

RUNNING HEAD: Disney's Effect on Society

Disney's Positive Effect on Society

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COMM 515T

Deconstructing Disney

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April 27, 2009

Disney and the various attributes the company owns are highly influential in the lives of most consumers, whether consciously or unconsciously. To help understand Disney's influence on society at large Alan Bryman proposed the concept of Disneyization in his 1999 article "The Disneyization of Society." Bryman defines Disneyization as "the process by which the principles of the Disney theme parks are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world" (1999, p.1). The four trends Bryman discusses in relation to the Disneyization of society are theming, dedifferentiation of consumption, merchandising, and emotional labor. While these aspects seem to be taken to a higher dimension in the world of a Disney theme park, it can be argued that these four trends are not reflecting the Disneyization of society, but instead have mirrored the intense changes that have occurred throughout society in recent years.

As noted in Bryman's article, these four trends are not solely owned by the Walt Disney Company, however he credits Disney for the popularization of these trends. There is not conclusive evidence that the concept of theming would not have occurred without the popularization of the themed lands demonstrated in a Disney theme park. The popularity of themed environments may be a product of the ever changing desires and needs of society. The desire of current generations to escape the pressure and responsibility of the real world may be the stimulus needed for the creation of many different themed environments, rather than Disney's influence on society in general. Although Disney may be reacting to the evolving consumer market, it is true that Disney has made the four themes in Bryman's article popular trends in order to capture consumer interest and capitalize on the company's assets.

The idea of emotional labor that Bryman introduces (1999) is especially notable. It has been defined as the “act of expressing socially desired emotions during service transactions” (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993, pg. 88 and 89). Also, Bryman points out that Disney was unhappy with the behavior of some of the cast members that he did not handpick for their locations (1999). Although this can be argued as taxing for the employee because of the level of consciousness that must be given every emotion, the Walt Disney Company's leadership programs and management teams have been studied many times over. Even to the extent of Disney offering Disney University-style leadership classes to teach customer service (Marsden, 2007). It can be argued though that this is the type of labor that is important to any successful tourism operation. Pieter A. VanDijk and Andrea Kirk study emotional labor in the tourism industry as a whole in their 2007 paper. Disney is using the technique that their consumers expect of them and that sets them apart from other locations — excellent guest service. If it is unreasonable for a certain person to behave in a certain manner, maybe a job at Disney is not the best place for them.

While this idea of emotional labor may concern some employees, Disney is not short of people who welcome this as part of their job. Many young performers look toward working in the entertainment department of theme parks such as Disneyland and Walt Disney World as a way of getting their foot in the door of the entertainment industry (Ansberry, 1992). They are happy to be working at a job they love, and it shows in their work, making it less of an emotional labor as opposed to someone that is looking at a job at Disney as just a job. Another example of the type of cast member that would not find emotional labor a bothersome aspect of their job are those who have always dreamed of

working at a Disney theme park because of their love of Disney. These cast members do not consider their happiness labor, but something that comes natural, because of having the job they have always wanted (Johansson, 2004).

It can be argued that the trend of merchandising is a product of a consumer society, not just attributed to a trend of the Disney parks. However, Disney is well versed in producing large quantities of items to sell at their theme parks. Although, if this merchandise did not sell, there would be no point in Disney producing the merchandise. Once again, it can be a matter of Disney listening to what their consumers' desire. Disney does this in various ways throughout the company. In order to keep young female consumers as they go from the stage of princess to that of rock stars, Disney began to offer various pop entities to hold the "tween" consumers interests (Kaufman, 2009).

As discussed previously, it is possible that Disneyization is not so much a matter of Disney influencing society but of society influencing the products made by the company. Although the example of Disney produced fairytales is outside the realm of the theme parks it is still important to consider. Disney has been accused of taking the scary parts out of their fairytales (Weiss, 2008) and in a matter, Disneyfying them. Weiss argues in her article, "once the princess climbs down from the tower, or the ball comes to an end, you're left with nothing to talk about at all" (2008). However, what parent wants to expose their child to the true, scary versions of fairytales at a young age when there are safe and happy versions available? Disney found a formula that worked for them, and expanded on it as any good company would do.

While Bryman discusses the possible negative effects on Disneyization in regards to society, certain positive influences that Disney has had must be acknowledged. One

account of how the Disney company has helped the society is the lengths it went to revitalize Times Square in New York (2004). By assisting in making Times Square a more family friendly location it can be assumed that it raised the property values of the location, as well as increased the New York City's tourism revenue. Because Disney cares about the reputation of any project the Disney name is placed on, it can be thought that by helping revitalize Times Square it is not only helping the reputation of its name, but that of the city itself.

Another example of the lengths Disney has gone to have a positive impact on society can be seen in the extent of the company's 2008 Corporate Responsibility report. This year the Walt Disney Company released a statement that it wanted to drastically reduce its greenhouse-gas emissions, with the main targets being its theme parks (Garcia, 2009). While some may argue that this is a public relations move on Disney's part because of the popularity of green efforts it shows Disney's dedication to this cause. Being a socially responsible company is not the less-expensive means of maintaining a business and by publicly releasing their goals it has made them a commitment to strive for, even if it costs the company money instead of saving it.

In conclusion, it would seem that the Disneyization of society is not necessarily as bad a thing as Bryman would like to have his reader believe. Disney has provided inspirations to leaders, management teams, and employees alike. It has taken a formula that works well for the company, and used it to create wonderfully themed attractions for people to visit across the world. While Disney may have popularized the four trends that Bryman discusses, it can also be argued that these trends were in response to the ever

changing consumer market, and therefore Disney may not be as responsible for the Disneyization of society as previously thought.

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