**Analyzing the international effects of Anime on the life course of a fan**

Author: Sean Malloy

Institution: University of California Davis

Word Count: 2060

**Abstract**

In my paper, I will analyze the effects of Anime within the fandom, and how it affects the life course of Anime fans. I will emphasize on how fans have initially received Anime, how it has affected their development into an adult, and how they utilize this information to create their own subculture. Anime, which is Animation made in Japan, has seen a huge boom in the early 2000’s, and remains a staple in global popular culture to this day. My goal is to interpret how fans initially received Anime, why Anime has appealed to them, what Anime has meant to them in their lives, and what they do with this cultural information to create more meaning in their lives. I will also relate my findings to sociological ideologies that help explain why certain fan activities and meanings appear out of the interactions the fans have with this peculiar medium.

Key Words: Anime-Life Course-Fandoms-Race

**Sociology 25 Final Paper: Analyzing the international effects of Anime on the life course of a fan**

Sean Malloy

998853013

6/7/2017

Since the Anime boom of the early 2000’s, there is a cultural phenomenon called anime, which is a form of animation from Japan. Anime is hugely popular around the globe, and gives Japan a huge amount of soft power, in incorporating their culture in other countries. As a part of this large success, there has been a huge following of fans throughout the globe, and this form of entertainment has created a huge subculture in which fans can interact with each other, and grow as people. What I want to talk in my paper is how anime has become a hugely successful medium of animation in foreign countries, how it changes the life course of fans, and how fans of anime interact with the medium to further enrich the anime culture. I want to analyze these ideas through the responses of interviewees of recorded interviews, and how anime has affected them.

Anime fans can be found in numerous places throughout the globe. It has even found its way into American popular culture, and has fans within the US. There are multiple reasons that anime has found widespread appeal within foreign nations, and why it has become an international phenomenon. From my interview data, some of the interviewees’ responses, such as those in the “Interview with Dark Flame Master”, suggest that fans have been watching anime since childhood, but never knew it was foreign until a few years later. What appealed to them was that anime was the more mature and unique option among other cartoons. Another interviewee, “Lupin”, critiques some of the anime he’s grown up with, such as Pokémon and Dragon Ball Z, as being difficult to truly categorize as anime, since these titles are very prevalent in our own culture, which made it seem like it was produced here. He/she categorizes Anime more as a sub-culture that is becoming more mainstream. I believe that one of the reasons that anime has appealed to him/her is because anime producers have learned to make their cast diverse, as well as adapt an odorless appearance in terms of nationality, to allow foreign fans to adapt ambiguously ethnic appearances, so fans can relate to characters as if they were their own nationality. They allow anime to be presented at a younger audience, with few cultural barriers. In the journal article, “Consuming Anime” by Dana Fennell, she describes anime as “lacking clearly identifiable Japanese national, racial, or ethnic markers”, which means that although culture in anime is not absent, and fans can still sense that it has Japanese origins, it allows itself cultural references that make it easily consumable in foreign nations. Anime allows itself to become odorless by incorporating “fantasy-esque” qualities, to separate itself from reality, and it allows the characters to look ethnically neutral sometimes (unless explicitly stated). Another source that helps describes the appeal of anime is the scholarly journal entry, “A life course perspective on fandom” by Denise D. Bielby, who provides an explanation of how fandoms provide a milestone in a fan’s life, and how fandoms could appeal to a fan’s different life course phases. In this case, anime could sometimes provide a way for fans to create a sense of self-identity, by relating themselves to the characters on screen. With one interviewer, “Interview with You”, the interviewee had utilized anime to empower his identity as an Asian-American. When he was younger, he roleplayed some of the characters in the anime that he watched. This helped him create a sense of self-identity, and help him with adolescence.

Another topic I want to visit is how anime affects the life course of the fans of the medium. Revisiting Bielby’s article on life courses, anime helps with transitioning between the four life course phases: adolescence’s struggle to find self-identity, young adulthood’s challenge of intimacy, mid-adulthood’s challenge of generativity, and late-adulthood’s challenge of integrity. With the challenge of identity, all the interviewees had self-identified as anime fans, but they all had different definitions of what being a fan meant to them. For “You”, being a fan meant having an appreciation of the artform that is anime. For “Evan”, being a fan had multiple levels of appreciation and complexity within the fandom, and for “Lupin”, it can mean many things; just if you enjoy the animation. There can be a multitude of meanings for being an anime fan, but fans can all agree that they are part of an anime community. This concurs with Eriko Yamato’s definition of Relatedness: the need to feel a sense of belonging and connectedness with others (“growing as a person”). This sense of relatedness pushes fans to increase their sense of identity, and motivates them to become more social with others. For “You”, it had provided him with a string of role models for him to look up to for growth, and this sense of belonging to the fandom has allowed him to find others and make friends. For “Evan”, it creates great opportunities to meet others in college and ways to lead conversations with others. For “Dark Flame Master”, being a part of the fandom and having a symbol of a show they like allowed him/her to become friends with other people whom they would not have befriended otherwise. It also allowed him/her to be engrossed with the growing community and involved in the plethora activities that anime fans enjoy, such as going to conventions, cosplaying, and watching anime with others. Anime has also allowed fans to have integrity within the fandom, and incentivizes them to be more productive, which fulfills Bielby’s mid and late adulthood’s challenges. In Eriko’s piece, she describes competence, which is the receiving of positive and informational feedback to make the fan feel capable within the fandom. With the interviewees, they felt this way by either feeling confident about their knowledge of anime when talking to others, or by the professionalism they have when creating their cosplays. Cosplay, which is the act of dressing up as a character from a series, creates an avenue for which anime fans can review each other on their ability to show their knowledge and affection for a program. For “Dark Flame”, who’s been cosplaying for years, cosplay has helped him feel like part of the community and a true fan of anime. As for “You”, he found enjoyment in going to conventions and seeing other people’s cosplays. Anime has also allowed some of the interviewees to become more open and change as a person. For “Dark Flame”, he used anime to gain insights into other cultures and become more open with other people and ideas than he would’ve otherwise. It created a medium for him to learn more about the outside world, and a way to gain insight on other cultures.

Albeit anime has some good aspects of engrossing the fans, it could also lead some of the fans to become too engrossed within the fandom. Interviewees “You” and “Even” critique that sometimes anime fans spend too much time either watching or partaking in anime activities. This type of behavior has created a negative stigma within the anime community, known as the “Weeaboo”. A “Weeaboo,” as some of the interviewees describe, is a nerdy or overly fanatical fan of Anime, or as “Dark Flame” puts it: “someone who fetishizes the Japanese culture”. Albeit some terrible stigma for anime fans exist, most of the interviewees still consider the anime fandom as a welcoming and exciting community that is changing with current trends. They see the fandom becoming something that they have control over, or as “Dark Flame” puts it: We can make it ours!”

Another influence that anime has on the fans, is that it encourages fan participation with the culture, and in turn, creates a culture of fan production on certain shows. In the interview with “Evan”, they state that they watch informal fan videos on YouTube on topics such as fan theories, animation techniques, and character analyses from shows that he enjoys. This insight shows the different ways in which anime fans create their own meanings or means of production from anime. In the paper “Global Geekdom: The rise of anime and Otaku in the information age”, Jinying Li talks about the different types of fan interactions on online sites, such as fan forums and discussions, and how the information age has helped create an online subculture of anime fans online, much of the same that “Evan” was talking about. This form of online participation helps create a sense of ownership and relatedness within the fan community, thus increasing the affection that fans have for the medium. Other forms of participation also include hosting your own events or clubs that is encompassed with anime. For Dark Flame Master, he/she created an anime club in high school that he/she felt made him more mature, and left a sense of legacy for him/her behind. It created a sense of growth for him/her towards an adult, and had created a sense of competence for him/her. In the piece “Growing as a Person”, they describe the interactions of fans organizing events for anime and staffing conventions as one way in which fans can grow and gain life skills from. Some skills include learning how to be responsible for others, or creating quick thinking skills to help them realize what to do in certain situations with the convention. Other scenes of fan participation are when people attend the conventions themselves, and participate in the activities. Listed in the “Growing as a person” piece, there are plenty of activities to do at conventions, such as singing, cosplaying, playing video games, and obtaining fan produced art, part of which the interviewees had partaken in as well. With “Lupin” and “Dark Flame”, when they go to Anime conventions, they collect items from their favorite shows, which help deepen their affection for the medium. These trinkets help give them a sense of relatedness to the culture, and helped “Dark Flame” make friends with other fans.

So, in conclusion, anime has been able to create a subculture within other nations, that has created opportunities for the fans of the medium to be influenced over the years. The medium of anime has created an impact on the life course of fans, and has created an avenue of sociability between others. With my analysis of the interviews, I could discuss how anime became popular in foreign countries, what impacts that anime has made on the life course of foreign fans, and how the fans further enrich the subculture of anime in their lives as they partake in the activities that anime provides.

References

Fennell, Dana, Ana S. Q. Liberato, Bridget Hayden and Yuko Fujino. 2013. "Consuming Anime." *Television & New Media* 14(5):440-456 (https://search.proquest.com/docview/1448991609?accountid=14505). doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1527476412436986>.

Yamato, Eriko. 2016. "'Growing as a Person': Experiences at Anime, Comics, and Games Fan Events in Malaysia." *Journal of Youth Studies* 19(6):743-759 (https://search.proquest.com/docview/1798002466?accountid=14505). doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2015.1098769>.

Harrington, C. Lee and Denise D. Bielby. 2014. *Aging, media, and culture*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Li, J. (2012). *Global geekdom: The rise of anime and otaku in the information age* (Order No. 3546450). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I. (1266251992). Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1266251992?accountid=14505>

Interviews

Evan Reider Interview with Max Somple

Iliana Chavez Interview with “Arsène Lupin III”

Johnathan Martinez Interview with “You”

Layna Auchard Interview with “Dark Flame Master”