

RISE OF THE OTAKU:

INVESTIGATING THE ANIME
FANDOM IN SOUTH AFRICA

BY

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COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

DECLARATION - PLAGIARISM

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Abstract

This ethnographic research project is an empirical investigation into the nature of the anime subculture and the practices of its fans (popularly known as 'otaku' in Japanese culture) in South Africa. Subcultural theory was used to outline the key characteristics of a typical subculture. My work has drawn heavily from Paul Hodkinson's (2002) interesting attempt to combine the theoretical strengths of both 'traditional' subcultural theories and their post-modern critiques. Resisting the post-modern tendency to see subcultures as ephemeral and fluid, Hodkinson outlines four key elements that define a grouping of people as having sub-cultural substance: autonomy, identity, consistent distinctiveness and commitment. In order to introduce, explore, and investigate the practices of the anime fandom in South Africa, I have made extensive use of these four subcultural characteristics. Henry Jenkins and John Fiske's seminal work on fandom and fan studies will be useful in this paper as I shall be attempting to understand *how* and *why* fans in South Africa enjoy and relate to anime. While utilising the testimonies of otaku, this thesis is also self-reflexive, and places my fandom within the context of cultural studies research, in order to provide a more in-depth investigation.

KEYWORDS: anime; subculture; fans; fandom.

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Introduction

“Of course I believe that other worlds exist. If they didn’t, life wouldn’t be interesting. It’s like love: you can’t see it but it exists- simply because you believe it. It’s just a matter of believing”

-Hayao Miyazaki

“Even when our eyes are closed, there’s a whole world that exists outside ourselves and our dreams”

- Hiromu Arakawa (Fullmetal Alchemist)

Sitting quietly in the library of The University of KwaZulu-Natal, I am banging away at my laptop, that I have aptly named Chibi (meaning ‘small’ in Japanese) listening to J-Rock (Japanese rock) while reading up on anime theory for this research paper. This is a typical day in my life as anime has always played an important role in my life, more especially since I entered high school. Without even knowing, or understanding what exactly anime was, I had a deep fascination for it, downloading anime and manga images for my cell phone and even sketching characters and scenes that I found inspiring.

Growing up in an Indian home and community, you would think that my interests and lifestyle choices would have no doubt been influenced by Indian cultural factors. But that is not exactly what happened in my life. While I participated in regular Indian community activities (such as Diwali festivals, and Hindi talent shows), they never really captured my attention. From a young age I have always been fascinated by Japanese people and their culture. It all began when I watched a series of the *Japan Video Topics* that was aired on SABC 3. I was captivated by the culture and lives of the Japanese people. As I grew older I became amazed with manga (Japanese comics), and anime (Japanese animation), often downloading anime wallpapers for my cell-phone. This was the beginning of my attraction to anime and manga. It simply amazes me at how something so foreign, can hold such attraction to South Africans, because as I soon learnt, there are a large number of other fans, not only in Durban, but South Africa as well.

When I entered university in 2008, I had access to the Internet and quickly began searching for anime pictures, which led me to watching AMVs (anime music videos), from which my interest in anime grew. However I had no access to download anime so I remained in awe of it from afar. It was during my second year at university (2009) when this fascination was turned into a hobby. I met people (who quickly became my closest friends) who spoke of how amazing the *Bleach*¹ anime was and how I should watch it. By the beginning of my third year, I had attained a copy of the first 25

¹ *Bleach* follows the life of 15 year old Ichigo Kurosaki, who discovers that he has the powers of a soul reaper, and must soon use these powers to save people.

episodes of *Bleach*, which I excitedly took home to watch, and I ended up watching about five episodes that night alone. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Obtaining anime in South Africa is quite a difficult task for fans to accomplish, because there are currently no anime-specific tv channels, nor do local retailers stock anime merchandise. The few stores that do stock anime DVDs and/or manga, have a very limited range to choose from, while also being unaffordable. These are the main reasons why anime fans often embark on the illegal underground journey of piracy such as streaming online or downloading episodes and/or entire series from the Internet. That being said, it is therefore important to understand exactly what the term anime is, in order to appreciate the subculture and fandom behind it.

When someone says the word animated, people automatically assume that it means the show is of immature and childish content; however, that is not the case with American animated shows such as *The Simpsons*, *King of the Hill*, *South Park* etc. If people can deem these cartoons to contain adult content and not allow their children to watch them, then why is it so difficult for viewers to accept anime as animated shows that also include mature content? The reasoning behind this condescension comes in the form of popular children's anime shows such as *Pokémon* and *Digimon*, which are aimed at children, and are therefore childish in content, which many people assume to be typical of anime.

If adult Westerners with no knowledge of anime were to walk into a video store and casually browse a selection of anime box covers, they might leave the store with little impression that anime is different than the animation with which they are familiar. If they were to spend the time to take a closer look at the art and text, they would realize that anime is somewhat different than the cartoons of their youth. They might notice the lack of animal characters and the diversity of genres, and they might even be surprised to find some of the few pornographic anime that exist. If they viewed some of the titles, they might note the dramatic nature of many stories, the titles for all age groups, the lack of musicals, the scarcity of goofball slapstick comedy, and many other differences from the Western animation with which most people are well acquainted (Poitras, 2008: 48).

So what exactly is anime? Briefly speaking, anime is the Japanese form of animated television series. It is extremely popular all over the world and “[a]ccording to the Japan Information Network, Japan’s export market is approaching over 60 billion dollars, with 60 percent of all cartoon shows on TV throughout the world made in Japan” (MacWilliams, 2008: 14). From that quote, it is easy to see why anime is so popular throughout the world, when a majority of cartoons aired are actually anime.

Anime (or animé, as referred to by some texts) can be characterised by colourful graphics that employ many cultural themes and references that are unique to Japan. Anime incorporates the use of traditional Japanese art as well as the more modern art forms of twentieth century cinema and photography (Napier, 2001). While many of the anime texts are aimed at children and teenagers, there are numerous anime texts that explore adult themes. As with Hollywood, there are many

different genres within the blanket term of anime, including shojo² , shonen³ , mecha⁴ , action, comedy, romance, high school, slice-of-life⁵ and even pornography.

Genres, as stated by Jenkins (1992b: 125), usually shape the perceptions of the viewer before they have even watched or read a particular text. Jenkins (1992b) speaks of producers mixing genres in order to capitalise on the different cultural interests of various individuals. While there are many different genres under the umbrella-term of anime, a series never fits neatly into the confines of the genre it has been given. For example when one reads that an anime text is shojo, one naturally assumes that it is a show aimed at young girls and which is about high school and romance; however there are anime that are characterised as shojo but actually contain strong elements of shonen within them, such as *InuYasha*, which is about a high school girl who travels back in time and falls in love with a half-demon, half-human man, while helping him fight an evil demon. Another example is *Rurouni Kenshin*, which is about a retired, wandering samurai who meets, and falls in love with the owner of a dojo; however the romance element is quite minimal and the series focuses instead on bloodshed and wars. Many people believe that all anime follow a single formula, however, what these above examples illustrate is that, similar to cinema, anime utilises genre hybridity which is the mixing of various genres to target a larger audience. Another example of an anime that utilises genre hybridity is *Kimi ni Todoke*⁶ , which is characterised as shojo but further divided into numerous sub-genres such as high-school, romance, slice of life, and comedy. In this manner a person interested in even one of these genres will feel inclined to watch the series, and so, a wider range of audience is reached, most of which are adults. What this variety of genres in anime illustrates is that anime is not only aimed at little children, but rather, can be seen as an adult form of entertainment as well. One can see that this media form is not only for children, as there are shows for almost every age group. Anime viewers range from little children watching series, like *Pokémon*⁷ and *Dragonball Z*⁸ , to teenagers, university students and adults watching *Bleach*,

2 Shōjo, shojo or shoujo is a class of anime for an audience of young girls, usually containing elements of romance.

3 Shōnen, shonen or shounen anime is a popular demographic of Japanese comics, the most popular genre of which is battle manga which is generally about action/fighting but often contains a sense of humour and strong growing friendship-bonds between the characters.

4 Mecha is a science fiction genre that centres on robots or machines.

5 Slice-of-life may or may not contain plot progress and little character development, and often has no conflict, with an open ending. It usually tries to depict the everyday life of ordinary people, sometimes but rarely, with fantasy or science fiction elements involved.

6 *Kimi ni Todoke* is the story of Sawako Kuronuma, a 15 year old girl, who befriends her classmates for the first time in high school and slowly gains her self-confidence. She also experiences romance for the first time with her friend, Shota Kazehaya.

7 *Pokémon* (short for Pocket Monsters) is an anime about a young boy and his friends who travel the world in an attempt to capture all the pokémon that they can, while battling other people (trainers) and their pokémon, in order to become the best trainers in the world.

8 *Dragonball Z* is the continuation of the highly popular *Dragonball*, with the lead character Goku, now being an adult and having a family. It is an action/comedy anime and follows a group of friends, who are considered Earth's protectors, and their fights against the many evils of the universe.

*Afro Samurai*⁹ and *Death Note*¹⁰. Animated movies such as those created by Hayao Miyazaki and his production company Studio Ghibli (creators of *Spirited Away*, *Howl's Moving Castle*, *Ponyo* etc), have audiences that range from the little children to their grandparents (Napier, 2001).

Anime series are usually adapted from manga, which are equivalent to American comic books, and which are the source for over ninety percent of anime (MacWilliams, 2008). Manga series are released in weekly or monthly manga magazines and “manga’s wide diversity and respectable status in Japan is a very fertile source of stories that can be adapted into anime” (Poitras, 2008: 61). However the anime does not always strictly follow the manga and can be either slightly altered or completely rewritten. Other sources for anime (and manga as well) “include legend, history, novels, and even ancient plays and recited tales” (Poitras, 2008: 61). *Sengoku Basara* for example is an anime based on the feudal era in Japan and includes characters based on actual samurai and war lords from that period.

Henry Jenkins states: “[f]ans often display a close attention to the particularity of television narratives that puts academic critics to shame” (1992b: 88). Being a fan myself has afforded me a priceless view of the anime subculture in South Africa, as both a fan and an academic. A fan like myself, immersed in anime, can provide a subcultural study with valuable insight, and the gap between fandom and academia can be breached through the “examination of the academic who also claims a fan identity” (Hills, 2002: xviii). The fan provides the enthusiasm and passion for the project and the in-depth knowledge of the field, while the academic provides the research skills to make sense of the fan subculture: both my identities are needed.

The study of anime as a subculture and the study of its fandom is one of a rich and interesting area which has not been sufficiently explored in cultural studies. In my research so far, I have not come across any studies of anime from (or about) South Africa. It is due to this lack of research in/on the anime fandom in South Africa that I feel a study is necessary as anime is a developing media form that numerous people are still unaware of, and I think a research paper of this nature will assist in shedding light on how identities, lifestyle choices and cultural commitments are being constructed in a post-apartheid, globalised epoch in South Africa. If the apartheid period froze identities into a range of ethnic enclaves solidified by territorial segregations (of living space, of school, etc.), then my generation, born around the birth of a democratic South Africa, has uniquely experienced the possibility of choosing to break free of these constricted ascribed identities in an emergent context of accelerated and de-territorialising globalisation. In my particular case, I have been free to choose to immerse myself in Japanese culture, through the window of anime, as a strong and clear example of post-apartheid, post-ethnic self-fashioning.

The first chapter introduces the reader to the world of anime as a media form. It briefly looks at the

9 *Afro Samurai* is a violent and graphic anime about a young boy who witnesses his father’s death at the hands of another samurai and swears revenge. This story follows the young boy, who is now a man, on his quest to avenge his father.

10 *Death Note* follows the story of Light Yagami, who finds a mysterious book that grants him the power to kill any person whose name is written down in it. The story is deep and forces the viewer to question themselves and what they would do if they had that kind of power.

origins and history of anime, while also providing a brief comparison to other forms of animation, more especially Western cinema. This chapter also defines some of the key anime terms that will be used throughout the thesis and will end by discussing some anime theory and case studies that I found interesting and useful.

The second chapter identifies and explains recent subculture and fandom theories that guided my research into the South African anime fan subculture. Subcultural theory is used to outline the key characteristics of a typical contemporary subculture. Hodkinson's (2002) interesting attempt to combine the theoretical strengths of both 'traditional' subcultural theories and their post-modern critiques has proved to be very useful. Resisting the post-modern tendency to see subcultures as ephemeral and fluid, while also abandoning the earlier hyper-politicised and overly-structured subcultural model of Dick Hebdige (1979), Hodkinson outlines four key elements that define a grouping of people as having sub-cultural substance: consistent distinctiveness; identity; commitment; and autonomy (2002). These categories refer to the ways in which individuals obtain their identities from the subculture, which requires a serious commitment to a distinctive set of values and practices, to the point where (subcultural) careers are even lived autonomously of the mainstream economy.

Henry Jenkins' seminal work on fandom and fan studies (1992a,b) and other fandom studies are also helpful as I shall be attempting to understand *how* and *why* fans in South Africa enjoy and relate to anime. Jenkins (1992b) argues against the view of fans as psychotic, crazed people that stalk celebrities, and instead offers a positive analysis of fandom that identifies fans as unusually 'active audiences' who produce 'cultural communities'. Through activities such as writing their own stories based on popular culture characters (for example, from *Star Wars* or *Harry Potter*), attending conventions or discussing shows in chat rooms, these fans are involved in the practice of constructing a 'participatory culture' which is leading to the increasing 'convergence' of professional and amateur producers of culture (Jenkins, 1992a; Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003). The numerous anime fan web-sites, discussion forums, subtitling of films, etc. are examined to identify the ways in which a fan community is sustained internationally, and then related to the practices of the local anime fans.

The third chapter outlines the various research methods, and also describes how I used these methods in my data gathering and data analysis. This thesis is a cultural studies project using qualitative ethnographic research methods. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln state that qualitative research "means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (2005: 3). This research project similarly interpreted data obtained through participant observation and semi-structured interviews in the 'natural setting' of the environment of anime fans in South Africa. This thesis thus investigated anime fans "from the perspective of the meanings members of that society attach to their social world" (Bryman, 2001: 10-11) - how the social experience of anime fans is lived through the meanings the fans bring to those experiences through their interaction with anime texts and fellow fans.

The fourth and final chapter analyses the data gathered on the anime fan subculture in South

Africa. I interpreted the data – and thus established workable themes - through the theoretical lens provided by Hodkinson's (2002) four subcultural characteristics, and fandom theory.



Chapter 1

Flashing Back: A Brief History of Anime

“Admiration is the furthest thing from understanding”-

- Aizen Sosuke (Bleach)

Due to the fact that anime is practically unheard of in the academic world in South Africa, I felt it would be helpful to provide a brief history of this media form to help better contextualise the research.

Gilles Poitras (2008) asks the question: “Where did anime come from?”. According to Poitras, anime has no special origin, rather “it comes from the same nineteenth-century roots that all animation comes from. In the Meiji era, which spanned the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there was a rich flow of technical and artistic knowledge between the Japanese, European, and American cultures” (2008: 49). The earliest known commercial anime works were shown in theatres as mini-films in addition to the main feature. In 1945, Japan had created its first full feature-length animated film, *Momotaro umi no shinpei* (Momotaro’s Divine Sea Warriors) (Poitras, 2008). Following the success of *Momotaro umi no shinpei*, Japan released its second animated feature film, *Hakujaden* (The Legend of the White Serpent, aka Panda and the Magic Serpent) in 1958, which proved to be the inspiration for numerous people who later joined the Japanese animation industry, “as well as proving that locally made animated features were a viable commercial product” (Poitras, 2008: 50).

By the 1960’s, Japanese animators had discovered a new medium through which to sell their works, which was television and “[1963] saw the broadcast of the first half-hour children’s series, firmly establishing the anime format in the television medium in Japan...[and] the importance of these programs lies not only with their popularity in Japan; they were also successful in overseas broadcasts” (Poitras, 2008: 50). The 1960’s also established several different genres and themes in anime, of which science fiction was and still is a highly popular genre due to the fact that “with animation you can do some pretty fantastic things without spending huge amounts of money on sets and special effects” (Poitras, 2008: 50).

Initially, anime was aimed at grade school children, however by the 1970’s companies were looking to expand the market and their target audience to middle school students by creating more mature anime (which often contained violent adventure stories) that would appeal to this new market segment (Poitras, 2008). The growth of anime continued in the 1980’s by targeting high school and university students and “the large volume of adult-oriented manga meant that a pool of stories existed that could be transformed into animation for older audiences” (Poitras, 2008: 53). The variety of stories (aimed at teenagers and adults) that began to arise during the 1980’s could be attributed to the fact that many of the children who had grown up watching anime were now adults and joining the workforce as either consumers or creators of anime. It was during the 1980’s that Hayao Miyazaki released his second animated movie *Kaze no tani no Nausicaä* (Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind, 1984), which has been considered one of the better works of anime with

its beautiful animation, and its dealing with environmental and war issues. Miyazaki went on to create *Tenku no shiro Laputa* (Castle in the Sky) in 1986, which was the initial feature film in his company, Studio Ghibli. As many anime fans would know, Studio Ghibli has been responsible for some amazing works of anime such as *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004), *My Neighbour Totoro* (1988), *Ponyo* (2008), and the critically acclaimed and Academy Award winning movie named *Spirited Away* (2001). During the 1990's anime began to target the older, working-class audience with more mature titles and themes such as *Cowboy Bebop*, and *Neon Genesis Evangelion* which gained large adult followings and invigorated the industry.

Another major development during the 1980's was the OVA (original video animation) which are the direct-to-video releases of a series as opposed to first releasing it on television or cinema. OVAs allowed companies to target specific markets and also became a means for testing concepts and "allowed the creation of a market for erotic anime ranging from the crudely pornographic to literary in quality" (Poitras, 2008: 54).

Today, anime is gaining more international recognition than ever before due to its popularity and the ease with which various series can be obtained. Anime movies are being shown alongside major Hollywood blockbusters at Western cinemas (with only *Spirited Away* being shown in South African cinemas); however there is still the perception that anime is a format for children and not sophisticated movie-goers, which has affected the distribution of certain movies. The anime industry has diversified over the years and as such has produced a larger amount of content to cater for the larger and more varied audience. During the 1960's there were shows only for children, in general, as well as anime specifically for little boys and girls; however today there are also shows specifically aimed at men or women, or shows that appeal to both men and women (Poitras, 2008).

Comparing Anime to Western Cinema

It is more apposite to compare anime to American animated television shows than Hollywood movies, as films tend to have much larger budgets. People who see anime for the first time tend to comment on the movement of shadows on characters' faces, the distinctive hair colours of the different characters (such as the use of blue, green, yellow, red and even purple and pink, in order to make it easier to distinguish between the characters) and most notably the largeness of the eyes (Appendix A.1). As Poitras writes: "[t]he eyes in anime are also used for subtle expressions of emotion. They may flicker as if tears are starting to form or turn dull to indicate death or diminishing of consciousness" (2008: 62). The diversity of characters allows for the use of different shapes and colours for the eyes, some characters may have extremely large eyes like Rukia (Appendix A.2) from *Bleach*, while others will have smaller, darker eyes like Sawako (Appendix A.3) from *Kimi ni Todoke*.

Aside from the visibly different physical aspects of anime characters, one of the other major differences between Western animation and anime, is the emotional aspects attached to characters and their situations. As Poitras says:

One of the key points of much anime is the characters' feelings. Once the audience puts aside the expectation that animation is either just for kids or just visually intriguing, and allows it to tell stories in the same manner as other media, elements like suffering or even death, including the death of innocents, is not as surprising. Requited or unrequited love, adventure, struggle, pain, and joy all can be part of a story. There is nothing that says that a particular medium has to be bound by previous genres found in it. The same variety that can be found in theatre, literature, and cinema is apparent in anime. Anime is as much a work of art as other forms of entertainment. In fact, anime is a branch of cinema and has produced fine works comparable to the best live-action cinema (2008: 60).

It is difficult to explain the amount of emotion that one invests into a particular anime series, but suffice to say that watching the death of an anime character can bring fans to tears. When watching the immensely popular anime series *One Piece*¹¹, I was brought to tears when Luffy's (the lead character) brother, Ace, died while saving him. The scene, in which Ace tells Luffy how happy he was to have been born and subsequently dies in Luffy's arms, was perhaps one of the most moving scenes that I have seen in my life. Another deeply moving scene in *One Piece*, was when the Fishmen Queen, Otohime, was assassinated and just before dying proceeded to tell her children not to hate her murderer, but rather continue her work to create peace between the Fishmen and humans. These two scenes have moved me in a way that no Hollywood movie or tv series has ever been able to, while also teaching viewers valuable life lessons. However, it is not only the sad scenes that move a fan's heart. In parts where the hero of the show suddenly turns the battle around and starts defeating the antagonist also provides fans with the exhilaration of watching the "bad guy" getting beaten to a pulp after harming countless innocent people. This can be aptly summarised by MacWilliams who says that "[t]he stories can also arouse powerful emotions such as horror, sexual desire, or suspense in the audience" (2008: 10).

Many Western male audiences become surprised when watching shojo anime and see action and violence included, because they expect it to be meek, tame, and quite romantic in order to cater for the female audiences. There are countless shojo anime that contain the core element of a relationship and romance between the two lead characters but are also set within action contexts, examples being *InuYasha*, and *Rurouni Kenshin*. These anime are set in the old warring era of Japan and contain violence as the lead characters battle villains and overcome numerous obstacles, only to end up together with the female lead at the end. There are also more docile shojo series such as *Bokura ga Ita*, and *Nazo no Kanojo* (Mysterious Girlfriend X) which are examples of high school anime and which are about young couples who navigate their way through their relationships and high school lives. These examples illustrate that anime cannot be boxed into simple genres and themes but should rather be seen as complex shows that evoke strong emotions in its viewers.

Another difference between anime and Western television is the traditional Japanese influences that come across in the anime. For example seeing white specks floating down upon characters could be construed as snow; however if the characters are not warmly dressed then any fan would know that these flecks are actually sakura (cherry blossoms) falling from the trees and thus deduce

¹¹ *One Piece* tells the story of 15 year old Luffy, who sets off on a journey to become the next pirate king of the great Pirate Era. He is joined by his crew, and they go on many adventures in their quests to achieve all of their dreams.

that it must be spring-time in the anime.

Popularity of Anime

The anime/manga phenomenon has erupted over the last few decades, with fan communities and subcultures first occurring in Asia, spreading to Europe and finally hitting North America in full force. However, the anime fandom in South Africa is much smaller than that of its Western counterparts and the possible reason behind this is that South Africans initially react to anime by calling the shows cartoons for children. This is one of the reasons that there are no longer any channels that focus exclusively on anime, which subsequently leads to peoples' ignorance about the media form. The national channels (SABC) do not air darker anime such as *Ao no Exorcist*¹² or *Deadman Wonderland*¹³, but rather air shows like *Dragonball Z* and *Naruto*¹⁴, which, while they have some serious elements, are aimed predominantly at children. Cartoon Network in Africa airs the new seasons of *Pokémon*, however these are not the only kinds of anime that are available for people to watch, which leads to the misconception that anime is just cartoons for little children.

Manga (Japanese comic books) and anime are not pieces of fine art that are placed on display in a museum (although there is an anime museum in Japan); rather it is a popular cultural media form that has gained a mass following. The fact that you can simply buy the *Naruto* manga at any Wallmart, is "evidence that manga [and in extension anime] is becoming a mass-market phenomenon in America" (MacWilliams, 2008: 14). However, in South Africa, anime and manga are quite expensive to purchase from retail stores due to inflated prices, and so the fans embark on an underground, pirate journey to obtain the desired anime. So, in a way, anime is an inexpensive form of entertainment, as (practically) all South African anime fans gain episodes or entire seasons free of charge by either simply downloading it or acquiring it from friends and other fans.

Anime is anything but uniform in "[its] style, content, characterization, themes, or meanings, as they are aimed at different subcultures, age levels, and genders, and produced within ever-changing social-historical contexts. Moreover, the fantasies they evoke are not homogeneous either; they do not uniformly convey any master narrative or transcendent system of capitalistic values to their audiences" (MacWilliams, 2008: 9). Like all media forms, anime can be formulaic but this does not mean that anime and manga lack expressive power and depth; rather the shows rely on clear plots and simple characterisations that viewers can identify with ease, and with repeated exposure, it becomes much easier to learn the codes utilised in anime (MacWilliams, 2008). The popularity of anime has grown immensely both in Japan, and now worldwide, to such an extent that anime fans

12 *Ao no Exorcist* follows Rin, the son of Satan, who was raised by a priest, and who is now on a mission to destroy his father and the evil he spreads.

13 *Deadman Wonderland* is a dark anime following the life of Ganta, who is falsely imprisoned for the massacre of his entire class. While in prison Ganta must perform and play games in order to survive, but soon finds that he has a special power of his own.

14 *Naruto* is the story of a young Naruto Uzumaki who is shunned by his village since his birth. This is due to him having a great demon sealed within him. The story is of Naruto's journey into the world, where he makes friends for the first time, and his efforts to rescue his best friend who has turned to the side of evil in a bid to gain more power.

even have their very own name: otaku.

Who is the Otaku?

One of the main terms that I shall be using in this paper (and even in the title) is otaku. The word otaku is a derogatory Japanese term, which is the rough equivalent to ‘nerd’ in English. The term was used to describe introverted and obsessive anime/manga/gaming fans in Japan but it received negative views and connotations when Tsutomu Miyazaki became known as the “Otaku Murderer” in 1989. During his bizarre murder spree, he kidnapped and murdered four little girls between the ages of four and seven. Upon investigation of his apartment, police found a large amount of anime, most of which was violent and sexual in nature, which they then blamed his actions on during his trial (Galbraith, 2010). It was from then on that the word otaku had negative connotations in Japan, and was used as a derogatory term.

More recently in 2004, Kaoru Kobayashi kidnapped, sexually abused and murdered a seven year old girl. Although Kobayashi was not an otaku, these crimes caused panic and dislike for the otaku once again. Despite these negative connotations, Western anime fans still adopted the term otaku to mean hardcore anime/manga/gaming fans, and proudly use it to describe themselves, especially the anime fans. Annie Manion (2005) and Hiroki Azuma (2009) define an otaku as someone who is deeply involved in anime and also the most productive in anime-related activities (creating anime music videos, cosplaying¹⁵ and participating in conventions). Due to this Western influence, South African anime fans have also adopted the word otaku in a positive light and therefore it shall be used affirmatively to refer to fans of anime and as a general description of the participants of the study.

Anime Theory

The immense popularity of anime has led scholars to write up academic articles or conduct studies of the fans of anime and their specific practices. However, although anime and manga are popular all across the globe, there is a great paucity of material in the field of anime theory, which is why I have chosen to discuss what little anime theory and case studies that I could find in this chapter.

One can say that anime theory itself is practically non-existent. Scholars have merely done studies on the media form of anime and its fans. A prominent anime theorist is Susan J. Napier, who has written several books and conducted various studies on anime and its fans. Napier states that anime should be studied as a *cultural* rather than commercial force, “as it brings insight into the wider issue of the relationship between global and local cultures at the beginning of the twenty-first century” (2001: 8-9).

Napier has focused on the anime culture in Japan more than on a global scale; however, based

¹⁵ Cosplay (or costume-play) is the creation of elaborate hand-made costumes that fans wear to impersonate their favourite characters at conventions, re-enact scenes or do photo-shoots with other cosplayers.

on new research, it appears that anime has gained quite a huge following all across the globe, not just in Japan and the West. It has also gained an increasingly diversified audience moving from largely university students to professionals in all fields. One of the major differences between anime and Western media forms is the fact that it is fundamentally different from traditional media which audiences are accustomed to watching. Another major difference is the fact that anime is a *medium*, not just a single series or even genre. It covers various genres and stories, and there are numerous sub-groups attached to the various anime forms; however all fans state that they are fans of anime in general (Napier, 2001: 245). Virtually all groups are involved in activities outside of merely watching anime and attending conventions. They engage in what scholars deem 'cultural appropriation' which is producing fan art and the creation of graphic stories utilising the fans' favourite anime characters (Napier, 2001: 246). These activities are proof that the otaku are as intensely and emotionally engaged in the anime fandom as any other fan (Napier, 2001: 246).

Contrary to popular belief, fans are not attracted to the (assumed) graphic scenes of sex and violence in anime; rather, the fans have stated that their attraction lies in the difference between anime and traditional forms of animation (Napier, 2001). The fans that Napier (2001) spoke to, all indicated that they were attracted to anime because it was vastly different from the animated shows that they were accustomed to viewing.

Her participants often compared anime to *Disney* and other cartoons, which they saw as more child-aimed and oriented than anime which deals with mature content. They saw anime as an art form that is not as "candy-coated" as traditional American cartoons (2001: 249). Napier claims that one of the reasons that anime has become so popular is due to the fact that it insists on being different from American popular culture. Possibly, the most striking feature of anime (as compared to other media forms that have been modified for Western consumption) is that it does not compromise the stories to make it more digestible to an American audience:

This is not only true in regards to the many specifically Japanese references within the narratives, but also in regards to narrative style, pacing, imagery, and humour, not to mention emotions and psychology, which usually run a far wider gamut and often show greater depth than do American animated texts (Napier, 2001: 9).

The anime world is not a mere representation of an idealised world that is logical and tranquil, rather it illustrates a world of chaos, and richly described characters. According to Napier, "they are uncanny evocations of a protean world of imagination that is both familiar and unfamiliar to the viewer, a world of simulations, possible states, and possible identities" (2001: 237). A good example of this world is the popular series called *Bleach*, which deals with a 15 year old boy who has the ability to see ghosts and monsters (called Hollows). He soon learns from a girl that he has spirit power called reiatsu and becomes what is known as a shinigami (Soul Reaper). *Bleach* was one of the more popular anime aired during its run and due to this anime fans are familiar with the world of death and shinigami as there are numerous other anime (such as *Death Note*) which deal with these aspects. So in essence, the idea of shinigami in *Bleach*, is both familiar to them (in the general sense) and unfamiliar to them (as *Bleach* takes on a different view of the shinigami as compared to

other anime).

Napier stated that many of the anime fan participants in her study claimed that because anime was not a mainstream pop cultural form of entertainment, they were generally marginalised and felt out of place (Napier, 2001: 244). However, through attending conventions (like U.S conventions, expos and joining online forums), they felt as if they had found a 'family', other people that did not consider them to be outcasts and geeky because they enjoyed anime. Anime clubs are also on the rise in America and Napier (2001) discovered that these clubs are growing in large numbers at universities. Some of the fans feel that if anime received more media attention, then it would lose its rarity and become diluted into mainstream culture. Anime fans are proud of their fandom and are wary of 'outsiders'.

In addition to Napier's study on American anime fans, Jesse Christian Davis attempted to understand "how a Japanese subculture of consumption was adapted by fans for the United States" (2008: 4). Both Davis and Napier arrived at the conclusion that anime is popular in the United States because youths often use Japanese anime as a form of 'exotic' resistance against their parents or even society in general in order to build a somewhat rebellious personal 'post-ethnic' identity (2008: 18; 2001). Davis arrived at the conclusion that "anime is popular because it provides something that is lacking in American popular culture" (2008: 2). As I mentioned in the introduction, my own relationship with anime is based upon my breaking away from my 'ethnic' Indian identity, which was kept in rigid place by the apartheid system and my family's strong cultural beliefs. Davis' study focused on the more hardcore anime fans for which this form of entertainment had become central to their lives. He utilised participant observation and interviews with self-identified anime fans (or otaku). As is the case with my research, Davis analysed his data in relation to fan studies and subcultures of consumption. Davis' (2008) study is also utilised in my research project as it forms a good basis for understanding how anime has perforated the Western media and in turn, South Africa.

Jayne Rebecca Taylor did a study which focused on fandom and the consumption of anime through cosplay, in her paper *Convention Cosplay: Subversive Potential in Animé Fandom* (2005). In a similar fashion to my research paper, she made use of Jenkins' (1992a,b) and Fiske's (1992) theories on fans and fan activities. In her study, she focused on cosplayers who frequented anime conventions and aimed to discover their constructions of identity and creative expressions in relation to their anime consumptions and behaviours. Taylor's research uncovered that "[c]osplayers and other anime fans are 'hidden in plain sight', inconspicuously existing in North American culture" (2005: 46). Through interviews with people who are active cosplayers, Taylor discovered that the attendance at anime conventions is a strong indicator of the popularity of anime and Japanese culture. Taylor's (2005) research is important as she interviews people who are active fans of anime, and how this impacts on their very identities.

The aim of Annie Manion's *Discovering Japan: Animé and Learning Japanese Culture* (2005) was to discover what *type* of person was interested in anime, why and to what extent. Manion (2005) aimed to uncover how anime had changed over the years to make it a significant force in encouraging interest in Japan. The students that Manion interviewed were students of Japanese language and culture classes and people that were involved in the anime fan community. Her

research showed that most of her participants discovered anime through watching various anime shows on television (such as *Pokémon* and *Dragonball Z*). It was also revealed through her interviews that her participants enjoyed the content and format of any anime series while additionally liking the idea that in Japan, anime was not seen as merely children's cartoons but as a media form for all ages to enjoy (as many of the series had in-depth plots and characters).

Her respondents enjoyed the Japanese artwork and her research revealed that the largest conflict between the fans and the anime industry was the poor quality of dubbing¹⁶. Very few of her respondents preferred dubbing to subtitling (or subbing¹⁷). In her survey, the respondents that claimed that they did enjoy dubbing, said that this was the case only if the dubbing was done properly and "did not suck" (Manion, 2005: 12). By seeking subbed anime, fans are seeking a purer form of Japanese culture, and Manion's results showed that her fans could feel that something was missing when they watch dubbed anime (2005: 12). These are issues that I will also discuss with my participants in the project. Manion's research serves as a firm basis for this research project and is important to my study as she utilises similar concepts in her analysis and has covered many issues that are similar to those being discussed within this project.

A majority of fans are also unhappy with the fact that anime is dubbed before being aired on American television. The fans take pride in subtitling anime, as at the beginning of most anime episodes there is a note for the viewer stating that the episode has been "subbed by the fans for the fans". They also do not charge for the distribution of these subtitled episodes, and this forms part of the anime network and understanding amongst the fans (Napier, 2001: 245). This form of fan productivity is what is known as subbing, which is where the fan actively subtitles the anime from its native language of Japanese to English, Italian, French etc. Hye-Kyung Lee (2010) explores the nature and implications of fan translation (or fansubbing) and the distribution of cultural commodities through the utilisation of a case study focusing on the fansubbing of anime. The case study focuses on the English translation and distribution of Japanese animation. Lee (2010) found that anime subbers were "motivated by strong affection for anime and devotion to sharing it with other fans" (2010: 9). Anime subbers were also motivated by the strong desire to improve the popularity of anime by making it more accessible to people across the globe. Of course there is a divide between the creators of anime who see the subbing and uploading of anime online as piracy, while the actual fans see it as the global distribution of anime.

Anime Underground

Anime in the West used to be considered one of the underground subcultures, as the fans regularly engaged in piracy to obtain certain series. This has greatly changed in recent years, since cable network channels such as Cartoon Network have begun airing dubbed and edited¹⁸ anime shows

¹⁶ Dubbing refers to a programme being dubbed (voiced-over) into the language of choice.

¹⁷ Subbing refers to a particular programme being subtitled into the language of choice.

¹⁸ Anime episodes that contain scenes of violence and profanity are usually edited to suit the younger audience.

and television networks have begun airing anime-exclusive channels. In addition to this, anime DVDs are much easier to obtain in Western countries due to its high levels of popularity. However, this is not the case in South Africa. We do not have any purely anime-dedicated channels, and it is relatively expensive to purchase anime DVDs. That being said, most otaku will either stream anime online, or download it illegally for free and share with others. So in effect, anime is still very much an underground subculture in South Africa.

However the underground nature of anime can still be seen as a global phenomenon. The subtitling and distribution of anime offer rare insights into fan creativity and the piracy that goes with it (Denison, 2011). Piracy of anime can be seen as one of the reasons that it is still such a small movement in South Africa, and the very high cost of purchasing and the limited range of official anime DVDs from stores may also discourage others. There are also numerous studies which have found that fansubbing¹⁹ has contributed to the globalisation and expansion of anime worldwide, which goes hand-in-hand with distribution and piracy issues (González, 2009; Denison, 2011; Lee, 2010; Hatcher, 2005).

For many ordinary cultural consumers, accessing and consuming foreign cultural products, such as anime, has become an everyday practice. It has become much easier to distribute and download the content via the Internet today than it was say, even twenty years ago. Fans can now download, record from television or buy a particular anime series, translate it into their own language, add subtitles and then distribute it via the Internet for other fans to either watch online or download. It is important to remember that all this is done without the permission of the relevant copyright holders (Lee, 2010). In a similar fashion, “scanlators” scan manga, translate and edit them and finally upload the manga onto the Internet for other fans to be able to download or read online. This phenomenon of fan translating is not confined only to Japanese popular cultural products; Western cultural products are also being translated into languages such as Taiwanese, Japanese, and Chinese for its Eastern audiences.

Despite anime’s growing global popularity over the years, its overseas distribution is yet to be fully globalised by media corporations (Lee, 2010: 6), although, highly popular texts have been globally distributed by major studios such as Hayao Miyazaki’s Studio Ghibli movies (*Spirited Away* etc) by Buena Vista and the *Final Fantasy* computer generated movies by Sony Pictures. However, in the case of television anime, only popular series are chosen for international distribution as local publishers prefer safer, tested and proven anime and in essence, niche demands are highly likely to be ignored. According to Lee, anime fansubbers embody the general characteristics of fans which are best described by John Fiske (1992): “[t]hey are motivated by strong affection for anime and devotion to sharing it with other fans. In return for their investment of emotion, time and effort, they obtain [a] sense of pleasure, fun and reward” (2010: 9).

The views of the industry and the fansubbers are however divergent as the industry sees it as piracy

19 A fansub/fansubbing (short for fan-subtitled) is a version of a foreign film or series that has been translated by fans and subtitled into another language.

and the fansubbers see it as the global distribution of anime. In some cases the fansubbers' work are backed by the anime creators (such as Eiichirou Oda, creator of *One Piece*) as they see it as a way of attaining global recognition and satisfying the needs of their overseas fans. The fan subtitling and distribution of anime has been effective in promoting the anime culture globally and has also diversified the scope of anime available to fans across nations (Lee, 2010). The piracy of the anime fandom will continue to occur as long as there are anime shows to be translated and subbed, and as long as there are fans that are willing to download them.

By delving into some of the few theories and case studies done on anime and the practices of the otaku, it is obvious to see that anime theory still has a long way to go. Having discussed anime theory above, I shall now move on to the major subcultural and fandom theories that have played a role in my research and the analysis of my findings.



Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

As stated in the previous chapter, the theory on anime is quite thin and there is not much literature on the subject that can relate directly to my research. However, the areas of subcultures and fandom are rife with pertinent theories which have been useful in my study. This chapter will cover the theories that I have utilised in my research on the practices of anime fans in South Africa, beginning with subcultural theory and then focusing on the theories of John Fiske (1992) and Henry Jenkins (1992a,b) and their work on fan studies. Their theories will play an important role in understanding and describing the fans of anime in South Africa.

Subcultural Theory

Ken Gelder states that “the most common narrative about subcultures is, of course, one that casts them as nonconformist and non-normative: different, dissenting, or (to use a term sometimes applied to subcultures by others) ‘deviant’” (2007: 3). As we shall see, the two most important institutionalised studies of subcultures certainly would agree with this summary. If the Chicago School saw subcultures as ‘deviant’, then the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies celebrated their dissension from the dominant culture.

Chicago School

The study of subcultures has a long history, and was first institutionalised in the early 20th century by the ‘Chicago School’ – pioneering sociologists at the University of Chicago whose focus was the city of Chicago itself, richly marked by a host of ‘distinct social worlds’ (Gelder, 2007: 44) such as gangs, immigrant ethnic enclaves, vagabonds and other ‘deviant’ and marginalised groups (Hodkinson 2002; Jenks 2005). What is also interesting about the Chicago School is its guiding theory of symbolic interactionism, ably summarised thus by Denzin:

[I]nteractionists assume that human beings create the worlds of experience they live in. They do this by acting on things in terms of the meanings things have for them... These meanings come from interaction, and they are shaped by the self-reflections persons bring to their situations. (1992: 25)

Denzin would also write that symbolic interactionists are “cultural romantics...preoccupied with Promethean human powers. They valorize villains and outsiders as heroes and side with the downtrodden little people” (1992: 2). These celebrated ‘human powers’ are the reflexive, creative and agentic abilities of ordinary – often ‘downtrodden’- people *actively* to construct meanings and micro-worlds through their social interactions.

It is one of the enormous weaknesses of what Jenks calls ‘structural sociology’ (2005: 57), relentlessly focused as it is on the ‘macro’ perspective ‘from above’, that it almost entirely misses this rich ‘micro-’ quotidian world identified by symbolic interactionists. Structural sociology emphasises those

dominating social structures and institutions that are seen to shape the way human beings think, act and behave. For the structuralist Marxist, Louis Althusser, for example, we were ‘interpellated’ into our very identities as conformist subjects by what he termed the Ideological State Apparatuses – the education system, the mass media, religions, and the family (1971). Stressing larger structural determinations leads to a disabling assumption that ordinary people are merely agentless and passive recipients of larger interests, no more than victims of dominant ideologies and institutions:

In other words, abstract talk and theorizing about systems and structures fail to recognize the startlingly obvious fact that people practically, or concretely, construct meaningful worlds on a person-to-person, day-to-day basis. Structural sociology fails to recognize or pay sufficient attention to the significance and importance of ordinary everyday people’s ability to attach symbolic meanings to things in their world, to other people in their world, and to the action of themselves and other people in that world. The interactionists’ perspective seeks an understanding of the basis of social organization in people’s obvious and perceived capacity to manage and control their own circumstances. Any individual, or social actor, demonstrates his or her ability to exercise control by the way in which they assess a situation and then place a definition upon that situation (Jenks, 2005: 57).

We inherit therefore from the Chicago School the profound insight that subcultures are interesting because, through their persistent sociality, their members *actively and creatively construct distinct meaningful worlds* that set them apart from the authoritarian meaning-making machines of the dominant system.

Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies

This ability to focus on the human scale, thus making visible the remarkable inventiveness of ‘popular culture’, is also shared by the second major institutional study of subcultures, that of the University of Birmingham’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). From the 1960s onwards (Hall & Jefferson 1975/1993; Hebdige 1979), the CCCS’s politically radical focus was on the British post-War urban working class youth subcultures such as mods, skinheads and punks. If symbolic interactionism has been endlessly criticised for ignoring those larger structural determinations (say of capitalism) and their seemingly obvious power to shape the patterns and identities of social life (Denzin 1992), then from the very beginning CCCS was, as Hall famously argued, caught in a not dissimilar conflict between the ‘culturalists’ (Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson) and the ‘structuralists’ (Levi-Strauss, Althusser): where the former emphasised ‘culture’ and ‘experience’ and agency, the latter drew attention to ideology and discourse and the ‘final determination’ of the capitalist economy (Hall 1980).

These ‘micro’ and ‘macro’ strands would find for CCCS some sort of resolution in the readings of Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, where domination is never simply ruling-class imposition upon passive and manipulated subalterns; ideological domination must always necessarily encounter the active and wayward difference of subaltern realities. As Hall explained the concept of hegemony: “It is this process of the coordination of the interests of a dominant group with the general interests of other groups and the life of the state as a whole” (1980: 66). For Marx, society is ‘structured in conflict’ precisely because of the opposing interests of capital and labour, a difference that is also cultural, so that the working class is also the space of alternative and often resistant cultural

traditions and experiences. It is these social tensions that make possible the constant cultural struggle between the elite and the people. As Fiske (1989) argued:

Popular culture is structured within what Stuart Hall (1980) calls the opposition between the power-bloc and the people. The power-bloc consists of a relatively unified, relatively stable alliance of social forces—economic, legal, moral, aesthetic; the people, on the other hand, is a diverse and dispersed set of social allegiances constantly formed and reformed among the formations of the subordinate.

This opposition, as Fiske further argues, can also be seen as one between the homogeneity of the power-bloc, and the heterogeneity of the people. The power-bloc is seen as homogenous due to its “attempts to control, structure, and minimize social differences so that they serve its interests” (1989: 8). However, these people are seen as a heterogeneous force due to the fact that they can “intransigently maintain their sense of social difference that is also a difference of interest” (1989: 8).

For Fiske, therefore:

Popular culture is made by subordinated peoples in their own interests out of resources that also, contradictorily, serve the economic interests of the dominant. Popular culture is made from within and below, not imposed from without or above as mass cultural theorists would have it. There is always an element of popular culture that lies outside social control that escapes or opposes hegemonic forces (1989: 2).

This conceptual model has caused the generation of a remarkable ground-breaking body of work in the field of ‘reception studies’ (Hebdige 1979; Fiske 1989; Willis 1990; Morley 1992), where it is precisely what Willis (1990) called the aesthetic ‘symbolic creativity’ of ordinary people in their everyday lives that is studied. Thus a Gramscian Marxism turns attention to the autonomous socio-cultural worlds of the ‘people’ constantly resisting the incorporating attention of the ‘power-bloc’ through the fabrication of alternative meanings. This in turn leads to a focus on subcultures, which are, within this line of thought, extreme examples of the ‘active audience’ engaged in ‘symbolic activity’.

The CCCS approach to subcultures, as a form of Marxist cultural politics, is perhaps best captured by Hebdige’s study primarily of British punks (1979). Subcultures are identified as working-class youth’s *cultural* rebellion against the ‘parent culture’; punks therefore waged ‘semiotic warfare’ against the dominant culture, disrupting through ‘noise’ the hegemonic sign system. It was a battle fought through the ‘conspicuous style’ of punk fashion, music, magazines, etc. (Hebdige 1979). While celebrating youthful militancy, Hebdige then argues that all ‘resistant’ subcultures are eventually emasculated by the system, both ideologically (newspapers have stories of happy punk families) and economically (capitalism commodifies punk style).

In summary then, both the liberal Chicago School and the radical CCCS possessed theoretical approaches – symbolic interactionism and Gramscianism – that allowed a focus on what Simmel (1998) called ‘microsociology’ – the everyday world of ordinary people as they actively and creatively generated meanings about themselves and their environments autonomous of dominant

values. Avoiding the pitfalls of a structural sociology mesmerised by the institutional power of elites, both schools were thus able, theoretically, to make complex and rich sense of those intensely 'distinct social worlds' we know as subcultures.

As we shall later see, my methodologies were chosen to cohere with this broadly 'active audience' approach, since 'interpretive' and qualitative research is precisely defined by its determination to seek the subjective views of the respondents themselves, rather than to see members of the anime subculture somehow as victims of elite discourses that therefore de-authorise their autonomous experiences and attitudes.

Critiques

There are, however, a host of critiques of the CCCS study of subcultures. The CCCS approach lost momentum, and was generally overtaken by more contemporary postmodern studies (Muggleton 2000; Bennett & Kahn-Harris 2004; Hodgkinson & Deicke 2007). While the studies of CCCS are recognised for their pioneering value, "they no longer appear to reflect the political, cultural and economic realities of the twenty-first century" (Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2003: 5). Subcultural studies no longer celebrated 'authentic' (that politically-loaded term) subcultures as sites of working-class resistance to a hegemonic capitalism through 'spectacular style' (usually connected to specific musical styles): such a singular interpretation did injustice to the sheer variety of contemporary subcultures. Not only were a great many subcultures not exclusively proletarian, or indeed social class not an issue at all (Thornton's famous clubbers were deliberately 'classless' (1995); see also Brown, 2003; Hodgkinson, 2002; Huq, 2006), but it was increasingly obvious that a deliberate counter-hegemonic cultural politics could only be associated with a segment of available subcultures.

It is extremely difficult, for example, to discover a radical politics behind the body-building or videogaming subcultures (neither of whom, of course, have any connection to musical genres). As Jenks has pointed out, CCCS had a "preference for tightly delineated subcultures with strong identities" (2005: 118), which further narrowed the range of subcultures, especially considering the more amorphous and fluid contemporary subcultures (Bennett 1999; Muggleton 2000), a great many of whom have no interest in 'spectacular style' (such as videogamers). Indeed, Huq for example takes CCCS to task for its "overly deterministic reading of youth social action": "for the CCCS, youth were social actors in highly circumscribed contexts, subject to structural constraints not of their own making and largely beyond their control" (2006: 11). What she refers to is the dominant 'modernist' Marxism of the CCCS, where the perceived extremity of subcultural rebellion is a consequence of having an 'over-totalised' notion of the capitalist system as comprising giant corporations and governments over which there is almost no popular control, and which almost entirely dominate social and cultural space to impose 'bourgeois order'.

Jenks also points out that CCCS's exclusive focus on specifically *youth* subcultures constituted a massive narrowing of focus in contrast to the Chicago School, whose subcultural focus on the 'underdog' extended across all age categories (2005: 122). The age issue is pertinent to the anime subculture, because in Japan anime and manga are popular with people of all ages, including of course, adults. Napier (2006) conducted a study of the Miyazaki Mailing List (MML), which is an

international group of fans that are dedicated to the animated works of director Hayao Miyazaki²⁰. The MML is perhaps one of the oldest Internet-based groups, having been started in 1991, and it is still ongoing. Napier chose this group to research as the participants were a particularly “articulate, engaged, and varied group, encompassing a wide range of ages” from around the world (2006: 48-49). Napier showed that most of the members were over 30 years old, with a large portion ranging between 30 and 60 years old. Hodkinson, in his study of the goth subculture in Britain, showed that although many goths became less involved with the subculture as they grew older (due mainly to the many responsibilities they faced as older adults), they still considered it of eminent importance to their sense of self (2002). It is also difficult to continue to speak of the rock subculture in terms of youth when the Rolling Stones in 2013 embarked on a series of concerts to celebrate their 50 years in the music business!

Andy Brown (2003) heavily critiques the CCCS in terms of their concepts around subcultures, and he does this using the example of heavy metal and its fans. Heavy metal was dismissed by the CCCS, and Hebdige (1979) marginalises the subculture by referencing it in a mere footnote, whose description of the fandom was very one-dimensional. While heavy metal fans can be considered a subculture, this group clearly lacks the “stylistic innovators” that make subcultures generally stand out. The CCCS scholars (Hall & Jefferson, 1975) believed that heavy metal did not express ‘ritual resistance’ and could therefore not be considered as a fully-fledged subculture. Brown argues that this problem is not one of heavy metal, but rather of subcultural theory, since heavy metal music was, “throughout the period of formation of the CCCS approach, a popular cultural form that attracted the spending and leisure focus of a large quantity of male (and some female) working-class and lower middle-class adolescents” (2003: 212). The anime subculture, be it overseas or in South Africa, is also not a “resistance” movement, but rather a gathering of like-minded people who share similar tastes and values that are largely distinct from the larger society, which does not share the intense enthusiasm for all things anime. This alone causes the theories of the CCCS school of thought to be deemed unhelpful to utilise in this research thesis.

The CCCS’s approach to subcultures assumes that they operated in a ‘media-free space’, claiming that the subculture speaks an unmediated truth, eliding the role the media plays (Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2003). The media for Hebdige is the dominant mass media which (predictably) has a relation of hostility to ‘resistant’ subcultures, only eventually ideologically incorporating the threatening subculture, thus contributing to undermining its rebellious otherness. There is here something markedly ‘romantic’ about Hebdige’s analysis: the dissenting subculture emerges authentically from the proletarian streets, outside of the ideological apparatuses of social control, actively disrupting the semiotic systems of capitalism from an ‘outsider’ position. Thornton by contrast argues that the various forms of media (including magazines) positively help in defining and extending the lives of subcultures (1995). The use of media in sustaining subcultures can be most visible in Hodkinson’s (2002) study of the goths and Huq’s (2006) study of pop music, where the use of print media, radio and television had served to advertise conventions (such as the Whitby Goth Weekend) and new bands and clubs that are aimed at a specific subculture. Magazines, often

20 Hayao Miyazaki is a Japanese film director, animator, manga artist, producer, and screenwriter and the co-founder of Japanese anime studio, Studio Ghibli which has been responsible for award-winning movies such as *Spirited Away*, *Howl’s Moving Castle*, and more recently *The Wind Rises*.

produced by subculturalists themselves, actively offer a defining coherence to a subculture. The various subcultures are effectively sustained through the use of the media and this can be seen in South Africa, where most anime conventions and merchandise are advertised on Internet sites such as *Facebook*, *Twitter* and various blogs and online stores (*Dark Carnival*, *AWX* etc). Indeed, entire subcultures are built around types of media, such as the videogame subculture, or indeed the anime subculture.

Maffesoli (1996) argues - in a book that has had a major impact upon postmodern subcultural studies (Bennett, 1999; Hodkinson & Deicke, 2007) - that group identities are no longer constructed through conventional structures such as class or gender (as the CCCS believed); however new forms of society and collective identities are created through consumption patterns and practices. Maffesoli (1996) describes these group identities as 'tribes' which are not rigid in their organisation or in the inclusion and exclusion of individuals; rather they are flexible and encourage fluid and even part-time identities, allowing individuals to flow between their identity constructs. Although this idea of the 'tribe' is centred on groups (or affective communities) rather than the individual, the individual is still rated higher than the 'modernist' cultures of the CCCS, where the rigid group structure is everything (Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2003: 12). This is because individuals do not claim the group as their top-most priority; rather they use the group as a means to satisfy their own cultural needs (Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2003: 12). Personally speaking, my identity as an otaku does not define me entirely, in the way that studies of punks claim their entire lives are centred on living out a punk lifestyle; however anime does fulfil cultural needs that other subcultures cannot. For example, I enjoy watching shojo anime more than any live-action Hollywood teen drama, because the anime has more of an emotional effect on me.

Hebdige's study (1979) focused on the white, working-class, British subcultures, and it is precisely this delimited focus on the *national* cultural space that is no longer relevant within the realities of globalisation, as Muggleton & Weinzierl argue:

Two important subsequent and related developments are, first, the reterritorialization of global diasporic Black and Asian culture – styles, music, representations – in a distinctively post-colonial era; second, the actual physical movement of temporarily or permanently dispersed peoples and populations – migrants, casual workers, international students and so on – around the globe (2003: 17).

Wulff (1995) agrees with this statement claiming that youth cultures are most fascinating as their interests and ideas move much more easily across nations and easily influence or are influenced by other structures and meanings. A result of this is the creation of cultural hybrids, such as South African Kwaito music or French rap (Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2003). Indeed, what is most progressive about many contemporary subcultures is precisely their construction of post-nationalist communities, often existing predominately online. Anime of course is made in Japan, but has been 'reterritorialised' by fans around the world, whose main access to anime has been by that very symbol of globalisation – the Internet.

One of the striking things about the vast majority of the CCCS subcultural research was the strange

absence of any ethnographic field-work. Hebdige's book, for example, contains no interviews with real punks, and is entirely the effect of the theoretical application of Marxism and semiotics to the punk phenomenon (Frith 1985; Muggleton 2000; Huq, 2006). This has a range of damaging consequences for the validity and accuracy of these earlier studies, because there is no gathered evidence from real punks to counteract or support the academic interpretations of the writer. This can lead to an imaginary construct called, for example 'punks', who are suddenly endowed with a radical political and aesthetically avant-garde identity because that is the interpretation favoured by the academic writer.

As I move to discuss in detail the study of goths by Hodkinson (2002), as it has proved to be an invaluable guide to my research on the anime subculture, I can at this stage conclude from the above analysis that I am comfortable with assuming that a subculture is a group of people who share a passionate interest to the point of it becoming a lifestyle different to the surrounding culture. Subcultures can no longer be confined to groups only interested in certain music or styles. Any group of people that forms a miniature society with its own rules and sets of values can now be considered a subculture, and thanks to the immense leaps in technological advancements these subcultures have a better chance of surviving and growing. Members of the groups share similar values and ideas, and are not necessarily trying to be deviant or go against the norms of general society and the mass media. Class structures do not play a pivotal role in the creation and sustenance of the subculture or fandom, and it is seen as place for fans to choose to gather and enjoy, share, and discuss their subculture. Furthermore, contemporary subcultures typically exist within the enlarged space made possible by globalisation.

Looking at Subcultures: Paul Hodkinson's *Goth: Identity, Style and Subculture* (2002)

One of the most influential works on my research has to be the study conducted on British goths by Paul Hodkinson (2002). The reason for this is because, like Hodkinson, I am not merely an academic, but a fan as well. Hodkinson was a member of the goth subculture, a commitment that provided him with the motivation to write an academic study of the subculture. His research focused on:

[T]he norms, meanings, motivations and social patterns of those involved, as well as the voluntary and commercial events, media and consumables which appeared to enable the goth scene to exist and survive on such a small scale. (2002: 4).

Hodkinson's aims are similar to those that I will be pursuing in this research paper, as I will also be focusing on the "meanings, motivations and social patterns" of anime fans. Hodkinson (2002) utilised participant observation, in-depth interviews, media analysis, and even a questionnaire. In my research I shall only make use of participant observation, in-depth interviews and questionnaires.

Elements of a Subculture

Hodkinson's (2002) study occupies an interesting position within the history of subcultural research, in that he clearly distances himself from the highly politicised and structuralist CCCS approach, while also resisting the more outlandish consequences of the more recent postmodern

studies, where all too often an opposition to the rigid solidity of the CCCS's subcultural model can become a view of subcultures as 'fluid' to the point of depthlessness, as if joining a subculture was as ephemeral as that season's fashion - just another temporary leisure pursuit. For Hodkinson, subcultures continue to have what he calls 'substance' - a depth of commitment felt passionately by its members, to the point of playing a central role in their lives, including their very identities (2002). It is the nature of this subcultural substantiality that he seeks to identify in his study. He therefore outlined four very important characteristics that define and constitute a subculture and give it substance. These four elements are imperative to my own study as I will be looking at the anime subculture in South Africa and relating it to the anime subculture of the West.

Consistent Distinctiveness

Hodkinson's first subcultural characteristic is 'consistent distinctiveness': within each subcultural grouping there are a set of shared values and tastes which differ from other subcultures, and which remain "reasonably consistent, from one participant to the next, one place to the next and one year to the next" (2002: 30). Although the styles of the goths varied widely, the overall style had basic similarities e.g. black was the colour most associated with the goth subculture. Members of the goth subculture would wear black eyeliner, and black lipstick along with black nail polish and clothes. Their hair would be dark (if not black) and they would wear thick layers of foundation on their faces which would allow the dark make-up to stand out (2002: 30). However, within these shared values there also exists internal diversity - something not recognised by the CCCS (in anime, to use a different example, different fans enjoy different genres of anime, but all nevertheless share a passion for anime). Muggleton (2000) and Thornton (1995) similarly uncovered in their respective studies that the tastes and norms of their participants were more individualised as opposed to the common misconception that all members of a subcultural group share the same set of values. Muggleton concluded that subcultures are "characterised as much by ambiguity and diversity as by coherence and definition" (2000: 75).

These set of shared values is of utmost importance to fans and members as it helps them gain acceptance, popularity and status within the subculture. This is achieved by "making oneself sufficiently compatible with the distinctive tastes of the subculture" (Hodkinson, 2002: 30). Hodkinson found that his participants chose to distinguish themselves from trendies, who apparently lacked individual tastes in fashion and music. The participants claimed that the trendies merely followed the mass media on what they should listen to and wear and the goths perceived the trendies as a homogenous group whereas they saw their subculture as one of similarities but filled with diversity (2002: 30). In addition, these characteristics of consistent distinctiveness form a large part of the fan's identity.

Identity

Muggleton (2000), and Hodkinson (2002) agree that the CCCS almost entirely ignored the subjective views of the young people who were members of the subcultures studied, and instead relied on prescriptive academic analyses imposed upon their subject-matter 'from above'. As Hodkinson put it, "such attempts to 'make sense' of youth styles often consist of little more than speculation and, at times, have imposed rather than extracted meanings" (2002: 61). This is all rather ironic considering that this analysis is supposedly dedicated to the liberation of the marginalised, yet

shows no interest in the views of the marginalised. Hodkinson goes on to say that the second indicator of subcultural substance - identity - seeks to address this problem through “focusing on the extent to which participants hold a perception that they are involved in a distinct cultural grouping and share feelings of identity with one another” (2002: 30-31).

In the case of the goths, the precise importance of their subcultural identity in relation to the other aspects of their lives differed between the individuals, however it is seen in Hodkinson’s study that there was a “like-mindedness” shared amongst the goths, despite their varying geographical locations (2002: 31). Hodkinson learned that his interviewees “indicated strong identifications with strangers perceived to share their subcultural affiliation in countries across the globe” (2002: 68). As important as it is to have affiliation with other members of the goth subculture (insider status), it is also important to gain a sense of distinction from people outside of the subcultural grouping (2002: 31).

Some of the goth respondents saw the world as divided between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (the mainstream of ‘trendies’), which Hodkinson contrasts to the “ever changing systems of tastes and distastes, identifications and disidentifications focused on by more postmodern-oriented approaches” (2002: 74). I am reminded here of David Locher’s point that in order to become an insider (to ‘industrial’ music), one must not only like what other members like but must also dislike what other members dislike (1998). Moreover, goths contrasted their own deep commitment to the values and practices of the subculture to those of the mainstream, who were seen as fickle and superficial in their affiliations. Non-goths, in other words, are seen as a conformist ‘mass’ who lack a serious cultural passion, but are instead swayed in all directions by the dominant media (Hodkinson, 2002: 31). Here indeed, we can find a central motivation for the very existence of contemporary subcultures – a kind of implicit cultural politics that denounces the debased conformity of mass consumer culture, in the name of a passionate individuality and self-reflexiveness.

Commitment

A substantial subculture must elicit a serious commitment from its members, and is usually “liable to account for a considerable proportion of free time, friendship patterns, shopping routes, collections of commodities, going-out habits and even internet use” (2002: 31). Hodkinson further adds that although some fans are reluctant to admit that they are goths, the subculture was shown to dominate their lives (2002: 31). The goths that showed more commitment to the subculture (in terms of intense levels of participation in relation to tastes and norms) received greater social rewards as opposed to those that merely flitted around the scene (2002: 31). As Hodkinson states: “[the] tendency for concentrated and continuous practical involvement among participants, then, may also distinguish subcultures from more fleeting, partial forms of affiliation, in which the energies of participants are shared more equally across a variety of groups” (2002: 31).

Autonomy

This category is important because it sets itself part from the CCCS notion that ‘authentic’ subcultures are untouched by the interests of commerce and the media, something already critiqued by Thornton (1995). Hodkinson has to be careful here: he agrees with Thornton that commerce and

the media are there in subcultures from the very beginning, but he also wants to avoid the CCCS-type conclusion that it is therefore only an 'inauthentic' plaything of capitalism.

Hodkinson's specific interest was in the distinction between the subcultural (internal) forms of media and commerce, and the non-subcultural (external) products or services which are "produced by large-scale commercial interests for a broader consumer base" (2002: 33). These categories, Hodkinson argues, are imperfect and therefore contain a "grey area" between the two, while also including diversity within each (2002: 33). Hodkinson goes on to say:

[This] distinction enables an assessment of extent to which groupings operate autonomously, and the degree to which they are facilitated and constructed from within. While non-subcultural products and producers were heavily implicated, specialist subcultural events, consumables and media were playing an unusually significant role in the generation of the grouping (2002: 33)

There is therefore in a 'substantial' subculture, "[the inevitable connection] to the society and politico-economic system of which it is a part...a *relatively* high level of autonomy" (2002: 32), particularly with regard to commercial activities.

Many of the conventions and expos held are done so by and for certain subcultural fans. Although in numerous cases, fans will participate in subcultural-related activities free of charge, there are other cases where the fans will participate for a fee. For example, Hodkinson (2002: 32) writes of goth events being Deejaed by certain fans, but for a small fee. However, this does not diminish the fan's status within the group as this kind of activity ensures the survival of the subculture to a certain extent. It should also be noted that most fan activities are done for little or no money as it is done for the fans by the fans. Anime can be seen as a niche market in South Africa and events like cosplay conventions and even the *rAge Expo*²¹ are practically unheard of by outsider fans. The *rAge Expo* is an annual event (and the largest gaming expo in Africa) which is held in Johannesburg, and is largely unknown by outsiders.

I have formulated questions surrounding these four elements of a subculture which I will pose to the participants of this study in order to understand how the anime subculture operates in South Africa. There are however other characteristics which Hodkinson (2002) mentions in his research, and these are important aspects to any study relating to subcultural studies.

Subcultural Capital

Subcultural capital is important to look at when discussing any subculture and I will be utilising it to analyse my research data in the Findings chapter. Hodkinson productively uses Thornton's (1995) notion of "subcultural capital", which she developed from Bourdieu's (1984) idea of "cultural capital". Subcultural capital refers to the esoteric knowledge, cultural goods or modes of behaviour

²¹ *rAge* is the abbreviated form of Really Awesome Gaming Experience, and is the largest gaming and anime expo on the African continent. It is an annual event, held in Johannesburg at the Coca-Cola Dome for one weekend, usually in September or October.

which are utilised to grant status and social advantages to individuals of the subculture (Thornton, 1995). Subcultural participants tend to classify and judge others through a set of shared standards, and subcultural capital is also useful as it not only describes the differences between the insiders and outsiders but also the differentiation amongst goths within the subculture: “[g]aining and maintaining subcultural capital, and the social rewards it entailed, then, was a key concern and motivation for most goths” (Hodkinson, 2002: 82). With such rewards (partners, social status etc.) available to the goths, it was more than enough “encouragement for individuals to collect, learn about and exhibit examples of established subcultural style and behaviour” (Hodkinson, 2002: 82).

In addition to the above subcultural theories, I have made use of fan and fandom studies in order to analyse the data obtained for this research paper. Fan studies have always played an important role in the studies of subcultures due to the fact that members are usually considered to be fans of the said subculture. It is therefore imperative to look into fan studies when studying a subculture of any kind.

Fans and Fandom

Jenkins begins his pioneering book on fandom, *Textual Poachers* (1992b), with the portrayal of *Star Trek* fans on an episode of *Saturday Night Live* in an article of *Newsweek*, which described them as overweight adults, who still lived with their parents and were obsessed with the franchise (1992). William Shatner, who played Captain James T. Kirk in the *Star Trek* series, was a guest on that episode of *Saturday Night Live* and after numerous questions from the *Star Trek* fans (known as Trekkies) he told them to “get a life” and proceeded with various (rather insulting) statements (Jenkins, 1992b). The *Newsweek* article (22 December 1986) went on to describe the various *Star Trek* fans, such as a man who wore his Federation uniform to marry his fellow Trekkie wife, who donned Vulcan ears to the ceremony. There is also the Starbase Houston, which is a club that has its own jackets and anthem (Jenkins, 1992b). All of these details are included in the article and “while no doubt accurate, are selective, offering a distorted picture of their community, shaping the reality of its culture to conform to stereotypes already held by *Newsweek*’s writers and readers” (1992: 11). The images represented by *Newsweek* were supported by other publications and won stereotyped public acceptance that this is what Trekkies were like.

Definition of Fans and Fandom

“Fan” is an abbreviated form of the word “fanatic,” which has its roots in the Latin word “fanaticus.” In its most literal sense, “fanaticus” simply meant “Of or belonging to the temple, a temple servant, a devotee” but it quickly assumed more negative connotations, “Of persons inspired by orgiastic rites and enthusiastic frenzy” (Oxford Latin Dictionary) (Jenkins, 1992b: 12).

Fans were, from the beginning described as overzealous, possessed, and full of madness. In more recent years, the possessed fans have even been likened to the Manson family (Jewett & Lawrence, 1977). This was (and sometimes still is) seen with the use of the term otaku in Japan, which was initially used as a derogatory term for fans that spent more time at home engaging in their hobbies than socialising with people.

News reports of fans frequently portray them as religious fanatics or psychopathic killers who have frustrated fantasies that can occasionally take on violent and antisocial forms, and “whose interests are fundamentally alien to the realm of “normal” cultural experience and whose mentality is dangerously out of touch with reality” (Jenkins, 1992b: 16). Joli Jenson reiterates this point by saying that “[t]he literature on fandom is haunted by images of deviance” (1992: 9).

Fans ostensibly blur the lines between fact and fiction, speaking of the characters or shows that they are fans of, as if they were real people and places that they could interact with and explore; however “fans cannot as a group be dismissed as intellectually inferior; they often are highly educated, articulate people who come from the middle classes, people who ‘should know better’ than to spend their time constructing elaborate interpretations of television programs” (Jenkins, 1992b: 19). Horton and Wohl (1956) characterised the relationship between the media and the audience as a form of ‘para-social interaction’ which sees fandom negatively as an imitation of normal relationships, and which attempts to duplicate absent face-to-face interactions. Similarly, a scholar claiming to be a fan is often looked down upon by the academic world, as “‘fan’ status may be devalued and taken as a sign of ‘inappropriate’ learning and uncritical engagement with the media” (Hills, 2002: x).

Throughout his career, Jenkins has sought to rescue fans from these highly negative stereotypes, particularly by seeing fans, in the cultural studies tradition, as highly creative and rich instances of ‘active audiences’ – people who therefore actively resist the 20th century tendency of the mass media to turn audiences into passive and manipulated ‘dupes’. For Jenkins, the wide range of ways in which fans express their fandom – writing stories, making videos, writing songs, attending conventions, discussing TV shows online, attending cosplay events, and so on – amounts to the emergence of what he interestingly calls a ‘participatory culture’, where ordinary people, in a movement that can only be good for the development of democracy, demand a greater say in the very production of their culture.

Indeed, as Jenson argues, there is something rather dubious about those who attack fans, in that those who enjoy opera, or those who attend scholarly conventions and symposiums (for fun), are not considered to be part of deviant fandom:

Fandom, instead, is what ‘they’ do; ‘we,’ on the other hand, have tastes and preferences, and select worthy people, beliefs and activities for our admiration and esteem. Furthermore, what ‘they’ do is deviant, and therefore dangerous, while what ‘we’ do is normal, and therefore safe (1992: 19).

In other words, there seems to be a high/popular culture opposition at work here: the difference between ‘them’ and ‘us’ is that the object of ‘our enthusiasm’ is high culture. If the text or object of a fandom is popular and easily accessible to the lower and/or middle class, then it is considered to be low culture which attracts *fans*, and “if it is popular with the wealthy and well educated, expensive and rare, it is preference, interest or expertise” (Jenson, 1992: 19). The division that occurs between fans and enthusiasts comes down to class and status. For Jenson, by thinking more carefully and

researching fans and fandoms, one can begin to better understand and respect others and also begin to appreciate “what it means today to be alive and to be human” (1992: 27).

For Jenkins, a fan subculture exists on the borders of mass culture and everyday life, and “constructs its own identity and artefacts from resources borrowed from already circulating texts” (1992b: 3). For Jenkins fans appropriate their favourite media texts in order to serve their own interests. Michel de Certeau (1984) refers to this as ‘poaching’ and it illustrates the difficulty that media producers have over the meanings of their media content, as fans typically construct their own identities and meanings that they assign to these media texts. The fans do not simply remain fascinated with the text, but rather experience other feelings of antagonism and frustration towards the text when/if it does not satisfy any of their expectations, although it still remains captivating enough for them to continue watching. It is then, that the fans take it upon themselves to rescue the text and “to try to articulate to themselves and others unrealized possibilities within the original works” by, for example, writing fan fiction (Jenkins, 1992a: 24). When this occurs, the fans cease to be a mere audience, and become active participants in the creation and circulation of the meanings of the text.

Fans take the works of popular culture and actively rework them into their own cultures through their own writings and understandings, and creating cultural canons. As mentioned earlier, subbing is seen as participation by the active audience, who actively seek out the anime texts and subtitle them for the visual enjoyment of other fans. Activities such as fan fiction²², fan art²³, AMV’s²⁴, and even dojinshi²⁵ are just a few examples of the activities that fans will engage in as an expression of and love for their fandom. These activities are also a way of sustaining the fandom, and enticing new fans to join. In anime if the active fan audience is unhappy with a pairing²⁶ they will often ship²⁷ their favourite couples via fan fiction and/or fan art, and even AMVs. Fans that are unhappy with certain storylines will also create their own dojinshi or fan fiction for fun, or for other fans that support their ideas.

Jenkins’ work is heavily influenced by the work of his mentor John Fiske, who saw fans as participants who reworked their fandoms (and by extension, the negative connotations associated with it) “into an intensely pleasurable, intensely signifying popular culture that is both similar to, yet significantly different from, the culture of more ‘normal’ popular audiences” (Fiske, 1992: 30). Fans turn their productivity into various forms of textual production, which they then circulate

22 Fan fiction is the writing of stories (by fans) using characters and scenarios from pre-existing anime (and other shows).

23 Fan art refers to the artwork done by fans, illustrating their favourite shows, characters, scenarios, and even canon or non-canon couple pairings.

24 AMV is the abbreviation for the term ‘anime music video’ and refers to the creation of a music video featuring the fans’ favourite scenes and characters.

25 Dojinshi refers to self-published, fan-created manga, utilising the same characters from their favourite anime, but drawing them following the story created by the fan. It also refers to amateur mangaka (manga authors) who do their own original work and are attempting to break into the mainstream industry.

26 Pairing in anime refers to a couple.

27 Shipping is a shorthand for ‘relationship’ and refers to the belief that a specific couple would be ideal together.

among the fan community, and thus aid in defining the community. This creation of a fan culture even has its own systems of production and distribution independent of the commercial systems that exhibit TV shows, etc. (Fiske, 1992).

Popular culture and academics alike, have adopted certain labels for fans, such as “Trekkies”, “Beastie Girls”, “Deadheads”- which “identifies them through their association with particular programs or stars” (Jenkins, 1992b: 37). While these terms may be accurate to some extent, they can be highly misleading; however fan culture cannot be linked to one particular series as fans often take pleasure in “making intertextual connections across a broad range of media texts” (Jenkins, 1992b: 37). Participation in fandom therefore goes beyond a single media text and usually encompasses numerous texts of the same genre. For example, *Star Trek* fans have also shown an affinity for *Star Wars*, *The X-Files*, *Quantum Leap* etc. In a similar fashion, avid fans of a particular anime series will also like other shows of the same genre, e.g. I am a huge fan of the shonen show *One Piece*, but I enjoy most shonen anime such as *Bleach*, *Ao No Exorcist*, *Fullmetal Alchemist*²⁸, and *Fairytail*²⁹. In addition to shonen, I am also a fan of shojo manga and anime. My fandom is not restricted to one particular genre of anime but rather any anime series, of any genre, that appeals to me.

“Fans often find it difficult to discuss single programs except through references and comparisons to this broader network; fans may also drift from one series commitment to another through an extended period of involvement within ‘fandom’” (Jenkins, 1992b: 41). Otakus cannot effectively discuss any anime series without reference to other shows and even with comparison to other live-action television shows and movies. Fans usually enter a fandom through a particular television show and then branch into other shows as they meet others with similar interests and tastes (Jenkins, 1992b). The very first proper anime series that I ever watched (meaning that I watched it with the knowledge that I was watching an anime show and it was in Japanese and subbed in English) was *Bleach* in 2010. Unlike other fans, I kept an open mind about anime, and soon got other shows from friends at university. When I say “other fans” I am referring to the fans that only watch *Bleach* and claim that it is the best series, without having watched any other series to compare it to, and this annoys most otaku. To be an otaku means to have a love for anime and all things anime (and manga), not just one particular series, without having watched anything else.

Jenkins asks us to look at media fans as “consumers who also produce, readers who also write, and spectators who also participate. On the one hand, these claims seem counter-intuitive. We tend to think of fans almost exclusively in terms of relations of consumption rather than production” (1992a: 208). Jenkins (1992b) speaks of four women gathering at an apartment to write fan fiction about their favourite show *Quantum Leap*. This activity leads to conversation as the women offer advice to each other about their individual stories, and eventually have supper together and watch fan-made videos. This form of fan activity still continues today but on a much larger scale due to

28 *Fullmetal Alchemist* follows the lives of brothers, and alchemists Ed and Al Elric as they search for a way to restore Al’s soul to his body and Ed’s missing arm and leg, all of which was lost when they attempted to use alchemy to revive their dead mother.

29 *Fairytail* is set in the world of wizards, where each wizard has their own unique powers that they use to carry out jobs and earn money, both for themselves and their guilds. The story follows the main character, Natsu who is on a journey to find his missing master, who just happens to be a dragon.

the ease of access provided by the Internet. Fans type up their fan fiction and upload it to websites, where people from across the globe can read and critique it. A more popular fan activity for otaku is the making of amateur music videos, or in the case of anime, anime music videos (AMV's). There are literally millions of AMV's online, which fans work diligently on for the enjoyment of other fans. There is also *dojinshi* (Appendix A.4), which is created by fans using the characters of their favourite manga/anime to produce their own stories. There are plenty of fans who take their favourite couples from anime and create a *hentai*³⁰ manga version, in which the couple finally unite and engage in sexual acts. This is similar to the slash or fan fiction written by *Star Trek* fans about homoerotic sexual encounters between Spock and Kirk (Jenkins, 1992b: 191-192).

In addition to all these various forms of fan activities, fanzines continue to be a way for fans to write and distribute their ideas on a specific subculture. Although today, these zines have now become (in most cases) e-zines as it is easier to create and distribution is free. E-zine editors can merely e-mail the zine to their friends or post the links onto their *Facebook* and *Twitter* pages, where their friends (and fellow fans) can easily access, read, comment, and most importantly provide feedback, all in mere minutes. Forums are also great places for discussions between fans to occur. As Jenkins says: “[p]recisely because the boundary between writer and reader is so flimsy, fanzine editors and writers remain more responsive than commercial producers to the desires and interests of their readership” (1992b: 162). Zines are typically non-profit, as they are created by the fans for the fans. *All Otaku Magazine* is a bi-monthly South African online anime magazine that aims to spread the world of anime and to keep otaku informed and up-to-date with what's the latest in the anime and gaming world (Appendix A.5). When I visited the site in 2013, the pdf versions of the magazine were available for free download.

Fiske states that: “[f]ans discriminate fiercely: the boundaries between what falls within their fandom and what does not are sharply drawn” (1992: 34). Although fans may argue about what characteristics will allow another person to join them in their subculture or fandom, there is a clearly drawn line that is agreed upon by most, if not all, members of the fandom (Fiske, 1992). Anime fans are not considered otaku if they have only watched the anime shown on national channels such as SABC or if they have only watched one anime series and proclaim that it is the best without watching others. The textual discrimination and social distinction within the subcultures and between fans is very much similar to the discrimination and distinction between fans and outsiders. This comes across clearly as I, myself, discriminate against fans that only watch one anime series and claim to be otaku. Although they may not be able to obtain other series to watch, I still find that those fans are far too immature (in terms of their fandom) and greatly lack cultural capital to be considered proper otaku. That aside, I also face discrimination from friends (especially males) when they find out that I enjoy watching *shojo* anime, which they consider silly, due to its lack of action and violence.

Productivity and Participation

Popular culture must therefore be understood in terms of fan productivity and not reception. Fandom then becomes not only a subcultural grouping but also a participatory culture, as the

³⁰ Hentai is the anime version of porn.

fans themselves create their own forms of entertainment utilising the objects of their fandom. Once created, these works of the fans are then shared with other fans giving rise to “some type of informal mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices” (Jenkins, 2009: 12). Participatory culture can be defined as a culture that has low barriers in terms of artistic expression, contains support for the creation and distribution of fan-created materials, and finally where members share some form of social connection with one another in terms of their fandom.

Jenkins (2009) listed some of the forms of participatory culture as follows:

- **Affiliations:** Memberships, formal and informal, in online communities centred around various forms of media, such as: *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *MySpace*, forums, metagaming, or game clans. Otaku join these various forms of social media in order to discuss any and all things related to anime. These informal groups are easily accessible to all fans, making it simpler for otaku to interact with other otaku.
- **Expressions:** Producing new creative forms, such as digital sampling, skinning and modding, fan videos, fan fiction, zines, or mash-ups. This is seen in the anime fandom quite clearly with the large number of fan-produced products appearing on the Internet, such as dojinshi, fan art, and especially AMVs, which are all an extremely popular activity amongst otaku.
- **Collaborative problem solving:** Working together in teams, formal and informal, to complete tasks and develop new knowledge, such as through *Wikipedia*, alternative reality gaming, or spoiling. Otaku will often gather together to organise events and clubs in their various countries, while also encouraging each other to produce fan-made products. These fans also work together to create anime-specific websites, and *Facebook* groups.
- **Circulations:** Shaping the flow of media, such as podcasting or blogging. There are numerous otaku who have their own *Youtube* channels, through which they can upload videos of them discussing certain anime and manga topics. Blogs are another way in which otaku can interact with other fans from anywhere in the world.

Fiske has categorised fan productions into three groups namely: *semiotic productivity*; *enunciative productivity*, and *textual productivity* (1992). Semiotic productivity “consists of the making of meanings of social identity and of social experience from the semiotic resources of the cultural commodity” (Fiske, 1992: 37). Enunciative productivity is simply the meanings that are created through semiotic productivity are then voiced within a face-to-face context and take on a public form (Fiske, 1992). Much of the pleasure of a fandom lies in the ability to communicate with other fans about the same things that they enjoy, and numerous fans have stated that their fandom choice was made through the oral community that they aspired to join. It is because people wish to join certain social groups that they often become drawn to the particular fandom that the other people of the group are a part of. Fiske goes on to say that:

This is not to suggest that the acquired taste is in any way unauthentic, but rather to point

again to the close interrelations between textual and social preferences. But, important though talk is, it is not the only means of enunciation available. The styling of hair or make-up, the choice of clothes or accessories are ways of constructing a social identity and therefore of asserting one's membership of a particular fan community (1992: 38).

These fans often join organisations and online groups and forums and/or attend conventions in order to be able to sustain conversations about their fandom with other fans, which they may not be able to always do in their everyday lives.

Textual productivity (otherwise known as fan fiction and fan art) is when the fans produce their own texts based on "their experience of watching television programs as the basis for other types of artistic creation – writing new stories, composing songs, making videos, painting pictures" (Jenkins, 1992b: 210). The fans do not receive economic compensation for their work, rather, it costs them money to produce these texts and distribute them. Fans who attempt to make profits off of their fan-made texts are seen as untrustworthy (unless they do it through official routes like online stores); however, fan art is usually sold at extremely high prices and is highly praised by other fans (Fiske, 1992).

Fiske also believes that "collecting is also important in fan culture, but it tends to be inclusive rather than exclusive: the emphasis is not so much upon acquiring a few good (and thus expensive) objects as upon accumulating as many as possible" (1992: 44) (Appendix A.6). As a fan of the *Pokémon* series, I went out and bought the official game handbook, even though I did not have the game. The book contained information on all 150 pokémon (that were available at that time) and this provided me with more information than any of the other children I had known. This information boost gave me a sense of pride as I saw myself as someone who knew the series and the pokémon much better than any of the other fans, and I gained the admiration of the other fans for my impressive knowledge.

Fiske (1992) argues that "the experts – those who have accumulated the most knowledge – gain prestige within the group and act as opinion leaders. Knowledge, like money, is always a source of power" (43). As a child I also engaged in the collecting of tazos (Appendix A.7) that were available in packets of the popular South African Simba chip brand and ranged from *Pokémon* and, *Yugioh!* to *Dragonball Z*. Completed collections were admired by other children and provided a sense of superiority in the fandom. In addition to the tazos, I collected the trading cards of *Pokémon* and, *Yugioh!* and engaged in the card games with my cousins, who were also fans (Appendix A.8). We created and participated in our own little tournaments to establish who the best from us all was. I still have all of these memorabilia kept safely, with no intention of throwing them away even though I no longer watch those particular shows. This illustrates the dedication to the collection of anime merchandise as a form of the accumulation of subcultural capital.



Chapter 3

Methodology

In order to research and re-present the practices of the South African otaku, I have chosen to conduct this research through qualitative research, also making use of autoethnography, semi-structured face-to-face interviews, a questionnaire (Appendix B.1), and participant observation (both at expos and over the Internet). This study was carried out from February 2012- July 2013, with the actual interviews taking place between September 2012- February 2013. The research was also conducted in the 3 main provinces of South Africa, namely: Durban, Johannesburg, and Cape Town. I also made use of the Internet and social networks, such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*, to track and observe the practices and activities, while also keeping myself updated on the latest gatherings of otakus.

In order to collect as much relevant and detailed data as possible, I chose to utilise face-to-face interviews and questionnaires. The participants chosen were mainly people that I already knew, due to my exposure to the anime fandom. The participants were, in most cases, very excited and happy when they discovered that my research was based on anime, and this information made them even more compliant. I initially compiled a list of names of the people that I thought would be interested in answering my questions, and then proceeded to contact them to set up interview times and dates. From a total of eighteen prospective participants, only fourteen agreed to answer my questions, and even then, some of the respondents expressed worry that they would not be able to adequately answer the questions posed.

There were four respondents who were able to meet me and be interviewed, while the other ten participants asked to be emailed the questionnaire, so that they could answer when they had the time. Out of this number only six people answered the questionnaire and emailed it back to me. The others apologised and stated that they simply did not have the time or forgot about it. Out of the ten respondents, there were five females and five males. In addition to this, I created a questionnaire (Appendix B.2) especially for the card duelling³¹ aspect of the fandom, and forwarded this to Prevasin, who is a dueller, judge, and organiser of these events. Due to the fact that anime is not aimed at a particular gender or race group, it was simple to ensure that diversity amongst the participants was catered for. The participants were varied as most of them were either university students or salaried workers (18-30 years of age). I attempted to speak to as many people as I could, from as different backgrounds as possible. This was made infinitely simpler thanks to my insider status. I also chose participants that varied in terms of their otaku status. There were some participants who claimed to be casual anime fans, who only participated in watching particular anime series, and then there were the more hardcore otaku, who not only watched series but also engaged in the purchasing of merchandise, attending of conventions and expos, cosplaying, the reading of manga, and also increasing their anime knowledge. This selection was done so as to ensure that there was a variety of anime fans to speak to, and in doing so, expanding the scope and depth of the research.

31 Card Duelling refers to the game (based on popular anime and gaming series) that fans play using a deck of cards and consists of complicated rules.

In addition to speaking to otaku, I engaged self-reflexivity in order to gain more in-depth data. While self-reflexivity is tricky to utilise in research, especially when the researcher is as close to their topic as I am, I found that by answering the interview questions myself, I was forced to examine the actual depth of my fandom. Not only did it provide substantial data to work with, it also illuminated some of my personal preferences, and expectations. Self-reflexivity involves an awareness of oneself as a subject and researcher, and I found this technique to be greatly helpful, particularly because I was both a researcher and an insider fan. By making yourself part of the research, you are exposing your own opinions (biases) instead of hiding behind the cloak of researcher objectivity, which essentially denies the fact that the researcher herself affects the data gathered and analysed and the conclusions reached. At the same time, by being self-reflexive you can also contain your biases and in this light, I found self-reflexivity to be extremely illuminating to my study of the practices of the South African otaku.

Qualitative Ethnography

This thesis is a qualitative ethnographic study into the lives and practices of anime fans in South Africa. This chapter will explain the range of methods that I have utilised in conducting my research, as well as drawing attention to the ways I put them into practice. Qualitative research:

consists of a set of interpretive, and material practices that make the world visible... qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln 2005: 3).

For research to make ‘the world visible,’ it is required to focus on the ‘lived experience’ of people, that is the ways in which they experience the world and themselves, and how they construct meanings to give sense to their lives. What is important is not some objective reality discoverable by the anthropologist as scientist, but the validity of a culture’s *self-understanding*, its peculiar *subjective* understanding of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Flick et.al, 2004; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). What is therefore important is to try and capture the ‘native’s point of view’ in a naturalistic setting (Bryman, 2001). In my Theory chapter, I drew attention to how both the Chicago School and the CCCS rejected the idea that ordinary human beings were merely passive playthings of larger dominant structures and discourses; on the contrary, ordinary people actively fabricated worlds and webs of meaning through their interactions. The qualitative and interpretive research methodology being used here is resonant with this theoretical position, as it similarly recognises this quotidian symbolic inventiveness, and therefore seeks to investigate anime fans “from the perspective of the meanings members of that society attach to their social world” (Bryman, 2001: 10-11), in the naturalistic social context of the ‘lived experience’ of the fans in their everyday subcultural lives. Anime fans *construct* and sustain subcultural worlds around Japanese animated television texts.

The focus of the research is intensive rather than extensive, the rich “in-depth study” (Hammersly & Atkinson, 2007: 3) of a few individuals and the cultural world they inhabit, and to that extent, as I discuss below, the most amenable research tools to gather qualitative data were participant observation and semi-structured interviews.

Insider/Outsider?

One of the key aspects of ethnography is that the researchers will immerse themselves in the world of the participants in order to obtain descriptive data concerning their cultural practices and beliefs (Bryman, 2001; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). By inserting themselves into the cultural fabric of those that they are studying, ethnographers effectively become (at least) partial insiders and partial outsiders (Bryman, 2001). As previously stated, I am an otaku, and have therefore already attained insider status within the subculture. The challenge I faced was the opposite of a researcher investigating another culture, in that I had to become a partial outsider, and somewhat extract myself from the fandom, in order to take on the subject-position of the academic researcher.

Ethnographic researchers also tend to focus on the personal and emotional aspects of the individual and the community and therefore there is the argument that the ethnographer should have some kind of insider status with the group that they are researching, in order to obtain the trust of the participants (Hodkinson, 2002). I agree with this as I found it easier to approach and speak to otaku due to my insider status. The participants of my study found it easier to trust me and reveal their actual ideas and thoughts about the fandom because of the fact that I am one of them. The participants that I did not personally know were initially very apprehensive to speak to me when told that I was doing my dissertation on anime, but once I began speaking about my own love for anime, they relaxed and opened up, which eventually resulted in the forging of friendships.

Having insider status also provides the researcher with understanding of the community and the ability to recognise what questions would be deemed appropriate to ask. Again, having already achieved insider status, it was quite simple for me to formulate a set of questions that I knew would not only aid in shedding light on the anime subcultural scene in South Africa, but would also not offend my participants and incite them to answer as fully as possible.

It is understood by many scholars that the ethnographer must maintain some distance from the community in order to accurately portray the research findings to the outside academic world (hence being a partial outsider); however, it has been argued by numerous theorists (Davies, 1999; Fetterman, 2010; Saukko, 2003) that this idea of distance and impartiality is impossible. As an ethnographer, the researcher must enter the field with a basic framework of theory, methodology, research questions to be answered, data collection techniques and tools for data analysis. This will obviously bring into the research the personal biases of the researcher without him/her even realising it. As stated above, my insider status proved to be useful in organising my work and questions but also illustrates the above point that research can never be completely objective. My previous interactions within the subculture influenced the sort of questions and theories that I employed, as well as the participants that I chose for the study.

In addition, ethnographers are known for entering their field of study with an open mind; however as with most (if not all) people, the ethnographer has preconceived notions about the field and the participants (Fetterman, 2010). As an otaku myself, the choice to study the fandom from an academic point of view was a natural one, though, I was highly aware of the sturdy presence that I

would undoubtedly have throughout the research. While this level of personal involvement may cause a bias within the study, it did make the choice of the participants, the questions, and data collection techniques easier, since I had already known what kind of questions to ask and how many participants I would need to interview. There is however the problem of “over-identification”, where the ethnographer identifies strongly with a group or person, and tends to overlook critically analysing their actions and beliefs (Gray, 2003). This tendency to romanticise one’s own subculture is something I became acutely aware of, the solution being to affirm one’s identity as a critical and self-reflexive researcher.

Ethnographers also develop a relationship with the participants through their various interactions which become the “bases of subsequent theorizing and conclusions...thus ethnographers help to construct the observations that become their data” (Davies, 1999: 5). If ethnographers are not careful, the study can become absorbed in their personal perspectives and the boundaries between the subject and object of study become blurred and can result in the destruction of the social research. However, ethnographers must make use of all standpoints available to them in order to make the research as whole as possible (Davies, 1999). By already being an otaku I was greatly advantaged in my search for willing participants, and the interview process was much easier considering there was already a relationship established between six of the ten participants, and myself. This study is a mix of both the views of the participants and myself, and this was done so as to obtain as wide of a view as possible on the anime subculture in South Africa.

Whereas previously, researchers looked at biases as being detrimental to the research, Fetterman (2010) claims that if a bias is controlled it can aid the researcher in limiting his/her research effort, or alternatively, if the bias is uncontrolled then it can severely undermine the quality of the research. As Fetterman goes on to say:

To mitigate the negative effects of bias, the ethnographer must first make specific biases explicit. A series of additional quality controls, such as triangulation, contextualization, and a nonjudgmental orientation, place a check on the negative influence of bias (2010: 1).

My research is limited by the fact that when I say South Africa, I am referring to the three main provinces of the country namely: Durban, Johannesburg, and Cape Town, as these are the places with the most amount of anime-related activities and (to my knowledge) contain the higher number of otaku in the country. That aside, my research is also limited by the fact that this is a Masters thesis and consequently does not provide me with enough space to conduct a vast number of interviews and I must therefore settle for interviewing only ten people. This obviously means that the research data is quite limited, as the number of otaku in the country is quite high and I may not accurately portray the fandom in South Africa. This is why I have chosen to include self-reflexivity and participant observation in the study, as my experiences as an otaku will greatly aid in the portrayal of the fandom and so will the observation of hundreds of other fans at conventions and expos.

New Ethnographic Research

In social science research, objectivity has in the past been seen as an imperative factor; however scholars especially from the 1980s began questioning the ability of the researcher to truthfully explain the lived experiences of others. This is where the “new ethnography” steps in, as it is now our understanding that objective research is not possible (Saukko, 2003). There are two aims in shifting one’s perspective. The first is being able to identify the personal, social, and academic baggage of the ethnographer, the fact that like all human beings, the ethnographer is located within a specific set of discursive contexts that generate ‘ways of seeing’ which ensure that all ethnography is finally an *interpretation* of reality, rather than some divine access to the truth of things. To this extent, we can happily say that all ethnography is the story of an *encounter* between a researcher and the researched, and that creative specificity is all we can reasonably hope for. There are no last words in the social sciences.

Secondly, as we become aware of the limitations of our understandings, so will we be made more sensitive to other experiences and worlds (Saukko, 2003). Within my own research it is abundantly clear that my involvement in the subculture will no doubt have an impact on the research itself. Additionally there is the risk of favouritism when choosing participant responses for analysis as I personally know six of the participants. Due to my engagement in the fandom, I felt it would be easier to include my own voice in the research, both for additional information and in order to deal with the entire ‘objective/subjective’ debate through the inclusion of self-reflexivity.

The next characteristic feature of the new ethnography is the ability to understand the different forms of experiencing the world “such as emotions, embodiment, or the sacred”, which have usually been neglected by ethnographers who are more interested in rational and scientific inquiry (Saukko, 2003: 57). As such, new ethnography has founded new ways in which to study and write, which will aid the research in being truer to the more emotional aspects of the participants.

Home or Away?

It is important to note that some, earlier definitions of ethnography speak of studying *other* cultures (e.g. Marcus & Fischer, 1986); however this has changed over the last few decades as more scholars are now researching cultures that are close to home (spatially or culturally). While Bryman (2001) claims that gaining access to a group of participants for research purposes should take time and effort, this is usually not the case when the ethnographer is researching a culture that they are either close to, or a part of. In my case, gaining access to anime fans was as simple as picking up the phone, mainly because I am an otaku myself, and I therefore know many other fans and I was also fortunate enough to have a quite a few anime fans within my close circle of friends. In addition to agreeing to be interviewed for my research, these friends also introduced me to other fans that they knew of, and consequently expanded the number of respondents I had.

However, the downside to conducting research in one’s own subculture is that often the ethnographer will take information and knowledge for granted (Davies, 1999). The ethnographer may assume that all participants understand certain terms or slangs, or that they all have the same understandings and knowledge as the researcher. In order to combat this issue, it is important for the ethnographer

to remember that not all information should be taken for granted, especially when embarking on data collection and the writing up of the actual research. I had a similar problem when I mentioned the term 'otaku' as there were some respondents who were unsure what it meant exactly. During the interviews I had to remember to explain clearly what otaku meant in terms of my research, in order for the participants to answer the questions I posed.

It is very fortunate that I am a member of the South African anime subculture, as it has provided me with an (almost daily) interaction with otaku beginning in late 2009. In anthropological terms, it would mean that I have spent, roughly, three-and-a-half years within this subculture, and as a result, I had a wealth of information and contacts to reach out to when conducting this research. As a researcher, this is extremely beneficial as it has afforded me a great amount of information, which will undoubtedly aid me in providing a full, well-rounded and vivacious account of the otaku in South Africa.

Me, Myself, and I: Auto-ethnography and Self-Reflexivity

In recent years, a new postmodern form of ethnography has emerged amidst great controversy: autoethnography. According to Ellis and Ellingson, autoethnography is:

[R]esearch, writing, story, and method that connects the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political...It is the study of a culture of which one is a part, integrated with one's relational and inward experiences. The author incorporates the "I" into research and writing, yet analyzes self as if studying an "other" (2008: 48).

It is therefore not the same as autobiography (with which it otherwise shares much) because it deliberately 'places the self within a *social context*' (Reed-Danahay 1997: 9 (my emphasis)): the self that writes does so as part of a larger culture, and so as to understand that culture. It is therefore not at all narcissistic. This thesis is not an autoethnography, but it does draw on autoethnography as one rather important source for data on the anime fan subculture. I have foregrounded my own membership of this community, and have also spoken about my feelings and beliefs about the subculture and the fans and this is where the use of self-reflexivity comes into play.

One of the most outstanding features of any ethnography is the use of self-reflexivity within the study. Bloor & Wood define self-reflexivity as: "an awareness of the self in the situation of action and of the role of the self in constructing that situation" (2006: 145). The researcher must be a self-reflexive researcher, always sensitive to his or her preconceptions and prejudices and world-views that may be colouring the research. There is no such thing as an 'objective' researcher: as we saw earlier, all interpretations are from particular positions, and so this must be overtly acknowledged in the research.

With reflexivity, the ethnographer is reflecting on what they are doing at every stage of the research, (Gray, 2003). My research contains self-reflexivity, and this is very important to know because quite a bit of the thesis is about my own experiences with anime. Being an otaku means that I am very biased towards anime and other otaku as well; however, as a researcher I have to be able to analyse the responses of the participants in relation to the themes that I have set out. By comparing

the experiences of other otaku to that of my own, I am able to better understand how and why anime is so popular in South Africa, and what draws people (like myself) to it. By comparing the subcultural practices and experiences of South African otaku to that of fans overseas, I am able to gain insight into how similar and different the subcultures are all over the world, and also where the South African anime scene stands in comparison to other countries. I have to also be aware of my own limitations, in order to understand how the diverse cultures of South Africa affect the otaku practices that occur all over the country.

In older research, self-reflexivity was seen as a way to undo the bias of the researcher; however, new ethnography argues that there can be no objective state in research and therefore self-reflexivity is now seen as an important tool for researchers. Self-reflexivity can be used “to enhance awareness of our situatedness and, subsequently, to be more receptive to perspectives that approach the world from a different position” (Saukko, 2003: 62).

Reliability and Validity

Ethnographic studies and more especially, participant observation have come under scrutiny in their ability to satisfy the two main criteria of research, namely: reliability and validity (Bloor & Wood, 2006; Davies, 1999). Reliability “is concerned with whether another researcher under the same circumstances would make the same observations leading to the same set of conclusions” (Davies, 1999: 84). Reliability also refers to whether the ethnographer has double-checked facts, information, and the interpretations of answers. I however, agree with Davies that “given the inherently high reflexivity of ethnographic fieldwork, it is important to begin by recognizing that no ethnographic study is repeatable, either by another ethnographer or even by the same ethnographer at another time” (1999: 87). While there can be no definite repetition of research findings, there will most definitely be an overlap in some of the findings, and where there are differences, the different ethnographers will then proceed to interpret and analyse their data reflexively to provide answers (Davies, 1999). I certainly do not expect any other scholar to exactly duplicate my research findings as each academic will attempt to answer different research questions and use various other theories and methods.

With this in mind, it is also important to remember that not all of the participants will share the same views, and different communities (of similar nature to those being studied) will have different beliefs and expectations. That being said, it is safe to assume that most social research will not yield the exact same results as others of a similar nature. I will stop here to make note again that (to my knowledge and that of my colleagues and supervisor) the study of the anime fandom in South Africa has not yet been covered, and therefore the results of my research cannot be referenced against a similar study done in the country. I have, however, attempted to compare my research to those of a similar nature, done abroad, because there is no research in South Africa that I could have used as a reference and more importantly, in order to provide a more holistic study of the anime fandom.

Validity on the other hand, refers to whether the findings are truthful or correct. Here I rely heavily on the recent work of Saukko (2003) who, fully in the spirit of the new ethnography, encourages us

to rely upon what she calls 'dialogic validity'. Dialogic validity "evaluates research in terms of how truthfully it captures the lived worlds of the people being studied" (2003: 20). She further breaks this principle down into three specific areas to ensure validity: truthfulness, self-reflexivity, and polyvocality.

Truthfulness refers to the researcher doing justice to the people that he/she is researching (so that overall, the people can agree with the results of the research) by granting the participants a chance to voice their opinions on how they are being studied and represented in the research. Self-reflexivity refers to the fact that researchers should be aware (and should make readers aware) of their "personal, social, and paradigmatic discourses that guide the way they perceive reality and other people" (2003: 20). Polyvocality means that scholars should be careful to understand that they are studying many living realities, and not just one, and this means that they need to include the opinions of a range of stakeholders in the community in order to remain true to the diversity, relations, and tensions that exist within any society. For Saukko these strategies are not designed to capture any spurious objectivity: "[t]he main criteria of validity of this approach then is how well the researcher fulfils the ethical imperative to be true to, and to respect, other people's lived worlds and realities" (2003: 20). Interestingly, Saukko takes a rather dim view of 'triangulation', the much encouraged use of a variety of methods to reach a truthful depiction, as the idea behind its promotion is that a single truth will be realised. For Saukko and indeed this thesis, the quest for objectivity is neither possible nor interesting.

Methods and Techniques

Fieldwork and Access

Generally speaking, the greater the openness of the society being studied, the easier it is to gain access (Bloor & Wood, 2006). Access is not a once-off meeting, but rather occurs throughout the many stages of research, therefore it is important to keep in contact with participants as access not only refers to getting into a society or subculture, but also getting along with the participants (Burgess, 1991). This was particularly easy for me, as I am already friends with many of my participants, and in other cases, I used the social networking sites such as *Facebook* and *Twitter* to keep in touch with them.

Once access to the subculture is gained then the fieldwork can begin. Fieldwork consists of the ethnographer working with people in their natural setting for an extended period of time (Fetterman, 2010). This is an important method as it allows the researcher to observe people and their behaviours and experiences in their own settings, devoid of outside interference and problems (which usually occurs in artificial settings like labs). Fieldwork offers the ethnographer the opportunity to utilise their common sense, subsequently allowing them to better make sense of the data collected (Fetterman, 2010). I embarked on fieldwork throughout the duration of the two years that were allocated for the completion of this thesis. Once the aims of the research were decided upon, I immediately began making plans of where I could go and with whom I could speak in order to gather required data. I attended the *rAge Expo* in 2012, and conducted a few interviews

while at the expo, however the main interviews only occurred in 2013. By interacting with fans at *rAge*, I was able to communicate with them in a space that they were comfortable in, and therefore provided them with the freedom to be open about their fandom and practices.

Selection and Sampling

Selection and sampling refer to the procedures utilised in choosing relevant data sources, and qualitative inquiry utilises non-probability sampling methods (Mason, 2002). The sample/s that the researcher chooses should be able to provide an adequate amount of information and insight into the culture being studied.

In relation to sampling individuals or groups of people, it is important to choose certain people who feature certain aspects of a particular culture. This form of sampling is not intended to be a statistical representation of the population, but rather certain characteristics of the selected culture are used for in-depth studies (Mason, 2002). This means that while the research samples are smaller in number as opposed to quantitative studies, the data provided by the participants is rich in detail. I first chose participants that were heavily engaged in the anime fandom, and then worked my way down to the more casual fans. I did this so that I could gain as much information as I could about the fans and their practices, and vary the study's participants as much as possible. However, the problem with this is that there can be quite a few repetitions in the data (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003).

In terms of selecting media texts and events, it is imperative to choose texts that provide data that can directly aid the research (Mason, 2002). This was simple for my research because the event that I chose to cover was the *rAge Expo*, knowing full-well that the event would afford me with the chance to meet other otaku and investigate the merchandise being sold there. The texts that I chose to use in my research were pictures and documents from *Facebook* that illustrated the anime fandom.

Purposive Sampling

The selection of participants in purposive sampling is based on particular criteria, and these characteristics allow for the maximum amount of information to be gathered (Mason, 2002; Patton, 2002). Participants are 'purposively' chosen according to their ability to provide you with abundant information and experiences about the object of your research. (Mason, 2002). Fetterman (2010) interestingly refers to this as 'judgement sampling', where the ethnographer relies on his/her judgement to select participants for study. The ethnographer should attempt to make the sample as diverse as possible. By choosing participants in this manner, the ethnographer can ensure that all key constituencies of relevance are covered, while also ensuring that a range of views are captured (Mason, 2002).

Ethnographers must mingle with as many people as they can at first, and I was no exception. The initial participants of my study included my immediate circle of friends from university; however I also communicated with various other people via social networks in order to gain as many otaku contacts as possible, while also diversifying the kind of participants I used in my study. When the

time arrived for me to conduct interviews and collect data through a questionnaire, it was highly useful to have as many otaku contacts as I did. I emailed the questionnaire to those contacts with whom I could not meet personally, and out of the ten emails that I sent, only six participants emailed back in time for the analysis part of my research to begin.

In most ethnographic studies, the focus of the study narrows as the research continues and soon begins to focus on specific individuals of the target population. However due to my limited access to other otaku, the individuals that I interacted with were the ones that I chose to interview. It is again noted here that the anime fandom in South Africa is still young, and has a much smaller number of fans in the subculture as opposed to other countries. Most ethnographers begin their fieldwork whenever it is most suitable for them, and I did the same, beginning my fieldwork by attending the *rAge Expo* in October 2012, while I was still writing up my theory chapter. It was also around this time that I contacted most of the people that I had interacted with at the expo with a preliminary set of questions for them to answer. It was amazing how excited other otaku became when they learnt that my thesis focused on anime, and their enthusiasm allowed us to converse freely and provided them with the comfort to give me their email addresses. Sadly however, from all the people I met with at the expo, only one person responded to my initial email, and fortunately, still keeps in contact with me.

Snowball sampling

This refers to asking participants if they can refer the researcher to other possible participants. Initially I only relied on the otaku that I knew personally, however these participants pointed me in the direction of other otaku who would be interested in answering questions about their fandom. In some instances, the participants asked if they could forward the questionnaire to friends, while in other cases, they just forwarded it on their own. Naturally I was pleasantly surprised when I received emails from people that I did not know, who had answered the questionnaire, and they stated that they had been forwarded the email from one of my participants.

One of the most important things for an ethnographer, is to be introduced into the community by a member, so that the community does not immediately shun you and/or your research. As noted by Hodkinson (2002), members of a subculture are very wary of outsiders and will therefore avoid and discriminate against you. In Hodkinson's (2002) case, he was already a member of the goth subculture and this made his research much easier as the other members felt more comfortable around him. It was the same for me, as I am an avid otaku already, so I know many other otaku, and because I am a part of the fandom, they consequently trust me and trust that I will represent the subculture accurately in my study. This trust allowed me to collect valuable data with ease, and the insider status provided me with prime opportunities to attend and successfully mingle with other fans. In addition to that, by being an insider, I am able to provide the reader with a more accurate portrayal of the fandom; however, this may sometimes border on my personal biases and involvement with the group. This is indeed difficult to remedy and as such, the only thing I could do to resolve this issue, was to keep an open mind when I interviewed people and analysed the data collected.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is considered the more archetypal form of research utilised by ethnographers; however it is more of a research strategy which employs a variety of data collection methods in its use (Davies, 1999). Participant observation is a central technique for ethnography and subsequently characterises a majority of ethnographic fieldwork (Fetterman, 2010). In the most classic form, participant observation consists of the researcher living within the community that he/she is studying, learning from and about their culture, becoming an insider in order to provide a well-structured study. It “combines participation in the lives of the people under study with maintenance of a professional distance that allows adequate observation and recording of data” (Fetterman, 2010). Participant observation permits the ethnographer to go beyond what is being said and described by the participants and provides a ‘descriptive context’ to the research, allowing the ethnographer to effectively set up the scene of the culture for the reader (Gray, 2003). It can therefore be explained as the careful observation of the lives and practices of a particular community and/or culture, with active participation in daily routines and activities by the researcher which is then explained from the ‘native’s’ point of view in the ethnography (Tedlock, 2005).

It is imperative to understand that participant observation requires the researcher to *immerse* him/herself into the culture that they are studying, but I was fortunate that I was already a member of the subculture that I was going to study, and that my research interest in this subculture did not require me to travel to a distant location and live in an unfamiliar culture. My immersion in the anime subculture of South Africa began years ago, and this was highly beneficial to my research.

It is considered more beneficial for an ethnographer to spend anywhere between 6 months- 2 years being immersed in the culture that they are studying, as it is considered to wield better results and information (Hammersly & Atkinson, 2007; Tedlock, 2005). With observation, the researcher partakes in local activities, from which they gain the trust of the members of the community. With this trust, the researcher also gains key informants, who will advise the ethnographer on who to talk to in the community and what activities to observe, as it is practically impossible to speak to everyone and observe everything during a research period (Davies, 1999). These key informants will also provide the ethnographer with other useful information on the society, which would not normally be told to outsiders. In addition to observing, the ethnographer will also engage in semi-structured interviews, take photographs, and collect various life histories (Davies, 1999).

However this amount of time cannot always be spent immersed in a culture because there are usually financial constraints and the researcher must therefore restrict his/her time living within the culture. One of the good things about studying a subculture that I am already a part of, and that can occur anywhere, is that I was not bound by financial restraints. While I did require money to travel to Johannesburg for the *rAge Expo*, I was already surrounded by otaku and being one myself, allowed me to gain information about the subculture and the other otaku with general ease.

Fetterman sums up participant observation:

It begins with a panoramic view of the community, closes in to a microscopic focus on details, and then pans out to the larger picture again—but this time with new insight into minute details. The focus narrows and broadens repeatedly as the fieldworker searches

for breadth and depth of observation (2010: 39-40).

Fieldnotes are used by the ethnographer to record pieces of information during their actual time on the field. Fieldnotes should be written during or immediately after the events which they describe in order to maintain as accurate information as possible (Bloor & Wood, 2006). This was something I did after attending the *rAge Expo* last year because while I was at the expo, I did not have adequate time to jot down everything I saw and experienced without missing out on something else that was just as important. I carried a pen and small notepad to record names and email addresses of people who were interested in being interviewed by me. Once I got back to the flat that I was staying in, I immediately began making notes on everything that I had seen, all the people that I had interacted with, and all of my personal thoughts and experiences. While writing down points is important in research, it is impossible to write down everything that someone says, especially in an interview. This is where other, more technological tools such as video cameras and various types of sound/voice recorders come into use for the researcher.

Other methods of data collection such as interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, and case studies will inevitably complement the ethnographer's fieldnotes (Gray, 2003; Luders, 2004). Participant observation is a means of research that facilitates conversation between the ethnographer and the participant, and allows the researcher to better understand the reasoning behind certain actions and beliefs, which would otherwise be lost. Participant observation and interviews can greatly complement each other in research. The experience gained from being an observer can aid the researcher in better interpreting the answers provided during the interviews. Answers provided in interviews can also cause the ethnographer to view things differently in the field, during observations (Hammersly & Atkinson, 2007).

In addition to observing anime fans at the *rAge Expo*, I also engaged in observation of otaku practices and activities through my participants' *Facebook* and *Twitter* pages, and through other local websites such as *Genkishen UCT*, and *Animated Meanderings*. I also followed South African anime pages on *Facebook* and used these pages as a means of observing the activities and interactions of the fans.

Interviewing

Another method for conducting ethnographic research is the process of interviewing, which plays an important role in any research, especially those that utilise participant observation (Hopf, 2004). Interviews refer to asking a participant a set of questions in the hope of obtaining research data (Bloor & Wood, 2006). While there are numerous types of interviews, I shall only focus on those that I have utilised to carry out my data collection; which were semi-structured interviews. While participant observation looks at the subculture and their practices through direct involvement, interviewing allows the researcher to put into context what he/she has seen and heard (Fetterman, 2010; Hopf, 2004). An important aspect of any form of methodology is that the researcher is able to contextualise the responses provided (Davies, 1999). The ethnographer should go into an interview with an understanding of the social, cultural, and economical contexts of the respondent and the society that they are researching in order to understand the participant better. In addition it is important to gain the trust of the participant in order to be able to obtain worthwhile answers from

him/her. This requires the researcher to spend time with the participant before the actual questioning occurs, and in many cases also requires that the researcher divulges information about him/herself in order to win this trust. The participants are more likely to answer freely and more honestly if they have trust in the researcher, and are also more inclined to pass on additional information such as other people to speak to and events that the researcher can attend for observational purposes (Fetterman, 2010).

Interviews that are carried out by researchers, who have utilised participant observation, will in all likelihood use semi-structured interviews, which would occur as a free-flowing, open-ended informal conversation guided by a limited range of key topics (that will later emerge as themes in one's analysis) (Davies, 1999). During the semi-structured interview, the ethnographer must keep the interview on track by utilising a set of questions, which will elicit a very broad and in-depth response from the participant. In order to gain uninfluenced answers from the participants, it is important for the researcher to maintain a level of detachedness from the interview (Davies, 1999). This was most difficult for me because I interviewed people that I personally knew from years ago, and the inclination to begin the "which anime is better" debates were strong. However, with the questions placed in front of me, I remembered the reason behind the interview, and kept my opinions to myself, and proceeded to sustain a very enlightening conversation

Open-ended or close-ended questions

I decided to use both open-ended and close-ended questions during the interviews as the purpose of utilising open-ended questions is to elicit as much information from the participant as possible by allowing them to interpret the questions as they wish. Questions such as "Can you please give me your own definition of anime and explain why you say this?" and "Would you consider your level of anime fandom to be that of an otaku? Please explain" allow for the participant to answer as freely as they wish. While open-ended questions allow for the participants to interpret the questions as they wish and answer accordingly, "[c]losed-ended questions are useful in trying to quantify behaviour patterns" (Fetterman, 2010: 46). Questions such as "How much of anime do you watch per day/week?" and "Would you make arrangements to specially attend an anime expo or convention if there was one to be held in your city? Would you join an anime club if they were available to you?" are useful questions to ask because they identify certain behavioural patterns of the individual otaku. Closed-ended questions also allow for the researcher to ask questions that are imperative to their research and to keep the interview on track. Open-ended questions are typically asked "during discovery phases of their research and more closed-ended questions during conformational periods" (Fetterman, 2010: 46). Stand-alone questions such as "do you watch anime?" or "are you an otaku?" are to be avoided in any interview as this type of question is not useful and far too vague, while also eliciting one-worded answers from the respondents.

Interview Protocols and Strategies

As Fetterman states "[a] protocol exists for all interviews" (2010: 46) of which the first element is respect. It is vitally important to show the participants personal respect as they are taking time out of their lives to answer your questions, which is why I profusely thanked all my participants after the interview was over. In addition, I was extremely respectful towards the participants during the

interview by not making any derogatory remarks or offending them in any way. Fetterman sums it up perfectly by saying “the interview is not an excuse to interrogate an individual or criticize cultural practices. It is an opportunity to learn from the interviewee” (2010: 47). It is also highly imperative to respect the wishes of the participants, for example, if they ask to remain anonymous, or if they ask for the tape-recorder to be switched off for certain parts of the interview (Gray, 2003).

Interviews can be conducted through informal interviews, and these conversations can occur in participant observation during the course of other activities, and can be highly enlightening because the participant is comfortable and willing to engage in the conversation. It is through this kind of informal conversations that I have learnt much of what makes an otaku tick. Aside from my own opinions, I have also made assumptions in this research based on what I learnt both from participants and non-participants through informal conversations (by hanging out together, or from people I met at the *rAge Expo*). The time and place where the interview takes place is also highly important. A well-chosen space can relax the respondent and make them feel more comfortable and open to answering in-depth questions. The location of the interview is important and should be on neutral grounds so that both the researcher and the participant feel comfortable. By choosing a neutral place to conduct the interview, like a park or local coffee-shop, both parties will be more comfortable to engage in an interview.

During most of the face-to-face interviews, I had to give the participants time to think of answers, and in order to make them feel more at ease and not rushed, I informed them at the beginning that they could take as much time as they needed. I also did not stare at them while they were thinking as this would have made them feel rushed and/or uncomfortable. As a researcher it is imperative “not to routinely jump in and clarify a question whenever silence falls. The best approach is to let the participant think about the question and digest it for a while before responding” (Fetterman, 2010: 49). Due to this, I chose fairly open areas such as a park and outside a computer LAN at university to conduct some of the interviews. In these areas, the participants felt more at ease, and it provided me with places to gaze at while waiting for some responses. In addition, these open areas made the interview feel more like a conversation between two enthusiastic anime fans. By turning the interview into a natural-flowing conversation, the respondents are able to comfortably answer the questions and speak openly about themselves (Gray, 2003).

Questionnaire

Questionnaires are similar to structured interviews because they “represent perhaps the most formal and rigid form of exchange in the interviewing spectrum” (Fetterman, 2010: 56). As similar as questionnaires are to interviews, the main difference is the distance between the ethnographer and participants, and they are therefore impersonal due to this lack of interactivity. The participants fill in the questionnaire in their own time, usually away from the ethnographer, and if the participant has any misunderstanding about any of the questions, there is no clarification due to the distance between the two (Fetterman, 2010). Due to this there are many misunderstandings and misrepresentations when using questionnaires, as many people prefer to idealise themselves on paper and the ethnographer has “no interpersonal cues to guide the interpretation of responses” (Fetterman, 2010: 56). Another problem with questionnaires is that there are often poor return rates

because people tend to place the questionnaire aside to answer later and in most cases they forget about it entirely. In the case of my study, many of my participants told me that it would be easier to answer the questions via email, which I complied with and forwarded them the questionnaire and informed consent form. I drew up a questionnaire that was almost identical to the set of interview questions I had (Appendix B.1). Once a participant told me (through social networks) that they would be able to better answer the questions if I sent them an email, I forwarded them the questionnaire and asked them to answer and send it back as soon as they could. There were participants that answered in great detail and were also kind enough to sign, scan, and email me the consent form. However, one of the downfalls of sending participants a questionnaire is the fact that some of the participants will either forget to answer it, or will answer it lazily, providing one-word answers.

I emailed the questionnaire to a number of participants; though the number of people who returned their answers to me was significantly lower than anticipated. However, I was surprised to discover that numerous participants actually forwarded the questionnaire to other anime fans that they were friends with or knew personally, and I received responses from those participants. Emailing participants was also a great way to speak to people that lived in other provinces and that I could not personally later meet and interview during the course of my study.

Questionnaires prove to be useful and efficient in gathering data on a large group of people in a limited time frame. Fetterman (2010) believes that questionnaires are a generally weak way to collect data; however, I disagree because it granted me the opportunity to reach more people from the comfort of my home (due to financial constraints). I found that most of the respondents provided in-depth answers, and in following conversations, stated that they thoroughly enjoyed the chance to answer questions about their anime fandom, which they rarely, if ever, got to do. Two of the respondents were intimidated by the questions and claimed that they were not as big of fans as others and felt that they would do the questionnaire injustice due to their lack of subcultural capital. In following emails, I assured those participants that the questionnaire required their opinions and was not about anime facts and that any information that they provided me with, would be useful in my research. In addition to these questionnaires, I analysed a variety of documents as well, which proved to contain much-needed information.

Documents

Documents can provide a plethora of information regarding the setting of the study, or organisations and key figures involved in the culture in question. Informal documents can refer to personal diaries, blog posts, *Facebook* statuses and wallposts, tweets, and even fan fiction. While these informal documents are good for referencing information, they are also unreliable as they are often written by the individual, who would want others to see them in a favourable light. However, as biased as these informal documents may be, they are useful in highlighting social relationships and provide a better understanding of the participant and, in this case, the extent of their fandom. Being friends with a majority of the participants has given me access to their *Facebook* and *Twitter* pages, and has allowed me to witness the extent of their fandom. With their permission, I have illustrated their anime fandom in the Findings and Analysis chapter by referring to their social networking.

Artefacts

Material artefacts also play a key role in the study of the social, especially subcultures. Ethnographies based on everyday lives “demands attention to [the] material features and how social actors engage with physical things” (Hammersly & Atkinson, 2007: 134). It is important in my study to give some attention to the impact that subcultural artefacts have had on both the fan, and the subculture as a whole. Merchandise plays an important role in the lives of fans, providing them with a form of subcultural capital. Another important aspect of artefacts is that they “embody their owners’ memories” (Hammersly & Atkinson, 2007: 136). Personally speaking, I have a memory attached to most of my anime merchandise, each one representing perhaps a struggle to obtain it, or the indecision of which keychain to choose, or remembering with fondness when friends and family purchased special anime goods as presents for me.

Artefacts also extend to visual culture: the creation of (in this case) anime-related visuals such as cars designed with anime characters on the hoods and windows, or as in Japan, trains and buses decorated with highly popular anime characters. There are even specialised retail stores in Japan that focus solely on one particular anime for e.g. there is a store in Japan that sells exclusively *Naruto* merchandise. What we do have in South Africa though, is the creation of anime t-shirts, as one of my participants showed me: he received a gift from a friend, which was a black t-shirt, upon which she had printed the characters from his favourite anime show, *One Piece* (Appendix A.9). As Hammersly & Atkinson point out, “[e]thnographic research needs to pay close and serious attention to the material goods and circumstances that are integral to the organization of everyday social life” (2007: 137). As such, I had asked the participants of my study to send me pictures of the anime merchandise (in addition to some of the questions posed) that they own so as to understand how the fandom affects their purchasing habits and life as a whole.

Data Analysis

After the data was gathered through interviews, participant observation, and questionnaires, I then subjected it to analysis, and this was done by arranging the material from the various types of interviews, my notes from the participant observation, and other documentation into a limited set of key themes (Yin 2011: 177-179). These themes were strongly guided by Hodkinson’s (2002) four characteristics of a subculture referred to in the Theory chapter. The data interpretation and analysis, draws on the limited range of themes that came through in the interview and questionnaire process. These key themes which came across in the collected data, have been put together in order to provide a comprehensive portrait of the anime fan subculture in South Africa.



Chapter 4

Findings and Analysis

In order to understand the nature of the anime subculture in South Africa it is helpful to analyse the findings according to Hodkinson's (2002) subcultural characteristics. These four characteristics (outlined in the Theory chapter) provide a framework within which I can interpret my research data gathered from interviews, questionnaires, observations and self-reflection (autoethnography). This data has therefore been categorised into each of the four characteristics, and, where necessary, broken down further into sub-categories, which are based on the themes that ran through the interview answers. However, it is important to note that some of the characteristics may overlap with one another and this cannot be avoided, a rather inevitable consequence of applying abstract theoretical concepts to real-world experience.

(1) Consistent distinctiveness

Hodkinson (2002) states that with consistent distinctiveness there exists a set of shared values and tastes that are unique to each subculture, but, within each subculture, there also exists an internal diversity. Members who wish to gain acceptance and popularity within the group, adhere to these shared values and tastes and, as they gain popularity, begin to diversify their tastes to become trendsetters. In order for this initial rise in popularity to occur, the members must invest in obtaining as much subcultural capital as possible. Subcultural capital is defined by Thornton (1995) as the cultural knowledge and commodities that a fan will acquire in order to raise their social status within the subculture, which also aids in distinguishing them from other group members.

(a) Acceptance

According to Hodkinson (2002) the first and most important step to becoming a subcultural member is acceptance. In order to gain popularity in any subculture, it is important for the members to be accepted into the group. This is how consistent distinctiveness works in a subculture. There are a set of rules and norms that members follow in order to be accepted into the group seamlessly. Within the anime subculture in South Africa, one of the norms of the group is to simply show great interest in any aspect of the anime fandom, be it card duelling, cosplaying, or even just watching shows. The three main anime shows that are extremely popular at the moment are *One Piece*, *Naruto*, and *Bleach*. A large number of fans begin their fandom by watching one of these anime (usually *Naruto* or *Bleach*); in my case it was *Bleach*. However, many more prominent otaku mocked me, saying that I was watching mediocre anime and then went on to suggest other, better series. People are not really considered fans if they watch only one show, and then expect to begin discussions with other more experienced fans. As my anime horizon began to grow, I began to accumulate more respect from those otaku and they began introducing me to other otaku, until I myself, was considered an insider. I have also received much (friendly) envy from these otaku (who could not make it) after attending the *rAge Expo* and purchasing as much anime merchandise as I could afford. I also purchased t-shirts, from which many other anime fans approached me and struck up conversation relating to the merchandise.

Acceptance into the anime subculture in South Africa is fairly easy to obtain as the fans are

very welcoming to noobs³². New anime fans are encouraged and ushered into the subculture by older otaku, as it is very rare and difficult to meet people who have an interest in anime in the country. In this manner, the fandom is sustained and is given the opportunity to grow. All of my participants shared the same notion, that the anime fandom was very welcoming to them when they initially expressed interest in it or joined. Many said that they were treated as one of the group upon expressing interest in anime, and were immediately provided with anime to watch, or recommendations from other fans:

Personally, I felt they were some of the friendliest people I was lucky enough to have met. At the end of the day we all share a common interest and it seemed as though they were really glad to see the community growing with a lot of new faces (Lavasen).

The data gathered suggests that a large number of otaku began their anime-watching days as young children, having been exposed to the dubbed versions of anime series such as *Dragonball Z*, *Pokémon*, and *YuGiOh!* on SABC and etv. However, as children, they did not realise that what they were watching was actually anime. It was only at university level, that the participants were introduced to subbed and uncut versions of anime. In all the interviews, the participants made mention of the three 'heavyweight' anime shows that initially got them hooked onto watching anime: *Bleach*, *Naruto*, and *One Piece*. These anime were always recommended to the newbie fans by other more seasoned otaku.

Anime first garnered my attention when I was in high school and exposed me to some of the mainstream fandoms, such as Dragonball Z, and YuGiOh!, shows that aired on South African television and were thus accessible. However, these shows were geared more towards younger audiences and failed to hold my attention as I matured. In college, I was for the first time exposed to some of the more popular series, it opened my eyes to the stories and themes that quality anime brought to the fore and developed a passion for it. Taking this into account, I have been a true fan for approximately five years now. My exposure was through friends who shared similar interests with me outside of anime and who believed I would enjoy it as much as they did (Nivriithi).

As can be seen from the above statement, a "true" fan is considered (by otaku) to be someone who has watched various different anime, has been a fan for numerous years, and who also enjoys anime in its full, unedited form (which is the subbed version). Otaku initially became fans due to the easy accessibility of the dubbed shows on SABC and etv, and this was propelled by the fandom at the university level. The privately owned channel, etv was one of the first channels to bring the extremely popular anime series, *Pokémon*, to the small screen. *Pokémon* went on to become one of the most popular anime series of that time, sparking a stock of a wide variety of merchandise and launching card tournaments. This was followed by SABC 2 airing the equally popular *Dragonball Z*, followed by *YuGiOh!*. These shows obtained a large fanbase amongst children (many of whom are still fans of these shows), and even some teenagers and adults. As a testament to the fandom, many fans I interviewed have still kept their merchandise and collectibles from almost a decade ago. This is important in terms of accumulating subcultural capital and thus gaining acceptance

³² Noob (short for newbie) is a colloquial term meaning that a fan is still new to a subculture or fandom i.e they are inexperienced.

into the subculture.

(b) Subcultural Capital

In order to be accepted as member of the anime subculture, it is important for fans to have a large store of knowledge about anime and the Japanese culture/language in general, or alternatively to own a large number of downloaded anime or DVDs, which they can lend to other fans, or merchandise which can be used to impress others. Knowledge of Japanese culture or the ability to understand and even speak the language will often greatly impress other otaku as it illustrates dedication to the culture from which anime was born. Whether the fans actively engage in the subculture or not does not negatively affect their social status; however, strong activism such as sharing anime information on social networks, starting *Facebook* groups, initiating gatherings, lending out anime to others and even just being able to recommend shows will greatly increase the social standing of the fan. It is not uncommon for otaku to have an impressive knowledge of their favourite shows and characters, some even going as far as learning the most obscure bits of trivia on their favourite characters and idols. These include learning about the mangaka³³, the seiyuu³⁴, downloading and listening to the soundtracks, and re-watching the anime in order to pick up interesting bits of information which they proceed to share with other otaku.

While the fan will never openly admit to placing importance on their subcultural capital, I have seen it happen and have experienced this sense of superiority myself. Veteran otaku will tend to look down on the noobs; especially when the new fans attempt to begin anime debates with their very limited knowledge. This superior attitude tends to be a characteristic of the younger otaku (under 21), as the older ones have a propensity to not really be bothered by younger, inexperienced fans, and will rather nurture these noobs in order to cultivate and sustain the fandom. When I initially joined the subculture I was overwhelmed by all the anime that is available, and it was thanks to my friends, who introduced me to proper Japanese anime, that I was able to watch good shows and improve my knowledge. My friends, who were already otaku, took me in and nurtured my interest in anime, by providing me with various anime series and including me in their discussions and debates. This usually occurs in the fandom when someone is introduced to anime by others. As with other subcultures, newer, younger fans will often turn to the older fans for guidance on what should be done in order to gain acceptance into the fandom. There is therefore a subcultural hierarchy of sorts that members will scale as they become more deeply involved in its practices. After a year of being an anime fan, I began to come into the title of otaku, not only due to my watching and purchasing habits, but also due to my increased knowledge. This cycle of mentor and student continually repeats itself in the fandom, as I am now an otaku, who welcomes and nurtures young anime fans, in the same manner that I was when I initially joined the subculture. This view is also shared by numerous other fans, as I discovered through casual conversations with other otaku and participants of this study, who felt that they were ushered into the fandom through the guidance of their friends. There are other cases where the participants of my study mentioned that

33 Mangaka is the Japanese word for comic artist, and is often used by Western otaku as opposed to its English counterpart.

34 Seiyuu is the Japanese term for someone who is a voice actor, i.e someone who lends their voice to certain characters, and in essence, brings the character to life.

they introduced a number of their friends to the subculture, and in some cases were successful in converting others into otaku.

Something that most otaku still have is their *Pokémon* merchandise, almost a decade after the show began airing on television. While *Pokémon* is still very popular worldwide, there has been a considerable fall in its popularity in the country. At its peak, *Pokémon* spawned the 'tazo' craze in South Africa, and the trading card game, which many South African anime fans still participate in. The tazos (which were found in packets of Simba chips) became a countrywide phenomenon when *Pokémon* was being aired. Naturally, as a huge fan of the anime, I collected as many of the tazos as I could, and still have that impressive collection to this day. (See image below.)



My personal collection of Pokémon tazos, which are all still in perfect condition almost 11 years later.

In addition to the tazos, I also collected the *Pokémon* trading cards, which I have kept in mint condition. These cards were also collected in order to play off against other players (see image below). At the time (almost 10 years ago) it was just as important to gain a high subcultural capital amongst other fans and players, as it is now, which necessitated obtaining as many tazos and cards as possible. Although I did not realise it at the time, I was investing a lot of time, money, and effort into becoming an important member of the subculture.



All the Pokémon cards that I own, with the rulebook, damage counter, and card catalogue.

As an otaku, I will never sell or throw away these collectibles. For otaku, it is very important to keep these items, out of sentimentality and to illustrate subcultural capital to other fans. Fans become really excited to see old anime merchandise still kept in good condition as it shows a love for a particular show. As can be seen from the screen capture of my personal *Facebook* page (see below), when I uploaded pictures of my *Pokémon* cards and *Dragonball Z* tazo collection, I got a very positive response from all of my friends, who also claim to still have their tazos and cards. In addition to *Pokémon*, Simba chips also had tazo collections for the variety of anime shows that were being aired at that time, namely *YuGiOh!* and *Dragonball Z*. All of the people that have commented of the *Facebook* post below are fellow otaku and therefore still have the anime merchandise that they purchased almost ten years ago. Zubher claims that kids these days “don’t know the joys of buying chips for the right reasons”, meaning that the main reason that we used to buy those packets of chips, was just so that we could get the tazos from inside and form complete collections. That is an example of our dedication to the fandom, even when we all were little children, until now, when we all are adults and still have those tazos kept safely.



A Facebook conversation surrounding the tazo and Pokémon card collection.

Having all of these old anime commodities does not however, ensure a much higher social standing within the anime fandom, mostly because the tazo collections were something that any child who watched these shows would be able to collect and keep. While still having these items are admirable, the real way to gain subcultural capital in the anime fandom in South Africa is to obtain proper merchandise of shows such as *Bleach*, *One Piece*, and *Naruto*. Proper merchandise refers to bags, t-shirts, badges, key chains, miniature swords, figurines, and even plush toys (refer to Appendix A).

All otaku that I have had contact with, including the participants of this study, have complained to me about how expensive anime merchandise is in South Africa. Since most fans are students, they often cannot afford to buy anime DVDs, manga books, or any other kind of merchandise.

The products available are also very limited and there is hardly any variety. It is due to this that many fans engage in piracy and download anime from the Internet, and/or share what series they have with other otaku. It is also the reason that fans usually do not have anime merchandise, and when otaku meet other otaku that do have goods, they are both very impressed and envious. Fans are usually strongly attracted to anime products on sale in stores and will spend what they can to obtain it, even if they have not watched that particular series, or know who the characters are. I purchased a hooded jacket from the clothing store Hang Ten in 2011 just because it had a variety of female anime characters printed all over it, despite not knowing who any of these characters were.



The Hang Ten hoodie that I purchased, merely because it was brandished with anime characters.



A One Piece bag that I purchased at the rAge Expo in 2012.

While it is fun to have anime merchandise, it is not the only – nor most important – thing to have as a member of a subculture. Subcultural capital is often built on the knowledge that the fan can demonstrate to others. One of the questions that I posed to the participants of my study was whether or not it was important to them to have more anime knowledge and/or merchandise than their fellow otaku. I found that the answers were almost evenly shared between, yes and no. Three of the participants said that it was not important to them, and offered no explanation, while another three claimed that subcultural capital was not important because sharing information was more fun. As Lavasen put it: “I feel the community is much more inclined towards sharing knowledge and anime”.

The final three participants claimed that it was important to them because it gave them secret joy to own merchandise that other fans did not have, and that by having more knowledge and anime goods, they somehow felt like they were truer fans. One of the participants stated that it was important for her to have a sound knowledge of your favourite anime, as it is only then that you can consider that as your favourite show, but in terms of merchandise, any anime commodity is good to have as it is so difficult to obtain.

I often refer to the knowledge of others, since my interest in anime peaked only after I started college, and others have been fans for many years. I do, however, very much like collectibles and mementoes of my favourite anime series, which have purely personal value. Having more has never been an issue with me, as I love to share everything I have with fellow appreciators. (Nivrithi)

I am often met by good-natured jealousy from friends and an impressed look by strangers when they see the anime bag or t-shirts that I own. Most otaku know that anime such as *Bleach* and *Naruto* are the more popular anime for beginners in South Africa, so when they see me with my *One Piece* merchandise, they get impressed and immediately understand that I have watched more than one

or two anime. This is because *One Piece* currently has (when this chapter was being written) 620 episodes and a vast majority of noobs are intimidated by that large number of episodes and will not undertake watching it as their first anime. That being said it is impossible to physically distinguish an otaku unless they are carrying or wearing anime merchandise proudly; however, distinction and discrimination is something that happens quite often in the anime fandom of South Africa.

(c) Distinction

In most subcultures importance is placed on being able to be distinguished from outsiders (Hodkinson, 2002). This is not the case with the South African anime fandom. A majority of fans do not deem it important to be distinguished from non-anime fans, as they feel that everyone is entitled to their own opinions and interests. This open-mindedness is found in most fans that I interviewed and observed.

There is however a small number of people that find it very important to be distinguished as anime fans because as one of my participants (also named Trisha) claimed, “it’s different to Twilight and that other stuff. I’m not a person that likes being associated with those common, cheesy motion pictures that lack character, intellectual discussions and so on”. Like Trisha, I also find it important to be distinguished as an anime fan, as it allows me the opportunity to meet other otaku who would, under normal circumstances, just bypass me. As Nivrithi says:

It is important to me to be acknowledged as an anime fan, which is natural when a good portion of my life is invested in it as a hobby. There is definitely an element of pride in being a fan of anime, as I consider it a great form of entertainment and creativity. I would readily admit to being an otaku, as it gives me great pleasure to find others with similar interests and spread some knowledge about anime to those who are not familiar with its merits.

In the case of the goths, distinction from non-goths was considerably easier due to their style of dress and appearance. The goths would even play a game called “spot-the-goth” in which they would attempt to find other goths wherever they were (Hodkinson, 2002). However this is impossible with anime fans, unless they are adorned with anime merchandise, and even then, there are some cases where people will wear an anime t-shirt or carry a bag simply because they like it, not because they are otaku.

In the fast-paced setting of today, individuals have only fleeting chances to impress others within the crowds of strangers that we are exposed to daily, which is why fashion has come to play such an imperative role in our lives (Bennett, 2005). With one glance, a person can tell whether or not someone is interesting based on their style and appearance and in this fast-paced world, first impressions are key to obtaining attention from an intended audience. As an otaku, I am immediately drawn to any persons brandishing anime clothing, accessories or any other form of merchandise and this usually leads to me striking up a conversation with the individual. I have also been approached numerous times by other otaku who have noticed me wearing a particular anime t-shirt, carrying my *One Piece* bag, or wearing any one of my anime accessories. These items serve as an unspoken cultural understanding – a shared subcultural capital - which only other otaku would recognise and appreciate. Otaku instantly take a liking to anyone donning anime merchandise as

they automatically become 'cool' for firstly knowing about anime, and secondly by brandishing anime merchandise (which is quite rare to obtain in South Africa). Owning anime commodities sends a message to other fans, implying that you are an otaku because you have spent time and money (original anime merchandise is quite pricey in South Africa, as you have to purchase it online or at expos like *rAge*) to obtain specific anime goods.

This fashion in everyday life importantly points to the great amount of personal investment made by individuals to fulfil their roles as fans and members of their particular subculture (Bennett, 2005). Fashion not only concerns the way in which otaku dress and combine their merchandise to show off their impressive anime commodities collection, it also refers to the way in which otaku go out of their way to cosplay as their favourite characters. Cosplay involves dedication, determination, time, and money in order to be done properly. One of the participants of my study, Genevieve is a South African cosplayer, and explained to me that she makes all of her costumes herself. She sews them or uses existing items that she has, and locally buys wigs and coloured contact lenses or even imports them to complete her costumes. Genevieve says that she enjoys "embodying characters or concepts I love. It's a lot of fun. I see it as fan art and I have always been a creative person".

Genevieve explained to me that the national cosplaying community is growing rapidly and although South Africa is still young when it comes to conventions, otaku and cosplayers are starting to hold some annual events (*KINCON*, *rAge*, *UCON*). While not all otaku will engage in cosplaying, they will greatly admire the dedicated fans that do.



Genevieve cosplaying the Bleach character, Yoruichi

Although the cosplay scene is practically non-existent in Durban (with very small cosplay gatherings, held once or twice a year), it is thriving in Cape Town. There are otaku who have dedicated websites

to the cosplay scene in Cape Town and there are clubs that gather quite a few times during the course of the year and hold cosplay parties and/or picnics at local parks. The members of these clubs go to great lengths to obtain costumes and accessories in order to dress up as their favourite anime characters, even making the costumes themselves at times. Members of the public are also free to join the picnics and observe the cosplayers enacting scenes from anime or just relaxing and taking pictures. One of the local websites, *Animated Meanderings*, is a dedicated website to both anime as a whole and the exploits of the Cape Town anime and cosplay clubs, periodically posting up pictures from these cosplay parties both on their website and their *Facebook* page. While distinction plays an important role in the lives of some of the otaku, discrimination is something that any member of any subculture may be subjected to by outsiders.

(d) Discrimination

Discrimination is something that can occur between insiders and outsiders, as well as amongst the members of the subculture. My research has identified a certain gender bias amongst some South African male viewers of anime. To use myself as an illustration, my male friends usually tease me about all the shojo anime that I watch, telling me that it is ‘crap’ and that I am wasting time when I could be watching other, better shows. Shojo anime (and manga) are considered by men to be “girly”, since they discuss issues like love, friendship, and romance, usually with the lead female character inevitably falling for the popular boy at school. As we are aware, the texts of popular culture can be divided into genres along gender lines – romantic comedy films and television soap operas aimed at women; action films and television sports programmes aimed at men – and this male condescension towards shojo anime does reveal how patriarchal power does not stop at the gates of subcultures.

As stated in the Introduction, much anime strays from generic specificity, and, somewhat ironically, considering the hostility of some men towards it, there are shojo shows such as *InuYasha*, and *Rurouni Kenshin* that also contain action and violence, with the romance aspect playing a very small role. Both these shows are about samurai and their adventures, with the lead female characters (who are exceptionally strong) eventually falling in love with them. Putting aside the gender issue, it must be emphasised that there is a massive spectrum of anime genres, aimed also at a wide range of ages, and so while to outsiders a person will be considered generally a fan of anime, in reality the anime fan subculture is made up of people with an equally wide range of anime tastes. This internal complexity of the anime fan subculture puts into question the more singularly rigid (structuralist) account of subcultures offered by Hebdige (1979). Instead of seeing subcultures like anime, as being *centripetally* united around a single centralised value or passion, it is more helpful to identify contemporary subcultures in *centrifugal* (Bakhtin, 1994) terms as a rather loose alliance of fans who have a passion for a broad range of anime shows and genres. This allows us to better comprehend ‘postmodern’ subcultures, as a complex unity embracing a plurality of tendencies and tastes. This internal diversity inevitably produces incessant debates about the merits of different genres and shows, but, outside the male bias against “girly” shows, there is no real internal discrimination against anime fans:

There are many differences of opinions between fans that I am acquainted with, with regard to which series is of better quality or has superior story elements, but none of these really

qualify as discrimination. Rather we encourage healthy debate and discussion where these differences are brought up. It greatly enlivens the experience of being an otaku. (Nivriti)

However, my research has revealed that there are many outsiders in South Africa who look down on otaku. The newer fans initially tend to shy away or hide their fandom from outsiders, for fear of rejection and discrimination. This discrimination occurs with friends and in many cases even family. Fans are considered ‘weird’ and immature for watching and enjoying such childish ‘cartoons’. As Tejas says “many people are quite judgemental and small-minded”. Denver furthers Tejas’ sentiment that people are judgemental by stating that people will often tease a fan about watching ‘cartoons’

All the participants of the study agreed that there are some outsiders who can be very judgemental, malicious, and small-minded when it comes to anime. Many of the participants recall incidents where they were asked why they watch ‘cartoons’ at their age (all participants are over the age of eighteen, and thus seen as adults). Outsiders often see anime as regular cartoons that are aimed at young children and are childish and anyone that watches it is seen as immature. This is the reason that many outsiders often mock otaku and question their reasons for watching it. I have been very fortunate that my family have never had a problem with me watching anime, and have been rather supportive in my fandom; other fans however, are not so lucky, as I have met numerous fans that claim that their families are the ones that will taunt them about anime.

(2) Identity

Hodkinson’s (2002) category of identity focuses on the extent to which members hold the *subjective* perception of their involvement in the group and their relations and feelings of identity to other members. Identities in South Africa have been very structured since the apartheid era, when people were classified by the colour of their skin which caused people to adopt certain identities and characteristics; however, this has changed drastically since the end of the apartheid period. Since then, individuals have had the opportunity to “grab” different aspects of varying identities, to combine and create their own, unique identity. While there are still strong notions of racial discrimination in South Africa, fandoms have offered the youth an opportunity to replace the structured identities that are proposed to them (from the apartheid period) with seemingly different (and sometimes ‘alien’) identities. Racial classifications were largely negative and oppressive, particularly for those ‘races’ that were denied equality by the apartheid regime, while the self-fashioning of identities through, for example fandoms, is not only freely chosen, but also a positive making of identity, free of all apartheid baggage.

While I am a Hindi-speaking Indian, and engage in Hindu traditions and rituals (festivals and prayers), I do not strictly adhere to this prescribed identity. I have found an attraction to the Japanese culture through anime, and have therefore, through the years, nurtured this fascination by learning as much as I possibly can about the culture and the people. This is predominantly done through the viewing of anime, which offers a view into the lives of Japanese people. I can now speak Hindi, which I learnt when I was younger, and now Japanese, which I have been learning through online lessons. Being an otaku (watching anime, collecting merchandise, and increasing

my knowledge both on the anime industry and Japan itself) has become a major part of my identity, and this feeling has been shared by numerous other fans and participants of this study. A number of participants have admitted to learning Japanese, and also utilising numerous Japanese terms in their everyday lives. Denver claims that: “I tend to answer my parents and some friends in Japanese. It’s sort of a reflex action”.

In Hodgkinson’s (2002) study the goths shared an important “like-mindedness” regardless of their location, class, sex, or age. It is also important to members to gain a separate identity from outsiders. As can be seen here, this theme heavily overlaps with the theme of consistent distinctiveness with regards to the questions posed in the interviews and questionnaires.

(a) Sharing a like-mindedness

This ‘like-mindedness’ is similar to the shared set of values and norms that exist within a subculture discussed in the consistent distinctiveness theme. It is important for members to be able to trust each other and this can only be achieved through similar tastes and shared activities within the group. This is one of the reasons why a majority of the participants of this study were so eager to answer my questions because, after looking at my social networking profiles and speaking to our mutual friends, they realised that I actually am an otaku myself, which made them feel at ease with answering my questions. Being an otaku also allowed me to engage in useful conversation during the interviews, during which we compared notes and excitedly discussed all things anime.

Otaku will generally find it much easier to interact and become friends with other otaku, due to similar passions, interests, and the like-mindedness shared amongst the fans. It is through this common ground that I was able to conduct such free-flowing and interesting interviews with the participants. All the participants agree that they do share like-mindedness with other otaku, and therefore find it much easier to relate to other fans; however, they also relate to other non-fans as well because anime is not the only interest that they have, and will therefore not be inclined to discriminate against outsiders. The participants stated that conversation is much easier to begin and maintain between anime fans and therefore fans make for better company, and this even leads on occasion to romance.

I do tend to find that many of my friends who are otaku share many other similar interests with me, and have a mindset, attitudes and opinions that allow me to relate to them better than others. A shared interest in anime does lead to a closer bond over such things and allows for everyday discussion about a shared passion, which really leads to a friendship or close association. (Nivriti)

There is also the tendency for otaku to end up sharing more than a love for anime, with many fans finding that they enjoy many aspects of the Japanese culture. As my research has shown, anime is often the gateway to a deeper knowledge of and fascination with Japanese culture in general. I recently discovered that a fellow otaku friend of mine shared many similar interests with me. It started with us discussing good shojo anime and manga and our favourite shojo anime series. Before long I learnt that she loved the same Japanese boy-bands and Japanese live-action dramas that I did, which led to closer bond forming between us. That aside, there are various other subcultural

indicators that are shared between otaku.

One of these indicators is that, otaku will generally understand the common Japanese phrases used in anime and therefore do not look at each other oddly when someone randomly spouts Japanese during a conversation. I may have outsider friends as well, but I find that I can relate to a fellow anime fan better because it is much easier to strike up a conversation with him/her, and as a result, a majority of my closest friends are anime fans.

This like-mindedness is not only shared between local friends, but also with other otaku that live in other cities and even other countries. In the case of otaku, distance is not usually a stumbling block for the friendships created, because with all the technological advancements that we have at our disposal today, it is far easier to communicate with people from across the globe. While I have many fellow otaku friends in Durban, I also have friends from the other provinces, mainly Cape Town and Johannesburg, with whom I keep in contact with via emails, and social networks. These friendships have often begun on *Facebook*, when we would comment on the anime pictures of a mutual friend, and soon engage in discussions.

A majority of the participants also have other otaku friends that live outside of South Africa, and they have all agreed that with social networks and anime forums, it is easier to not only make new friends, but to also to maintain old friendships.

Yes, I do have friends overseas who share my interest in anime. The distance does not affect our relationship in any way, as we regularly communicate new series, events and our shared favourites amongst anime series. We correspond by email, social media such as Facebook and Twitter and by chat. As anime is more popular in many other countries, it allows for me to gain some insight into the culture overseas and conventions such as ComicCon, which one of my friends had attended in London. (Nivriti)

As any fan will know, there are literally thousands, if not millions of fan pages and groups on *Twitter* and *Facebook*, and this is a great place to find and interact with fellow fans. I follow quite a few anime fan pages, and role-playing³⁵ accounts of *Facebook*. As with any other fandom, there are millions of fans who role-play as their favourite anime characters on *Twitter* and *Facebook*. It is through these accounts that I have made many otaku friends from overseas, some from the Philippines, and others from the UK. Although no personal information is shared between myself and the administrators of the role-playing pages, we still have many discussions regarding anime and manga, and the characters that they are role-playing online.

(b) Being an otaku

In a majority of cases, an otaku will be extremely proud of their fandom and identity, and will not let anyone discourage them from following their passions. However, due to the negative connotations associated with the term otaku, many fans shy away from it due to misunderstandings and fear of being labelled as an obsessed, psychotic killer, or someone with impaired social skills (!). There is also a fair amount of misconceptions in relation to what exactly defines a fan as an otaku.

³⁵ Changing one's appearance or personality to mimic those of a(n) (anime) character. This is usually done for fun.

An otaku is someone who stereotypically spends most of his or her time indoors: the “nerds” and “geeks” who stay at home to watch anime or play video games, which will (presumably) cause their social skills and abilities to deteriorate. However, the term otaku can relate to any fan of any fandom, topic, hobby, and/or form of entertainment. Due to the attention that the term received during the Tsutomu Miyazaki incident, whenever a person is referred to as an otaku, they are immediately negatively judged and seen as people that cannot relate to reality. In English however, the term has come to refer to anyone who is a fan of anime/manga and/or Japanese video games and the Japanese culture in general. There is some dispute amongst fans as to whether the term should be used within the anime subculture, but Western fans refer to themselves as otaku. The term still has generally negative connotations in Japan, but Western audiences have adopted the term as a way to describe themselves, and wear the title proudly. In South Africa though, there is much confusion as to what the term means, as could be seen in some of the responses to my research questions. As Genevieve states: “otaku actually means that your social skills are affected, and mine certainly aren’t”, and this is how many participants and fans in general define the term otaku.

From the ten interviews that I conducted, only three participants said that they would not consider themselves an otaku, either because they felt that it was a negative term, or because they felt that they did not engage enough in the fandom to be deemed otaku. Francine claims that she would have to be in Japan or some other Asian country in order to participate in otaku activity, which in reality is untrue as there are plenty of otaku activities being held in South Africa, which are similar (but smaller) to those being held overseas. This is an example of the misunderstanding of the term otaku in South Africa. Otaku activities are not limited to merely cosplaying and attending conventions and expos, but encompass all aspects of the anime fandom, such as watching as many shows as possible, buying merchandise, and engaging in anime fan get-togethers.

There are many anime fans that do not know what the term ‘otaku’ means, and upon explanation of what it stands for, they readily admit to being one. However, when the word ‘obsessed’ is mentioned (defined during the interviews as someone who invests more time and money into the fandom than other anime fans), a lot of these fans would deny it (even if they are). The negative connotations associated with the word ‘obsessed’ puts many fans off from calling themselves otaku, and it has to be explained that these days the word ‘otaku’ means a hardcore anime/manga/gaming/Japanese popular culture fan.

Focusing on myself, I am proud of being an otaku and will readily admit to it because as stated above, watching anime has had a great influence on my life and the way I behave. In most of the anime that I have watched, the characters are always learning important life lessons, which are imparted onto the viewer as well. The lead characters are always strong and have many emotional life lessons to learn on their journey, and it gives hope and strength to those that watch it. Due to the vastness of the anime field, there is a show for everyone to relate to, it’s just a matter of finding it, which is why I think people enjoy anime so much. There is always a character, scene, or story arc that someone can relate to. In shojo anime, there is always a girl that has a rough past (she may be an orphan or working part-time to support her single parent and siblings) but she is always smiling and dispensing good advice to those whose troubles don’t even compare. It’s inspiring and the

advice given always makes me stop to think about my life, and in a way has influenced me to lead a happier, more positive life.

Like shojo, shonen manga and anime also provides the viewer with good advice and “feels”³⁶, often bringing viewers to tears, or getting them really excited as the story progresses. This is something that I have not experienced with any other media platform, except for anime, which can make me cry, or be happy, excited, or angry. I say this fully aware of a certain academic tendency to dismiss popular culture as a barren terrain littered with ephemera and commerce, a shoddy advertising dream-world incapable of struggling below its lustrous surface to the serious and significant. In my subcultural research, including the surveying of other subcultures, it is precisely this life-enhancing existential encounter found in popular culture that is stressed.

From the research conducted for this thesis, I found that a majority of participants (around 80%) stated quite boldly how proud they were to be anime fans, while the rest would not claim to be otaku, due to the negative stereotypes attached to the term. However, to truly be a member of a fan subculture, there is a certain level of commitment that the fan must illustrate.

(3) Commitment

Subcultures will most likely be responsible for “a considerable portion of free time, friendship patterns, shopping routes, collection of commodities, going-out habits and even internet use” (Hodkinson, 2002: 31). While some fans may be reluctant to admit that they are members of a subculture, questions about their practices reveal that the subculture plays a dominant role in their lives. Hodkinson (2002) also states that the more commitment a person shows to their subculture, the greater the social rewards received. This involves intense levels of participation in relation to the tastes and norms of the fandom.

(a) Watching anime

Since becoming a proper anime fan (and eventually an otaku) my level of commitment to the fandom has steadily increased. Initially I was an obsessed fan, by which I mean, I could watch up to 25 episodes in a single day (which is roughly 8 hours a day). That was the extent of my commitment at that point in time. The noobs of the fandom usually show their commitment by becoming ‘addicted’ and watching hours of anime, sometimes even forgoing sleep. The dedication to the fan subculture can most simply be illustrated through the amount of time that an otaku would dedicate to just watching anime. Giving up valuable work or sleep time to watch anime is a clear indication of just how much fans love anime and also how dedicated they are to their subculture.

The amount of anime that a fan watches in a day or week depends on a variety of factors which includes the amount of work that they have to do, whether they have started a new anime show, or if they have become addicted to a certain anime. Most of the participants have admitted to watching what outsiders would consider obscene amounts of anime, sometimes 13 hours of anime per day. While otaku will often watch shows other than anime, a majority of otaku invest hours of

³⁶ Shorthand for the word ‘feelings’ which is used to describe an intensely charged emotion such as sadness, excitement, or awe.

their time specifically watching anime.

On a free day I can watch up to 20-25 episodes in a day, sometimes more. On busy days, I can watch maybe 5-10 episodes a day. It also depends on how interesting the anime is (Trisha.C).

(b) Dedication to the fandom

While these numbers may be impressive (or overwhelming, depending on how you look at it), not all otaku will spend this much time on *just* watching anime. Veteran otaku will either spend the same amount of time watching anime or will use a lot of their free time looking up information or interacting with other fans. Time is also spent downloading/streaming anime from the internet since purchasing anime in South Africa is far too expensive, and also downloading anime fan art and images, music and a series' original soundtrack, reading manga and dojinshi, and watching trailers and anime music videos. Time is spent on social networks, or anime forums and websites, where fans can interact and socialise with other otaku, and this includes having discussions, debates, sharing information and (if possible) organising meetings for the fans. The amount of time spent watching anime is just a portion of the free time used by otaku. Their lives become dedicated to the fandom itself, whether they realise it or not, and the Internet has provided a plethora of platforms for the anime fan subculture – both locally and globally – to sustain itself through the formation of these “virtual communities” whose persistent presence is entirely due to the active and regular participation by the fans themselves. As we have seen in the Theory chapter, it is subculturalists themselves who construct and maintain these micro-worlds and their localised systems of meaning.

I spend about 98% of my time on anime and anime-related stuff. If I am not watching a series, then I am usually engaging in fan art of my favourite characters, or reading up interesting facts about the series or characters. I also enjoy downloading fan art and videos of anime. And a lot of my time is spent downloading anime to watch, either for myself or my brother (Trisha.C).

Like Trisha C., by watching as much anime as I did, I began to love it even more, to the point where I began sketching various characters and attempting to purchase anime merchandise. My commitment to the subculture grew tremendously as I joined various *Facebook* groups with the acquisition of newer anime series. I also began buying more anime merchandise, even if I did not recognise the characters or the show (at that point in time, my access to anime commodities was highly restricted and so I would settle for whatever I could get my hands on). As my subcultural capital grew, my friends began to introduce me to the latest anime series, online stores and conventions, and other groups that I could join. These opportunities opened up more doors that led me to increase not only my knowledge of anime and the ‘animeverse’³⁷, but also my chances to collect more anime merchandise and increase my collection. I have also recently started my own anime and Japanese drama fan page on *Facebook*, in order to cater to the needs of Japanese popular culture fans. This includes posting information and pictures that are about anime and Japanese culture.

37 A fandom slang used to refer to the anime universe as a whole.



A screen capture of my Facebook fan page, which is titled J-dorama & Anime.

In addition to running my own page, I have also recently become one of the many administrators for an internationally run anime page named 'Casual Otaku'. I went through an online interview process with the owner of the page in which I had to answer several questions via *Facebook*. As part of my duties as the admin of the page, I am required to remain active by posting anime pictures, information, and provide links to other sites. I wanted to run my own page and be the admin for an international anime page, as I find a great joy in sharing interesting information and pictures with other otaku and engaging in lively discussions about our favourite anime and anime characters.



One of my Casual Otaku posts. My admin name is Asura-chan.

By being admin for two *Facebook* pages, I have to spend more time online finding pictures, links,

and information to post for others to see and read. In addition to being an active admin for two *Facebook* pages, I (along with thousands of other users) have utilised social networks to organise gatherings and events.

The screenshot shows a Facebook post by Trisha Ramrathen on October 9 at 12:19pm. The post asks if anyone else is going to a Japanese film festival at Gateway Cinema Nouveau on October 19-20. The thread includes several replies: Timothy Biggar asks what films; Trisha offers a pamphlet; Timothy Biggar says he's keen; Junaid Ballim asks about anime or martial arts; Miranda VD Heever expresses disappointment about exam time; Prashant Parsadh mentions a specific anime film, 'The Place Promised in Our Early Days'; Prashant Parsadh asks if there are other films; and Trisha Ramrathen responds that the festival is in her district and she hasn't seen any of the movies.

A Facebook status thread that I started on 9 October 2013 in regards to the Japanese Film Festival in Durban.

As can be seen in the above thread, *Facebook* was additionally utilised to rally all my friends and fellow otaku to attend the Japanese Film Festival, which was held in Durban, to watch the anime movie, *The Place Promised in our Early Days*.

(c) Anime in our daily lives

Otaku also illustrate their commitment to the fandom by assigning anime-related names and meanings to their normal everyday objects and scenarios. Most otaku will refer to their fellow otaku by Japanese nicknames and sometimes converse with each other in general conversational Japanese that they have picked up from anime. My friend, Seshni, refers to me as 'Tree-san' which consists of 'Tree' (derived from my name, Trisha) and 'san' which is an honorific used by Japanese

people to show respect to peers and family. There are numerous honorifics that the Japanese use, each used to refer to different people. My otaku friends either call me 'nee-san' (sister), 'Tree-san', or 'Tree-chan' all of which we have picked up from anime. In turn I refer to my friends with a variety of names such as 'nee-san' or I add an honorific to the end of their names or nicknames. I tend to do this even with my friends who are not anime fans, and of course, I initially have to explain why I am adding the honorific at the end. Conversations between otaku in South Africa are usually a mix of Japanese and English, and can be quite confusing to outsiders.

Personally speaking, when I initially began watching anime, I would walk around my home spouting whatever Japanese phrase I had picked up from anime and could remember. These phrases usually had no relevance to my life, it just became stuck in my head once I heard it. I also got into the habit of giving my possessions Japanese names, for example I named my netbook "Chibi" which literally means "small" or "little" in Japanese. I have also named a teddy bear I own, Momo, which is the name of a character in the series *Bleach* and which means "peach". But the most prominent use of Japanese in my life (which I learnt from anime) is to call my cat "nee-san" which is what a Japanese person calls their sister, and calling my brother "oniichan" which is the term for brother. I have also begun reacting to situations the way anime characters do in the shows for example I say "kawai" (scary) when something scares me, or "kawaii" (cute) when I see something cute or adorable. Personally, it is fun to speak Japanese and behave the way my favourite anime characters do, because it is cute and entertaining, even if it only entertains me.



My reaction to anything that scares me (really or sarcastically). I will usually imagine my face to be like this and will say the Japanese word "kawai".

It was not surprising to me when I found that all the otaku that I spoke to for this research stated that they too use Japanese and anime references in their regular everyday lives. Anime has played such a large role in their lives that it has become sort of a reflexive action to utilise Japanese

greetings, honorifics and nicknames in everyday life and situations. Otaku will also often converse with each other in as much Japanese as they can, and give each other popular character nicknames. Participants noted that they often got strange stares from their family or friends when they randomly used Japanese phrases, and then had to explain what it meant. The participants have also stated that they utilise anime pictures as their avatars on social networks, and one member even stated that she will be getting an anime tattoo on her neck at the end of the year.

Many members of the subculture often provide their pets and commodities (such as laptops, computers and even teddy bears) with Japanese names that they usually find in anime. Numerous otaku also name themselves after their favourite anime characters on social networks such as *Twitter* and *Facebook* (e.g. my *Twitter* username reads as “Asura_chan”, which is the name of many anime characters, and also included the use of honorary titles that succeed a name, used in Japanese culture, which is also seen in anime).

(d) Conventions and Expos

As seen in the *Facebook* screen captures above, there are always otaku who are keen to attend anime conventions, expos, and screenings. These gatherings provide otaku with the opportunity to not only meet with their friends, but also give them a chance to meet new anime fans and expand their circle of friends. This was one of the reasons that I jumped at the opportunity to attend the *rAge Expo* in Johannesburg in 2012. While the *rAge Expo* is predominantly a gaming expo (and the largest to be held in Africa), the anime aspect of the expo has grown exponentially over the last few years. More and more stalls dedicated to anime merchandise have gone on display at the expo in order to cater for the anime fandom. This was the perfect occasion to personally engage with other otaku from outside of Durban, and observe the extent of the fandom, in terms of the supply and demand of anime merchandise. I initially heard about the *rAge Expo* in 2011 after a few of my friends attended and returned with numerous anime products. This made me interested in the expo and I immediately began making plans to attend in 2012.

It was at the *rAge Expo* that I met quite a few fellow otaku who were more than happy to answer some of my questions and pose for photos. The fans were very gracious in speaking to me and helping me out with the research. They directed me to anime stalls, and introduced me to (or pointed out) other otaku that I could speak to. I gained quite a few contacts on that day, a few of which I still speak to on regular basis through social networks. It is not only because of the merchandise that people can obtain at these conventions and expos, but also the invaluable contacts that can be made through attending, thus making the journey worthwhile. It is a great way to climb up the subcultural social ladder by stating to others that you attended certain conventions and met certain people (this is not unlike a religious pilgrimage, returning from which undoubtedly increases what we may call one's religious capital).

In addition to attending expos and conventions, there are a large number of fans that would readily join an anime club if it were available to them. When asked about the option of joining a club, a majority of fans agreed that they would jump at the chance to join a club where they can meet and interact with other otaku. Clubs aid in the growth of any subculture, as it stimulates interaction between members and allows for discussions, debates, and even the exchange of anime shows with

each other. There is no anime club at UKZN due to the formal constraints placed on club activities, but there is a club at The University of Cape Town (UCT), which is highly efficient and functional. The UCT Anime club has been operational for years and caters to the needs of the otaku that attend UCT by having anime screenings throughout the year and a forum where the members can gather and discuss anime and other anime-related topics.

Home ▶ About Us

New About

Written by dragonite
Thursday, 29 September 2011

Genshiken.UCT, the Society for the Appreciation of Anime, was formed to promote anime and Japanese Culture to UCT students. It was founded in 2006 on the blood, sweat, tears and passion of dedicated anime lovers and opened its doors to members at O-Week 2007. In 2013 the society started incorporating console and pc gaming.

The society meets every second week for screening events where everyone gets together to watch anime on the BIG SCREEN. There are various interactive activities at screenings such as ninja tag, quiz nights and as of 12 April, Genshiken 30 seconds, the game is much like the usual 30 seconds but the cards are anime, gaming, Japanese and society based. Screenings with the former mentioned activities usually include amazing prizes and great food which is given at a reduced fee to members.

When the society is not having a screening, they are hosting a gaming tournament. Tournaments are hosted with companies such as 2Up Gamers, Maingaming, Gameson and Organized Chaos. The tournaments are made for all types of gamers, including all genres and gaming platforms. 6-7 April 2013 the society hosted its first big gaming event in Jammie Hall, UCT. The event was done in collaboration with Maingaming and 2Up Gamers, the event brought about 200 gamers together in Fifa 13, Black Ops 2, Halo and Tekken Tag 2. 19-21 July 2013 will be the societies first massive LAN hosting 1100 players in UCT sports centre in collaboration with OC.

Lastly, the society will be the first to host UCON, an anime and gaming convention that will be held in August 2013. The event will incorporate anime by having various South African companies such as Readers Den, Outter Limits, Gadget time, Wizards etc. showcasing their merchandise, there will also be various anime related workshops such as into to the Japanese Language, Origami art, Japanese history and culture, how to draw manga. Of course no anime convention is complete without having a maid café and cosplay fashion show. Console gaming will be hosted by 2Up Gamers and Maingaming and will include all genres of gaming on Xbox and PS3. A LAN of 1100 will be hosted by OC in the UCT Sports Centre and will include a wide range of games such as LoL, Dota and Counter Strike etc.

Genshiken.UCT is more than that, it's a chance for anime and gaming lovers to meet and greet and enjoy that which we all love as a community rather than alone. Although the society is a university society we welcome non-UCT students to our events.

The 'about' section on the Genshiken UCT Website, which anyone is free to join.

Home

Latest News & Announcements

Halloween Screening 2013 - 11 October 2013

October 07, 2013, 12:32:53 am by IwantsURSoul

Hello again everyone!

I did promise to be more on the ball with announcements so here you go:

The society will be holding it's final screening for the year and as is tradition it will be Halloween themed. There will also be food and drinks provided at the screening.



The current home page of the Genshiken UCT anime club page. They are advertising their annual Halloween Screening schedule of anime.

Events

No Upcoming Events

Welcome

Welcome, **Guest**. Please login or register.
October 14, 2013, 02:27:39 pm

Username:

Password:

1 Hour

Login with username, password and session length

[Forgot your password?](#)

Join Us On IRC

#genshiken@irc.uct.ac.za

Recent Forum Posts

Re: Halloween Screening 2013 - 11 October 2013
by Kinghero

October 11, 2013, 01:23:50 pm

Re: Your Internet Connection
by Sean_Lume

October 11, 2013, 12:25:38 am

Re: Rebuild of Evangelion

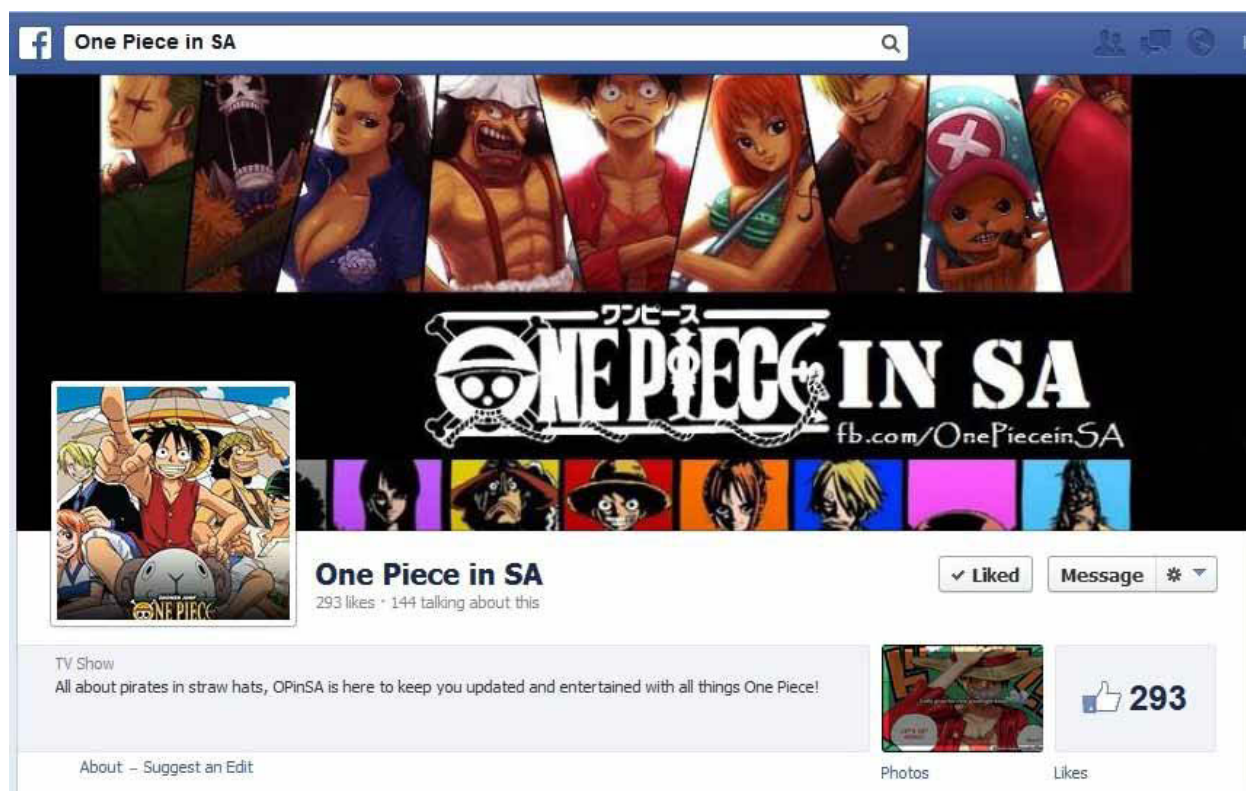
While Durban may not offer any actual anime club, there are various other virtual clubs offered to otaku on *Facebook* and *Twitter*. A popular one is called the *Durban Otaku*, which currently has 159 members. On this group, fans can ask about the latest anime and movies, and also advertise any merchandise that they may have come across. Some fans will offer to buy merchandise in bulk so that the actual price would drop and everyone who gets in on the order will inevitably pay less. In addition to the region-specific pages, there are also the highly popular "In S.A" pages, which are specific anime pages dedicated to South African fans such as "*Naruto in SA*" and "*One Piece in SA*". These are always offering updates and even hosting competitions, in which the victor usually wins certain chapters of the manga (sometimes up to R700 worth). While the physical collection of anime fans is scattered across the country, the virtual community is teeming with members, friends, and otaku, who are all keen to share, discuss, debate and just plain enjoy interacting and communicating with other otaku.



The Durban Otaku Facebook page. It's 'about' section states: "A place to discuss manga, anime, cosplaying, figurines and gaming. This is a group for all of us in the KwaZulu-Natal region!".



A fan using the Durban Otaku page to advertise some manga that she has for sale.



The One Piece in SA Facebook page. Their 'about' section states: "All about pirates in straw hats, OPinSA is here to keep you updated and entertained with all things One Piece!".

A majority of the participants also expressed a keen interest in attending expos and conventions if they were held in their cities, especially the Durban fans as "Durban is often bypassed when it comes to gaming and anime expos and conventions so I would definitely make special arrangements to attend one if one were to be held here" (Trisha.C). Conventions and expos will often have stalls that sell anime merchandise, and since it is so difficult to obtain these products, these expos provide the otaku with the perfect opportunity to be able to browse and purchase commodities. However, due to the fact that the anime subculture is still relatively small (as compared to the gaming subculture), anime-specific expos and conventions are rarely held, and if there are any (such as *KINCON*) then the event is highly restricted in terms of the number of entrants allowed and the stalls and goods being sold.

Aside from the events that happen throughout the year, there are also other groups that meet and have tournaments, such as the *Yugioh!* group of South Africa. *Yugioh!* is a manga series about a timid young man who unlocks a darker alter-ego that protects him and his friends from danger by challenging the antagonists to a game which reveals the true nature of the contestants' hearts. The game is known as the 'Shadow Games' and the loser of a game is subjected to punishment in the form of the 'Penalty Game'. The anime series *Yugioh! Duel Monsters* is based upon certain chapters of the manga series and involves the use of cards known as 'duel monsters'. The duels have complicated rules and are about trading cards and competing against other participants. Due to its popularity, real cards were created and sold, which began the *Yugioh!* duelling craze. Fans of the show would purchase the cards and duel each other, and shortly thereafter official tournaments

were being held. Duelling is a huge phenomenon in South Africa with tournaments being held in Johannesburg, Durban, and Cape Town, and smaller events in other cities.

According to Prevashin, an event organiser, tournament judge, and dueller himself, the *YuGiOh!* tournaments are a social and competitive event that allows people who know the game (and even those that are new to world of duelling) to interact. While the core focus of these gatherings is *YuGiOh!*, these meetings also extend to other anime and manga. As a growing platform, the members of this group range from the die-hard fans to those who are just learning about it and transitioning into the duelling world and each event plays host to over fifty fans, and players. According to Prevashin, the reason for beginning this group was to provide those who had a pure interest in, and dedication to the game, a place to duel with other fans because “it’s a great way for people to just duel and have fun and not be confined to just the virtual gaming and society. It’s the real game, with real cards, and most importantly real competitors, rivals, and friends”.



A tournament in full-swing in Durban. (Also see Appendix A.10)

As an otaku I have also been through the *YuGiOh!* duelling phase when I was about fifteen years of age, when it was all the craze. My brother and I bought many decks of duelling cards and built up a massive collection in order to gain respect from other duellers, but also to be able to duel and win against others. We were too young to get into massive, official tournaments, so we held tournaments at our home and duelled against our cousins instead. Being the otaku that I am, I have kept all of the cards that we bought, and it is a part of my anime merchandise collection. As popular as it is, *YuGiOh!* is not the only trading card game that South African anime fans partake in. The *Pokémon* card battles can be played at home amongst friends, or within proper tournaments, such as those held at the *rAge Expo*, where the victor wins prizes, and more importantly, prestige.



Some players engaging in a card battle at the rAge Expo 2012. This is quite a popular event for fans. It is a chance for players to meet and mingle with other fans, trade cards, and battle and beat opponents to climb up the subcultural social ladder.



Intense Pokémon: Trading Card Game battles. I was told it was fine to take pictures as long as I did not disturb the players.

The cards that are used for these tournaments are very expensive (see Appendix A.11) and difficult to obtain, yet these fans and players are so committed to the activity of duelling that they do not find any problems with forking out the hundreds (sometimes thousands) of rands required to purchase these cards. The cards used for duelling can be purchased from certain chain stores, hobby shops, or alternatively online stores. A common practice amongst players is the trading of cards with other duellists, either through trade forums on the Internet, or during social gatherings.

Not only do some fans collect these cards and other anime merchandise, they also engage in importing and selling these items to other fans, which leads us to Hodkinson's (2002) final subcultural characteristic: autonomy.

(4) Autonomy

Hebdige (1979) claimed that subcultures, as radical grass-roots movements, remained beyond the reaches of capitalism and the media, to which they were unremittingly hostile, until these both "incorporated" the subculture commercially and ideologically, thereby destroying the subculture. Hodkinson on the other hand claims that:

In contrast, my reworked notion of subculture regards both these crucial elements of contemporary Western societies as critical to the construction and facilitation of subcultures. Thus, behind the identities, practices and values of the goth scene lay a complex infrastructure of events, consumer goods and communications, all of which were thoroughly implicated in media and commerce (2002: 32).

Autonomy, according to Hodkinson (2002) is the inevitable involvement of subcultures in commerce and the media, but – most importantly - where a significant degree of autonomy in these areas is maintained by the subculture. Hodkinson wants to show that because a subculture is entangled in the worlds of business and the media, this does not mean, the way Hebdige suggests, that the subculture is overwhelmed by that involvement. This includes fans participating in subcultural activities such as expos and conventions, and purchasing anime commodities, such as cosplay items that are available on South African online stores (*Dark Carnival*, *AWX* etc). Fans are also responsible for organising their own events and 'meets' free-of-charge to promote the subculture. What is important for Hodkinson is to show that these transactions are largely performed by subculturalists themselves.

(a) Commerce

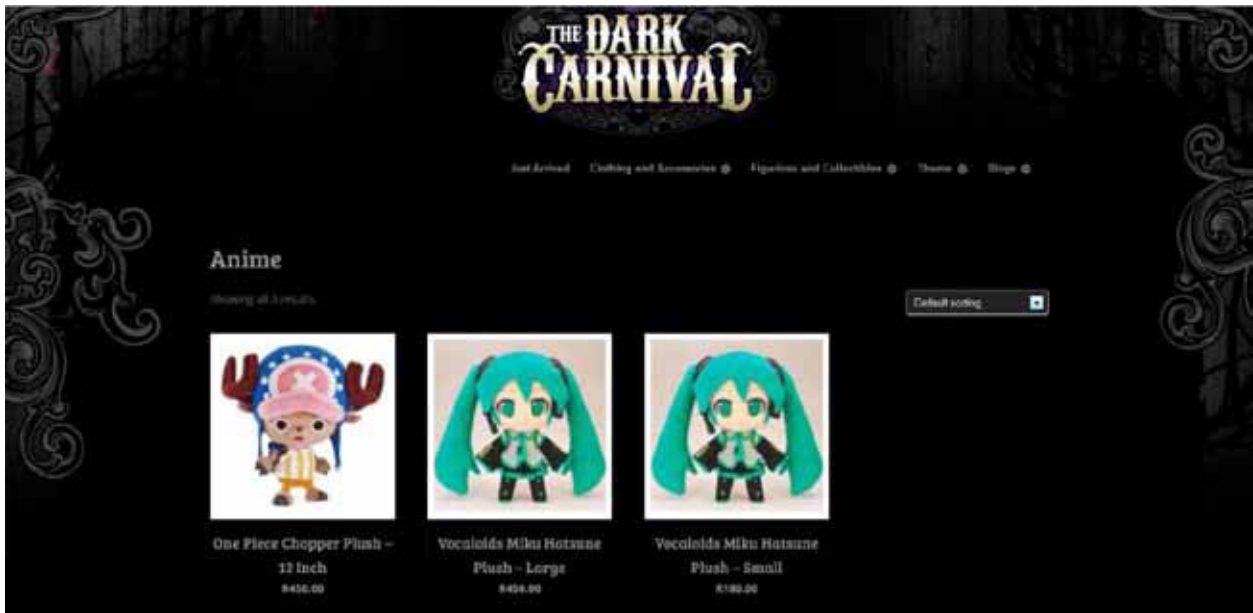
With the anime subculture in South Africa, one can clearly see the effect that commerce plays in keeping the fandom alive. Official events held in South Africa are the *rAge Expo* which is predominantly a gaming expo, but has, in recent years, begun to grow its anime section, with an increase in anime merchandise stalls, and anime cosplayers attending the event. There are other semi-official anime conventions such as *KINCON*, which was held in Johannesburg in 2013 and catered to a significantly smaller number of people as compared to the *rAge Expo*. The Cape Town cosplayers hold cosplay events quite a few times a year, where all of the veteran and aspiring

cosplayers gather to show off their costumes. These gatherings would not be possible if it were not for commerce. Online stores such as *Dark Carnival* and *AWX* are owned and run by anime fans who began their businesses in order to cater to (not only) the anime fans and that specific niche market. As such the owners have begun *subcultural careers* by opening these stores which allow both gaming and anime fans to be able to purchase merchandise. It is important to note that many gaming fans are anime fans as well and vice versa, and this is how it is possible for these businesses to run effectively as they target more than one fandom that inevitably overlaps with others.

These online stores stock anything that an otaku can imagine, and if they do not have it, they can import it on special request.

The image shows a screenshot of the AWX online store. The website has a navigation menu with categories like Home, Gaming, DVD, Books, Hardware, Figures, Merchandise, Pre-Owned, Pre-Order, and On Sale. The main content area is titled 'Anime and Related' and features three listings for mini-figures: Briareos Mini-Figure (R 290.00), Carmine Mini-Figure (R 65.00), and Cerulean Mini-Figure (R 65.00). Each listing includes a small image of the figure, its name, price, and a 'BUY IT' button. To the right of the listings is a sidebar with sections for 'Basket' (Your basket is empty), 'Updates' (listing pre-owned items), 'Online' (Guests: 21, Members: 0), and 'Poll' (Buying Next Gen consoles). On the far right, there is a vertical image of a cosplayer with red hair wearing an orange and white outfit.

The South African AWX online store from which a fan can purchase anything anime-related such as figurines, manga, anime series and movies, plush toys, badges, bags etc.



The Dark Carnival anime page illustrating three of their available plush toys.

The *Dark Carnival* also runs a stall at the *rAge Expo* every year, at which they sell anime, gaming, and nerd merchandise at reduced prices.



A collection of One Piece, and Naruto badges at The Dark Carnival stall in rAge 2012. (See Appendix A.12 for more images of The Dark Carnival rAge stock).

The purchasing of merchandise plays an important role in the life of any fan (consider soccer fans, or the fans of *Star Wars*), and it is no different in the anime fan subculture of South Africa. It is more difficult to obtain anime commodities in South Africa, as the market for it is still relatively

small, as compared to that of overseas, where the subculture is much larger. However in recent years, due to the rapid growth of the subculture and the increasing popularity of anime in general, there are many stores that have opened up to cater to this niche market. The online store *Dark Carnival* stocks anything related to subcultures such as *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *The Big Bang Theory*, comic books and superheroes, and in recent years, anime merchandise. This illustrates the growth of the anime fandom in South Africa, which causes online stores like these to offer anime goods to fans which they import especially from overseas. The *Dark Carnival* stall at the *rAge Expo 2012* sold all kinds of items, and had a large array of anime merchandise available for purchase.



A fan looking to purchase a Sanji (from the anime One Piece) figurine.

When a subculture expands, it also aids in getting more business people to cater to the niche market of anime fans. It is due to the rising popularity of anime, and the demand for anime merchandise that many stores (be it online or larger chain stores) have begun to stock anime commodities. As can be seen in the pictures below, there are some chain stores that stock anime and manga merchandise as they have noticed the demand for these items. This of course, is no longer subcultural autonomous commerce, but mainstream capitalism supplying a market, but I have also included these examples because it draws attention – in postmodern vein – to the *grey* area that exists between subcultural and mainstream commerce, and, most importantly, how we can no longer speak confidently (in the manner of Hebdige) about the obvious anti-capitalist identity of subcultures. Postmodern subcultures are located within capitalism, within both its economic and cultural aspects, and the drawing of lines of subcultural autonomy is always going to be ambiguous and complicit.



A large manga collection on sale at Bargain Books in The Crescent, Umhlanga. Bargain Books has always stocked manga, but most recently has upgraded its collection to include more series. This is similar to what was said earlier, about Walmart in USA stocking both the manga and anime series for purchase.



The Devil May Cry anime DVD set which consists of all 12 episodes on 3 discs, with special features, was available for purchase at Look 'n Listen. This was given to me as a birthday present earlier this year. Look 'n Listen was known for stocking various anime series such as Naruto, Bleach, and Cowboy Bebop, and movies such as Spirited Away, and Nausicaa: Valley of the Wind.



The Dark Carnival advertises their One Piece rAge stock on their Facebook page.

(b) Media

As can be seen above, the commerce aspect of the anime subculture in South Africa is still relatively small, but is definitely expanding along with the fandom. This expansion and maintenance of the fandom largely depends on the role of the media. This is because the media (especially the Internet) largely enables the anime community in South Africa to stay together. As illustrated throughout this thesis, the Internet has played a pivotal role in the sustaining of subcultures, by allowing current members to keep in contact and new members to meet other fans. With the anime fandom as young as it is in South Africa, the Internet has played an imperative role in introducing new members to the subculture and allowing otaku to keep in contact with other fans, both inside and outside of the country. The use of social networks has allowed otaku to arrange gatherings, organise club activities, purchase merchandise, and advertise any anime products that they wish to sell.

The use of social networks in maintaining the anime fandom in South Africa is very important. There are also many subcultural websites, run by South Africans, that are dedicated to anime such as *Anime Direct*, *Animated Meanderings*, *Genshiken* (which is the UCT anime clubs' website), along with *Dark Carnival*, and *AWX*, which are online stores that carry anime merchandise. There are also numerous *Facebook* groups dedicated to South African fans, namely: *One Piece In S.A*, *Naruto in S.A*, *Durban Otaku*, and *South African Anime Society*. These sites, blogs and *Facebook* groups are dedicated to giving its users up-to-date information of anime series that are available and also provide people with links to websites from where they can download anime and read manga online for free. An otaku can also 'like' certain anime *Facebook* groups and they will be provided with a forum in which they can discuss anime with other fans from across the globe. These groups also

provide information on the series or characters and put up pictures of fan art that other fans send to them. I follow numerous anime groups on *Facebook* namely: Kuchiki Rukia (a character from *Bleach*); *Bleach*, *One Piece*, *Animated Meanderings*; *Cosplayers South Africa*; *Tokyo Otaku Mode* etc.

These groups often ask fans questions which allow for friendly discussion about anime series. They also post fan art and hold competitions, in which they mention the winners' names on their page. The South African-run groups are more about posting about anime and keeping its South African fans updated on news in the anime world, with regards to conventions (held in S.A and abroad), competitions, and new anime series. *Tokyo Otaku Mode* recently posted an album on *Facebook*, in which they had a collection of the best anime character cosplays that their administrators had come across. As was mentioned earlier, there is also an anime fan club at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and they have their own website and have viewings and cosplay conventions/parties. I follow a group on *Twitter* called 'Cosplay S.A' which updates its followers on the happenings of the cosplay scene in S.A. Through use of the Internet, many fans are able to learn about new anime series and interact with other otaku outside of their home towns and even outside of their countries.

The Internet was utilised by goths to enhance their knowledge and subcultural capital (Hodkinson, 2002) and this can also be said for otaku across the globe, especially so in South Africa, where the subculture is spread across the country. Personally, I have used the Internet to obtain information on anime (or manga) in order to locate new, interesting anime series to watch and to also 'show-off' my increased knowledge of the characters, the creators and even the voice actors of certain anime series. It is seen in interactions with other otaku, that these fans are more likely to look down on people who only watch one series and call it the best.

In addition to keeping otaku linked, the Internet allows for the very subculture to exist in South Africa in terms of downloading. As mentioned previously, anime DVDs are extremely expensive, and therefore unavailable to the majority of otaku, who are students, or have just entered the working world. This is the main reason, as stated by my participants, that they engage in the downloading of anime from the Internet, and file sharing amongst their friends and fellow anime fans. However they have stated that if anime DVDs were cheaper they would purchase their series as collector's items or as Nivrithi puts it: "I would prefer to purchase series in the future, as it is made available because I feel this would show support for anime sales in South Africa, and I would encourage other otaku to do the same". The *Devil May Cry* anime DVD set that was presented to me as a birthday gift earlier this year, was on sale at *Look 'n Listen*, and this is the only reason that my friend could afford it. As any fan of any other television related fandom, otaku would also gladly purchase anime DVDs if it were more affordable in order to show support for the mangaka and the series. Thus from a business point-of-view, the South African anime scene is characterised by wide-scale and illegal piracy, and so it is, to some extent, anti-capitalist in orientation.

This sharing of anime amongst friends is also related to the sharing of anime between otaku from all across the globe. The subbing of anime is usually done by fans in other countries, so South Africans merely download them from these websites directly, or stream the video from *Youtube* or other sites but I have yet to meet a South African who subs anime. The use of the Internet to download anime for free leads to its underground nature, as fans do not pay a fee to download or

stream the video. There are far too many anime series and episodes for people to be able to afford to purchase, so they just download it for free or copy it from other fans who already have the entire series. There is also the problem of limited stock in South Africa, which forces South African fans to download anime as opposed to buying it. Stores such as *Look 'n Listen* that carry some anime series may only carry one season of a particular series and this will also be extremely expensive. It also costs a lot of money for fans to order merchandise and series from overseas, so it is cheaper and easier to just download the series from the Internet, especially in the case of students.

The media has played a huge role in the introduction of anime to fans worldwide, South Africa included. As noted before, SABC and etv were responsible for airing some anime shows, and in many cases introducing children to the world of anime. While the programming may have changed over the years, the effect is still the same: many otaku begin their fandom by watching anime on television. The dubbed version of anime is aired overseas on channels such as Cartoon Network, but we are not as fortunate in South Africa. We did, however, have an anime channel on the DSTV premium package, known as Animax, which aired for a short time before being cancelled.

The participants of my study (those who had access to Animax) claimed that its failure was due to the fact that there was not enough promotion for the channel before it was launched and even during its run. Another factor that the participants agreed on was the lack of variety and dubbed anime on the channel. Most otaku prefer subbed anime as it has more emotion and is not edited too much (as it is for the Cartoon Network channel) and therefore watching dubbed anime was a major setback for the fans. They also complained of the lack of variety of shows aired, and the fact that the anime that they did show was not the best available. Personally speaking, if I had the choice to watch dubbed, mediocre anime on TV, or download subbed anime that I knew would be good, I would not waste my time watching that channel. Some participants even claimed that the anime subculture in South Africa was very young at the time of the Animax channel launch, and therefore did not get the high ratings it so badly desired. While this may be true, I feel that the main reason that the channel failed was due to the fact that the channel did not cater to the needs of the South African otaku at the time. It would have been an excellent medium to rope more otaku into the subculture, had it been better run.



Conclusion

This thesis has aimed to explain the practices of the anime fan subculture in South Africa, by drawing on pertinent subcultural and fandom theories and applying those I found helpful in an ethnographic study reliant upon participant observation and interviews over the period 2012-2013. Due to the lack of (South African or indeed any) research done on anime in the country, I found it helpful to utilise my insider status in the subculture to articulate the practices of the otaku in this country, given recent encouragement – against suspicions of subjectivity - for subcultural or fandom insiders to use their privileged location to generate rich research (Hodkinson 2002; Jenkins 1992b).

As discussed in the Introduction and Findings & Analysis Chapter of this thesis, the anime fandom in South Africa is of an underground nature. The underground status of the anime fan subculture is due to the difficulty in obtaining anime series and merchandise through legalised channels such as purchasing DVDs and other commodities at chain stores. This was agreed upon by a majority of the participants of this study, as they expressed frustration at the lack of anime events being held in the country, and the expensive merchandise that is available to them. While this could be a very possible deterrent to potential fans, otaku have found their way around this, by downloading and sharing their anime, free-of-charge.

The Theoretical Framework Chapter discussed these pertinent subcultural and fandom theories, focusing heavily on the works Paul Hodkinson (2002), Henry Jenkins (1992a,b; 2009), and John Fiske (1992). Hodkinson (2002) interestingly attempted to balance modernist and postmodernist subcultural theory, and highlighted four different subcultural characteristics (consistent distinctiveness; identity; commitment; and autonomy) which enabled substructures to be understood as both relatively stable with strong affective attachments by its members (the modernist emphasis), and as internally complex and diverse (in my case, there is a general divide between otaku who enjoy shojo anime and those who enjoy shonen anime) with immersion into media and commerce (the postmodern emphasis), a combination which allows researchers to identify subcultures of real ‘substance’ rather than fleeting groupings of fashion-driven ‘neo-tribes’. I utilised the same four characteristics to explain the anime subculture in South Africa. I was able to illustrate how the anime fandom in South Africa can similarly be described as a contemporary fan subculture of ‘substance’, its members displaying powerful affective attachments for all things anime, and whose sense of who they are, and the sort of social groups they identify with, were closely bound up with being an otaku.

Hodkinson’s (2002) four subcultural characteristics also broadly structured both my data gathering and data analysis of South African otaku. Hodkinson (2002) defined the first theme; consistent distinctiveness, as a set of shared values and tastes that exist within the subculture, while also containing a distinct internal diversity between the members. The conformity of members to the characteristics and values of the subculture is a straight-forward way for new members to be accepted and also to gain social status within the fandom. In order for this acceptance to occur members must increase their subcultural knowledge and invest in merchandise, which Thornton

(1995) has defined as subcultural capital. The higher the subcultural capital, the higher the social status of the fan. The importance of subcultural capital varies between the different fandoms, and in the South African anime fandom, there are fans who think it is of utmost importance and there are others who do not care about how much a person knows or has, but are more interested in sharing their own knowledge with their fellow fans, and occasionally with outsiders who have expressed interest in the fandom. A majority of South African otaku that I interviewed and observed also did not feel the need to be distinguished from outsiders as they felt that everyone is entitled to their own opinions. However there are some fans that felt the need to be set apart from outsiders as they felt it is an honour to be associated with such a foreign art form.

The rise in social status begins with the fan being accepted into the subculture by other members and this is easy to accomplish in the anime fandom in South Africa as stated by the participants of my study. All a noob has to do is show interest in any anime or anime-related activity, and they are immediately welcomed into the fandom, and provided with an abundance of information and anime to watch. However, the respondents of my study stated that people are only “true” fans or otaku when they have shown interest in more than one anime show and have more knowledge than casual anime fans. In addition otaku will often keep their anime merchandise for as long as possible, as illustrated by the many participants of this study who readily confessed to still having their *Pokémon* tazos and trading cards, even after almost eleven years. While the younger otaku (under 21) will often look down on noobs, the older otaku will rather nurture these noobs in order to foster and sustain the fandom in the country.

Due to the lack of anime commodities available to South African otaku, when someone is seen brandishing any form of anime merchandise, they are immediately approached or admired by other otaku. This is because anime merchandise plays the role of an unspoken cultural understanding (or a shared subcultural capital) between fans. Owning anime commodities also sends out the message that the fans are “true” fans as they have invested time, money, and effort to obtain these goods. Locating other fans in the anime fandom is not of utmost importance to otaku, however, there is a great sense of joy and familiarity one feels when they meet a fellow otaku in South Africa. This is because the anime fandom is still growing, and fans will not always meet other otaku in their daily lives, so when they do see someone brandishing anime merchandise, they will undoubtedly get excited and want to speak to that otaku. Otaku do not necessarily care whether or not they are judged by outsiders, as many of my participants stated that they have numerous friends who are not otaku but they are quite pleased when they meet other fans, and in many cases it is through the merchandise that the fan is wearing.

A branch aspect of this anime fashion is cosplay, in which fans dress up as their favourite anime characters, which takes large amounts of time and money to create and enact properly. These commodities can of course only be understood as objects encrusted with specific meanings, and it is those meanings which fans purchase (Baudrillard, 1998). If signs exist to enable communication, then these objects are markers of cultural belonging, which allow fans to recognise and connect to each other. However, there is a touch of discrimination that also exists, both within and outside of the fandom.

A considerable amount of anime strays away from the traditional genre specificity, with numerous shonen anime containing scenes of violence, vulgarity, and bloodshed, and shojo anime containing scenes of romance and love. This brings me to the point of discrimination within the fandom, as there is a general divide between otaku who enjoy shojo and those who enjoy shonen. My participants did however mention that they do get asked why they watch such childish cartoons by outsiders and there is often discrimination between insiders and outsiders.

The second theme drawn from Hodkinson (2002) that was utilised in this research was identity. Members of a subculture will no doubt share a like-mindedness which is similar to the sets of shared values and norms that were discussed in the consistent distinctiveness theme. It is due to this like-mindedness - an identification with the anime fandom that was also an active (re-) making of identities by fans through their central focus on anime ("I am the sort of person who is strongly attracted to anime") - that the otaku that I interviewed were so open and happy to be interviewed by me. The participants knew that I was also an otaku and they felt that I would better understand them and not be judgemental towards their interests and opinions. In addition this like-mindedness is responsible for the development of friendships, and even romances between otaku. Many of my participants found that they do tend to gravitate towards their fellow otaku, but will also maintain their friendships with outsiders, due to their varied interests. Friendships are also formed and sustained with otaku from other provinces and even other countries, through the ease of the Internet.

Due to the misconception surrounding the term otaku, many fans (especially the noobs) will shy away from being labelled as an otaku; however the older fans will enthusiastically embrace the term. There are other fans that feel that they could not be considered otaku as they do not engage enough in the activities of proper otaku, as being an "authentic" otaku means engaging in all aspects of the anime fandom, such as downloading and watching anime regularly, buying anime-related merchandise, routinely visiting anime-focused Internet sites, and even attending conventions that contain anime sections.

Any discussion of identity in the South African context needs to address the once determining power of the apartheid identity-machine, focused as it was on generating exclusively *ethnic* identities (Zulu, Afrikaner, Indian, etc.) within a racial hierarchy privileging white power. With the emergence of a new democratic social order (formally from 1994) the institutional reproduction of ethnicity has dramatically retreated, leaving a significant space for the remaking of *post-ethnic* identities within a democratic logic of *choice*. This political transformation coincided with a massive acceleration of (economic and cultural) globalisation (itself highly dependent upon digital technology, including the Internet), to which the South African economy and culture were exposed following 1994, as a result of the lifting of international boycotts. The fascination with Japanese culture amongst anime fans has much relevance to the exploration of post-ethnic identities among South African anime fans, who are visibly *choosing* to re-construct their identities through an encounter with the Japanese culture. I here include myself, as a young woman born ('free') into a KwaZulu-Natal Indian community. We can therefore add to the study of the post-apartheid quest for alternative identities by also drawing attention to the key role that globalisation is playing in enabling the South African youth to imagine other identities. The borders of the ethnos and the nation can no longer confidently

secure and stabilise identities. If one takes a (modernist) Marxist view of ascribed identities, that they are shaped by the interests of the ruling classes to ensure conformity to dominant interests (as was most famously argued by Althusser (1971)), then this fan active *self-fashioning* can be seen as a progressive strategy by post-apartheid youth to fabricate identities outside of the ideological structures of conservative social interests. The very essence of fan subcultures – that they give enormous pleasure, that they foreground desire, that they attract remarkable degrees of affective investment and commitment, that they are part of leisure rather than work, that they playfully encourage consumers to be active producers of fan fiction, fan art, etc. – opposes them to that sober resignation to ruling class domination associated with hegemonic identity formation, and instead puts on centre stage the de-naturalised *making of elective* subjectivities. To distinguish oneself as a subculturalist from ‘others’ is in its deeper significance to separate oneself from a ‘mainstream’ unable or unwilling to travel beyond imposed hegemonic subjectivities, and to re-think oneself within the remarkably enlarged space of globalisation and its integral interactive digital media.

This is also true in my case, where I have garnered an immense curiosity and appreciation of the Japanese language and culture, through my love for anime. While my initial identity as a young child was that of a traditional Hindu girl who actively participated in cultural shows and Hindi language programmes, I have since grown apart from this identity, and moved on to Japanese culture and anime, which forms a large part of my identity today. This post-ethnic identity is similar to that of numerous other otaku, who consider being an otaku a major part of their identity. Over the last two years, I have adopted a quieter disposition, which is a characteristic of a majority of female characters in shojo. It was a subconscious change, and I only noticed it once it was pointed out to me by an old friend. It was also brought to my attention that I am now a “tsundere”, which is a category of anime female characters. A tsundere is typically quiet and cold at first, and very slowly warms up to people. In addition to this, and as with many of my participants, we all found that we tended to ascribe anime terms and behaviours to our everyday lives.

This leads directly to Hodkinson’s (2002) third subcultural characteristic that I drew on, and that is subcultural commitment, a key measurement, if a subculture is to be considered as “substantial”. A subculture is responsible for a considerable portion of the fan’s life and questions about fan-related practices revealed to me the amount of time and money that South African otaku will dedicate to their fandom. Otaku will spend as much time as they possibly can watching the various anime shows and inevitably building up their subcultural capital (never mind the considerable time it takes to download anime from the Internet). However, veteran otaku will spend more time reading up and learning about their favourite anime shows and characters as a means of gaining more knowledge and also satisfying their curiosity. Veteran otaku will also spend much of their time discussing and debating anime theories and stories with their friends, both locally and globally. In addition to all of the above mentioned, otaku will assign anime-related names and ideas to their everyday lives and situations. Many of my participants expressed a great interest and desire to attend conventions, expos, and even anime clubs if these were available to them, due to the limited number of anime events being held in the country. Some otaku have even gone to the lengths of attending and participating in card tournaments as a means of climbing up the subcultural social ladder. By engaging in this activity, those otaku must invest a large amount of time and money to purchase the cards, build up their decks, and practice to win against other duellers.

Hodkinson's (2002) fourth subcultural characteristic, autonomy, indicates (against the position of Hebdige (1979)) that subcultures cannot be completely devoid of media and commerce and that, in many cases, they require these two aspects to live and thrive. It is thanks to the few anime expos and conventions that are held in South Africa that the fandom is gaining more recognition. There are even a few active fans that have turned their hobbies into businesses forming subcultural careers, such as the owners of the online store *Dark Carnival*. These businesses were established in order to cater to the anime fans, which as discussed in previous chapters, is a niche market in South Africa. In order for businesses to be able to actively cater for anime fans, the media is needed to advertise. Media such as *Facebook* and *Twitter* are used by otaku to advertise their conventions and expos and for online stores to advertise their merchandise to potential customers. Moreover, local anime fan communities engage in a variety of fan activities which can be found on *Facebook*.

The focus on commerce draws attention to how fans (including in South Africa) have embarked on an underground journey in order to obtain anime series that they cannot purchase at stores. Piracy of anime includes the downloading, subtitling, and re-uploading of the anime onto the Internet so that other fans are able to view anime shows in their home languages. Due to the high cost of anime DVDs, and the lack of anime series on national television stations in South Africa, otaku will regularly engage in the online streaming or downloading of anime, and even sharing with other otaku. With serious fans routinely collecting over 500 episodes of a particular anime TV series, it is imperative to download off fan Internet sites, thus connecting to a global community of anime fans. This streaming and downloading of anime heavily restricts otaku in the amount of anime that they can watch as people are often limited with their Internet caps and data bundles.

The illegal downloading of anime TV episodes and series by fans is so widespread and time-consuming that it becomes one of the defining characteristics of South African anime fandom. The issue of illegality for downloading anime fans is not unlike the situation of the marijuana smoker, who smokes marijuana because she likes it, but then finds herself outside of the law, cast into an underground subculture by mainstream culture and its laws.

What is even more curious is this downloading activity's peculiar relation to globalisation. Globalisation enables anime texts to flow through its digital networks to every corner of the world, where it is picked up by youths and others in a clear example of (the very common experience of) post-nationalist cultural identification. South African youths identify with Japanese culture, but if we then turn in orthodox fashion to the 'cultural imperialism' thesis so dear to many critics of globalisation – that global media corporations *impose* Western culture upon the rest of the world, thus destroying local cultural specificities – then we have a serious problem. Not only is anime from the *East*, but Japanese media companies have shown almost no serious interest in counter-acting the wide-spread piracy of its products by for example making its TV shows easily accessible at reasonable prices to non-Japanese fans. There is no Japanese cultural imperialism at work here, and as a result fans have to go to extraordinary lengths to gain access to anime shows.

The seminal works of Jenkins (1992a,b) and Fiske (1992) on fans and fandom theory were also valuable in my research. While fans were in the past seen as psychotic, Jenkins (1992b) and Fiske

(1992) preferred to see fans as creative producers based on their fandoms. Both Fiske (1992) and Jenkins (1992a,b) claimed that fans are active audiences, and are responsible for creating their own productions based on their fandom such as fan art, fan fiction, AMV's and also cosplaying. In this manner, fans are not merely seen as an audience that can be duped into believing what they receive via the media, but rather as active members of the audience. With regard to anime, as we have seen, some fans go so far as to subtitle entire anime TV series, without any remuneration, for the benefit of other fans.

Anime can be seen as a significant part of the cultural fabric of youth societies around the globe, and is a rapidly growing media form in South Africa. While still seen as an underground movement, due to the piracy surrounding the obtaining of the actual anime shows, it is gaining a wider audience through word-of-mouth. Fans are slowly but surely spreading the word of anime and as a result, more people (both youths and adults) are beginning to join the subculture. While this research has been limited by space issues within the thesis, I believe that I have compensated for that lack by not only interviewing a variety of people but also by including my own personal thoughts and experiences, which encompass a wide variety of fan-related practices and activities. In addition, by utilising Hodgkinson's (2002) reworked ideas of subculture and his four subcultural characteristics, I have been able to bring to light the key practices and values of the South African anime subculture. I hope that this thesis will aid in shedding light on the anime fandom in South Africa, and allow future scholars to be able to further study this fascinating global fan subculture.



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Appendix A

1. Roronoa Zoro from *One Piece* has bright green hair. The bright colours of a character's hair is somewhat of a trademark of anime characters.



2. Rukia Kuchiki from *Bleach* has large purple eyes, which is characteristic of anime characters.



3. Sawako Kuronuma with smaller darker eyes as opposed to Rukia.



4. Dojinshi done by a local artist. It features the two main characters of the anime *Bleach* as a couple, which is not the case in the actual anime and manga.



- 5.1 The *All Otaku Magazine*, September 2013 edition, which was free for download from the website. The cover page is shown below:



5.2 The Anime reviews and previews section of the magazine.

Anime Reviews and Previews

Garden of Words

Dipped in a coat of deep emotional atmosphere, the Garden of Words movie is set to waltz its feelings in the sways of heavy clouds over the life of a lone protagonist as he is discovered within the waters of his family. Released on 6th of August this year for English speaking markets but having already premiered at the Gold Coast Film Festival at Australia on the 28th of April. The trailer does what a good trailer does and gets you interested in how the story will be pieced across your imagination. The movie is directed by Makoto Shinkai, who also worked on the award winning film 5 Centimeters Per Second and the unforgettable Chihiro Who Chose Lost Voices. Making an equivalent for another great anime movie title we can watch over and over, with a refreshing amendment.

Inu to Hasami wa Tsukaiyou

Flow like any steady stream is going to fill PLCL levels, why this every one has seen. Haruichi, Kurokawa is a high school boy who loves books and is a fan of amateur Human Kishinetsu. One day, he finds his way into a cafe, about to be shut by a rather ill owner. Encountering a strange cat, he pretends her from the street but is killed instead of her. Through the supernatural games of a bookworm, he is resurrected as a mechanical dog. In his new existence Haruichi is walking from life without books, when a regular woman introducing a pair of glasses offers him help. She is Kurokawa Haruichi.

Based on the novel of the same name I am optimistic but nervous about the title offering. It's a unique premise and the characters look very appealing, but I am a bit wary that that may fall into the same trap a lot of light novel based anime does and become trapped in writing for the most volume. Critics are interested.

Watamote

Watamote is a young girl entering her debut in high school. She has 20 years of dating experience with over 100 boys, it's a pity that they're all 2D and Watamote is probably the most unhinged and socially maladjusted person on the planet.

When I first heard that there would be an anime adaption of Watamote or "It's Not My Fault That I'm Not Popular" I wondered how they were planning on capturing the awkward and stilted characters of the anime through this screen. How did they succeed although I'm not sure success is anywhere failing as the screen is one of the most painful things I've ever had to watch.

Watamote is a "kawaii" or "crazy girl" who desperately needs her human contact, but hasn't the faintest clue how to engage with people socially, she has decided to research on popular people through the internet and is a consequence of every little detail around her. This however has manifested as her complete inability to handle reality. "Mikohoshi" as Watamote is called is an desperate for human contact that she goes to whatever for any form of recognition.

On a related standpoint the art and music of this show are top notch, the animation really catches the damaged nature of Mikohoshi's perception of the world. While there are moments when the art becomes sloppy and very much lowering the show's score as a whole these are usually used for good effect.

However the real reason is part of why watching this show was painful to me. While Mikohoshi clearly has social and some of the recognitions that are played for humans are precisely facing. The whole scene just can't connect with me. Characters like this are usually set up with either a redemptive arc like Watamote or the ITR or are played with a light-hearted optimism like in Lucky Star. Watamote has neither and suffers for it. Watching the show, all I feel when I see poor Mikohoshi is a great deal of sympathy about Otaku have been lonely at some point and the way that Mikohoshi seems so someone just pulls at my heart strings and depresses me. The problem is that the show seems to be playing to her laughs with Mikohoshi being the butt of most jokes and all I feel is shame that I'm not feeling a funny instead the depression and sadness that periods have just make me feel like an ant on the fire because I do laugh.

Technically this is a B but I'm sorry watching any anime miserably it's an F on my book.




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6.1 A Zarak Kenpachi (Bleach character) t-shirt that I purchased from rAge 2012.



6.2 A *One Piece* bag owned by my brother, which was also purchased from *rAge* 2012.



6.3 A Soifon (*Bleach* character) wallet that I currently own and use.



6.4 My Tony-Tony Chopper (*One Piece* character) plush toy which was bought for me by a friend from *rAge* 2013.



7.1 My personal collection of *Pokémon* tazos which is still in mint condition.



7.2 My *Dragonball Z* tazo collection



8.1 My *Yugioh!* duelling card collection, which has also been kept in mint condition.



8.2 My *Pokémon* card collection. While only having two decks of cards, I still cherished them as a child and kept them for all these years.



9 The *One Piece* t-shirt that was gifted to a friend, was printed by a local printer for his birthday.



10. A *Yugioh!* duelling tournament, held in Umhlanga, Durban, in 2013.



11. The (very expensive) *Pokémon* cards at rAge 2012.



12.1 The plush toys available at The *Dark Carnival* booth at *rAge* 2012.



12.2 Miniature zanpakutou (swords used in *Bleach*) available for purchase at *rAge* 2012.



12.3 The Going Merry, which was the first ship that the main characters in *One Piece* used at the beginning of their adventure was also available for purchase at the *Dark Carnival* booth at the *rAge Expo* 2012.





Appendix B

1. The questionnaire that was sent to some of the participants via email

Personal Information

1. Name?
2. Age?
3. Sex?
4. Current residence?
5. Current occupation/ Field of Study?

Questions about Anime

1. Can you please give me your own definition of anime and explain why you say this?
2. Would you consider your level of anime fandom to be that of an otaku [an otaku is someone that is considered a huge (almost obsessed) fan of anime]? Please explain.
3. Can you please explain to me, in your own words, what the anime scene is all about in your city? (e.g. Durban; Cape Town; Johannesburg etc.)

The Subculture and Practices

6. Is it important to you, as an anime fan, to have more knowledge, and more anime goods than your friends and other anime fans?
7. Since becoming an anime fan, have you noticed that you now assign more anime-like meanings to other everyday normal situations and objects (for e.g. replying to someone using Japanese phrases you have picked up from anime or giving pets and gadgets Japanese names based on your favourite anime characters)? If so, can you name some examples and explain why you do this?
8. If anime suddenly became more mainstream in S.A, would it still hold the same attraction for you as it does now? Please explain.
9. Is it important for you to be distinguished from other non-anime fans? Is it important that that you are distinguished as an otaku? Are you proud of being an anime fan? Would you readily admit to being an otaku?
10. When did you first, knowingly, become interested in anime? Was it through the recommendation of someone? How long have you been an anime fan?
11. Within the anime subculture, do you ever find that you are discriminated against for perhaps liking a particular series or genre?
12. Do you ever find that you are discriminated against by other non-anime fans? How do people (your parent, family and friends) react to your anime fandom?
13. How did other otaku treat you when you first became an anime fan and started mingling with them?
14. How much of time, in your life, do you dedicate to anime? Do you spend a lot of time on the internet reading up on and/or downloading anime?
15. How much of anime do you watch per day/week?
16. Do you go out of your way to purchase anime goods? Do you purchase anime from large chain stores? And what do you think of the range that they stock? Would you purchase anime series from chain stores if they were, say, cheaper and had a larger range of anime to choose from?
17. If not, from stores, where do you obtain your anime from? And would you prefer to

purchase the series?

18. In terms of your social circle, do you find that you tend to get along with other anime fans better than non-anime fans? Do you find that you share a kind of like-mindedness with your fellow anime fans?
19. Of all your friends that also enjoy anime, are any of them located outside of your city? Does this have any effect on the friendship?
20. Would you make arrangements to specially attend an anime expo or convention if there was one to be held in your city? Would you join an anime club if there was one available to you?
21. Do you now prefer the anime you watch to be subbed or dubbed and why? (What difference, to you, does it make?)
22. Why do you think that the Dstv channel, Animax failed?
23. What do you think of AMV's (anime/amateur music videos) and doujinshi (fanfiction)?
24. Have you watched a series that has really had an impact on you, and if so can you please explain this further?
25. What is your attraction to anime and/or the Japanese culture?

Cosplay (If you are an active anime cosplayer)

26. Where do you get the items that are a part of your cosplay outfit?
27. Why is it that you enjoy cosplaying? What kind of pleasure do you get from this form of fandom? Do other fans compliment you on your cosplaying ability?
28. Would you say that you cosplay in order to gain acceptance and respect from other anime fans?
29. Do you know many other people that also enjoy cosplaying?
30. Do you attend many conventions where you get to cosplay?
31. What do other people (non-anime fans) think of your cosplaying?
32. Is cosplaying a normal part of the anime fandom? In other words, are there a lot of other anime fans who engage in cosplaying?

2. The questionnaire developed especially for duelling participant and judge, Prevashin

1. Can you please give me your own definition of anime and explain why you say this?
2. Would you consider your level of anime fandom to be that of an otaku [an otaku is someone that is considered a huge (almost obsessed) fan of anime]? Please explain.
3. Can you please explain to me, in your own words, what the anime scene is all about in your city? (e.g. Durban; Cape Town; Johannesburg etc.)
4. Can you please explain what the *Yugioh!* tournaments that you hold are about?
5. Do you have many fans attending? Please provide a rough estimate.
6. What was the purpose for beginning this group?
7. Is it important for you to be distinguished from other non-anime fans? Is it important that that you are distinguished as an otaku? Are you proud of being an anime fan? Would you readily admit to being an otaku?
8. Do you ever find that you are discriminated against by other non-anime fans? How do people (your parents, family and friends) react to your anime fandom? Perhaps being called childish?
9. Do you purchase anime series from large chain stores? And what do you think of the

- range that they stock? Would you purchase anime series from chain stores if they were, say, cheaper and had a larger range of anime to choose from?
10. If not, from stores, where do you obtain your anime from? And would you prefer to purchase the series?
 11. What is your attraction to anime and/or the Japanese culture?
 12. From where do you purchase the cards that you use? Or how do you obtain these cards?
 13. Why is it that you enjoy duelling? What kind of pleasure do you get from this form of
 14. Would you say that you duel in order to gain acceptance and respect from other anime fans?
 15. Do you know many other people that also enjoy duelling?
 16. Do you attend many conventions where you get to duel?
 17. What do other people (non-anime fans) think of your duelling and anime fandom?
 18. Would you say that duelling is a normal part of the anime fandom? In other words, are there a lot of other anime fans who engage in it?



