

### Individuality in an Environment of Commercial Control

America is home to a culture of people that thrive on their individuality and self-reliance. It is also the superlative example of capitalism. The interaction and relation between individual social practices and corporate influence is confusing and often hypocritical. American culture stresses the idea of personal freedom and independent thought but individuals consensually subject themselves to a corporate structure that thrives on the control, order, and conformity of its patrons for self perpetuation.

American product distribution is rooted in the opportunity of life improvement, whether it be permanent or temporary. Disney is one of the largest American Corporations and is supported by overwhelming positive imagery. Within "Say "Cheese" The Disney Order That Is Not So Mickey Mouse," Clifford Shearing and Philip Stenning discuss ways in which Disney Productions induce consensual control over guests at Disney World. There is always some measure in place to insure the comfort and security of visitors while overshadowing control functions insuring the flow of product exposure. People allow themselves to be willingly controlled for the sake of personal happiness. "Opportunities for disorder are minimized by constant instruction, by physical barriers which severely limit choice of action available and by the surveillance of omnipresent employees who detect and rectify the slightest deviation."(p175)<sup>1</sup> This sort of control becomes consensual because it is embedded into the structure of the park. For example, the grouping of a family for exhibits and transportation, as explained in "Say Cheese!", insures unified family experience, but also allows for parents to maintain control of their children, alleviating the threat of possible disorder. To obtain what they want, people must comply with instructions that are often masked as personal advantages. Patron self interests are exaggerated by the company, convincing the consumer to endure relatively unusual behavior for their own benefit. This is displayed by the exceedingly long time people will wait to board a ride.

As discussed in "Growing Up American: Doing the Right Thing" by Amparo B. Ojeda, people in America are observed being strongly independent and self reliant in character. "I found out that from an early age, a person is encouraged to be independent, to make up his or her mind, and to stand up for his or her rights."(Ojeda, p63)<sup>2</sup> In contrast to American "thought" and much like the basic structure of Disney World, Ojeda explains the beliefs of her Filipino culture. "Traditions do not stress independence and autonomy of the individual."(p65) Unlike at Disney and many other corporations, this unifying mentality is instilled for the safety and stability of family and not personal gain through coercion.

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<sup>1</sup> "Say "Cheese" The Disney Order That Is Not So Mickey Mouse" by Clifford Shearing and Philip Stenning, from *Private Policy*, 1987 Sage Publications printed in *Talking About People – Readings in Contemporary Cultural Anthropology*, Haviland, Gordon, Vivanco. McGraw Hill, New York.2002

<sup>2</sup> "Growing Up American: Doing The Right Thing" by Amparo B. Ojeda, from *Distant Mirrors: America as a Foreign Culture*, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1993 printed in *Talking About People – Readings in Contemporary Cultural Anthropology*, Haviland, Gordon, Vivanco. McGraw Hill, New York.2002

Capitalism is a profit driven, open opportunity, yet independently focused form of government. The culmination of these factors leads to a very strange cultural structure. As individuals we strive to be independent and self reliant in shaping our own happiness. However, companies are driven to succeed by developing a reliance of consumers on their product. The corporations of America offer an opportunity to aid individual but effectively market towards a mass audience with images of personal benefit, some being true and some not. It is very hard to say we are a nation of individuals when, out of personal necessity we are actively participating in a mass market. It is possible that our individuality can be surmised from the products we need.