PIP Title: Heroines don't dream of heroes

PIP Research Question/Statement: "To what extent is Japanese Anime and Manga an agent of patriarchal oppression or gender-based liberation for adolescent audiences?"

Extract Section: Log

Log

This research topic was inspired by my passion for Japanese popular culture and my personal experience of being a female within a society which prioritises the visibility of males and continues to encourage conformity to dominant feminine ideals. As an adolescent consuming Japanese Anime and Manga, I constantly witnessed the blatant objectification and sexualisation of female characters which was normalised in popular media. As a Western consumer, I began to question the broader sociocultural gender imbalance and the macro-level exclusion of authentic female experiences from mainstream media both within and outside of Japan. This prompted my engagement with academic, secondary research and led to the realisation that this experience has been compounded over time by the historical misogyny inherent within the patriarchal structure of both Japanese and Western cultures, a socioculturally constructed norm which has perpetuated the continued submission of women across the micro, meso, and macro-levels of society. It was through my research that I was exposed to the varying representations of female characters in Anime and Manga over time from the hypersexualised vixen to the submissive damsel-in-distress, in contrast to the ordinary and relatable portrayals of men in the same genre. Thus, in considering this representational disparity, the cross-cultural focus of gender was developed to analyse the framing of attitudes and values of Western audiences from the 1970s to 2020s towards Shoujo and Shounen Anime and Mangas' construction of femininity and masculinity.

Through my initial research I developed a guiding framework for my chapter focus questions, with Chapter One investigating the sociocultural construction of Shounen and Shoujo genres as mediums for gender-based liberation or patriarchal suppression. Chapter Two then focused on the extent to which Shoujo and Shounen acted as agents of oppression and objectification, and Chapter Three contrastingly analysed the capacity of Shoujo and Shounen to function as agents of liberation and empowerment for both men and women. Additionally, I was conscious of my own personal experiences and remained objective despite the assumptions I was bringing to the

process as a female Generation Z adolescent who has consumed a variety of Anime and Manga throughout my life. Through a visit to the State Library of New South Wales in December 2021, I was able to consolidate the vast amount of secondary research I had already accessed, including books, journal articles and University theses, all of which validated the less academic forms of online social commentary and primary research.

Additionally, a combination of appropriate primary research methods including; a focus group, content analysis and questionnaire, were instrumental in enhancing the reliability and validity of my investigation. The focus group enhanced the cross-cultural gender-based analysis in acquiring a direct understanding of the micro-level perceptions of objectification of females in Anime and Manga, while also enhancing my empathic understanding of perspectives different to my own. Additionally, content analysis of various Shoujo and Shounen Anime and Manga from the 1970s to 2020s provided essential empirical evidence regarding the power of the macro-level media in perpetuating both patriarchal and liberating ideals. Yet in the process of sourcing Shoujo Anime episodes and Manga chapters for content analysis, the 1970s and 1980s lacked the presence of prominent male characters, thus hindering the validity. This was mediated through the use of the administered questionnaire which was invaluable in gathering micro-level perceptions and experiences of Anime and Manga's construction of gender roles. However, due to the niche nature of the topic, I experienced some difficulty in obtaining sufficient questionnaire respondents, therefore my teacher and I distributed the questionnaire via social media platforms which allowed for the collection of diverse and authentic perspectives outside of my micro and meso world. These primary research methods provided substantial data which was triangulated with my secondary research to assist in developing well-informed synthesis, further enhancing my social research and academic writing skills. It also enhanced my social and cultural literacy by empathising with and appreciating the diverse beliefs and values of different societies and cultures, and by researching effectively and ethically, thus showing critical discernment toward information and the media. Overall, the PIP process was an invaluable, educative experience and I feel a significant sense of achievement in completing a research project in an area of both personal interest and social relevance.