Girly Girls and Pretty Boys:
Gender and Audience Reception of English-translated Manga

June M. Madeley
University of New Brunswick, Saint John

Introduction

Manga is the term used to denote Japanese comic books. The art styles and publishing industry are unique enough to warrant keeping this Japanese term for what has become transnational popular culture. This paper represents a preliminary analysis of interview data with manga readers. The focus of the paper is the discussion by participants of their favourite male and female characters as well as some general discussion of their reading practices. Males and females exhibit some reading preferences that are differentiated by gender. There is also evidence of gendered readings of male and female characters in manga.

Manga in Japan are published for targeted gender and age groups. The broadest divisions are between manga for girls, *shōjo*, and manga for boys, *shōnen*. Unlike Canada and the USA, manga is mainstream reading in Japan; everyone reads manga (Allen and Ingulsrud 266; Grigsby 64; Schodt, *Dreamland* 21). Manga stories are first serialized in anthology magazines with a specific target audience. *Weekly Shōnen Jump* is probably the most well known because it serializes the manga titles that have been made into popular anime series on broadcast television in North America (and other transnational markets) such as *Naruto* and *Bleach.* Later, successful titles are compiled and reprinted as *tankobon* (small digest-sized paperback books). The *tankobon* is the format in which manga are translated into English and distributed by publishers with licensing rights purchased from the Japanese copyright holders. Translated manga are also increasingly available through online scanlations produced by fans who are able to translate Japanese to English. Scanlation circles usually divide up the work of scanning and cleaning the images, removing Japanese text and replacing it with translated English text. Scanlations also usually contain many added footnotes to explain cultural references in the original text.

Manga are printed in black and white with an occasional colour splash page at the beginning or end of an episode. In the original magazine format the cheap paper may be coloured and the ink is always monotone, but may be a colour other than black. An episode can vary in length depending on the norms of the original magazine publication (the average range is between 30 and 75 pages).

Although, it is still the case that manga are considered a significant aspect of mainstream popular culture in Japan, the sales have been declining (JETRO 4-5). Commuters on the subways and trains are seen less often reading manga magazines and more

often reading novels on their cell phones or communicating with others via text message or the internet. Consonant with decline within the domestic market has been the rapid growth in export sales, particularly in the US market (JETRO 8; Reid). When manga first hit the US market the titles were primarily those geared to male readers (*shōnen* manga) and were sold in the same specialty stores through which comic books are distributed (Thompson and Okura 229). Since 2002 sales in mainstream bookstores have fuelled growth in manga's share of North American graphic novel sales and particularly of content geared to female readers. The majority of titles found in bookstores are geared to female readers, while comic shops have usually given more space to manga content geared to the males in their early twenties who are the largest proportion of their customer base (Reid). Currently more publishers are breaking into the translated manga business in the US, normally in a partnership with a Japanese publisher, and they are targeting both bookstores and direct sales comic shops. Publishers have also been primarily targeting female readers (Gustines).

Female readers have for decades been largely ignored by the comic book industry in North America, but have become a target of publishers distributing translated manga content. We have as yet very little data about the reception of this transnational popular culture by male or female readers; manga reception has been previously studied in France, Australia and Korea (see Norris; Noh; Vanhee). This research relies upon individual interviews with manga readers in Canada exploring their meaning-making and fan practices. This paper concentrates on discussions by participants of male and female characters and the confusion, fluidity and pleasure associated with the variety and ambiguity of depictions of males and females in manga. This research is one phase of a larger project that will examine cross-cultural data generated with Japanese readers and readers of manga translated into English.

Method and Characteristics of the Interview Sample

The findings are based on twenty-nine in-depth interviews[1] that were conducted between February and April 2009.[2] The schedule was composed of three main sections. The interview began with questions about how the participant first was introduced to manga and then covered other general readership characteristics such as how often they read manga, whether or not they re-read manga or discuss it with their friends. In the second section the questions focused on particular manga and characters with which the participant was familiar. The final section of the schedule focused on fan activity and interactions with other readers of manga. The focus of this analysis is the middle section where the participants

---

[1] Interviews were recorded to digital audio and uploaded to a computer as wav files. The interviews were transcribed to text, but not completely verbatim. Any quotes used in this paper are verbatim quotes taken directly from the audio recording.

[2] These interviews were designed to last about an hour, but actual times ranged from thirty-six minutes to one hour and twenty-four minutes. The mean length of time was fifty-nine minutes with a standard deviation of twelve minutes.

talked about their favourite manga, about favourite male and female characters and about whether or not they had ever had difficulty telling the difference between male and female characters in manga.

Participants were recruited through local libraries, book and comic shops as well as through snowball sampling.[3] Recruitment was also conducted via postings on comic shop web pages (forums and Facebook groups). There were a total of forty potential interviewees who were invited to participate in this research. The age of participants in the sample ranges from fourteen to twenty-eight years. The mode age was nineteen years. Participants' tenure as manga readers ranged from one to fourteen years. The mean tenure of reading manga was 6.5 years with a median of six years. More females than males were newer to reading manga (reading between one and three years).

Of the twenty-nine interviewees nine (32%) were male and twenty (68%) were female. In the sample pool there were 35% males and 65% females. Given that the available published manga is currently directed at female readers these proportions seem to be in line with the broader readership of translated manga. I have visited a number of comic book shops across Canada (Regina, Saskatoon, Saint John, Hamilton, Toronto, and Halifax) and am told by staff and managers that manga are purchased more often by female than male customers. I cannot presently quantify the disparity, but I am confident that a larger proportion of the current readership is female.

Reading Manga in Context

It seems rather counter-intuitive that in western cultures mythologies of gender equality circulate broadly while at the same time the images of women have consisted mainly of sexualized objects with measurements impossible to attain by the average woman (Macdonald 220); more so in comics and animation (where nothing but imagination sets limits on body configurations) than elsewhere in the popular culture. Even the more independent and strong female images in popular culture since the 1990s have also been of this same ideal physical type (Gauntlett 90). Lara Croft of the *Tomb Raider* games is an often-cited example of the new strong female character. "Representing renewed notions of femininity she no longer needs a man to rescue her; however, in her pursuit of saving the world she is familiarly recast into the male gaze" (Tragos 343). These are strong females, but they are also portrayed as highly sexualized in a way that is not seen among male heroes in video games or other popular media (Dill and Thill 858-859). The proportions of Lara Croft's body, limited only by the imaginations of computer animators, are highly unrealistic and unattainable (Tragos 343). Japan, in comparison to western cultures, is regarded as a culture with very rigid gender roles prescribed for males and females. Yet the popular culture, specifically manga, offers tremendous play with and fluidity of gender, sexuality and gender

---

[3] Snowball sampling is the method of finding participants by relying on the recommendation of other participants already affiliated with the research.

norms (Perper and Cornog 54-86). What might these depictions have to offer readers in the US and Canada?

While these portrayals of gender may be quite well entrenched in each of these cultures, the reality is somewhat different. There is evidence that while much has improved, gender inequality still exists in western cultures like the US and Canada (see Jacobs and Gerson; Sümer; Statistics Canada; U.S. Census Bureau). Women still take primary responsibility for housework, elder care, and childcare. Women's wages are, for the above mentioned and other structural reasons, lower on average than the wages and salaries of men doing similar work. Women make up the largest proportion of those living in poverty and women's standard of living still significantly decreases following divorce and separation in direct contrast to that of men on average.

Rigid gender roles are also not the whole reality in Japan. In fact a great deal has changed since the middle 1980s. Japan enacted an Equal Employment Law in 1985 that went some way in alleviating and drawing attention to workplace inequalities. Many researchers regard Japan as a culture where gender relations are in transition (Chambers 215-273; Grigsby 76; Ogi 781). Many Japanese women are finding that they feel like foreigners, *gaijin*, in their own country because their familial goals are so juxtaposed to the expectations of their male counterparts of the same age (Ito 93; Chambers 116-150). Such changes have drawn attention not just to the limitations of roles long assigned to women, particularly in workplaces where "office ladies" hit a "rice paper ceiling" but also to the limitations for men of the norms of total dedication to the company (Chambers 119). Men have been expected to not only work long hours, but also to engage in after-hours drinking with colleagues and bosses. Women's roles have actually been much more varied, though it remains the expected norm for the husband to support the family on his income after marriage. This is proving more difficult to accomplish since the mid-90s economic crisis (Chambers 215-273). The popular representations of gender seem to be in high contrast between Japan and western cultures, but the realities appear to have much in common.

When readers first enter the world of manga it can be a bewildering experience. "The males are often so thin and wispy in appearance that they can be distinguished from the females only by their clothes and their somewhat larger feet" (Schodt *Manga!* 92). Even *shōnen* manga often contain feminine looking male characters in comparison to the more realistic *gekiga* art style of *seinen* (men's) manga or to the styles common in North American comics. Characters with clearly masculine features are rather uncommon in *shōjo* manga, and when they do make an appearance they usually are used to denote the "bad guys" (Schodt *Manga!* 91). In *shōnen* manga the depictions of male characters are much more obviously masculine in their physical features. The most idealized, *bishōhnen* or beautiful boys, who populate the manga aimed at female readers are drawn with stylistically feminized features (Kinsella 117). The idealization of westernized standards of beauty has also been a preoccupation in manga (Grigsby 68; Schodt *Manga!* 92; Schodt *Dreamland* 60-62). Not only have artists utilized the style of cute faces and large eyes, but "comic artists have also

adopted the long, leggy look of fashion models of Paris and New York for both their female and male characters. These characters are recognizable to western readers and this may contribute to the popularity of this transnational culture. There are clear distinctions between what are referred to as *shōnen* and *shōjo* styles of artwork in manga. "[S]*hōjo* art is often abstract or minimalist compared to the highly detailed (and often photo-traced) backgrounds seen in *shōnen* and even *seinen* [mens'] manga" (Thompson 335). The internet and manga fan clubs are significant resources that readers employ to learn manga literacy and build the practical knowledge they need to navigate this bewildering transnational popular culture (Vanhee 8).

There are global communities of translators (called scanlators) who share and discuss manga content online (Jenkins 165). The internet is a valuable tool to gain cultural insight and makes manga more accessible to readers who may not feel welcome in a comic book store. In the interview sample there are more female readers who are new to reading manga and there are a few male readers who have already lost interest in this transcultural popular culture. In the case of these male readers they indicate an initial pleasure with the difference of manga, which has worn off over time. "At first you think, This is Amazing! Over time it doesn't stand out anymore" (025m19-7).[4] The length of tenure as a manga reader as well as the availability of content at that time are relevant factors shaping the reading practices and interests that one develops. The attraction of transnational cultural products, like manga, seems to be tempered by one's introduction to such material. Younger fans have benefited from a mainstreaming of some anime content via television broadcasts and the widespread availability of the translated manga sources of that anime. It seems that on school grounds everyone is reading *shōnen* titles such as *Naruto* and *Bleach.* New readers in this context develop an interest in action-oriented manga content that also has garnered a large audience for dubbed anime on television. Readers with a longer tenure reading manga and who were introduced via some connection to fan communities have broader interests. They also abhor dubbed anime in favour of subbed (sub-titled) anime. However, the availability of scanlations online has brought these different readers together. When newer readers want access to the latest chapters of *Naruto* or *Bleach* that have already been released in Japan, they go to online scanlation sources, where they find a whole world of other manga titles also available soon after their original release in manga magazines in Japan.

Among the interview sample 22 (76%) read manga online on a regular basis. There were 6 participants who currently spend no money purchasing manga because they read for free online. Among those only two were content with online access while the others were keeping up with titles online, but had intentions to make more purchases once their financial situation improved; they were all students. The majority of participants who read manga

---

[4] Interviewees are identified by a three digit number, followed by an m or f to indicate sex. This is followed by their age then a dash and a figure representing how many years they have been reading manga. So in this case the participant is interviewee 025, he's male, nineteen years old and has been reading manga for seven years.

online also purchase the licensed material when it becomes available and also indicated a preference for reading manga in book form, rather than as page-by-page scans online. A few participants preferred the scanlations because they more often keep traditional terminology and avoid other edits made to "Americanize" the content. Popular examples of this include the substitution of donuts for *onigiri* (rice balls) in *Pokémon* and the re-naming of a number of the ninja techniques described in *Naruto*.

The internet offers a great deal of manga-related content so that readers can enter the bookstore knowing that much manga content was created with their gender and age group in mind. The female participants in this research were well-versed in the gender/age divisions of published manga; familiarity with both terminology and stylistic difference was particularly evident among the female readers interviewed for this study.

There is evidence that publishers and distributors of translated manga have targeted girls and women as a market previously untapped by the comic book industry (Gustines). North American comics are part of an elite sub-culture from which girls and women have long been side-lined (Robins 7). One does find manga in comic book stores, but the majority of sales are through bookstores (Icv2.com). Manga arrived in bookstores as a small section of the teen and young readers section in the early part of the decade, but have quickly begun to take up more space than Science Fiction and Fantasy content in many bookstores (just visit any Borders or Chapters store). Manga sales have recently eclipsed the revenues from translated anime in the US. market (Reid). A manga volume costs about the same as a mass-market paperback book and it is estimated that about 1700 volumes of manga were released in English in 2008 (Reid).

Discussion and Analysis

During the interview participants indicated the types of manga that they disliked, that they liked, and those that they considered their favourite titles. They also talked about their early introduction to manga which provided opportunities to talk about their earlier likes in contrast to current ones as more seasoned readers. There are some patterns that emerge from the likes and dislikes that were articulated throughout the interviews. In Figure 1 a bar chart is presented that indicates participant reading preferences by sex.

Figure 1: Genre Preferences by Sex
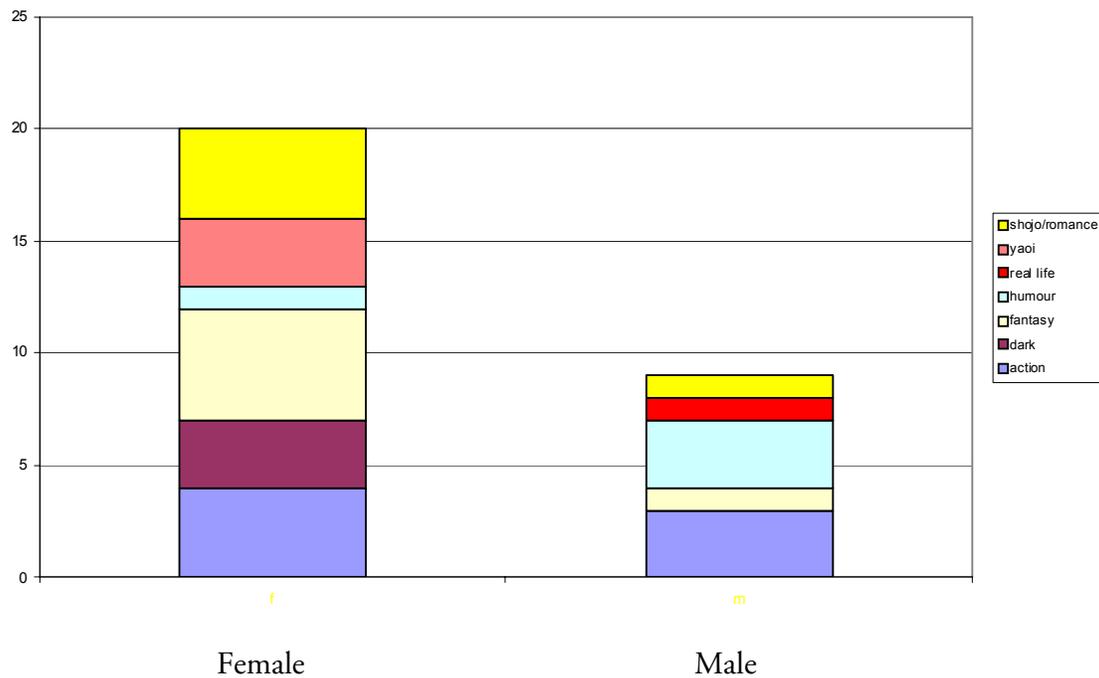
What stands out in Figure 1 is that action is a popular type of manga among both male and female readers (female=4, 20%; male=3, 33%). There is a large proportion of female participants who like fantasy (5, 25%), while only one male participant indicated that preference. Humour is indicated as a preference among male participants (3, 33%) and only one female participant. However, the enjoyment of comedy and humour in manga was articulated by most participants at some point (or several) during the interview. This figure merely indicates the proportion of participants who, when directly asked what type of manga they like, mentioned humour and comedy first. The *shōjo*/romance type of manga is quite popular among the female readers and only articulated as a preference for one male reader. However, a number of male readers indicated that some romance in manga was enjoyable, as long as it was not the main focus. Not surprisingly *yaoi*- manga that feature romantic and sometimes sexual relations between beautiful male characters that are directed at a heterosexual female readership-was popular among some female readers, but of no interest to male readers. The female readers (3, 15%) who indicated a preference for dark manga, were all interested in vampire fiction and psychological horror/drama. Across the entire sample, action was the most preferred genre (24%), followed by fantasy (21%) and then *shōjo*/romance (17%).

When asked what type of manga they dislike, some similar patterns emerged as indicated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Genres that Participants Dislike by Sex
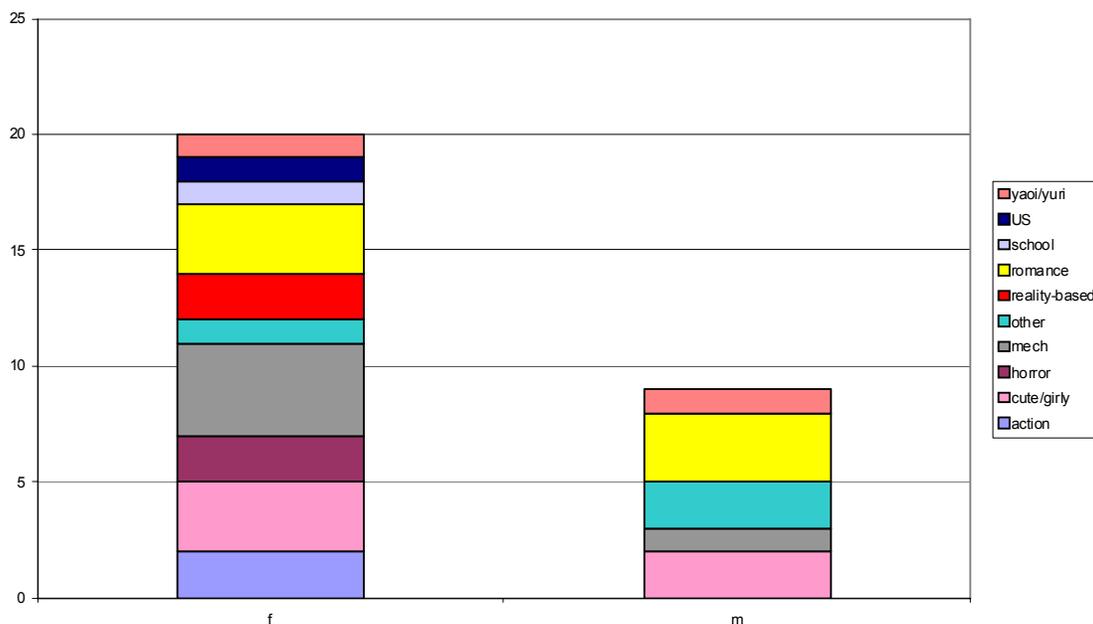
Interestingly, the most disliked genre overall is romance, which is disliked by equal proportions of male and female readers. Mech, which is the term for manga that features robots, is tied for second overall most disliked type of manga. Though mech seemed to be a particular dislike of female readers (female=4, male=1). Similar proportions of male and female readers also dislike manga that is considered too cutesy or girly (female=3, male=2). The types of manga that are disliked are somewhat more varied than those that are liked by the participants in the sample. Some of the more idiosyncratic dislikes included: US made manga, manga based on school life, manga with poor artwork, manga that goes on and on without an end, and manga that is too silly. These categorizations of likes and dislikes have been distilled from longer descriptions that were provided by the participants.

It is surprising that so many female participants indicate enjoyment and pleasure from reading what they call "girly" manga, but they are highly critical of "girly girl" characters in manga that they have read. This response is also in contrast to much analysis of manga which suggests a great deal of play with gender and fluidity in terms of roles for females and males (see Ito; Lunsing; McLelland; Noh; Ogi; Perper and Cornog; Welker). When participants tag manga as girly they mean that it is clearly coded for female, usually younger readers. Some male and female participants use this term in a sheepish way to identify manga that they enjoy, but feel may not really be directed at them due to age or gender—or both. They called up a label that was disparaging, but for a type of manga to which they are positively disposed. When using this label for manga titles the focus was on cutesy looking characters and the emphasis on romance in the stories, rather than on

behaviours. In contrast, when labeling female characters as "girly," and this was always a negative moniker when applied to females, the emphasis was on behaviour that was "irritating" or "stereotypical." It is a certain constellation of behaviours associated with the feminine that prompted the label of "girly girl" and a decidedly negative evaluation of same. "They are whiny and need to be saved a lot" (015f25-4).

Among both male and female participants there is strong criticism of the portrayal of female characters in manga. The majority of participants indicate that the portrayal of female characters is problematic. Among males 67% took some issue with how females were portrayed in manga. The responses below reveal some of the issues that they have with female characters in manga:

> Some of the clichés you see can be annoying, air headedness. Seems common; it's so easy for them to do fan service to get some form of audience. It's been the norm, going to the well is an easy way. Maybe that is the perception because that's the only thing that's been released. At first glance it seems a lot more stereotypical. They look too similar. (009m23-14)

> Winry from *Full Metal Alchemist* she's an automail mechanic—equivalent to prosthetic limbs. Not your typical girly girl, she cares and worries about the main characters … Still has long hair, but likes to get dirty, likes to work on machines. Instead of going out for jewellery and what not she shops for wrenches. She gets angry. [found it hard to think of another female character] for some reason, most of my favourite characters end up being guys. (014m22-3)

> they don't really make female characters very prominent. Male leads are most prominent. *One Piece*, Naruto there are females—*Naruto* is in a team with a female (020m28-5)

> there are some [female characters], they're generally not built up as much. I find the male is always the one that is in charge. In *Naruto* there are female ninjas and eventually one of the leaders of another village is female … Are typically support role people. (017m23-4)

Each of these participants is invoking female characters from *shōnen* titles that they read as highly stereotypical and "cliché;" female characters "are typically support role people" (017m23-4). The majority of the male participants indicated that female characters are "not very prominent" in the manga that they read though (009m23-14) acknowledges that this may be skewed due to the titles that have been made available in translation. The character Winry stands out because she is not a product of the same old fan service well of feminine clichés that readers associate with females in manga. She is not an airhead, she does not need

to be rescued, she gets angry and she prefers wrenches to jewellery (her interest in wrenches came up several times in different interviews with male and female readers).

One male participant views female characters through an objectifying lens:

[talking about female characters] a little bit easier for me. I'm not really paying attention to the male characters. Based on what type of character you like…I'm into the whole shy girl type. (025m19-7)

Another was reading females through a lens of long experience with translated manga since the earliest volumes became available in English:

there's a lot of series that have female main characters; I'd say its pretty well even. A lot of stuff I've seen lately is more female main characters. All the early stuff was all male—*Dragon Ball*, etc. and then *Sailor Moon* counter acted. (021m24-14)

This less problematic view is based on the quantity of main characters that are female, rather than with an eye to the sort of limited characterizations that other participants articulated in response to the questions about females in manga.

Among the female readers, 75% expressed difficulty with the female characters they encounter. Several expressed outright annoyance regarding females in manga:

I hate the obsessive girly girl who needs to be rescued all the time. Tohru from *Fruits Basket*, Kagome from *InuYasha*, I can't stand her. Get yourself out of it! It just annoys me. They're concerned about their looks, always wondering "does he like me, does he not like me," always taking back seat. Typical woman from Victorian era, but placed in manga. (026f21-8)

A lot of the time they are irritating. They have the annoying, really girly…They are whiny and need to be saved a lot, I find. A lot of the stuff that I've read is mostly with guys [laughs] … I like the guys that are pretty; I don't like the girls to be girly, but I like my men to be girly. (015f25-4)

A lot of manga especially *shōjo* manga has stereotypical girly girls, very feminine, child-like and naïve; that is common. Culturally that's how girls are supposed to act, very feminine. I've never really found that very appealing. They are the same character, with different hair styles—like a cookie cutter. (022f25-9)

Most of the girl characters are kind of ignored, I mean they're always portrayed as weak and helpless and defenseless. It kind of makes me mad. Not all females have to

be weak and stuff. They have some power too; they can fight! Orihime from *Bleach*, she keeps getting kidnapped and held hostage, and like why don't you stand up against them?! Stop letting them kick you around; do something! She has power but she doesn't use it to defend herself. Quit just standing around! (002f15-5)

Female readers also consider the female characters to be stereotypical and less prominent-"ignored." Even the characters who have magical powers are perceived as weak. It is also clear that female participants are not only displeased by these limited portrayals of women and girls in manga, but also by the similarly limited cultural norms of femininity (see for example the quote by 022f25-9 above).

In other cases they articulated a lack of interest in female characters:

[long pause after the question was asked] I don't really pay attention to girl characters (008f18-1) a lot of the stuff I read doesn't have a lot of female characters in it, even the stuff that isn't *yaoi*. (022f25-9)

I don't like female characters as much as my favourite male characters. I tend to relate better to males. Part of loving these characters is I wish I could be them. (024f25-10)

024f25-10 clearly does not want to be like the female characters that she reads about in manga, but she wishes she could be her favourite male characters. These responses indicate that the female characters these readers encounter in manga are not as appealing to them as the male characters.

Those few who have favourite female characters choose characters that they see as strong, powerful, independent, and not waiting around to be rescued; a key attribute of the girly girl. These are the type of females who are "strong at the core" even if they seem "weak on the outside" (006f28-11). These favourite females embody the same powerful representation of femininity that has been noted as increasingly common in western popular culture since the middle 1990s (Gauntlett 90; Tragos 343).

Three of the female participants articulated annoyance with both the stereotypical girly girl, and the powerful, confident action heroes. Both the girly girl and the image of girl power were viewed as narrow roles for female characters. They each suggested that these were two very limited clichés and that in contrast to the broad diversity among male characters, they were just not that interesting. For example:

Really, female characters are much less broad, male characters tend to be anything. Female characters tend to be either very confident, powerful, successful women or they are completely on the other end—ditzy and useless, that sort of thing. None of

that really interests me. Powerful ones seem too cocky to me. Sailor Moon is the epitome of useless! (023f22-12)

While some female readers profess to like girly manga, they cannot abide the stereotypical, girly girls who often inhabit those manga and manga in general. Most of the male readers also find the females in the manga that they read are not at all compelling.

Among the male readers, there appeared to be largely unproblematic readings of male characters in manga. Male readers seem to like characters with remarkable powers, who are funny, quirky, complex and have potential that they develop over the course of the story. For example:

> Uzemaki Naruto, he's a spunky bratty kid. Really good at what he does, has so much potential … Eventually he finds out he's the son of the greatest *Hokage* [leader] of all time. He's always said that he'd be *Hokage* some day. I like his attitude and he's really funny. I like his outlook and his way of life. No matter what's in his way, he's thinking about how he can help people. He just wants to do better to prove them wrong. (020m28-5)

Some male readers prefer characters that they can relate to, the ones without special abilities, who develop throughout the story. While others indicated that they like the bad guys, especially ones that had a clear philosophy to guide their actions rather than being some one-dimensional caricature:

> Bad guys are always more interesting. They can do whatever they want and good guys are always bound by the rules. If you're strong you live, if you're weak you die. He [Shishio from *Ruroini Kenshin*] had a really detailed philosophy. I liked that he was developed. Typically, the bad guys are like *Scoobie Doo* monster of the week, just there to defeat. (017m23-4)

There were a few who favoured outrageous perverts, not because they are endearing, but because they are hilarious. "I like his [Jaria from *Naruto*] long hair and his tastes—watermelons, women, a sense of humour" (018m19-4). This character is both a novelist and a ninja in the manga and apparently spends a lot of time peeking into the girl's changing area.

Female readers focus on different male characters as their favourites and for different reasons. Although, some female readers do mention strength and power as an important element, they are really compelled by vulnerability, sensitivity and the expression of emotions that sometimes is combined with strong, male characters. Most of the female participants were interested in male characters who were strong, yet also showed vulnerability and expressed emotion as noted below:

Katra from *Gundam Wing*. He's very sensitive, which I find reassuring in a male character. Something you don't see very often. Not overtly anyway. (026f21-8)

Roy Mustang [from *Full Metal Alchemist*]—leader of the squad, the colonel. He's a big womanizer and tough guy, but also vulnerable. When his best friend is killed, you see him cry. (015f25-4)

Yuki from *Fruits Basket* … Yuki is kind of the outcast, sort of lonely, quiet type. He is sort of sensitive and understands her [Tohru, the main character] problems. He's there for her, even though he's afraid of people. (012f19-5)

These characters support others, they are sensitive as well as strong; they protect others and they cry. Female readers also enjoy characters who are funny and make them laugh:

I like characters who are funny. Ed [from *Full Metal Alchemist*] is really funny. If someone calls him short … it's just so hilarious…There are some pretty boys in *Monochrome Factor*. The way that they smile or the things that they say are pretty funny. And they're also physically attractive. Ed is a really nice guy and always wants to help people. (019f19-1)

Not surprisingly, a number (8/20) of the female readers specified that they like "pretty boys" such as those that commonly populate *shōjo* and *yaoi* manga:

I like the ones that are typically not seen right off as the male stereotype. I like girly boys [laughs] L from *Death Note*. He's all hunched over and pale, clever, keeps to himself, socially recluse, sweet tooth. They [manga] show more emotion than American characters-comic superheroes. They [manga] show males that cry. (001f21-8)

In *Shugo Kyara*—One of them is the class president, they call him the prince—you know stereotype pretty boy. (004f19-7)

The characters I do like are pretty feminine. Not long flowy hair, but are still very feminine—are not all muscle bound. They are drawn all pretty feminine. Pretty, pretty looking. (007f23-10)

Definitely, he's [Phi from *Tsubasa*] pretty, most of the characters are attractive looking—at least for characters that you're supposed to like. (023f22-12)

The characters that "you're supposed to like" are all "pretty" and female readers derive pleasure from this prominent feature of *shōjo* and *yaoi* manga.

One female participant enjoyed the perverted characters who nevertheless were actually sensitive and caring underneath their vulgar exterior. "Onizuke is a total pervert, actually he's really, really nice, but has a hard time showing it" (007f23-10). This is a similar sentiment to the overall desire for male characters that are strong, yet sensitive and able to be vulnerable and show emotion.

Overall, the female participants preferred male to female characters in manga. They enjoyed complex characters that embodied a mix of strength and vulnerability all wrapped up in a pretty *bishōnen* (beautiful boy) wrapper.

There is some clear contrast between the way female participants read male characters and the way the male participants read them. Male readers admire characters who are strong and have extraordinary powers and abilities. Female readers desire pretty boys who are strong and powerful, yet sensitive and vulnerable. Much like the maligned girly girls, the pretty boys are well-represented in the manga directed at female readers which dominates the bookshelves in North America. Pretty boys are not the whole reality of males in manga and there certainly was some crossover between male and female participants and their favourite male characters. What is telling is that while sometimes participants were discussing the same characters, the emphasis was different for males and females. Male readers like the characters in *shōnen* titles like *Full Metal Alchemist*, *Bleach*, and *Naruto* primarily because they are humorous, they have remarkable abilities, are strong and also because they do try to help other people. Female readers like the same characters primarily because they are both strong, yet caring enough to stand up and do things to help others—they are sensitive; they cry.

Conclusion

A high proportion of the participants in this research count "girly" manga as among the types they dislike (usually the first descriptor they mention), but among female readers, girly men, pretty boys, and sensitive men are the characters that they prefer. Other female readers like the "girly," *shōjo* style of manga. Interestingly, younger female readers prefer action-oriented *shōnen* titles and dislike romance and "girly" content. Some male readers embrace "girly" manga, while others eschew manga with a romance focus and even in one case those with too much focus on sex. For all the focus on manga as a transnational cultural product that highlights gender play and fluidity of gender (see Ito; Lunsing; McLelland; Noh; Ogi; Perper and Cornog; Welker) the participants in the research see familiar stereotypes among the female characters that populate manga; regardless of the gender of the target audience. Neither male nor female readers have much interest in girly girls which they associate with the majority of manga of a variety of types and genres. There is a sense among the participants that male characters do offer something you do not see often in North American popular culture. For female readers the abundance of "pretty boys" and male characters that are both strong and emotional is clearly a source of the pleasure they get out

of reading manga. For male readers the draw is more the humour depicted by male characters and their outlandish powers and abilities.

There is little doubt that in manga "both male and female characters are 'out there' compared to North America" (010m17-6). There is gender fluidity and even gender bending to be found in much manga, particularly that directed at female readers, but female characters are not as "out there" as their male counterparts according to the participants in this research. The discussion during the interviews was limited to characters that were familiar to the participants; certainly that varies by reading preference and exposure over time to different manga content. The availability of manga has expanded exponentially in the last five years. This includes not just the increase of published volumes, but also the availability of scanlations which offer even more variety of content than that deemed suitable by licensed publishers and distributors. Further analysis into what is available through licensed publications and through scanlation postings is needed. The landscape of available translated manga is moving beyond the influx of female oriented publications populating the shelves of bookstores and libraries and into as yet uncharted territory. It remains to be examined just how much of the scanlation materials are available primarily through knowledge of and connection to fan community and how much is easily found with little knowledge beyond how to conduct a basic Google search. I suspect that further research will reveal a distinction between readers of manga who stumble upon manga on their own and those who are introduced into the sub-culture and fandom by other fans with years of experience with Japanese popular culture.

The data suggest that other factors besides gender are salient to one's reading of manga. In the future, I will be analyzing the relationship between age, tenure as a manga reader and involvement in fan community as potentially salient factors in shaping meaning making while reading manga.

Works Cited

Allen, K., and J. E. Ingulsrud. "Manga Literacy: Popular Culture and the Reading Habits of Japanese College Students." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 46.8 (2003): 674-683.

Chambers, V. *Kickboxing Geishas: How Modern Japanese Women Are Changing their Nation.* New York: Free Press, 2007.

Dill, K. E. and K. P. Thill. "Video Game Characters and the Socialization of Gender Roles: Young People's Perceptions Mirror Sexist Media Depictions." *Sex Roles* 57 (2007): 851-864.

Gauntlett, D. *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction.* New York: Routledge, 2002.

Grigsby, M. "Sailormoon: Manga (Comics) and Anime (Cartoon) Superheroine Meets Barbie: Global Entertainment Commodity Comes to the United States." *Journal of Popular Culture* 32.1 (1998): 59-80.

Gustines, G. "Girl Power Fuels Manga Boom in U.S." *New York Times* [online] December 28, 2004. 6 March 2007 <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/12/28/books/28mang.html?pagewanted=2&_r=1&oref=slogin>.

Jacobs, J. A. and K. Gerson. *The Time Divide: Work, Family, and Gender Inequality.* Boston: Harvard University Press, 2004.

JETRO (Japan External Trade Organization). "Japanese Publishing Industry." *Japan Economic Report.* October-November 2006. 20 February 2007 <http://www.jetro.go.jp/en/market/report/pdf/2006_25_r.pdf>.

Ito, K. "Images of Women in Weekly Male Comic Magazines in Japan." *Journal of Popular Culture* 27.4 (1994): 81-95.

Icv2.com. "Graphic Novels Hit $375 Million." News release 18 April 2008. 3 July 2008 <http://www.icv2.com/articles/news/12416.html>.

Jenkins, H. *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture.* New York: NYU Press, 2006.

Kinsella, S. *Adult Manga: Culture & Power in Contemporary Japanese Society*. New York: Routledge/Curzon, 2000.

Lunsing, W. "Yaoi Ronsō: Discussing Depictions of Male Homosexuality in Japanese Girls' Comics, Gay Comics and Gay pornography." *Intersections: Gender, History & Culture in the Asian Context* 12 (2006): 34 para. January. 20 February 2006 <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue12/lunsing.html>.

Macdonald, M. *Representing Women: Myths of Femininity in the Popular Media*. New York: Arnold, 1995.

McLelland, M. "The Love Between 'Beautiful Boys' in Japanese Women's Comics." *Journal of Gender Studies* 9.1 (2000): 13-25.

Norris, C. "Cyborg Girls and Shape-Shifters: The Discovery of Difference by Anime and Manga Fans in Australia." *Refractory* 8 (2005): 25 para. 22 August 2005 <http://blogs.arts.unimelb.edu.au/refractory/category/browse-past-volumes/volume-8/>.

Noh, S. "Reading YAOI Comics: An Analysis of Korean Girls' Fandom." Paper presented at Korean Society for Journalism and Communication Studies Annual Meeting, Fall 1998. 27 December 2006 <http://moongsil.com/study/yaoi_eng.pdf>.

Ogi, F. "Female Subjectivity and Shoujo (Girls) Manga (Japanese Comics): Shoujo in Ladies' Comics and Young Ladies' Comics." *Journal of Popular Culture* 36.4 (2003): 780-803.

Perper, T. and M. Cornog. "Eroticism for the Masses: Japanese Manga Comics and their Assimilation into the U.S." *Sexuality & Culture* 6.1 (2002): 3-126.

Reid, C. "New Report Finds Manga Sales Up; Anime DVD Down in '07." *Publishers Weekly*, 7 December 2007. 15 January 2008 < http://www.publishersweekly.com/index.asp?layout=articlePrint&articleID=CA6510598>.

Robbins, T. *From Girls to Grrrlz: A History of Women's Comics From Teens to Zines*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1999.

Schodt, F. L. *Manga! Manga!: The World of Japanese Comics*. New York: Kodansha International, 1986.

---. *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga*. Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 1996.

Statistics Canada. "Women in Canada." *The Daily.* 7 March 2006. 13 July 2008 <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/060307/d060307a.htm>.

Sümer, H. C. "Women in Management: Still Waiting to be Full Members of the Club." *Sex Roles* 55.1-2 (2006): 63-72.

Thompson, J. *Manga: The Complete Guide*. New York: Del Rey, 2007.

Thompson, J. and A. Okura. "How Manga Conquered the U.S." *Wired* 15.11 (2007): 223-233.

Tragos, P. "Monster Masculinity: Honey I'll Be out in the Garage Reasserting My Manhood." *Journal of Popular Culture* 42.3 (2009): 541-553.

U.S. Census Bureau, Housing and Household Economic Statistics Division. *Comparing Employment, Income, and Poverty: Census 2000 and the Current Population Survey.* Sept. 2003. 13 July 2008 <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/laborfor/final2_b8_nov6.pdf> .

Vanhee, O. "The Production of A 'Manga Culture' in France: A Sociological Analysis of a Successful Intercultural Reception." Paper presented at Asia Culture Forum, October 2006. <http://www.ceri-sciencespo.com/themes/manga/documents/texte_production_vanhee.pdf>.

Welker, J. "Beautiful, Borrowed, and Bent: 'Boys' Love' as Girls' Love in Shōjo Manga." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society* 31.3 (2006): 841-870.

Gender Bender. Harem. Historical. Nido Tensei Shita Shounen wa S Rank Boukensha Toshite Heion ni Sugosu-zense ga kenja de eiyuu datta boku wa raisede wa jimini ikiru; A Boy Who Has Been Reincarnated Twice Spends Peacefully as an S-Rank Adventurer, ~ I who was a Sage and a Hero of Previous World, Will Live in Peacefulness in the Next World ~; äºŒåº¦è»¢ç”Ÿã—ãŸ. MANGA DISCUSSION. Leave a Reply Cancel reply. Your email address will not be published. Sola and Kyung-ho are the perfect coupleâ€¦almost. Three amazing years together and thereâ€™s only one teeny problem: heâ€™s never given her an orgasm. When Kyung-ho discovers Solaâ€™s trusty stash of sex toys (a girlâ€™s gotta get off somehow!) a screaming row erupts and they break up. Cut to next morning and somethingâ€™s offâ€¦ Sola and Kyung-ho have switched bodies! Chapters. Read hottest manga online for free, feel the best experience 100%! Bl manga/manhwa that has a healthy relationship like they trust each other, and won't assume or have a misunderstanding, I don't like slow burn stories, so suggest me anything that isn't like that. Thank you! reply. Recs plsssss. suki December 21, 2020 9:46 am. Umm some wholesome yaoi manga plssss ;-; reply. I just want to have some sad girl hours. I've read a couple ones but I am done for more discoveries!!! reply. Any Yaoi recommendations or a list with sekes? (In short, they can do both An array of pretty people as eye candy isn't just for the guys. Girls get their Cast Full of Pretty Boys to ogle too in the name of Fan Service. This tends to be less noticeable than its female counterpart because exclusively (or near-exclusively) male casts are already common and expected (thought not always with the intentional appeal to females) and the fanservice tends to be along the lines of "he cooks" or "naked chest" and is never as sexual or objectifying as fanservice in normal male-oriented The girls and women that Leblanc portrays in Pretty in Punk are very nearly as original, spirited, and delightful as Leblanc's prose itself....A happy conjunction author, topic, and methodology. - - Carol Brooks Gardner, professor of sociology and women's studies, Indiana University-Indianapolis. Product details. Item Weight : 14.4 ounces. Punk was supposed to offer girls and young women a subculture based on gender equality. So what happened? LeBlanc details how the 80s hardcore scene pushed punk backwards and how girls used punk to carve out their own resistance to patriarchy and their punk peers.