

# WEDNESDAY 26 JUNE 2024

## "It's Kind of Fun to Do the Impossible": Whimsical Disney Panel

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### **Trying to Spread the Magic: Playful Gifting on Disney Properties**

Perhaps one of the most surprising features of Disney fandom to those outside of it is the extensive gift-giving that happens across various properties, from the theme parks to the cruises. While Disney as a commercialized and curated space dominates the cultural understanding of the company, on the ground communities are often working through and around this modality through extensive practices of gifting. Drawing on both interview and participant observation data, I explore how gift-giving operates both as a vibrant source of playful community engagement and participatory culture, but also wrangles with expectations tied up with reciprocity and commodification. In particular I will focus on three specific forms: “fish extenders,” “pixie-dusting,” and scavenger hunts. Fish extenders, a guest-created and organized gifting system that operates on Disney cruises, utilizes online networking features to provide guests opportunities to participate in a quasi-Secret Santa gifting system during their cruise. Using bags that guests hang outside their cabin doors, fish extenders form an active subculture on cruises. By contrast, “pixie-dusting” is usually used as a term to designate smaller, spontaneously given gifts on property (be it parks, hotels, or cruise). Scavenger hunts, like those at Disney’s Fort Wilderness campground, are facilitated on Facebook and involve hiding items around the property and posting clues to the FB page. None of these activities are organized or sanctioned by Disney. Drawing in my fieldwork, this talk will explore the pleasures, labor, and social negotiations people make when participating in these gifting subcultures. Particular attention will also be given to the special conditions around gifting that arise in heavily regulated environments (such as Disney properties), cross-generational practices, and tensions with commodified expectations.



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