

True values of disneyland



Disneyland is, for children, where they meet princesses, princes, Donald duck, Capitan hook and Buzz Lightyear, which for them, makes Disneyland the ‘happiest place on earth’ (Disneyland website, home page). However, from an anthropological perspective, Disneyland is full of commodification. This commodification is through physically being at the Disneyland theme park – on rides, meeting the characters – or outside of the park – watching movies at home, eating Disney themed food or playing with plush toys – Disney commoditizes the culture of children through marketing and branding. It is never acceptable to commoditize the culture of children and prey on their happiness for capital gain. This commodification is not innocent, it is not amusing, it tries to hijack children’s culture and dreams.

Disneyland was created by Walt Disney, who’s vision it was for “parents and children could have fun-together” (Walt Disney). While Disney’s main reason for opening the park was to entertain, some say that in recent years, the company has lost focus and developed attractions and rides that will only bring in the most money (Barnes, 2009, A2). In recent years, Disney has turned into a multi million-dollar, multinational corporation that not only focuses on Disneyland, Disneyworld, but also on Disney products which all in turn, commodify children’s culture. This analysis will focus on the commodification that comes from Disneyland as well as the whole Disney corporation’s drive/focus to commoditize children through targeting them through marketing and product branding.

We know that Disneyland is a staged authenticity. Tourism and commodification changes the meaning of a culture, that we know already. But, this leads to inauthenticity and a staged authenticity. In some cases,

commodification could be a good thing, but in tourism, the more ‘ authentic’ and real, the better the experience. Simply put, Disneyland is a tourist attraction that was made to make money. One way they do this is by preying on children’s imagination (Barnes, 2009, A4).

Consumption and commodification doesn’t just undermine the principles of happy childhood, it shows that our society can only have “ kind of value, market value; one kind of success, profit; one kind of existence, commodities; and one kind of social relationship, markets” (Grossberg, 2005, p. 264). However, corporate supervised culture (commoditization) doesn’t just exploit the desires and dreams of children at Disneyland; it is driven to exploit public entertainment for private gain.

In recent years, commodification has become part of the process of how meaning and authenticity of a culture is constructed. As stated above, Disneyland is trying to hide commodification through consumption. This consumption is done through market and branding, which are integral to explaining the commodification Disney uses. A child’s happiness is often through playing, watching cartoons or other activities, Disneyland markets/brands itself into a child’s daily life through the shows/movies they watch, toys they play with, and other everyday objects (Linn, 2004, p. 9). Inside one of the most consumer driven societies around the globe, Juliet Schor says that children are the “ epicenter of American consumer culture” (Schor, 2004, p. 9). Disneyland corporation and its various outlets, with a lead role on the commodity markets, are the main force in influencing, if not seizing, how children describe themselves, their values, curiosities and relationships (Kanner, 2005, p. 50).

Anthony Cohen's rethinking of commodification and authenticity focus on the assumptions that are made concerning tourism development. The commodification of a child changes their culture and leads to stage authenticity. Disneyland is "one of the best known symbols of capitalist consumerism" (Lyne, 2004, p. 3), and it also offers branded quality products. Understanding the cultural role Disneyland plays is not trivial nor is it simple. It not only focuses on a child's culture, but it also uses its products to reach all child driven platforms. The Disney branded image is focused on the idea of childhood innocence and quality entertainment. As an American icon, the Disney corporation appeals to parents and their children's dreams as it tries to transform the children into lifetime Disney consumers. If we place Disneyland under a microscope, the contradiction quickly shows itself between the Disney nation as the model of child innocence and the actuality of Disney's strong business minded character.

One way the violation on children's culture can be seen is through the marketing accomplishments, Disney uses to shape children into consumers. For Disney, every child has the potential to be a consumer that is commoditized and submersed into the culture defined by the brand (Schor, 2004, p. 9). Disneyland does not spare any expense to create clear branding and making sure its products are fully implemented into family fun. While Disneyland represents tradition and nostalgia, it has marketers, advertisers and media persons that not only exploit children for profit, but also constructs them as commodities while promoting the change in their 'natural' culture, turning childhood as a profitable commodity (Giroux, 1999, p. 26).

From an anthropological perspective, what we've learned in class states that there is a concern about how tourism impacts indigenous culture. There is an assumption that the change indigenous cultures would be negative. In the case of Disneyland, the indigenous culture is children's 'natural' culture and the impact of Disneyland is a negative one. Disneyland plants itself into a child's daily life through the shows/movies they watch, toys they play with, and other everyday objects. In moderation, this impact on a child's culture is harmless, but when it explicitly interrupts a child's life simply for capital gain, that is when it is wrong (Giroux, 1999, p. 26).

The separation between the ethical responsibility and market values to care for children is seen at Disneyland. The disturbing part is that Disneyland, its marketers and advertisers employ child psychologists, who analyze children and their culture so that marketing and branding aspects are seamlessly effective and hidden (Kanner, 2005, p. 49). Disney asserts that research like this enhances their motto that, be a prosperous corporation, "you have to start with the kids themselves" (Barnes, 2009, A14). Disney's effort to concentrate on the child as a commodity through complex research models and academic knowledge shows just how far marketing has gone to separate itself from moral obligation. Disneyland makes it clear that its sole objective is to win over children any way they can, so that they will become loyal commodities and consumers. In these covert ways, the contradiction between the public image Disney portrays as good fun and the hidden reality of the economic and political power endorses only corporate interest, depriving the minds of children (Giroux, 1999, p. 26).

For a child, their authentic true culture is simplicity, full of fun as soon as a multinational corporation figures this out, they find a way to market their products and their own culture into a child's. Tourists are often on a search for authenticity. Traditionally speaking, cultural construction of authenticity is not produced for a market. From the objectivist approach, commodification of tradition, specifically commodification of a child's traditional culture means that the culture will lose its meaning. Although this is true, the culture then morphs into a new culture, one that embraces or accepts this change. Emergent authenticity does this. Disney and its various outlets are part of a child's culture is increasingly becoming accepted. As we learned from studying various primitive cultures, the argument came up that authenticity is a problematic concept, that it is production of tourism. Exploiting the culture and authenticity of the foundation of a child's life by marketing, branding and producing product such as movies, television shows, toys, and Disney characters showing up on food containers explicitly removes the idea of authenticity and maintaining the natural flow of a culture. For most children who visit Disneyland and remember it, have fond memories and definitely do not see it as encroaching on their childhood – but it was a part of their childhood. When did the line get crossed that now marketers are commodifying children and their culture? Once society and children accepted Disney as part of their culture, Disney then began frantically finding a way to commoditize and make money off of the peaked interest.

Corporate culture is altering children's culture, which is becoming increasingly visible through various traditional boundaries that once sustained between education and entertainment, have now crumpled

(Grossberg, 2005, p. 264). Disney's message is that parents need to accept the ever-present screen in their child's lives and to see it as unavoidable (Furedi, 2008).

Consequently, everything becomes a commodity, most importantly, individuality and identity. Globally, capitalism controls difference and diversity by selling and commodifying identity while also encouraging self-commodification. If the Disney corporation had its way, the culture of children would become a way of not only accumulating capital but also for producing more commodification. With global politics defined by consumer power and its markets, the American people give no challenge to seizing and colonizing children's culture by multimedia conglomerates such as Disneyland (Giroux, 1999, p. 25). Corporate culture is eager to feed off of a child's desires and needs to make them spend money or parents to spend money to meet the corporate bottom line.

Zeroing in on in the discussion of the innocence of family entertainment in order to hide the product placement and the inner workings of corporate control, Disneyland uses platforms such as movies, attractions and characters to gain attention from children as consumers. As one of the leading corporations around the world, Disneyland and its parent company Disney, does more than provide amusement, it defines how children see themselves, their values, interests and relationships (Kanner, 2005, p. 50).

The values Disney and its outlets such as Disneyland attempt to commodify children, is not innocent, it is not entertaining and it attempts to hijack children's culture and dreams. While not all corporations are set out to hijack

a child's culture or turn them into commodities, Disney is a company that does. Simply put, Disneyland is a tourist attraction that was made to make money. One way they do this is by preying on children's imagination (Barnes, 2009, A4). The forms of entertainment broadcasted by Disneyland have become prevalent in manipulating all aspects of a child's daily life, through movies, television shows, toys, and even food they consume and leads towards a lifetime of unthinking consumption (Linn, 2004, p. 9). It will never be acceptable to commoditize the culture of children and prey on their happiness for capital gain.