

DISNEY ADULT OR DISNEY CULT?: OBSERVING THE EFFECTS AND
PERCEPTIONS OF TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING ONTO FANDOM

By

Sara Spradley

A Project Presented to

The Faculty of California State Polytechnic University, Humboldt

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in English: Applied English Studies

Committee Membership

Dr. Renee Byrd, Committee Chair

Dr. Lisa Tremain, Committee Member

Dr. Janet Winston, Program Graduate Coordinator

July 2024

ABSTRACT

DISNEY ADULT OR DISNEY CULT?: OBSERVING THE EFFECTS AND PERCEPTIONS OF TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING ONTO FANDOM

Sara Spradley

Transmedia storytelling is the vehicle for narratives to become immersive to their audience through different modalities. The Walt Disney Company employs this form of storytelling by placing any one of its films in the context of attractions and live-action performances, or vice-versa, creating a convergent culture that will follow these products through every medium. This project views transmedia storytelling used by the Walt Disney Company as the reasoning for the Disney Adults' fandom interest in interacting with Disney products. Through the use of discourse analysis, and digital ethnography I will observe this relationship between the use of transmedia storytelling, fandom creation, and identity negotiation within the Disney Adult community. The field of Fandom Studies will allow me to demonstrate how effective or ineffective Disney's transmedia use is concerning fandom in order to get to the core of this group's interest as well as the social and physical effects that come with membership. By observing these relationships, I will reveal the direct link between transmedia storytelling to fandom development through moral ownership.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my committee members Dr. Renee Byrd and Dr. Lisa Tremain for their offered guidance often in the form of talking me through my multitude of mental breakdowns. I also want to thank my family for consistently believing in me even when I didn't believe in myself (as corny as it sounds) and for helping me to go on my first Disney trip in years, that was definitely all about research. Thank you to my partner Xander for the hours upon hours spent bringing me back down to Earth when this project became too much to handle as well as the late nights listening to me rant about the Haunted Mansion. Furthermore, I want to thank Julia White and Aimee Talmadge for their help keeping me afloat mentally as they offered insight into their own master's experience, letting me know I'm never alone in my struggles. Thank you to Fortunato for throwing new ideas (and food) at me whenever I hit mental walls and offering countless resources throughout the past three years. Lastly, I want to thank my friend Betty for being my encouragement to start this journey and my younger sibling Sam for their never-ending support that pushed me to the finish line. Without you all I would not be here.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
INTRODUCTION	1
Definitions	6
Positionality	9
Theoretical Framework.....	13
Literature Review	14
Methodology	20
WHAT IS A DISNEY ADULT?	25
Disneyfied Language	26
Subsections of the Community	30
Cult Label	38
SOCIAL MEDIA AND FANDOM REPRESENTATION	42
Methods	44
Results.....	46
Discussion.....	50
Conclusion	52
THE HAUNTED MANSION’S TRANSMEDIA RELATIONSHIPS	54
Attraction Story Overview.....	56

Building a Transmedia Story	58
The Hatbox Ghost.....	62
Ensuring Community Convergence.....	67
CONCLUSION.....	69
REFERENCES	71

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Number of videos posted to Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook when placed into genre categories after searching #disneyadult and altering the search to by recent.	47
Figure 2. Number of videos posted to TikTok, and Facebook when placed into genre categories after searching #disneyadult and altering the search to by relevant.	47
Figure 3. Number of videos posted to Instagram, TikTok, and Instagram when placed into genre categories after using the search term disneyadult and altering the search to by relevance.	48
Figure 4. Number of videos posted to Instagram, TikTok, and Instagram when placed into genre categories after using the search term disneyadult and altering the search to by recent.	49
Figure 5. Reasoning for criticism of the Disney Adult community by outsiders based on videos posted to Instagram, TikTok, and Instagram.	50

INTRODUCTION

On March 3rd, 2022, Jordan Jacee posted a video of themselves entering the Magic Kingdom Park in Walt Disney World Florida and crying upon seeing Cinderella's Castle for the first time. This video went unrecognized for some time and existed simply as a moment of documented joy, until TikTok user EM parodied the video on January 15th, 2023. The parody video features EM walking through Disneyland in Anaheim, California, gasping, falling to their knees, and yelling in excitement as they saw the Sleeping Beauty castle "for the first time since covid." Soon, both videos were surrounded with commentary like "Disney adults are just another thing man," but the ridicule didn't stop in the comments section (luda_storm).

As a result of this parody, a new TikTok trend was created where people would fall to their knees and gasp with excitement as they viewed different things supposedly for "the first time since COVID" like attractions at other theme parks such as Universal Studios, or in one case Plymouth Rock. While this trend was going on there were still plenty of creators replying to EM's video as an accurate representation of the Disney Adult community, solidifying the idea that many outsiders to the community find Disney Adults as "some of the weirdest people in existence" (sha). Soon after, the labeling of "weird" and "odd" evolved into "cult" with TikTok users like Dalton Smiley creating lists of communities they think are cults: the first being the Disney Adult fandom. What started as a moment of excitement within Disney Parks became a pathway to define an

entire fandom community outside of societal norms, but is this commentary and critique an accurate depiction of the Disney Adult fandom?

While the Disney brand may be synonymous with creating content for children, there is a huge community of adults who connect their interaction with Disney products to their identity. This garnered them the name of Disney Adults. These fans are not a recent addition to the overall Disney fan community; however, they have made headlines in the world of popular culture due to their more extrinsic forms of interacting with Disney and its products like the previously mentioned crying as they enter a Disney Park or having a collection of Mickey Mouse ears. Subsequently, these headlines have introduced the fandom to outsiders without a complete context of their engagement styles, leading to the title of “cult” being tied to the community.

I argue that the Disney Adult fandom and their identity connection to The Walt Disney Company is the direct result of Disney’s ability to create interactive, immersive experiences through transmedia storytelling. The Walt Disney Company has seemingly mastered the monetization of one’s ability “To fully experience any fictional world, that places new demands on consumers and depends on the active participation of knowledge communities.” through transmedia storytelling (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 20-21). Within the Disney Adult fandom transmedia storytelling takes on the role of an entry point for consumers into the greater Walt Disney brand, leading them into a more immersive interactive experience with their products.

This project uses the concept of transmedia storytelling alongside Henry Jenkin’s piece *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* to explore how Disney

Adults work to form a relationship with the Walt Disney Company through convergence culture. Jenkins suggests that convergence and convergence culture “represents a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media” (*Convergence Culture* 323). As Disney Adults culturally converge onto different pieces of Disney media, I argue that they are encouraged as well as expected to gain a greater understanding of and relationship to Disney products by actively seeking out more convergence opportunities. It is these interactions that outsiders to the community deem odd or “cult-like,” however, this critique is built on a fundamental misunderstanding of why Disney Adults are so immersed within the culture of the Walt Disney Company and subsequent brand.

Through transmedia storytelling the Walt Disney Company utilizes the ability to take a classic fable and put it in the context of a theme park attraction, video game, or film, in order to expand upon the subsequent story world, thus solidifying themselves as a powerhouse in the world of entertainment. This project uses transmedia storytelling as a vehicle for observing how the products of the Walt Disney Company are able to flood multiple markets, reaching current fans as well as those who previously may not have had interest in the product’s story due to the modality it was placed in. Once these products reach new modalities, more entryways are created for consumers to converge upon whether you are a new or old fan. Therefore, the Walt Disney Company consistently utilizes transmedia storytelling throughout their products in order to appeal to as many consumers as possible, creating cultural convergence among the Disney Adult fandom.

Through transmedia storytelling and convergence culture, Disney creates an immersive story experience for its consumers as well as cultivates an active, devoted fanbase of Disney Adults. In this project, I observe the Disney Adult community itself, analyzing their public presence through social media, and relationship with the company to gain an understanding of the social and physical effects of this interaction on the community as well as outsiders. This project will work towards observing cultural convergence by looking specifically at the Disney Adult fandom's interactions with the Haunted Mansion attraction and subsequent transmedia stories in films, books, and other products. This analysis will yield information on the process of how fandom convergences upon immersive transmedia stories as well as who holds power in the dynamic of fandom/consumer and company/storyteller.

By following the framework created by Henry Jenkins, it can be understood that convergence culture and transmedia are the origins of many fandoms that surround media-based content (*Convergence Culture* 2). Jenkins shows that the more a piece of media envelopes the consumer in its story, the more willing consumers are to follow that content as it enters different modalities, acting as convergence onto transmedia properties. This direct interaction between transmedia storytelling and convergence is well documented amongst different fandoms from those who are invested in anime to video games, as communities will rally alongside their favorite piece of media as it interacts in new modalities, however, the Disney Adult community has yet to be delved into. (Lamerichs 14).

When observing social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, where the Disney Adult community convenes to discuss their interests in Disney products thus converging onto these transmedia stories, there is also a huge community of non-Disney Adults who are outspoken in their ridicule. Often community members are parodied for their excited nature when interacting as consumers with Disney products, with outsiders arguing that they are overindulgent in their interactions or ignorant of a world outside of their fandom. While I am not arguing that this ridicule does not happen to other fandoms, within recent years, the Disney Adult community has had a considerable uptick in mockery that in some cases has overshadowed the community as a whole (Apollonio 4).

Previous research has shown that transmedia opens doors for community engagement either through fandom membership or general water-cooler exchanges, representing the positive effects of transmedia use. However, little focus has been placed on the specific negative effects of the transmedia-to-fandom-pipeline (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 26). This posits that the Walt Disney Company uses transmedia storytelling in order to engage convergence culture thus leading to immersion within products leading to fandom creation. By observing the post-transmedia, pre-convergence stage where fandom exists both inside and outside of direct interaction with their chosen piece(s) of media, like the Haunted Mansion, I will understand the power that fandom holds conversation with the companies who create their specific transmedia stories of interest. These observations will work towards an analysis revealing the difference between the interactions of company-to-fandom and outsider-to-fandom. This in turn will create a greater understanding of how and when consistent fandom interaction with

transmedia products is accepted by those producing transmedia products, members of transmedia-based fandom, and general consumers.

As popular media outlets like Rolling Stone and NPR document the fandom's increase in popularity they also work to increase the public awareness of the community. However, these outlets often focus on social/emotional connections to Disney products as the reason for Disney Adults' existence (Harris). By focusing on the Disney Adult community as the product of transmedia storytelling, understanding is gained on the values of the Disney Adult community beyond moral connections and into the power dynamics between company and consumer.

These concepts are researched in order to answer the questions: are the outsider perceptions of the Disney Adult fandom as “weird” or “cultish” the result of the fandom's consistent interactions with transmedia storytelling? Furthermore, how does being a member of a transmedia-based fandom affect one's ability to present as well as negotiate their identity and values between the company, other fandom consumers, and outsiders?

Definitions

I will utilize multiple key concepts, however, the most important to define is that of the Disney Adult themselves. Throughout this piece, I will define the Disney Adults and those within the fandom as consumers of the Walt Disney Company's various products and productions who base a large portion of their identity on their consumption of this brand. In the current era, internet videos on TikTok and YouTube show the general Disney Adult to be stereotypical, they are defined as millennial-aged consumers.

In fact, multiple user-created definitions of Disney Adult on Urban Dictionary specifically define members of this community as millennials without children with the financial ability to interact with Disney frequently. While this may be an element of identification, the core of the Disney Adult relies on them having closer, often emotional ties to the Walt Disney Company that are enhanced by their frequent interaction with products brand through going to Disney Parks, buying, and collecting merchandise. These interactions often take place through Disney's transmedia storytelling which then further enhances the fandom's emotional ties to the brand.

Some scholars like Bailey Apollonio have framed the greater Disney fandom alongside Disney Adults specifically through the lens of nostalgia and kitsch. Focus has also been placed on the general Disney fandom within the context of them being active contributors alongside participants of the story world in which Disney products, namely Disney Parks exist (Clément 66). This project expands on these ideas by specifically recognizing the Disney Adult community's nostalgic relationship as well as their frequent participation and contributions to the Disney brand as the result of community members' emotional/moral ownership over the brand and story world. Through this project's research questions, the concept of moral ownership became a hugely present factor in the interactions between the Walt Disney Company and the Disney Adult fandom alongside the creation of the Disney Adult fandom itself. However, in order to understand moral ownership, there needs to be an understanding of the stages of transmedia storytelling to fandom creation that come before it.

Transmedia and transmedia storytelling will be defined using Henry Jenkins' definition, "The art of world-making. To fully experience any fictional world, that places new demands on consumers and depends on the active participation of knowledge communities" (*Convergence Culture* 20-21). In the context of the Walt Disney Company, transmedia storytelling looks like the story of *Frozen* beginning as a film and then continuing with a new plot as a Walt Disney World attraction, as well as the creation of a sequel film and multiple books that take that extends the universe and plot of the original film. Therefore, consumers would only be able to completely immerse themselves in the transmedia story if they were to interact with it in multiple modalities and gain knowledge of said modalities.

When fans follow a particular story like *Frozen* as it is a new modality they are interacting with convergence culture. More specifically, convergence culture is the "Flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want" (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 2). Convergence and convergence culture as a result take on the role of recruiting consumers towards interaction with transmedia stories as companies diverge their products into multiple outlets for different types of consumers to interact with.

The concept of immersion is one that I am taking on within this research as a direct product of convergence and convergence culture. To become immersed in this context is to move beyond convergence on a singular transmedia story and towards consistent interactions with the stories of transmedia brand regardless of modality.

Therefore, immersion and the process of consumers being immersed within a transmedia story becomes vital to transmedia-based fandoms like Disney Adults. Without immersion, consumers may struggle to create stronger emotional ties to transmedia stories as well as understand the stories they are interacting within their full context.

These stages lead to the consumer's moral ownership over the Disney brand and the eventual creation of the Disney Adult fandom. Jenkins identifies that "media producers and advertisers now speak about 'emotional capital' or 'lovemarks' to refer to the importance of audience investment and participation in media content" (*Convergence Culture* 175). Within this project, I will identify this emotional capital as moral ownership and identity connection in which consumers take on strong ties to a product due to their consistent participation within the transmedia story world. For the average Disney consumer on their way to becoming a Disney Adult, this can look like them having strong favoritism for the *Frozen* film, thus feeling compelled to interact with and approve of the Frozen attraction at Epcot.

Positionality

My focus on this community and transmedia use comes from a life-long infatuation with Disney products, specifically Disney Parks. Around age 12, I learned that Walt Disney Imagineers, those who create Disney Parks and their subsequent theming, place "Hidden Mickeys" within the park's theming. I was immediately compelled to interact with these "secrets" and form a stronger, more knowledgeable relation to Disney products which was only strengthened by learning that these "secrets"

also occur in other Disney properties like film and video games. This was my first interaction with transmedia storytelling and convergence culture.

I was hooked. I spent hours upon hours watching documentaries on Disney history, Disney films, and first-person perspective recordings of Disney Park rides, practicing for the chance to actually attend a park the following year. I did not hide this infatuation, I frequently wore Disney merchandise, carried around Disney guidebooks, and would boast about my knowledge whenever I got the chance, proclaiming that one day I would be an Imagineer who created these hidden details.

Elements of this interest have stuck with me into adulthood. I still interact with Disney products by choice and generally get excited to learn background information and history surrounding these pieces of media. I was content with being a fan of Disney, that is until my younger sibling referred to *me* as a Disney Adult.

I immediately deflected the identity, claiming I was not as obsessed with the company as Disney Adults frequently are. I argued that I can see the flaws in the company and withhold from interacting with their products, unlike actual Disney Adults who, I believed at the time to be “cultlike” in their fandom. My sibling shrugged off this comment, but it stayed with me. Was I a Disney Adult? If so, why did I hate being called one? What did it *really* mean to be a Disney Adult?

These are the questions that led me to this research as I want to understand this community and how one’s identity is affected by the title of Disney Adult. Within this research, I intend to represent the Disney Adult Community, Walt Disney Company, and outsiders in a realistic light, one that does not place blame on any one group for harm

caused but rather focuses on how one recuperates from the harm of being ignored or stereotyped. When focusing specifically on the Disney Adult community I will refrain from causing any more harm to the community from ridicule or inaccurate representations.

My language use is chosen with specific intent, especially when using the term “cult”. I am not arguing for the use of this term in connection with the community, however, in order to accurately present the multiple perspectives, I am discussing and their importance within my research, I need to include how they use the term. This along with my other corpus will be collected from the perspective of a person in the middle, one that can exist both in the Disney Adult community and the outsider community with the intention of offering a more descriptive, realistic outlook on this fandom than has been held within popular culture.

Regarding the Walt Disney Company as a consumer, they have always chartered to my specific demographic as a white cis-gendered woman in a straight-presenting relationship, although I do identify as bisexual. I grew up in the lower middle class but still had the opportunity to go to college away from home and pursue a passion of my choosing. Currently, interactions with Disney products in a consistent fashion as is expected of the community is not something I am able to financially accomplish, further distancing me from interacting directly with Disney through convergence culture.

Due to my identity as a queer low-income person and the distance that comes with it, I have since been able to acknowledge the flaws of this company and critique the Disney Adult community. Disney tends to uplift queer, POC voices and stories only

when it benefits them, a point of view that is hard to accept when you are so close to the consumption. Since I have slowly distanced myself from consumption, I have been presented with often unheard perspectives that I will take the time to place in research, that is those who feel they have been taken advantage of or harmed by the Walt Disney Company.

Most importantly, I want to acknowledge the time period in which I am writing this piece requires me to interact with the Walt Disney Company monetarily through a Disney+ subscription, purchasing Disney products such as the books in *Tales from the Haunted Mansion* series as well as visiting Disneyland in Anaheim, thus increasing my amount of consumption. While I am supporting the company financially, I do not condone or agree with their support of Israel. My interactions were done with the intention of viewing the company's transmedia practices as well as community interactions from a broad perspective, and not with the goal of supporting the Walt Disney Company in the time of boycott. However, I understand that intention does not matter when genocide is occurring, and I am using the income I do have to support those who fund said genocide. This is why I am actively participating in other boycotts against companies that support Israel and choosing to abstain from interacting with Disney products once I complete my research. I know that supporting other boycotts does not "make up" for my interactions with the Walt Disney Company but I hope it offers more transparency into my outlook going forward.

With all of this in mind, I can confidently say I will never be able to fully understand the experiences of those whom the Walt Disney Company continuously

harms through ignorance or stereotypes. I can only attempt to learn from these perspectives and work towards accurately representing and supporting those who have not had the same opportunities as myself within my work.

Theoretical Framework

As I take on this project I observe my research within the realm of Fandom Theory. Fandom is seen by Jenkins as a bigger picture of participatory culture one that focuses more on the interaction of fans of multiple ages with one another through the context of a particular text or piece of media (*Convergence Culture* 216). While this terminology and theory did not originate with Jenkins, his work led to expansions within Fandom Studies in which it can be utilized to pay attention to relationships between consumers and texts. The research of this project heavily relies on this specific work of Jenkins in defining transmedia storytelling and convergence culture among other terms in order to outline the process of fandom creation as the result of transmedia storytelling.

My approach to Fandom Theory also takes on approaches presented by Nicole Lamerechs who argues that the emotional or moral connection gained through creative acts like writing fanfiction are the main contributors to identity creation within the fandom realm as well as contributors to community connections (17). As a fan interacts with an item, they are gaining a connection built on emotional or moral ownership that ties that product and the media it represents directly to identity. Given the Disney Adult fandom is largely based on consumer culture, it is extremely important to recognize how their purchases reflect relationships to identity. Moral ownership is a crucial step in the

process of transmedia storytelling to fandom creation that is observed consistently throughout this research.

Furthermore, this relationship between fandom and culture can present itself within connotations of cult-like behavior due to groups extensively dedicated to interaction and devotion to a particular piece of culture. Previously, these types of fans have been studied in direct comparison to religion and historical, spiritual context (Giles, “Parasocial Interaction”). While relevant to viewing fandom experience, it can lead to generalizations about communities and idolization. Therefore, I take upon a neo-religious approach that Matt Hills argues for, acknowledging that there are similarities between religion and fandom behavior, but equating the more devoted actions of fans as an “effect of fan discourses and practices” (*Fan Cultures* 86). These frameworks all influence my understanding of Disney’s transmedia story world and the power that it holds over consumers.

Literature Review

Although the phrase “It all started with a mouse” is often used by the Walt Disney Company, in 1923 the then Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio was created with a specific focus on revisiting and revitalizing a previous Alice in Wonderland cartoon series alongside creating an entirely new character of Oswald the Lucky Rabbit (Wasko 11). It was only after parting ways with Universal Studios and losing the rights to Oswald that the character that would soon be Mickey Mouse was created by Walt Disney (Wasko 12). This moment is typically where the world of Disney Studies begins as given the Walt

Disney Company's 100-year span of work in the field of entertainment, there is a plethora of concepts to focus on.

Under the watchful eyes of Roy Disney, Ub Iwerks, and Walt himself Mickey Mouse made his debut performance in 1928 in the cartoon *Steamboat Willie* under the new and improved Walt Disney Studio (Willis 22). Soon enough, Mickey Mouse was surrounded by a gang of recurring friends such as Minnie Mouse, Goofy, Pluto, and Donald Duck. With these characters returning cartoon after cartoon, an animated universe was built, one where Mickey and his friends were at free reign to go on adventures or simply exist within the mundane (Freeman 100).

By the 1950s this "Disney World" comprised more than just Mickey and his friends but a plethora of other characters from Snow White to Mr. Toad all from stories and films that hit on this idea of whimsy and wonder that became synonymous with Disney. It is these characters within Disney films from the originally *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* to *Frozen* that are contextually analyzed within Disney Studies, often in the purview of analyzing the company's growth from political incorrectness to performative activism (Karma and Bhad 4).

The characters of these films would eventually enter the physical world after Walt proposed the idea of a family amusement park to his production company (Mittermeier 2). This park was the first of its kind, not only because it focused on entertaining children as well as adults, but it attempted to create a space that was entirely separate from the real world, one that was themed to specific fantastical locations, earning it the title of a theme park. By creating this theme park, Disney subsequently placed importance on immersion

and having guests feel enveloped by the story world around them, thus starting the company's movement towards transmedia storytelling.

On July 17, 1955, this theme park officially opened in Anaheim, California under the name "Disneyland." It had four themed areas: Adventureland, Fantasyland, Tomorrowland, and Frontierland after the single "hub" entrance of Main Street U.S.A. (Mittermeier 17). Within each area or "land" of the park, guests are completely secluded from the outside world of Anaheim and placed within a new immersive reality. In this reality, the previous intellectual practices of the production company became transmedia practices focused on making the stories of Walt Disney Productions come to life rather than remaining stagnant in their original modality.

This is often the moment where Disney Studies and Fandom studies overlap given that within every attraction or environment, a guest walks through, there is a specific goal of Imagineers, those who work to create these theme park spaces, to make the guests feel as if they are entering the story world of Snow White or Peter Pan. This immersion is accomplished with "the classic arts of filmmaking or music, these can include the use of audio-animatronics to simulate humans or animals; touch screens, virtual reality, and other kinds of interactive information technology; different kinds of vehicles for actual simulated transport; and many more such tools, often state-of-the-art" (Mittermeier 5). By telling the stories of Walt Disney Productions in a physical space, Imagineers and the production company are effectively entering the world of transmedia storytelling.

Transmedia storytelling is rooted in the work of Henry Jenkins, who views these concepts as modalities for diversifying entryways for consumers to interact and follow

texts (*Convergence Culture*). This concept can be summarized as “the increasingly popular industrial practice of using multiple media technologies to present information concerning a single fictional world through a range of textual forms” (Evans 1). As a result of this new physical realm to interact with, consumers are given the chance to actively participate in the works of Walt Disney Productions, rather than just viewing it.

Within recent years, this concept of transmedia in Fandom Studies has flourished through the prevalence of online communities as Marie-Laure Ryan discusses in their piece “Transmedia Storytelling: Industry Buzzword or New Narrative Experience?” Ryan brings up ideas of transmedia becoming even more fluid through virtual space, specifically in the context of fan creations like fan fiction. When observed through Disney Studies, this interaction looks like research on brand communities and how those within the Disney fandom interact with one another in order to get the most out of their Disney Park experience (Whalen 188).

Convergence culture is the location where all of the following interactions between fans/consumers and companies overlap. With every new book, film, and attraction consumers were given new entryways into the stories of Walt Disney Productions, often offering them further insight and background information that couldn’t be understood by iterating through just one modality. While this idea works toward the root of my research interests and questions, there has been some criticism in relation to its use within cultural and media studies. James Hay and Nick Couldry argue that while it is a tendency of authors and teachers to view convergence culture as the center of culture, this point of view can harm our understanding of culture as there are still many unknowns

on how this interaction occurs beyond broad thinking (433). In order to avoid this approach, I will be observing convergence culture as a stepping stone within the process of fandom creation from transmedia storytelling.

This connection to convergence culture often parallels that of participatory culture given Jenkins defines this culture as a concept that “contrasts with older notions of passive media spectatorship. Rather than talking about media producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules...” (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 3). This interaction is one that is still not completely understood within the culture as it often leads to debate over ownership of an idea or theme belonging to the fan from which the idea is expanded upon or the company from which the idea stems. Exploring these specific interactions specifically within the realm of ownership and consumer connection in order to explain how the feelings of ownership are related to transmedia storytelling is a main goal of this project.

As more and more products were created an insurmountable amount of background information was also created in the form of these “secrets” or “lore,” as described by fan communities that the average fan may not be aware of. This new level of interaction is called participatory culture. It is defined by Jenkins as a concept that “contrasts with older notions of passive media spectatorship. Rather than talking about media producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules...” (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 3). In this new participatory setting, fans feel as if they have more

influence over the product being consumed and a greater connection is held between the product and the consumer (Murphy 46).

This thought brings us to today's Disney Parks setting where the Walt Disney Company now has six hubs all with 12 individualized theme parks across the globe. Although each park is different, they follow a similar formatting to that created by Disneyland in Anaheim in that they focus on creating an immersive experience that takes guests into a realm outside of whatever city the park is geographically located within. Over time, this interaction and displacement of reality have created a specific culture of fans different from that of the past in that they were now able to be a part of these stories rather than just witnessing them.

That being said, the specific fandom of Disney Adults has only recently been named within the Journal of Fandom Studies by Bailey Apollonio and their analysis of the community focused primarily on the contexts of discrimination and consumption. Discussion of the Disney Adult fandom within the context of transmedia however has not been touched by either discipline specifically, but rather focus has been placed on fans of specific brands under the Disney umbrella. For example, Marvel Entertainment exists under the brand of the Walt Disney Company which has resulted in more transmedia stories being distributed throughout comics, films, TV shows, and Disney Parks therefore the Marvel fan has a plethora of stories to interact with (Scott 1049).

This project intends to focus on the fandom of Disney Adults in order to address the Disney fandom outside of specific interests and analyze the overall effects of transmedia storytelling within Disney products on the fandom. The connection between

transmedia and the Disney Adult community has yet to be specifically analyzed within either field therefore there is a lack of understanding towards the creation of the Disney Adult community. By observing the process in which fandom is created from transmedia storytelling through the Disney Adult community, I am able to uncover the power that consistent convergence immersion has on an individual when transmedia storytelling is at its most influential.

Methodology

In order to answer the questions of whether or not consumers outside of the Disney Adult fandom perceive the Disney Adult fandom as “weird” or “cultish” due to their interactions with transmedia storytelling and how members of transmedia-based fandom present as well as negotiate their identity and values between the company, other fandom consumers, and outsiders, I gathered digital ethnographic data about the Disney Adult community’s online interactions with the Walt Disney Company. Through observations of Disney Adults' interactions with those outside the community on the social media platforms of TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook, I began to document instances of convergence, immersion, and moral ownership within the fandom. This was done in order to gain a greater understanding of the values of this community as well as their perceptions of their relationship with the company, asking if they see themselves as more of a consumer or an active participant within the brand that may influence the company’s decisions.

It is important to note that the Disney Adult fandom exists both within the physical space through convention meet-ups and trips to Disney Parks as well as the virtual spaces. Within this scope of digital ethnography and social media analysis, I will not be able to observe direct interactions that happen in the physical space between consumers within the fandom and not as well the Walt Disney Company. A huge portion of transmedia interaction and Disney Adult representation comes from the lived experience of being physically immersed in a story often through the space of Disney Parks, a space I am not able to regularly interact with.

Therefore, my research will be limited to viewing these interactions through social media, meaning I will only be able to view what community members, the company, and outsiders are comfortable with portraying online. Given that I did visit Disneyland Park in December of 2023, I am able to pull from my own lived experiences but not direct interactions with members of the community. This can lead to ignoring aspects of community interaction that have the potential to alter the course of convergence culture and power dynamics. However, these gaps were filled with digital ethnography of social media posts and videos. The result of these limitations will be this project exclusively analyzing how these groups represent themselves within the transmedia context.

I observed the Disney Adult community by gathering digital ethnography from various social media websites in order to identify the types of discourse prevalent in the community. Narratives, tips, and strategies, as well as product reviews, are incredibly prevalent among the Disney Adult community. Discourse analysis as a method was

chosen to analyze this ethnography due to its ability to put into perspective power dynamics within the belief that "...language is not a neutral means for conveying a message but rather shapes our perceptions of the world; that such shaping takes place within hierarchical structures of power..." (Griffin 97). Through this analysis, I was able to pinpoint moments of "Disneyfication," moments where language use is altered to suit the needs of the transmedia-based Disney Parks as well as enhancing the Disney Adult's overall immersion into the transmedia story world. As a result, I will look at what language fandoms have adopted from the brand and vice-versa in order to understand if one group holds more power over another when altering how they exist within the communal space. This method also helps to illustrate when and where the Disney Adult community has the opportunity to negotiate their identity in relation to the Walt Disney brand and their individualized experience.

Alongside fandom conversations that discussed building identity relations to Disney products, I also observed a huge conversation about the community through the form of ridicule, comedic commentary, and parody by those outside the community. Therefore, focus is also placed on outsiders' interaction with this community as a way to gather data on the social effects of Disney Adult membership. By looking at the Disney Adult hashtag and search term on TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook I document what an outsider would first see when researching this group on social media. This in turn assists in my understanding of how outsiders react to this community and in what context these reactions are based.

The use of digital ethnography for analysis continues into my understanding of how the Disney Adult community interacts with the Walt Disney Company's Haunted Mansion attraction and subsequent films, books, and merchandise. I analyzed the fandom's reactions to the multiple transmedia iterations of the Haunted Mansion story world in order to gauge the power that Disney Adults can hold in conversation with the Walt Disney Company. Furthermore, I observe multiple fan theories and beliefs as a way to demonstrate the community's ability to build moral ownership over the Disney brand, solidifying their identity connections.

The methodology of digital ethnography is similar to that of other scholars in the field such as Jenkins, Lamerichs, and McCarthy, given that Fandom Studies have increasingly focused on digital communications instead of physical spaces. Social media analysis as a modality for looking at this digital realm goes hand and hand with the digital ethnographic focus given that the Disney Adult community exists hugely on social media platforms when interacting with the brand and other community members. By viewing the interactions of this community within the context of their cultural discourse insight will be gained into the community's cultural values, specifically understanding the ways members negotiate their identity and represent themselves online. This focus allows me to view the community in its most prominent state without interfering with results, but instead from the perspective of another member of the community observing discussions.

The Haunted Mansion as an intellectual property was chosen to be textually analyzed as it is one of the oldest original concepts within Disney Parks that is still being

updated yearly, with multiple versions in different modalities across the world. Unlike other notable Disney attractions, the Haunted Mansion was not based on a previously existing fable or film but was created for the sole purpose of entertaining guests within the original Disneyland Park in Anaheim, California. It is only due to overwhelming fan interaction that this attraction has been brought to other countries, consistently updated in story and theme, and brought into different forms such as individual films and book series. By comparing the Haunted Mansion attraction to its modern-day iterations, I focused on specific changes to the story and how they were influenced by the Disney Adult community. This analysis highlights the physical effects that come with fandom membership alongside the previously mentioned power dynamics between the company and the consumer.

Discursive data for this research will focus on posts within the last 10 years or less, given this is the timeline in which Disney Adults have gained their title as well as prominence within the online sphere (Apollonio 4). Posts using the #disneyadult and disneyadult search terms are primarily focused on with interest placed in consumer interactions and discussions. These posts are not restricted to Disney Park interaction as fandom membership itself is not exclusive to park interaction but based on building connections to the brand whenever possible, thus including outside interactions.

WHAT IS A DISNEY ADULT?

The Disney Adult fandom has gone by different names from Pixie Dusters to Disneyphiles, however, the title of Disney Adult has become the most popular in recent years (Brigante; Willis 111). It is unknown who officially coined the term Disney Adults however it has increasingly gained popularity within the community with the rise of social media platforms, namely Tumblr (Dickson). Members of this fandom community have the ability to delve into the products of the Walt Disney Company through frequent interaction and equate them to parts of their individual identity. Stereotypically, they are millennial-aged adults with large disposable income which allows them to regularly interact with this brand through going to Disney Parks, buying, and collecting merchandise, with the most common interaction being watching the films and TV shows of their multiple brands under the Disney umbrella (Dickson).

Within this fandom, you are expected to have a general awareness, if not full understanding of multiple products of the Walt Disney Company regardless of modality or genre. Over time, this interaction and displacement of reality have created a specific culture of fans different from that of the past in that they were now able to be a part of these stories rather than just witnessing them. This ability acts in direct connection with Disney Adult's ability to negotiate their identity in the form of acting within their individual values and interests towards their relationship with the Disney brand. It is within these identity negotiations that the Walt Disney Company utilizes its power over the Disney Adult community. I argue that through transmedia storytelling and the ability

to offer exclusive immersive experiences, Disney actively encourages the Disney Adult community to further delve into their story world, thus separating them from the average consumer.

Disneyified Language

The transmedia story world of the Walt Disney Company, and more specifically the Disney parks is upheld by a specific Disneyified language. Terms like Cast Member, hidden Mickey, magical moment, and many more were created by the Walt Disney Company within their products in order to create more immersion within the new story or new in-park reality. By using these terms guests are encouraged to fully delve into the immersion that the parks have to offer through transmedia storytelling, further separating Disney from other theme/amusement parks. Furthermore, these terms that Disney has created further strengthen Disney Adults' connection to the parks by creating a discourse reliant on the Disneyified vernacular. That vernacular is exploited to create a power imbalance between a casual and serious consumer whereas the more serious Disney Adult actively strives for immersive experiences.

In the case of Disney Adults, these immersive experiences are often referred to as “magical moments”. Having a magical moment is when you experience “the magic of Disney wherever you may be.” (“#DisneyMagicMoments.”). In Disney’s transmedia story world, magical moments are gateways into greater immersion and can happen at seemingly any interaction with a Disney product. To touch on my own experience, I had a magical moment with my family at Disney’s California Adventure back in 2017. A

Cast Member told my father he “dropped his fast passes” as we were walking away from an attraction that had a two-hour-long wait time. Out of kindness, we were given the opportunity to skip the line for said attraction and make the most of our last night in the park. To this day my parents will still talk about this event and how special it made our trip. It is these kinds of moments where you are able to interact with the products of the Walt Disney company in a way that is free from outside influences, that create a magical moment that Disney Adults will consistently strive for.

The term “magical moment” itself has become a hashtag utilized by the Walt Disney Company to advertise more entryways for consumers to interact with Disney products like watching a star of the latest Disney film read the novelization of a Disney classic (“#DisneyMagicMoments.”). What started as a more casual phrase to describe often random moments where consumers feel individualized within the grand scheme of the Walt Disney brand has become a tool utilized by the Walt Disney Company to entice consumers into interaction. Magical moments have become an extension of the immersion into Disney. To have that magic moment is to have an exclusive experience. The Walt Disney Company entices customers through that exclusivity: creating a consumer culture built on Disney Adults' need for special privileges, perks, and parasitic experiences. The value then becomes immeasurable and where the only way to find value is through interaction. While magic moments seem to hold positive intentions, the byproduct of that is a hyper-competitive buy-in. As Disney placed more value on magical moments, so did the Disney Adult community. This in turn creates a new type of magical moment, one that covets a price tag.

Within Disney Parks, there has been a recent influx of special Disney After Dark party events in which guests are often given exclusive opportunities to interact with themed entertainment shows, meet-and-greets, food, and more, that is if they are able to get a ticket for these often one-night events. The most recent Disney After Dark celebration at the time of writing was Disney Channel Nite within Disneyland in Anaheim which offered the exclusive experiences of interactions with “rare” walk-around characters like the Experiments of the *Lilo and Stitch* franchise, Camp Rock-themed karaoke, and special *High School Music* and *Zombies* themed “pep rally” (Tuttle). By making these events exclusive, the Walt Disney Company is actively incentivizing the Disney Adult fandom to pay a high-ticket price to have a magical moment. Therefore, Disney holds power over the Disney Adult community, acknowledging their interest in these moments where they feel recognized by the “magic of Disney”, and using it for their benefit.

In this sense, Disney has begun to incentivize their transmedia experiences and the ability to converge upon them. This incentivization is reliant on Disney Adult’s awareness of the exclusive and often rare immersive experiences that are advertised. Without that knowledge, the Walt Disney Company cannot profit off their audience and Disney Adults cannot gain a greater identity connection to Disney products. This is not only the reasoning behind the Disneyified language, but it is the reasoning behind the community’s acceptance of this concept and its member exclusivity. By maintaining exclusive language, Disney Adults maintain exclusive experiences: all to the benefit of Disney’s wallet.

The term “Cast Member” acts as the next step in the process of fandom creation in which after converging upon the transmedia stories of a Disney Park, they are actively encouraged to immerse themselves within said story world. A Cast Member is an employee of the Walt Disney Company, not to be called an employee but a member of the Disney team. By calling these employees Cast Members, Disney is inviting guests into the immersion of their parks where they are completely away from the “outside” world and exist within the magic of Disney. This magic does require a general awareness of the Disney brand and its media success.

While Disney Adults are certainly incentivized by the Walt Disney Company to fully immerse themselves in said magic, by utilizing the Disneyfied language they are consenting to the isolating nature of existing within an exclusive Disney reality. By subscribing to the renaming of the employees, they acknowledge the entertainment aspect of the experience to disconnect from reality. Disney’s invitation to the world may be to all, but those who learn and adhere to the terminology are critical to the immersion of others and the cycle of consumption. The term Cast Member alludes to the idea that all employees are members of the Disney cast, meaning that whether they are a walk-around character or a hostess at one of the park restaurants, all employees are members of the show that Disney is putting on for guests. While it could be interpreted that this term was created with the intention of placing all employees on a level playing field where they are all members of Disney’s story world, there is still an aspect of control by the company in play with the label.

Disney holds complete power of the stories guests are interacting with and by using the term Cast Member, they are actively displaying their power to their consumers. While Disney Parks are the place where “dreams come true” you as a guest still have to follow the strict guidelines set forth by the Disney Company. Cast Members then act as enforcers of the story world where they encourage immersion, but only if it has been predetermined by Disney. In this sense transmedia storytelling is only as immersive as the author, Disney, allows it to be, when the goal of the story is to create fandom.

Disney Adults are not negotiating their identity with the Walt Disney Company but rather accepting any activities to expand their immersion. Negotiation of fandom identity exists only between Disney Adults due to the exclusivity of immersive interactions within the Disney story world. This presents the idea that Disney holds power over their consumers but has even greater power over the Disney Adult community in regard to their entry point and continued interactions with the transmedia story world.

Subsections of the Community

While using Disneyified language, the Disney Adult community not only immerses themselves into the Disney brand but further connects them to other members of the community. Within this fandom community, there are smaller groups that focus their interest on community interactions within the Disney sphere. When analyzing the Disney Adult community in the light of specific language use, common themes emerge based on the fandom’s goals. These themes include the concept of immersion, which I

argue is one of the main goals of the Disney Adult community within their interactions with the Disney story world. However, there is another theme present that focuses more on community interactions. Within the subsections of the Disney Adult community such as Disney Bounders, Pin Collectors, and those who like to analyze Disney products for “secrets”, the theme of participation is present. I argue that the theme of participation is different from immersion in that to participate in the Disney story world is to act within your own accord as you “become a part of the story” while being immersed requires the Disney Adult to follow Disney pre-approved interactions strategies.

Within the transmedia story world of Disney products, namely the parks immersion allows guests to ignore the realities of the outside world or make connections to other stories. However, there is a sub-community within the Disney Adult fandom that focuses on the intricate details put into every piece of Disney media. “For some visitors, the appeal of the Disney parks is experiencing the amazing creations that have been designed by those crafty Imagineers and trying to figure out how it all works.” (Wasko 181). This interest, I would argue, goes beyond understanding the mechanics of the attraction and towards the community actively seeking out the community by discussing what they individually notice and then trading perceptions among other like-minded community members.

This sub-culture continues the online sphere as community members like YouTube creator Offhand Disney post weekly videos ranging from “The DEMONOLOGY of Mr. Toad's Wild Ride” to “The HIDDEN Stories of Pirates of the Caribbean” that take the time to dissect the minuscule details of Disney products for a

better understanding of their meaning and intention. Once these videos are posted online, other members of the community are then able to interact with the creator, also through social media, offering additional observations and opinions. This creates a community-wide discourse focused solely on Disney properties, which in turn offers many other types of immersion into the story world, one in which they have a greater understanding not only of the story itself but how it was created.

Like the exclusive transmedia events of Disney Parks, the Walt Disney Company has found a way to monetize the interests of the Disney Adult Community to gain insider knowledge. Starting in 2009, for a \$75 fee, you could receive insider information about upcoming Walt Disney products and productions as provided by the company (Boucher and Chmielewski). This insider club led to the formation of the D23 event, which is hosted bi-annually where, again for a price of admission and membership, people are able to physically experience and learn about Disney's up-and-coming projects before the public, alongside access to exclusive merchandise. By hosting this event the Walt Disney Company creates another controlled environment for Disney Adults to immerse themselves within as well as the opportunity to collaborate with peers on their process of immersion. Due to its controlled nature, there isn't space for identity negotiations between company and consumer but rather a facilitated space for Disney Adults to interact with one another.

It is at events like D23 that another niche within the Disney Adult community is often present. Disney Bounders are one of the more notable subsections under the Disney Adult umbrella due to their large social media presence, with the hashtag

#disneybounding having over 500,000 uses within posts on Instagram. To Disney bound is to create “a full costume inspired by your favorite Disney character using items that you can find in your own closet or at your local mall” (Kay xii). An example of this would be wearing a red crop-top shirt and yellow jeans to Disney bound as Winnie the Pooh. The term itself was coined by Leslie Kay through their 2011 Tumblr blog and wanting to express their creativity on a Walt Disney World trip has become a worldwide phenomenon (Giles, “Magic of Magic Kingdom” 97-99). Through social media platforms like Instagram and Tumblr, Disney Bounders are able to share thoughts, advice, and commentary on their love for interacting with the Walt Disney Company through fashion.

Disney Bounders will often go to meet and greets with characters while Disney bounding which often garners them a more personal conversation and connection, often in the form of a magical moment (Kay 135). This allows an interaction that is individualized rather than created for a general consumer in that the consumer, in this case, the Disney Adult, is in control of the interaction rather than at the whim of what experience the Walt Disney Company is offering at the time. Disney Adults are in this sense able to immerse themselves in the transmedia story world through interactions based on Disney bounding but are now able to participate in a way that is more suited to the consumer’s interest, in this case, fashion.

Furthermore, those Disney Adults who interact with the Disney story world through Disney bounding identify the process of Disney bounding as more accessible than interaction exclusively through Disney products. In an interview with Leslie Kay,

Disney Bounder Jennifer B. stated in an interview with Leslie Kay that “The Disney-bound community has created a welcoming place for anyone, no matter the age, race, size, or background, to have the freedom to transform into our favorite Disney characters” (142). When a Disney Adult interacts with the Disney story world through Disney bounding, they are in total control of themselves as they decide, who, what, where, and when to Disney bound. To Disney bound is to choose how you enter the Disney story world rather than have your entry place chosen for you, thus encouraging power from individuality within the Disney Adult community.

As those who Disney bound are in control of themselves and their entry point, this shifts the preexisting power dynamics between the Walt Disney Company and Disney Adult community in which Disney Adults gain more power in their identity negotiations. “After the popular success of Disneybounding and Dapper Day as fan creations, Disney started to place much greater emphasis on fashion merchandising beyond bland resort t-shirts. Disneybounding became a way for fans to embody Disney figuratively and literally into their everyday lives, thus creating a huge new market” (McCarthy 142). By interacting with consumers through producing more Disney bound worthy merchandise, Disney is actively attempting to hold power over the Disney Adult community as they take their interactions beyond the Disney purview. In this regard, the Walt Disney Company is attempting to rebalance the scales of their interactions with the Disney Adult community where in they remain in control of their consumers' entry points, thus continuing to control the transmedia story world.

Furthermore, within this participatory act of Disney bounding and creating individualized entry points to Disney's transmedia story world there is often debate of ownership debate in regard to Disney's intellectual properties. This looks like the Walt Disney Company combating fan creations or clothing lines that interact with Disney products (George-Parkin). The struggle of ownership is discussed by Mirko Tobias Schäfer, within the context of "cultural freedom" and while still unsolved, their relationship to these new ideas is now outlined from the perspectives of both producer and consumer to see where their interests overlap (173). By observing this interaction within the light of participatory culture and transmedia storytelling, the Walt Disney Company is attempting to stop any further identity negotiations between themselves Disney Adult Community. Both company and consumer place value on the ability to interact with products through participation, however, the Walt Disney Company continues to commodify those interactions while the Disney Adult community is consistently finding new ways to individualize and diversify them. This in turn creates a power dynamic that is constantly changing and evolving based on consumer interest.

Pin Traders/Collectors are another sub-community within the fandom that interact with the Disney brand through individual participation however they are more controlled by the decisions and power of the Walt Disney Company than Disney Bounders. In 2000 Disneyland in Anaheim introduced the concept of collectible pins to guests alongside the idea of pin trading (Giles, "Magic of Magic Kingdom" 57). These pins "tend to be about an inch-and-a-half to two inches across, and are made of cloisonné enamel—a metal frame filled with colored enamel that creates an appearance not entirely dissimilar to

stained glass. Most pins depict a Disney character, a Disneyland attraction, or both...” (Giles, “Magic of Magic Kingdom” 58). With each purchase of officially licensed pins from Disney outlets, consumers are encouraged to interact with others in the community as well as Cast Members within Disney Parks through the trading of pins.

Pin Traders are different from Disney Bounders in that their interactions are still Walt Disney Company approved and it is required that you interact with officially licensed Disney products. With this interaction existing as the product of the Walt Disney Company, it has been quickly commodified within the park space. Yes, you are able to trade with other Disney Adults but if you want to trade with a Cast Member you are put under limitations such as a “maximum of 2 pins per Cast Member or trading board, per day” alongside “Only official Disney pins may be traded” (“Pin Trading Guidelines”). The Pin Trader community is not required to exist in the physical space; therefore, they are not restricted to interacting with pins that they don’t have an interest in or trade exclusively with Disney. Pin trading then allows for identity negotiation between members of the community as “...pins and pin trading have integrated themselves deeply into fan culture: fans establish group membership and specific interests by the pins they choose to purchase and wear...” (Giles, “Magic of Magic Kingdom” 57). Interactions between other community members are a huge aspect as well as draw to the sub-community of pin trading in which Disney Adults are able to identify like-minded individuals exclusively based on how they choose to interact with Disney products

Pin Traders have an element of individualization through their ability to form a community both inside and outside of the Disney sphere although the entry point for

procuring pins has to be through the Walt Disney Company. This then influences the way Pin Traders interact with the process of pin trading in ways that are outside the influence of Disney. “Collectors come together in a variety of ways. They meet at events such as a September pin celebration at Epcot and on Disney pin cruises. They meet on online message boards and in line for rides at the parks. And they meet at the trading post outside of the pin stores...” (Mendelsohn). The ability to meet with other members of the community takes the pin trading and collecting process further out of the purview of the Walt Disney Company and towards the control of the community.

While Disney is still the one producing content, in this case, pins, for community members to interact with, the company exists in this case exclusively as an entry point for interaction. From the initial pin purchase or trade, it is up to the consumer, the Disney Adult to decide how they want to go about immersing themselves in the world around them, whether that be through more in-park interactions or entirely outside of the Disney transmedia space. This opens the gates for identity negotiations between consumers that foster a more community-based environment rather than the competitive one that is created by D23 or other exclusive events. Pin Traders may still be seeking out exclusivity in the case of rare pins, but they are not doing so as it is their only option, it is instead out of one’s individual preferences. The transmedia story world of Disney in this regard is still blocked by entry fees, but there aren’t as many restrictions to how one immerses oneself.

These Disney Adult sub-communities use their interactions with the company as a way to gain a greater relationship with other community members as well as Disney

products. Thus, Disney Adults are active participants within Disneyland, building deeper connections to the products through immersion at the hands of Disney theming and commitment to consistently interacting with the brand in a way that is most suited to their needs. With this participation however, there is still little room for identity negotiation as the Walt Disney Company holds ultimate power over the acceptable ways to interact and immerse oneself within their transmedia storyboard. This is not to say that Disney does not have limitations when it comes to their control over their fandom communities, but rather it shows that in order for identity negotiations to occur beyond fan-to-fan interactions they often need to be outside of the Disney scope, mainly within the online space. Disney Adults in turn are able to settle into their identity by finding moments where they exist under the purview of Disney's approved immersion strategies as well as moments when they are able to express themselves based on their own, individual interests.

Cult Label

Social media platforms exist as a space for Disney Adults to interact with the Disney brand and other community members while building upon their identity connections. However, their existence has been misconstrued by those outside of the community as they are often given the titles of "weird," "crazy," or "cultish." On platforms like TikTok there are arguments of "Disney adults are a cult" in reference to Disney fans selling the water from the former Splash Mountain attraction after its closure in Disney Parks as well as nearly twenty-minute videos on YouTube calling the

community “nauseating” (Sideways; Haylo Hayley). When observing the hatred Disney Adults receive online, those outside the community are extremely vocal in their language, often claiming that fans have “cultish” tendencies and are unable to view the company in a negative light. While the acts of the Disney Adult community may be outlandish at times, they are often still actions of community members attempting to immerse themselves in Disney’s transmedia story world. The cult label is built upon the perception that Disney Adults are unlike any other fandom types in their devoted behavior. However, the devotion does not have a religious connotation, but rather a focus on immersion.

This perspective, though, has not stopped the influx in popularity towards calling this fandom a cult. For example, when user Satoshi_4 on Reddit asked, “what group doesnt look like a cult but is actually a cult?,” the most popular reply with four thousand up votes was from user yeyallik replying “I live in Orlando and Disney people are crazy.” The labeling of those who identify as a Disney Adult as well as those in the general Disney fandom as members of a “cult” has reached a point in popularity where even bigger brands like REACT have made posts “Calling all our Disney cult fanatics.” The use of the term cult defines the Disney Adult community and those within it as something entirely out of the ordinary, something that is actively separate from other types of fandoms due to its grandiose nature. “‘Cult’, in other words, does not surrender all religious force when used by fans, even if this use may also be ironic or humorous (see Hills 2000a:81–2). But within a predominantly secular environment this fan neoreligiosity is perceived as alien and as other in media coverage of fan cultures.” In the

case of the Disney Adult community, the perceptions of their interests as cult-like are based on this idea of different fan cultures, and an inability to relate to outsiders as a result.

One of the greater reasons for the lack of relatability and cult title of Disney Adult fandom is the idea of nostalgia or nostalgia blindness. In one popular YouTube video with 2.3 million views, this concept is brought out between a couple on a date in which one of them reveals themselves to be a Disney Adult. The couple argues with one suggesting, “That sounds like a cult” which garners the response, “Just because I was indoctrinated as a child, ignore all the bad parts about it, and yield fully to its influence over me does not mean I’m in a cult” (Dropout 2:11-2:21). Although it is meant to be comical, this idea of indoctrination and influence serves as a tool to further differentiate those who identify as Disney Adults to other types of fans. While nostalgia does hold power within the realm of transmedia storytelling and convergence where fans may feel more comfortable following a familiar story into a new modality, it is not an encompassing depiction of the entire community.

Due to the Disney Adult fandoms' focus on immersing themselves within the transmedia story world of the Walt Disney Company, members of the community have found themselves within identity negotiations not only with other fandom members but the company itself. In order to interact with the Disney brand, fans must follow the guidelines and rules of the Walt Disney Company which can leave little room for individuality that is not a price point. There are exceptions to these rules in which Disney Adults are able to negotiate their identity by choosing the vehicle for interacting with the

brand. However, it still has to be accepted by the Walt Disney Company in order to be effective in acting as a tool of immersion. As Disney Adults continue to immerse themselves within Disney's transmedia stories, they have received the label of a "cult" from those outside the fandom due to an inability to relate to one's interest in immersion. However, this inability to relate to the Disney Adult fandom by outsiders does leave space for Disney Adults to negotiate their identity with outsiders and other members of the community.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND FANDOM REPRESENTATION

The label of “cult” towards the Disney Adult fandom has created a conception within popular culture that those who identify as Disney Adults are odd and should be ridiculed. The ridicule of the Disney Adult community in this regard comes from outsider perceptions that I argue are not based within a transmedia understanding. In this section, I will observe more specifically how and where Disney Adults are being ridiculed. This will also inform my understanding of where the Disney Adult community congregates and how they react to this ridicule. This will illustrate whether the community’s ridicule is based on their interest in transmedia interactions as well as how they are able to negotiate their identity with outsiders given this ridicule or misunderstanding.

Although members of the Disney Adult community are drawn to physical interactions with Disney products through Disney Parks, members of the fandom often display their interests through social media. As Disney Adults interact with one another on social media they are actively influenced by the transmedia practices of the Walt Disney Company within the type of content they post. It is with this accessibility that outsiders are also able to share their new perceptions with others, regardless of the fact that they may have been created without a complete understanding of the Disney Adult fandom. To be a Disney Adult is to frequently interact with the Walt Disney Company’s transmedia stories in different modalities, however, misconceptions are then built about the fandom due to a general unawareness of this requirement. The lack of understanding

of the prevalence of transmedia storytelling and converge culture within fandom is where the ridicule of the Disney Adult community begins.

From YouTube to Facebook, the same social media websites that Disney Adults use to converge are flooded with outsiders to the community offering their opinions and general commentary over the community. The perceptions of “cults” and “cult-like behavior” come into play in this realm with videos like Kurtis Conner’s “A Deep Dive Into Disney Adults” that have garnered over 15 million views and spread the messages of eccentrics that this community is similar to that of a cult. That is not to say that Conner’s video is exclusively calling Disney Adults members of a cult, but it is the commentary that viewers tend to focus on and subsequently reproduce amongst other social media platforms.

Therefore, I am asking how prevalent these perceptions are when looking into the Disney Adult community on social media and how they relate to their interactions with transmedia storytelling. I will analyze the potential first impressions made on outsiders of the Disney Adult community via videos on Facebook, Instagram Reels, and TikTok. I plan to gather digital ethnographic data about these online interactions, observing how these groups interact with other community members and Disney products within and beyond the previously mentioned discourses. Focus will be placed on the social media platforms of TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook, which Disney Adults and outsiders use for these interactions.

By observing the Disney Adult fandom and outsiders through social media posts I will gain clarity on the social effects that come with fandom membership specifically

why this community is discussed in the same light as cults beyond unrelatability.

Furthermore, I will build a greater understanding of the values of this community as well as their perceptions of their relationship with the company as an active participant within the environment that transmedia storytelling created.

Methods

The study sample consisted of 200 video posts from the social media websites of TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook understanding that the smaller data set may skew the results given the inability to view the Disney Adult community in its entirety. However, this research utilizes the smaller data set for this reason in that outsiders are not likely to gauge the Disney Adult community in their entirety but rather with the small glimpses they are able to see on social media. Samples were gathered using the phrase “disneyadult” as well as “#disneyadult.” Both phrases were used to create the most consistent data given Instagram Reel’s search engine is different from the other sites and will only show the most popular video in a search without adding a hashtag as well as only showing recently posted videos when a hashtag is used. Videos were gathered by opening each website and altering the searches to relevant or recent, the phrases #disneyadult and disneyadult were looked up. New accounts were created on each platform to avoid any algorithmic preferences based on previous platform interactions. The first 20 videos appearing in each search were then hand-coded into categories and compared directly to see which ones were more frequently posted as well as most popular.

These categories included Parody, Stick/Reply, Identifier Commentary, Park/Product Experience, and Unrelated Disney (posts that use the disneyadult hashtag or term to reach a wider audience even though post content does not discuss the community). Besides the Identifier Commentary, videos were placed into categories regardless of identification as a Disney Adult or outsider. Data sets, “With Hashtag, Sorted by Recent, With Hashtag, Sorted by Relevance, Without Hashtag, Sorted by Recent and Without Hashtag, Sorted by Relevance” counted reposted videos as separate date entries. These videos were not taken out of the data set as they would not relay accurate results of an outsider looking into the Disney Adult community’s first interaction with the disneyadult phrases.

The websites of Facebook and TikTok have a larger pool of videos due to their ability to use both preferences of relevance and recency when conducting searches. As a result, the data sets “With Hashtag, Sorted by Recent” and “Without Hashtag, Sorted by Relevance” only feature results from Facebook and TikTok. Furthermore, these data sets were not taken out of the study as their results still applied to the later data set of “Reasons for Ridicule” as well as gaining further insight into what types of Disney Adult content garner the most viewership. The “Reasons for Ridicule” set tallied the reasons Disney Adults were being ridiculed in any of the 200 videos regardless of website origins. Categories of Know-It-Alls, Unrelatable, Money Spent, Over Eccentric, Child-Like Interests, and Self-Centered Actions were used in this set as reasons outsiders ridiculed Disney Adults. Unlike the previous data sets, this section excluded reposted

videos due to the nature of a repost in that it is the exact same content, therefore there would be no new form of ridicule produced.

Results

When looking exclusively at the search results when the phrase #disneyadults included a hashtag, the overall most prominent type of video was Park/Product Experience when looking at Instagram and TikTok. Most of these videos were of people documenting their park experience rather than interacting with products. These types of videos were created by members of Disney Adults, however, there were some outsiders commenting on their park experience, often without the same excited interest as those who identified as Disney Adults. When looking at TikTok, however, the most popular type of video was Identifier Commentary, a category that only increased in popularity when looking at the “Videos Sorted by Relevance, with Hashtag” data. Parody videos, while assumed would be the most popular out of all categories were only apparent on TikTok when sorting by relevance and recent, with the outlier of one video on Facebook when sorted by recent.

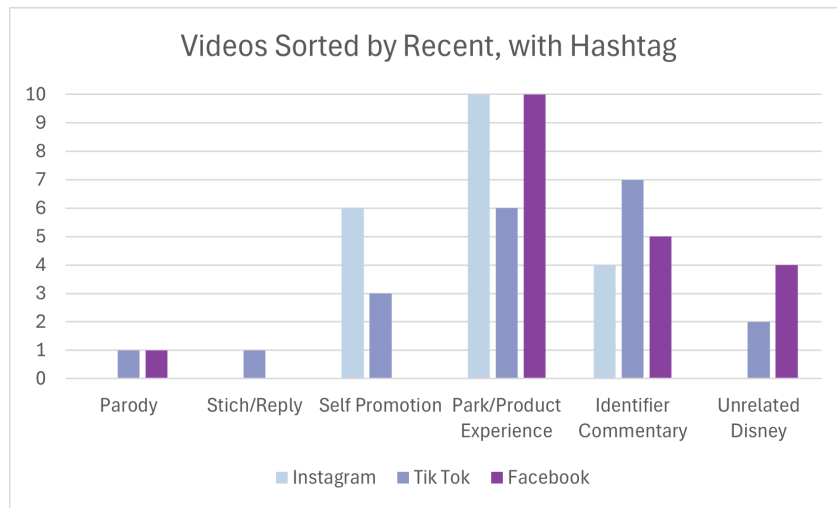


Figure 1: Number of videos posted to Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook when placed into genre categories after searching #disneyadult and altering the search to by recent.

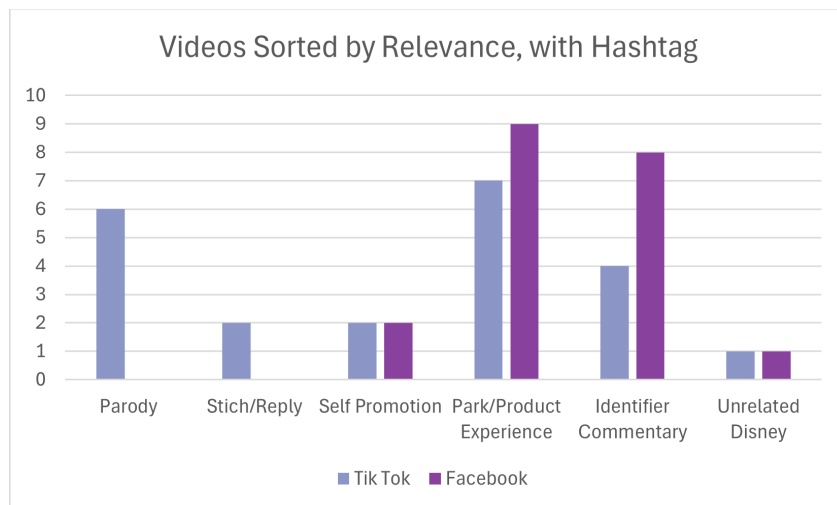


Figure 2. Number of videos posted to TikTok, and Facebook when placed into genre categories after searching #disneyadult and altering the search to by relevant.

In the data sets “Without Hashtag, Sorted by Recent” the results were more varied; however, Park/Product Experience was still the consistently most used genre again by those inside the community and outside when looking at posts on Facebook. This popularity significantly decreased when sorting by relevance where Self-Promotion

was the most popular category. It is important to note that in the “With Hashtag, Sorted by Relevance” data set within Facebook results there were five of the same Parody videos reposted, with four out of the five times being from the same account and ten of the same Park/Product Experience video posted all by different accounts. Parody videos increased in prominence when using a search term rather than a hashtag with it being the most popular category of TikTok videos and $(ab)^n = a^n b^n$ most popular category for Facebook when sorted by relevance.

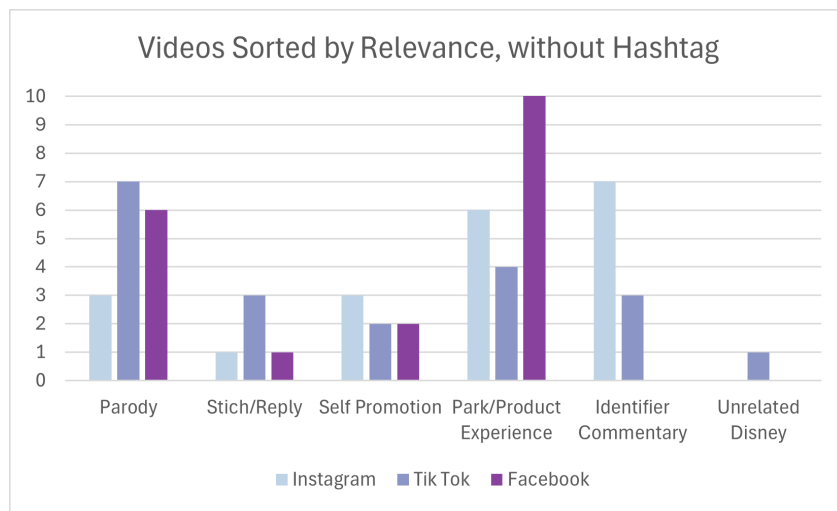


Figure 3. Number of videos posted to Instagram, TikTok, and Instagram when placed into genre categories after using the search term disneyadult and altering the search to by relevance.

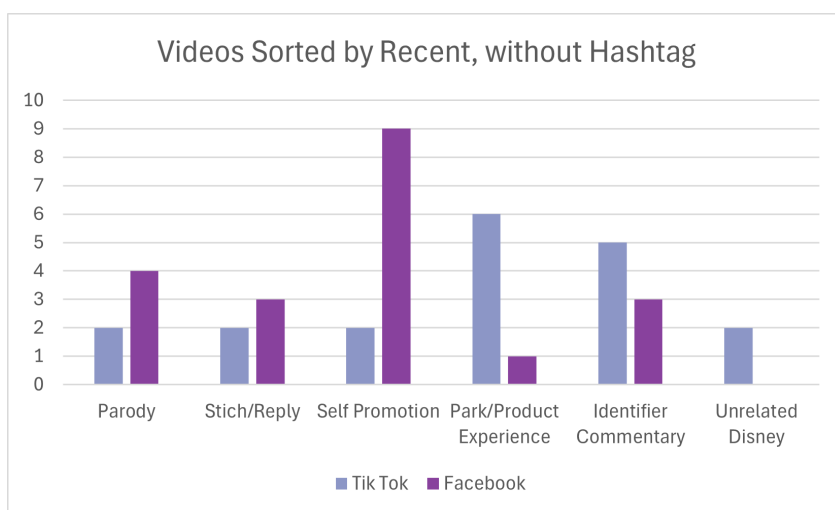


Figure 4. Number of videos posted to Instagram, TikTok, and Instagram when placed into genre categories after using the search term disneyadult and altering the search to by recent.

The results of all the previous data sets help to accumulate reasons as to why Disney Adults were being ridiculed. The most popular reason for this ridicule was the over-eccentric nature of Disney Adults, garnering 35.7% of the results. This ridicule would often mimic Disney Adults crying at the sight of Cinderella's Castle at Disney World or would be a parody of community members relating things in their everyday lives back to Disney. In the same vein was ridicule about Disney Adults acting as if they know everything relating to Disney. Examples of this would include people pretending to find Hidden Mickeys, in places it obviously was not. "Self-Centered Actions" ridicule was the least popular taking up 7.1% of the results, however, it was still prevalent, specifically in stitches/replies where people were confused by the Disney Adult community due to their explicit inability to relate to community members. Although it

was not the main argument of the video, childlike interests tended to overlap with videos arguing for the self-centered nature of Disney Adults.

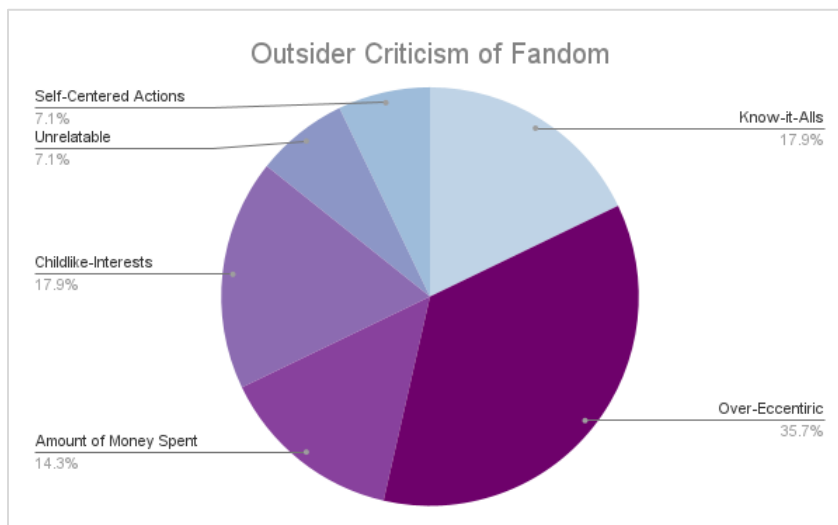


Figure 5. Reasoning for criticism of the Disney Adult community by outsiders based on videos posted to Instagram, TikTok, and Instagram.

Discussion

When looking at the social media of those within the Disney Adult community their moral ownership of the brand is on full display. As previously mentioned, this moral ownership is the direct result of the Walt Disney Company's transmedia practices connection in which consumers take on strong ties to a product due to their consistent participation within the transmedia story world. Therefore, Disney Adults frequently display their interest in transmedia on social media as a way to further their identity connections and moral ownership. The online prevalence of this community ensures that those looking in will view Disney Adults interacting with transmedia storytelling before they see outsiders criticizing the fandom. However, this does not stop the prevalence of

criticism within the community, namely the reasoning criticism being an outsider's lack of understanding over the connections Disney Adults feel to Disney products.

Actual identifiers posting using the disneyadult search term as well as hashtag shows that despite criticism from the community, Disney Adults actively choose to place value onto the Walt Disney Company. Many of the members of this community agreed with those making parodies as well as making parodies themselves due to their awareness that their interests can be perceived as out of the ordinary. On Facebook, many of the videos in the Identifier Commentary/Comedy section use audio files that discuss reasons why it was “okay” to be a Disney Adult, give another member of the community permission to be themselves, and announce that their account was a safe space for other members of the community. This reinstates the idea that Disney Adults know that their identity is not easily understood, however, they are placing value in the ability to share their perspectives on the Disney brand with others above being normalized. Furthermore, there were also no instances of retaliation from Disney Adults against outsiders documented in this data, demonstrating that Disney Adults do not feel the need to alter their online presence due to the beliefs of others.

A continuous theme throughout the ridicule in each category was that outsiders perceived Disney Adults as ignorant of their surroundings as if they thought the way they were acting was completely normal, and to a degree, this assumption is correct. Disney Adults have presented a general negligence to outside perspectives but that is because they feel so compelled to interact with the transmedia stories that Disney creates. Rather than being ignorant of their surroundings, they are hyper-aware of the world around them

and how they can potentially interact with it, as a result of their goal of immersion within the transmedia story world of Disney.

Another interesting note in this regard is that the ridicule for being childish comes up frequently throughout although the only “childish” action that was documented by actual Disney Adults was their interaction with the Walt Disney Company. This further proves the argument that to outsiders Disney is synonymous with youth and innocence, qualities that outsiders do not believe line up with that of Disney Adults. The route of all the ridicule boils down to outsiders viewing Disney Adults as different from them and their anti-brand communities, and the ridicule is a way for outsiders to cope with this lack of understanding. When posting a ridicule video, outsiders are testing the waters to see if others agree with them or if they are alone in their thoughts. Although these videos do get views, the quantity of videos is few and far between: showing that the outsiders are in the minority.

Conclusion

Disney Adults are a community that consistently frequents social media, illustrating to different audiences their interests and values. However, these videos are perceived by outsiders to be immature because of their relation to Disney and preconceived notions that this company is for children. Although there is a plethora of outsiders that make videos ridiculing Disney Adults for their hyper-obsession, Disney Adults actively refuse to withdraw their interest for the sake of being perceived as

“normal” as they place a higher value on their moral ownership and ability to connect with other community members.

As Disney Adults take on the effects of being members of a transmedia-based fandom, that being the consistent ridicule and labeling they receive, they also open up the space for further identity negotiations. Through the vehicle of social media, Disney Adults are able to express their values and specific identity connections to the Walt Disney Company with their peers and connect to the Disney brand outside of the Disney purview. These interactions create the perceptions of the Disney Adult community as odd from outsiders while still allowing space for conversation and negotiation with those who are not a part of the community. Social media goes on to act as the vehicle for identity negotiations alongside the Walt Disney Company, making it incredibly important to the Disney Adult identity.

THE HAUNTED MANSION'S TRANSMEDIA RELATIONSHIPS

While the interactions of the Disney Adult community may be considered odd or cultish, their focus on immersion is not without its benefits. The Walt Disney Company on numerous occasions has recognized their fandom community in ways that allow space for the community's values to be taken into consideration. The values of the Disney Adult fandom have been consistently present within Disney's Haunted Mansion which has since cemented a legacy for itself within the mind of the Disney fandom due to its creative use of theming. This attraction's ability to intrigue guests with a story that is not based on a Disney film or classic fable has led to its continued popularity through different iterations from Mystic Manor and Phantom Manor. With each locational version as well as individual refurbishment, interest in the Haunted Mansion as an intellectual property has grown among casual parkgoers and members of the Disney Adult fandom.

As a result of this growing interest, many members of the general Disney fandom as well as Disney Adults have placed active importance on the story or "lore" in order to decipher the true meanings behind the attraction. This focus on details and "secrets" then creates a feeling of ownership over the brand and story world as community members are able to connect with the story in a way. From the perspective of the Walt Disney Company, this interest has laid the groundwork to expand the Haunted Mansion stories outside of theme park attractions and into multiple book series, TV shorts, two feature-length films, and a Muppet special. Henry Jenkins' describes this expansion as a trend wherein:

"Media companies are learning how to accelerate the flow of media content across delivery channels to expand revenue opportunities, broaden markets, and reinforce viewer commitments. Consumers are learning how to use these different media technologies to bring the flow of media more fully under their control and to interact with other consumers. The promises of this new media environment raise expectations of a freer flow of ideas and content. Inspired by those ideals, consumers are fighting for the right to participate more fully in their culture" (*Convergence Culture* 18).

The Haunted Mansion attraction and its plot serve as a vehicle for analyzing the effects of membership within a transmedia-based fandom. Through the lens of Fandom Theory, we begin to understand the process by which transmedia storytelling creates a devoted fandom. By analyzing the development of the Haunted Mansion story in relationship to fan reception, I offer a specific look at how the Walt Disney Company employs transmedia storytelling and moments where the Disney Adult fandom can negotiate their interests with the company. I argue that the Walt Disney Company utilizes the Disney Adult community's moral ownership over the Haunted Mansion and other Disney products to ensure further cultural convergence within their transmedia products. Thus, my analysis demonstrates the amount of power and control the Walt Disney Company has when it comes to developing transmedia stories, they are able to create a vast array of products that will appeal to a wider audience, resulting in further fandom creation.

Attraction Story Overview

In 1963 the Haunted Mansion opened its doors to the public as a “dark ride” attraction in which guests would board their take an unofficial tour of the house led by their “Ghost Host.” The tour of this house begins in the exterior as guests walk up to the southern-style plantation house placed among Magnolia trees passing by a well-kept lawn and pet cemetery with gravestones sprawled with one-line jokes and puns. Guests first interact with their “Ghost Host” when they enter the Foyer as they hear an ominous voice stating “When hinges creak in doorless chambers, and strange and frightening sounds echo through the halls. Whenever candlelights flicker where the air is deathly still — that is the time when ghosts are present, practicing their terror with ghoulish delight!” “Frequently, visitors to the Haunted Mansion will also hear a chorus of echos from other Disneyland veterans, reciting the lines with aplomb. The narration that accompanies the attraction is as familiar as the Pledge of Allegiance to many of the park’s repeat visitors” (Baham 88). The ability to recite the lengthy monologue of the Ghost Host from memory in just a single example of the time and energy that the Disney Adult community puts into their immersion through interaction in which they are acting in part with the transmedia story world.

After the host finishes talking guests are ushered into the Portrait/Stretching Room by Cast Members who encourage them to “fill in the dead space.” Soon enough, the voice of the Ghost Host returns, inviting the guests to look at their surroundings, asking if the previously “normal” portraits are stretching, an effect achieved as guests are

lowered in an elevator, as they turn into more comically gruesome scenes as well as acknowledging that there are “no doors or windows.” The Ghost Host then presents his “way out” as lightning and thunder crash above revealing the Ghost Host hanging from a noose in the rafters. This grisly imagery is quickly moved on as guests leave this room and enter the loading area, passing by portraits that become ghastlier when lightning crashes as well as busts that seem to follow you as you walk towards your “Doom Buggy.”

Once sat in the vehicle the Ghost Host returns to encourage guests not to pull down on the safety bar as he will “lower it for you” and Buddy Baker’s “Grim Grinning Ghosts” sets the tone for guests as they pass an endless hallway, a crypt, and multiple doors to the rooms of the 999 Happy Haunts that reside in the manor. As the attraction goes on guests enter the Seance Room where they see Madame Leota in a crystal ball, calling upon the ghosts of the mansion to “materialize.” It is only after leaving the Seance Room that guests see a ghost for the first time, rather they see multiple ghosts having a party within the mansion’s Ballroom. The Ghost Host’s voice returns to let the guest know that he will be joining the “swinging wake” which comprises multiple Pepper’s ghost effects as the ghosts ballroom dance, reveal themselves from portraits, hang from chandeliers, and play an organ.

After this scene, guests enter the mansion’s Attic as a feminine voice repeats the “Till death do us part” amongst other wedding-themed lines, setting the tone for multiple wedding portraits begging to change, each erasing the head of the groom, until guest pass “The Bride” with a reappearing hatchet. The “Grimm Grinning Ghost” tune is met with

lyrics as guests leave the attic and enter the mansion's Graveyard, passing by the only living characters of the groundskeeper and his pet dog. Within the Graveyard ghosts from all different backgrounds from a ghostly band to a mummy drinking tea, and an opera singer amongst many others, all enjoying the dismal tune. The Graveyard scene comes to a close as the Ghost Host warns guests to look out for "hitchhiking ghosts" who appear in the reflection of guests Doom Buggies right before they exit the attraction. Once they leave their Doom Buggies and are walking back to the land of the living, guests are encouraged to "hurry back" and not to "forget your death certificate" by a tiny Ghost Hostess, named Little Leota. This tour concludes as guests find themselves outside, exiting from the mansion's Crypt, and often immediately met with a pop-up store with Haunted Mansion merchandise.

Building a Transmedia Story

As of today, the Haunted Mansion in Disneyland remains one of the park's most popular attractions, with the highest recorded wait time for the 7-minute endeavor being 135 minutes, with a 28-minute average (depending on the season and which overlay is in place) ("Wait Times"). This increased interest is what influenced the attraction to be placed in each Disney Park around the world in some capacity alongside its entrance into other media types. But how does this story enter the world of film or fill the pages of a novel if there is no discernable plot or group of main characters to follow?

The Walt Disney Company's solution to this issue was to listen to community members such as those within the Disney Adult fandom. As a result of the Haunted

Manion's plot focusing on subtly rather than explicit concepts, members of the Disney/Disney Adult fandom began to theorize about the Haunted Mansion attraction as a way to fill in their gaps in knowledge and further add to the immersion of the attraction. In action, this looks like community members claiming that a ring-shaped pipe in the cement walkway outside the mansion is the wedding ring of The Bride thrown out the window and into the attraction's queue (Williams 117-119). Therefore, when that loop is reconstructed to look like an actual ring after an attraction refurbishment, the fans who created the theory feel a sense of pride and possession over the theory or story as well as the attraction. This possession is called moral ownership, and it is the reason behind the Disney Adult fandom's exuberant devotion to the Walt Disney Company.

Henry Jenkins discusses the concept of moral ownership in the same context as consumer participation in that those who interact with media through fandom, often through the means of creative practices, feel a sense of ownership over the properties due to their more encompassing understanding of the said product (*Convergence Culture* 175). In the case of the Haunted Mansion, many members of the Disney fandom and Disney Adults alike feel a sense of moral ownership over the brand due to its long-standing history acknowledging and often accepting fan theories like the one of the Bride's ring. Given that the original plot of the Haunted Mansion attraction is so informal, there is a plethora of room for these theories to exist and Disney Adults to build moral ownership over the brand by developing and interacting with fan theories. This ability to theorize and build a connection to the Disney brand based on one's own ability

to create new concepts for the transmedia story world offers the Disney Adult community the power to influence their immersion outside of Disney's purview.

Theories about the characters and plots of the Haunted Mansion are consistent throughout Disneyland, Walt Disney World, and Disneyland Tokyo as the attractions' exact story replicas of one another in that there is no named owner of the mansion. The lack of an owner has led members of the fandom to analyze the attraction's details in order to identify the true leader of the 999 happy haunts, thus utilizing their own moral ownership. As fans theorize about the mansion's owner they are creating new versions of the transmedia story world, ones that are individualized to the specific Disney Adult theorizer, therefore they are creating a moral ownership over the Haunted Mansion story. Those within the fandom community focus on small details like the names atop gravestones outside the Haunted Mansion itself in order to build these identity connections. For example, when guests enter the queue for the mansion and pass the gravestone of Master Gracey many members of the fandom take on the title of "Master" to be more than a nod to Imagineer Yale Gracey, but an official title given to the owner of the mansion.

"Master Gracey's" tombstone was X. [Atencio]'s tribute to special-effects wizard Yale Gracey and has led many fans to incorrectly assume that the master of the house—and thus the Ghost Host—is named Gracey. This urban legend took on such a life of its own over the years that it has become an accepted part of Haunted Mansion lore almost by default. In fact, when it came time to name 'The Master' in The Haunted Mansion

movie, filmmakers named him Gracey in honor of Yale and the rumors spawned by his tombstone” (Surrell 64).

The Walt Disney Company took a wideset belief within the fandom and made it canon within the plot of the 2003 *Haunted Mansion* film, actively solidifying members of the fandom as collaborators within all future expansions of the attraction. By recognizing this idea publicly, validity is placed onto fandom members and their ability to find meaning that may not always be explicit in the works of Walt Disney products. Furthermore, this acceptance shows that the Walt Disney Company is conscious of the power it holds when deciding the canon of a story. Therefore they are aware of how its decisions will impact further convergence in that its decision may encourage or deter fans from seeking these new modalities.

The 2003 film was just a stepping stone on the path towards making the Haunted Manion the transmedia enterprise it is today. Although it was a commercial flop and members of the fandom may not have found it amusing, there was and still is interest placed on the film today due to its transmedia nature. More specifically, this film offered up a new entryway into the Haunted Mansion franchise where new consumers could interact with the story without having to know all of the background knowledge of the attraction. Furthermore, original fans of the attraction, members of the Disney fandom, were given a new perspective on their product of interest that offered new information ready to be interacted with thus gaining a greater understanding of the Haunted Mansion concept as a whole. “Whilst the film itself may be a form of what Henry Jenkins (2009) calls ‘redundant transmedia’ in that is essentially an adaptation of key elements of the

ride narrative, fans of the Mansion have drawn upon it as a resource to expand its storyworld alongside a range of other paratexts and fan interpretations” (Williams 113-114). The ability to draw upon theories of fandom acts as a bridge between the Walt Disney Company and current consumers in that they are actively recognizing the values of their current fandom and using them as a tool to further ensure ongoing consumer interest.

Although it may seemingly have a negative connotation, in the case of the Walt Disney Company, “redundant transmedia” is often what fans directly call for and find interest in, due to the nature of nostalgia. By placing the Haunted Mansion in the new context of the modern day (or 2003), Disney “allows fans to take pleasure in alternative retellings, seeing the characters and events from fresh perspectives,” while still using the original concepts and characters of the mansion, the redundant transmedia, that fans already have a connection to (Jenkins, “Origami Unicorn”). This creates a “best of both worlds” scenario in which Disney transmedia products meet a multitude of different criteria so that fans of any demographic can find something to be interested in. More importantly, this offers an entryway into the fandom to newcomers and the ability to build great emotional ties to the product is offered to current fandom members, thus continuing the cycle of fandom indoctrination.

The Hatbox Ghost

Given that members of the fandom feel moral ownership over the Haunted Mansion story and brand, questions arise as to what power these fans actually hold in

comparison to that of the Walt Disney Company. The best example of these two groups' power at play is the inclusion of the "Hat Box Ghost." When Disneyland's Haunted Mansion attraction was still being conceptualized by Imagineers, Yale Gray, and Marc Davis made ambitious plans for one of their 999 happy haunts. As guests in their Doom Buggies pass "The Bride" within the attic scene they are met with a ghost animatronic holding a hatbox (Surrell 111). This animatronic was named the Hatbox Ghost and was described as "...an ambitious, close-up special effect that was supposed to make the bony, elderly ghost's skull-like head disappear and then reappear in the hatbox he was toting in one claw-like hand, while the other hand quivered on an old cane" (Baham 114-115).

By the time the Haunted Mansion opened to the public in 1963 however, there was seemingly no trace of the "Hatbox Ghost" in the attic let alone the rest of the mansion. Despite his lack of physical presence, some park-goers and Cast Members who viewed the attraction around opening day claimed to have seen the Hatbox Ghost in the attic scene (Baham 115). Soon enough, this mythic animatronic became present outside of guest memories and towards the general Disney fandom, which would soon evolve into Disney Adults fandom alongside the rise of social media. These stories became fixated on by the community as fans would search through published Disney material and the Disney archives looking for slivers of evidence of the ghost. Online message boards and YouTube videos were dedicated to solving the mystery of the Hatbox Ghost and whether it ever actually made it to opening day, as well as asking the question "Where is the Hatbox Ghost now?" (Disney History Institute).

These moments of questioning and research would also result in members of the fandom developing moral ownership over the mansion. By 2005 Disney was aware of this moral ownership in the Hatbox Ghost and began to sell merchandise, specifically a Hatbox Ghost figurine, leading to huge fandom interest. This trend of including the Hatbox Ghost in merchandise kept the fandom enthralled in the Haunted Mansion lore, namely they consistently discussed the potential return of the Hatbox Ghost to the Mansion and how it could be added to the preexisting story. Then in 2015, it was announced that the Hatbox Ghost would make his faithful return to his final resting place within Disneyland's Haunted Mansion after his forty-five-year absence all the while acknowledging the fact that this animatronic had a "cult following" (Disney Parks 0:51). Fans rejoiced as they watched a fully updated audio-animatronic Hatbox Ghost get placed back in the attic scene, a reaction that I argue was due to their moral ownership over the Hatbox Ghost alongside the feeling of approval from the company in recognizing their interest. By listening to the fandom community's values, the Walt Disney Company is placing the power of transmedia entryways into the hands of its consumers. This offers the community a feeling of agency and moral ownership, however, it could also be viewed as the Walt Disney Company continuing its control over its transmedia storyline by accepting fan theories only when profitable.

This is a direct example of Disney utilizing the interests of the Disney Adult fandom to further increase interaction with their transmedia products. As Jenkins suggests, "...the best way to do this turns out to be giving them some stake in the survival of the franchise, ensuring that the provided content more fully reflects their interests,

creating a space where they can make their own creative contributions, and recognizing the best work that emerges” (*Convergence Culture* 173). By recognizing the interests of the fandom, the Hatbox Ghost continued to remain a fan favorite within Disneyland and eventually found a home on the Silver Screen in the 2023 *Haunted Mansion* film. In this film, The Hatbox ghost takes on the role of one Alastair Crump (another reference to a former Imagineer, Rolly Crump) who is the antagonist of the film. Like its 2003 counterpart, the owner of the film’s mansion is Master Gracey however, we are introduced to a second mansion (with an exterior to look like that of Walt Disney World’s Haunted Mansion while this Gracey’s looks more like Disneyland’s), owned by Crump/Hatbox Ghost.

This film made more explicit references to the initial attraction of the 2003 version by pulling more ghosts and theming elements/decor directly from the attraction. However, it did not offer the most new or exciting perspective on the mansion, it was an alternate retelling of guests entering the mansion that transmedia requires, but it came from a perspective that fans had seen before.

“The filmmakers of both the 2003 and 2023 films opted for a basic plot element that I wish they would have steered clear from - the whole outsiders experiencing the mansion. That's essentially the premise of the attraction (we are the outsiders), and it works brilliantly, but the filmmakers should have used the opportunities afforded them to go in a different direction... What I would have loved to have seen is an actual origin story showing us how the mansion became the way it is - just a

linear plot line from the mansion's construction to its ultimate fate as the abode of the 999 happy haunts” (Zorro).

In order for transmedia storytelling to be truly effective in creating convergence and piquing the interest of fans to a point of devotion, new perspectives need to be achieved, and arguably the only new perspective achieved in this film was putting more attention on the Hatbox Ghost by giving him a backstory. This fan review of the newest film shows that the strong connection those in the fandom feel toward the Haunted Mansion is fueled by consistent additions to the lore, whether through community conversations or official products. Fans in this community place value on the ability to make new meaning in their products of interest, and without the ability to draw new conclusions or make connections to preexisting thoughts, fans will deem the transmedia use (or general storytelling) not as effective as it could have been.

The 2023 film also did not receive the highest reviews from the public or fans however more negativity was placed on the transmedia story world of the Haunted Mansion after the Walt Disney Company officially announced that the Hatbox Ghost would be included in the Walt Disney World version of the attraction. While it would be assumed that fans would be as excited about this new addition as they were with the Disneyland version members of the fandom were instead upset about the placement of the Hatbox Ghost more specifically it was announced that the Hatbox Ghost would be placed in “The Endless Hallway” scene. By placing the Hatbox Ghost here Disney actively disregards the widely accepted plot point batch ghosts do not appear in the Haunted Mansion until Madam Leota asks them to “materialize” (Offhand Disney). This

effectively takes away Disney Adults' "stake" within the Haunted Mansion story and stops any further convergence onto the new product from those already within the fandom. Disney Adults are then unable to negotiate their identity connections with the Walt Disney Company, displaying the power that Disney holds over their ability to immerse themselves in the story world.

The fact that fans got upset over an alternative interpretation of the Haunted Mansion may seemingly conflict with my previous statement that fans want new retellings of their interests, however it seems that fans want new perspectives only when it comes to new modalities approached through transmedia. Given that the original modality of the Haunted Mansion story was that of a theme park attraction, any changes to the story in that modality that challenge the fan's moral ownership over what they perceived to be the accepted plot will not be approved of. The return of the Hatbox Ghost to the Haunted Mansion proves that the Walt Disney Company values the interests of the fandom, although, its placement within Walt Disney World shows that moral ownership can only hold so much power in the relationship between company and consumer.

Ensuring Community Convergence

Regardless of whether the Walt Disney Company interacts with the community, that being through the form of acceptance or negligence, convergence will occur surrounding their transmedia products due to the general acknowledgment of their interest. While the company may not always meet the standard that the fans set for them, the ability to offer alternate perspectives on a preexisting story and build upon preexisting

connections will always spark interest in consumers who want to have the most immersive experience within their products of consumption. In this sense, the Walt Disney Company's transmedia use is effective in creating a fan base who will interact with their products/stories, but more importantly, it is effective in creating a cycle in which all of their products can follow resulting in the devoted fan base that is Disney Adults. These moments all combine into fandom creation where those who convergence on products and have a sense of moral ownership come together to discuss new ideas and perspectives which in turn influence new transmedia stories.

The Disney Adult fandom will continue to negotiate their identity by arguing for the values of their connections as their created theories accumulate themselves into a greater moral ownership over the Haunted Mansion transmedia story world as well as the Disney brand. With this new moral ownership Disney Adults actively voice their values and concerns, showing they hold power in the relationship between company and consumer by supporting projects that value their ideas and discrediting ones that don't. Even with this ability, Disney still hold the majority of the power between their dynamic as they are the final decider of what becomes canonical, thus permanently accepted into the transmedia story world

CONCLUSION

While the Disney Adult fandom may have the active public perception of over-eccentric cultists, they are in fact products of effective transmedia storytelling. The Walt Disney Company utilizes the cycle of transmedia storytelling to moral ownership in order to ensure fandom creation and continuation. As the stories of Disney enter new transmedia modalities, they are converged upon by consumers for entertainment. Immersion is achieved through consumers interacting with the transmedia story as well as learning more details about them within their subsequent modality. This interaction builds ties between the consumer and the product which results in moral ownership. As consumers feel this moral ownership of the product, they then become members of the product's fandom. Soon after the cycle repeats with a new transmedia story to converge upon, ensuring the Disney Adult fan's commitment to the product and brand. This effect is enhanced by the monopoly the Walt Disney Company has over the media industry and the ability to engage in multiple modalities to reach a wider audience.

This commitment to the brand is what has garnered the Disney Adult community their "cult" descriptor. Disney Adults negotiate their identity and relationship with the Walt Disney Company through their moral ownership, which overrides the ridicule and labeling they receive from outsiders. Through these negotiations, Disney Adults are able to create their own entry points to the community and fixate on their specific values thus expressing their individuality under the scope of Disney's allowance. Transmedia storytelling is more than just a vehicle for stories to be expanded upon, rather it is the

gateway for the fandom that is the Disney Adult community to exist. Furthermore, it is through the identity negotiations of Disney Adults within the community that consumers are able to take back some of the power the Walt Disney Company has held against them. Disney Adults have the ability to decide what entryways they interact with as well as how to individualize their experience either through distinct community interactions or by following the accepted routes of immersion laid out by the company.

By observing the Disney Adult community in the light of transmedia storytelling we are able to understand the power that immersion has on the individual. Disney Adults are viewed as cultish due to Disney's innate ability to create stories that envelop the consumers, like Disney Adults, into completely new story worlds. With the huge repertoire of properties that the Walt Disney Company has, there are more stories and modalities that any one person can consume in their lifetime, which entices the Disney Adult fandom into consumption. Disney Adults are not members of a cult but rather the product of incredibly effective transmedia storytelling in that they will actively seek out these different stories in all their different modalities in order to truly understand and immerse themselves in Disney's transmedia story world.

REFERENCES

- Apollonio, Bailey. "All Grown up at the Most Magical Place on Earth: Refracting the Disney Adult: Journal of Fandom Studies." *Journal of Fandom Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, Mar. 2023, pp. 3–17. *EBSCOhost*, https://doi.org/10.1386/jfs_00068_1.
- Baham, Jeff. *The Unauthorized Story of Walt Disney's Haunted Mansion*. Second Editions-, Theme Park Press, 2016.
- Boucher, Geoff, and Dawn Chmielewski. "Disney's D23 Expo in Anaheim May Be the Start of Something Special." *Los Angeles Times*, 24 Aug. 2009, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/blogs/hero-complex-blog/story/2009-08-24/disneys-d23-expo-in-anaheim-may-be-the-start-of-something-special>.
- Brigante, Ricky. "'Pixie Dusters' Artwork Examines the Obsessive Side of Disney Fandom." *Inside the Magic*, 19 May 2014, <https://insidethemagic.net/2014/05/pixie-dusters-artwork-examines-the-obsessive-side-of-disney-fandom/>.
- Clément, Thibaut. "Fans as the Researcher's Unwitting Collaborators: A Few Notes on Disney Theme Parks, Fandom, and Data Collection." *Journal of Festive Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1, May 2019, pp. 52–77. *journals.h-net.org*, <https://doi.org/10.33823/jfs.2019.1.1.22>.
- Dalton Smiley [@dalton.smiley]. "DID ANYONE ELSE ALSO EXPERIENCE THE LAST ONE?? still terrified". *TikTok*, 17 Apr. 2024, https://www.tiktok.com/@dalton.smiley/video/7223082181776772394?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7148202298626704939

Dickson, Ej. “How ‘Disney Adults’ Became the Most Hated Group on the Internet.”

Rolling Stone, 21 June 2022, <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/disney-adults-tiktok-hated-internet-1370226/>.

“#DisneyMagicMoments.” *Disney News*, <https://news.disney.com/magicmoments>.

“Disney’s Happiest Memories.” *Facebook*, 6 Nov. 2012, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/490000671032849>.

Disney History Institute. *Disneyland History 1969 - Mystery of the Hatbox Ghost*. 2011.

YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VnERBLhd5ac>.

Disney Parks. *Hatbox Ghost Reappears in Haunted Mansion | Disneyland Resort*. 2015.

YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oAg3pP-PYok>.

Dropout. *Adult Disney Fans Are Weird (Hot Date)*. 2017. *YouTube*,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HVldRjNb4BE>.

EM [@emlaem111]. “#emotional”. *TikTok*, 15 Jan. 2023,

<https://www.tiktok.com/@emlaem111/video/7188932299130539307>.

Evans, Elizabeth. *Transmedia Television: Audiences, New Media, and Daily Life*. Taylor

& Francis Group, 2011. *ProQuest Ebook Central*,

<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/humboldt/detail.action?docID=668562>.

Freeman, Matthew. “A World of Disney: Building a Transmedia Storyworld for Mickey and His Friends.” *World Building : Transmedia, Fans, Industries*, edited by Marta

Boni, Amsterdam University Press, 2017, pp. 93–128. *directory.doabooks.org*,

<https://directory.doabooks.org/handle/20.500.12854/31707>.

George-Parkin, Hilary. "The Disney Black Market Is Booming." *Racked*, 5 Sept. 2017,

<https://www.racked.com/2017/9/5/16192874/disney-fan-stores-instagram>.

Giles, David. "Beyond Parasocial Interaction: Fans and Stalkers." *Illusions of Immortality: A Psychology of Fame and Celebrity*, edited by David Giles, Macmillan Education UK, 2000, pp. 128–46. *Springer Link*,

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-09650-0_8.

Giles, David M. *The Magic of the Magic Kingdom: Folklore and Fan Culture in Disneyland*. 2017. Utah State University, M.A. *ProQuest*,

<https://www.proquest.com/pqdtthss/docview/1886457761/abstract/D5F86ADCFAC24A4FPQ/3>.

Griffin, Gabriel. "Discourse Analysis." *Research Methods for English Studies*, vol. 2, Edinburgh University Press, 2013, pp. 93–112, <https://dokumen.pub/research-methods-for-english-studies-2ndnbsped-0748683445-9780748683444.html>.

Harris, Aisha. "Yes, I'm a Disney Adult. Let Me Explain." *NPR*, 12 June 2022. *NPR*, <https://www.npr.org/2022/06/12/1104213916/yes-im-a-disney-adult-let-me-explain>.

"Haunted Mansion Wait Times at Disneyland." *Thrill Data*, <https://www.thrill-data.com/waits/attraction/disneyland/hauntedmansion/>.

Hay, James, and Nick Couldry. "Rethinking Convergence/Culture: An Introduction." *Cultural Studies*, vol. 25, no. 4–5, Sept. 2011, pp. 473–86. *Taylor and Francis+NEJM*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2011.600527>.

Haylo Hayley. *TikTok's "Disney Adults" Are NAUSEATING...* 2024. *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDtMDVTfY0>.

Hills, Matthew. *Fan Cultures*. Routledge, 2002, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203361337>.

---. "Media Fandom, Neoreligiosity, and Cult(Ural) Studies." *The Velvet Light Trap*, vol. 46, 2000///Fall, pp. 73. ProQuest,
<http://ezproxy.humboldt.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/media-fandom-neoreligiosity-cult-ural-studies/docview/1306636742/se-2>.

Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press, c2006. *ACLS Humanities EBook*,
<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb05936.0001.001>.

---. "The Revenge of the Origami Unicorn: Seven Principles of Transmedia Storytelling (Well, Two Actually. Five More on Friday) — Pop Junctions." *Pop Junctions: Reflections on Entertainment, Pop Culture, Activism, Media Literacy, Fandom and More.*, 12 Dec. 2009,
http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2009/12/the_revenge_of_the_origami_uni.html.

Jordan Jacee, [@jordan.jacee]. "Que the ugly crying. First time seeing Cinderella's Castle in Magic Kindgdom thank you @annadotee for the most unforgettable trip ever." *TikTok*, 3 May 2022,
<https://www.tiktok.com/@jordan.jacee/video/7073736698768887086>.

Karma, Anwe, and Abhir Bhad. "Disney Setting and Changing Gender Stereotypes." *Global Media Journal*, vol. 21, no. 66, 2023, pp. 1–28. *csu-humboldt.primo.exlibrisgroup.com*, <https://doi.org/10.36648/1550-7521.21.66.402>.

Kay, Leslie. *DisneyBound: Dress Disney and Make It Fashion*. Disney Editions, 2020.

Kurtis Conner. *A Deep Dive Into Disney Adults*. 2021. YouTube,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BvNmLwOLz3w>.

Lamerichs, Nicolle. *Productive Fandom: Intermediality and Affective Reception in Fan*

Cultures. Amsterdam University Press, 2018. *directory.doabooks.org*,

<https://doi.org/10.5117/9789089649386>.

luda_storm [@Luda_Storm]. "Que the ugly crying. First time seeing Cinderella's Castle

in Magic Kindgdom thank you @annadotee for the most unforgettable trip ever."

TikTok, 7 Mar. 2023,

<https://www.tiktok.com/@jordan.jacee/video/7073736698768887086>.

McCarthy, William. *Contested Kingdom: The Role of Online Media in the Relationship*

between Disney and Fans over Disneyland. 2019. Thesis.

digital.library.adelaide.edu.au, <https://hdl.handle.net/2440/120989>.

Mendelsohn, Aline. "Tiny Ambassadors -- Big Connections: Disney-Pin Trading Is as

Much about Building Friendships as It Is about Building Collections." *Knight Ridder*

Tribune Business News, 8 May 2006, p. 1.

Mittermeier, Sabrina. *A Cultural History of the Disneyland Theme Parks : Middle Class*

Kingdoms. Intellect, 2020. *directory.doabooks.org*,

<https://directory.doabooks.org/handle/20.500.12854/64077>.

Murphy, Morgan. *The Childless Millennial Pretzel Company: Exploring Stereotypes*

Within Disney Fan Groups on Facebook. 2020. Middle Tennessee State University,

M.A. *jewlscholar.mtsu.edu*, <https://jewlscholar.mtsu.edu/handle/mtsu/6282>.

Offhand Disney. *I Kinda Hate Disney World's Hatbox Ghost...* 2024. YouTube,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bHzsGaS2EMo>.

---. *The DEMONOLOGY of Mr. Toad's Wild Ride*. 2022. YouTube,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g83ohj-rFAY>.

---. *The HIDDEN Stories of Pirates of the Caribbean*. 2022. YouTube,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rYvfu7bRpS8>.

“Pin Trading Guidelines & News.” *Walt Disney World*,

<https://disneyworld.disney.go.com/shops/pin-trading/>.

Ryan, Marie-Laure. “Transmedia Storytelling: Industry Buzzword or New Narrative

Experience?” *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2015, pp. 1–

19. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.5250/storyworlds.7.2.0001>.

REACT. “BOYS vs Girls: Disney Quote Battle.” *Facebook*, 1 May 2024,

<https://www.facebook.com/reactmedia/videos/1136924320908854>.

Satoshi_4. “What Group Doesnt Look like a Cult but Is Actually a Cult?” *R/AskReddit*,

19 Mar. 2022,

www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/thr7ex/what_group_doesnt_look_like_a_cult_but_is/.

Schäfer, Mirko Tobias. “Participatory Culture: Understanding Participation.” *Bastard*

Culture!, Amsterdam University Press, 2011, pp. 167–74. JSTOR,

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46n23s.10>.

Scott, Suzanne. “Modeling the Marvel Everyfan: Agent Coulson and/as Transmedia Fan

Culture: Modelando El Everyfan de Marvel: Agente Coulson y/Como Cultura de

Los Fans Transmedia.” *Palabra Clave*, vol. 20, no. 4, Dec. 2017, pp. 1042–72.

EBSCOhost, <https://doi.org/10.5294/pacla.2017.20.4.8>.

sha [@sixtwentyseven]. “#stitch with @emlaem111 no shade to this creator. I don’t understand Disney Adults #fyp #disneyadult #disney” *TikTok*, 23 Jan. 2023, https://www.tiktok.com/@sixtwentyseven/video/7191775437075467566?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7148202298626704939.

Sideways [@Sideways440]. “Disney Adults Are a Cult.” *X*, 24 Jan. 2023, <https://twitter.com/Sideways440/status/1617714359672901632>.

Surrell, Jason. *The Haunted Mansion: Imagineering a Disney Classic*. Third Edition, Disney Editions, 2015.

Tuttle, Brit. “More Details Announced for Disneyland After Dark: Disney Channel Nite, Including Disney Channel Wand ID Photo Op - WDW News Today.” *WDW News Today*, 23 Feb. 2024, <https://wdwnt.com/2024/02/more-details-announced-for-disneyland-after-dark-disney-channel-nite-including-disney-channel-wand-id-photo-op/>.

“Urban Dictionary: Disney Adult.” *Urban Dictionary*, <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Disney%20Adult>. Accessed 23 Apr. 2024.

Wasko, Janet. *Understanding Disney*. 2nd ed., Polity Press, 2020.

Whalen, Elizabeth A. “Online Brand Communities: A Case Study of Disney.” *Interpreting and Experiencing Disney: Mediating the Mouse*, First edition., Intellect, 2022, pp. 187–204.

Williams, Rebecca. "Extending the Haunted Mansion: Spatial Poaching, Participatory Narratives and Retrospective Transmedia." *Theme Park Fandom. Spatial Transmedia, Materiality and Participatory Culture*, Amsterdam University Press, 2020, pp. 101–32, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvw1d4g3.7>.

Willis, John. *Disney Culture*. Rutgers University Press, 2017. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1p0vkn3.7>.

yeyallik. "I Live in Orlando and Disney People Are Crazy." *R/AskReddit*, 19 Mar. 2022, www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/thr7ex/what_group_doesnt_look_like_a_cut_but_is/.

Zorro. "Anyone Care to Guess How Much the Haunted Mansion Movie Is Going to Lose?" *MiceChat*, 31 July 2023, <https://discuss.micechat.com/forum/disney-theme-park-news-and-discussion/disneyland-resort/8676202-anyone-care-to-guess-how-much-the-haunted-mansion-movie-is-going-to-lose/page2>.