AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Abstract approved:

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This research covers Japanese animation and its popularity in the United States. It

focuses on hardcore fans for whom this animation has become part of their lives.

Using interviews of self-identified anime fans, this research explores how anime

fandom has become a part of American life despite originating in a different culture.

The information is analyzed through the theories of media anthropology, fan studies,

and subcultures of consumption to better understand the popularity of Japanese

animation in a country where few other non-native media have succeeded. Many fans

started watching anime as a way to assert their own identity. Anime was appealing

because of the digital community that supports fans even in remote parts of the country and because anime differed from mainstream entertainment. Anime fans differ in their actions based upon the age of the fans, with high school age fans very vocal in their support and identification with anime. Older fans are more likely to consider anime as only a limited part of their life. Anime has created an interest in Japan among many fans, but this interest has little to do with the actual country and more do with a perception of "Japan" as an exciting, exotic place.

Japanese Animation in America and its Fans

by

Jesse Christian Davis

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of the Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Jesse Christian Davis, Author

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To my wife, Deborah, for supporting me in every way imaginable, I thank you.

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Introduction

Summary

This study is about American fans of Japanese animation. I wish to show why these fans feel connections to a medium from a different culture. Japanese animation (*anime*) and comics (*manga*) have increasingly become common in American popular culture. What differentiates Japanese animation and comics from their American counterparts is the style as well as the content. Anime and manga cater to all segments of the Japanese population and can cover any genre from children's adventure to pornography to educational material. This is hard to imagine for many Americans because they see cartoons as almost exclusively children's entertainment. Anime and manga have been niche interests in the United States since the mid 1970s, but its popularity exploded from the late 1990s and is still growing today. Currently, almost every book and video store in the United States has an entire section devoted to manga or anime respectively.

In this thesis I look into the influence that watching a product of a different culture has had on anime fans. Using interviews and participant observation to learn about the influence that manga and anime have had on people who read or watch them, I came to the conclusions that anime is popular because it provides something that is lacking in American popular culture and, that while many anime fans are interested in Japan, few gain more than the most basic understanding of the language and culture. Those fans that gain a deeper understanding of Japan often do so using anime or manga as the inspiration to learn the language or travel to Japan. This deeper

understanding of the country often leads to a fan watching less anime because they find other parts of the culture more fulfilling. The biggest reason for anime and manga's popularity in the United States is the sense of identity and community that fans get from participating in something different. Some fans also gain a feeling of resistance towards authority in their lives.

Research Questions and Relevance

My thesis is on how anime is a part of the lives of its fans in America and what made it popular with these fans. For my project, I used both participant observation and semi-structured interviews to learn how anime and manga have influenced the lives of anime fans. I also studied the characteristics of the anime and manga fandom subculture. To measure the influence of anime on fans, I want to investigate what they do related to anime and manga in their daily lives. I also want to cover fans' use of language, their desire to learn Japanese, and what motivates them to be fans. Specifically, my thesis covers the following:

- Why fans are attracted to anime and manga.

- Reasons for participating in fan culture.

- The different facets of the anime and manga fan community.

- The role of knowledge within the fandom.

- How fans' knowledge of the real Japan affects their fandom.

My project can be useful in a variety of ways. I hope it will show why anime and manga have become popular in America as well as what fans gain from engaging in its hardcore community. Before the success of anime and manga, many believed that it was almost impossible for media from other countries to become popular in the United States. The anime fan community is important because it shows how a Japanese subculture of consumption was adapted by fans for the United States. The language and culture barrier prevent many fans from visiting Japan, but Japan is still highly esteemed in anime fandom because it is the origin of anime and manga. This unclear understanding causes many fans to form false perceptions of Japan. Studying how anime fandom works can also give insights into how culture is perceived and distorted through media.

Studying anime and other fandoms can give insight into how fans create their identities based on their fandom and media. For fans to maintain their identity, they need the support of the community of other fans. The themes of identity and community showed up continually during my interviews and research on anime fandom. My study adds to the available literature on anime fandom. My specialization in applied anthropology is business, specifically marketing. I want to research how the presentation of manga and anime affects what people think of Japan, which can apply to business market research. The Japanese government has noticed the influence that Japanese culture has abroad and wants to capitalize on that positive perception. Travel groups are offering tours of popular destinations for American anime fans to visit Japan and experience some of the culture firsthand. My study can

provide information on how to better market Japanese culture abroad and how ideas are transmitted cross-culturally. Fan knowledge is also very valuable to companies that import and localize anime, manga, and related merchandise as well as to marketing to the fan communities that influence purchasing decisions. In general, this contributes to research about what drives young consumers in the realm of entertainment and leisure play.

About the Researcher

I have studied Japanese on and off since high school and have lived in Japan twice. I can remember when anime was a very niche interest group. In high school (around 1995-1997), I went to local science fiction conventions in Spokane, Washington and Missoula, Montana, and there would often be an anime room. Many people would be watching low quality, fan-subtitled anime tapes. Late at night, the content would even change to very violent and pornographic titles.   In my first year of college (1997-98) *Dragon Ball Z* slowly became popular. I remember marveling at *Pokémon's* popularity a year later, until I bought one of the video games and played far too many hours of it.

Eventually, I studied in Nagasaki for four months and then spent two years teaching English in the Tokai region of Japan. What inspired me to work on this thesis was my trip home to the United States after living in Japan for one year. While visiting my parents, I visited a bookstore and noticed the manga section. It seemed

very natural to me at first, but then it hit me that I was back in America and not in Japan. There were so many books and even some imported toys and snacks from Japan that seemed no different than the Japanese bookstores I often frequented. This shock made me think about how popular and mainstream anime and manga had become in the United States.

I still watch anime and read manga regularly today. Many of my friends and family are also heavily into anime and manga. In many ways I can identify with hardcore anime fans. I prefer to watch in Japanese, and I hate to see a series become unrecognizably edited in order to appeal to American children. Thus I carry some preconceived ideas into this study of which I am aware. This familiarity made it much easier to communicate with the research participants because the interview rarely had to stop while the subject explained the meaning of a term or an anime series. This led to our having shared knowledge and feelings about anime, and often made interviewees feel like we were having a conversation with a new friend.

Anime and Manga History and Background

Brief Synopsis of Anime and Manga in Japan

Japanese animation and comics have been a popular form of entertainment in Japan for over 60 years, but traditions of graphic art go back much earlier. Some scholars believe manga follows in a lineage from the 11th Century Animal Scrolls by the Buddhist priest Toba through to the *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints of the Edo Period (1603-1868) (Schodt 1996:22). The *ukiyo-e* artist Hokusai first used the term manga to describe his drawings.

Figure 1: One of Toba's Animal Scrolls.

Figure 2: An example of Hokusai's *manga* from a book of prints.

The modern form of manga originated alongside American comic strips at the beginning of the 20th century (Schodt 1996:22). During the Occupation, Japan saw an even bigger influence of American culture with comic books and animated movies being brought over to entertain the occupation forces. *Popeye*, Max Fleischer's *Superman* and *Betty Boop*, and Disney were highly influential to Japan's new manga artists. Over time, Japanese animation developed a very distinctive style and animation series were frequently based off of popular manga series.

Among the new manga artists working after World War II, none was more influential than Osamu Tezuka. Tezuka singlehandedly changed how manga were viewed by Japanese and helped start television animation in Japan. Originally

influenced by Disney animation, Tezuka created popular manga that appealed to all ages by creating a broad variety of work, from children's action to more adult stories with morally ambiguous heroes and deeper plots. Among his most famous works are *Astro Boy*, *Jungle Emperor*, and *Black Jack*. *Jungle Emperor* is noteworthy because of the controversy surrounding it and Disney's *The Lion King*. *The Lion King* resembles *Jungle Emperor* in many ways, but Disney denied that anyone on their staff had any knowledge of Tezuka or *Jungle Emperor*. This enraged many Japanese animators, who saw it as a denial of Tezuka and the art of Japanese animation (Patten 2004:167).

An equally important Japanese animator is Hayao Miyazaki. Miyazaki creates anime films of exceptional quality and won an Oscar for his film *Spirited Away*. Miyazaki's works are known for their complexity and beautiful artwork, but particularly stand out because of their strong female heroes. Strong heroines are rare in anime because Japanese culture is very male-centered. Miyazaki's films have brought worldwide interest in Japanese animation. Among his many works are *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Kiki's Delivery Service*, and *Princess Mononoke*.

Today, manga and anime are a mainstream part of Japanese entertainment. About twenty-two percent of published material in Japan is manga (Pink 2007:1). Manga exist for almost every segment of the population and many major magazines include manga stories. Anime is somewhat less mainstream because a large percentage is targeted to children and teens; however, more mature anime are

available in many stores. Anime and manga are treated as any other form of media in Japan and their content and stories are unlimited in their variety.

Anime fandom in Japan has a larger base of people, so certain fan activities and products exist that do not in the United States. Toys and statues of anime characters are popular and common in many Japanese stores. In addition, there are chains of shops that deal exclusively in anime and manga related goods. Merchandise of all sorts is common, like cell phone accessories, clothing, stationery, plush toys, figures, models, and music CDs.

Perhaps the most unique aspect of Japanese fandom are *doujinshi*, fan-created comics using characters from existing manga or anime. These fan comics often show characters in humorous or sexual situations similar to Western slash fiction,[1] but illustrated in comic book form. This is possible because Japan's copyright laws are not enforced as strictly as in the United States. In fact, many manga artists started out working in a *doujinshi* circle.[2] The manga companies realize that *doujinshi* creators are some of their biggest fans and that *doujinshi* actually increase interest in titles and help sell more of the originals (Pink 2007:3). This complex arrangement exists through an unspoken agreement between the *doujinshi* circles and the publishers, in which the circles print very limited editions and the publishers do not sue for the infringement of their copyright. *Doujinshi* are sold mostly at conventions called comic markets with the biggest one lasting three or four days with attendance in the

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[1] Slash fiction is a form of fan-created fiction where two characters are linked romantically. The name comes from how the stories were labeled, for example, one of the most popular stories from Star Trek is Kirk/Spock, often abbreviated K/S.
[2] *Doujinshi* creators are usually called circles, even if there is only one member.

hundreds of thousands. The nature of these arrangements and American attitudes towards intellectual property rights means that there is almost no possibility that the *doujinshi* part of anime and manga fandom will spread into the United States. Instead, American fans have found other ways to emulate the Japanese anime and manga fans.

History of Anime and Manga Fandom in the United States

Japanese animation was first shown in America in the 1960s with *Astro Boy*, *Jungle Emperor*, and *Speed Racer*. At the time, few people were aware of these shows' origins because they were dubbed into English and edited to be similar to other American cartoons. However, in Hawaii and some cities on the U.S. West coast, Japanese anime was played with subtitles for Japanese immigrants on international TV stations starting in the 1970s. Most shows were science fiction and involved space travel, political intrigue, and action. These shows caught the interest of fans of *Star Trek*, *Star Wars* and other popular science fiction of the time. The science fiction fans wanted to learn more. Some were able to go as far as obtaining the manga that the stories were based on and try to understand the comics without knowing Japanese.

In the early 1980s a few more Japanese anime series were introduced to American television. These series especially struck a chord with the emerging science fiction fandom that started in America. The fans sought out other series from Japan and some were able to obtain VCR tapes of popular anime shows in Japan. Because very few people spoke Japanese, sometimes one person would translate or the fans

would read a printed script of the show as they watched. Later the tapes were subtitled and often copied many times. Many older fans remember getting scratchy tenth generation recordings that were barely understandable. Tapes like this were shown at sci-fi conventions up through the mid-nineties, like at the conventions I attended in high school.

With the rise of the Internet, it became much easier for fans to access one another and Japan. Anime fans, like many fans of science fiction and fantasy, are often early adopters and very open to new technology. The early Bulletin Boards Systems (BBS) were used to discuss Japanese animation among fans and as a way to meet other fans. The wide adoption of DSL and broadband also made the need to mail old VHS tapes obsolete. Fans could instead download episodes of anime series to watch.

Today, anime fans still have many things in common with science fiction fandom. Annual conventions across America are still one of the most popular ways to create a community for anime and manga. I personally have been to two anime conventions during the course of my research: the Seattle Sakuracon in 2006 and 2007. Sakuracon is one of the largest conventions in the United States and attracted over ten thousand people in 2007. Individuals from the manga and anime industry in both Japan and the United States were the guests of honor with special panels set up for them to talk at set times during the convention. Many fans dressed as anime characters, known as cosplay. The dealer's room was almost like going to Japan,

complete with Japanese language manga and *doujinshi*, toys, statues, imported video games, and even Japanese snacks.

Not surprisingly, like Japanese anime fans, American fans have found ways to claim the medium as their own. For example, fans often converge on-line to create fan art and fan fiction for even the most obscure anime series, much like the *doujinshi* circles of Japan. Anime music videos (AMV) are a novel creation by US anime fans. AMVs are clips from anime set to song. Many fans spend hundreds of hours to perfect their videos by picking perfect clips or synching the frames exactly to the song lyrics.   As I will discuss later, this habit of taking anime and manga further than simply enjoying the narratives plays a central role in why these Japanese forms of entertainment have become so popular in the United States.

Literature Review

While anime and manga are relative newcomers to the American cultural landscape, the amount of books and articles being written on the subject is fairly large and increasing constantly. Two anthropologists in particular, Anne Allison and Susan Napier, are leading the field of anime and manga research. To complement the research on anime and manga fans in the United States, I also reviewed media anthropology, identity formation, and subcultures of consumption research. Media anthropology shows how best to frame anime and manga fandom into anthropological theories. Anime fans have chosen fandom as part of their identity and delving deeper in how identity forms is important to my work. Subcultures of consumption studies are important because anime and manga fans are defining themselves by the shows they watch and the products they consume.

Anime and Manga Fandom Studies

Much of the work on anime and manga studies is done by two anthropologists, Susan Napier and Anne Allison. Their focus is on the culture shown within anime and manga. To find more information specifically on anime fans, I used articles from Kimberly Gregson and Theresa Winge. All of this information gave me a basis on which to start my research and give me a clearer picture of anime fandom as a whole.

Susan Napier is one of the foremost anthropological authorities on anime. Her book, Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle, was one of the first to study the

phenomenon of Japanese animation from an anthropological perspective. Napier

makes a case for why anime should be studied by anthropologists. Anime is part of

the interaction of global and local cultures, as well as one of the exceptions to

American cultural hegemony (2005:9). Anime is also exceptional in that it succeeded

in America without changing to fit American tastes. Series on television were

changed at first, but in the past few years, fans have demanded translations to stay

closer to their Japanese origins, a situation which has spurred further growth in anime

popularity.

On why anime has succeeded, Napier states that this is because "the medium is

both different in a way that is appealing to a Western audience satiated on the

predictabilities of American popular culture and also remarkably approachable in its

universal themes and images" (2005:10). To dig further into her theory, Napier

surveyed a sample of the fans on the Miyazaki Mailing List in her more recent article,

"The World of Anime Fandom in America." The most illuminating question she

asked was "where they thought their beliefs were in relation to mainstream American

society" (2006:57). A majority believed they were outside of mainstream values.

This shows that Miyazaki's films and the beliefs behind them are enjoyed partially for

their non-American values. Fans do not merely immerse themselves in Miyazaki

films; some also see a call to action, to do something for the environment before it's

too late (2006:59). Another appeal of Miyazaki's films is the lack of a clear divide

between good and evil. As an example, in the film *Princess Mononoke*, the woman

destroying the heroine's forest is doing so to help the outcasts (lepers and former

prostitutes) she leads. Both characters have sincere motivations, but both go about their actions in a wrong way. Which one is the "good guy" – the protagonist who ruthlessly kills people for her forest, or the antagonist that burns the forest and kills the animals to support those people that society has abandoned? Miyazaki's fans often respond to what they see as an ideology in his work, either environmental or acting for others (2006:53).

To be clear, Napier mentions that the Miyazaki fans on the website differ from "critical and conventional expectation of the people that comprise fandom" (2006:50). By this she means that the stereotype of fans as marginal in society and adolescent in nature do not apply to many of the fans on the Miyazaki Mailing List. Because Miyazaki's work is the best of its kind, it will attract a different type of person than the typical fan of the current action anime on television. Napier also mentions that part of the older skew of her survey participants could be because Miyazaki films attract artists and families as fans. She then follows this up with the idea, that in her experience with fandom, anime's explosion in popularity has made it difficult to pin down a "typical" fan.

In late 2007, another book by Susan Napier was published. This book, From Impressionism to Anime, covered how Japan has been seen through the eyes of the West since the country was opened to European and American influence. She has extensive sections on anime fandom including information on the commonalities among fans she interviewed. The commonalities Napier described are mostly generic attributes, like a love of reading and greater interest in different cultures. However,

Napier then delves into what anime fandom means to fans. To her, the most important parts of fandom are its interactivity and what she calls "subcultural capital" (2007: 150). Subcultural capital, as Napier explains, is how a fan's knowledge (either of anime fan conventions, anime trivia, or Japan) allows a fan to gain status within the fandom. Both interactivity and subcultural capital engage fans and further encourage participation in the fandom.

Napier has one final thought on the rising popularity of anime: escapism. Fantasy genres in general have been on the rise recently with the successes like *Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*, and many modern movies based on American comic books like *Spiderman* and *X-Men*. For America, she speculates that the September eleventh terrorist attacks caused many people to want to escape from harsh reality, and anime and manga fill that need.

Anne Allison takes a different approach on why anime has become popular and captivated fans. She focuses on how Japanese toys and notions of play have become popular around the world. She also explores particular series' popularity to determine how anime in general has gained a tremendous following in the United States.

First, in her article "The Japan Fad in Global Youth Culture and Millennial Capitalism," Allison covers how Japan is now seen as a "cool" country primarily through the popular culture that Japan exports. Allison mentions how the manga, anime, and video games market has exploded around the world and now exceed Japan's former leading industries: cars and steel (2006b:13). What strikes Allison as

interesting is how the influence centers on youth, how the stories mainly take place in fantastic worlds, and that the coolness is based on an image of (and not necessarily the actual) Japan. She uses a 2004 episode of the *Power Rangers* television show as an example. When *Power Rangers* was first aired in the United States, it was cut and changed to Americanize the show and erase its Japanese origins. To that end, the origin live action scenes with Japanese actors were replaced with an ethnically balanced team of Americans. However, in the example episode, the American actors end up watching an original Japanese episode. They see it as different from the "American version," but not in a bad way. This acknowledgement of *Power Ranger's* Japanese counterpart is part of media companies' growing realization that fans like to watch Japanese shows in part because of their origins, not in spite of it.

Allison also studied the more recent anime import *Duel Monsters*. Unlike many other anime shows brought to the United States, the show *Duel Monsters* keeps its Japanese origins intact and retains some of the Japanese language in it, using this as a way to distinguish itself from many other anime series on American TV. Despite its advertisement as a Japanese product, *Duel Monsters* is a hybrid because an American company created the associated card game and the show has dual distribution, one version for Asia and one for the rest of the world, primarily Western countries. This makes it difficult to distinguish the role that Japan plays in fans' imaginations, although obviously part of the show's appeal still lies in its connections to Japan.

In her book, Millenial Monsters, Allison further explores the idea of anime popularity with *Sailor Moon*. *Sailor Moon* was very different from anything else on

TV when it was first shown in the U.S. in 1995. Not much was done to localize the

anime. DIC Entertainment did not rotoscope[3] out all signs of *Sailor Moon*'s Japanese

origins. Stories and characters were changed to remove homosexuality, some of the

violence, and all of the nudity because there was no way it could be shown on

television in the United States at the time. The people in charge wondered if the show

would succeed because of the many Japanese references, including temples, Japanese

food, and cram schools. The show was considered to be a commercial failure.

Insufficient localization was blamed and in 1996 it was taken off the air (2006a:152).

In Japan, the problem was believed to also be that "American girls don't like Japanese

anime" (2006a:152). Both of these sides were too quick to judge how the viewers

actually felt about the show. In its brief time on the air, *Sailor Moon* had acquired a

very devoted following who campaigned to have the series put back on television.

Despite what the American production executives believed, many fans loved the show

for the simple fact that it was so different. Allison conducted a survey and found that

the fans liked the show because the characters and storylines were more complex than

American shows. The imperfect characters let fans see some of themselves in the

characters and furthered their connection with the series. The fans rarely complained

about the show being too Japanese, although many were bothered by the changes that

the localizers had done to characters and stories.

Throughout her studies, Allison reiterates that Japan's rise in worldwide

popularity is connected to the United State's fall in popularity within the global

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[3] Rotoscoping is an animation technique that allows changes to be made to each animation cel to add or remove part of the animation.

community. There is dissatisfaction with Hollywood's lack of imagination and stories that do not seem real enough. Another appeal that Allison sees for Japanese products to American youth is the theme of change. Anime and manga characters are always changing, transforming, and dealing with an uncertain world. This can help young people cope with problems in their lives and lead to different ways of seeing the world (2006b:20).

Although Napier and Allison are the leading researchers in anime fandom studies, the widespread popularity of anime has caused others to examine it from other viewpoints. Kimberly Gregson studied the fans of a specific anime genre, *shojo*.[4] In her article "What if the Lead Character Looks Like Me?" Gregson covers college age and younger female fans of *shojo* (young girl's) anime and their presence on the Internet. Gregson postulates that the attraction to *shojo* anime comes from its strong female characters and how anime differs from standard media for girls (2005:126). Gregson also found that fans preferred to write about the male characters in a way that parallels how other girls fawn over young, real-life male celebrities. This practice helps girls to communicate with each other and imagine what relationships are like. The most popular *shojo* characters are called *bishonen* (beautiful boys). *Bishonen*, often Anglicized and abbreviated as "bishies," are extremely pretty male characters, usually with long flowing hair, slim builds, and almost ambiguous gender.

Shojo is interesting because fans tend to create communities around the subgenre, the same way that anime fans in general have created a larger sense of

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[4] *Shojo* literally means "young girl" and refers to a genre of anime focusing on romance.

community. *Shojo* fan web sites are places to exchange art, stories, and information about favorite series, pairings, and other *shojo* anime topics. Of note are many fan spoiler warnings, warnings not to read on if you have not watched the series in its entirety. Fans do not want to ruin another fan's enjoyment of watching a series and finding out what happens next. This consideration is of particular importance in anime because plots and relationships can be very convoluted and finding out the ending could possibly ruin the whole story.

Shojo fan sites also use Japanese for emphasis, many times without translation. The Japanese is used as a barrier to non fans because the webmasters believe true fans should understand the Japanese. Another interesting thing is that the Japanese is not actual Japanese script, but an alphabetic approximation of it, possibly because the website creators actually only know a little bit of Japanese or that it usually requires a program add-on to display Japanese. The *shojo* fan websites showcase some of the common traits of anime fans like being technology-minded, wanting to share information, and being "language snobs."

The reason many fans make websites is to share their love of certain anime series and to connect with others who like *shojo* anime, which may be hard in many towns in America where anime fans are uncommon. Gregson thinks that the support and friendship of other fans keep girls interested in anime and their websites allow them to share their fantasies to a wider and very understanding audience.   Like Napier and Allison both discovered, Gregson feels that connecting to other fans is almost as important as the anime stories themselves.

Websites are not the only ways in which fans increase their enjoyment of anime and manga. As I mentioned in an earlier section, fans love to create new stories and make the media their own through stories or anime music videos. Another way fans creatively express their fandom is via cosplay, a Japanese clipping of the words "costume" and "play." Fans at anime conventions often dress like characters from anime, manga, and video games. I personally saw this phenomenon at Sakuracon, a large anime convention held every year in Seattle. From my rough sampling, approximately 30% of the ten thousand fans were in full costumes. Cosplay allows fans' fantasies to become reality for a day or two. Instead of their normal selves, fans can turn into a ninja, a great warrior, or almost anything within their budget or skill at creating costumes. Some fans role play as their characters in the halls of the convention and others merely wear a costume.

Theresa Winge gives in-depth information on cosplay in the United States in her article, "Costuming the Imagination: Origins of Anime and Manga Cosplay." The origins of cosplay started in America. The practice came to Japan after a Japanese anime writer, Takahashi Nobuyuki, went to a science fiction convention in Los Angeles and liked the costumed fans in the masquerade part of the convention (2006:66). When he wrote about his experience, he mainly covered the masquerade and encouraged Japanese fans to dress up for their conventions. Takahashi had to change the term "masquerade" because it already had a different meaning in Japanese, so he chose to use the words costume play (2006:67). Like many long loan words in

Japan, *kosuchumu pure* was shortened to *kosupure* and reintroduced to English as cosplay.

Cosplay allows a temporary change in identity and allows fans to experiment with other personalities or to just be more assertive than usual. This, along with the positive reinforcement of thousands of other fans at conventions, makes cosplay a popular pastime for anime fans. Cosplaying is a very social activity; the encouragement of other fans at the masquerade or just having their picture taken adds to a cosplayer's sense of character. At times the cosplayer will roleplay as the character they dressed up as and will often approach other people with costumes from the same anime series to either chat or to act more like their chosen character.

Some fans will invest a large amount of time and money to make their costume look perfect, and other fans will spend time to act just like the character they imitate. The clothing and costumes are often created by fans. Some articles have to be adjusted, and others are made from scratch. There are some entrepreneurs who sell cosplay goods online, as well at conventions. These goods range from cloaks and weapons to specialized contact lenses.

There are many variances in cosplay. Some fans crossplay[5] and dress as a character of the opposite gender. Other fans create costumes that are humorous plays on a character's name or a situation from the anime. Sometimes these are even combined, for example when large hairy men dress like *Sailor Moon*. Yet cosplayers will often keep in character even if they are dressed as the opposite gender. Winge has a humorous anecdote about a male Sailor Moon meeting a male Tuxedo Mask (Sailor

[5] Cross-dressing + cosplay = crossplay.

Moon's boyfriend in the show). The two strike up a conversation about saving the

world at a room party and the villain to be vanquished is Mr. Jagermeister (the liquor)

(Winge 2006:72).

At conventions, it is often easy to spot what the current most popular anime is

because a large percentage of the cosplayers will be dressed like characters from that

series. At the 2006 Sakuracon, *Bleach* and *Naruto* were very popular (see Figure 3).

At the time, both shows were on American TV and had very large casts of characters,

making them ideal for cosplay.

Figure 3: A group shot of *Naruto* cosplayers at Sakuracon 2006 in Seattle. Naruto is a very popular manga and anime series about ninja with special abilities. (Photo by author)

There are differences between Japanese and American cosplayers, though most are explained through culture. In America, cosplayers are more likely to improvise a skit during the masquerade portion of a convention, while in Japan, cosplayers will either say their character's signature phrase or strike the character's signature pose (Winge 2006:73). American cosplayers will also stay in costume all day, going outside the convention to eat while in costume, while Japanese cosplayers are often only allowed to be in costume in certain designated areas of the convention. The reason for the Japanese restrictions is to prevent anything happening to young female cosplayers and to not antagonize the Japanese populace, who often have a negative view of nonconformist behavior.

Anime and manga are a new area of study for the social sciences, but much research has already been completed. The work of Napier, Allison, Gregson and Winge gave me a good background of what aspects of anime fandom had been studied. Their work gave me potential strategies to analyze my research as well as needed background. This helped most of all for me to focus my thesis around the possibility of finding repeated themes within anime and manga fandom.

Media Anthropology

My study falls under the label of media anthropology which contributes to explaining why Japanese animation is popular in the United States. Media anthropology studies cross-cultural media flows, which are very relevant to my research because anime is one of the few foreign media to attain popularity in the

United States. Other important aspects of media anthropology cover how media become a part of people's lives by being used as cultural markers and the role that media play in identity formation. These areas of study are applicable to the study of anime and manga in the United States.

Mark Allen Peterson in his article "Performing Media" explains the concept of intertextuality. He introduces the concept by showing how he and other fathers in his daughter's softball team broke the ice by reciting part of Abbott and Costello's "Who's on First?" schtick (2005:129). He defines intertextuality as "the interweaving of bits and pieces of dialogue, actions, or other symbols from mass media texts into everyday speech and action" (2005:130).

Intertextuality has relevance for fan studies because it can show how media can become part of people's lives. Part of Peterson's argument is that intertextuality is a social act and not just a characteristic of texts, and that the knowledge to successfully use references is a form of cultural capital (2005:130). This fits most fandoms very nicely because a proper reference at an appropriate time can raise one's social standing within the group. This can (and has) been used by some anime fans to determine if someone else is like-minded. This can be as simple as abbreviating the name of *Full Metal Alchemist* to FMA, or using the Japanese names of the ninja techniques in *Naruto* to exclude fans who have only watched the English versions.

Drawing from Bauman and Briggs definition of intertextuality as "an active social process involving the extracting of a discourse or discursive element from one

setting (decontextualization) and inserting it into another (recontextualization)" (2005:130), Peterson goes on to show that intertextualization is used to create connections between people. These connections can be used in ethnography to find the layers of meaning that may exist when media are referenced in conversations. When a line of dialogue from a film is quoted, it could be potentially used to impress, entertain, check if the other person has watched the movie, or even relate more specific aspects of the film to the current situation that the referencer is in. For example, if someone working at a retail job quoted the comic movie *Clerks*, he could be trying to make someone laugh, while at the same time comparing himself to the characters stuck in a dead-end job at a convenience store. These multiple layers of meaning are important to understand especially when studying fans of popular culture.

In "Globalizing Manga: From Japan to Hong Kong and Beyond", Wendy Siuyi Wong covers how Japanese comics grew and spread around Asia and eventually to the rest of the world by looking at global media flows. Japan only started to grant manga copyrights to overseas publishers about fifteen years ago during its economic recession (2006:24). The rise of new technologies for communication has changed the way media have traditionally traveled and have started to upset the American media hegemony. One aspect that Wong brings up is that the black markets are often ignored when Japan's globalization is considered (2006:26). If it exists on the black market, then there is interest in the products beyond what official sales would show. This information means that anime's popularity in other East Asia countries is higher than the official statistics would indicate.

Despite the similarities in aesthetics and culture, it was difficult for Japanese manga to spread into Asia because many countries had not forgotten or forgiven Japan's behavior in World War II. The Taiwanese and South Korean governments had bans on Japanese cultural products for decades, but Hong Kong had free trade with Japan (2006:30). Hong Kong had a comics boom in the 1960s with artists from China defecting, but at the same time many famous Japanese comics were entering the colony as pirated Chinese copies. By the 1970s, Japanese manga was the main influence on Hong Kong comics (2006:30). Taiwan opened up later than Hong Kong, and now their comics industry takes its inspiration from Japan. Korea's industry was influenced by Japan despite the ban on cultural products because Japanese companies have outsourced animation production to Korea and artists could hone their skills working in one of the animation factories.

For Europe and North America, manga became popular for reasons other than cultural closeness. Some influence came from immigrants who brought some of their culture with them, but that only affects the limited area of Hawaii and the West coast of North America. For France, the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, and Spain, there are local comics cultures that are open to outside influence and manga became popular much more easily there than in the United States. In France, comics are treated as a respected art form and it is a very big market for many types of manga and anime (2006:37). All of these European countries have manga and the related fan culture in some form or another. International licensing has even allowed countries like Poland to translate and sell popular manga titles (2006:38). Anime and manga have spread

across the globe, but in different ways dependent on the culture of the country and other factors.

In Douglas McGray's influential article, "Japan's Gross National Cool" he shows how Japan has become a cultural superpower. In the 1980s Japan was one of two economic superpowers with the United States, but the "bubble" burst at the end of the decade and the economy went into a recession from which it is still recovering. This, according to McGray, is part of the rise of Japan's soft (cultural instead of economic) power because the economic uncertainty of the recession encouraged many Japanese to become creative entrepreneurs. He compares how Japan, like America, is cool abroad even without authenticity. He uses the examples of cream cheese sushi in America and potato salad pizza in Japan to show inauthentic products that still retain the "whiff" of Japanese or American cool (2002:46). Importantly, Japan has broken from the standards of American cultural hegemony by gaining popularity in Europe and Asia without first becoming popular in the United States.

However, Japan is succeeding in the U.S. as well, through video games by Sony and Nintendo, through the increased presence of anime and manga, and by the influence of Japanese style on American popular culture. A theory espoused in the article is that Japan's history of selectively importing, changing, and keeping parts of other cultures has made modern Japanese culture a pastiche of the world's culture and thus makes Japanese goods more recognizable and palatable for consumption around the world. This is significant because what is seen as "Japanese" is often a Japanese interpretation of other cultures' ideas.

In a section on Hello Kitty, McGray covers the vast scope and story of its marketing by the Sanrio Company. In America in the 1980s, Sanrio customized Hello Kitty for the United States by using certain colors and eliminating certain side characters, resulting in some success. In Asian markets in the 1990s, similar local adaptations failed because customers knew Hello Kitty was Japanese and did not want a Taiwan or Hong Kong Hello Kitty; these consumers only wanted the authentic Japanese version. McGray explains that this is because Japan's culture "has succeeded not only in balancing a flexible, absorptive, crowd-pleasing, shared culture with a more private, domestic one but also in taking advantage of that balance to build an increasingly powerful global commercial force" (2002:52). This quality of Japan's culture is what has allowed it to become cool in the eyes of the world. Japan's aura of cool is certainly a reason for anime and manga's current popularity.

Media anthropology brings out the cultural aspects of media, and allows those aspects to be better understood in context. Anthropology's strength is in cultural matters, so the cultural interactions that brought anime to the United States can be best studied using some of the techniques and theories of media anthropology.

Identity Formation

In the course of my interviews I learned that many informants had similar stories about becoming fans. To better understand this, I needed to know more about the process of identity formation. I was recommended the works of Melucci, Giddens, and Vygotsky to best identify how anime fans began to see themselves as fans.

Alberto Melucci's research into modern social movements is relevant to my thesis. His theory is that people have more personal reasons for joining modern social movements instead of joining to work towards an end goal. The reason many people join groups is in their search for identity. To quote him:

> In modern complex systems individual social actors have the chance of becoming individuals, that is, of defining themselves as distinct subjects of action irrespective of their group memberships, their situations, or their heritage. Ties based on place, language, and religion gave way slowly in industrial society to new elective identities linked to new roles and institutions: the individual came to be identified by his or her membership of a profession, a party, a state, or a class. These references still hold, but a new question seems to have come to the fore. It relates exclusively to the individual: "Who am I?" (1989:113).

Many fans participate in their fandom for at least one of the same reasons that people join modern political and social movements, to gain the sense of identity and belonging that comes from interacting with like-minded others. This sense of a supportive community is strong among many anime fans and many other fan communities. By becoming part of an organized fandom, people receive an identity and some stability that was missing from their lives. However, people see themselves as more than a member of the group because they choose group membership; they are capable of leaving the group or at least disagreeing with the group's ideals. This would seem to come back to Melucci's idea above, that people are joining groups for community, but even more centrally for individual identity.

Anthony Giddens wrote on how the process of self-identity has changed in the modern age. His work focuses on modernity and how it has changed the creation of self-identity. Giddens believes that modernity has changed the fabric of social life and

that organizations have replaced the traditions of small communities in the role of identity creation. This change has created a vacuum where people have to search for and create their own identity. To Giddens,

> Self-identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits, possessed by the individual. It is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography (1991:53).

By this he means that identity is not found from a person's behavior, but from how a person creates and sustains their personal narrative. This fits well with anime fandom because fans often identify with characters and see parallels between their life stories and the anime they watch. Giddens then defines lifestyle and how it fits into his theory:

> A lifestyle can be defined as a more or less integrated set of practices which an individual embraces, not only because such practices fulfill utilitarian needs, but because they give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity (1991:81).

This can be observed among different fandoms because the fans often believe that owning products associated with their fandom helps to prove the identity of "true" fans.

Lev Vygotsky was a Russian sociologist whose theories show how people use objects to form their identities. According to him, people "modify the environment's stimulus value for their own mental states" (Holland 1998:35). By changing an

object's influence, the person can then use the object to affect their memory and remind them of mental states that are desired. Fans can use the objects to remind them of who they want to be and slowly this feeling is internalized and the object is no longer as important. Objects can then "open up" the imagined worlds of fans to make them appear more real. Vygotsky is important because his research shows how buying and owning items associated with a story/fandom make the story more real to the fans. The story is important because it shows fans the life they want to have for themselves. This relates and strengthens Giddens' work on identity as self narrative because the identity is still created as a story, but the narrative is stronger with actual objects to reinforce it.

The work by Melucci, Giddens, and Vygotsky is important because it explains how and why identity is formed in modern society. This allowed me to better understand how anime fans choose to become fans. It also showed what processes allowed them to associate fandom with their self-identity.

Subcultures of Consumption

Subcultures of consumption are another way to look at anime fans. Anime fans fit many of the definitions of a subculture of consumption because they self-select their lifestyle in part from what they consume. Many articles on subcultures of consumption are useful to my study because they research fandoms like *Star Trek* and *X-Files*. Another very interesting subculture of consumption is the Judo subculture

because, like anime and manga, Judo is an import from Japan that had found a way into American culture.

In "Subcultures of Consumption: An Ethnography of the New Bikers," John Schouten and James McAlexander introduce subcultures of consumption as a way to analyze and better understand consumers' identities. They define subcultures of consumption as "a distinctive subgroup of society that self-selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product, class, or consumption activity" (1995:43). Subcultures of consumption have the following characteristics in common: "an identifiable, hierarchical social structure; a unique ethos, or set of shared beliefs and values; and unique jargon, rituals and modes of symbolic expression" (1995:43). While the shared beliefs and values do not fit anime fans well, jargon is a very large part of the anime and manga fan subculture, especially Japanese language. Rituals are hard to spot, but many behaviors at conventions have a ritualized quality to them, in particular those involving cosplay. Continuing the definition, the authors state "the observable elements of the subculture, such as common language, techniques, terminology, and costume, serve to unite members of the subculture of consumption" (1995:45). This fits anime and manga fans very well and shows why subcultures of consumption are a useful way to look at anime fandom.

Otaku are the subject of Lawrence Eng's paper "Otak-who? Technoculture, Youth, Consumption, and Resistance. American Representations of a Japanese Youth Subculture." In American anime fan circles, *otaku* means an anime fan, but the definition has changed often in Japan. Originally the word was a formal way to

address another person, but that meaning shifted to instead be applied to a type of obsessive fan. A few years after this new definition became commonplace, a grisly series of child murders occurred and the murderer was an *otaku*. Japanese media sensationalized that case by calling it the "*Otaku* Murders" and the label has become somewhat tainted.

The *otaku* are a youth subculture of sorts in Japan that is stereotyped to be antisocial, occasionally violent, obsessive fanatics who make their hobby their life. Almost everything in Japan can have *otaku*, from anime and manga (the most common), to cars, trains, military equipment, popular singers, toys, tropical fish, or almost anything. The *otaku* is different from most subcultures of consumption because the thing they value most is knowledge about their obsession. An anime *otaku* could tell you all the anime series a particular voice actor has worked on, as well as what roles they auditioned for and what is still in the planning stage. The more obscure and the fewer people that know a fact, the more valuable it becomes for them. This fetishization of knowledge is a common aspect of fandom, even in American anime fans. Knowledge allows one fan to be "higher" and have more status than other fans.

The presence of Judo in the United States is in some ways similar to anime and manga. In the article "A Cross-Cultural Examination of a Subculture of Consumption: Judo in Japan and the United States," James McAlexander, Katsutoshi Fushimi, and John Schouten examine Judo in the United States and Japan with regard to how it is a subculture of consumption and how the meanings attached to the symbols of Judo

have been interpreted and changed. Unlike anime, Judo was brought to America with its outward appearance virtually unchanged. In both countries, Japanese is used to instruct the students and name the techniques. The clothing is the Japanese *gi* and is regulated by a Japanese Judo organization in regards to material, color, and thickness. To complete the study, ten veteran instructors (with 10 + years of experience among other qualifications) were interviewed in Japan and the United States. The reason for the qualifications on experience was because the most committed members of a "subculture of consumption will most strongly reflect the ideology of the subculture" while the junior members "play out the stereotypes without an internal understanding" (2000:50). The major differences that were found in the different areas of the Judo subculture were not in the outward appearance, but in the deeper meanings that practitioners associated with Judo that reflected the host culture in each country. Japanese Judo values repetition, personal effort, and the reinforcement of discipline while American Judo values achievement, exclusivity, and individuality more. American Judo also values authenticity because it sets the individual closer to the origins of Judo and makes it feel more real to them. Judo sets the Americans apart and gives them the sense of belonging common to subcultures of consumption. In many ways this parallels how anime fans feel about their subculture.

Robert Kozinets' article "Utopian Enterprise: Articulating the Meanings of *Star Trek*'s Culture of Consumption" covers *Star Trek* fandom and its activities. For his research, Kozinets spent 20 months doing fieldwork with *Star Trek* fans using fan clubs, conventions, the Internet, and in-person interviews. *Star Trek* has been

extremely successful with four spin-off television series and nine movies as of 2001, generating billions of revenue dollars over its lifetime. What has been noteworthy of *Star Trek*'s success is the hardcore devotion of the series' fans. They are the main reason for the lucrative nature of the license. The popularity of *Star Trek* fandom has also led to its stigmatization. Many people who like the television show will not call themselves fans because the image of nerdy social outcasts in *Star Trek* uniforms is common in public discourse on *Star Trek*. Some anime fans feel similarly and will not say they are fans. Kozinets contrasts a *Star Trek* fan's process of self-transformation with Schouten and McAlexander's bikers because the obstacles that a biker had to overcome were physical and financial, but a fan's barriers were social (2001*:* 74). The interest in marketing to a devoted subculture is great because the fans' devotion guarantees customers. In discussing the fan club meetings, Kozinets notes that a majority of the time is spent in "commercially centered activities." These include talking about the television shows and movies, discussing the books, sharing catalogs, and reviewing products. The consumer activities take up a majority of the club's time, but the stated goal of the club is to make the world a better place, more in line with *Star Trek*'s ideals.

Kozinets has another article similar in scope to his *Star Trek* work, but this one covers a more modern television subculture of consumption. In "'I Want To Believe': A Netnography of The X-Philes' Subculture of Consumption," Kozinets studies the relationship that fans of *The X-Files* television series have with the show and its consumer aspects. In this study much of the work was done through the Internet, and

Kozinets used the term "netnography" to refer to his extensive use of the Internet to gather information from fans. He also conducted research at media fan clubs and two *X-Files* conventions. The most important part of the X-Philes phenomenon was series' creator Chris Carter's use of statistical research to determine the commercial viability of the *X-Files*. Carter decided there was a market for the television show after reading that three percent of Americans believe that they had been abducted by aliens (1997:472). Because fans already believed in UFOs and conspiracies, their commitment to the show was immediately strong. Another aspect that differentiates the X-Philes is their critique of the series if it fails to suspend the fans' disbelief. If something brought fans out of their experience, they were vocal in showing disappointment. This can happen in anime if a situation seems too ridiculous to believe. In a way, Trekkers and X-Philes share similar beliefs because they both believe that their programs are more than television shows and producers have a responsibility to keep high standards on what gets made under the name of the of *Star Trek* or *X-Files*.

J. Patrick Williams' article, "Consumption and Authenticity in Collectible Strategy Games Subculture," explores an interesting subculture of consumption, the collectible game player. Williams spent time interviewing *Magic: the Gathering* and *Mage Knight* players. *Magic* is a collectible card game and *Mage Knight* is a collectible miniatures game. Both are fantasy-based and involve the player strategically maneuvering monsters and magic to defeat another player. In *Magic* the monsters are shown on cards and in *Mage Knight* the monsters are small plastic

figures. These games are only two of many on the market, including collectible card games for *Pokémon* and *Yu-Gi-Oh*.

Williams spent time playing both games and determined the money and commitment involved to stay competitive was considerable. To begin, a customer buys a special starter group of cards or monsters. The starter monsters are nothing special and to get more monsters and better chances of winning, the player needs to buy booster packs. Booster packs cost less than the starter sets, but have random cards or figures inserted, both valuable and ordinary. A player would have to buy at least hundreds of dollars of boosters to complete a set. Most players cannot afford to collect every card, but most will trade or look online for the most powerful cards or figures. To keep players buying and interested, the game manufacturers continue to make additional sets and rule changes that force players to buy the new cards if they want to stay competitive. Furthering encouraging game play, the manufacturers sponsor tournaments in game stores and give out prizes for the winners. This keeps players involved socially and increases the players' identification with the subculture to prevent people from leaving. In the case of *Yu-Gi-Oh*, the anime and manga further reinforces the hobby by showing the cards used in dynamic situations. Often, a character's life depends on winning a card game. This has proved very successful for *Yu-Gi-Oh*.

Subcultures of consumption are a very interesting way to look at modern society because in many ways the United States is now divided into different groups according to consumption practices. Most fandoms fit into this model and anime

fandom is an especially good fit because many fans use anime as part of their identity. *Star Trek* and other fandom studies are all important to my research on anime fans because of their shared characteristics. While originally created with a focus towards marketing, I believe that subcultures of consumption are very useful for research on fandoms and other modern subcultures.

Anime and manga studies are working to unravel the reasons for anime's popularity outside of Japan. Without this previous research, my own would have been very difficult to pursue. Media anthropology gives a framework to understand how cultures interact, which helps my research. The Internet has caused a rise in the number of subcultures because people with isolated interests are now connected with each other. Anime and other fandoms represent a significant path for subcultures of consumption research and the greater body of social research. All of this research allowed me to form a complete picture of anime fandom in the United States.

Observations of Anime and Manga in the United States Today

Since I returned from Japan and started graduate school I have been observing trends in anime and manga here in the United States. I did this observation in anticipation for researching this thesis. In this section I will report on my observations from my time attending the meetings of the Oregon State University Japanese Animation Club and observations made in the course of my personal life.

Currently, anime and manga are very popular and every book and video store has some of each, if not a section fully devoted to them. Toy stores abound with Japanese licensed toys, from video games to action figures and plush toys. In a bookstore, I even saw educational manga that taught SAT vocabulary to high school students.

Part of what makes anime popular is its style. Anime's style was originally influenced by Disney and early American cartoons, but it gradually developed into a style of its own. For the most part the style is minimalist and somewhat abstract, using a few lines used to convey a lot of information. This originally came from manga techniques that made the most of the black and white format. American comics became more detailed over time and now tend to emphasize realism versus the Japanese abstract. The style of anime is an example of intertextuality in that modern Japanese animation relies on a group of visual cues that originated in earlier anime and are now not explained, but assumed that viewer understands what these visual cues mean.

As noted earlier, part of anime and manga's appeal is that it contrasts with American cartoons and comics. Determining that fine line of difference can be tricky, however. Most fans are in support of bringing as many series over as possible, as long as they are done right. What "done right" means is the problem. Fans and companies tend to disagree as to what constitutes doing a good job of localization. Fans are often purists and very detailed-oriented, with even the more rational ones demanding a very low level of change from the Japanese originals. The companies, however, want a series to have broad appeal and occasionally try to Americanize and censor an anime series to the point where it is unrecognizable to the original. This, of course angers many anime fans. However, things are slowly changing. Less TV shows are using rotoscoping, especially for more adult-oriented anime. Manga has seen more success too. Companies are now censoring printed material less often. Many manga even read Japanese style, left to right, so the art does not become transposed. Sometimes, names are changed to correspond to the American television version, but that is rarely much of a problem with fans.

Part of this demand for better translations comes from a high level of global connection. Many anime fans have followed their passion and moved to Japan. While anime fans in the past lacked information from Japan about releases and had to rely on companies for information and videos, now they have contacts in Japan that inform fans via the Internet of happenings in the Japanese market. Some of the fans in Japan are exchange students or English teachers. Fans in Japan scan manga and upload the scans for other fans to translate to keep everyone up to date on their favorite series.

For example, there are at least five groups who scanslate (scan and translate) the *Naruto* manga, and the newest chapter can be found translated online a few hours after it comes out in Japan. Many anime series are the same way, with episodes of the anime appearing with English subtitles within a few days of the episode airing in Japan. These fans are a very valuable source of information for the rest of the world because Japanese fans rarely speak much English and often do not even realize (or care) about their international counterparts.

The foreign fans have been noticed by some Japanese, but the reaction to their fandom is mixed. Japanese anime fans are often very interested in what is popular in America and how things are changed or adapted. Ordinary Japanese citizens, in my experience, often seem somewhat embarrassed that, of all the Japanese culture, manga and anime have spread abroad.

Although anime and manga fans have a sense of community, fans often have a bad reputation when viewed by people outside of the fandom. Anime fans have a reputation, especially on the Internet, for having fanatical views. Manga and anime fans are stereotyped as unconnected with reality, childish, and immature. Because their lives revolve solely around anime, the obsessed hardcore segment of fandom seems to alienate more people than they convert. Like many fanatics, their one-sided world view makes it difficult to see others' perspectives and accomplishes little for the fandom as a whole. Another part of the bad reputation comes from people discovering a new show and worshipping it while denigrating all other forms of entertainment. This along with many people's poor manners on the web makes few people think

positively of anime fandom. Certain terms have been coined to describe the obsessed fans. One is wapanese, meaning white kids who want to be Japanese. A synonym for this is weeaboo. The origins for this term come from abusive content posted on the popular anime fan site 4chan.org.[6] The site administrator added a filter that changed the insulting phrase "wapanese" to nonsensical weeaboo.[7] Unfortunately, this did not stop the abuse; it just gave another insult. Another term of derision is animu, which makes fun of many fan's obsession with proper pronunciation. Among fans of American comics, there is something of a backlash against anime and manga, perhaps due to obsessive anime fans rejecting and insulting all American graphic art and animation simply because it is not Japanese.

These observations are important to understand current anime fandom. Among young people there is a social stigma against being an anime fan. Just watching anime occasionally is not socially discouraged, but the obsessive fans have created a barrier to anime fandom, similar to what Kozinets describes for *Star Trek* fans (2001). Conventions and cosplay are also common to both subcultures of consumption. Unlike *Star Trek*, anime has a success story that broke it from a niche interest to the mainstream: *Pokémon*.

[6] 4chan is an open uncensored message and image board similar to a famous Japanese image board. With anonymous contributors, the images are often in very bad taste or pornographic.
[7] A term that likely originated from the webcomic Perry Bible Fellowship. The comic is question is at http://pbfcomics.com/?cid=0PBF61009BC-Weeaboo.jpg#62, but why it was used is unknown.

Case Study: *Pokémon*

When most Americans think of anime, they think of *Pokémon*. While anime shown on cable TV in the United States like *Sailor Moon* and *Dragon Ball Z* helped garner more attention to anime, *Pokémon* (a Japanese clipping of *pokketo monsutaa* or Pocket Monsters) was the breakthrough series for anime's mainstream popularity in the United States. Originally produced as a video game in 1996, Satoshi Tajiri wanted to create a game that recreated some of the wonder he felt exploring nature as a child, allowing more communication among kids in an increasingly disconnected Japanese society. The game was originally slow to gain popularity in Japan, but soon it became widespread enough that a weekly boys' manga wanted to create a *Pokémon* comic. Unlike most video games, *Pokémon*'s sales did not decrease within a few weeks, but increased from word of mouth (Kohler 2005:241). Nintendo reacted quickly to its hot new property and commissioned an anime series, toys, and character-themed goods such as school supplies. With 150 different creatures to choose from, it was a marketer's dream.

The first exposure that most Americans had to *Pokémon* came in December of 1997 when a news report spread that Japanese children had seizures from a strobe effect for an explosion in a particular episode. This story was even parodied in an episode of the Simpsons. In the immediate aftermath of the seizure incident, many American companies that dealt with animation were quick to denounce anime and promised that they would never endanger American children with it (Patten 2004:109).

After two years, the head of Nintendo of America wanted to bring *Pokémon* to the United States, but to guarantee success, he wanted to bring the video games, the anime, books, toys, and the card game to the United States at the same time. Toy companies were very reluctant to carry the toys because *Pokémon* did not follow any of the rules of American toys: there were no heroic characters, it was based on a game with a complex storyline, and there was no good versus evil focus (Allison 2006a:242). Another problem that toy companies saw was that the characters were too cute. They believed that there was no way that American boys would ever play with a bright yellow, cuddly mouse-like character. To market *Pokémon*, Nintendo shifted its marketing focus to feature the human characters more than the Pocket Monsters and to make them more active and colorful. The shift in focus to the human character turned out to be an interesting misjudgment because American children were much more interested in the electric mouse Pikachu, just like Japanese children (Allison 2006a:244). Despite this shift, only a few companies agreed to carry the toys, which immediately sold out.

Nintendo of America believed that the animation was key to *Pokémon*'s success in the United States, so they were very careful in how they changed the cartoon. Definite changes were made to the animation style, characters' personalities changed, and objectionable material edited out. The localization of the anime muted romance, erased sexuality, toned down violence, and tried to erase many parts of the series that placed it in Japan. In addition, the Americans wanted the Japanese designers to change the character designs for American tastes, but the Japanese

designers refused to compromise their vision. In some cases, names of *Pokémon* were cleverly changed to adapt a Japanese pun to an American equivalent.[8] Many of these changes were done in response to the possible reactions of an imagined audience. Because of its popularity and in part because the show was marketed to young children, Nintendo wanted to ensure that *Pokémon* met standards that Americans apply to children's TV, which are much more stringent than Japan. The video game had less significant changes, but was still localized to reflect a younger audience.

Perhaps the most obvious change to the *Pokémon* franchise, though, was taking the "Japan" out of *Pokémon*. For example, the money system was changed from Yen to the generic Pokébucks. The erasure of Japanese culture elements was problematic and sometimes insulting to fans that had watched the Japanese originals. Almost all Japanese writing was edited out or replaced by a static shot of similar information in English.

Another element that was changed was food. Unlike writing, it would be difficult to edit out. So the solution was to change what the food was called. In an example infamous to fans, *onigiri*[9] were called doughnuts despite looking very little like doughnuts and having visible rice grains. The translation would not have been hurt by calling the food "rice balls," but by calling them doughnuts, American producers 4Kids went against their stated reason for changing things in the localization; they brought kids out of the fantasy because any child that was paying

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[8] For example the Pokémon *hitokage* (fire lizard) was translated as Charmander (char and salamander). This gives the same sense of a fire lizard with the added tie-in to the mythology that salamanders are creatures of fire.

[9] *Onigiri* are a ball of rice, often with fish in the middle, wrapped in *nori,* a type of dried seaweed.

attention realized that *onigiri* were not doughnuts. In later episodes, the *onigiri* were rotoscoped out and replaced with more culturally neutral food.

Despite the early controversy from the seizure incident, *Pokémon* was extremely successful. The *Pokémon* fad peaked in 2000. Once American animation companies saw the profits come in from *Pokémon*'s success, they quickly backtracked from their original denouncement of anime and bought the licensing rights of imitators like *Digimon* and *Monster Rancher*.

Pokémon's significance comes from what it did to the market for anime and manga in the United States. Companies that missed their chance to license *Pokémon* jumped on the chance to find the next big thing. While none were as successful as *Pokémon*, it showed that anime could make money in the United States. *Pokémon*'s immense popularity also caused a shift in a lot of markets in the United States. Anime and manga became a very big part of the children's entertainment market and have remained so since *Pokémon*'s decline in 2001. More Japanese toys and fads were imported and cute became a more accepted concept among marketing for American children.

Many fans feel that *Pokémon* was both good and bad for fandom. They appreciate that *Pokémon*'s popularity allowed anime to become more mainstream, but fans regret that the route to mainstream involved removing the Japanese culture that made *Pokémon* more than just a children's cartoon. *Pokémon* reinforced the idea to

companies that animation is mainly entertainment for children and should be changed and censored to best accommodate that market.

Pokémon's importance is also related to the study of anime fandom in the United States. Without *Pokémon*'s unavoidable marketing, there would have been very little research done on the topic of Japanese animation's popularity far from Japan. This section was added to provide a more detailed background on the most famous anime series to air in the United States.

Methods

Methodology

The best way to discover how and why people become fans of anime is to personally ask them. I conducted in-depth interviews with anime fans to ask them why they liked anime, what impact it had on their lives, and if its Japanese origins were important to fans. These questions can best be answered with qualitative research methods because quantitative data will only show the numerical increases in popularity in anime and manga without telling why the change has occurred. It was possible to send out an online survey like Napier's work with the Miyazaki Mailing List (2006), but I believed it would be more accurate to personally conduct the interviews because I could follow up on questions and encourage more detailed responses. Qualitative research looks at problems in an in-depth fashion.

> Qualitative research is not looking for principles that are true all the time and in all conditions, like laws of physics; rather, the goal is understanding of specific circumstances, how and why things actually happen in a complex world (Rubin and Rubin 1995:38).

It would be impossible and impractical to treat a study of fandom in the same way as in a physical science study. Using a semi-structured interview survey, I interviewed eighteen anime fans. Follow up questions were used to elicit more details. I then transcribed the interviews and looked for themes and commonalities among the anime fans I interviewed. Some of my information also came from my experiences and observations within the fandom.

Recruitment

Recruiting fans was much more difficult than I had originally anticipated. In my experience, most fans are introverts who often have anxiety in social situations. By using their fandom, I believed I would be able to make fans feel comfortable while conducting interviews. The Oregon State University's anime club was temporarily disbanded before I was able to conduct interviews. I was also unable to make a helpful contact at North Eugene High School. It was difficult to recruit at Corvallis High School because the students are young and shy. If I had a chance to talk with them individually, I would have had less trouble getting interviews. Because I spoke to the entire group at one time, most students ignored my request for interviews. Because many fans are shy, it was occasionally awkward to approach fans and get them to talk to me.

I did, however, find ways around the many obstacles I faced. I had no refusals when I was able to use referrals to talk to fans individually and tell them about my project. At Corvallis High School, I was able to contact the president of the anime club and she directed me to a few other students whom I could interview. My best recruiting ground was through a comic book shop called Emerald City Comics in Eugene, Oregon. I was able to interview one of the people who worked there and she directed me to her friends as well as customers that watched anime or came in to rent anime, buy manga or purchase related goods.

Most interviews were held in a restaurant or café. We would have a drink and talk some before and after the formal recorded interview. I did run into problems with

background music in my first few interviews, but I was careful to move away from the music speakers after that.

Sample

I interviewed a total of eighteen anime fans, between the ages of sixteen and thirty, in the Eugene and Corvallis area. I interviewed seven males and eleven females. Five fans were in high school at the time of the interviews and all of the high school students attended Corvallis High School. Of the thirteen fans who graduated from high school, all had attended at least some college and six are currently students with one working on a Master's degree and another on his Doctorate. Only six participants had jobs and disposable income.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Education	Known major
Barbara	Female	33	Bachelor's degree	Animal Sciences
Jill	Female	30	Working on Master's, plans for PhD	
Karl	Male	30	Some college (recently returned)	
Kate	Female	28	Working on Master's, plans for PhD	Art History
Melissa	Female	28	Some college (dropped out)	
Matt	Male	26	Two Associate's degrees	Computer related
Adam	Male	26	Working on PhD	Computer Science
Anne	Female	21	Working on Bachelor's	Business
Allen	Male	21	Two Associate's degrees	Computer related
Brianna	Female	21	Some college (plans to return)	Japanese
Robert	Male	20	Working on Bachelor's, plans for PhD	Foreign Language
Curt	Male	20	Working on Bachelor's	English
Andrea	Female	18	Finished HS, plans for Bachelor's	
Sarah	Female	18	Finished HS, plans for Master's	
Laura	Female	16	Working on HS, plans on Bachelor's	
John	Male	16	Working on HS, plans for PhD	
Timothy	Male	16	Working on HS, plans on Bachelor's	

Figure 4: Interview participant list, including gender, age, education and college major (if known)

Semi-Structured Interviews and Questionnaire

The interviews were conducted using the Internal Review Board approved survey (see Appendix) with some deviation based on responses and my judgment. The interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed by myself. I listened to the interviews twice and carefully read over the transcripts to code themes and commonalities among the participants in my survey. Coding is a process used to group related material from transcribed interviews and organize it by themes (Rubin and Rubin 1995:238). For the most part, my coding corresponded to the questions, but some larger themes came out of reading and rereading the interviews. These themes were Identity, Community, Older and Younger Fans, and Japan.

All participants were assigned pseudonyms in accordance with the Internal Review Board regulations (see Figure 4). The pseudonyms are to protect the identity of my informants. I used common American names mainly to make it easier to mentally keep track of all my interviewees. This has the added benefit of being easier to read than more abstract pseudonyms.

There were no problems with the interviews, aside from difficulties in recruitment. Everyone whom I was able to interview was happy to talk to me about anime. For almost all of the interviews, I was able to gain insight and a good grasp of what roles anime played in fans' lives. Interviews were conducted at a place of the participant's choosing to ensure their comfort. Interviews lasted from about 15 minutes to an hour and a half depending on what the fan had to say and how much

depth they were willing to talk about their interest. The average length was a half hour.
There were never any objections to questions, but some questions were inapplicable to
some interviewees.

The interview questions were chosen to answer my original research questions
and to look for other possible areas to focus my research towards. The complete list of
questions is located in the Appendix. Again my research foci are:

- Why fans are attracted anime and manga.

- Reasons for participating in fan culture.

- What the anime and manga fan community is.

- The role of knowledge to gain status within the fandom.

- How fans' knowledge of the real Japan affects their fandom.

The responses for many questions were different than what I expected. Some
of the questions turned out to not be very applicable to the themes I found and those
responses were not used here. Other questions were mainly for demographic
purposes.

I grouped my interview questions into categories. The questions on favorite
anime series and characters were to open up fans and to show that I shared common
ground with them. Many fans are quite introverted and this question helped them to
relax on a subject that is easy for them to discuss. I limited this question to their top

three favorite series and characters because in the past I have casually asked other fans

what they liked and received a list of almost every anime series they had ever watched

with a corresponding ranked list of favorite characters by anime series. This question

had another level as well, as a kind of test to surreptitiously gauge what level of fan I

was interviewing and to also see what series were popular among fans in the area. In

all, this question was a warm-up, but having a feel for what type of fan I was dealing

with helped during later questions because I knew when to ask more in-depth follow-

up questions.

My next question – what do you like about anime - is important to my thesis as

a whole. I wanted to determine what appeal anime has on its fans and asking directly

helped to answer that. I wanted to ask *why* to coax fans to better articulate their

responses and think about what makes them like anime.

I asked about anime dislikes because there are many aspects of anime that

different people could be uncomfortable with, ranging from overly obsessive fan to

pornography to just particulars within the industry. For example, a few fans

mentioned that they did not like "filler" episodes[10] and others disliked that the

American localization had "butchered" many series. Also, asking in what ways a fan

is dissatisfied with their fandom helps to determine what sort of fan they are because

more mature fans may not see everything about anime as perfect. I had assumed that

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[10] Many anime series start soon after the manga become popular and because animation can be created
much faster than the manga is written, steps have to be taken not to run out of plot. The solution is
often throwaway episodes and plotlines that "fill" up space. These are called "filler episodes" by fans.

younger fans in general tend not to think critically about what they like and accept something completely if they like it.

I asked how participants became fans in the first place because it is useful to look for commonalties in the experience. The question that asks about the degree of fandom was important because it helps to show a fan's self-perceived devotion to their fandom. The *otaku* question had multiple reasons behind it. It follows upon the previous question about self-perceived fandom and gives a quick check of their knowledge of Japanese language and culture at least as it pertains to fandom. I almost always followed this up by asking what the definition of *otaku* was to them. The word has different shades of meaning in Japan, and depending upon when a fan learned the word, their definitions varied as well. As I mentioned while discussing Eng's (2002) article on the subject, the word *otaku* has a stigma in Japan, but many American fans appropriated the word to mean "fan of anime and manga." I expected to find many different definitions of the word and a variety of feelings towards the word as well.

The questions about friends were to find out how anime fits into a fan's greater social life as well as see how they perceive their fellow anime fans. I expected mixed results because from my experience as a fan, talking to other fans can be both pleasant and unpleasant. I believed it was important to learn what the fans' families thought of anime because Americans tend to think that cartoons are only for children, while many anime series clearly violate that idea. I also wanted to know if parents approved and if other family members understood anime or manga.

The language in which fans watch anime is important because it is one of the debates within anime fandom. Many fans consider it "sacrilege" to watch in anything but Japanese with subtitles and look down upon fans who watch it in English. I wanted to know if this was always the case or if there were exceptions. Along this line, I asked if the informant had studied Japanese. The follow-up asked if anime had any influence on their decision to study the language. From my previous experience, I assumed that a majority of fans had studied some Japanese and were influenced to study it because of anime.

I wanted to see how else people spend their time. Was anime and manga the only thing in a fan's life or did they participate in other activities? I asked the questions on video games, American comics, and American cartoons because many fans of anime also pursue these hobbies. Many video games are Japanese and many times the two hobbies are enjoyed by the same person. Games from Japan often employ a similar style to anime and often the two media use the same properties, i.e. *Pokémon* started as a video game and there are a very large number of *Dragon Ball Z* games. The questions on American comics and cartoons were used to see if fans are interested in comics and animation in general and if anime is only one part of their interest in comic art.

With the shopping questions I wanted to see fan views on piracy as well as what fans actually spent money on to support their fandom. As noted in Kozinets's (2001) article on the *Star Trek* subculture of consumption, the related character goods are often a huge part of the fandom experience. Piracy is an interesting topic,

especially among anime fans, because the entire fandom was originally based off of quasi-legal fan-subtitled tapes. Aside from the shows, CDs and other merchandise are also pirated and sold through legal loopholes in Hong Kong. When you consider that many fans are young with limited or no resources, piracy can be a very appealing option.

Part of my thesis involves what effect watching anime has had on fans' views of Japan as a nation. This came about because I met anime fans who came to Japan, but were very disappointed because the country did not live up to their anime-influenced ideal of Japan. I wanted to find out what fans actually knew about Japan as well as how much seemed influenced by anime and manga.

Limitations

There are definite limitations to my study. My participants all chose to be interviewed and I concentrated my recruitment on comic shops that cater to college students. It was also difficult to recruit younger fans at Corvallis High School, perhaps because of fans' tendency to be introverted or from the stigma of being an anime fan in high school. However, even with my small sample size, certain patterns and themes still emerged from the interviews. Because my informants were mainly students, the findings on attitudes towards piracy and spending habits are skewed towards students with little money. By looking for participants that self-identified as anime fans, I may have missed other important sources of information like former

anime fans and people who like anime but see "anime fan" as a negative label. Lastly, my connection to anime fandom may have made it difficult to distance myself from my work. Despite these tendencies, I was able to pinpoint themes both in my research and in the interviews that can help build groundwork for later research into anime fandom.

Results and Discussion

From my interviews I found four themes among anime fans. The themes are Identity, Community, Older and Younger Fans, and Perception of Japan. For my results I will explain each of these themes and give examples from my interviews to support each. The themes are in no way mutually exclusive and some data can be used to support multiple themes. Identity and Community in particular have a complex relationship as motivation among anime and manga fans. Some fans like anime and manga because it is different and makes them feel unique, but it is lonely without anyone to share it. The struggle between asserting one's individuality and belonging to a group could be seen in some of my interviews.

I will use some in-depth interview information to highlight the themes as they emerged from speaking with my informants. Unlike Napier's (2007) study of anime fans, I found definite commonalities among my informants. This could be due to my small sample size and more student-focused sample. The common underlying values of anime fandom I found were: an interest in fantasy; a high degree of computer literacy; love of reading; openness to other cultures; a feeling that one is different from mainstream American society; and a tendency towards being introverted.

The interviewees I chose to go in more detail with were Brianna, Melissa, Sarah, Kate, and Adam. Brianna is my most important informant because of her knowledge of fandom and the business side of manga and anime as well as her willingness to talk in detail about it. Melissa was a great source of information on why some people are attracted to anime and the anime community. Sarah was the

president of the Corvallis High School Anime Club and a good example of younger fandom and its beliefs. Kate was very informative on the feeling of disillusioned older fans and their feelings towards Japan and the younger generation of fans. Adam shows how fans can use anime to learn about the real Japan and not an idealized Japan.

Identity

Identity is a major reason why people become anime fans. I define identity as the view one has of one's self that encompasses one's actions and the perception that one has of their actions. Anime and manga are something exotic that allow its fans to be different from their parents. In one of my interviews it was stated outright, but many other participants hinted that identity was an important part of becoming an anime fan. Anime can also be a form of resistance to conformist society and a way to distinguish one from one's peers. Identity and resistance are interrelated because they are both reasons for people to become anime fans. In this case Giddens' (1991) work on identity is relevant because if identity is seen as a self-reflective narrative, then fans create their identities based on those around them as well as in reaction to their environment. Resistance is a form of identity building, but in reaction to a person's surroundings. Other fans see in anime something different and exotic from their everyday lives and this allows the fans to associate with something more than themselves. Whatever part of anime or manga motivates fans, the most important thing that fans have invested themselves in is the fandom. Their engagement with anime makes them more devoted to an identity as an anime fan. In looking at anime

fan identity, the best place to start is to see why they like anime and how they became fans.

The best place to see how identity affects the choice of people to become anime fans is to see why fans like anime and manga. The reasons that fans gave for liking anime and manga show that anime and manga contributed to identity formation by giving fans glimpses of a life they cannot have. There was much variation in responses when I asked this question: some fans gave two word answers, while one fan started to philosophize on why we like anything and gave me close to a page of text in answer. For many of my interviews, the art and style of anime are important. Almost as many people mentioned that story and plot are also very important. One person mentioned that anime allowed her to connect with a friend who moved away because they shared anime and wrote each other about it. One older fan, Karl, has this to say about what he liked in anime:

> But there's things in my life I wish for that I can't have that people in anime have. So it's kind of nice to see people with the gifts and the talents that I want and can never have. Kind of like reading a book.

Karl also mentioned that his interest was similar to others' interest in movies, just that his interest is animated. Curt was even more revealing in why he liked anime:

> I'm a huge escapist when it comes to anime. I'm not capable of living lives as exciting as the main characters in these stories, so anime is the only place where I can even somewhat feel special or excited.

This response seems somewhat dramatic, but the statement is powerful because it directly states how anime fulfills a niche in his life. Curt sees his reality as boring, but he wants to identify with the exciting lives of the characters he sees in anime. Anime

can often add vicarious excitement to fans and this gives them more encouragement in

their identity as anime fans.

Another fan, John, liked animated fantasy because it was more believable than

live-action. There were no "cheesy" special-effects that would bring him out of the

experience. One respondent in particular, Brianna, had a very informative response.

She said:

> Why does anybody like anything? Because it engages you. Because it's
> appealing to you. It's visually appealing, it's mentally appealing. You can
> relate to the characters, it's a very accessible medium, I think, for lots of
> different reasons. I think it just combines a lot of things that I've always liked
> about anything. I really like comic books. And a lot of anime is based on
> comic books. I like sort of epic stories and big battles between good and evil
> and those are without fail in almost every single series. I like romance and like
> human interaction and that's in there too. And so anime is something that you
> can say you like and that means you like everything. It's appealing and
> accessible and it's fun.

Brianna's response covers almost everything involved in anime. Many other

responses echoed this one on why the interviewee liked anime, but most fans limited

themselves to one or two reasons they liked anime. Some fans only liked the art and

others thought the storylines were the most important. Both of the last groups of fans

did not consider anime as major part of their identity, but treated it like a hobby

instead.

Before my informants could become anime fans, they first had to be introduced

to anime. The story of how my informants became anime fans often followed very

similar paths and gives insight into how/why anime became meaningful to them. I

discovered that many fans became fans after watching a select few movies or series.

The main difference for most only depended on what year they started to watch anime. The fans who started earliest watched around the mid-1990s when only a few anime movies like *Akira* and *Vampire Hunter D* were available. A few years later, two series were responsible for many people becoming anime fans, *Dragon Ball Z* and *Sailor Moon*. *Sailor Moon*, particularly, had a lot of influence on female fans. As Allison (2006a) noted, *Sailor Moon* must have struck a chord with viewers by challenging them with complex plots and a genre mix of action and romance along with a very Japanese setting. Many fans joke that *Sailor Moon* was a "gateway drug" because it got them addicted to anime. *Dragon Ball Z* had similar effect on male fans. Six of my informants started with one of these two series. In most cases, the first experience with anime was so different from anything else on television that fans wanted to watch more and eventually discovered the wider world of anime and fandom. Many of my informants said that learning that there were many different anime series and other people that liked them, they began to feel that they would like to be a fan. This was exactly how Brianna became an anime fan.

Brianna's first experience with anime was with Miyazaki's *My Neighbor Totoro*. She watched the movie the year it came out in Japan, when she was four. Her aunt is Japanese and had to sit down and translate it for her and her sister. However, it wasn't until *Sailor Moon* that anime became an immersive experience for her. In her words:

> I was twelve years old and my friend and I were bored out of our skulls watching our younger siblings at their school play. And so we sat at the back of the room trading notes. My friend did a drawing of *Sailor Moon*. I thought

it was the coolest thing since sliced bread. But, um, anyway that was sort of the beginning of the end for me. And it's kind of interesting that I can pinpoint that exact time. I think I looked up the date one time, it was the second week in December 1997, so I think it was a Thursday. Anyway, that's the story and then after that I watched *Sailor Moon* religiously, *Pokémon*, *Dragonball Z*, 'cause that's all that was on. And then I sort of realized, this is fun and all, but I started to lose interest in it. Instead of saying, well, that was cool, and moving on. That was *really* cool, I *really* liked that, let's see if we can find something else. And so I started looking around for other series and that's how I got into the comic books because in America, there were no, after you run out of things to watch on TV that's all there was at that time. And so the only other place you could get the Japanese anime style of art and storytelling was through the comic books. So that's when I really got into comic books and that's when everything else sort of took off.

Exposure to *Sailor Moon* has turned Brianna into a fan of anime for over ten years and changed the course of her life.

Brianna gives a particularly interesting look into identity because of how deeply anime has affected her life since that first introduction. She built her identity around anime and manga. Her identity and interests have matured while still focusing on anime. Her goal is to become a manga translator and dedicate her life to anime and manga. She was going to college, but took time off for reasons not mentioned. It is possible that her anime fandom got in the way of her studies. This would not be unusual, as many people I knew who were very involved in anime fandom have had trouble in school or dropped out. On the other hand, Brianna is also different from other people I interviewed. Her interview was by far the longest (over one hour) and one of the most informative. Part of that may come from her outgoing personality, which differs from many other fans. For example, her interview took place at the comic shop where she works, and we were constantly interrupted because regular customers as well as friends stopped to say hi. In addition, Brianna's knowledge and

insight into anime fandom was unparalleled, partially from her devotion to anime, but also in part due to her job. Perhaps this is why Brianna's response to why she likes anime seemed to be a good summary for all of my participants. She personifies how fans have used anime to create their identity, and she has matured while still maintaining anime and manga as the defining part of her identity. To use Giddens' theory, Brianna used anime fandom to create a narrative for herself that gave her goals and way to live her life.

Melissa's explanation as to how she became a fan and why she likes anime illustrates how anime helped her create her identity in several ways: as a way to distinguish herself from her twin, as a way to establish her own network of friends, and as a way to rebel against her parents. Melissa is Brianna's good friend. Her path to anime fan was different than that of many other female fans. She was in college and one of her friends on a romance novel list serve told her about anime and sent her some series. Melissa and her twin sister watched all 52 episodes of *Fushigi Yuugi*[11] in "about 72 hours." "It was really the first time we'd ever been exposed to an extended series that had a plot. It kept going on and on and built off one episode to another." She enjoyed that the series expected you to think and remember details from previous episodes to understand what was happening.

Melissa's identity is self-described as a "fan girl," especially of the romance-oriented *shojo* genre. "Fan girl" means a somewhat obsessive fan of *shojo* anime, *bishonen* (pretty boys), and *yaoi* (explicit male homosexual) manga. "Fan girls" are

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[11] A romance anime by Yuu Watase involving a girl's magical journey to ancient China.

often very active members of fan communities, online or not. She is proud of this identity, and says that part of the reason why she cares about identity issues is that she has a twin and twins often are acutely aware of identity because they are considered part of a pair and not as individuals. Melissa's understanding of anime as part of her identity creation is significant because many other interviews hinted at the issues Melissa pointed out to me explicitly, like when she mentioned that one of the reasons she became an anime fan was to have an identity that her parents would not understand.

Melissa enjoys anime because of the complexity and character development. Just because she is a fan, though, doesn't mean she has completely bought into her fandom. She mentioned that one of her problems with some anime is that the plots can stretch the suspension of disbelief too far and fans realize that the story is just kind of stupid. On *Macross 7,[12]* she said, "he's in a mech, and he's playing guitar, and he's singing a song, and he's defeating the enemy? That's just silly." Her critical view of anime here shows her maturity and how her anime fandom is not threatened by imperfections in the medium.

Like an anime fan's personal fan history, another aspect of identity is how a fan's family reacts to anime. When I asked about how a fan's family felt about anime, I expected parents to not understand it, and for the most part I was correct. Often siblings were united in their interest in anime and manga, but parents had very different ideas about the hobby. Generational attitudes towards anime was interesting because the oldest fan I interviewed was thirty-three, but almost every fan said their

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[12] A science fiction anime about giant piloted robots.

parents disapproved or at least did not understand the attraction to cartoons and comics. A few said that their parents did not care either way, and one fan's dad approved because he loved *Speed Racer*. From this question, I also found that a number of my informants lived with their parents after high school and beyond. I chose not to delve too deep into this because of the negative stigma attached to living at home after turning eighteen in the United States. The informants were usually reluctant to mention it and I respected their feelings on the issue, but I wanted to know more because there are stereotypes about living at home as a fan.

Anime seems more attractive because it is something that a fan's parents do not understand. Melissa said this about how she became a fan:

> The funny thing is, that it's almost part of the reason why I fell so hard is because it was something that my parents really wouldn't get into. We were 18-19, we're trying to establish our own identity and we're like, 'oh dude, this could work.'

Fans often use anime as a form of resistance against their parents or even ordinary popular society in general. To further the example, Melissa had a lot of interest in fan-created work, including *yaoi*[13] work. This was surprising because she lived with her Pentecostal parents. She admitted she kept the boy's love videos and *doujinshi* away from plain sight. This could be resistance to her parents' views or this could be another facet of Melissa's using anime to create a separate identity for herself. As Melissa seemed to have no trouble with her parents, it is more likely that she just

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[13] *Yaoi* is an acronym of a Japanese phrase "yama nashi, ochi nashi, imi nashi" which translates to "no climax, no punchline, no meaning." The meaning shifted and now means explicit male homosexual fan media in Japan and male homosexual content in America.

wanted a way to separate herself from her parents, especially because she still lived at home.

Before I conducted interviews, I thought piracy would be another form of identity through rebellion. My informants' views on piracy, however, were different than I expected. Many preferred to follow the legal ways to get anime. Fan-subtitled works are usually only allowed until a series is licensed in the United States, and then the fans are supposed to stop subtitling and all copies of it are to be erased. Most fans tried to follow these rules, but many still had "moments of weakness" when they bought or downloaded something because they could not wait for it to be translated formally. Fans told me they would feel guilty from breaking their own rules, but felt that occasionally breaking the rules was okay because they spent a lot of money supporting the series in other ways. Most fans realized that anime and manga need sales to encourage more series to be imported. Thus, like Melucci (1989) stated about modern social movements, anime fans are not rebelling against any larger social causes, but for the right to choose their entertainment on their own terms. Most fans are not interested in rebelling against the marketplace because the marketplace originally brought anime to the United States. However, these are not hard and fast rules because fans know their power as consumers. One of my informants called her views "intelligent piracy." She defined this as supporting the companies that were true to the series and to its fans, but if a company censored, charged exorbitant amounts for DVDs or CDs, or otherwise alienated her ideals, she felt no problem in acquiring products from illegal downloads. Another fan never downloaded anything

because she believed it was wrong to do so. Almost every fan had a different view on this subject, thus agreeing with Melucci's theory and adding to Schouten and McAlexander's definition of subcultures of consumption.

Anime fans definitely fall under the definition of subcultures of consumption because to many fans, purchasing anime goods is a way to prove one is a "true" fan. This can lead to the approval of other fans, and to the strengthening of their own identity as a fan. With more consumption, it becomes harder to abandon the identity as an anime fan because too much money has been spent on the hobby. If a fan decides to leave the fandom, then the ex-fan has to admit to wasted time and money. This can be a powerful argument for some fans to remain a part of the community.

Fans use language in interesting ways to identify themselves and other anime fans. When I asked my informants about the word *otaku*, I was given a variety of answers. Some younger fans took it to be a badge of honor to be obsessed with anime. These fans used the term *otaku* to refer to themselves. This use of *otaku* could be seen as a form of resistance because they chose to use a label that carries an anti-social stigma on themselves. Other informants were less involved in formal fandom and had no knowledge of the word. A small group of fans admitted to being *otaku* in the past, but were not as obsessive now, like Melissa:

> I wouldn't say I'm a real otaku because it's like these are the people who have the ball-jointed dolls and claim that the latest greatest is soul bonded to their souls. And just really weeaboo about the whole thing. I have been that weeaboo in the past, I'm just not like that right now.

All of the fans that actively disassociated with the term admitted that they were formerly *otaku* themselves and most had used the title for themselves until they learned the negative connotations that the word has in Japan. This seemed like a definite step in changing from a younger fan to a more mature one. Some of those fans had been to Japan, but others had learned of the negativity of the word from other sources. The fans that used the term to describe themselves considered it a cool way to reference their fandom.

Some fans even saw the obsessive connotations of *otaku* as positive. These fans have claimed a negative label and use it to identify themselves to remove some of the stigma from the word. This use of the word *otaku* is definitely a sign of rebellion against the dominant Japanese and Japanese-speaking fans viewpoint.

The culmination of all identity issues is readily seen at anime conventions. In my observations, conventions are almost the real life incarnation of the Internet communities to which most anime fans belong. Intertextuality also comes into play here because fans take parts their favorite anime and give them new contexts within the convention space. With so many anime and manga fans together, many fans act more wild and unrestrained than usual because they feel that for this one time and place, they are the majority and can act as they please. Cosplay contributes to the feeling that anime conventions are a space to act differently because costumes allow fans to explore other identities for the weekend.

In some ways the anime convention is carnival-like. The convention is a liminoid[14] place for many fans. Fans use the convention to "try out" new identities and further their engagement with anime fandom. The participants are often costumed and do things that they would not normally do. From personal experience and interviews, it seems that the convention space becomes more sexualized and people have fewer inhibitions. Perhaps it is in imitation of the stylized anime characters, or it could be the insulating effect of the Japanese words used to describe the sexuality. I noticed a lot of sexuality: in low-cut costumes, in people's actions and in what the dealers sold. In 2006, the most popular item I saw was a large wooden paddle that said *yaoi*, referring to a type of *doujinshi* that involves male characters romantically and/or sexually involved, similar to a comic book slash fiction. *Yaoi* is a popular genre with female fans, but the flaunting of American society's squeamishness on the topic of homosexuality seemed significant to building a resistant identity.

Identity is a very important theme for my study because without it, there would be no anime fans to study. Fans see something in anime that they like and want to have some of its exotic and interesting nature transferred to them. In this way, anime fans are a very typical subculture of consumption as defined by Schouten and McAlexander (1995). Some fans buy products to better cement their identity as "true" anime fans. A fan may also use the products to as reminders of the person that they wish to be like in Vygotsky's theories. Others create anime-inspired media like fan

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[14] Liminoid is Victor Turner's modern equivalent to Van Gennep's concept of liminal. Van Gennep's liminal state was the between state during a rite of passage. For example, during a ceremony to change boys into men, the participants are no longer boys, but they are not yet men. Victor Turner saw that true rites of passage are rare in a post-industrial society, but there are occasions that allow people to play and perform to test out new identities (Turner 1982).

fiction, fan art, websites devoted to their hobby, or cosplay at conventions. What is most important is how anime engages its fans and makes them want to share their knowledge or creativity with others as a community. This community works like Giddens described in that they support each other and create identity with the interaction of the group used to created biographical narratives for its members. These behaviors make anime fandom fulfilling in the eyes of its fans.

Community

Anime and manga fans may become fans for various reasons, but they remain fans often because of the community. The anime fan community is not readily defined because a large percentage of fans would say that most of their fan interactions are done online. This makes it difficult to properly show how important the community is to fandom, yet almost every fan I interviewed spoke of having friends that were fellow anime fans. These friends were either in the area or part of an online community. The importance of the community comes from how it supports fans by allowing them to talk without worry about what their peers or classmates might think of them. Especially among younger fans, there is a stigma to anime fandom because some fans act "too different" and high school students are hypersensitive to embarrassment.

This community has become one of the reasons that anime remains popular in the United States even though fans may live far apart. In many cases the anime fan community is digital, but that rarely is a problem according to fans. Much of fan

activity involves the Internet and fans are usually comfortable downloading videos as well as chatting and making connections with other fans through various websites. Anime fandom coalesces at conventions. For many fans, this is their one time to be themselves without worrying about being a called a "freak." This seems to show that the anime fan community is brought together from fans' common interests as well as their relationship to the rest of society. They feel safe and secure away from the disapproval of mainstream society. This allows anime fans to truly interact as a community. Younger fans often use this as an excuse to go wild, much to the annoyance of more mature fans. This is important to the younger fans because it gives them a safe space, community in which to experiment with and strengthen their new identities.

Now we move to the building of community within itself—it is interesting that there is status here as in non-alternative communities. Anime fans gain status within their community through knowledge and authenticity. For fans, the original Japanese version of a series is the best version and the manga (if it came first) is the purest version of a story. This means that if there is any change from the manga to the anime, some fans will note it. Sometimes these facts will be used to show how much knowledge a particular fan has compared to other fans in order to gauge status among fans. Japanese language and culture knowledge are very prized among fans also because fewer fans have the motivation and drive required to learn Japanese. Another way to gain status in anime fandom is to have authentic Japanese anime goods.

Depending on personal taste, some fans collect figures, plush toys, or even animation cels to be "cool" and increase their status in the fan community.

Another way that anime fans show their fandom is through creation. Fans often have very specialized interests and to find further information or art about their favorite characters, fans have to create it themselves. Do It Yourself (DIY) is an important part of fandom for this reason and because many fans cannot afford to import a lot of Japanese goods. In the background section I mentioned how fans made anime their own by writing stories and creating art using anime characters. Personal involvement and creation further cements the devotion to a show or medium. By the act of creating, fans invest in their show or anime in general and by sharing it, in the community. This investment means it becomes part of how they view themselves, i.e. as anime fans. There are many websites that allow anime fandom to share fan fiction, fan art, and pictures of cosplay. This follows Vygotsky's notion of objects used in identity building and subsequently, community-building. When fans receive feedback about their creations, this improves the sense of community and simultaneously reinforces the identity that these people are trying to build. This identity/community feedback loop is important not only to the people themselves; it also helps the fan community to maintain many devoted fans. In the above examples, the themes of identity and community overlap and show how each is reliant on the other.

When anime fans gather, watching anime is not always the reason for getting together. Instead fans gather just for social reasons. During my time spent with the Oregon State University's anime club, I noticed that during the Thursday viewing

sessions many people had already watched the anime that were shown. Instead of concentrating on watching, some people used the time instead to socialize with their friends who share common interests in anime and other subjects. Others only paid attention when certain shows or even just certain episodes of series were on because they wanted to re-watch the best parts and share the fun with others. It was a very informal gathering and some people only stayed for a few shows or just to socialize with their friends before returning to school responsibilities. Anime seemed to be of secondary focus for the meetings and socializing with people who shared your interest was the most important aspect for most of the club members. I believe this socialization was important to the members because they could watch anime anytime, but it was hard to find other fans to talk to in real life.

When anime fans meet, it is often positive because there is a chance to talk with someone who understands the hobby. Many of my interviewees told me that some fans are friendly, stable people who are enjoyable to spend time with. Brianna sums up the feelings of many fans when she said:

> I mean, if you if you want to throw yourself into a series completely, you can dress up like the characters, you can write your own stories for them, you can draw them, you do whatever you want with them and there will always be somebody else who supports that and will encourage you and will do it with you. That's something that's really encouraging because if you're the only person out there who's doing it, it's very, it's a very isolating feeling. When I first got into it, it was just me and a couple of friends who thought it was interesting. We watched *Sailor Moon* and that was it. We didn't even know that there was anybody else out there who actually watched the show and who felt the same way about it that we did. And then we discovered the Internet, and gosh there are people all over the world who are watching it and thinking the same things that we are and it's a, it gives you some place to connect.

This sheds a lot of light on what fans get out of anime fandom. They get a sense of support and community. As a lot of anime fandom is digital, having the support of other fans online allows fans to not get discouraged in their fandom even if no one local understands them; they still have the knowledge that there are others who think like they do.

To sum up the theme of community, Melissa's comment at the end of the interview was insightful and useful in understanding what other fans get from interacting with the anime community:

> The slightly horrible truth is that I'm more in it more for the fan-derived. The fan works (more) than anything else. I know a lot of anime fans and some of them are pretty cool and some of them are really kind of 'wow, you guys need some professional help.' I like it. It's kind of fun because you go online or whatever and it's like a community. As long as you accept that it's one community. I like the connection you can get with people. It's like 'Wow. Fangirl is really the universal language.'

Of note in her quote is the part about anime fandom being one community. Melissa has probably had trouble because she likes *yaoi* and she believes that fans should stick together instead of bickering over minor details. Her words, however, also point out that there are divisions in the community.

Not all fans lend to this sense of community. There are anime fans that are not understanding and supportive, but instead annoying and divisive. Interview participants told me a minority of fans that have poor hygiene or social skills fit the Japanese definition of *otaku* and are too obsessed with anime and Japan. I personally witnessed this with one member of the OSU anime club. One student spent time with

the club, but he had very poor hygiene to the point that it was unpleasant to be within 15 feet of him. The club president became tired of him and regularly told him to take a shower and then come back. He seemed to think that the president was joking and kept coming back.

One of the more interesting things that often showed up in interviews was the perception of "levels" of fandom. The community of anime fans divides itself according to perceived ranks according to a fan's knowledge of anime, Japan, and fandom. My findings dovetailed with Napier's (2007) research on anime fans. This hierarchy is also a defining part of a subculture of consumption . These "levels" were mentioned by the most devoted fans and even the more casual fans recognized a hierarchy in anime fandom. Some interviewees did not like to associate much with fans that were of a lower "level" than they were. Part of the reasoning for this was that more novice fans would require more explanation of terms and ideas that experienced fans already took for granted. Others had studied Japanese and found it very irksome to hear newer fans butcher Japanese pronunciation. Some also outright called it elitism. They know more than other fans and would prefer to spend time with fans that have similar interests, knowledge level, and commitment to anime. Another telltale sign of a new fan was the anime they had watched. If they had never seen anything in Japanese or not on television, they would be considered the lowest level of fans with just a casual interest in something that other fans were devoting themselves to. This fits into Peterson's (2005) use of intertexuality because the media knowledge

required to have a higher level of fandom was great and if a fan could not understand certain references, there is a chance they could lose status compared to other fans.

For example, as a self-proclaimed "elitist bastard," Brianna has little patience for people who look down on fan activities like cosplay. She also has to grit her teeth when someone comes into her comic shop and proclaims they are an anime fan, but have only watched *Naruto* on Cartoon Network. When she has spent ten years studying Japanese and learning in depth on anime and manga production, it irritates her when someone says that they are a fan because they watched one show. Even she realizes it is a little irrational, but she believes they do not show anime the same respect that she does. However, she very much enjoys talking to fans on her "level" of fandom:

> I love interacting with fans that are, this sounds very like elitist, but like I said I'm elitist and I don't care. But I like interacting with other fans who are sort of on my level. Who have the same amount of integration into the fandom, who have similar interests, that's really fun because you can talk about things that you may otherwise have to explain to somebody else. Like if we start talking about like, recently there's a movie coming out in Japan called *Paprika*. It's going to be this big event, it's animated, a lot of great directors, and actors and stuff. And the first thing I noticed when I looked at the cast list was Megumi Hayashibara is making her return to voice acting. She's a very famous voice actor. She did *Ranma*, she worked on *Ranma*, and *Lum*, and *Sazan(3X3) Eyes*, and *Evangelion*, and just a billion things. She's an icon. And she several years ago she sort of stopped doing voice acting because she wanted to focus on her music career. And she did okay in her music career. And now she's coming back to voice acting, and that's the first thing I noticed. When my friend showed me the link to this website, and I said 'Megumi's coming back.' And he's like 'What?' 'Megumi is back.' '*What*?' There was complete lack of comprehension there. And so I went and told another friend, 'Megumi's coming back and she's going to be in this one movie.' And they immediately knew what I was talking about. And so that's a really gratifying thing. To be with other people with the same interest on the same level and

sort of operating on the same wavelength. That's something that's really enjoyable for me.

Brianna also stated that most of her anime friends are online because very few people in her town are her level of fan. She said that most people who she can relate to work in the industry.

A subset of anime fandom is particularly disliked and avoided because of their fondness for violently pornographic or pedophilic anime. This small section of fans, often on the Internet or occasionally at conventions, is usually described as "creepy" or "scary" because of their obsessive interest in the sexually-themed anime and manga. Often these fans enjoy and talk often about *lolicon*[15] anime and manga which involve sexual situations with what look like underage girls. These fans are shunned for two reasons: because their frank discussions of sexual anime make other fans uncomfortable and because they reflect badly on anime fans as a whole and other fans do not want to be associated with them.

The anime fan community is important because one of the main the reasons that anime fans stick with their hobby. Anime fans are often isolated from one another and need encouragement to keep with a hobby that others around them do not understand. Most fans are supportive of one another, but there are fans that act divisive towards the community. Either these fans are obsessive or socially inept, but the end result is that these fans actually hurt the fandom by making would-be fans shy

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[15] *Lolicon is* a Japanese clipping of Lolita complex, the attraction to young girls. Often anime fans will abbreviate the term further and use the term "loli" to describe anime and manga that involve sexualized young girls.

away or make people outside the hobby think that all anime fans are like the outspoken *otaku*.

Another divide in anime and manga fandom is less divisive towards the community of anime fans, but appeared frequently in my interviews. This is my next theme, older and younger anime fans.

Older and Younger Fans

Fans identified with anime and the fan community differently depending on their age. I came to this conclusion through my research without fans explicitly stating age as an important difference. Some older fans did mention their annoyance with younger fans, but no younger fans mentioned older fans in a positive or negative way. This division in the community has much to do with how anime is perceived in a fan's daily life as well as the role that fandom plays in a fan's identity. Fans that were still in high school have grown up with anime and the easily accessible fan community on the Internet. Younger fans are also more likely to obsess over anime. Older fans remember when anime was difficult to find and community almost non-existent because there were few ways to find other anime fans. Older fans are also less likely to be a part of anime fandom and instead treat anime as another part of their lives. These differences lead to a split in how anime and manga are a part of the lives of younger and older fans.

How a fan viewed Japan seemed to be split by age. Fans in high school and early college almost universally thought Japan was great place and many said they loved the country, despite having never been there. Older[16] fans usually admitted that they did not know much about the country and believed that anime would be a very unfair way to judge Japan. If a fan had spent time learning more about Japan, they were much more likely to mention that Japan was not perfect, but it was still interesting.

Even the definition of anime was different between younger and older fans. I would ask participants about the first anime they and the younger participants would say "well *Pokémon* (or *Dragonball Z*) doesn't count…" On the other hand, older fans actually pinpointed *Dragonball Z* as a series that exposed them to anime. In all of my previous experience with anime and anime fandom, anime was defined as Japanese animation without qualifiers. Younger fans have grown up with anime and may feel the need to differentiate this more general form of anime from their current hobby because the anime that has been shown on American television is often simplistic and childish. Older fans grew up without anime on television and they already see a clear distinction between the cartoons they watched as children and anime and therefore see no need to further tighten their definition of anime. To me, the younger fans' definition of anime feels like a self-conscious reaction to anime's current popularity. They want to be seen as interesting and exotic and if anyone can flip on the television and watch anime; it becomes difficult to see your hobby as unique. Unfortunately, I

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[16] For the purposes of my discussion, older fans are at least 21 and younger fans are below that age. It is a somewhat arbitrary number, but almost all of my interviews could be divided this way.

did not catch on to the importance of these statements during the interviews, so I could not ask them to clarify their responses.

I also found a divide in how fans perceive anime itself based on age. The biggest difference here is where anime and manga fit into a fan's life. Older fans usually see anime and manga as a part of their life, but not the defining thing. They also see faults with anime and manga. Younger fans usually have rose-colored glasses concerning Japan, anime, and manga because they often use anime as the basis for their identity, and finding fault with Japan is like finding fault with themselves. This rather myopic view is common among younger fans in general.

What triggers the switch between younger and older fans? For some fans, it is experience or changing tastes. Other fans pull back after being exposed to the vocal hardcore segment of fandom. These people might have become anime fans, but after seeing how serious some fans are, they decide that they want nothing to do with anime. This choice just reflects a different path for that individual's identity. I have observed that sometimes experienced fans feel the need to lord over new fans or tease them because the new fans do not share the same knowledge of anime. The antisocial obsession of some fans alienates many potential anime fans.

Fans may just lose interest in anime for other reasons. Fans could gravitate to other forms of entertainment like video games, movies, or live-action television. They may spend their time with sports, work, or family instead. It is also possible that their interest just changes with other aspects of their personality when the fans mature.

Interests can also change because a fan does not want to continue to have the stigma of being an anime fan. Instead the person wants to change part of their identity and changes their internal narrative accordingly.

Kate is an example of an older anime fan and one whose fandom changed over time through the exposure of living in Japan. Kate is a friend of mine that I met in Japan while living there. She had recently returned from teaching English at a Japanese high school for three years. In many ways her perspective was heavily skewed by her growing dissatisfaction with her job and Japan. Her interview was conducted through e-mail and I asked follow-up questions through e-mail as well.

Kate's main interest in anime is for the "artwork and the serial plotlines." Her fandom started with *Sailor Moon*, the same as Brianna. Before living in Japan, Kate had been to anime conventions and had helped run a convention in Iowa. Her experiences gave her a different perspective on anime conventions. According to her, conventions have changed a lot over the years. Now there is a "con culture" that dominates with younger fans referencing the other conventions they have visited. Convention panels were once debates about intellectual issues in anime, but now are often about the culture of the convention. I personally saw this at Sakuracon with panels on "how to flirt at the convention." Another of her dislikes of convention culture was the physicality of strangers. She says, "I hate 'glomping.' This is where random people tackle you and hug you. That is called a glomp." In the Seattle anime convention I observed this as well and mostly teenagers would hug each other.

Kate's view of conventions is reinforced from one of my younger informants, Sarah, who stated that she liked conventions for the same reasons that Kate was annoyed with anime conventions. Sarah was the president of the anime club at Corvallis High School. Sarah is a good example of a younger fan because she had a lot of enthusiasm for anime, but little knowledge. About Sakuracon, Sarah said:

> For me it was an excuse to run around, be hyper, and just be off the wall crazy for three days in a row and no one cared. It was a lot of fun. I got to meet a lot of other people. And I hugged a lot of people and hugged me, so I guess it was a little more intimate experience than I usually get.

This corresponds to Kate's statements and my own observations. Younger fans seem to care more about the socialization aspect of conventions.

Kate's changing view of anime was very sudden. Sarah's views have yet to change and may not ever change. Brianna's, the participant who works in a comic book shop, is more subtle. Although she does not perfectly fit either the younger or older stereotype, her mature attitude towards anime typifies her as the latter. Her narration of why she likes anime fits more with the younger responses, but her descriptions of how she wants to transform her fandom into a career is more adult. Ultimately, Brianna has changed over time so that she sees that Japan and anime are imperfect, like everything else in life.

Age and experience affect how a fan sees anime and where anime fits into a fan's life. For many of my informants, their lives as anime fans went through stages. Younger fans are more likely to wholeheartedly embrace anime and become obsessive

about it. Many fans that joined anime fandom mentioned a sense of belonging, like

what Melucci states is a major reason for people to join modern social movements. A

few fans remain the stereotypical, obsessive *otaku*, but most grow out of that stage.

Some fans stop watching anime altogether, but other fans just realize that anime and

manga are enjoyable, though not the best thing ever. Brianna, Melissa, and Kate all

admitted to being obsessed with anime when they were younger, but at some point

realized how they were acting and grew up. This could also be understood as a variant

of Vygotsky because fans start by surrounding themselves with what they think anime

fandom entails. Later, the identity as an anime fan is internalized and they realize that

they are still a fan even if they do not like all aspects of anime or fandom.   If a fan

has a bad enough experience they may leave the fandom entirely. Kate is almost at

that point, but some of what she said may be out of bitterness from her living and

working conditions in Japan than anything to do with anime or manga.

Perception of Japan

Many fans state that they like anime and manga because it is from Japan, but is

that really why they like anime? From Napier and Allison's research with anime fans

as well as my interviews, it seems that Japan the country is not a main reason for

anime's popularity.   I use "Japan" to denote the imagined Japan that is seen through

the lens of anime. Many fans see "Japan" as the exotic, as providing something

different from "boring" and "predictable" American entertainment. "Japan" is seen

through anime as a place with high technology, short skirts, hyperactive people, ninja,

giant robots, and general craziness. Japan fascinates anime and manga fans, but few have the dedication to learn the language or visit the country. Fans that do visit Japan are almost always changed. Some see anime as one facet of Japanese culture, but others cannot deal with the cultural differences and recoil from their previous fandom.

When I asked about fans' perceptions of Japan, there was a distinct split in how anime fans viewed the country. Many of the older fans I interviewed knew more than just anime-based speculations about Japan or realized they knew little about the country and did not let anime color their view of the country much. However, many of the high school age informants told me that they thought that Japan was a great place and they wished to go there someday. When asked for more information, most of the younger fans gave me vague examples that were based on anime they had watched. It was clear that Japan seems cool, but the main interest for most fans is not Japan, but anime and manga.

As I mentioned earlier, fans place a high value on authenticity. When this is combined with the often censored, poorly acted English language versions of many anime, most fans prefer to watch anime in Japanese with English subtitles. A majority of fans followed the same path of starting out watching in English, but switching to Japanese because the average quality of the English voice actors was very low and many fans preferred to watch the unedited Japanese version. Some of the fans I interviewed still enjoyed watching anime in English because they had familiarity with the English version and one fan disliked subtitles because they distracted her from paying attention to the art.

Some fans also use anime as a way to learn Japanese. Every fan I interviewed was positive towards learning Japanese, even if they were not actively studying the language. While watching anime can be good for language practice, the speech in anime is often very strange Japanese. Either it is abrupt and rude or it can be archaic and stylized. In both cases, using anime Japanese will not help much in communicating with real Japanese people and can sometimes be very offensive. This split in language mirrors how Japan is seen through the eyes of anime fans because the "Japan" of anime is a distorted view of the real country.

Adam is another of my friends I met while I lived in Japan. He spent one year in Japan teaching English, but had spent time previously as an exchange student, where he learned about Japanese culture. His experience in Japan was largely positive and he greatly enjoyed his time there. Adam is currently working on his doctorate in Computer Science and has little time for anime now, but he still considers himself a fan. I conducted this interview through e-mail because he now lives in Texas. Adam's interest is mainly Japanese culture, old and new. On why he liked anime, he had this to say:

> It's deep-set link with Japanese culture. I think it provides a kind of insight (which is probably not a correct one if taken by itself) into what is basically a whole different world from Western thought. While many do a good job of masking this (or the translators do, at least), some series stand out as unabashedly granting a clear glimpse into Japan's culture. *Azumanga Daioh*[17] stands out as one of these.

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[17] *Azumanga Daioh* is a comedic anime series about a group of girls and their time in high school. The series has attained some popularity in the United States despite relying on Japanese cultural nuances and puns for a lot of its humor.

His focus on culture is exceptional because few fans I interviewed delved into Japanese culture unless it directly affects the anime they watch. Most fans I interviewed thought a little about the culture, but the art or action was more important to them. Japan was the source of their entertainment, but to many fans it was secondary to their interest. Younger fans were often anime fans for the community and identity that anime fandom provides. Older fans have a more mature outlook and have more interest in Japan because they can see how Japanese culture has influenced anime and manga. There were exceptions to both groups, but in general my informants fell into these groupings.

Most mature anime fans cited some things that they did not like in anime, but it was informative to see what those fans who lived in Japan disliked in anime. Adam's dislikes about anime cover some common features that other fans mentioned in their interviews, like "fanservice"[18] and the over-sexualization of high school and younger girls. Some male fans like these aspects, but for others, they feel like "perverts" for watching shows with that much sexuality in them. Some of this may be due to cultural differences, but some fans just want originality, or good stories, and do not require sexuality to be entertained.

Kate's dislikes of anime were the portrayal of women, the formulaic plots, and "filler" episodes. On what portrayals of women she disliked in anime, Kate had this to say:

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[18] Fanservice in anime is often a camera angle or view that emphasizes the sexuality of a character. Often this takes the form of an upskirt view that shows a female character's panties.

When I studied 'How to Draw' manga, specifically 'How to Draw Manga and Video Game Characters' at first, I was fascinated by how clear it was. Girls could be broken up into 5-9 types. There is a specific way to draw them, specific faces they make, specific ways that they stand, stereotypes for what they say. Until this moment, anime had seemed foreign and exciting, like a window into a mirror world that reflected my world back at me like a fun house mirror. Recognizable, but completely changed, and that made me look at my life in a new way. That was exciting at first. But like a fun house mirror, you often don't like the image that is reflected. Suddenly, like a light had been turned on, I saw anime with new eyes. Every female was a type, and it was very, very rare that they could be anything more. They are just a cardboard cutout of one of nine types parading around in a very designed way saying a lot of stereotypes.

The fun house mirror analogy is very interesting. This is similar to how others have described Japan in general when compared to America. To them, Japan is visually close to America, but distorted because only on the surface is it the same and how people act is much different. In my experience, many Americans only noticed the deeper differences after staying in Japan for a longer time and casual visitors thought it was very similar to the United States.

Seeing those stereotypes acted out in Japan, as well as the stress of living in a small town where everyone knows everything about you, Kate's feelings then turn negative:

The disgust came when I moved to Japan and realized that so many of them try to play those types in real life! Every day in Japan I walk around with my foreign perspective hating and feeling disgust for the women around me, bound to walk with their knees pointed in to be cute, saying the same stereotypical phrases, never having an original thought, or if they do, never letting on.

Kate's negative reaction to Japan is fairly common. It is a different country and it can be very stressful adjusting to how things are done in a new culture. I experienced this as well to a certain extent while living in Japan. Many of my female students only

wanted to be cute and most all of my students were happy to fit stereotypes. As an American, it can be frustrating because we are enculturated to value difference and diversity. This is compounded because, as a foreigner, it is almost impossible to conform and be accepted by Japanese society. Kate said of her students:

> I saw my exciting, fun, interesting students smash themselves into those stereotypes just as soon as they were freed from their uniform. Then it goes the other way. It is very easy to objectify a stereotype. The men's reaction to women disgusts me. The men's reactions to me disgusts me. I'm sick of men touching me in the train, jumping in front of my bicycle, treating me like a cute toy, begging me to teach them English at a bar, following me, staring at me, talking about me, and singing to me. When I see anime now, that is what I see. I see the gender stereotypes in Japan that I cannot accept. Before I moved there, I thought it was just the media. When I moved there I realized the trends are so strong with the people themselves, the media may just be reflecting it, not creating it. Which is reflecting which? The answer doesn't matter. It is the point about Japan that I can never accept, the reason why I will never live there again, and the reason why even 'cute, harmless' stories disgust me because I can only see the stereotypes they contain, which makes me picture the real women and men that walked by me or harassed me daily.

Her feelings towards Japanese men was not too unusual among the other American women I knew who worked in Japan. I thought these quotes had to be included because it summed up her experience and gave a lot of insight into why some anime fans become disillusioned with anime and Japan. Her experience was compounded from living in a small Japanese town where everyone knows and watches what you are doing as the only foreigner. The role of women in Japan came up in other interviews as something that fans knew about Japan and were troubled by, but none had personally experienced it to Kate's extent.

Adam did not have Kate's negative experience with Japan for a few reasons. Because Adam was male, he did not have to worry that his gender made others look

down on him. He also lived in a city and therefore was not the subject of neighborhood gossip. Lastly, his teaching situation was much different because he taught at many different elementary and middle schools with students young enough to not feel the pressure to conform like high school students.

The perception of Japan among anime fans depended upon individual. Some fans chose to emphasize the Japan aspect of their fandom and learned about Japanese culture and the language. Other fans felt that Japan was irrelevant to their fandom and remained ignorant of the country. On average, the older fans were better informed about Japan because they enjoyed the depth that cultural understanding brought to their hobby. However, the greater understanding of Japanese culture also made some fans conflicted because of differing attitudes about gender and sexuality. In all, the issue of Japan was complex and difficult to summarize.

The themes I found among anime fans are important to understand fandom in the United States. Many fans see anime as personal and consider it part of their identity. The community allows fans to communicate and become further invested in anime fandom. What anime means and how it fits into the life of a fan is often a product of the age of the anime fan. Japan is important to anime and manga fans, but its importance is mainly that it represents something different from America.

These themes are interconnected and overlap somewhat. Identity seems more important for younger fans because older fans have had time to create their own identity before anime became popular. Age affects the anime fan community, with

older and younger fans seeing the community in different ways. However, many older fans act as teachers and mentors to younger fans because they still have much in common. Japan is seen as more important among older fans, but younger fans who keep with the fandom tend to learn more about Japan and how it affects their passion. All of these themes together help to give a complete picture of anime fandom in the United States.

Conclusion

Anime and manga are popular in America because they are different and this appeals to many people. How the difference is perceived depends on the fan. In my study I identified four themes that help explain the popularity of anime and anime fandom in the United States. These themes again are Identity, Community, Older and Younger Fans, and Japan. Identity means that fans use anime to change how they view themselves and perhaps the world around them. The theme of community shows what activities unite anime fandom and how status is gained through knowledge in their hobby, as well as providing a supportive audience that allows people to feel comfortable with forming identities as anime fans. Fandom is divided by age with high school age fans behaving and perceiving fandom differently than older fans. Some fans focus on the origins of anime and learn about Japan and the language. Anime does attract people to Japan, but this is not necessarily beneficial to Japan. It stimulates an interest and positive reaction to Japan, but to a Japan that only exists in the minds of anime fans.

Some of the fans gain more than entertainment from watching anime or reading manga; they gain an identity. This is not unusual in the modern era because the traditional identity markers of location, ethnicity, and age have become less important to a younger generation that spends a lot of time on the Internet. Anime and manga give fans a feeling of difference, of being special because they enjoy something that many people do not understand. As Susan Napier's (2006) research with the Miyazaki mailing list suggests, some anime fans do not feel they share the same

values as other Americans. This can manifest itself in enjoying the exotic or finding entertainment that better fits their worldview. Fans that I interviewed felt that American television and movies did not challenge the viewer enough because most plots were simple and happy endings are standard. They reacted to the continuing storylines and complex plots that are common in anime and manga. This was a common reason that many of my informants continued to watch anime and later became fans. As Giddens' (1991) argues, it would seem that fans construct a story of their lives and anime adds something exotic and exciting to their narrative.

Sometimes an anime fan's identity was created to resist outside influences in their life. I saw examples of resistance in my interviews, but the examples did not have the frequency or strength to be included as a complete theme, so resistance best fits under the theme of identity. Melissa's decision to get into anime fandom because it was something different that her parents would not understand shows a conscious choice to resist some of the parental influence in her life. Her later interest in *yaoi* media while living with her Pentecostal parents is further proof of Melissa's determination to make her own identity and life separate from her parents. Some of the younger fans, like Sarah, used their anime fandom as a way to resist the social pressures of high school by taking pride in being different. To many anime fans, resistance is a part of their identity because no one locally understands them or their hobby. To remain fans, most need to look online for support.

The identity of fans is reinforced when fans go online and find out that they are not alone. Many fan websites allow fans to host pictures or files of their creations.

This encourages other fans to write fan fiction, draw fan art, create anime music videos, or make costumes for cosplay. Do It Yourself is a strong part of anime fandom in Japan and the United States because a lot of fan interests are too specific to attract the attention of companies. When a fan spends the time to create something like a story about anime characters, they are investing in anime as part of their identity. If another fan compliments the story, then the first fan is even more likely to see himself or herself as an anime fan. This also creates a sense of community with many fans communicating and encouraging each other. This is similar to Giddens' idea of identity formation through a personal narrative, but the personal narrative is further strengthened through external support.

Community is another very important part of anime fandom in the United States. The anime fandom community is what keeps many fans from finding other interests and losing interest in anime. Aside from the Internet, there are anime clubs and anime conventions that allow fans to meet face to face. Like some of my interviewees, even if a fan usually watches anime alone, they may still come to club meetings to socialize. Despite its growing popularity, anime is still a specialized interest and many fans greatly enjoy any chance to talk with other fans about their interest. Even disagreements within the fandom rarely cause members to leave because as Melucci (1989) stated, individuals choose their group memberships and can choose to disagree with portions of what the group believes. Some fans see their fandom in terms of anime and manga in general and other fans only enjoy certain genres, like *yaoi*. Despite many (especially male) fans distaste for *yaoi*, fans of this

genre see no reason to stop considering themselves anime fans. This does go against part of the definition of subcultures of consumption, but a shared ethos might not be as important for every subculture of consumption as it is among Harley-Davidson owners (Schouten and McAlexander 1995). I've known very dedicated anime fans that are atheist, Christian, ultraconservative, or ultraliberal. Yet all of these fans could happily interact because of their shared love of anime. I think this is rare among subcultures of consumption.

The best place for fans to meet one another and interact is at anime conventions. Conventions are a special place to fandom because it is one place where anime fans do not have to worry what the rest of society thinks. This feeling along with the large number of fans and cosplay, give conventions a carnival-like atmosphere. Cosplay allows fans to play with identity and sexuality in ways that they could never do at home. Fans can try new identities to see how it feels to be more assertive or what it's like to have other traits that they desire. Because fans know that the community accepts them, it allows the fans to experiment without the social consequences that could occur in other social settings.

Anime fandom is similar to many subcultures of consumption described by Schouten and McAlexander in that knowledge is a way for fans to gain or lose status in relation to each other. While there are hierarchies to fandom, like in other subcultures of consumption, fans can change their status with time and knowledge. Fans spoke of feeling good when they were with people with similar anime knowledge because they did not have to explain themselves or worry what other people thought of

them. This is probably the biggest draw of the Internet for the hardcore fans because, like Brianna explained, it was hard to find fans of her "level" in the Eugene area. The Internet is very important for anime fandom because it brings fans together.

Older and younger fans often had very different views of anime fandom and its place in their lives. The fans in high school had often grown up with anime and it was a big part of their identity. This identification with anime meant that it was hard for younger fans to remove themselves when talking about anime. Complaints about anime could be seen as finding faults within the fans. This over identification with anime and a high school student's naiveté mean that these fans were rarely critical of anything related to anime, or, by relation, Japan. I believe that this is not a generation gap among fans, but part of the process of growing up and maturing. As fans grow up they become more secure in their interests and could then look critically at what they enjoy without spoiling their enjoyment. This fits with Melucci's work because the younger fans joined anime fandom for a sense of identity and as they matured, they could see their fandom with more than an all-or-nothing stance.

Anime fandom appears to have certain stages and perhaps the obsessive *otaku* is one of the stages. Fans seem to start by watching a certain show or get introduced by a friend. Something about the anime catches their interest and they want to watch more. Often the interested person then wants to know more about a certain series and they seek out information online. This brings them in contact with other fans, who help teach about fandom and anime. Sometimes the budding fan wholly accepts anime fandom and makes their fandom a large part of their identity and becomes an

otaku. This is often the stage that gives anime fans a bad reputation because they become fanatic in their defense of Japan and all things anime and manga. In the words of Giddens (1991), these fans see anime as the primary part of their personal narrative and feel they must share the feelings that anime gives them. This can often go beyond creating a life story and become the meaning of life for very devoted fans. This behavior was not mentioned in Giddens' work, but it could be an extreme example of creating identities through his methods. Most fans grow out of the *otaku* stage and either leave anime fandom behind or integrate it as a part of their lives, but not the most important thing. Brianna is an exception to this path because she wants to work in the manga industry so anime and manga are a large part of her identity, but she has a life beyond those interests.

Older fans were more mature about anime and manga and how media fit into their lives. They often were dedicated fans, but anime was not the main aspect of their identity. When I asked older fans about Japan, they often told me that they did not know much about the country and that anime would be a poor way to learn about Japan. Sometimes older fans were offended by younger anime fans, particularly at conventions. They saw younger fans as not caring about anime, but only wanting to hug each other and hang out while at conventions.

Anime is a product of Japan, but few fans really understand Japanese culture or learn the language. Many fans see anime as part of Japan's "cool" mentioned by McGray. Part of his thesis is that Japanese pop culture products are a pastiche of influences and styles from other countries, and therefore are well-received abroad. A

few fans do see beyond anime and manga as entertainment and want to know more about the country that brought them manga and anime. These fans learn Japanese and often visit or live in the country. In Schouten, Fushimi, and McAlexander's study on the Judo subculture of consumption (2000), they state the importance of authenticity to the American Judo practitioners. This need for authenticity is also very apparent in the anime subculture of consumption. In both cases because the subculture originates from another culture, there is a greater emphasis on authenticity. However, the exposure to Japan often conflicts with the Japan that the fan imagined. This conflict can be resolved in a number of ways. Sometimes the fan becomes disgusted by how Japan is different than the one in their head and a fan stops caring about anime. Other times the fan may like anime and manga, but as part of their greater interest in Japanese culture with some fans just leaving anime to focus on other aspects of Japan.

While anime fandom fits the definition of a subculture of consumption in almost every way, there is one way that anime fandom is inconsistent with the definition. Anime fans choose to watch anime, they have their own jargon and social hierarchy, but the shared beliefs and values among fans are not nearly as consistent as with other subcultures of consumption. There are a few possible explanations for this discrepancy. Anime could be too broad of a category, akin to finding a shared ethos among movie buffs. For example, in Napier's (2006) study of Miyazaki anime fans, she found that fans shared the beliefs of the animated films they enjoyed. I was able to narrow down the commonalities among my sample of anime fans into a few core values: an interest in fantasy; a high degree of computer literacy; love of reading;

openness to other cultures; a feeling that one is different from mainstream American society; and a tendency towards being introverted.

In all, anime and manga's popularity has been very good for Japan's international image. Even if the average fan shows little interest in Japan, they still know that anime and manga originated there and are positively inclined towards the country. Japanese products are cool and this supports McGray's (2002) idea, that only the hint of Japan is all that is needed to make something seem better.

Anime and manga are popular because they give gives fans a sense of identity and community. Fans feel that watching anime and manga are exotic and different because few Americans watch or read entertainment from other cultures. Anime fandom allows for a lot of creativity and this reinforces fans' feelings toward their hobby. When fans attend anime conventions it gives them a sense of freedom from the restrictions of society and this makes fans more eager to see themselves as a part of anime fandom. To this end, fans try to gain status by learning more about their hobby or by obtaining authentic Japanese anime-related goods. The highest status fans are those who know Japanese and have been to Japan.

I believe my research has given valuable insight into why anime became popular in the United States and how anime fandom has maintained its popularity. The themes of identity and community are relevant to all studies of fandoms and other subcultural groupings. My work has larger implications and will be of help to others studying anime and manga fandom or subcultures of consumption. My study shows

how another culture's products can become popular in the United States. It also shows

how niche interests can grow and expand by uniting fans through the Internet.

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Appendix

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Anime and Manga Culture in the United States Survey

Demographics

Age?

How much education have you completed or are attempting to complete?

General Anime questions

What are your three favorite anime series or movies? Why do you like them?

Do you have any favorite anime characters? Why are they your favorites?

What do you like about anime?

Why do you like anime?

Is there anything you don't like about anime?

How became a fan

When did you first watch anime? What was it? What did you think?

Did anyone introduce you to anime? If so, who?

When did you start watching more?

How old were you when you became a fan?

On a scale of 1 to 10, what degree of anime fandom would you say you are at?

(1 is don't go out your way to watch, but you like it and 10 is your life revolves

around anime.)

Would you classify yourself an *otaku*?

Social

Do you enjoy watching anime alone or with friends?

Do you have friends that you enjoy anime with?

How would you characterize your anime friends?

How many anime fans do you personally have frequent face-to-face contact with?

Do you like interacting with other anime fans? Why or why not?

What does your family think about anime?

Have you ever attended an anime convention? If so, what did you think?

Language

What language do you generally watch anime in?

If you study Japanese, what was anime's influence on your studies?

How much Japanese can you understand when you watch anime?

Hobbies

Aside from anime, what other hobbies do you have?

Do you play video games? What kinds?

Do you read American comics? Which ones?

Do you watch American cartoons? What ones? Have you noticed any influence anime might have had on American cartoons?

Shopping

How much of your resources (e.g. time, money) do you estimate anime consumes?

Do you also buy products associated with anime? If so, what do you buy?

What do you think about pirated anime goods, like DVDs, wall scrolls, and CDs?

Japan

What is your opinion of Japan? What do you think about the country?

How do you think anime has influenced your opinion of Japan?