**Sociology 25 Documentary Paper: AFOL**

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5/19/2017

This week we have watched the documentary “AFOL: Adult Fans of Lego”, which was a video that presented the ways in which adult fans of Lego interact within their fandom, and how being in that fandom has shaped their lives and habits. It documents the Fans of the Lego Fandom, and how in part of that fandom has shaped their lives and personality. In my paper, I will talk about how the practices they are engaging in are considered poaching, how they frame their life course “Selves” in relation to their fandom, and what sense of empowerment their fandom grants them.

What I want to talk about first is how being a part of AFOL has lead the fans to become poachers of Lego. Poaching, coined by Michael de Certeau, means “an impertinent raid on the literary preserve that takes away only the things that are useful or pleasurable to the reader” *(Textual Poachers, Jenkins*), which in simpler terms means: taking something and making it for yourself in unintended ways, ways that are not intended by the original creator. There are two ways in which that Adult Fans on Lego are poachers. One they look for certain pieces of Lego, and pick out the parts in which they find useful or pleasurable to themselves. Two they take these pieces, and create things that were not intended with the original pieces. At stores and conventions, fans of Lego can pick and match pieces that they like at will, taking only the parts that they feel would be useful for their own projects. This aligns with the literal sense of Poaching, in which they are taking bits or pieces that they feel is pleasing to them. The other term is that they are utilizing these pieces to create new forms of production, not intended by the manufacturer. They can create different projects, such as cars, robots, spaceships, buildings, and other interesting sets from simple building blocks intended for building other things. This sense of poaching went as far as that one of the Adult Fans of Lego could create a business from his poaching habits, where he created new forms of projects from the pieces of Lego that he bought, and was able to be paid by Lego to show his creation to students or younger fans, to impart a sense of awe in them to also become fans. As has been said above, the Adult Fans of Lego were able to present the idea of poaching, the act of taking something from a fandom that is pleasurable, and was able to make it their own, and make their own production of Lego from the building blocks that Lego has presented them.

Another topic I wanted to get into was that how did the Adult Fans of Lego frame their life course selves in relation to the fandom. The Study of life course is the study of how an individual’s life unfolds and how it is shaped by both internal psychological and external social processes (*A life course Perspective on fandom, Bielby*). This can be done through analyzing Fandom and life milestones, changing age norms, the ageing self, and changing fan objects. Some aspects that reference how being and Adult Fan of Lego affected the life course of the fans is that becoming a fan of Lego were memorable milestones to their lives. They fondly remember either getting their first sets, or creating a good masterpiece, and how their lives were affected from their practices. It shows that the fandom had an impact on their lives, both socially and economically, where they structure their lives in part to being able to support their hobby. They also identify the changing age norms of the fandom, from one that used to be restricted to young kids, to fans of all ages. They identify how the fan object keeps changing and updating every couple of years, including more sets and pieces into their hobby. One other point I want to include is that it can also highlight some of the ideas of the 4 life course phases of Adolescence, young-adulthood, mid-adulthood, and late adulthood. It shows that for when they were adolescent fans, they could utilize the fandom to gain a sense of identity from their practice, and were able to form a self-image from being a consumer and a builder of Lego. They slightly reveal the idea that as a young adult, they could become intimate with other people, and not isolated. Some of the fans could find a significant other from the conventions, or at least longtime friends. For Mid-Adulthood, they express that they still have a sense of generativity, and a willingness to give back to the fandom, as some could take their creations, and utilize them in a way to show the younger generation how being a fan of Lego was fun, and brought them a sense of achievement. And lastly, for late adulthood, they expressed that they have a sense of integrity, and happiness from being a fan of their hobby, then falling into despair. One segment talks about how the guy who was being a paid builder of Lego would quit if he couldn’t be creative anymore, since he doesn’t want to dread on being despaired on his creativity, and wants to keep hold of that sense of awe and wonder he had building Legos. These 4 stages of life course were in one way or another expressed in the film. So, in conclusion, being an Adult Fan of Lego has had a life course impact on the fans of the fandom.

One other aspect of the documentary that I want to analyze is that being an Adult Fan of Legos has a sense of empowerment. Empowerment, which is the process of becoming stronger or more confident, while being able to control one’s life and claiming one’s rights could be found for being a fan of Lego in that of having a sense of ownership over which they create, and having an increase in confidence due to it. Their creations are largely impressive in terms of scale and dedication that the fans pour into their projects, and from this they gain a sense of pride and achievement from pulling it off. In one scene from the film, one of the Fans were talking about how social media is a great way for them to get acknowledgement from other fans, as they have followers who care about their creations. At another scene, they talk about how their creation looks like it could come from a set is both a compliment or an insult, as it is a compliment for being well-done and professionally made, but an insult on how it isn’t said to be explicitly theirs. Their sense of empowerment could also come from the fact that being a fan grants them a sense of ease and escape from life, as a source of enjoyment. Empowerment could also come from the fact that being a fan of Lego has increased their social interaction with other people, since they have something in common with each other, and could create large projects with others, and be a part of a tightly knit community of other people with similar interests. This increases their sense of confidence in their technical level and creativity as a person, and grants them the confidence to make friends. As one person in the video said, one of the greatest take-aways from a convention is the friends you make. Being a Fan of Lego could impart a sense of empowerment into the fans by granting them a sense of achievement, escape, and social incentives to being a fan of the community.

Being an Adult Fan of Lego allows adults a sense of ownership in their creation, and a faucet of generativity and social ties within their fandom. In the film “AFOL: Adult Fans of Lego”, I could analyze that the adult fans in the fandom engage in fan Poaching, a study of Life Course, and a sense of empowerment in the Fans.

References

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