

Findings in Sport, Hospitality, Entertainment, and Event Management

Volume 1

Article 2

2021

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Recommended Citation

Havard, Cody T. (2021) "Journey into Your Imagination: A Topical Essay on using the Spirit of Imagination (with a little bit of Figment) and Creativity in the Pursuit of Knowledge," *Findings in Sport, Hospitality, Entertainment, and Event Management*: Vol. 1, Article 2.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.memphis.edu/finsheem/vol1/iss1/2>

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Findings in Sport, Hospitality, Entertainment, and Event Management

Topical Essay – Sport, Hospitality, Entertainment, Event

Journey into Your Imagination: A Topical Essay on using the Spirit of Imagination (with a little bit of Figment) and Creativity in the Pursuit of Knowledge

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Abstract

The current research essay addresses the importance of using imagination and inspiration in the research process. The research process-the continued search for knowledge and understanding-should be a worthwhile endeavor, and one that brings satisfaction and inspiration to academics. Therefore, the current research essay discusses potential ways to use one's imagination to engage in meaningful, satisfying, and fulfilling research.

Keywords: Research Process, Scientific Inquiry, Imagination, Seek Understanding, Disseminate Knowledge

The Issue

“Two tiny wings, eyes big and yellow,” are lyrics to the song that accompanies the Journey into Imagination with Figment attraction at Epcot in Walt Disney World. Figment, a little purple and pink dragon, is the star of the attraction and represents the embodiment of human imagination. The history of the attraction includes a sponsorship with Kodak, a pavilion at then EPCOT Center, and an episode of *Magnum PI* providing inspiration for the dragon’s name (CITE(s)). The purpose of the pavilion and attraction is to show visitors how our greater society is built and shaped through the human imagination, and encourage people to tap into their imaginations in daily life.

The current research essay addresses the importance of imagination and creativity in the research process, and calls on researchers to utilize both in the investigative process. It is important to note that by calling for imagination and creativity to be used in the investigative process, it is not suggested that researchers participate in anything less than ethical conduct (e.g., this essay is not suggesting anyone make up data or take liberties with less-than-sound research methods). Instead, this essay suggests researchers call on the human imagination in the questions we ask and creativity in the ways we disseminate information, whether through written or oral communication. In this spirit, the current research essay examines the role and place imagination and creativity should play in the investigative process relative to the fields of sport, entertainment, hospitality, and event management, while providing potential ideas for doing so and encouraging relevant conversation among colleagues and interested parties.

Background

As consumers, we are regularly exposed to imagination creativity. Imagination is defined as “creating mental representations of concepts, ideas, and sensations that are not contemporaneously perceived by the senses” (von Stumm & Scott, 2019, p. 707). Creativity has been described as the developed products of imagination that can be consumed by others (Franken, 1993). Further, institutions of higher education offer classes on the topics in an effort to reach future practitioners of their importance and implementation. However, little is known about imagination, and its importance from an academic perspective.

Within academic literature, an area of research exists that examines the use of imagination and creativity in industry and education (Paixio & Borges, 2019). However, research suggests that even people investigating imagination and creativity assume their readers already understand the two as less than 10% of reviewed articles explained the meanings of the terms (Forgeard & Kaufman, 2014).

In popular culture, there is no shortage of examples in imagination and creativity. From the musical works of artists such as Lin Manuel Miranda and Rogers and Hammerstein to the theatrical releases of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), and the writings of authors such as Ridley Pearson (see the young-adult *Kingdom Keepers* series) and suspense author Stephen King, we are the beneficiaries of seeing other people’s imagination on display by way of creativity. We also see imagination and creativity come to life in the animated films distributed by the Walt Disney Company, then again in the live-action remakes of classic movies. Further, the public personas, at least those presented through books and

movie production, of Walter E. Disney is a great example of someone who was willing to use theirs, and tap into others imagination and creativity for public consumption. The artistic interpretation and portrayal of P.T. Barnum in *The Greatest Showman* is another example of the imagination and creativity of a man, along with the storytelling using script and musical theater presented in the film.

While it is easy to point to luminaries in the arts, we also see a great amount of imagination and creativity on full display in advertising, marketing, and promotions. Additionally, we see the characteristics when people invent new products or introduce solution to assist others and the greater society (see the *Freakonomics* book series for many such examples), and the ways educational information is delivered via print and oral formats. Further, imagination and creativity are display on a daily basis by parents seeking to entertain or educate their children, and in children exploring and making sense of their surroundings and world. For the purposes of the current research essay and call to action, we will focus on the many ways academics can use the imaginative and creative processes to accompany their research and dissemination of ideas.

Call to Action

This final section will identify a few areas where, at least according to this contributor, imagination and creativity can help the investigative process. Specifically, the call will address areas such as (1) Asking Questions, (2) Collecting Information, (3) Disseminating Knowledge, and (4) The Researcher's Journey. While providing example and potential areas for use, this call to action need not be treated as a technical guideline to follow with discussion or deviation, as doing so would have the

opposite effect on the imaginative and creative processes. In that vein, allow these ideas to foster imagination and creativity, and hopefully discover where some are already in use in your investigative works.

Asking Questions

Research begins with one or more questions that need to be answered. Some use prior research to drive future investigations, and others observe phenomena in society they want to learn more about. Both are acceptable ways to launch the investigative process, and both carry great merit. While one may seem more clinical, it is still the responsibility of the researcher to fully develop and understand the ideas. Even for early-career researchers and those working in apprenticeship roles, asking the question(s) is a skill developed over time and practice.

There are questions to be answered everywhere. It takes imagination to find and select the ones that can be addressed using a researcher's quiver, which in turn take often requires a little creativity, and both are also skills developed over time. As many will tell, there is an aspect of interest in a particular area of research that is based on personal experiences. For example, I study rivalry because I have always been interested in learning why people are treated differently based on their respective group status, in sport such as favorite team but more importantly out of sport based on characteristics, ideas, and backgrounds. Researchers should search for the questions they want to answer and work with others in a collaborative effort to identify potential streams of study and investigative methods.

Collecting Information

At this point, it is again important to note that the essay is not suggesting that

researchers collect or conduct investigation in anything but an ethical manner. Instead, this call points to the need for researchers to show imagination and creativity in the way they engage participants in the data collection process. With the use of online survey software such as Qualtrics and Survey Monkey, researchers are provided with several creative attempts to engage study participants. For example, researchers can use the software programs to *pipe* in previous survey responses so that participants are reminded of target brands throughout data collection.

Researchers also find their research projects have to compete with other media that are easily consumed. For this reason, they are also encouraged to find ways to make their data collection processes more attractive to participants. Ways include designing data collection methods using social media popular to the target audience (e.g., communicating or storytelling rather than just posting messages inviting people to complete a survey) and looking for methods that are appropriate for the chosen participants and research questions.

Disseminating Knowledge

To better address the need for research to engage with interested parties in the general public, investigators should use their imaginations to find or craft creative ways to reach readers, viewers, and/or listeners. One way to engage the public is through the dissemination of short video summaries explaining the *why*, *how*, and *what this means* aspects of the project. This is the primary reason why publishing in this outlet requires authors to be willing to produce short summary videos that can be easily shared via social media and by other means. Additionally, the use of infographics, tables, comic storytelling, and/or dramatic

interpretations (e.g., radio dramas) are all creative ways to engage the public in the dissemination of information. Researchers should always use their imaginations to strive for new and creative ways to share their findings and implications.

The Researcher's Journey

Finally, researchers need to tap into their imaginations in order to find creative and fun ways to remain engaged in their own research. Part of this definitely has to do with *asking the question* that most interests the researcher, but there are also ways to try and avoid any pitfalls presented during the research, writing, and publishing process. Recently, some colleague and myself wrote a piece for *Transformative Works and Cultures* in which we identified the MCU as a tool to help researchers approach the research process and develop a liner research line (Havard, Fuller, Ryan, & Grieve, 2019). This may present a helpful way for researchers, especially those that are fans of the MCU, to view and guide their research while making sure their investigations link with others in a meaningful way to help disseminate knowledge.

For non-MCU fans, there are also a myriad of ways to use a creative approach to keep them engaged in the research process. Finding a way to view the research as a game or story is one way of doing this. For example, researchers should strive to *tell a story* to the reader during the writing process. This does not refer to manipulating data or interpretations, but instead view their writing as a piece of art or work that should engage the consumer. In this vein, researchers could view themselves as authors responsible for catching and maintaining a reader's attention and interest. Further, researchers could view themselves

as protagonists in a story about their research career. For example, investigating a question where not much existing literature can be found is similar to Elsa traveling into the great unknown in *Frozen II*, or Ian and Barley going on an epic quest in *Onward*. Researchers can find many ways to tap into their imaginations to stay engaged in the research process, and this call encourages this endeavor.

The current topical essay makes a call for researchers to tap into their imagination and creativity in the pursuit of knowledge. The research process should be enjoyed, and one way to maintain the passion and motivation is to find relatable ways to remain engaged. The current topical essay serves to encourage researchers to find ways that make the process enjoyable and collaborative through the use of their imagination and creativity. So, go forth and break some eggs!

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