opened to Disney fans (Walt Disney Marathon website). The course spans 26.2 miles and weaves through the four Walt Disney World theme parks, including Epcot, Magic Kingdom,

Disney's Animal Kingdom, and Disney's Hollywood Studios (runDisney website). In addition to the Walt Disney World Marathon, fans can participate in the Disneyland Half Marathon, Disney Wine and Dine Marathon, Tinker Bell Half Marathon, the Princess Half Marathon, and other assorted smaller races in the parks. Each runner who registers and completes the races receives a t-shirt, program guide, goody bag, refreshments, personalized website, and a finisher medal (runDisney website). Fans who complete multiple races are eligible for "legacy" medals (for competing every year since the beginning of Disney marathons) and coast-to-coast medals (for competing in Florida and California during the same year). In addition, there is a variety of on-course entertainment and events during the marathon weekend for participating runners and observers.

These marathons are a chance for runners and Disney fans to come together, combining fitness and fandom in different ways. Runners have the chance to run through the Disney parks prior to normal operating hours, seeing the park in a way that they could not normally see. In addition, participating in the marathons allows fans to enter into a distinct group in the Disney fan community. Many different web portals and forums have sections of their sites devoted to details about the race and encouraging Disney fans to get in shape and participate. For example, one thread on LaughingPlace was created by a fan who was considering entering the Disneyland Half Marathon and wanted advice from other runners and information on how to register for the event. Other fans responded with information including registration dates, costs, warnings to enter early before it filled up, and personal anecdotes. The thread was also a way for fans to keep up with the

progress of other fans intending to participate in the marathons and encourage participation and improvement:

“Belles, five years ago I could barely run one mile. Now I run Ultra Marathons up to 50 miles and hope to run a 100 miler later this year. If I can do it anybody can do, that for sure!” (ArcadeX5 “Disneyland Half Marathon” 3/25/2011)

“I hope the rest of you thinking about doing the Disneyland Half do it and we can all cheer each other on to the finish line!” (BellesLibrarian “Disneyland Half Marathon” 1/27/2011)

It is through websites and the forums that many fans receive encouragement, advice, and they are able to talk to other fans about their marathon experiences. In my content analysis of Disney websites, of threads that discussed the Disney Marathons and Half Marathons, the focus was on encouraging others to completing the race and the race as a personal achievement. Fans encouraged other guests to attempt the race or to improve their personal times. However, in what I analyzed, I did not find any posts that insulted other racers, boasted of a faster time, or attempted to discourage others. This demonstrates the positive and empowering online atmosphere that has risen out of the Disney races.

This positive online atmosphere has also extended onto the course. Entertainment along the marathon courses, such as music and characters on the sidelines, creates a positive atmosphere. In addition, cast members, other fans, and family provide support for the racers. Realizing that family and friends can have a positive effect on the racers,

Disney has created planning tools for spectators to cheer their racers on in different parts of the race, as well as newsletters and special viewing areas. As Anna notes,

My most recent experience with Disney World was in 2009. My New Year's Resolution was to run my first 5k. So, I decided on doing the Royal Family 5k at Epcot. My husband, Albert, did it with me. It was absolutely amazing. You get to run in the park before opening... I didn't have the best time for a run (54:18) but I was so proud of myself for finishing the race. I ended up running 3 more 5ks in 2009, and have now started doing triathlons.

Anna's experience fulfilling her resolution in the Royal Family 5k demonstrates how the Disney marathons are a chance for fans to improve their physical shape and race with other fans. Even while it was Anna's first 5k, she was able to complete the run and feel proud for finishing the race. Her positive experience encouraged her to continue to enter races, and gradually improve to run triathlons.

The positive atmosphere of the Disney marathons and the incentive of Disney medals also encourages fans to perform in ways that they may have never been able to do otherwise. Anna argues that having to register for the marathon at Disney World encouraged her to continue her training:

I think it was because I knew if we planned a trip to go there and actually made reservations for hotels and parks and things, that I couldn't back down from my goal of training. It pushed me harder to run each day knowing that there was an incentive to go have fun, too.

The reservations for the hotel and the parks gave her a hard deadline, where backing down from training was not an option. The costs were too high. In addition, completing her training and participating in the marathon came with the rewards of not only medals and self-satisfaction, but also a tangible reward of the vacation in Disney World.

While the promise of a vacation at Disney World encouraged Anna to complete her training and compete in the marathons, other fans have been encouraged to tackle other obstacles. For example, in her interview, Mara discusses how the Disney marathons helped her improve more quickly after a severe injury:

I've been doing endurance races for 11 years (marathons, triathlons, etc). I've done many WDW races so when Disney announced that they were starting the DL half marathon I said "Hell yeah!" I did it year after year while continuing to do the WDW races. Last year at the time I was gearing up for the Princess Half and already registered for DL Half in Sept. I was "Legacy" status meaning that I had been there for the DL half each and every year. So about this time last year I had some serious problems with my left leg as I was training. I started losing leg function but got thru the Princess Half and then started seeing doctors. Long story short my left femur and hip had a serious problem. I had something called giant cell tumor that had hollowed out my entire left femur. The doctors spent 1 1/2 months trying to figure out exactly what it was. I had femur and hip reconstructive surgery on July 19th, 6 weeks and 6 days before the DL half. Believe it or not, I did the race! I walked it with a cane and was determined to get my 5 year medal, my coast to coast medal (for doing a race at WDW and DL in the same calendar year) and my legacy medal. Had it been any other race besides

"MY" Disney race I would have probably recovered properly and not raced!!!!

Only cuz it Disney.....

For Mara, her diagnosis of a Giant Cell Tumor was potentially life changing. She was a marathon runner who had been competing for many years, and Mara intended to compete in the upcoming races to win specific medals. These medals required a lot of time, financial investment in travel expenses, and dedication to training and competing in races. Had Mara not been able to compete, she would not have been able to win her legacy or her five year medals, medals which could potentially take at least another five years to earn back. With the inspiration that the medals and the act of competing would provide, Mara was able to finish her Princess Half Marathon despite the pain. Even more startling is her dedication to her training after her surgery, her recovery, and her ability to finish the Disneyland Half Marathon, only six weeks and six days after her surgery.

During the Disney marathons, both Anna and Mara participate in a ritual. For Anna, who is a first time runner, crossing the finish line is not only the completion of her first 5k run, it also signals her entrance into an elite group of Disney fans- the marathon runners. Runners who have completed the race in the past may compete for more elite honors, such as a coast to coast medal or a Legacy Medal. Runners (and especially Legacy runners) join an exclusive group of fans that requires great personal sacrifice to enter. Not only are marathons expensive in terms of travel expenses, but they take energy and sacrifice to train for. The runDisney events serve as an example of ritual and as a celebration of the self and of the Disney community.

Firstly, the Disney marathons are an example of a ritual for runners. In order to participate in the runDisney marathons and run through the parks, a sacred place,

individuals prepare themselves. To compete, fans must register with runDisney, attend an orientation, and obtain their orientation packet. This packet includes the bib that all runners must wear, which includes the name of the race, the runner's name, an identifying number, and their corral number¹¹. This preparation for the race is a routinized act that all runDisney participants complete together, focusing them on the race at hand. Once the race begins, the runners set off at the same moment and then race through the Disney parks in groups along a pre-determined course guided by fences. The initial transformation is then completed as a fan crosses the finish line for the first time. All runners participate in the same ritual and share the same experience, which binds the participants together.

These Disney marathons are a celebration of self-empowerment, that Disney fans can push their limits to complete the marathons and 5k runs. Even while finishing a race is a runner's personal achievement, fans engage in this ritual together and share the experience. These challenging experiences allow fans to form encouraging online communities and build relationships with other fans. This sense of solidarity and community can clearly be seen in the parks along the race routes and in online message boards where runners and other fans cheer the runners on. For Anna, the solidarity found at runDisney events made the Princess 5k a positive experience, "The [cast members] cheer you on along the way. People were dressed as princesses. It was such a positive experience." These feelings of solidarity and group accomplishment are also demonstrated by the earlier quote by BellesLibrarian, who encouraged new and returning marathoners to run the Disneyland Half Marathon together. Running and finishing the

race together creates a sense of accomplishment and collective effervescence that is hard to match by any other means.

Theme Days

As the sun begins to set on Disneyland Park, a crowd of oddly dressed people slowly begins to congregate in front of the Haunted Mansion. Some of the people in the group are dressed all in black, with pale complexions and dark makeup. Some have elaborate gowns of lace and silk, clad in wide brimmed hats and holding parasols to protect their pale skin from the fading light, while others are dressed in ripped jeans and t-shirts. In a different corner, another group seems to stand out, wearing Victorian garb, goggles, and top hats, their clothing accentuated with gears, cogs, and other mechanical parts. Except for the fact that the group is milling together talking, and obviously gathering for a pre-determined event, there almost seems to be no obvious link between the groups. However, these Goths, Gothic Lolitas, and Steampunks, are all a part of the Bat Day Goth scene gathering together for a picture in front of the Haunted Mansion after a long day of posing for pictures, special events, and camaraderie.

The above description is from the 13th annual Bats Day celebration, where the Gothic Disney fans descend upon Disneyland Park for a day of themed revelry. Bats Day started in August 1999 as a park meet between the promoters of Goth/Industrial and Deathrock Clubs, Absynthe and Release the Bats (Bats Day Fun in the Park). Since the initial Bats Day park meet, the event has grown into a three-day weekend event, drawing a variety of fans from Goth, Industrial, Steampunk, and other associated subcultures. The

three-day weekend, which is now held in May for reasons associated with weather, includes a variety of activities for its fans, including a music festival that features DJs from the Dark Alternative genre, a Bats Day Black Market with over 50 vendors, a Meet and Greet Dinner, small group photos in front of the Haunted Mansion, a large group photo in front of Sleeping Beauty's Castle, and a "Ghoulish Gala," and a "Happy Haunts Swing Wake," which is a costumed gala event where attendees dress as "the deceased" to celebrate the afterlife (Bats Day Fun in the Park). In addition to these events, the primary event is the Bats Day Fun in the Park, where fans dress in their Bats Day best for a day in Disneyland, including smaller events such as a Haunted Mansion group photo.

Bats Day Fun in the Park is a day for Disney fans belonging to one of the many Gothic, Metal, Industrial, or Steampunk¹² subcultures to come out and socialize with other fans. It is also a chance for Bats Day fans to show off their favorite costumes and outfits, displaying pride for their subculture. Alan, who identifies as a Steampunk, enjoys attending Bats Day, "It is always fun to dress up and walk about. I go with friends who are also dressed up. Then there is a giant photo shoot in front of the castle and in the evening we all...line up at haunted mansion and take pictures in front of it." Alan asserts that one of his primary reasons for attending Bats Day is to hang out with his friends in Disneyland and to dress up, showing off his costume. However, Bats Day also allows him to socialize with other people in the Steampunk community, "I get to be with my friends and go on rides and meet other people like me... to socialize with Steampunks and Goths and go have fun." Alan also noted that it is frequently difficult for him to meet other Steampunks in person and many of his Steampunk friends he has only talked to

online. Bats Day provides space for members of the Goth subculture, whether Steampunks, Goths, or Industrial Goths to meet others like them.

For other fans, who appreciate the sense of style but are not necessarily a part of the subculture, Bats Day is a chance to dress up for the day or just have fun in Disneyland. Carol, who does not identify with the subculture, but enjoys its sense of style, has always wanted to attend Bats Day because, “it would be fun to dress all dark and gothy in the ‘Happiest Place on Earth’ (oh the irony), but I haven't been able to yet.” Similarly, even while Alice chooses not to dress up for Bats Day, she has attended in the past. As Alice notes, “Bats day is incredible! All the Goths and Death Metal kids come out in full dress. It's a great day to people watch. The park was full of people dressed in Victorian/gothic clothing. And they are all so much fun to look at.” For both Alice and Carol, Bats Day is simply a chance to people watch and take pictures of people in interesting costume. As neither Carol nor Alice belong to any of the subcultures found on Bats Day, neither one have a strong interest in meeting others or showing solidarity. The importance of solidarity and meeting others is more prevalent in another popular theme day- “Gay Day.”

Another type of theme day which provide a chance for fans to socialize and show solidarity is Gay Day, held annually in both Disneyland and Walt Disney World. Gay Days began in 1991 in Walt Disney World as a single designated day for the LGBT community and friends to “Wear Red and Be Seen” (Gay Days Website). While the Walt Disney World Gay Days was created as a way to increase visibility for Gay Pride in the parks, Gay Days Anaheim was created by fans in 1998 when Disneyland cancelled its annual private party night for gays and lesbians (Gay Days Anaheim). While the original

gay and lesbian private party night was hosted by Disneyland, neither Gay Days, Anaheim, nor the Walt Disney Gay Days are officially presented by Disney. Annually, Gay Days in Walt Disney World and Gay Days in Disneyland attract over 150,000 and 30,000 Gay Day participants respectively (Gay Days; Gay Days Anaheim). Both events are “mix ins,” meaning that LGBT individuals, friends, and straight people mingle together while the park is open to the general public (Gay Days Anaheim). Events for Gay Days and Gay Days Anaheim include cocktail soirees, concerts, parties, theme park visits, a group photo, scavenger hunts, and meet-and-greets in the park.

To identify as a member of the Gay Days group, fans wear red shirts to show solidarity and to be able to identify one another. Carol, who accidentally attended a Gay Day in Disneyland, noticed that “there was an exceptionally large number of people wearing red shirts (some of which made a clever pun on the gay term ‘bear’ by featuring images Disney bears in compromising positions, i.e. Winnie the Pooh wearing leather bondage clothes).” In addition to being red, some of the shirts also had silk screened images and phrases, which further identified members as part of the LGBT culture or that twisted traditional Disney concepts in a new direction. The Winnie the Pooh bondage shirt, which takes the traditional Winnie the Pooh figure, is, as Carol noted, a pun on the LGBT term “bear,” an image that the Disney company might feel is not “family friendly.” Billy also noticed similar shirts with catch phrases. However, Billy also noticed the effect that a large group wearing these shirts has on members of the community that are attending:

I attended Gay Days in Disneyland to support my girlfriend and my friend Julian.

In all, it was a lot of fun. People were wearing red shirts and talking to each other

in line. A lot of the shirts were also customized, saying things like ‘You must be this tall to ride’ or other witty but sexual phrases. There was a lot of energy and people were talking and flirting in line. Even while I often see LGBT people in Disneyland, I don’t often see them flirting or holding hands. I saw this old lesbian couple holding hands in a ride. I am not sure they would normally do that in Disneyland for fear of being harassed, but I feel like they felt like for Gay Days it was okay, that they had support.

Billy’s experience at Gay Days in Anaheim demonstrates the solidarity that is created among participants. All of the Gay Day participants wore red shirts, which not only demonstrated their numbers (approximately 30,000), but also their support for the day and for each other. Billy also noted that he saw a lot of people talking to each other in line, including those who just happened to meet in line. This is different from what I normally notice in Disneyland lines where families may talk to each other, individuals may play on phones, or people may just stand staring ahead- rarely in my participant observation or my personal experiences have I seen strangers talking to one another.

The This support enabled many of the Gay Day participants to act in ways that they normally might not be able to. Even while Disneyland’s “official policy” on public displays of affection does not differentiate between LGBT and heterosexual couples, many LGBT individuals might be afraid to demonstrate simple public affection in the park, such as a kiss or holding hands. The support offered by Gay Days helps some guests feel more comfortable with their sexuality for the day, and helps them feel like they are a part of a group.

In my participant observation, I saw this first-hand when a woman gave her partner a brief kiss on the lips in the Pirates of the Caribbean Line. Even while this is allowed in the Disney parks, a man in line ahead of the couple turned to them and called them “Dykes.” The man then told them that their brief kiss was disgusting, they would be going to hell for such behavior, and he would be reporting it to the Disney parks. The closer woman told him that he could tell whomever he liked, because her actions did not violate any rules, and that she was proud to be out with her partner on “their day.” Watching this interaction were other visitors from the parks, including some males there for Gay Day, standing behind the woman that were not a part of the women’s party. At the woman’s pronouncement, the Gay Day men around her clapped, offering her encouragement such as “You go, girl!” and “You tell him!” Another man from the group shouted at the man that he was homophobic and that he would be reporting him for harassment. After this interaction, the male turned away, quietly insulting the group to his wife, while the couple turned around to thank the other Gay Day group, talking to them for the remainder of the time in line. This interaction demonstrates two things. Firstly, Gay Day makes some participants feel more at ease at visiting the parks with their same sex partners. This is evident when she identified Gay Day as “their day.” It is a day that not only LGBT fans can feel more at ease, but also that they have other fans there to support them. The second thing that this interaction demonstrates is LGBT fans willingness to support each other on Gay Day and their increased numbers making this more possible. Just as Gay Day fans wear red to show solidarity, so fans showed solidarity here by defending each other to “outsiders.” I saw similar smaller demonstrations of solidarity throughout Gay Days, including strangers smiling and

waving to others wearing red, compliments made on silk screened shirts, and strangers talking in line.

One of the main ways that Gay Days generate feelings of solidarity is through “wearing red and being seen.” Like Bats Day, which encourages participants to dress as a member of the Goth subculture, all theme days have specific attire that they encourage in their participants. The importance of “dressing up” for a theme day is two-fold. Firstly, dressing up allows the participants to identify as a part of the group, as well as to identify themselves to other members. As Marie, who has attended Gay Day in the past with her friend Brandon, noted, “Dressing in red helps me feel like I am part of the group and show support for my friend.” In his interview, Billy also mentioned a similar experience, where dressing in red helped him show support for his friend and girlfriend, while also feeling like a part of the group. As fans can easily recognize members of the theme day, they can mingle, or even in the case of Gay Day participants, show support in moments of difficulty. Fans know if they see a fan in similar attire that they share something in common, that they are a member of the same community. In contrast, individuals not wearing Steampunk attire or red are not members of the theme days, and thus, are outside of the community. Secondly, dressing up for a theme day demonstrates solidarity and makes a statement about the presence of its members. For example, fans are easily more visible all around the park, and when they gather, their numbers are even more apparent. This is especially true of park photo opportunities where all members gather together for a photo (which all fan run theme days share), or other activities such as the “Big Red Boat,” where Gay Day participants gather to ride the Mark Twain together. Filling the Mark Twain to full capacity with LGBT fans in red shirts is a

demonstration of Gay Day's presence in the park, even more effective than seeing people in red shirts wandering around.

The final type of theme day discussed by participants during the interviews was "Star Wars Weekends." Star Wars Weekends is an annual celebration held at Walt Disney World for Star Wars fans that spans several weekends. Star Wars weekends include special events in the parks, such as celebrity signings, celebrity guest appearances, special parades, parties, and performances (Star Wars Weekends). However, one thing that sets Star Wars Weekends apart from other theme days is that the event is created, designed, and run by Walt Disney World. Other theme days such as Rock-a-billy day, Dapper Day, Bats Day, and Gay Day are run by fans and are not affiliated with the Disney parks- they just occur partially in the parks.

Due to Disney's support for Star Wars Weekends and the larger budget of Walt Disney World, the event features many events for fans that would be otherwise impossible. Carol, who was working as a cast member during Star Wars Weekends notes the wide variety of entertainment that was available to guests,

Some fans actually dressed up as Star Wars characters (pretty rare, but the ones that did were creative -- the bikini-clad Leia was pretty surprising given Disney's reputation for dress codes). There were meet-and-greets with costumed characters and panel discussions with Star Wars filmmakers and actors ... Also, there was a special Star Wars Weekend store held in a converted exhibition room; I got a souvenir magnet to add to my mom's sizable fridge collection.

In addition to these events, fans have the chance to ask for autographs and attend other special events. For example, in May 2011, Disney premiered the new Star Tours II ride at

Disney World during one Star Wars Weekend. Mike, who is a Star Wars fan, has attended two Star Wars Weekends, notes,

Since I grew up with Star Wars, the Star Wars weekend is a dream come true. I love the Storm Troopers walking across the top of the Entrance Gate. One REALLY cool thing was I was on a rather empty street at DHS and who comes walking towards me - 4 Storm Troopers. It was surreal.

For fans who attend Star Wars Weekends, the variety of entertainment in the parks surpasses any other theme day. With guests like Anthony Daniels (C-3PO), Peter Mayhew (Chewbacca), and Ray Park (Darth Maul), fans have an opportunity to meet and interact with the people who brought their favorite stories to life.

Even while Star Wars Weekends offers many chances for fans to see parades, take pictures with costumed characters, and meet their favorite actors, Star Wars Weekends lack the sense of community that is present in other theme days. When asked about the level of interaction among fans, Mike commented that “although in the line to see Darth Vader all the guests were having fun commenting on Darth and how he interacted with the people,” interaction occurred primarily between guests and characters. This is a very different situation from Gay Days and Bat Days where fans wore similar clothing to show solidarity. In addition, many fans, including Billy, Marie, and Alan, noted that they attended theme days to show support for friends or to meet others who shared similar values and interests. This demonstrates how fan-run activities place an emphasis on building community through meet and greets and events. In contrast, fans attended Star Wars Weekends for the entertainment and activities offered by the Disney parks.

Fan Forums

From theme days to annual fan conventions, Disney gatherings offer an opportunity for fans to meet and bond with other fans. As demonstrated in this chapter, these activities allow fans to generate or display status, interact with sacred objects, share narratives, and build solidarity. These activities are particularly important, because Disney fans lack many of the geographic boundaries and other traditional factors that tie communities together, such as ethnicity, religion, or occupation. However, even though these events serve a variety of social functions, these events are few and far between-making it difficult for fans to maintain the social ties built at these gatherings. To maintain these ties and build ties with others in the communities, fans participate in fan forums online, allowing for more frequent interaction.

This analysis of Disney fans is similar to DeMello's (2000) analysis of the tattoo community, where fans are able to build solidarity and create identity on a semi-annual basis at conventions and other gatherings. DeMello (2000) notes that in addition to these semi-annual gatherings, identity is created on a more daily basis online and through community-based texts and websites. This is very similar to Disney fan communities that gather on a semi-annual basis for conventions and special events, and on a daily basis online through web forums and community texts such as websites, books, and magazines. In addition to providing a space for fans to communicate, these mediums allow fans to share narrative and texts. In addition to articles and newsletters, fan sites usually have a forum where fans can come together to discuss a variety of subjects. Tom, who is a

moderator for a Disney fan forum noted that his interactions with other fans on the forums is one of the most important aspects of his fan experience.

Fan forums are one of the most important structures within the fan communities. While news articles and newsletters allow fans to keep up with the latest news and read interesting stories, the majority of fan participation happens within the forums. On the forums fans can pose questions to other fans, respond to questions, solicit opinions from other fans, express their opinions, discuss their personal lives, and even participate in forum games. Unlike other web content which is limited to what the author chooses to discuss, fan forums are only bound by very simple rules to encourage respectful behavior. Fans' choices of subject are endless and any fan can start a new conversation topic or participate in an existing thread. Any fan can register and all fans are equally welcomed as long as they are courteous and do not violate the rules of the forums. In cases where a fan is rude, violates the rules, or causes trouble, moderators will ask them to either behave or they will be banned from the site.

Because Disney fans are interested in many different subjects, the fan forums host a wide selection of conversation topics. Common topics found on the forums include ongoing construction at Disney, fan responses to press releases and news articles, and rumor sections that discuss possible upcoming changes. In the Disney parks section of the forum, there are also discussions that focus on differences between parks, including how some rides differ, how lands differ, and which rides only exist in specific places. Other threads may discuss collectibles or showcase fan collections. On the forums, fans are able to not only explain their collections but post pictures as well. Other threads serve as a space to discuss community events such as the Gumball Rally or to organize

fan meet ups. Finally, fan forums may serve as the focal point for fans to express disapproval of Disney either verbally or through action. The popularity of specific threads differs from site to site; however, the threads with the highest number of replies are frequently threads that discuss changes to the park or “game threads.”

“Game threads” are quite simply online games that fans engage in to pass time. Game threads can easily exceed several thousand posts and continue for years at a time. The game begins when a fan proposes a word game for fans to play. The poster will start the first round by posing a question or riddle. Other fans in turn reply with the answer to the previous post and by posing a question for the next poster. These games are a way for fans to relax and have fun talking to other Disney fans. Even while the initial starting question may be simple, such as naming something that the author has never done, answers can be quite complex. Even simple questions, like naming something that a fan has never done, reflect Disney, as fans name Disney parks that they have never visited or show that they have never had the chance to see. Even games where fans name something from each letter of the alphabet reflect Disney, with answers like “D is for Daisy” or “P is for popcorn truck.” Rather than simply choosing to answer the question, many fans choose to share experiences relating to their answers, like the memory of the first time they rode a particular attraction or their first time meeting Mickey Mouse. Due to the nature of the boards, where children are allowed to participate, all of the answers tend to be kid friendly or fun, but the answers can also share personal moments of hardship, like battles with illness or death. These games allow fans to share something personal about themselves and connect to other fans in intimate ways. Fans are not merely sharing answers to a questions, but also intimate memories.

Another type of popular thread on forums discusses upcoming changes to the park. These threads are different from construction threads because rather than discussing *how* something is being built, these threads discuss what it *is* being built. Utilizing a combination of insider information, official press releases, rumors and speculations, the primary purpose of this type of thread is to discuss new and upcoming changes to attractions and the parks. Examples of this type of thread include discussions about changes to the Walt Disney World Haunted Mansion queue, possible changes to the Pirates of the Caribbean queue, and planned expansion of Walt Disney World's Fantasyland area. Upcoming change and speculation threads provide insight into how fans communicate and participate with the community. Rather than simply accepting the new changes that Disney outlines, fans display creativity in suggesting alterations to attractions and critical attitudes in welcoming new rides. In such a way, fans address the sacred setting at which many of these rituals happen and memory is created- the parks.

Disney fan sites give fans a chance to participate in the fan community and assume a leadership role. For example, Tom notes that he is a moderator on the Walt Disney Boards. Due to the frequency of his posting (and occasionally writing pieces for the site), Tom has had the chance to get to know many of the regular posters by talking to them online. In addition, Ricky runs a podcast and a website that includes coverage of special events, interviews, product and movie reviews, feedback from fans, and live recordings from Disney theme parks. Ricky estimates that at the time of the interview, Insidethemagic.net had reached approximately 200,000 fans, with an audience of ten to twelve thousands fans tuning into the podcast each week. As Ricky notes, InsidetheMagic.net

began almost 6 years ago as a podcast called "Inside the Magic" which I started when podcasts, in general, were a new concept. I still produce the show weekly and as such it is the longest-running Disney podcast (unofficial or official). When I launched the web site in January 2010, it was intended as a supplement to the weekly podcast, allowing fans to get the latest Disney and theme park news between episodes of the show. The site includes articles, videos, photos, and reviews. It sounded like a fun project to share Disney fun with the world. I wanted to jump into the world of podcasting while it was new and Disney was the first topic that came to mind.

As the owner of the website, Ricky is also afforded a special status in the fan community. His website and podcast make him more visible than other fans, and he is occasionally recognized in the park by listeners. However, for Ricky, his status as someone who is knowledgeable about Disney is not the reason that he continues the podcast. For Ricky, the podcast and website have been a fun way to report on one of his favorite topics and to connect with other fans. For example, Ricky receives daily emails from listeners and has even been able to organize a few meet ups over the years with other fans. Ricky, like many other fans, is motivated by what Jenkins (2006) called epistemophilia, the pleasure not only of knowing information for knowledge's sake, but also of exchanging information with other fans. Examples of leadership on websites and fan forums demonstrate how fans can become producers and gatekeepers of knowledge rather than simple consumers. Ricky, who runs a large website, is a gatekeeper of knowledge, sharing information released by Disney and other fan sites, as well as a producer of knowledge with his analyses, interviews, reviews, and photos.

As demonstrated by both Ricky and Tom who build relationships with other fans online, fan forums can build friendships and community ties among individuals who have never met. In addition to discussing topics related to their fandom, fans also share ideas and thoughts on a variety of other topics, including matters of a personal nature. As Billy notes, "If someone is having a bad day or has some bad news, other users will comfort them. If good news is shared, congratulations are in order. People act like friends and, for the most part, are very respectful of one another." Fans build genuine friendships with other fans online, demonstrating emotional support and other types of support when necessary. Examples of support might include offering advice, congratulations, words of sympathy, or in some cases offering other forms of help, such as money or legal assistance. In cases where a fan disappears without warning, other fans will sometimes grow concerned and attempt to figure out if the missing member is okay. As Anna notes,

On Intercot...I wasn't posting for awhile because I was just swamped with work. People actually were commenting to each other, "Hey have you heard from josiecat21, is she OK?" They really cared about what was going on with me. I think this was about the time I was having some problems with my health and I had posted something in one of their ... "water cooler" boards where you can talk about general topics. But they were very supportive of me during this time when I was having all these medical tests.

For Anna and many other fans, these fan forums are more than a mere online web board; they are intricate networks of friends. While Anna was having her medical tests done, she was able to talk to other fans that supported her and offered her encouragement. In

addition, Anna's disappearance did not go unnoticed. This demonstrates Anna's connection to other fans and that she is considered a member of their community.

In cases where a member has disappeared permanently, fan sites also serve to preserve the memory of the missing fan. As Tom notes, "If you want proof that it is possible to have an online community, see [Stupid Guest Tricks]. I'm constantly reminded of a friend of mine that has passed, and you'll see how many people this person has touched, and how many of them have never met this person in person." Even while many of the fans on the boards have never met Tom's friend in person, he had a strong impact on their lives and how they saw the world. Even while he is no longer around to interact with the other fans, he is still in their memory, and in the memory of the fan boards, as they continue to post about his life and the impact that he has had on them. In such a way, the fan boards serve as a sort of memorial in his honor, detailing not only his posts on the boards, but also the relationships that he had with other fans.

These ties are important because in the modern age, humans are increasingly building relationships online with people that they have never met. From online games to Facebook, human beings are conducting many of their social interactions online. Disney fan forums demonstrate the strong ties that are built online, from fans' memories of the deceased to the willingness to support other fans in their time of need. Disney fans are not only individuals who come online to talk to one another. Many are life-long friends who are willing to go to great lengths to help one another—in some cases, to greater lengths than offline friends. Thus, Disney fan forums serve as a model for how communities can communicate and grow between real life gatherings, as well as how individuals can build strong social networks online.

In many cases, fan interactions online can sometimes lead to more permanent relationships or face-to-face interactions. For example, Anna notes that she met a good friend on the Disney Food Blog. While Anna just was originally offering Katelyn writing help for her new blog, a friendship quickly blossomed between the two fans. Since the first email was exchanged, Anna has done several guest blogs for the site and the two often talk on Twitter or Facebook about upcoming trips and projects. Other fans have even chosen to meet people from online message boards in person. Mara, a regular on the DIS Boards, notes that members of the boards frequently greet each other in the parks. As Mara notes, “The DIS boards are known for their bright lime green color so you can spot each other in the parks and I’ll tie that color ribbon on the stroller and on my back pack when we go this summer.” Other examples of fan meet ups include a movie night hosted by members of DoomBuggies.com to celebrate the upcoming Haunted Mansion movie, days when fans meet each other in the park, and scavenger hunts. In one case, two regulars from Doombuggies.com posted a thread inviting other fans to join them in their attempt to break their record of riding the Haunted Mansion forty-eight times in one day. Not only were they successful, riding the Haunted Mansion fifty-six times during the day, but they were joined by at least eleven other members.

In addition to feelings of trust, the online fan community also demonstrates high levels of trust. As Billy notes,

As with many websites, there are a lot of lurkers (people who just read the forums and rarely post) but there are quite a few regulars that hang out. I’ve seen some people prefer to be anonymous, while others happily call each other by their real names. There aren’t too many places on the internet where people would readily

give up their actual names and addresses, but there are some on these sites that do just that. Most people prefer to have a screen name not related to their real name to protect their identity. That and their website avatar will not be a picture of themselves. But, on the sites I visit [Disney fan sites] people are more open with sharing that personal information.

Other examples of people openly sharing personal information with each other include Vinylmation trading online and Secret Scary Santa. In online Vinylmation trading boards¹³, fans post which Vinylmations they need for their collection, and which they are willing to exchange. When another fan is willing to make the trade, the two fans exchange private messages with their addresses and exchange the Vinylmations via mail or in some cases in person. In Secret Scary Santa¹⁴, members of the DoomBuggies website exchange Christmas gifts with other members. Members go online to the Secret Scary Santa Board to post their wishes, and moderators match up fans randomly. Through the annual Secret Scary Santa, fans are able exchange personalized gifts that are Haunted Mansion themed, including pins, plush animals, hand-drawn pictures and portraits, hand-made jewelry, and a hand-painted ghost nut-cracker ornament in a painted coffin. These Secret Scary Santa gifts demonstrate not only a great deal of creativity, as many of them are hand-made, but also concern, due to the amount of time and energy put into the gifts. In addition, to participate in the Secret Scary Santa, fans must give their address and personal information to people over the internet. When people online give other members their names or addresses, other fans respect this privacy and do not take advantage of the other fan's trust. It is notable not only that these forms of information are being given freely to other members, but also that this trust is being respected.

Conclusion

The Disney fan activities discussed in this chapter demonstrate how fans are able to build solidarity with one another, despite an untraditional community structure. Even though Disney fans lack geographic boundaries and social ties common to other types of communities, Disney fans have managed to come together to build social networks through semi-annual community gatherings and constant online communication.

However, this solidarity would not be possible without the wide variety of fan activities that fans engage in on a daily basis, from pin trading to Disney marathons. Even though not all fans participate in pin trading or in running a marathon, these activities are open to all Disney fans, and reflect many of the narratives that fans share, such as working hard, community, and believing that dreams can come true. These fan activities allows fans to engage with other fans and feel like a part of a community, even while only participating in a few of the activities. Not only are fans able to build identity and solidarity with other fans, they are also able to interact with sacred objects. Without these activities, any sort of Disney fan community would not be possible.

¹For a history of the Disneyana Fan Club please see Chapter 1.

² It is interesting to note that a fan can be a member of the national Disneyana Fan Club without belonging to a local chapter. Membership simply enables them to join a local chapter. In contrast, a member cannot join a local chapter but refuse to join the national organization.

³D23 considers all members who joined in 2009, the first year of the club as “Charter Members,” which entitles them to a special status and merchandise available on the site and at the expos.

⁴ Just as Destination D was held at Disneyland, Disney World had a similar event also named “Destination D.”

⁵ To maintain Charter member status fans must maintain their membership. By letting their membership “lapse” by forgetting to renew, fans relinquish their charter status.

⁶ A Hidden Mickey is a Mickey face silhouette hidden around the Disney resorts. Hidden Mickeys may be found in paintings, architecture, rides, movies, carpet patterns, furniture, and other places.

⁷ In this section I will focus primarily on pin trading. Even while pin collecting will be discussed briefly in passing, pin collecting is very similar to other types of collecting.

⁸ While hundreds of designs are available for purchase at any time, pins are frequently retired. While it is difficult to obtain some of the older pins, thousands of designs exist that a fan may collect

⁹ During my trips to the park while doing research, these are only a small variety of the number of pins that I saw and recorded on my visits.

¹⁰ Vinylmations are a type of Disney collectible that is 3 inches high and costs approximately ten to twelve dollars. Sold in mystery packs, Vinylmation trading has garnered some interest, but has not become as popular as pin trading.

¹¹ The Corral number is a number which designates a runner's starting corral. Runners begin the race with other runners from their "corral," including a pace leader which runs the race in a specified time. Runners may choose to pass their corral or slow down, but many runners choose to run as a group.

¹² Steampunk is a subculture and aesthetic movement based upon science fiction and a future that never happened. Frequently associated with authors such as H.G. Wells and Jules Verne, Steampunk is heavily influenced by older styles of clothing such as Old West or Victorian, and steam powered or clock-work mechanics. Steampunk is also heavily influenced by a "do it yourself" sensibility, where Steampunks (or Steamers, as they are sometimes called), are encouraged to make their own clothing, goggles, and machinery.

¹³ "Vinylmation Buy/Sell/Trade." *MiceChat* WEBSITE.

<http://micechat.com/forums/vinylmation/117442-vinylmation-buy-sell-trade-print.html?pp=50>

¹⁴ "Dear Secret Scary Santa..." *DoomBuggies*. WEBSITE.

<http://disneyhauntedmansion.yuku.com/topic/9171/Dear-Scary-Secret-Santa?page=2>
And "Thank you Secret Scary Santa!!". *DoomBuggies* WEBSITE.

<http://disneyhauntedmansion.yuku.com/topic/9237/Thank-You-Scary-Secret-Santa>

CHAPTER 3: HISTORY, URBAN LEGENDS, AND TRIVIA

SHARED NARRATIVES AND INTERESTS AMONG DISNEY FANS

Introduction

In the age of modern technology, tools such as the telephone, the computer, and the internet have transformed the ways that human beings are able to communicate with one another and how they share information. As Jenkins (2006) notes, prior to the invention of the phone or internet, fan communities existed and traded ideas and information through the mail. While fans continue to discuss many of the same subjects, they are able to use the internet to increase the speed of their communications. Not only do modern tools allow us to communicate with people instantly over long distances, but the internet has transformed the ways that humans may obtain knowledge. While before the internet people might have had to look through dozens of books to find a particular fact, the internet allows individuals to find this information almost instantaneously through search engines like Bing, Yahoo, and Google. In addition, the internet allows for instant communication with a large population over long distances and allows users to store vast amounts of information online. This use of the internet is in many ways similar to Pierre Lévy's vision of the cosmopedia, a utopian knowledge space that is a place for discussion and the storage of collective knowledge (1999).

According to Pierre Lévy (1999), contemporary society is in a transitional moment that has enormous potential for transforming existing structures of power and knowledge. One of the ways that existing structures of knowledge are being transformed is through the "deterritorialization" of knowledge. In the deterritorialization of knowledge, knowledge would be taken away from gatekeepers who control access to

information and reorganized so that it is more widely available. According to Lévy (2001), the deterritorialization of knowledge will be made possible by the internet to facilitate rapid communication between large groups of people. This deterritorialization of knowledge is now visible in modern society. Such communication may enable broader participation in decision making, new modes of citizenship and community, and easy reciprocal exchanges of information. As information travels quickly with modern technology, such tools may remove geographic and other constraints on communication and lead to a declining loyalty of individuals to structured groups.

As the need for structured groups declines, “knowledge communities” form that are defined through emotional investments and intellectual pursuits (Lévy 1999). These new “knowledge communities” are voluntary associations that serve as a site of “collective discussion, negotiation, and development” (Lévy 1999: 1). According to Lévy (1999), these new communities, held together through the exchange of knowledge, allow individuals to move between communities as interests change or even belong to several different communities at once.

Even while Lévy’s cosmopedia is a theoretical construct, many online fan communities are similar to this vision. According to Jenkins, online fan communities are “expansive self-organizing groups focused around the collective production, debates, and circulation of meanings, interpretations and fantasies in response to various artifacts of contemporary popular culture”(2006: 137). These online virtual communities have been studied by a variety of academics and have been found to reflect Lévy’s concept of knowledge communities. Just as Lévy’s knowledge communities are bound together by knowledge rather than geographical boundaries or other traditional ties, fan communities

define themselves by what they have in common (Jenkins 2006). As fans come from a wide variety of backgrounds and geographical locations, some of the strongest connectors among fans are shared narratives, such as urban legends, history, and trivia. Found online and in printed texts, these stories help fans to create a shared identity and feel like part of a community. As DeMello notes,

The events and texts are also important because they tell and retell the story and the history of the community to members who are not always present to share it.

‘Who we are and where we come from’ must be expressed, both to fellow members and also to outsiders, as a way of defining the community and crystallizing identity (2000: 42).

These stories create a history that fans can share, explaining to fans “Who we are and where we come from.” In addition, many of these stories instill values into the readers that distinguish fans from other “guests.” “Identity in a community depends in large part on the possession of an informal, and often unconscious, set of ideologies that extends well beyond superficial qualities” (DeMello 2000: 42). For fans, these ideologies include valuing many of the traits demonstrated by Disney heroes, such as kindness, trust, working hard, and belief in the statement “Dreams Come True.” In addition to the importance of shared narratives in building collective identity, these shared narratives fulfill two other important sociological functions.

The first of these functions is that sharing new information, trivia, urban legends, and pointing out Hidden Mickeys demonstrates “insider” status. As discussed in Chapter 2, status demonstrates not only how well fans are known in the community, but also what they are known for. Just as fans may generate status by displaying their collections or by

leading a Disney fan club, Disney fans can also gain status by disseminating information to other fans. Secondly, these different types of shared narratives mediate the boundaries between the sacred and the profane. Disney deaths and urban legends highlight the significance of the border between these two categories. For fans, crossing these boundaries, such as by discussing Disney deaths, can be titillating and build interest in Disney fandom.

Urban Legends

From reports that the hearse outside of the Haunted Mansion was used to carry the body of Brigham Young to rumors that “Uncle Walt” remains in suspended animation under Pirates of the Caribbean, urban legends have become an important part of the lore surrounding the Disney parks. These stories, which deal with puzzling subjects such as death, unknown science, witchcraft, and the origin of specific props, add an element of mystery to the lore surrounding the park. One of the popular stories, mentioned by an ex-cast member named Tom, is the story of George the ghost in Walt Disney World:

George was a construction worker building [Pirates of the Caribbean] where he later on died in an accident...They say that he still haunts the attraction, and that if you don't say good night to him (if you're working closing shift) that he'll create havoc in the ride system causing it to break down often and cause for multiple evac's¹ [sic]...They'd say he was so dedicated to his job, which is probably why they say it's George if the ride breaks down, that someone isn't giving their all or whatever. Some people think it's cool that there's a real ghost on property, and

actually there are a few more floating around, just not as well known. I've heard of one in HM (really) and another one in Epcot, not sure where.

For Tom and other cast members, George has become a part of the Pirates of the Caribbean attraction. Frequently blamed when the ride needs to be evacuated, George is viewed as a sort of guardian for the ride. Tom also notes that other ghosts have been seen on property. Rather than frightening guests or cast members, the purported presence of ghosts in Walt Disney World seems to enhance the mysterious lore surrounding the park. As Carol notes, “[Urban legends] add to a mysterious sort of lore surrounding hidden things and occasionally macabre/weird details. Hearing these stories adds an additional layer of excitement and mystery, and can sometimes make the most familiar, benign things appear somewhat darker.” Even while many of the urban legends surrounding Walt Disney and the parks have been proven to be untrue, they continue to be retold by fans. However, if these stories are widely known to be untrue, why are they often repeated as fact? What is the appeal of urban legends for Disney fans?

According to Fox Tree and Wheldon, “Urban legends are stories that have reached a wide audience, generally passed on by word of mouth or by e-mail. They contain surprising information, usually with an emotional impact, and they change over time to fit current mores” (2007: 459). These stories often have details that in other contexts may seem impossible. For example, one of the most popular urban legends is that Walt Disney himself is held in suspended animation under the Pirates of the Caribbean ride. This is highly unlikely, seeing as Walt’s death and burial site are well documented (Mikkelsen and Mikkelsen 2007). Yet, due to the secrecy surrounding Walt Disney’s

death, and Disney's reputation as a technological innovator, the urban legend continues to thrive.

One important characteristic of urban legends is that while events in the stories are extremely unlikely or impossible, the details seem to be plausible and do not encourage close examination (Simpson 1981). Kiara notes that the unknown or magical parts of the parks contribute to the urban legends feeling more plausible: "The way you feel like you're in a separate place from the whole outside world...Why wouldn't there be a whole other world under the park as well?" In some cases, portions of a story might be true or the entire story may have been fabricated by another party. Like other types of stories, people can exaggerate certain aspects of the story, highlight other aspects, or misremember details about the event. This makes it difficult to discern what is truthful (Clark and Gerrig, 1990). However, even while some of the information found in urban legends seems surprising or unlikely, urban legends are often told as if they are true. As Fox Tree and Wheldon note, it is the truthfulness of urban legends that make them appealing to listeners (2007: 459).

As urban legends are retold, repetition leads to an increased sense of truthfulness . Multiple exposures make people think that these stories are more truthful, and this helps explain why otherwise unbelievable stories survive (Fox Tree and Wheldon 2007). It is the nature of urban legends that over time, as the stories continue to be retold, more fans continue to believe them as fact.

Disney urban legends can be divided into two basic categories. The first type of Disney urban legend are stories that make the park seem more mysterious or extraordinary. Examples of this type of urban legend include that there is a city

underneath Disneyland made of tunnels or that Walt Disney is cryogenically frozen under Pirates of the Caribbean.

In contrast, while some urban legends highlight the extraordinary, some Disney stories juxtapose more profane aspects. For example, one urban legend mentioned by Kiara was that Walt Disney was a Nazi. Other examples include rumors that Disneyland is cursed or that the park was built on a Native American burial ground (Carradine 2009). These types of urban legends demonstrate how juxtaposing the profane (such as death or curses) with the sacred can stimulate fans by destabilizing boundaries.

In addition, urban legends, like history and other forms of information, contribute to a shared identity among Disney fans. While history tells fans where they have been, and sneak peeks demonstrate potential futures for Disney fans, urban legends essentially function as a sort of Disney mythology. These urban legends contain larger-than-life stories that are not only interesting stories to hear, but can also transmit Disney ideals and values among Disney fans. Some examples of Disney ideals are that “Dreams Come True” (found in Cinderella, Snow White, Tangled, and all Disney princess movies); how hope and determination can lead you to overcome hardships (Bambi, Lion King, and Cinderella); the value of hard work and persistence (Princess and the Frog, the narratives of Walt Disney’s life, and the history of Disneyland); the importance of friendship and community (Lion King, Bambi, and nearly all other Disney movies and television shows); and the importance of innovation and child-like wonder (found in UP and the history of Imagineering).

Trivia

While urban legends focus on mysterious or sometimes unbelievable aspects of the Disney parks and Disney history, many fans enjoy sharing trivia or true stories with other fans. Like urban legends, trivia functions as a shared narrative among Disney fans; however, Disney trivia is based in fact. Disney trivia may include information about the history of the company, Walt Disney, movies, television shows, attractions, or parts of the park that were never been built. Other areas of interesting trivia may include names, dates, or other details that others might consider to be inconsequential. Some particularly popular forms of trivia mentioned by Disney fans in this study included notable achievements by individuals, information on Imagineers pertaining to specific rides, and information on areas that have changed over time.

For some of the fans that were interviewed, like Nicky, the appeal of Disney trivia and history is the chance to learn something new about Disney that they did not know before. In contrast, Tom prefers to study Walt Disney himself. As Tom notes, “I like Disney trivia because there's so much interesting facts and trivia about Walt Disney as a person and how he came to be by doing the most extraordinary things.” Just as Nicky’s knowledge of the parks increases her enjoyment of rides and attractions, Tom’s fascination with Walt Disney helps him to better appreciate Disney as a whole, including Walt’s innovations in the movies and parks. For Nicky and Tom, trivia and history enhance things that they already enjoy.

For Mark, learning new information about Disney enhances not only his experiences, but also the experiences of fans,

I like Disney trivia because it always gives me the opportunity to learn more about something I love. I usually do trivia with my fellow Disney fans and cast members and we try to see who knows more. I am proud to say that usually people will come to me for answers on Disney trivia. If I don't know, I try to find out. I just want to be in the know on all things Disney.

For Mark, his appreciation for Disney history and trivia has led to other people considering him an expert. As an “expert,” Mark is able to answer questions for family, friends, and other fans, which may increase his reputation in some groups. Disney trivia represents the chance for fans to demonstrate insider status and build solidarity. By sharing trivia with others, Mark receives the chance to interact with others and strengthen relationships. This is very similar to reasons why fans join D23, seeking insider knowledge.

Hidden Mickeys

In 1989, Arlen Miller wrote an article about Hidden Mickeys for Walt Disney World's *Eyes and Ears*, a weekly cast publication (Heimbuch 2011; Shaw 2006). While Arlen Miller's article is the first publicized evidence of Hidden Mickeys in any of the theme parks, other sources suggest that Hidden Mickeys may be much older (Barrett 2007; Hill 2006; Shaw 2006). According to Shaw's website, Disney official history states that Hidden Mickeys started to appear the late 1980s in Epcot as an inside joke among Imagineers. However, Jim Hill (2006) believes that this tradition is older, and that it may date back to the late 1970s or early 1980s. Jim argues that the installation of Hidden Mickeys into EPCOT was a response to Walt Disney Productions' management decision to keep Disney characters out of EPCOT so that the park would appeal more to

adults. Rather than completely removing Disney characters from EPCOT, Imagineers began to secretly and deliberately hide Mickey-shaped objects in EPCOT's rides, shows, and attractions (Hill 2006). Hill (2006 para. 6) also notes that, "At first, this was just a slightly subversive secret shared among a handful of Imagineers. But then one of the guys from WDI clued an EPCOT Center cast member into the gag. And that cast member eventually shared this info with another cast member ... And the whole thing just snowballed from there." Since the Walt Disney Company has never compiled a complete list of all of the "known" or "deliberate" Hidden Mickeys² (Barrett 2007; Shaw 2006), it is difficult to confirm or disprove either Hidden Mickey sightings or even a true history of the first Hidden Mickey. It is even possible that Hidden Mickeys pre-date the 1970s. New Hidden Mickeys are anticipated with the opening of every new attraction or theme park. Sometimes Hidden Mickeys are also added to existing attractions or for special events. In fact, in 2005 for Disneyland's 50th anniversary, fifty new Hidden Mickeys were temporarily added to the park ("Golden Days at Disneyland" 2005). Called "Hidden 50's," these golden Mickeys varied in size, and were created from a variety of materials and techniques, including carving, painting, and antiquing.

Since Hidden Mickeys were first reported in *Eyes and Ears*, they have become a popular topic of conversation for many fans. Online there are a variety of fan websites devoted to finding new Hidden Mickeys including HiddenMickeys.org, and HiddenMickeysguide.com. On these websites, fans are able to report newly discovered Hidden Mickeys and comment on Mickeys that have been found by other fans. Fans can "confirm" that they also found a Hidden Mickey, note that it was removed, or even label a Hidden Mickey as "wishful thinking."

With the success of Hidden Mickeys in the park and online, Barrett published a book in 2007 detailing Hidden Mickeys in Disneyland. With the publication of an unofficial guide to Hidden Mickeys and soon after an iPhone app by the same author, and then Disney's willingness to sell it the book the park, the visibility and popularity of Hidden Mickeys have increased. The book and app provide a short history of Hidden Mickeys, places to spot Hidden Mickeys, clues, and even a route for a possible scavenger hunt. This allows vacationers who might not know about Hidden Mickeys (or a particular park) to participate in the scavenger hunt or learn about its history.

However, just as there is no official list of Hidden Mickeys, many are not listed in the book, or in its associated iPhone app. Many fans who are particularly interested in Hidden Mickeys enjoy searching for new Hidden Mickeys as new attractions open or for older ones that have not yet been found. In addition, passionate Hidden Mickey fans frequently go beyond the material supplied in the book or the app, discussing the origins of a Hidden Mickey or about Hidden Mickeys that have been removed. For example, Billy notes that his girlfriend likes to point out to him the Hidden Mickeys that have been intentionally or accidentally removed, "It is cool to learn about the bits and pieces that have disappeared over the years... and her telling me about it is passing this information on so it doesn't disappear. Sometimes I just wish I had seen them while they were still there."

Even as the popularity of Hidden Mickeys has increased, many guests are still confused over the definition of a Hidden Mickey. A Hidden Mickey, according to modern definitions, is an intentional reference to Mickey Mouse that is hidden on Disney property or within Disney products. As HiddenMickey.org notes,

Today, the Hidden Mickey has taken on many forms: the classic tri-circle head with ears, such as the stone Mickey in Disneyland Toontown, Mickey-on-the-boots at Walt Disney World's All Star Music Resort or the alien symbols on The ExtraTERRORestrial Alien Encounter in the Magic Kingdom; a silhouette or profile of the loveable Mouse; an actual animated face with features, such as Mickey appearing in the rock concert scene in *A Goofy Movie*... even a pair of Mouse ears on someone or something else of Mickey where it isn't normally expected, such as the Viking in the Maelstrom's loading area mural in Epcot (para. 4).

From the description of Hidden Mickeys above, it is clear that while many “Hidden Mickeys” take on the classic form, Hidden Mickeys exist in a variety of shapes, sizes, and levels of complexity. Just as Hidden Mickeys can exist almost anywhere, they can be created by almost anyone or out of many materials. While Imagineers are responsible for the first Hidden Mickeys and many that are in new attractions, cast members have also slipped their own Hidden Mickeys into the parks. For example, cast members frequently place a pair of mouse ears on “Bones,” a skeleton in Disneyland’s Indiana Jones ride, and cast members rearrange the shells on the beach in Pirates of the Caribbean to form a Mickey (Barrett 2007; HiddenMickey.org). Over time, some of these Hidden Mickeys will disappear during maintenance or when one cast member does not realize they are altering a Hidden Mickey. Cast members who notice that the Hidden Mickey has been removed might replace it or re-arrange the shapes back into the traditional Mickey shape.

In some cases, Hidden Mickeys simply occur through random chance, such as in stonework or patterns of bubbles. However, many fans assert that Hidden Mickeys that

occur in nature, outside of Disney influence, or in obvious places as a part of a decoration (frequently called décor Mickeys), do not qualify as “true” Hidden Mickeys. But, no matter how Hidden Mickeys ends up in their final locations, guests enjoy finding these pieces of Disney history for a variety of reasons.

For many fans, Hidden Mickeys are simply fun. While Hidden Mickeys were originally an inside joke among Imagineers, Hidden Mickeys have more recently evolved into a sort of game. As Nicky notes, “I look for them everywhere I go. It gives us something to do while waiting in line. My favorite would be the Mickey that is outside the park close to the Paradise Pier Hotel.” Just like a crossword puzzle or a “Where’s Waldo” book, Hidden Mickeys challenge guests to find Hidden Mickeys in a variety of places. Whether waiting in line or riding an attraction, Hidden Mickeys range anywhere from easy to spot to extremely difficult to find. If a fan has found all of the Hidden Mickeys listed online or in web pages, Hidden Mickeys provide an additional challenge, to find one of the Hidden Mickeys that has never been found before. Nick remarks, “My favorite, naturally, is the one in the Great Hall/Ballroom at the Haunted Mansion. Clever. I like the fact that Mickey is so popular that they make him a ‘Can you find it?’ kind of thing to keep their audiences going. I think that’s what they were intended for actually.”

Hidden Mickeys, like many other details in the park, function as a sort of “Easter Egg”³ or hidden extra that ensures that fans will not see everything in one visit. For example, in her interview, Carol shares a story that she had read about the installation of hidden details in the park:

Walt Disney overheard a conversation between a kid and a parent -- the parent said something about this being their one visit, because they already saw

everything. Walt was appalled by what he heard, and immediately saw to it that changes were made on a regular basis, making sure that future visits could still offer something new.

Just as Disney constantly adds new attractions and shows so that guests appreciate something new with each visit, details like Hidden Mickeys provide a similar experience for repeat visitors. These details provide an additional layer of experience that encourages repeat visits by ensuring that fans will always have something new to see. Thus, even while Disney maintains much of its original structure and design to generate feelings of nostalgia, the parks are constantly evolving.

In addition to providing a source of amusement, Hidden Mickeys can also demonstrate knowledge of the Disney Company and the parks. As Ashley notes,

I always point out the ones I know on Haunted Mansion, Pirates, Thunder, etc. You're a cool insider if you know them. It shows your dedication to Disneyland that you know where they are, plus it's a nice and fun Disney touch. One more of their PERFECT details to enjoy the parks that much more.

For Ashley, Hidden Mickeys allow her to demonstrate her insider status, just like repeating Disney trivia or sharing behind the scenes information. By sharing these types of information, Ashley feels like she is an "expert"- which makes her feel special.

According to Mark, "I would say the great thing about the hidden Mickeys[sic] is finding them with friends and family. I love sharing the ones I know about and I love discovering new ones that others tell me about." From helping others find Hidden Mickeys to seeking new ones out, searching for Hidden Mickeys provides a bonding

activity where fans are able to work together. In some cases, when a fan is pointing out a Hidden Mickey to someone in their party, another guest in line will overhear the discussion. Situations like these provide a common interesting topic for guests to discuss, such as what a fan's favorite Hidden Mickey is or where other Hidden Mickeys can be found and can build solidarity among fans. In situations where fans already know where a specific Hidden Mickey is, pointing out the Mickey each visit can also be fun and even serve as a ritual where fans reaffirm their knowledge. For example, in her interview, Carol noted that she always points out the Hidden Mickeys that she remembers; it is a part of her experience and how she interacts with the parks. Not only do the Hidden Mickeys act as a sort of scavenger hunt, they also reaffirm her knowledge of the parks and her "insider" status.

One cause for debate among Disney fans who enjoy Hidden Mickeys is the classification of non-Disney Mickey shapes as Hidden Mickeys. As one website devoted to Hidden Mickeys notes,

Remember, Disney didn't create water, so water (H₂O) that looks like a Hidden Mickey, is not one. The same goes for other "Hidden Mickeys," such as the ones reported in Death Valley and the one in the movie Independence Day. Not associated with Disney; not a Hidden Mickey. (Hidden Mickey.org, para. 8)

However, even while "official" Hidden Mickeys must be created intentionally and associated with Disney, many fans continue to spot Hidden Mickeys outside of the Disney parks or, in some cases, create their own. As Anna notes, "Actually, I had a Hidden Mickey in my wedding. It was on my flower bouquet in crystals. I'm sure the florist thought I was nuts." As Anna noted in her interview, not everyone understood

what Disney meant to her or why she would want to include Disney items in such a formal event. Even while Anna knew that many of her guests (and florist) would not understand why she wanted to include a Hidden Mickey in her bouquet, she chose to include the Mickey anyway. Just as individuals want to play their favorite song at their wedding or bring things that are important to them into the ceremony, Anna's Hidden Mickey was a symbol for Disney and that she was getting her "Happily Ever After."

While Anna chose to invent her own Hidden Mickey for her wedding ceremony, other fans choose to look for Hidden Mickeys in unexpected places. For example, Hannah enjoys hunting for Hidden Mickeys in the parks but also notes that she also likes to find Hidden Mickeys around her hometown. Similarly, Mark describes an experience that his friend and fellow cast member had on a trip to China:

A friend of mine went to China last year and found a "Hidden Mickey" in the foot massage path in a garden in the Forbidden City. Coincidence? We may never know. I just love that we will look for them wherever now. I think it is just another part of what helps to make magical memories and that is all part of the Disney experience. My friend wasn't even in a Disney park and she found this and it made the trip all the more special. She is a fellow cast member. I would have felt the same way.

The "Hidden Mickey" that Mark's friend found in the Forbidden City pre-dates Hidden Mickeys and even the Disney parks. Just like Anna's crystalline Hidden Mickey, the tiles in the footpath have the shape of the traditional Mickey. However, while many fans would argue that these examples do not qualify as a Hidden Mickey, for some fans, they do.

Hidden Mickeys function as a symbol for the Disney Company and all of the positive memories and ideals associated with Disney. While originally Hidden Mickeys were created as a nod to Disney fandom and working cast members, many fans utilize the Hidden Mickey symbol to conjure specific values and memories. This use of the Hidden Mickey to generate associated symbolism is demonstrated in Anna's use of a Hidden Mickey shape in her wedding bouquet. She wished to express her identity as a Disney fan on her wedding day. From the crystals in Anna's wedding bouquet to the stones that Mark found in the foot path to the Forbidden City, fans point out these Hidden Mickeys as symbols that have meaning.

Finally, Hidden Mickeys, like trivia, D23, and behind-the-scenes information, represent for fans the possibility of being "in-the-know." This was demonstrated by Ashley and Mark, who enjoy sharing this insider information with their friends and family. Disney fans who can point out Hidden Mickeys to friends and other guests demonstrate knowledge of the Disney theme parks that are only shared by other fans. In addition, fans can demonstrate a higher degree of expertise by pointing out well-hidden, rare, or obscure Hidden Mickeys, or by sharing little-known background information about their placement. For example, in her interview, Carol notes that some of her favorite Hidden Mickeys have either been removed or are not listed in the book. They are some of her favorites because they are not widely recognized, and being able to point out these Hidden Mickeys makes her feel even more special.

Disney Deaths

One of the most controversial types of information discussed by Disney fans are “Disney deaths.” As described by Billy, a Disney death is “a death that occurs in the Disney parks, caused by the park itself or otherwise.” Disney deaths can be caused by malfunctioning rides, cast member negligence, guest stupidity, and in some cases, freak accidents. The concept of Disney deaths has inspired a wide variety of conversations and print media, including news articles from reputable news companies such as CNN and Fox News, web pages devoted to urban myths about Disney deaths, web pages devoted to “confirmed Disney deaths,” forum conversations, and even books. One cast member, Richard Carradine, wrote a book entitled *“The Park” After Dark*, which explores urban legends and true stories surrounding Disney deaths and hauntings in Disneyland. The book discusses urban legends and possible ways that the park might be haunted, likely haunted spots, and spots where confirmed deaths have occurred.

People dying in the Disney parks, whether as a guest or cast member, is something that has occurred in the past and always generates media frenzy. However, one popular urban legend is that nobody has ever died in the park⁴. While it is true that it is not in Disney’s best interests to admit to accidents or deaths occurring in the ‘Happiest Place On Earth,” cast member and guest deaths have been confirmed on site. Yet the myth that they haven’t continues to be perpetuated by fans. As Kiara notes, “Nobody dies in the park....so we're led to believe. We just talked about it the other night. No one is declared dead until after they are removed from the park...can't spoil the magic.” For some fans, this emphasis on not spoiling the magic with tragic stories makes the subject taboo, and increases the enjoyment gained from these stories.

Other fans appreciate Disney's silence on the subject and would prefer not to hear about such stories. As Marie notes, "I have heard there have been Disney deaths but I try to tune out any information. It scares me so I don't like to think about it." For Marie, who is already wary of some rides, the thought that a ride could malfunction, possibly leading to death, scares her even if the scenario is highly unlikely. For example, in her interview Marie stated that she was not interested in riding the Big Thunder Mountain attraction in Disneyland after the ride malfunctioned and the locomotive separated from the rest of the train, crushing a guest to death and injuring several others. Even while the problem has been solved and the trains undergo regular tests, the thought of a ride malfunction scares her too much to ride.

Other fans would prefer not to think about something so tragic while vacationing in the Disney parks, as Mark explains: "I do not like to hear about that. I heard about someone who died on the monorail but honestly, I don't like to hear about that so I didn't investigate it or read on it in depth." Even while Mark is not afraid of a ride malfunctioning, he finds the subject of Disney deaths to be sad and would prefer not to hear about it on his vacation. For both Marie and Mark, Disneyland is more than a simple vacation spot. It is a theme park filled with magic and happy memories. Disneyland and the other Disney parks are sacred to them and many fans. As Marie and Mark hold the theme parks in high esteem, they would prefer not to think of Disney deaths and profane the parks' symbolism. Discussing Disney deaths makes the parks seem mundane or profane.

While many fans prefer not to hear about injuries or deaths within the Disney parks, there is a portion of the fan community who like to read about and discuss these

incidents. For fans like Carol, Disney deaths function as interesting stories that can be discussed in line. Moreover, many of the deaths serve as reminders about what not to do in the park. Even while some Disney deaths are caused by accidents, many of them have been the result of what Carol and Billy call “guest stupidity.” For some fans these stories serve a similar purpose to the popular Darwin Awards⁵. For example, in his interview, Billy mentioned Philip Straughan and his friend, who on a Grad Nite in 1983 decided to get drunk and take a joy ride around the Rivers of America in a stolen inflatable rubber maintenance motorboat. When the two were unable to control the boat, it struck a rock near Tom Sawyer’s Island and tossed Straughan into the water where he drowned. As Carolyn notes, “[Disney Deaths] add to the ghosts in the mansion... It teaches you what not to do like stand up on Splash Mountain, and then there are stories associated with the person, what they were doing, where they were from.” For fans like Carolyn, these stories about incidents in Disneyland are not only reminders on what not to do, but also serve as amusing stories detailing what happens when someone goes against Disney safety rules. Carol agrees, “It also makes an amusing (if macabre) anecdote, when applied to the more ridiculous and stupid deaths -- i.e. Grad Nite students climbing on the Monorail tracks.” For fans like Carol and Carolyn, the appeal of Disney deaths lies in the circumstances surrounding the deaths, where the cost of stupidity in dangerous places can be dire. Disney deaths also function as a sort of dividing line between fans and other guests, such that fans do not engage in the “stupid” behaviors of other guests that could lead to disaster.

For other fans, the controversy surrounding incidents at Disney parks are a part of their appeal. As Emily notes, “The person who stood up on the Matterhorn, the heroin

addict who leapt from the people mover. The conspiratorial nature regarding covering them up is what interests me the most.” While Carol and Carolyn appreciate anecdotes applying to deaths through guest stupidity, Emily favors stories that discuss the ways in which gruesome details are covered up. For fans that thrive on conspiracy, they appreciate the dark side of Disney and like knowing that Disney is not perfect. For Alice, these macabre stories help her appreciate Disneyland because tragic things happen even in the “happiest place on earth.” Ashley echoes these sentiments:

I have those 2 books all about the underbelly of Disney! The book is called *s Mouse Tales*. It’s a great book, but you can’t be just a happy love Disney person. It talks a lot of trash about the place and tells many stories. Crazy stories, from abortions to deaths to lies^[6]. I like it because nothing in the world is perfect, it’s kind of fun to see the other side of Disney. ... Probably comes from me being a Goth; I like the twisted side of things. It’s just interesting because it’s such a happy place and then tragic things happen. It’s just interesting, how everything is Yin and Yang, evil and good. It gives me a more complete view of my second favorite place in the world!

For Ashley, she believes that nothing is black and white, and that everything has balance. She knows that everything has a dark side, including Disney, and enjoys seeing what she calls the “twisted” side of Disney. For Ashley, reading books like *MouseTales* and *The Park After Dark*, not only provides stories that she finds interesting, but also helps her gain a more complete view of Disney.

Finally, some fans enjoy reading about and discussing Disney deaths because these stories add to the urban legends and lore surrounding the Disney parks. When asked about her opinions on Disney deaths, Carol responded,

I think this is a fascinating subject because it adds to the often mysterious lore surrounding Disneyland. To me at least, it means more when applied to Disneyland of all the parks, because of its history as the first [Disney theme park]. This goes along with other "secret" aspects such as Club 33, Walt's apartment, unfinished attractions, and hidden/forgotten passages. And like in any theme park ride, the knowledge of violent deaths and injuries adds to the danger and excitement of the ride.

Carol categorizes Disney deaths as another piece of Disney park history. However, she does not categorize it as some of the usual trivia that guests hear when they enter the park, but rather as a "secret" aspect of Disneyland. Along with information on Club 33 (a secret club only for members above the Blue Bayou) or unfinished attractions, she considers Disney deaths as part of a secret network of information to which only certain fans are privy. As someone who is interested in these "secret" and often morbid aspects of Disney, she is part of an exclusive group of people, who are aware of things that are not advertised to the general public. In some cases, being in the park on a day when an accident happens allows the fan to gain information that would be difficult to find, as scenes of accidents are quickly cleaned up. As Billy notes,

I have heard a couple "Disney Death" stories. They are, for lack of a better word, appealing to me, and I'm quite interested in hearing about them. One time, when I was in line for the monorail, I heard police/ambulance sirens coming from

somewhere close by. The next day, my brother (who was with me at Disneyland) showed me a story of how those sirens were in relation to a guy who jumped from the Disneyland parking structure! And we were totally there when it happened! Granted, none of us actually saw the jump, but there it was on the internet the next day. I was just surprised at how quickly the scene was cleaned up.

For Billy and his brother who were in Disneyland on the day that someone jumped from the parking structure, the morbid mishap provided a shared experience. In addition to providing a topic of discussion for the rest of the day, discussing what the sirens might be for, Billy was later able to talk about his experience and say that he was there on a day that an accident happened. Billy's story about the man who jumped adds to the lore that his friends and family share about Disneyland. Also, like Carol, Billy is now privy to a source of secret knowledge about the park that other fans may not have access to. In some ways this increases both Carol and Billy's standings within the community, because they are able to share information that other people might not have access to.

Disney deaths are an extreme form of "insider knowledge." While Hidden Mickeys, trivia, and behind the scenes information are prized and shared by fans, they are not considered taboo by Disney. When asked, a cast member can point out a Hidden Mickey or inform a guest that Cars Land is under construction. In contrast, cast members are not permitted to talk about deaths in the Disney parks because it would spoil the "magic." As cast members are not permitted to discuss Disney deaths, fans who are interested must learn about Disney deaths outside of the parks, such as by searching the internet or watching the news.

Disney deaths also demonstrate how some events can highlight the border between the sacred and the profane. This is demonstrated in the juxtaposition of the two opposing views about Disney deaths. For example, Marie and Mark do not read about Disney deaths and prefer not to talk about them at all, because they do not want to associate death, what they consider a profane subject, with Disney. In contrast, Carol and Billy enjoy talking about deaths in the parks, and go so far as to research them online. For Carol and Billy, death adds a mysterious elements that set the parks above and beyond the everyday world, while still reflecting more mundane aspects like mortality. Like urban legends, Disney deaths present a juxtaposition between the sacred and the profane that many fans find titillating. For both Billy and Carol, these stories are interesting because they are forbidden by Disney. To go against Disney and learn about Disney deaths is to cross between the boundary between the sacred and the profane.

However, even as fans cross this boundary, as Gamson (1998) notes, profanation helps to reaffirm boundaries. This is demonstrated in both Billy and Carol's interest in "guest stupidity." In his study on day time talk shows, Gamson (1998) notes that even while fans are interested in boundaries being crossed, even more individuals want to see these boundaries reaffirmed. For example, he notes that while individuals asserting their gender and sexuality crossing boundaries drew polite applause, the largest amount of applause was reserved for individuals who reaffirmed dichotomous boundaries. Viewers wanted to see those who transgressed boundaries being placed back into a dichotomy. This is also clearly seen in Disney deaths. As previously noted, both Billy and Carol were interested in learning and sharing taboo insider information. However, for Billy and Carol, the most interesting stories were not the ones where someone was hurt in an

accident. The most interesting stories involved “guest stupidity,” where an individual crossed a boundary and these boundaries were reaffirmed in the most severe manner possible— death.

Construction in the Parks

One of the hottest topics of conversation among fans is construction and “what’s next” for Disney. Conversations may include rumors of coming changes, news articles on “confirmed” changes, and current construction. In addition to this sharing of information, many fans post their opinions on coming changes, such as by lamenting changes or the loss of a ride, excitement over new possibilities, and wariness that the final product might not meet their standards. Other fan activities concerning construction might include trying to get a “peek” at the construction while in the parks or discussing the changes face-to-face with other fans. However, no matter how this information is disseminated, one thing that many fans share is excitement over the “next big thing.”

One of the things that set Disney and its parks apart from other companies is the emphasis and realization of the Disney ideal of innovation. Walt Disney was frequently quoted as saying, "Disneyland will never be completed. It will continue to grow as long as there is imagination left in the world" (Schaffer 2010:8). This emphasis on innovation is seen as rides are constantly updated with the latest technology, new attractions are installed, and Disneyland changes to reflect mainstream culture. Many fans who enjoy Disney’s emphasis on innovation and change eagerly await the next big thing. As Mike notes, “We pay attention to see what is the next grand idea. I think the construction keeps Disney ‘new’ and the previews are just neat to look at trying to imagine what it will

eventually look like.” Nicky who likes to read about construction online and in cast publications, notes, “I like learning about upcoming new rides, because I like to see what new ride to try next. I never know what could be my favorite new ride, and new rides add so much more to the parks.” For these fans, whether it is an announcement from Disney or scaffolding on a closed Star Tours, the construction is proof that something new is coming.

For other fans, the physical construction occurring in the parks contributes to their appreciation of new rides. These fans like behind-the-scenes information and like to hear about how new rides are made or about how technology in a ride works. For example, Kiara notes that she was able to see World of Color while Imagineers were testing the lights and fire features. Kiara notes that seeing the tests help her appreciate the level of imagination and hard work in new attractions:

I'm always impressed with the genius of it all. How someone's mind can think up these things and someone else can make it happen. Doesn't spoil it for me...enhances it... Then in the end I really appreciate how much hard work went into creating something so wonderful.

For many fans, seeing the construction in the parks is not just enlightening; it can also be fun. As Billy remarks, “I'm interested in actually seeing the construction in the parks. Seeing the scaffolding around Splash Mountain or the construction of the new ‘Cars’ ride is fun to look at and watch.”

While many fans are positive about changes in the Disney parks, Carol notes that honoring old classic rides and new innovation requires a careful balance:

I'm pretty positive when I see changes to the park. I like new special effects, themed areas, attractions, etc. To see Disneyland as a place of change as well as a place that honors its own classic past is a delicate balance, which usually works out (to me, at least).

Tom echoes this sentiment, noting that he appreciates how Imagineers try to keep things fresh and new in the parks. But construction must be carefully managed. When construction is rushed, new attractions may lack some of the creativity or “Disney feel” that makes the parks different. Even while new construction has potential, Tom notes, part of the rush to release new attractions tied to movies can be detrimental to the park. Tom laments,

It seems that everything has to be based on a movie so they can sell product, etc, and that's not how Walt would have wanted it. If you think about it, the most "Disney" attractions you think of aren't tied to any movies. Pirates of the Caribbean (not anymore) Jungle Cruise, Haunted Mansion (really Eddie Murphy?!) Big Thunder, Space Mountain, etc.

For Tom, even while the original Disney attractions frequently had tie-ins to movies and merchandise, more effort was put into the original attractions and how special effects would work. This sentiment is also held by many fans in the Haunted Mansion community called “Doom Buggies” who are wary of changes to the Florida and Disneyland Haunted Mansions. Recently, the Florida Haunted Mansion underwent renovations, including adding an interactive queue for guests to enjoy while waiting for the ride. The new interactive queue features a sea captain’s tomb that blows bubbles, a rhyming ghost that asks guests to complete childish riddles, and a musical wall that

guests can use to play variations of the Haunted Mansion theme song. In addition, at the end of the ride, Imagineers changed the old Hitch Hiking Ghosts that follow the guests home from an old Peppers Ghost mirror illusion to an interactive computer generated effect, where the ghosts play with the guests. Some fans, in online posts on Doom Buggies.com, were pleased with changes to the Hitch Hiking Ghosts, and noted that the changes are “comedically creepy,” such as when Ezra swaps his head with a guest’s.

Other fans prefer the old Pepper’s Ghost illusion, as one fan notes, “Upon watching the video, and seeing the traveling ghost inflating a balloon, my first thought was how that new interactive hitch-hiking ghost really blows” (Haunted Hearse 4/4/11)⁷. Doombuggies.com members note that some recent construction in the parks, such as the Walt Disney World Haunted Mansion queue, lack a balance between subtlety and noise that is found in the original Haunted Mansion. One fan argues that recent additions to the queue of the Haunted Mansion seem like Imagineers squashed “Toontown-esque” things into a space that “was once supposed to be subtle mystique and mystery” (Booster 3/11/2011)⁸. These concerns are echoed by Carol, who is uncomfortable with the changes occurring in Disney California Adventure:

I thought that the previous entrance was distinctive and appropriate for the all-encompassing California theme. By incorporating design elements and images from landmarks and features from places throughout California, it didn't single out one part - as it will later, when it resembles just Los Angeles (which is also precisely the design in Florida). DCA wasn't meant to be a copy of another park, as Magic Kingdom was to Disneyland. And anyway, I think it's practically a crime against art to dismantle the world's largest ceramic mural, only to grind it up for floor tiles.

As demonstrated by the posters on Doombuggies.com and by Carol, it is evident that not all fans agree with changes proposed in the Disney parks. Rather than simply accepting whatever construction was proposed by Imagineers, Disney fans think critically about a variety of subjects relating to their parks. In cases where planned construction is an improvement, Disney fans are quick to praise the parks and visit to see how the finished product turned out. In contrast, in cases where fans disagree with proposed changes, they are quick to point out problems with the projects and articulate reasons why changes are a bad idea.

Like many of the other forms of information discussed in this chapter, Construction and information on what's next demonstrates insider knowledge. Even while a great deal of information on Disney construction is disseminated through the Disney blogs or in Blue Sky Cellar⁹ in California Adventure, fans are frequently able to obtain rare insider information and rumors on fan sites or from friends and family who work for Disney. These types of information are considered much harder to come by and, in many cases, more appealing.

Different Sources of Information

From Hidden Mickeys to Disney deaths, Disney fans are interested in a wide variety of subjects that can range from appreciating little details in construction to the mysterious and morbid. Disney fans receive information on these subjects from a variety of sources, including websites, forum threads, books written by fans, and official Disney press releases. In addition, cast members like Mark, Nicky, Tom, and Carol have access to behind-the-scenes information, such as backstage publications, the HUB¹⁰, and

information from other workers. Finally, one of the most important places that fans get their information is from other fans. Yet, the information released via these sources is not all equal. Different sources approach material in different ways that may highlight certain details or gloss over them. One of the primary ways that these sources differ is seen between fan-run sites and official Disney-run sites.

Disney sites are valuable for fans because they offer official information on which fans can rely. In addition to visiting the Disney parks website to book vacations, check prices, and check black out days, Disney fans visit official Disney sites to check for official news about upcoming events or changes. Even while Disney fans visit Disney official blogs in addition to fan sites, the Disney sites are “official” sources of information. Fans cite the official Disney sites, such as the D23 website, Disney.com, or the Official Disney Parks Blog, as being “family friendly,” easy to use, and well executed. While other Disney sites may have incorrect information or rumors, information on the Disney websites are widely regarded as confirmed facts or changes. For fans like Ricky who visit the official blog and other announcement sites, the Disney websites are a good way to keep up with the latest news. When discussing construction, Ricky notes that when Disney releases information on construction they “tend to do it in a well-presented way. They make it fun, engaging, and visually pleasing.”

While fan sites are focused on showing “what’s new” with Disney, official Disney publications focus on preserving the “magic.” As Tom notes, “They'd like to hide all the little 'secrets' that make all the 'magic' happen such as lighting and special effects and advanced [Audio Animatronics].” As Brian notes:

Until fairly recently, Disney tended to hold things pretty close to the chest and wouldn't really acknowledge something was happening until it was pretty obvious it was happening... and sometimes, not even then! I think with D23, they've realized that the community has an interest in hearing about what's coming, so they're a little more open about it - to a point.

Both Tom and Brian note that what is released through Disney publications had traditionally been limited. While Disney might release information on new destinations for a Star Tours ride as part of a “Sneak Peek,” this information is usually delayed until close to opening and will not show any of the “guts” of the ride, such as wires or programming code. This is similar to how Disney fans are prevented from seeing behind the scenes in the parks. Construction is shrouded by walls, and work sites don't have overlays at night until after the guests have left. Carol, however, who worked in Walt Disney World, was able to see a lot of the construction after guests had gone home for the day. She was also exposed to information that she was specifically told not to share with guests. For example, in her interview Carol noted that one Haunted Mansion fan issued a bounty for the Walt Disney World's Madame Leota crystal ball. In order to protect the crystal ball, the entire séance room is equipped with sensors that will notice if someone exits a ride vehicle. If someone leaves their Doom Buggy, the crystal ball will shoot into a trap door in the ceiling, the ride vehicles will freeze, all of the lights will turn on, and security will be notified. However, as Carol notes, the security measures are “over-kill,” as there is a duplicate head hidden under a sheet in an unlocked cast member only section of the attraction. The duplicate head would be much easier to steal.

While Disney releases more “sanitized” versions of information, fan sites tend to be more open and honest with their information. For example, Dawn and Hannah note that fan run-sites are more objective about changes and products than Disney sites. While Disney sites are attempting to sell a product or generate excitement, fan-run sites can afford to be more honest with their opinions. Fan-run websites release a much wider variety of information including rumors, links to press releases, and photographs submitted by other fans. These photographs are frequently taken by fans over the construction walls or through the cracks. Photographs found on sites like Micechat.com and LaughingPlace.com show the gritty or behind-the-scenes details that many fans wish to see despite Disney’s efforts to keep them out. As Ashley notes, “Micechat feels a bit more underground like a behind the scenes insider kind of renegade way of seeing it.” Seeing something that is taboo or forbidden can have an appeal of its own. As Carol notes,

As a guest in Disneyland, the only clearly "forbidden" things are those which I get a peek at between the cracks and over the walls. They're generally nothing unexpected (e.g. an empty Rivers of America), but just the fact that I'm looking past something that has been placed to prevent my seeing just seems by nature a little more special.

By peeking through cracks and over walls, Carol is able to see the construction that Disney would prefer to hide in order to “preserve the magic.” However, rather than ruining the magic for Carol, the construction walls and hidden details enhance her experiences in the parks. By marking the construction areas as taboo or forbidden, the details become more tantalizing.

The juxtaposition between Disney-released information and fan-supplied information demonstrate how fans have very different perspectives on the types of information that they wish to receive and how these types of information affect their views of the parks. More importantly, this juxtaposition demonstrates how fans react to more profane or mundane views of the Disney parks. Taking the example of construction, some fans, such as Billy and Carol, argue that it is fascinating to see how their favorite attractions are constructed. Both Billy and Carol like to peek behind construction walls. In both cases, viewing construction did not detract from their view of Disneyland as a special or extraordinary place, out of time and the reality of the outside world. In contrast, Disney would prefer not to release photos of the Rivers of America under heavy construction or a lit Indiana Jones, because it would take away from the “magic,” making these attractions seem more mundane. Just as Disney would prefer to preserve the magic, some fans argue that seeing the scaffolding and a drained River of America make the park seem mundane.

Conclusion

The different types of information discussed in this chapter form the basis of the collective knowledge shared by the Disney fan community. For example, Disney trivia and history explain not only where characters or the parks come from, but also the history of fans. In contrast, construction shows fans where Disney is headed. Disney deaths act as warnings about obeying safety instructions knowledge, but also as macabre anecdotes. Hidden Mickeys act as a sort of “Where’s Waldo” game for fans to play in line. These types of information combine to form narratives shared among Disney fans.

These types of information express the difference between fans and regular guests. These different types of “insider” knowledge are easily available in books or online, but only fans are able to remember the cast member who died in America Sings or that Walt Disney’s lamp always remains lit in his honor. While tourists may buy a book in the park that talks about Hidden Mickeys or the Main Street Windows, fans choose to research the stories and go beyond the books sold in the parks.

Over time, as fans read the same stories, urban legends and Disney deaths become a sort of mythology or folklore shared by Disney fans. As fans read books about Walt Disney and share with other fans, histories and trivia become the history of the fan community and create a shared sense of identity. It is important to note that this shared sense of identity is not the result of individuals, but rather of shared interaction. For example, Emily noted that she enjoyed learning about the history of the Mickey Mouse Club and the early Disney Company: “I think it’s important to learn about Disney history. Everyone thinks that Disney created the Mouse Club and the first convention and pin trading... but really, it is the fans... it is our history.” Just as fans weave together the fabric of their history by sharing stories, fans also weave together mythology and lore. By sharing these different types of information, fans transform this knowledge into collective knowledge that is shared by the community. This shared knowledge creates a sense of identity that individuals belong to a group and also a sense of solidarity with fellow fans. Sociologically this is important because this shared sense of identity and this collective knowledge is what holds fans together, making them a group of fans rather than just individuals who all enjoy reading about Disney.

As demonstrated by both Disney deaths and urban legends, these narratives have the potential to challenge and reaffirm the boundaries between the sacred and the profane. Disney deaths and urban legends are a provocative juxtaposing of the sacred with the profane. For many fans, crossing these boundaries can be titillating, as these subjects are taboo. More importantly, however, are the ways that these taboo subjects reaffirm boundaries and, with the binary opposition, create symbolic order. It is through this juxtaposition of the sacred and the profane, and through the reaffirmation of these boundaries, that transgressions are punished, the dichotomy is defended, and solidarity is strengthened.

¹ Evac's are a cast member term that is an abbreviation for "Evacuation." When a ride malfunctions, the ride must sometimes be evacuated entirely, so that the ride may be fixed. Also refers to evacuations that are the result of emergencies (very rare).

² While some fans see natural Hidden Mickeys, such as those found in nature, according to the Disney Company, a true Hidden Mickey is deliberate.

³ Traditionally an Easter Egg is a hidden extra found on a DVD. Disney DVDs also have Easter Eggs and Easter Egg like objects have been inserted into the parks.

⁴ This is an urban legend mentioned by many different fans including Carol, Billy, and Alice.

⁵ The Darwin Awards are online awards that are given to individuals who "significantly improve the gene pool by eliminating themselves from the human race in an obviously stupid way." They may remove themselves from the gene pool by destroying their ability to reproduce or through death (Northcutt, right column, para. 2)

⁶ The books mentioned in this quote relate lies and rumors told by cast members and guests, as well as true stories.

⁷ "Hitchhiking Ghosts Speculation." *Doom Buggies* WEBSITE/FORUM. Retrieved April 10, 2011. <http://disneyshauntedmansion.yuku.com/topic/9391/Hitchhiking-Ghosts-speculation?page=2>

⁸ "Subtlety and Noise." *Doom Buggies* WEBSITE/FORUM. Retrieved April 8, 2011. <http://disneyshauntedmansion.yuku.com/topic/9381/Subtlety-and-Noise?page=2>

⁹ Blue Sky Cellar is an attraction in California Adventure that discusses changes coming to the Disney theme parks. In Blue Sky, guests can talk to cast members, watch videos, and look at models showing upcoming changes.

¹⁰The Hub is an online web page for cast members only. It contains a wide variety of information including construction updates, company policies, information for work, sneak peeks, and cast only events and contests.

CHAPTER 4: DISNEY TRADITIONS AND SYMBOLISM

THE MEANING OF RITUALS AND SYMBOLS IN THE DISNEY FAN EXPERIENCE

Disneyland as a Site of Pilgrimage

From the moment a guest arrives in Disneyland, they are immersed in a world of symbols, ritual, and play. As Moore (1980) notes, to enter the Disney parks is to enter a site of pilgrimage. Visitors to the parks must pass through a number of symbolic and cultural barriers that prepare the fan for what awaits them inside. As visitors prepare to enter Disneyland, they must first drive along the Interstate 5, exiting at “Disneyland Way.” From the moment that guests exit the interstate, they are welcomed into the park by Mickey’s friends, found on everything from signs to their parking pass.

As guests leave the parking structure, they must leave behind their car, a part of their identity and a connection to the outside world (Moore 1980). As guests continue towards the park, they must either walk through Downtown Disney or ride the Disney tram, before being deposited at the front gates. Here they are searched, their bags are checked for “inappropriate items,” and they must go through the turnstiles into the park.

Guests must enter the park through one of two narrow tunnels, which beckon them into the park, over which hangs a plaque, “Here you leave today and enter the world of yesterday, tomorrow and fantasy.” Passing under the tunnel, they are surrounded by “Coming attractions” posters of the rides that depict Disneyland’s popular attractions and remind guests of what waits for them inside. Finally, guests step out from the tunnel to see Main Street USA laid out before them, the castle at the end of the long street.

Surrounding the guest are symbols, such as the American flag and Mickey Mouse. Along Main Street the guest is immersed by smells piped by vents onto the streets such as popcorn and baked goods, while turn of the century music flows out of the shops. Here on Main Street guests are exposed to new scents, sights, and sounds, immersing them in a whole new world.

As previously noted, Disney theme park guests must pass through many different barriers in order to enter the parks. These barriers include economic barriers such as having to pay for parking and the ticket price, and physical barriers such as the turnstiles and the bag checks. In addition, guests must leave behind certain aspects of their identity, such as their car in the parking lot or items that Disney labels inappropriate such as studded jewelry, revealing clothing, or clothing with sexual or profane references. If a guest is unable to get through any of these barriers, they are not allowed to proceed. Moreover, as guests travel along this path in the company of the other visitors, they are surrounded by symbols, such as signs warning them how to proceed and images of Mickey Mouse welcoming them into the park and by other guests, many in Disney attire. This path is important because it functions as a sort of secular pilgrimage where guests must pass barriers to enter.

The Disney parks act like a site of secular pilgrimage, drawing pilgrims from great distances as well as nearby (Moore 1980). Set aside from the outside world, the Disney parks offer a space that is a break from reality. Once inside, the parks are an immersive experience, limiting a guest's view of the outside world and enveloping the guest in a world of fantasy. As guests enter the Hub, they are able to enter a completely different world, immersed in a world of new sights, sounds, smells, and stories. Guests

may travel into the future, fly to different worlds on Star Tours, or barrel through the stars on Space Mountain. If guests prefer, they can pass through the castle and into a small medieval village, lined with shops and rides that will transport them into familiar fairy tales. This new immersive world suspends disbelief with animals that can talk and pirate ships that can fly, pulling guests further from the reality of the outside world.

In addition to these factors, Disneyland and the other Disney theme parks share many other characteristics with sites of pilgrimage. As Moore notes, a traditional pilgrimage site must have “common activities (often conducted en masse) and myth which the other elements (site, symbols, and activities) evoke; such myths are narratives commonly known” (1980: 208-209). As discussed previously, these elements are part and parcel of the Disney experience: pin trading, Hidden Mickeys, theme days, and fan narratives abound.

One of the most important aspects of the Disney parks as sites of pilgrimage is that such spaces contain symbols with a universal appeal that are widely understood by guests (Moore 1980). In the Disney parks, just as a guest is immersed in a world of “make-believe,” they are immersed in a world of symbols¹ that are internationally understood. These symbols awaken feelings in us that are spontaneously communicated through the symbol (Durkheim 2001). One important example of symbols communicating to guests in the park is Sleeping Beauty’s Castle in Disneyland or Cinderella’s Castle in Walt Disney World. The castles symbolize not only stepping over a threshold into a world of Fantasy, but also in many cases are used as icons to symbolize the park.

The importance of symbols and their ability to move people is demonstrated by Tessa's reaction to the Cinderella's Castle on her first visit to Walt Disney World, "When we walked into [The Magic Kingdom] and I stood on Main Street I cried my eyes out. It was a dream come true to see it in person." For Tessa, the castle symbolized not only the entry way into Fantasyland or visiting Walt Disney World, but also dreams. Seeing Cinderella's Castle for the first time symbolized to Tessa that wishing means something and that her dream was coming true. According to Durkheim, "This transfer of feelings simply occurs because the idea of the thing and the idea of its symbol are closely connected in our minds: as a result, the emotions provoked by one are contagiously extended to the other" (2001: 165). In addition, for Tessa and her family, the symbol of Cinderella's Castle was able to keep their feelings alive. Symbols are able to inscribe feelings onto lasting objects; once the feeling is attached to an object, the symbol will perpetually call these feelings to mind and keep them alive (Durkheim 2001).

Symbols are also important to fans, because they can also be used as a way for groups to distinguish themselves from others. Even while Disneyland and Mickey Mouse are symbols that represent different things to different people, they are also symbols of the larger Disney fan community as a whole. Just as Mickey Mouse represents Disneyland, he is a symbol that all of the Disney fan community can recognize. Just like Durkheim's (2001) concept of the totem, Mickey is a sign by which the fan community can distinguish itself from other fan communities, and he embodies the collective sentiments, values, and history of that community. Individuals understanding shared symbols are fundamental to the functioning of any community (Durkheim 2001; Mead 1973).

Finally, as a site of secular pilgrimage, the Disney parks are an area where guests may participate in organized and routinized play on a large scale (Moore 1980). Defining play, Huizinga notes,

We might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside ‘ordinary’ life as being ‘not serious’, but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner (1980: 13).

Play can be seen in many different places in the Disney parks. For example, when a guest enters the Disney parks, they are in a world quite different from reality. Even while a guest knows that when they ride Star Tours they are not really going to the Moon of Endor, they suspend disbelief and focus intently on the subject of their play. It proceeds within the confines of the park or ride, and lasts only as long as the ride occurs. As Billy argued in his interview:

I know that I’m not *really* driving the jeep through the Temple of the Forbidden Eye, but I’ll pretend. The steering wheel doesn’t even move! Doesn’t matter. When I’m on these rides, I’m living these rides. Half the fun is forgetting you’re in the real world and just letting go. Getting back in touch with that long-forgotten childhood, where everything seemed like magic.

The above quote by Billy demonstrates how play, like other forms of ritual, can transform space and time. While Billy is physically in a building, riding an attraction in a theme park, he suspends his disbelief to enjoy the moment and his escape from the temple. Billy is consumed utterly for the moment by the adventure and the thrill of danger.

One thing that sets Disney fans and Disney parks guests apart is that while guests participate in forms of play at the Disney parks, many fans also participate in rituals. As Moore notes, both ritual and play are a part of the same metaprocess, “Both are symbolic, transcendent, or ‘make believe,’ both allay anxieties and prepare the organism to act; both are related to changes of interaction rates over daily, yearly, and generational cycles, and to interaction across population boundaries” (1980: 208). One important distinction between play and ritual is that while play may occur spontaneously, rituals are acts that have become highly routinized over time.

From riding Space Ship Earth as the last ride of the night to buying ornaments in the park during the Christmas season, one thing that many Disney fans share are rituals. Of the twenty-five fans interviewed, twenty-four of them noted that they engaged in some sort of ritual, and many of the fans had multiple rituals that were an important part of their Disney experience. These rituals, to which the fans frequently referred as “traditions”², are activities that the fans engage in on a regular basis when visiting the park, preparing to visit the park, or during special events at home. These rituals took on a variety of meanings for participants and included a wide variety of activities including preparation rituals, consuming specific foods, enjoying attractions in a specific order, games of skill, and holiday traditions.

Getting Ready

While many of the traditions involve visiting the parks or special events, some rituals begin before the trip has physically begun. These rituals that are focused on getting ready for an upcoming trip create a shared sense of excitement and intensify the

connection between friends and family. As Alexander notes, “Ritual effectiveness energizes the participants and attaches them to each other, increases their identification with the symbolic objects of communication, and intensifies the connection of the participants and the symbolic objects with the observing audience, the relevant ‘community’ at large” (2007: 527).

One example of rituals centered on getting ready for a Disney trip was explained by Mara, who creates a countdown to the vacation:

We do a countdown chain that starts at day 100. I plan (and here's where I think I lose most people) Disney "nights" on the weekends leading up to our big trip. I build an afternoon around a Disney movie, including watching the movie, meals, activities, etc... Though they take a lot of time to plan (and a bit of money) they make for the best afternoon/evening. We often invite friends over. Please note that my husband refused to have anything to do with these Disney nights.

Mara’s Disney ritual begins one hundred days before the start of any Disney trip, quite a lot of time in advance. Her Disney rituals are also very involved, including a themed evening with a movie, a meal, and other activities. Even while Mara’s husband isn’t a “Disney fan” like his wife, and chooses not to participate in the Disney nights, these nights still serve as a site for community building among the fans in their network.

Just as Mara begins a countdown 100 days before the start of any Disney trip, Aurora creates a similar countdown in the form of an advent calendar:

When the kids were little I would draw [a] huge outline of the castle, paste pictures from WDW, cover them with little doors and the kids would take off one

each day, like an advent calendar. It increased the anticipation. The kids loved it. We have four sons and started taking them when the oldest was 3 and the baby was 8 months. They feel they grew up there. They are 32, 29, 26 and 23 now, so it's a long tradition.

This castle-themed advent calendar referenced positive memories, with the pictures posted on the castle, as well as hinting at an exciting future, all in the form of a countdown. This connects past memories to the coming future, creating a sense of excitement, and as Aurora notes, increasing the anticipation. This connection between the past and the future is significant because one of the primary purposes of rituals and shared narratives is community building, linking the past to the future. Aurora's ritual of the advent calendar demonstrates a sense of continuity. The ritual has been observed for over twenty-nine years, and still continues today.

Aurora and Mara's rituals share many similarities. Both of these rituals were created by mothers who wished to generate shared excitement for their family for an upcoming Disney trip. By utilizing a countdown, both Aurora and Mara created an activity that their families could engage in that brought them closer to the trip. Aurora and Mara's rituals create a sense of shared excitement among their family and friends. As Edles and Applerouth note, "Because they are practices (not beliefs or values), rituals can unite a social group regardless of individual differences in beliefs or strength of convictions. It is the common *experience* and *focus* that binds the participants together" (2005: 122). In this case, the experience of the Disney nights and castle countdown provide common experiences for the families to share and remember.

However, even with the similarities in design, both Aurora and Mara chose to structure their countdowns in different ways. While Aurora chose to focus on pictures and the calendar, Mara chose to focus on creating additional Disney memories during Disney nights. Finally, Mara chose to include a different sort of activity in her ritual-food. Sharing meals can serve as a way to bind people together.

Food Rituals

Of all of the rituals that were discussed in the interviews, one of the most common involved the consumption of food. Often found in celebratory events, food has been a staple of rituals and tradition for thousands of years. From wedding cakes to bread at communion, food is served at a variety of festivals and ceremonies, including in weddings, wakes, and coming of age ceremonies (Durkheim 2001; Prosterman 1985). In addition, food often takes a prominent role in the event or ritual (Prosterman 1985). This is seen in all of the rituals involving food discussed by fans, where the food is central to the ritual. In cases where food is not present, its absence is frequently a part of the ritual, such as in fasting.

In some cases, these rituals involve eating in a specific place or seeing a show while the food is consumed. One example of a food ritual is the Dole Whip Float sold at Disneyland's Tiki Room. The outside queue for the Tiki Room consists of a pre-show featuring Hawaii's gods and goddesses, and a video featuring Dole pineapple as the official food of the Hawaiian Islands. Here, the Dole Whip Float, the Dole Whip, and pineapple spears are marketed to guests as a part of the attraction, and guests are encouraged to take the food in for enjoyment during the show. Some fans have integrated

the Tiki Room and Dole Whip Floats as a necessary part of their Disneyland visit. In their interviews, both Carol and Marissa noted that on each visit to the park, they stop by the Tiki Room to enjoy a Pineapple Float during the show. As Carol notes, “I can’t remember a time when the two didn’t go hand-in-hand.” For Marissa and Carol, the Pineapple Float and the Tiki Room are an essential part of their Disneyland visit. The Dole Whip Float and the Tiki Room are so intertwined in Disney advertising that the ritual seems profit-driven or manufactured. Even while this relationship has been manufactured in order to sell food, it is still a ritual that has memories and meaning for Disney fans.

For another fan, Brian, food is also an important ritual in his visits to Disney theme parks. As Brian notes, “I love to buy a box of popcorn and sit on a bench and people watch– it’s interesting to see all the different kinds of people having fun.” Just as with Marissa and Carol, food and action have become integrated into a single ritual. For Brian, one of the main sources of enjoyment does not come from traditional actors or shows, but rather from watching other people enjoy their day. While sitting on the bench, Brian immerses himself in the activities and feelings of others around him, allowing him to feel connected to others within the park. However, this interaction with others around him is a show, an unscripted one put on by other guests in the Disney parks. It is appropriate to call Brian’s people watching a show, because it is not an interactive experience; he simply watches.

In some cases, consuming food becomes the ritual. In these cases, the food does not always need to be consumed with a show, but a particular food is necessary to make the trip feel complete. For example, Marie notes that she enjoys a Dole Whip Float and

Mark always enjoys a treat at the French Bakery and an Icee on every visit. For most of these fans, the food does not have any particular meaning; it is just enjoyable and necessary. However, in some cases, types of food carry a particular memory or ritual:

I almost always get a bag of assorted soured from one of the candy shops. I love tasting them because they remind me so much of being there. I enjoy the bag even after I've left. (Alice)

On the way out I always get fudge. I never have fudge unless I am on vacation so for me Disneyland is like a little vacation. And it tastes great. (Emily)

In these cases, Emily and Alice have attached particular memories to specific foods. By consuming fudge or assorted sours from the parks, it helps to remind them where they are. Both fans note that these desserts also symbolize the concept of vacation. For Alice, this is taken one step further as she takes the remainder of the assorted sour candies home to enjoy, which reminds her of the trip. The assorted sour candies are a way to remember Disneyland and the memories once Alice has gone home.

The food rituals of Disney fans demonstrate different ways that fans attach memories to food. As discussed earlier in this section, food has been used for thousands of years in ritual, to bind participants together. By breaking their fast together or sitting down for a meal, individuals share a ritual. Whether enjoying dessert in the Tiki Room, on a park bench, or even on the way home, the fans in this study have demonstrated that powerful memories can be attached not only to physical action, but even to taste. As Alice noted, her memories associated with Disney are linked to sour candies, which she continues to enjoy even after leaving the park.

Memories Creating and Remembering

Another type of ritual found among Disney fans are those that revolve around the creation or preservation of memories. In these rituals, fans focus on creating new memories that can be easily preserved, or repeating rituals to preserve a specific memory. Examples of rituals that create or preserve memories include taking a picture in a specific place every visit, re-enacting an event, or retelling a story in a certain place.

One of the most common types of ritual engaged in by Disney guests and fans is the creation of memories through photography. Photographs are a valuable part of ritual because they allow individuals to preserve a moment in time. These photographs can be pulled out later as a way of remembering a trip or even a period of time in an individual's life. These types of photography link one picture or time/space moment to another. One example of this photography ritual is explained by Mike, who always takes a picture of his two boys in EPCOT: "We take the picture from the World Showcase and have Spaceship Earth in the background. It is remarkable to see them age against the backdrop of the ball."

Mark's picture ritual is not simply a father taking a snap shot of his family on vacation. It is a ritual that has continued for years. As Mark notes, the picture is taken every visit in front of the same spot with the same background, a highly routinized act that has continued for years. Mark's family ritual of taking a picture in front of the World Showcase is notable for several reasons. Firstly, in this ritual, Mark and his sons are not only creating a mental memory, but also a physical one in the form of the snapshot. Like Anna's countdown posters, these photographs can be pulled out months, years, and even decades later to recall a memory. Secondly, this ritual connects the past in a visible

timeline and demonstrates change over a period of time. In such a way, these snapshots are not only symbolizing the memories created during this trip, but also the growth of Mark's sons, who grow over time in the photographs. In these photos, Mark is literally documenting how his sons grew up at Walt Disney World.

Another form of ritual that utilizes memory is re-enacting or re-telling stories. These types of rituals focus on bringing together participants by recalling memories and invoking nostalgia. One example of this is given by Andrea, who notes that she always likes to watch the fireworks, because she remembers the amazement that she felt seeing Tinker Bell fly for the first time as a child: "When I see her fly, it makes me feel like that little girl that saw her 55 years ago :-). 'I Believe' :-)." Another fan, Ashley, remembers a ritual that she has every time she enters the attic scene on the Haunted Mansion: "Of course my biggest one has been for the last 6 years. Every time I'm on the Haunted Mansion I say, 'This is when Chad asked me to marry him!'."

These rituals of recalling memories show the power of ritual to transport individuals not only through space, but through time as well. The ability of rituals to transport individuals through time is seen in Passover ceremonies, when Jewish participants are transported back in time to their ancestors' enslavement in Egypt. However, unlike Passover, fans are not simply transported back in history; they are transported back in their own memories, allowing them to connect to the symbol in an intimate way. Ashley is not simply remembering the amazement she felt as a child; she is feeling her amazement in the present moment.

As demonstrated by these rituals, memory and ritual are closely connected. Like ritual, memory has a performative nature. "We 'do' memory together with other people,

time after time, doing and re-doing year after year the same things, looking at the same pictures, telling the same stories, reciting the same prayers” (Rosati 2009: 4). As individuals perform, they are “doing” memory together with other individuals. These memories link individuals in the community together with a collective history or shared memory. Just as importantly, these rituals of creating and recalling memories link the present and the past along a timeline, such that individuals are able to travel through not only space but through time as well.

Sometimes Rituals Don't Have an Obvious Symbolism

While many of the rituals discussed thus far have specific meaning or symbolism attached, some rituals are less obvious in their meaning. Some of these rituals are simply fun, and Disney parks provide an opportunity that, as one respondent noted, “are just too fun to pass up.” However, even while some fans might not know how a specific ritual started or what it means, they are still an important part of their trip, that negatively affect a trip when skipped. One important function of these rituals is that they create symbolic order, transforming space and time from a mundane moment to a sacred moment. Rituals help order the world into the sacred and the profane.

One example of a ritual without obvious symbolism can be found within ride rituals. These can include getting fast-passes in a particular order when entering the park, making sure that certain rides are accomplished, riding something a certain number of times, or riding something at a specific time. For example, Nick always rides Haunted Mansion as the first ride of the trip. Haunted Mansion is his favorite ride, and he views it as a positive way to start out his trip. Similarly, Tom notes that the last ride of the day

always has to be Spaceship Earth. Tom chooses to ride Spaceship Earth last because it is close to the exit. This ritual was begun spontaneously, but Tom has decided to continue the ritual. For both Nick and Tom, riding these rides at specific times is an important part of their trip.

Another example of a ride ritual was mentioned by Anna, who practices this ritual with different members of her family, including her husband and her brother. Anna notes:

We have to go to Magic Kingdom first. We didn't do that on the last trip and it totally messed me and my brother up ... We also have to ride the Tomorrowland Transit Authority first. It's a weird ride, I know, to want to ride first. But, it's just what we do as a family.

Anna's experience on her last trip to Disney World demonstrates what happens when fans deviate from their rituals. Even while the Tomorrowland Transit Authority is not Anna's favorite ride, it is a ritual that has continued for many years and is shared by all members of her family. When Anna's family was not able to complete their usual ritual, it negatively impacted the rest of their visit. Even while the Tomorrowland Transit Authority does not hold any particular symbolism for Anna and her family, it serves as a sort of good luck charm to start the trip. These examples demonstrate how fans use rituals to order time and space, choosing to complete certain acts in a routinized fashion, from visit to visit. By completing these rituals fans create a sacred moment and a sacred space, transforming the world around them.

While some fans enjoy engaging in rituals relating to the order of specific rides, other fans engage in other sorts of rituals that have evolved over time. These rituals are reflective of the concept of play. Even while these acts lack some of the symbolism

found in other rituals, they are still rituals. Moreover, these routinized acts are repeated by groups and are frequently a site for community bonding. One example of this type of ritual is to point specific things out to other fans, such as Hidden Mickeys. For example, Ashley always tries to catch a glimpse of the Evil Queen in the window above Snow White. Also, Carol notes that when she is on a ride, she always liked to point out the Hidden Mickeys. She notes that a game has evolved between her and her best friend where they always point out the Hidden Mickeys they know of and search for new ones. When fans share information, such as the locations of Hidden Mickeys, they are passing on their collective knowledge onto other fans. In cases where the other members of the group are already aware of the information, it is a fun way to spot something that most other guests do not know. By pointing out the information to each other they are able to confirm and demonstrate their knowledge of Disney history and trivia.

Several fans also noted rituals that are demonstrations of skill. In these ritual games, fans compete against one another to accomplish a certain goal, such as getting a coin in a cup. In some cases, these demonstrations of skill may go against the expressed wishes of the Disney Company. As Ashley notes,

For about thirty years my friends and I would throw pennies into the tin can that a pirate is holding on Pirates of the Caribbean in the jail sequence... I think it started in high school on a dare. Like, 'hey I bet you can't get a coin in that moving tin cup'. I stopped doing the tin can about 7 or 8 years ago. Sometimes they would yell at us over the microphone on the ride 'Please don't throw anything at the pirates'

Ashley's ritual of throwing the pennies into the tin can is notable for several reasons. Firstly, the ritual spanned about thirty years, even though Ashley couldn't think of any symbolism behind the ritual. Secondly, even while it started as a mere dare, the ritual of throwing the penny into the tin cup still brought the small community of friends together, designating the penny throwers as part of a group. It is also interesting to note that this ritual continued despite attempts by the Disney Company to stop it, such as ride operators ordering them to stop their antics. This demonstrates a ritual of resistance by Disney fans, to continue their antics despite the demands of Disney, the object of their fandom.

The tossing of change into wishing wells, bodies of water, and smaller targets at the Disney parks is far from unusual. During my last few visits to Disneyland, I have seen coins (primarily pennies) in the body of water in the Big Thunder queue, the Snow White Wishing Well, and in covering the floors and cups in the dungeon in the queue for the Snow White ride. The large amount of change covering the bottoms of these areas suggests similar rituals of tossing coins among fans. Billy notes that he has seen many fans tossing pennies to make wishes in the past and that this is a ritual that he engages in regularly:

When I am in line for the Snow White ride, my girlfriend and I try to toss change into the cups in the dungeon. We never make it into the cup, and the change always lands on the floor; however, we always try if we have any change. I do make sure to hold on to the quarters, and fling in the less useful (but equally as wish-granting) nickels and pennies.

While Ashley classified tossing change into the tin cup as a test of skill, the cups and bowls of various sizes in the Snow White dungeon offer a similar place to test the skills

of Disney fans. However, as Billy notes that even while he and his girlfriend generally do not succeed, they continue to try. In addition to labeling the tossing of pennies as a test of skill, Billy also notes that the ritual includes playfully making a wish that might come true if he succeeds in making the change into the cup.

These rituals demonstrate how elements of play persist in modern society and in fan communities. According to Turner, as far as individuals or a community regard themselves as masters of ritual and liturgy, they have the authority to introduce elements of novelty into ritual customs (1982: 31). Even while the fans in these examples may not be masters of ritual in general, they are the masters or creators of these rituals. Traditional examples of this play, which Turner (1982) labels ludic, might include joking relationships, sacred games, mock ideals, holy fooling, and clowning. However, even while ludic rituals contain elements of play, they are still connected to the sacred and have purpose. As Turner (1982) notes, play is in earnest, as performing symbolic actions and manipulating symbolic objects promote the well-being of the community or individuals, whether through increased fertility, successful raiding, or good crops. The examples of ritual in the park, demonstrated in this chapter reflect Turner's definition of ludic ritual, where individuals have the ability to introduce novelty into ritual customs. Even while it seems like these rituals may not have a purpose, a simplistic one exists. Just as ludic actions for Turner were designed to alter the outcome of events in a favorable way, Disney fans complete these games of skill and luck in order to alter the outcome of their future. The most frequent example of this in the park is the tossing of pennies into cups for good luck or to make a wish. This is reflective of the Disney ideal that if you wish, dreams can come true.

Disney Holiday Rituals

Disney traditions cover a wide variety of types of rituals, including eating food, wearing certain clothing, getting ready for a trip, or enjoying certain parts of the park in a particular order. However, for some fans, Disney rituals are intertwined with other types of rituals, and are sometimes linked to specific times of year, such as the winter holiday season. These times of year, which usually have their own rich rituals, also encourage Disney rituals. One ritual that Tessa notes is watching Disney movies on New Year's Eve; "We stay at home and all the kids try and make it here and we just watch our favorites or like this year the latest one out and have family time." For Tessa, watching Disney movies on New Year's Eve is a way for the family to come together. While Tessa noted in her interview that the ritual started while the children lived at home, as the children have grown, they continue to try and make it to Tessa's home to share in the ritual. For the evening, they stay up watching their favorites, creating new memories, and bonding together. In this case, the ritual does not take place in the park, but rather is part of a larger New Year's Disney ritual.

While many different holidays are celebrated during Disney rituals, one of the most common holiday tie-ins that was mentioned was the Christmas season. For example, both Andrea and Anna note the importance of the family ritual of buying an ornament each year. As Anna notes,

Now since me and my husband have been going, we also buy a [Christmas] ornament from the resort we stay in and a pin for the year that we visited. So far, we have 2008 and 2009. And the Christmas ornament and pin was a thing my

husband wanted to do. As a kid, his family would get ornaments for each kid during the year and he wanted something special for us to say "we're now our own family."

Andrea notes a similar ritual that she is continuing with her partner:

My partner and I now always buy a new Christmas ornament every year. I think they somehow connect me with my childhood and all the wonderful memories of Disneyland as a little one. I also remember the trips that we bought them and the new tradition I now have with my partner.

For both Andrea and Anna, the ritual of buying a Christmas ornament each year at Disneyland was a family ritual that they chose to carry on with their own families as they got older. For Andrea, she remembers the childhood trips when the ornaments were bought, and this translates into her choosing to continue the ritual with her partner. In contrast, it was Anna's husband that suggested that they carry on the ritual in his family where the children would get their own ornaments each year. The ritual of buying a Christmas ornament not only gives the family something to remember the trip by, but also cements for each of the women that the couples are members of a family. Just as Andrea's family bought ornaments with her family when she was a child, the ritual is being passed onto her own children.

Andrea notes that in addition to the Christmas ritual of buying an ornament, her family always chooses to visit Disneyland at Christmas time: "My friend and I always took the kids when they were young and now my partner and I carry on that ritual. The Christmas ritual started because the park is so beautifully decorated at that time. Going to Disneyland was our official beginning of the Christmas season." Even while the ritual

of visiting at Christmas began singularly, like other forms of ritual, it does not have any less meaning. Andrea chose to return each year for Christmas because it was decorated beautifully, but since the ritual has begun, the yearly trip is now considered a necessary start to the Christmas season.

These rituals demonstrate how Disney rituals can become intertwined with more common holiday rituals. Rather than taking on the meanings associated with churchly aspects of these holidays, fans choose to focus on family-oriented rituals, such as gathering together or collecting ornaments for a Christmas tree. In each of these cases, these rituals build solidarity among family and friends by creating shared experiences and collective effervescence.

Conclusion

The Disney parks are a special place for guests, filled with symbols and meaning. The parks allow many fans and guests to temporarily suspend disbelief for the duration of their visit to enter a world of fantasy and magic. One important example of this is the singularity of Disney characters. Disney maintains (to anyone who asks) that there is only one Mickey and one Minnie. However, even while most fans are aware that Mickey Mouse is really a human in a Mickey suit, they allow Disney to mislead them. When guests go up to hug Mickey, they allow the illusion to remain in place and greet “Mickey” like an old friend. If Disney fans were unwilling to suspend this disbelief, and instead viewed characters as actors in costumes, Disney would seem much more mundane. No one wants to pay to be hugged by a stranger in a dog costume, but people will gladly line up to meet Pluto. While in Disneyland, fans are not only immersed in

“magic”; they are also set apart from the profane world outside. As Disney functions as a sacred place, fans must prepare themselves to enter, both through ritual and by passing barriers. Once inside the park, rituals mediate the fan’s relationship to the parks.

However, even while Disneyland has sacred elements, I would argue that the park is merely a totem; a physical representation of something that is held by fans in higher esteem. I would suggest that the Disney parks are a site of pilgrimage and a totem; a physical representation of Walt Disney. I would argue this for several reasons. Firstly, even while Disneyland and the other Disney parks are the common link between the majority of the rituals that are performed by Disney fans, each is still a physical object with consequent impairments and profanations. Disneyland has many different sacred elements, but at the same time, it still retains profane elements and imperfections, such as construction, trash, and broken elements. Even while fans reverently discuss their visits to the parks and visit frequently, they also point out many things that they dislike, where the magic is ruined. In contrast, even while fans could not point out a single symbol that had any great meaning for them, fans frequently agreed on Mickey Mouse and the Disney parks, two of Walt Disney’s creations. Finally, most fans mentioned Walt Disney during their interviews. Disney was always mentioned in a positive light, and fans described Walt Disney as smart, creative, innovative, and hardworking; ideals that Disney fans seek to emulate. As Kim notes, “I just like what Disney represents and admire Walt Disney for his creativeness and ingenuity. I think he was one of a kind and in turn created theme parks that are one of a kind as well.” While Walt Disney was mentioned with regard to many of the urban legends and history discussed during the interviews, not a single fan mentioned a negative thing about the founder of the company.

These arguments are not to suggest that Walt Disney is considered a god or that fans worship him. Instead, what I argue is that Walt Disney is highly respected by fans and is considered sacred in some respects. As Durkheim (2001) notes, in many ways, the simple deference that men of high social standing inspire is similar to religious respect. From the Disney coat of arms on Sleeping Beauty's Castle to the Walt and Mickey Partners statue in the center of Disneyland, Walt Disney has been immortalized in the park.

The rituals that have been discussed in this chapter cover a broad spectrum of activities and meanings. While some Disney rituals are tied to other holidays, some are a means of remembering important parts in the fans' lives, enjoying food, or preparing for trips to the park. In many cases, rituals may not have any apparent meaning and may instead take the form of a game of skill. However, even while a fan's reasons for engaging in a specific ritual, or the meaning they get from these rituals, may vary, each of these rituals share similar functions. Firstly, all of the rituals discussed in this chapter demonstrate different ways that fans mediate their relationship with something sacred. From preparation rituals that prepare fans for their encounters to holiday rituals meant to bring families together, each of these rituals allows fans to interact with the sacred in their own ways. Secondly, rituals are fun ways for fans to share positive experiences with friends and family. The rituals that fans engage in are a way for fans to energize participants in the ritual and increase the fans' identification with shared symbols, such as Mickey Mouse, a particular attraction, or the Disney parks themselves. In addition, group participation in Disney rituals intensifies connections among participants and the

Disney fan communities. These rituals created “shared meanings” and memories that unite participants as part of a cohesive group.

¹Symbols are quite simply something that represents something else.

² For the remainder of this paper, I will be using the term “ritual” to define these acts. Even while fans referred to them as traditions, they more closely fit the definition of ritual.

CHAPTER 5: A FAN LIKE NO OTHER

DEFINING DISNEY FANS

Introduction

In the previous chapters, I have attempted to explain how Disney fans create community. Disney fans engage in a variety of activities related to their Disney fandom, and regularly interact with one another online. These online fan communities serve as the primary structure of the Disney fan community, storing a virtual wealth of history, trivia, and lore online, where all Disney fans are able to access it. The relationships that are formed online and at fan gatherings combine to create strong support networks that have assisted many fans during times of need, and introduce new friendships.

The Sociological Significance of Disney Fan Identity

This chapter attempts to examine what the appeal of Disney is for fans. It explores why some individuals have chosen to become Disney fans rather than simply guests, and how their experiences in the park help define their identity. Rather than simply defining themselves based on liking Mickey or Minnie, many Disney fans have carefully constructed their identity based on difficult life experiences and how they relate to Disney on a deeper level.

Proponents of critical theory would argue that Disney culture is simply a creation of the culture industry created for profit. This paper does not dispute that the Disney Company is a for-profit enterprise aimed at drawing in larger crowds. Instead, what this chapter argues is that despite these profit-seeking goals, Disney fans have formed a deep

emotional attachment to characters, their stories, and the Disney theme parks that forms a valid identity. It may be true that Simba from the Lion King was created to sell movie tickets (and that the movie fulfills a false need), but this does not mean that fans cannot draw inspiration from these stories. The ideals in these stories have become the ideals of the community that give individuals hope in hard times and encourage friendship and community, no matter for what reason they were created. Just as Disney fans use Disney to look towards the future in difficult times, they also use the Disney parks and movies to help remember the past and happier times.

This chapter also demonstrates how fans have evolved into critical consumers of Disney products. It is true that Disney fans eagerly wait for the next “big thing.” However, Disney fans have come to expect a certain level of quality from the Disney Company, and act as a sort of quality assurance. This shows a boundary between the sacred and the profane, where by fans seek to preserve the sacred aspects of the park. Rather than simply accepting whatever Disney puts out, Disney fans will boycott Disney or protest when they feel that Walt Disney’s ideals have been violated (Gracy 2004).

The Appeal of Disney

One appealing aspect of Disney with which fans can identify with is the characters, perhaps because to fans, these characters seem “real.” Disney characters are often the subjects of trials or tribulations. Losing one or both of their parents at a young age, some Disney heroes are forced to battle villains for their lives or the lives of others. Rather than backing down, these characters display courage, intelligence, and honesty in the face of adversity, sometimes undergoing radical transformations in the process. For

many fans, their favorite Disney characters are not only interesting or fun; they are someone that fans can relate or look up to.

Marie has a strong attachment to Daisy Duck; this attachment, she explains, originally came through Donald Duck. However, as Marie got to know Daisy, she found that “she was a 'woman' I could relate to. She was saucy and she wasn't a doormat and she wore a big bow and poofy sleeves and man can she accessorize.” Daisy appeals to Marie’s sense of fashion, with bows, “poofy” sleeves, and accessories, but Marie also relates to her on a personal level. Daisy is able to stand up to Donald Duck’s frequent temper tantrums without bowing under pressure. In addition, Marie appreciates Daisy’s “saucy” attitude. Marie also notes that she identifies with the story of Cinderella, “Her story is so romantic and you want to be her, you want to overcome you [sic] humble beginnings and find happily ever after. Her dress and tiara also don’t hurt her appeal.” Marie appreciates Daisy and Cinderella for many of the same reasons. For instance, she enjoys their sense of fashion and likes to find ways to incorporate them into her own wardrobe. Marie also identifies with Cinderella’s story of overcoming humble beginnings. Like many people, Marie finds hope in Cinderella’s story for finding her own romantic partner and being able to improve her situation.

While Marie enjoys Daisy’s saucy attitude and Cinderella’s ability to overcome her humble beginnings, Mark is impacted by the story of Simba in “The Lion King”:

The Lion King really impacted me because I lost my father at a very young age also. And I looked for him in the sky all the time when I was a child. I don't want to tear up too much. It just really impacted me because I could relate and believe that my dad

lives in me and that I will be okay. Whenever things are not going my way, I just say ‘Hakuna Matata’ and keep going.

For Mark, the story of “The Lion King” impacted him, because like Simba, he lost his father at a very young age. However, Mark does not just simply identify with the movie; he takes inspiration from its message. Rather than mourning how his father was gone from his life, Mark followed Simba’s example and looked towards the stars or within himself to find his father. This helped Mark connect with his father and feel better about a tragic situation. In addition, Mark uses the motto of “Hakuna Matata” to overcome other bad situations. Just like the inspiration he draws from Simba, Mark has learned from the movie to focus on the positives and not be bothered by bad situations. By identifying with Simba, Mark was able to improve his life. The stories of Mark and Marie both demonstrate how the ideals transmitted in a Disney film can impact an individual’s life. Even while many of these attachments are individualistic, they demonstrate how some of the ideals that Disney fans share have come to be. While Mark may have a personal connection to Simba, it is a connection that other fans may have as well, and gives them an ideal they can share and a subject that can discuss.

Another important part of the Disney appeal for many fans is the consistent high level of detail found in movies, television shows, and theme parks. Movies are aesthetically pleasing and carefully inked, with the animation containing a high number of cells per second. Movies also contain Easter Eggs (hidden details), including characters from previous movies, references to A113 (a classroom in CalArts used by many Pixar animators¹), and clues to future movies. For example, the bedroom scene in Pixar’s “Up” includes a hand-drawn picture of Dug (the dog) and Kevin (the bird) from

the titular film (Scrietta 2009). Also in this scene: flowers from the film “Monsters Inc” are painted on the wall, an iconic ball from the short film “Luxo Jr” is seen on the floor, and a stuffed Lotso sits on the floor next to the girl’s bed (Scrietta 2009). In this four-second scene, there are Easter Eggs alluding to past movies and short films. We are also given a brief glimpse of characters not yet introduced in the story, and a hidden new character for “Toy Story 3.”

Just as Disney and Pixar movies have high levels of details and hidden Easter Eggs, many Disney rides and attractions feature similar design elements. From Easter Eggs to forced perspective, many fans appreciate the level of architectural detail found in the parks. One example, Aurora points out, is the use of forced perspective on Main Street. Aurora argues that these details not only create a more immersive experience, but also help her appreciate the level of effort and detail put into the parks. Anna comments, “Every little detail had a reason behind it. Like the color on Tower of Terror was made to match the Morocco tower so it could blend into the skyline of Epcot. It’s things like that that really make me appreciate the hard work that went into the parks and their creation.” Brian explains that most people aren’t often aware of the level of detail found in Disney parks. From the ways that trash cans change their designs in different lands to cast costumes, many fans enjoy noticing small details and the way they come together. As Andrea notes, one of her favorite things about Disneyland is “the amazing authenticity and originality of each ride. I really love the details that each ride contains from the costumes of the worker to the tiniest details of paint, plants, etc.” Andrea and Anna are not simply interested in which attractions are in a land or how the lands are generally themed, they are concerned with minute details such as the stitching on the costumes and

how colors are blended along sky lines. For many fans, noticing these small details is not simply a way of demonstrating “insider knowledge”; it is also a part of the identity of being a Disney fan. Carol argues, “As a fan I know all the trivial details and stories associated with Disney... They provide an additional layer to my experiences in the parks.”

One thing that all of the interviews shared was that all of the fans grew up with Disney in one way or another. From watching Saturday morning Disney cartoons as a child to annual family trips to the Disney parks, many individuals in modern society are exposed to Disney at a young age. For example, Tess notes that her family would gather together on Sunday nights to watch the Disney channel. Marissa notes that her early exposure to Disney movies has affected the way that she sees the world, “Growing up Disney means you grow up with [Disney’s] changes, and it becomes engrained into you. You learn from a Disney character’s mistakes, lessons and the always happy ending for that endearing good guy.” Many fans also argued that their favorite characters are from movies that they saw growing up as a child, such as Mark’s connection to Simba or Marie’s connection to some of the Disney princesses. For these fans, the connections that form are based on life experiences similar to those of the characters, but frequently continue into adulthood.

Other fans note that while they feel connected to the Disney stories they heard as a child, a seemingly more important factor was early Disneyland visits. Of the fans interviewed, nineteen of the twenty-five fans noted that the earliest Disney experience that they could remember occurred in the parks. Even while many of the fans had earlier Disney experiences, it was difficult for them to remember a movie, a show, or a stuffed

toy. The immersive trips to Disneyland were easier to remember, and in many cases altered how they would later view the Disney parks as an adult. Examples of this are fond memories of a specific ride or attraction, or the memory of interacting with a specific character in the parks. For example, Noel remembers the Main Street Electrical Parade and the distinct smell of Pirates of the Caribbean ride: “The Pirates of the Caribbean ride it’s so distinct that even catching a whiff similar anywhere I go, triggers thoughts of the ride itself.”

One of the most important aspects of being a Disney fan is how Disney and the Disney parks make them feel carefree or childlike. For many fans that are stressed over money and other worries, Disney allows them to temporarily forget their worries and simply enjoy themselves for the day. Hannah notes that the Disney parks allow fans to relax and turn back time to a younger and more carefree time; “I think just the fact that we all turn into someone else. Walk into any park and become younger and less stressed.” For Hannah, it is the feeling of walking into the park and feeling her worries temporarily disappear that appeals to her more than any attraction or show. Alice, Andrea, and Nicky note that the parks have a similar effect on them, allowing them to temporarily escape everyday stresses into a world of fantasy. Andrea argues:

A place that you can go and forget about everything in the ‘real’ world. A place that memories can be made and relived. A place where it’s ok to be goofy or silly and totally give in to the ‘little girl’ inside.

Some fans explicitly define their experiences with Disney as a form of escapism. As Brian notes,

The parks (and the movies and many other things people like) offer a way to get away from the stresses and the problems of the world for a while. Some people take something to forget their troubles and enjoy themselves for a while. In my case, I do it by going to the parks and having some fun. I know it's a temporary escape, and that's fine - I can deal with all the trouble in the world a little better after I get back.

When fans, like Brian, enter the Disney parks, hoping to leave their problems at the gate for the day, they are aware that when they re-emerge that the problems will still be there. Fans who enter the Disney parks are not seeking a permanent escape, but rather a happy day that will lead them to a more positive frame of mind. As Kim notes, “Not to sound cliché, but for me [Disneyland] really is the happiest place on earth.” While on Disney property or watching a movie, Disney helps fans forget about their adult worries, such as taxes or health problems, and relive fond memories of the past. This in turn, many of the fans argued, helps them face their challenges with a more positive frame of mind. This emphasis on escapism is not unexpected. Walt Disney designed Disneyland to be immersive, an escape from the outside world; and the Walt Disney Company has capitalized on this, marketing Disneyland as the “Happiest Place on Earth.”

For many fans, Disney not only makes them feel like a kid again; it brings back specific memories of when they were a child. One example of this yearning for the past is found in Mark’s memories of the Electrical Parade,

It is not there all the time but when I do see it I am instantly transported back to the first time I saw it when I was 10 years old. As soon as I hear the music, I get nostalgic, I get goose bumps and my eyes start to water. I remember the times my

mom took me as a kid and how amazed I was to see that parade and it was always the last thing we did before leaving the park.

For Mark, the Electrical Parade is a reminder of the times that he was able to spend with his mother when he was a child. The Electrical Parade is not simply a happy memory; it is a reminder of a happier time when Mark and his mother were able to spend time together. Aurora notes that the park similarly reminds her of the time that she spent in the park with her now deceased mother, “My mother passed away 15 years ago but always went to Disney with my family right up until a year before she died. So much there reminds me of her.”

Fans also use the parks, movies, and television shows as a way to remember and lament their lost childhood. For example, Billy explains that he has *Talespin* and *Duck Tales* on DVD: “I was raised on Disney cartoons and toys, so I feel a special kind of nostalgia when re-visiting these mediums.” Anna notes that old Disney channel shows and movies has a similar effect on her memories of her childhood,

I think about watching Kids Incorporated on the Disney Channel (when the Disney Channel was cool), I think about how cool Disney cartoons were (like I was singing the Gummi Bears theme song the other day nonstop). It just makes me feel young and remember a time when I had no worries.

Just as old television shows such as the Gummi Bears can trigger older memories in fans, so can experiences in the Disney parks. Just as Noel notes that smelling things similar to Pirates of the Caribbean triggers memories of her favorite rides, other things in the Disney parks, such as shows, attractions, music, and other smells, can trigger feelings and memories. One particularly effective tactic used by Disney to create nostalgia in guests is

the use of music. As Carson (2004) notes, when entering the park, the guest is continually bombarded by musical events that simultaneously refer to older Disney memories and create new ones. Examples of music used within the parks include “piped in” background music for lands and attractions, live music by roving musicians or stage shows, and pre-recorded performances like Fantasmic and the fireworks shows (Carson 2004). One musical event that evokes memories and feelings for Andrea is the fireworks: “One of my favorite things as a kid was watching Tink fly before the fireworks. It makes me feel like that little girl that saw her 55 years ago. ‘I believe’.”

Disney fans and their memories demonstrate how memories can have an effect on perceptions of sacred objects. As discussed throughout this thesis, one of the most important distinguishing features of sacred places is that they can transport worshippers to a different time or place. For all of the Disney fans interviewed for this thesis, this was one of the most important parts of the Disney park’s appeal. From transporting fans to Never Never Land to meeting Davy Crockett in the Old West, the Disney parks represent a chance for fans to not only suspend disbelief, but to actively participate in play and make-believe. Just as important, however, is the park’s ability to invoke memories, transporting the fans not only into *the* past, but into *their* past.

Negative Aspects of Disney

Even while Disney fans are very positive about Disney, the theme parks, and the Disney fan community, they are aware that Disney has many dark or negative aspects. One of the most common complaints among female fans is that Disney princesses glorify traditional gender norms. Even while some princesses such as Tiana and Belle are

intelligent and focus on hard work to improve their own lives, many of the Disney princesses are not independent or action oriented. As Alice notes, “The only thing that really bothers me is that all the princesses need to be rescued by a prince.” Carol and Emily also note that many of the princesses conform to a “damsel in distress” gender role. As Carol notes, “Personally, I’ve never felt entirely offended or convinced by the whole princess theme, but I think that it’s gone into a whole new level of overkill in recent years.” One thing that each of these fans has in common is that they believe that the “damsel in distress” gender is outdated. In addition, they feel that Disney needs to release more movies with princesses as positive strong role models for young girls. As Emily notes, “The day Disney puts out a movie about two princes that fall in love we will know we have truly evolved. Disney films encourage little girls to be submissive and boys to be dominant.”

Another thing that Disney fans are critical of is the management of the Disney theme parks. Fans argue that the Disney parks are over-priced and lack a variety of food and merchandise. As Nicky notes, a water bottle costs three dollars². Just as Nicky is critical of the cost of basic food and water within the parks, Aurora is critical of the lack of variety and emphasis on merchandise in the park, “The shops that are at the end of every attraction and not enough variety in the merchandise. You can find almost the same stuff in every shop.” Tom is also critical of Disney’s concept of synergy, which fuses movies, the parks, and merchandising, “Their marketing schemes to make the most money off a single franchise sickens me. Their ‘synergy’ where they milk a franchise dry is what bothers me the most.”

Other fans note ways that they feel Disney is becoming more commercial and hierarchal. For example, Mike notes that he is upset that Disney is adding purchasable add-ons to things that used to be free, such as premium viewing for the Fantasmic shows. Mike argues, “Disney is creating a structure where wealthy guests can do more than average guests.” This is detrimental to many fans who are pass-holders, because they do not have extra money to pay for special seating on their visits. This stratification of fans is profane and values some fans (the ones with wealth) above others. In addition, this stratification goes against older Disney values that emphasize all customers are guests, worthy of equal treatment. While I was a cast member at Disneyland, this concept was something that was emphasized to all cast members. Cast members were not allowed to discriminate against guests for any reason and we were actively encouraged to create a “magical experience” for all guests; this emphasis on providing a magical experience was especially important for poorer families who were not able to return regularly or for whom the trip might be a once in a lifetime experience. In contrast, these purchasable add-ons, which limit the viewing capabilities of poorer fans creates an underclass, where fans are valued by how many add-ons they can purchase.

While some fans are concerned with money, other fans are concerned that the Disney parks are moving away from the traditional Disney Company way of doing things. For example, one Indiana Jones Ride thread on MiceChat has highlighted all of the different, broken effects on the ride. In all, fans categorized over eight special effects that were broken and then never fixed, including a falling rocks effect in Mara’s room and the cobra’s range of motion. Some fans also lament the lack of caring shown by Disney by not fixing the broken ride elements. As Darth Maul notes, “What happen to

Walt's rule about maintaining what you create?" (4/3/2011)³. Another example of fans' irreverent approach to Disney's troubles can be found in a thread discussing malfunctioning audio-animatronics (AA's). The thread, which includes a video posted by the author highlighting a pirate having a "seizure", attracted a wide range of responses, including Michael J. Fox jokes and stories of other AA's malfunctioning. Fan Pizzapants notes, "Too much flash photography. Will someone please think of the epileptic pirates?" (4/1/2011)⁴. This politically incorrect joke is a reference not only to the pirate's malfunction, but also to some guests' habit of using flash photography on dark rides where it is forbidden. These examples of threads demonstrate the irreverent attitudes of many fans where malfunctions are celebrated and in some cases are recorded. Even while Disney would prefer to keep the "magic" alive, fans such as the ones posting on these threads revel in Disney mistakes and use Disney's misfortune for comedic purposes. As such, fans' publicizing Disney's mistakes is a way for them to have fun and express their disapproval communally.

Other fans note that Disney has also abandoned many of its classic rides that are more expensive to operate. For example, Aurora notes, "There has been a move away from the attractions that were more expensive to operate. 20,000 Leagues was expensive to operate. It loaded slowly and used fuel, but at one time, Walt Disney's submarine fleet was larger than the USSR!" While Walt Disney's submarine fleet was a point of pride for the company, it too was a casualty of rising costs. Fans note that other rides such as Walt Disney World's Mr. Toad's ride, Horizons, Imagination, and the Wonders of Life have been other casualties in a war to cut costs and raise profits.

Fans are also concerned that as Disney parks have been suffering, so has Disney animation. In recent years, Disney is putting out fewer hand-drawn animation films and more films that utilize computer modeling. As Marie notes, “The biggest issue I have with Disney is that they have gone the way of Pixar and effectively killed 2D animation. I am a sucker for the old look, this digital animation looks like cartoons trying to be a movie.” Even while Marie appreciates Pixar movies, she notes that the computer modeling animation is a trait of Pixar and not Disney. Billy also notices that Disney has moved away from its traditional Saturday morning cartoons, “The Disney Channel gets on my nerves. Why they insist on playing pre-teen crap all the time is beyond me. Why do they assume Disney fans are 12 year old girls? Where are my classic Disney cartoons? Or movies? I don't care for any of the stuff that seems to plague that channel now.” Even while the Disney Channel still has a few hand-drawn cartoons such as *Phineas and Ferb*, fans note that like the Disney parks, there has been a declining standard.

According to Carol and Tom, the traditional standard held by many fans and cast members is “What Would Walt Do.” Defining Walt Disney’s lifetime as the golden age of Disney, many fans believe that the parks have slowly moved away from an emphasis on innovation and maintenance towards cutting costs. As Tom notes, “Ever since Walt had passed, and the rest were struggling to keep running the company ‘as Walt would have,’ they've been straying away further and further from where it would have been if Walt were still around.”

However, it is not only the Disney theme parks and the Disney Company that fans view negatively. For example, in their interviews, Tom, Billy, and Carol were critical of impolite Disney guests. Fans argue that impolite guests “ruin the magic” for others, such

as through flash photography or littering. Rather than suffering in silence, many fans have chosen to air their grievances on fan forums. One example of this is a site called “Stupid Guest Tricks” (SGT). Tom, who is a regular poster on the site notes, “The SGT is a forum for employees of theme parks, and those who frequent the parks who can sympathize with them. The employees rant/vent about the stupid things people do at the parks, amongst other random things to help relieve stress.” As it is considered highly inappropriate for a cast member to talk badly about guests, Stupid Guest Tricks is a way for cast members to discuss things that are not allowed on property. To preserve their anonymity, so as to not jeopardize their jobs, cast members only share their current hire status, the park they work in, and their general department. For example, one cast member described a situation where two teenage guests put their lives in danger to sneak into a close off area:

This has to win some sort of SG award or something. In all my years of working and playing at DL, I have NEVER EVER witness anything like what I witness tonight. I, and many CMs, came to witness two teenage SGs ducking under the rope in a closed off Fantasyland area..... DURING FIREWORKS..... LIVE FIREWORKS!!! Luckily, the pur [sic] horror and screaming of my fellow friend saw this, which alerted several CMs to go chasing after them to kick them out. Why in their right mind would they do into a very, and potential dangerous area with REAL LIVE FIREWORKS GOING OFF!!!! (DLRFantasmic!Dan 06/07/2011)⁵

Not only did the teenaged guests put their own health in danger, they also placed the cast members who had to chase after them in harm's way. Not only is this stupid, as the poster describes, it is also inconsiderate.

In addition to Stupid Guest Tricks, other threads have emerged with similar themes, including threads that discuss fans' Pet Peeves⁶ and another that discusses things that stupid guests have snuck⁷ into the park, such as alcohol, drugs, and even a dog in a baby stroller. These sites, like Disney deaths represent a chance for fans to ridicule or punish those who have crossed the boundary between the sacred and the profane.

Finally, some users not only criticize Disney for their perceived failures, but also encourage fans to engage in activities against Disney. One example of this is that in January of 2004, Disney fan sites including the Haunted Mansion Fan Club organized a protest against the Disney Company that included a boycott against the company and a black-out⁸ of Disney fan sites (Gracey 2004). The boycott and blackout were organized in support of Roy Disney and Imagineers who had resigned in protest of Michael Eisner's mismanagement of the company; demands included Eisner's resignation and the reinstatement of the imagineers and Roy Disney who had resigned. As an open letter to Michael Eisner and the Walt Disney Company stated,

We encourage Disney fans everywhere to join us in showing Mr. Eisner our dissatisfaction with his erosion of Uncle Walt's dream by refusing to visit Disney parks, purchasing Disney merchandise, or patronizing a Disney theater film for the month of January. We would also encourage Disney fans to write to Mr. Eisner demanding his resignation from the PUBLICLY TRADED Disney company ...Don't stand by as this man leads to ruin the dreams and memories of untold mil-

lions of people. Help take back OUR magical kingdom and restore what Walt created and gave to us. Enough is enough (Gracey 2004).

There are many things that are notable in the above quote. Firstly, the author of the open letter claims partial ownership of the Disney Company, as both a Disney fan and as a share holder in the company. As Gracey (2004) argues, fans need to band together to take back their magical kingdom and restore what Walt Disney gave to fans. The fans are not boycotting against the Walt Disney Company in general, but instead are protesting what they feel is its defamation and decline. In addition, the open letter functions as a call to action, encouraging fans to write letters demanding Eisner's resignation, boycott the Walt Disney Company, and blackout fan sites. Finally, it is important to note that the fans succeeded in their protest. On March 3, 2004, the board of the Walt Disney Company voted to strip CEO Michael Eisner of his role as chairman after forty-three percent of the shareholders voted to oppose his re-election to the board. While Eisner was able to keep his role as CEO, the positions of CEO and Chairman were separated and George Mitchell was elected to the role of chairman (La Monica 2004).

Another example of fan forums encouraging resistance is the "Return our Adventureres [sic] Club"⁹ thread, led by Master_Gracey. The thread is a revival of an older thread designed to put pressure on Disney to reestablish the Adventurer's Club in Walt Disney World. Using the secret motto of the club as a war chant¹⁰, the thread was a way for fans to share their experiences in the club and find ways to encourage its return. The thread sought to encourage resistance among fans by encouraging fans to flood specific Disney park blog entries with demands to return the club, positive memories about the club, and scorn for any plans that may build on the site. In addition to

encouraging comments on Disney's official blog, Master_Gracey also suggests other venues including a letter writing campaign and entering the "Let the Memories Begin" contest with Adventurer's Club memories. The campaign to reinstate the Adventurer's Club demonstrates the organizing power of fan forums as a site of resistance for fans. Not only did fans resist changes to the club by posting on blogs; participating fans also entered contests using Adventurer's Club information and through a letter-writing campaign that targeted Disney's top executives. The campaign is also notable because in many cases fans took Disney posts and repurposed them for their own uses. For example, in a Disney blog asking about favorite Disney couples, fans flooded the blog with comments about their favorite Adventurer's Club couples. Most importantly however, is the way in which fans rearticulated the Adventurer's Club war cry for use against the Disney Company. Despite fans' best efforts, the Adventurer's Club has not reopened, but fans continue to mobilize their efforts.

Similar campaigns have been waged by Disney fans to preserve other attractions such as Walt Disney World's Carousel of Progress¹¹ and the Enchanted Tiki Room. When rumors circulated in 2011 that the Carousel of Progress was going to be closed, fans organized a letter-writing campaign and other protests to prevent the closure. In addition to writing letters and posting on Disney blogs, fans also visited the attraction in increased numbers to demonstrate to Disney that the ride was not outdated. A similar campaign was organized when the Enchanted Tiki Room in Walt Disney World was replaced by "Under New Management," a show that altered the traditional storyline. Fans expressed their disapproval by writing letters, boycotting the show, and posting negative comments (Blogging Disney)¹². Despite poor attendance, the "Under New

Management Show” continued until 2011, when a fire in the attic shut the show down permanently (Blogging Disney). Noticing a fresh chance to make their voices heard, fans restarted their campaign, using the fire to ridicule Disney’s poor taste in attractions and to urge a return of the old Enchanted Tiki Room. As DisneyKid1994 notes, “The Gods have been angered by this crappy replacement” (5/15/2011) ¹³. What is notable about the fire in the Enchanted Tiki Room and fan’s efforts to restore the original attraction is that they succeeded, and in August of 2011, the Enchanted Tiki Room re-opened in Walt Disney World.

Disney fans’ protests about aspects of Disney that they do not like are important for several reasons. Firstly, these criticisms are an opportunity for fans to think critically about the object of their fandom and express dissent. Rather than simply sitting back and accepting all changes made by the Disney Company, fans stress the importance of good workmanship, maintaining attractions, and producing quality goods. While some fans might argue that this is a form of resistance against the Disney Company, I would disagree. In each of the examples I found where fans are demonstrating signs of “resistance,” they are either benefitting the Disney Company or reaffirming its ideals. For example, protests in the park allow Disney to collect money for tickets and food. Efforts to demand improved maintenance or the return of a favorite ride reaffirm the company’s ideals. Instead, I would argue that these efforts by fans are not a form of resistance, but rather are an effort by fans to hold Disney to its founding ideals. Invoking the spirit of Walt Disney, these fans fight tooth and nail to see the return of some of his favorite attractions and ensure quality in future construction. By “resisting,” fans are

instead reasserting the boundaries between the sacred and the profane, demanding that the parks are a sacred place to be treated with the respect they feel it deserves.

What does it mean to you to be a Disney fan?

Many fans argue that being a Disney fan is very similar to being a fan of something else. Just like some sports fans like to attend Padres games, some Disney fans like Disneyland or Mickey Mouse. As Noel notes, “Being a Disney fan doesn't mean anything beyond it's one of the things I love and I can share it with the people I love. It just fits part of the puzzle.” Marie echoes this sentiment that being a fan is just part of her personality, “To me being a Disney fan is just what I am... it's a part of me.” For both Marie and Noel, being a Disney fan is simply a part of their identities as individuals, just like being female or a student. It is simply a small part of the picture about what defines them as individuals. In addition to being part of an identity, being a type of fan can be a hobby. Carol agrees that being a Disney fan is similar to other types of fandom, noting that “Other fans know all the trivial details and stories associated with their interests, and they also engage in creative ways.”

However, while some fans claim that being a Disney fan is similar to other types of fandom, the majority disagree. Fans argue that Disney fans are different from other fans for a variety of reasons. Fans argue that Disney is family friendly, which promotes Disney in families. In addition, fans argue that Disney fans are more passionate and that Disney fans form a cohesive fan community, with a rich history and shared values. Finally, Disney fans note that being a Disney fan can change an individual's life or how they see the world.

Fans argue that even while being a Disney fan can in some ways be similar to other types of fandom, Disney fans are, on average, more passionate than fans of something else. Brian argues that there are few things that these people are as passionate about as Disney,

There's something about experiencing Disney that seems to make for a lot of really passionate fans. There are people who enjoy Warner Brothers cartoons or Universal theme parks, but I've never really seen where there are communities of people that are as large or as devoted to those things as they are to things Disney. The closest I've ever seen to that level of passion is among Star Wars and Star Trek fans, but you have to remember that both of these fan communities have been around for a lot less time than Disney fandom.

While some fans are very passionate about other types of fandom, such as the *Harry Potter* series, *Twilight*, and music stars, Disney fandom tends to be more long-lived. All of the fans in this study have been fans of Disney since childhood. In contrast, many of these other forms of fandom fade over time. One important example of this are bands and music idols like the Backstreet Boys and Justin Bieber. This passion, however, is not only a personal interest. As Anna, Carol, Ricky, and Brian note, part of being a Disney fan is sharing this passion with others.

The Disney fan community leads fans to believe that being a Disney fan is unique. Fans argue that the Disney fan community is much more extensive than other types of fan groups. Disney fans meet at annual conventions, semi-annual events, and participate on a daily basis online. Some fans argue that in addition to the number of events held for

Disney fans, the community has a higher level of camaraderie than other types of fan communities that they have experienced. As Kiara notes, “It’s amazing how much camaraderie Disney fans have. It’s like being born in the same city or part of the country. Just tell someone you just went to Disneyland....and the conversation flows.” For Kiara, her Disney fandom is an instant way to connect with other fans through conversation and through shared identity. Kim notes that she has similar experiences meeting new people,

I think Disney fans have more of a camaraderie than other types of fans. I know when I meet another Disney fan, we have an instant connection and can talk for hours about our favorite Disney things. For example, there is a Doorway of Dreams (DVC membership store) at a mall near me. I can just be walking by and stop to look at the cast members pins as I go by and end up talking for an hour about Disney. A person who was a casual acquaintance of mine is now a good friend because we found out we had the ‘Disney Connection’. Now we get together frequently and talk about our trips and Disney experiences (among other things). I know every type of fan base has this to an extent. But, I think it is exceptional amount Disney fans.

Both Kim and Kiara note in their examples that many types of fans around the world share camaraderie in their individual fan communities. They also note that based on their experiences with other fan bases, the level of community and friendship is exceptional among the Disney fan community. For Kim and Kiara, being a Disney fan is not simply a shared interest; it is also a rapport that is difficult to find among other fan communities.

I would argue that many of the things that fans argued make Disney fans “unique” can be found in other fan communities. Many different fan communities have annual

conventions (such as E3 and ComiCon), and many fans communicate daily on online message boards. Similarly, many fans have a rapport with other fans with similar interests. These are all things that make fan communities important sites for study, that fans can build this camaraderie with individuals far different from themselves. The Disney fan community at its most basic level is still a fan community and it shares many similarities with other types of fan communities. However, even while being a Disney fan can be similar to being a fan of something else, there are some things that set it apart from other fan communities.

One potential way that being a Disney fan is different from other types of fandom is how Disney's ideals have the potential to shape lives. Disney movies have characters that overcome hardships, despite the odds stacked against them. Mark notes that even while he identifies as a "Trekkie," for him, Star Trek is primarily for entertainment purposes. While some Star Trek fans find inspiration in the series, Mark identifies Disney as more inspirational and educational, and notes that being a Disney fan has impacted the way he interacts with others:

[Star Trek is] all fantasy and I like escaping into world of space exploration and futuristic gadgets. The only thing I am going to get out of 2 klingons fighting is being entertained, especially since they have a distinctive way of fighting and a special weapon. I am not going to get a life lesson out of it. When I watch Pocahontas, I can relate to her struggle to choose the right path, which may not be the easy one or the one her parents/family want for her. It's not to say I am not entertained by Disney movies, but I get so much more out of it

These stories can inspire fans to believe in their dreams and be willing to fight for what they believe in. As Mark notes, part of being a Disney fan is being able to believe that anything is possible and that dreams come true. This belief, shared among Disney fans, is echoed in Mara's determination to finish the marathon on crutches, despite having surgery only six weeks before. Mark also notes that his experiences with Disney helped him when his father passed away when he was young. The Lion King helped Mark see that tragedy is a necessary part of life, and that he had the potential to preserve his father's memory. Disney fans also share specific values and a state of mind.

When asked what defined many Disney fans, fans responded that Disney fans share a sense of childlike excitement. As Emily notes, being a Disney fan is about becoming a fan of the story, "As a fan of Buffy I can't involve myself in the story. I can't go on a ride where I can slay a vampire. But I CAN go on a ride where I fly in the skies above Big Ben or go on a trip to Endor." However, being a Disney fan is not about visiting the parks and going on rides. Being a Disney fan is about believing in the magic. Whether it is taking a flight on the Starspeeder 1000 to the moon of Endor or meeting Mickey Mouse, Disney fans share a willingness to let go of adult responsibilities and embrace a world of fantasy and wonder. While some adults may regard a Disney character as a human in a Mickey Mouse suit, Disney fans see the character as THE Mickey Mouse. Hannah notes that as a Disney fan, "You have to be able to lose yourself in Disney and accept things that happen around you that create the magic that we all long for. It is magical if you let it, and once you let it you can't get enough of that magic." However, even while this form of escapism seems very idiosyncratic, it requires cooperation among guests, fans, and cast members to make these fantasies seem real.

While fans set off for the Moon of Endor in a Starspeeder, they take this adventure together. All of the fans take the same twists and turns, overcome the same obstacles and share in the same feeling of exhilaration. One fan expressing disbelief or alluding to the way that things work in a ride could ruin the magic for all of the other rides; thus, fans must suspend their disbelief not only for themselves, but also so that other fans may enjoy the experience.

Many fans associate this willingness to believe in magic as a childlike state of mind. Associating children with imagination, these fans note that being a Disney fan allows them to reconnect to their childhood. These fans note that part of being a Disney fan is to let go of adult concerns and enjoy the parks as if you are a child. Billy notes that part of being a Disney fan is being able to tap into his inner child: “Being a Disney fan means realizing that some things just never go out of style, and that you're never too old to enjoy a good time. ...I sing and dance without caring about who sees me, and I feel better.” Kim agrees with Billy that part of being a Disney fan is letting go of expectations for adults, and being able to act like a child for the day: “I find myself running up to characters to get my picture taken and just being less reserved than I am in the real world.” Even while Disney fans are able to let go and enjoy their childish impulses for the day, the Disney parks are a space where adults can indulge these fantasies. Mike notes the impact of Disney on his own life:

To me Disney addresses the little kid inside each of us. I'm not sure anything else returns you to your childhood... Disney has a certain magic about it. I am a HUGE Pittsburgh Steelers fan but if I was given the chance to go to a Steelers Football game (something I have never done) or go to Disney with my family I

would go to Disney. It addresses both your mind and body. The Body - via the thrill rides and the sights and sounds. The Mind - because it returns you to your childhood.

Finally, Disney fans are different from other types of fans because they possess a willingness to rebel against Disney or go against Disney's wishes. This is frequently seen on websites such as MiceChat, MousePlanet, and LaughingPlace, where Disney fans will violate Disney's privacy, such as sneaking backstage to get behind the scenes information. Many of the photos stored on these sites are of backstage or restricted areas, where a fan had to violate park rules in order to obtain and post the photos. Online, Disney fans also organize letter campaigns and other forms of protest to object to changes by Disney that the community disagrees with. In addition to these online forms of resistance, discussed earlier in this chapter, Disney fans have gone against Disney's policies in other ways. For example, despite the Disney's parks stringent no adult costumes policy, Ricky notes that he once wore an elaborate Haunted Mansion costume for his first trip to Disneyland:

When I first went to Disneyland, I wanted to do something 'special'. So I dressed up in my Ghost Host Halloween costume and walked around the park for most of the day. I didn't get caught, so don't worry. But I did have pictures from guests. But I only did it for one day. It was fun while it lasted. My favorite part of the day was that I was in Toontown, and a little girl's parents had asked for a picture, which I quickly agreed on. Then they asked for an autograph. This is where I used my limits and said that 'I only sign in invisible ink, so it cannot be done. I'm

sorry.’ But they were okay with it and said good-bye to me. That and a few ride-throughs of the Mansion doing his spiel were the highlights of the day.

In this example, Ricky notes that he violated Disney’s no adult costume policy to celebrate his first trip to Disneyland. Even while Ricky was aware of the policy, he still proceeded with his plan.

Other examples of fans going against Disney’s policies include the scattering of human remains (ashes) onto rides such as Pirates of the Caribbean and Haunted Mansion (Holguin 2007; Schoetz 2007; Lutz 2007). According to Holguin (2007), approximately two people per year come forward to ask Disney for permission to deposit ashes in the park, and Disney has always responded that it is strictly prohibited. Disney also notes that there is no evidence to suggest that ashes have been dumped in the Disney parks (Holguin 2007). However, despite Disney claims that ashes have not been scattered in the parks, evidence suggests otherwise (Schoetz 2007; Lutz 2007). Al Lutz (2007), the owner of MiceAge.com, one of the largest Disney fan portals, notes that people have been dumping ashes in the Disney parks, particularly the Haunted Mansion since the late 1990s. Even while many people are passionate about the object of their fandom, few organizations can say that fans’ remains have been snuck onto property to be laid to rest, against the expressed wishes of the company. Being laid to rest (permanently) at the site of your fandom requires a level of passion that few fans possess.

In each of these cases, it is important to know that the fans actively went against the Disney Company’s wishes. However, it is also important to note that these acts of resistance reaffirmed the ideals of the Disney community and of Walt Disney in many different ways. For example, Ricky’s Haunted Mansion costume, while violating

company policy was very much in the spirit of play and make-believe of the parks themselves. Even when Ricky had to refuse to give an autograph, because the girl thought he was a character, Ricky did it in a way that “preserved the magic.” In addition, while many individuals have scattered ashes in Disneyland against company policy, there has been a long standing tradition of permanently etching history into Disneyland. This can be seen in hidden Easter eggs that reference previous attractions, as well as the windows on Main Street that honor past Imagineers. Even while laying ashes to rest in Disney is extreme, it demonstrates how many fans view Disney as sacred enough to serve as a final resting place.

¹ The Walt Disney Company bought the Pixar Animation studios in 1996. Even while Pixar is frequently referenced independently, it is a part of the Disney Company, and is represented within the Disney parks. For example, Disneyland has the attraction “Nemo’s Submarine Voyage” and “Buzz Light Year Astro Blasters” which reference the *Finding Nemo* and *Toy Story* movies created by Pixar. Similarly, Disney’s California Adventure Theme Park has attractions that are based on the Pixar movies including *Monsters Inc.*, *Toy Story*, and *A Bug’s Life*.

² For a singular water bottle of a similar size, the approximate cost in the surrounding area is \$1.00 to \$1.70. If water bottles are purchased in bulk, their cost drops substantially.

³“Indiana Jones Broken Ride Elements.” *MiceChat.com*. WEBSITE. Retrieved April 21, 2011. <http://micechat.com/forums/disneyland-resort/151995-indiana-jones-broken-ride-elements-print.html?pp=50>

⁴The Most Hilarious Audio Animatronic Malfunction Ive ever seen!!! At Disneyland.” *MiceChat* WEBSITE. Retrieved April 12, 2011. <http://micechat.com/forums/disneyland-resort/151933-most-hilarious-audio-animatronic-malfunction-ive-ever-seen-disneyland-2-print.html>

⁵ “Why In The World Would You Go Into A Fireworks Fallout Area?!?!?!?”. *Stupid Guest Tricks* Website. Retrieved May 3, 2012. <http://stupidguesttricks.com/showthread.php?t=7543>

⁶“Pet Peeves.” *Laughing Place*. WEBSITE. <http://mousepad.mouseplanet.com/printthread.php?t=167534&pp=50>

⁷“Every seen something snuck into the park” *Laughing Place* WEBSITE. Retrieved April 20, 2011. <http://mousepad.mouseplanet.com/printthread.php?t=162557&pp=50&page=3>

⁸ The term blackout refers to when fans purposefully shut down their own sites in protest. This has been seen more recently when the sites Reddit and Google were opposing the SOPA Legislation in Congress.

⁹“Return our Adventureres Club.” *MiceChat* WEBSITE. Retrieved April 2, 2011.
<http://micechat.com/forums/walt-disney-world-resort/146724-return-our-adventureres-club-print.html?pp=50>

¹⁰“Some days you eat the mouse/Some days the mouse eats you. But never give into the mouse without a fight! KUNGALOOSH!”

¹¹ “Carousel of Progress.” *MousePlanet* WEBSITE. Retrieved October 5, 2011.
<http://mousepad.mouseplanet.com/showthread.php?3535-Carousel-of-Protest>

¹² “The Enchanted Tiki Room Revival.” *Blogging Disney*. WEBSITE. <http://disney-blog.com/2011/08/enchanted-tiki-room-revival/>

¹³ “The Enchanted Tiki Room.” *MiceChat* WEBSITE. Retrieved October 5, 2011.
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CONCLUSION

In 1929, Mickey and Minnie Mouse premiered in “Steamboat Willie,” heralding the dawn of the Disney Company. Mickey Mouse was not the first character to use sound, nor the first cartoon to be used in advertising, but he has spawned a multi-billion dollar empire that no other cartoon character has come close to reaching. Within the first year of Mickey Mouse’s premiere, fans began to organize fan clubs and collect Disney merchandise. Over time, these fan clubs and later fan forums have formed social networks and shared narratives. Disney fans are not merely fans who talk to one another online or in the parks; they are a complex community with gatherings, collective narratives, feelings of solidarity and even ideals.

Is being a Disney fan different from being any other sort of fan?

One of the most important questions considered in this thesis was if being a Disney fan is different from being any other kind of fan. Disney fans clearly felt that it was different, with twenty-three out of the twenty-five fans arguing that being a Disney fan is different from being a fan of anything else. This is interesting, because the majority of these fans stated that they were also a fan of something else, including Star Wars, Star Trek, sports teams, and television shows. Citing unique activities, high levels of camaraderie, and passion among Disney fans, these individuals argued that the Disney fan experience and identity was unique from other types of fandom that they had experienced.

However, many of these fans had difficulty articulating why Disney fans are different, and many of the reasons they listed do not stand up to scrutiny. For example,

fans from many different fan groups demonstrate creative skills, such as in art, fan fiction, and music. Fan fiction, for example, can be found for virtually every fiction book, movie, comic, or television show. A search of the popular fan fiction site, Fanfiction.net, yielded nearly 2.5 million stories from thousands of different fandoms, including television shows, books, comics, and movies (February 19, 2012).

Just as other fandoms demonstrate creative skills, many of the activities that participants claimed made Disney fans unique, such as fan forums, gatherings, and conventions, are found in other fan groups. For example, fan conventions occur annually for Monty Python (Sharp 2006) and more popular fandoms may even boast several conventions a year, such as Star Trek (TrekNews 2011) and Harry Potter (PotterCon; LeakyCon). On a more regular basis, fans are able to gather on forums for websites devoted to their fandom and at local gatherings such as meetup groups. These gatherings allow fans to build solidarity with other individuals in their particular fandom, just as the participants in this study argued that Disney fans share. Just as Disney fans demonstrate camaraderie and feelings of connectedness, many other fan communities demonstrate solidarity among their members, such as sports fans and Star Trek fans, frequently labeled as Trekkies or as many prefer Trekkers.

Finally, many fans argued that Disney fans are “different” because they engage in activities that they considered forms of “resistance.” However, resistance among fans is not unique to Disney fans. For example, in 1968, Star Trek fans staged a protest when NBC threatened to cancel Star Trek (Boucher 2008). In addition, as discussed in Chapter 5 with the boycott of “The Enchanted Tiki Room: Under New Management” these activities are not so much an example of resistance, as much as efforts by fans to

make their voices heard and preserve traditional aspects of fandom. This is also demonstrated when in 2004, Disney shareholders led by Roy E Disney voted to remove Michael Eisner as chairman, arguing that he was destructive to the Disney Company.

However, even while Disney fans are in many ways similar to other types of fans, there are ways that Disney fans are different. The first way that Disney fans are different from other types of fans is through the extraordinary fan activities that Disney fans participate in, such as pin trading, theme days, and runDisney Marathons. Even while many different types of activities for fans exist, such as fan fiction and fan art mentioned earlier in this chapter, Disney fandom is different due to the wide variety of activities available to Disney fans and the ways that these activities allow fans to engage with the object of their fandom. Like fan activities found among Star Trek fans and Harry Potter Fans, these activities allow fans to show support for one another and build solidarity. These activities are chance for fans to reaffirm their identity and demonstrate their “insider status” to other fans. Just the concept of these activities alone does not make Disney fandom unique, but rather they allow fans to mediate the boundaries of the sacred and profane with regard to their fandom. Fans are able to mediate this boundary due to one crucial thing that sets Disney apart from other fandoms, the Disney theme parks.

The Disney theme parks are crucial to the study of Disney fandom because they provide a physical sacred space for Disney fans to travel to and interact with. Even while some fandoms may have mythical places that fans consider sacred or central to their experience, such as the Star Ship Enterprise, many of these places do not exist physically. Star Trek fans may be able to see the Enterprise on television, visit a museum of props, or in rare cases visit the set of a particular episode or movie. However, fans are not able to

physically board the ship and then travel with the Enterprise to explore a new planet; they are only able to imagine what it would be like. Whatever sacred space a fan is able to interact with is a two-dimensional set, where the “real world” is readily apparent to separate the space from reality. Simply be looking to the right or the left, a fan on a television set can see wires and cameras, demonstrating the mundane aspects of these spaces. In cases where physical spaces exist for fans such as stadiums or monuments, these physical locations often lack interactive elements. For example, sports fans are not permitted to go down onto the baseball field or enter a team’s locker room. The game may last for only a few hours and during this time, fans are spectators, watching the game rather than actively participating. In contrast, Disney fans are able to travel to familiar worlds and physically enter new adventures. Disney fans are not merely watching a movie on screen or looking out over a two dimensional set; in the parks, they are completely surrounded and cut off from the outside world. If a Disney fan wants to travel from the Temple of Doom to Big Thunder Ranch, they can walk there along paths and control their own adventure. Even while, like a Star Trek set, the backstage exists, this mundane space is successfully hidden from fans, maintaining its extraordinary or sacred nature. This separation from the outside world and control over their own destiny makes the Disney sacred spaces more convincing than many of their counterparts. The only similar space that comes to mind with similar properties is the relatively new “Wizards World of Harry Potter” in Orlando, Florida. However, this park is much smaller than any of the theme parks, more limited in its offerings, and has a more narrow appeal, targeting fans of a specific book series. Due to its relatively young age, the

Wizarding World of Harry Potter also lacks the history and folklore typically found in the Disney parks.

The Disney parks are also extraordinary in their emphasis on history and folklore. From cast members hanging an Eeyore sign in the Temple of Doom to remember the bulldozed Eeyore parking lot to fan pages such as Yesterland¹, Disney fans seek to preserve the history of the parks in extraordinary ways. Even while all physical spaces might have a history, and many of them have folklore attached, such as Jimmy Hoffa being buried underneath the Giants Stadium (CBS News 2010), Disney parks history and folklore is extensive. From Disney Deaths to Hidden Mickeys, the intricate web of folklore and history surrounding the Disney parks can fill volumes and act as narratives that connect Disney fans together. In addition, the Disney parks are physical spaces that do not only have their own history, but that have also contributed to the history of the world. Diplomats, presidents, and Hollywood stars have all visited the Disney parks. The history of Walt Disney and his relationship to the parks is particularly important for many of the fans in this project. These fans expressed their preference for Disneyland to Walt Disney World, not only because it is the original, but because they have the chance to walk in Walt's footsteps. Knowing the Walt Disney walked down Main Street USA, the same street they were on, and supervised the construction of the park made it more special. Rather than being unique, this emphasis on history and folklore sets the parks apart as extraordinary.

Even while the above mentioned differences make the Disney parks different or extraordinary, one thing that sets the Disney parks apart is their function as a sacred space. The Disney parks serve as a sacred space in two ways: as a site of pilgrimage and

as a place of ritual. Firstly, as discussed in Chapter 4, the Disney parks serve as a site of pilgrimage for many fans, where visitors must pass through certain symbolic, cultural, and even economic barriers to enter. As fans enter, they are immediately immersed in a world of symbols, ritual, and play that is set apart from the mundane outside world. Like other areas of pilgrimage, Disneyland and the other Disney parks are sites of common activities (sometimes conducted en masse), such as theme days, Disney pin trading, and runDisney marathons. Activities such as pin trading and gathering to take photos on theme days provide times for fans to interact together and with the parks. As a site of pilgrimage, the Disney parks also have myths and other narratives attached to them, which are common knowledge among fans. In turn, these myths are evoked through the rituals that fans complete, such as by pointing out the Eeyore parking sign in the Temple of Doom, in order to preserve the history and memory of the land. In addition to the different forms of play that Disney fans engage in en masse, Disney fans also participate in ritual and engage with the sacred on a smaller scale or a more personal level.

This is not to say that Disney is the only fandom with religious elements or that can be identified as quasi religious. Star Wars, Star Trek, and the Lord of the Ring trilogies all have values that are shared among members of their fandom, including shared religious symbols, folklore, and hope for a brighter future. In fact, Star Wars has even spawned an entire religion (Jedi Church; Temple of the Jedi Order). However, even while the Disney parks have not spawned their own religion, the parks set Disney fandom apart. One cannot simply walk into Mordor, and there is no physical space for followers of Star Trek, Star Wars, or Lord of the Rings to engage in ritual.

The Disney parks allow fans to interact with the sacred space and to participate in the sharing and forming of narratives. These rituals are a way for fans to interact with sacred objects, while clearly maintaining the boundaries between the sacred and the profane. In addition, many of these rituals demonstrate the symbolism shared by Disney fans and how fans view the parks as having magical or supernatural properties. These activities demonstrate how fans can make use of a sacred space when one exists, and the possible functions it can serve.

Finally, every Disney fan that was interviewed demonstrated a direct link between nostalgia and the past. All of the Disney fans who were interviewed for this project explained that nostalgia is an important part of why they are a Disney fan. Being a Disney fan is not only a way to remember nostalgically; it is also a way for fans to physically relive these memories. The reason that this link to nostalgia is possible is because for many children, the Disney parks and movies are a part of growing up in today's culture. From Saturday morning cartoons to family vacations, it is difficult for a child in the United States to grow up without being exposed to some aspect of Disney. This allows Disney to invoke nostalgia in a way that few other fan followings can. As many different generations have been exposed since childhood, it is something families can experience together and pass down.

Disney as a Post-Modern Community

Disney may also be considered a postmodern community. As Giddens notes, one of the most basic definitions of a postmodern culture is a trajectory of social development that "is taking us away from the institutions of modernity towards a new and distinct type

of social order” (1990: 46). Disney is important to consider as a postmodern community for two reasons.

Firstly, with the progression of technology and the invention of the new media, individuals are able to have closer communication with each other, creating a sort of global village. Online, Disney fans are able to communicate with new individuals that they have never met, across the world. Many of these fans might never have had a chance to meet, because they live in different geographical areas and are not a part of the same personal network of contacts. As Grazian (2010) notes, Internet-based communications are unique because they are not constrained by geographic space nor limited to personal network contacts. To communicate with others, Disney fans can simply go online to a fan forum and post a message for other Disney fans to see. Other fans can respond at their leisure, seconds or even years later. This process, which Giddens labels disembedding, consists of “the ‘lifting out’ of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space” (1990:21). Humans are not merely communicating on these forums with individuals they have never met; they can communicate with individuals who are not there either in space or time. Past consumer reviews, comments, responses, and website are recorded digitally and displayed online for repeated public consumption.

Another reason that the Disney fan community functions as a postmodern community is that it has no definitive past, but instead many different narratives that all are valid forms of knowledge. “The condition of post-modernity is distinguished by an evaporating of the ‘grand narrative’ - the overarching ‘story line’ by means of which we are placed in history as beings having a definite past and a predictable future” (Giddens

1990:2). Rather than having one grand narrative, Disney fans value a variety of claims to knowledge, including urban legends, trivia, and historical accounts. Even in cases where fans do value factual knowledge, many of the sources of this information conflict. This is seen in the contrast between Disney's and fans' construction information. Both sources of information are seen as factual, but as demonstrated earlier, these sources conflict not only in what is released, but also in how it is released. Fans value both sources of information, some more than others, but both narratives are valued equally.

Unanswered questions

As demonstrated above, this project demonstrates different ways that Disney fans are building solidarity and how fans have attached meaning to Disney symbols. From the Lion King to the Disney parks, Disney fans are able to identify with and draw inspiration from Disney culture. However, even while this project answers many different questions about the nature of fan attachment and how fans build community, there are areas for further research. Future studies could explore demographics further, such as who constitutes members of the Disney fan community, and how individuals' backgrounds affect the meaning that they draw from Disney symbols. People's social circumstances affect not only the meanings they attribute to cultural objects, events, and experiences, but also the type of pop culture that they consume (Grazian 2010: 17). Just as these demographic factors affect meanings and the types of popular culture they consume, it is also important to consider where individuals come from.

Future studies, in addition to these factors, could study the effects of geographic location on fandom. For example, future studies could further determine how

geographical location affects fans' interaction with sacred places, as well as how access to these places affects meaning. In addition, such studies could examine how demographic factors affect feelings of nostalgia among Disney fans and the effects that these feelings have on their fan experience. Questions might include: As the Disney fan experience has religious elements; are more religious individuals more or less likely to attach symbolism and ritual to Disney objects? Do fans across different religions share similar views of Disney narratives or do different religions generate different meanings? In addition, future studies could explore themes of race and class. While the Disney fans examined in this study represent a range of ethnic and economic backgrounds, this study is not large and diverse enough to explore such themes adequately. Future studies could explore if individuals from different economic backgrounds are more likely to draw different meanings from Disney narratives. For example, is someone from a poor background more likely to identify with Tiana and other narratives of hard work and pulling one's self up, than someone from a more well-to-do background? How do the basic messages transmitted by Disney change based upon location or socio-economic status?

Another possible direction for research lies in nostalgic memories of childhood. As demonstrated earlier, all of the Disney fans interviewed had strong ties between Disney and their childhood. Even while this subject was explored in this paper, it is a significant pattern and should be explored in greater detail. More specifically, future studies could explore how Disney is effectively able to create nostalgia and from a psychological standpoint and how nostalgia affects individual experience. In addition, future studies might explore how the relationship between Disney fandom and nostalgia

is formed. How does a fan being exposed at a young age affect their fandom? Are fans who are exposed at a young age more likely to be fans? Which types of exposure generate the strongest feelings of nostalgia later in life?

Finally, this paper in many cases shows families who pass traditions down from generation to generation. As many different generations have now grown up with Disney, future studies could explore this more in depth, including how rituals and meanings are passed down. It could answer questions such as: What aspects of Disney fandom are shared among families? What sorts of rituals or traditions are traditionally passed down? When these traditions are passed down do the meanings change? How do symbols and meanings change from one generation to another? Which family members pass on traditions and to whom?

Final Thoughts

We as humans are in a pivotal point in human history. Traditionally, humans have been limited by geographic restraints or who was in their personal network of contacts. However, in this modern age, with the aid of modern technology, the very nature of human contact is changing. Humans can communicate with others from thousands of miles away, annihilating the geographic boundaries of communication. Just as our ability to communicate through space has changed with the telephone and the telegraph, the internet has allowed us to pass through the boundary of time, communicating with people who aren't even physically there. I can post a message today, and someone in India can read it tomorrow or even next year. What I send out into the world is not lost or forgotten, but instead stored on the World Wide Web.

The very nature of human communities is changing. Human beings are entering a post-modern moment where our social interactions have been lifted out of geographic space-time. We interact with people we have never met (or who may not even be online at the same time as us), and we form communities based upon these interactions. Just as we can form communities based upon religion and where we come from, we can now form communities based upon other things that we have in common such as our favorite television shows or other leisure time activities. These communities can then be reinforced through interactions with each other and the collective narratives that we create. The Disney fan community is a demonstration of how post-modern communities can work.

¹ Yesterland is a fun-run site devoted to preserving the history of closed Disney parks' attractions. The site includes stories, descriptions, and photos of old attractions, restaurants, and assorted services.

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¹ This DVD was given to me by the Disneyana Fan Club and it is a homemade recording of a convention segment discussing the NFFC's history.

Appendix A: A Guide to Terms and Common Abbreviations

Audio-Animatronics (AA)– a type of robotics created by Disney Imagineers for shows and attractions in the Disney theme parks. The robots move and make noise, using pre-recorded movements and sounds. While originally designed by the Walt Disney Company, they can now be found in other companies as well.

Backstage- A cast only area that is out of guest view.

Bat's Day- An unofficial event held at Disneyland annually for members of the Goth, Steampunk, Industrial, Gothic Lolita, and associated subcultures.

Cast Member- A Disney Employee

Costume- A uniform worn by a Disney employee that differs based upon location.

D23- Disney's "official" fan club that was premiered in 2009.

DCA- Disney California Adventure.

Disneyana- a term which has been traditionally used as a descriptor for "all things Disney", including art and merchandise

Disney Death- A death that occurs on Disney property.

DL- Disneyland

DVC- Disney Vacation Club. A club run by Disney similar to a timeshare.

Gay Days- A series of events held in Walt Disney World and Disneyland annually that is focused on LGBT Pride. Gay Days is not affiliated with the Walt Disney Company.

Guest- A term used by Disney to describe customers on Disney property.

Hidden Mickey- A Mickey shaped silhouette, usually consisting of one large circle and two smaller circles for ears. Hidden Mickeys may be hidden on attractions, in stores, or anywhere on park property.

Mickey Mouse Club- A club originally started by Harry Woodin for children that included a Mickey Mouse matinee, a club pledge, and other associated activities. In 1930, Walt Disney hired Harry Woodin to franchise the club to other theaters.

Mousekateer- A member of the Mickey Mouse Club

NFFC (National Fantasy Fan Club)- Later known as the Disneyana Fan Club

On Stage- An area that a guest can see.

Pin Trading- An activity that occurs between two guests or a guest and a cast member where Disney pins are exchanged.

Steampunk- Steampunk is a subculture and aesthetic movement based upon science fiction and a future that never happened. Frequently associated with authors such as H.G. Wells and Jules Verne, Steampunk is heavily influenced by older styles of clothing such as Old West or Victorian, and steam powered or clock-work mechanics. Steampunk is also heavily influenced by a “Do it yourself” sensibility, where Steampunks (or Steamers as they are sometimes called), are encouraged to make their own clothing, goggles, and machinery.

Vinylmation- A collectible, typically 3 inches in height that is tradable in some stores in the Disneyland parks. The collectible is a blank 3d canvas consisting of a Mickey shape,

with another image superimposed on top of it. (For example a 3" Mickey collectible with an Alice pattern)

WDW- Walt Disney World

Appendix B: Interview Schedule¹

- Can you please describe for me your earliest memory of Disney?
- Have you ever been to any of the Disney theme parks? If so which ones?
 - (If first memory was not in a park...)
 - Can you please describe for me your first experience in a Disney park that you can remember?
 - Your most recent experience?
 - What stands out to you about these visits?
- How often do you visit the Disney theme parks?
- Do you own an annual pass?
- Do you have any Disney traditions that you like to engage in? Can you please describe them for me?
 - How often do you do these traditions?
 - Do they have any meaning for you?
 - Who participates with you in this tradition?
- Do you visit any websites owned by Disney on a regular basis?
 - Which ones? Can you please describe them for me?
 - What do you do on these sites?
 - Why do you visit them?
- Do you visit any websites, associated with, but not owned by Disney on a regular basis?
 - Which ones? Can you please describe them for me?
 - What do you do on these sites?
 - Why do you visit them?
 - Can you describe for me your relationship with other people on the site?
- Are you a member of any Disney fan clubs or fan communities?
 - Which ones? Can you please describe them for me?
 - What is your role in the club? What do you do?
 - Why did you join?
 - How long have you been a member?
- Do you participate in D23?
 - If so, what made you join?
 - What do you enjoy about D23?
 - Do you participate in any of the D23 events?
 - Will you buy a membership again?
- Can you please explain to me how interested you are in the following subjects? (For each one, ask about their interest level, experience with the subject, why it appeals to them, etc)
 - Disney Deaths
 - Disney Urban Legends
 - Trivia
 - History
 - Hidden Mickeys
 - Construction in the parks (released by Disney)
 - Construction in the parks (released by fan portals)

- What sort of Disney merchandise do you buy?
- Do you identify with any specific Disney characters?
 - If so, why? Can you please describe for me what you like about _____
- Can you please describe for me, what appeals to you about Disney?
- Can you please describe for me, what appeals to you about the Disney theme parks?
- Is there anything about Disney that bothers you? Can you explain for me?
- What did you think of Disney's Celebration Promotion?
- What did you think of Disney's Volunteer promotion?
 - Why do you think Disney did these promotions?
 - Were you aware that Disney cancelled the Volunteer promotion early? If yes, ask what their opinion was.
- Can you please explain to me what Disney represents to you?
- What does it mean to you to be a Disney fan?
- Is being a Disney fan different from being a fan of anything else? Like a Sports fan or a Star Trek fan?
- Can you please describe for me your happiest Disney memory?

¹ Some questions will deviate from this interview schedule based upon a fan's experiences and preferences.