

Illinois State University

ISU ReD: Research and eData

Faculty Publications - Kinesiology and
Recreation

Kinesiology and Recreation

2024

Parting Thoughts XXX: My Struggle With Disney and Cognitive Dissonance

Robin Lizzo

Illinois State University, rlizzo@ilstu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.library.illinoisstate.edu/fpknr>



Part of the [Sports Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lizzo, R. (2024). Parting Thoughts XXX: My Struggle With Disney and Cognitive Dissonance. *Leisure Sciences*, 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2024.2381195>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Kinesiology and Recreation at ISU ReD: Research and eData. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications - Kinesiology and Recreation by an authorized administrator of ISU ReD: Research and eData. For more information, please contact ISURed@ilstu.edu.



Leisure Sciences

An Interdisciplinary Journal

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/ulsc20

Parting Thoughts XXX: My Struggle With Disney and Cognitive Dissonance

Robin Lizzo

To cite this article: Robin Lizzo (18 Jul 2024): Parting Thoughts XXX: My Struggle With Disney and Cognitive Dissonance, Leisure Sciences, DOI: [10.1080/01490400.2024.2381195](https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2024.2381195)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2024.2381195>



© 2024 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC.



Published online: 18 Jul 2024.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 110



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Parting Thoughts XXX: My Struggle With Disney and Cognitive Dissonance



Robin Lizzo

School of Kinesiology and Recreation, Illinois State University, Normal, IL, USA

As a child I grew up watching Disney movies, had a Minnie Mouse sweatshirt, and accompanied my family to Walt Disney World (WDW) at the age of two. As things go, this is probably a pretty normal way to be introduced to the recreation, leisure, and tourism giant that is Disney. However, over the past 2 years I have found my love for Disney rekindled. Yes, there is the nostalgic factor of rewatching movies from childhood, but it is more than that. I find that I enjoy Disney's new movies, Disney's running events, and especially, WDW in Orlando, FL. I find the interactivity and immersivity of WDW to be a rewarding and thrilling leisure experience. In fact, a recent study found that my generation (the millennial generation) enjoys combining our solid digital skills and connectivity with technology with authentic and memorable experiences (Santos & Costa, 2023; Veiga, et al., 2017), which fittingly describes my Disney theme park experiences. In this way, I find myself identifying as a "Disney Adult"—and yes, I view this term as positive and not derogatory—a term being discussed in recent research (Apollonio, 2023). Additionally, the number of Disney adults is growing as we find one another on social media platforms, build community, and embrace our chosen fandom.

However, an experience during my recent visit to WDW challenged my belief in Disney as a quality entertainment company and triggered a deep sense of unease, resulting in a struggle with cognitive dissonance, when two beliefs are inconsistent or incongruent with one another (Festinger, 1957). Although this is not my first experience with cognitive dissonance, encountering it during one of my most cherished leisure pastimes was unexpected. This experience occurred as I rode Mickey and Minnie's Runaway Railway for the first time. One of Disney's newer rides, Mickey and Minnie's Runaway Railway opened March 2020 in Disney's Hollywood Studios theme park. The Hollywood Studios website states that you will "Burst into the cartoon world for the first time ever to go on a picnic with Mickey, Minnie, and pals" (Disney, 2024). All information available in the park and on various Disney websites indicate that this ride is for children of all ages. Perhaps that is why I was so shocked at what I saw as I rode Mickey and Minnie's Runaway Railway for the first time.

Picture this, you are excited as the ride pre-show opens in front of you. A short film begins to play and we encounter Mickey Mouse singing a catchy upbeat tune

CONTACT Robin Lizzo  rlizzo@ilstu.edu  School of Kinesiology and Recreation, Illinois State University, Normal, IL, USA.

© 2024 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

while rolling up a picnic blanket and packing items into the trunk of a car. Next, we see Minnie dancing and singing her way out of the house with the picnic basket. Minnie executes a graceful pirouette as she kicks Pluto into the trunk of the car. We then see Pluto poke his head out of the trunk with a bruised eye, a dazed expression, and stars circling his head. At this point, Minnie tosses the picnic basket into the trunk, right on top of Pluto's head, and slams the trunk shut. Following this, the scene cuts to an image of Pluto crammed into the small trunk, in the dark, for the duration of the car ride (Figure 1).

When I exited the ride, I was appalled by what I had seen, Pluto being treated in a cruel and abusive manner by two beloved Disney characters. This instance of animal cruelty and its wide acceptance among the other park guests made me uneasy and distressed. This dissonance in my belief in Disney as a quality entertainment company and my strongly held belief that animal cruelty is never okay (even fictional depictions) created a struggle within me. On the one hand, I love Disney! But on the other hand, depictions of animal cruelty are not something I support. How, as a Disney adult, am I to reconcile these two beliefs? As Cognitive Dissonance Theory suggests, I needed to change one of these conflicting beliefs to feel a sense of resolution and to avoid future instances of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). I asked myself, what attitude or behavior can I change to resolve the dissonance? I realized that I would either need to change my attitudes and beliefs about the Disney Company or my attitudes and beliefs about animal cruelty. In the end my strongly held belief in the evils of animal cruelty won out over my belief in Disney as an entertainment company. By nature, we are rationalizing beings, so, because of this experience, I don't foresee myself forgoing Disney themed leisure in the future. However, I do foresee that a shadow has been cast over not only my memories of past Disney experiences, but my expectations for future experiences. A new and far more critical lens has been placed over my view of Disney and what they have to offer.

With the all too real problem of animal cruelty, abuse, and neglect in U.S. society and around the world, is this really what we should be casually endorsing in our leisure experiences? What purpose does abusing Pluto serve in Mickey and Minnie's Runaway Railway? Could the experience have been designed to exclude animal cruelty and been just as engaging and enjoyable for park guests? These are questions I would like to ask Disney. As a Disney adult, and more importantly, as a human in this world, I want to open this conversation. I want to challenge Disney, and you, to look around and see what is really there. Don't let the fear of being outside your comfort zone stop you from truly seeing what is involved in your leisure experience. And perhaps, if you have an experience like mine, you too will have the chance to examine



Figure 1. Four still shots from the pre-show film of Mickey and Minnie's Runaway Railway.

your beliefs and to change for the better. Because, although this was an uncomfortable leisure experience, I do feel that I have emerged at the other end more confident in my beliefs and with a more critical view of a recreation, leisure, and tourism giant, both of which will aid me in my continual journey of learning and living.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

References

- Apollonio, B. (2023). All grown up at the most magical place on earth: Refracting the Disney adult. *The Journal of Fandom Studies*, 11(1), 3–17. https://doi.org/10.1386/jfs_00068_1
- Disney (2024). Disney's hollywood studios live your ultimate adventure. *Disney's Hollywood Studios Walt Disney World Resort*. <https://disneyworld.disney.go.com/destinations/hollywood-studios/>
- Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance* Row. Peterson and company.
- Santos, R. C. D., & Costa, M. F. D. (2023). Walt Disney World: Consumption experience of the millennial generation in theme parks. *Revista Brasileira de Pesquisa em Turismo*, 17, e-2746. <https://doi.org/10.7784/rbtur.v17.2746>
- Veiga, C., Santos, M. C., Águas, P., & Santos, J. A. C. (2017). Are millennials transforming global tourism? Challenges for destinations and companies. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, 9(6), 603–616. <https://doi.org/10.1108/WHATT-09-2017-0047>