Watching Anime, Doing Gender:

Hegemonic Masculinity, Sexual Modesty, and the Gendered Consumption Practices and Preferences of Kuwaiti Anime Fans

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Abstract

Japanese animation--referred to as "anime"--can be understood as a culturally unique and specifically Japanese cultural product. It has also become a global phenomenon, both commercially and culturally, and a major player in the transnational entertainment economy with worldwide popularity. The Japanese animation industry has targeted not only Western countries but also culturally conservative countries in the Middle East (particularly concerning gender and sexuality), such as Kuwait, to expand their business. Kuwait is both a Muslim-majority nation proud of its Islamic culture and a nation containing multiple generations of Kuwaitis who grew up watching Anime. The region of the Middle East--and the country of Kuwait, in particular--provide an opportunity to study how the consumption and circulation of Anime as objects of popular culture are shaped by this specific context. In Kuwait, where Anime has been accessible since the 1970s, there is a high degree of circulation and consumption of Anime with a large and growing fan base. Simultaneously, the indigenous animation industry in the Middle East has grown substantially in recent years. The region has thus become a key site for the global animation industry in which local and foreign animation circulate.

Yet, while a growing body of literature has focused on the expanding industry of Middle Eastern animation, very few studies have considered the presence of Japanese Anime in the region and its reception by Middle Eastern audiences. There is a virtual absence of scholarship on the circulation and consumption of Anime in Kuwait. The present study aims to address this gap in the literature by investigating the forces that have shaped the distribution and use of Anime in Kuwait over time and how Kuwaiti anime fans' anime consumption practices and preferences may influence, as well as

reflect, their attitudes and beliefs regarding gender and sexuality within the world of Anime and beyond.

The study's findings are based on data collected from questionnaires with 103 Kuwaiti anime fans, and in-depth interviews with 27 Kuwaiti anime fans and other individuals involved in the anime industry in Kuwait. The findings suggest that Kuwaiti culture and anime culture to which participants were exposed continuously since childhood have acted as compatible and mutually reinforcing twin forces, particularly in the realm of gender ideologies. In particular, the hegemonic masculine portrayals in Anime from the 1980s and 1990s that the study participants were first introduced to and grew up with resonated strongly with them, reflecting the messages they were simultaneously receiving from Kuwaiti culture about what it means to be proper men and women, what it means to be masculine or feminine. That is, the hegemonic masculinity portrayed in Kuwaiti culture aligned with the hegemonic masculinity portrayed in the Anime of the 1980s and 1990s, and the findings suggest that it is for that reason that the Anime from this time period was wildly popular among Kuwaitis.

As this hegemonic masculinity started to wane in the 2000s with the emergence of the "new" Anime characterized by gender transgressions, with more female protagonists, depictions of dominant female characters, and submissive male characters, the participants became increasingly ambivalent and even weary of the new Anime. Much of the new Anime that they now watch is at odds with their culture in terms of the depictions of males and females and the definitions of masculinity and femininity. They now contend with a culture clash between anime culture and Kuwaiti culture around gender that previously did not exist.

Much like with hegemonic masculinity, the participants' modest responses to sexual content in Anime seem to reflect an alignment between Kuwaiti anime fans' consumption practices and preferences and Kuwaiti cultural norms. While they preferred uncensored Anime and thus were willing to watch Anime with sexual content that went against Kuwaiti and Islamic laws, participants mostly did not display enthusiasm for such content, and even displayed disdain and disgust for much of the sexualized fan service in the new Anime. This suggests that the sexual modesty encouraged by Kuwaiti culture is reflected in their responses to sexual content in Anime.

The study's findings suggest that the anime consumption practices, preferences, and beliefs displayed by the Kuwaiti anime fan participants illustrate that watching Anime is a form of "doing gender," reproducing and challenging ideologies around gender and sexuality presented to them through Anime and through Kuwaiti culture. The study concludes that a variety of forces have shaped the circulation and consumption of Anime in Kuwait over time, including Kuwaiti culture, the larger cultural, religious, and political contexts of Kuwait, censorship, and technological changes. The study further concludes that both Kuwaiti culture and anime culture--as twin forces that acted upon participants' as they developed their anime fandom over the years--interact to inform participants' attitudes and beliefs around gender and sexuality both within the world of Anime and beyond.

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Introduction

Japanese animation--referred to as "anime"--can be understood as a culturally unique and specifically Japanese cultural product, as evidenced by its animation techniques, story themes, and socio-historical contexts (Crump, 2018). As a specifically Japanese cultural product, Anime represents a critical component of Japan's post-war "pop culture diplomacy," aimed to soften anti-Japan perceptions outside the country, and its more recent manifestation as "Cool Japan" (Iwabuchi 2015). "Cool Ja (Krammer n.d.) (Placeholder1)pan" refers to an economic, diplomatic, and national branding strategy developed by the Japanese government in the late 1980s to "remake Japan's global image through association with cultural products."[1] Primarily entertainment products, they range from literature, film, music, plays, television, radio, and fashion, but principally center on Anime, manga, and videogames (Peltoniemi 2014; Valaskivi 2013).

Thus, although Japanese Anime is a Japanese cultural product, because of its role in Japan's pop culture diplomacy broadly and "Cool Japan" specifically, it has become a global phenomenon "both as a commercial and cultural force."[2] and a major player in the transnational entertainment economy. Its worldwide popularity has been aided by a number of other defining features of Anime, including its universal themes of love, friendship, and death that appeal to a global audience (Cooper-Chen 2011; Lu 2008), its characters who typically do not appear to belong to any race but rather depict a "hybrid

1. David Tyler Crump, “Anime and Japanese Uniqueness: The Cultural Authenticity of Japanese Animation.” *(*MA Thesis, George Mason University, 2018), 1.

2. Susan J Napier, *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*, Updated ed. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 8.

global 'look."[3] referred to as "mukokuseki" (literally meaning "without nationality") (Napier2005, Oóhagan, 2007) and its ability to be easily dubbed into other languages (Westcott 2011).

Although Anime has been used as part of Japan's pop culture diplomacy, an inherently political tactic, Lu argues that a separate tactic, that of "de-politicized internationalization, as a commercially successful tactic" accounts for Anime's popularity across cultures "because it allows a broader imaginary space of identification for people of various cultures. "[4]

Starting in the 1970s, Japan "shifted its status from importer to exporter of information"[5] According to Japan's Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (2016), Anime accounted for more than 77 percent of all Japanese TV exports in 2016. Driven mainly by streaming and exports, the Japanese animation industry doubled in size to more than $19 billion annually between 2002 and 2017 (Blair, 2018). In 2018, the Japanese anime market recorded its highest sales; however, overseas sales, still its biggest driver, slowed down (Masuda et al. 2019). According to Masuda et al. (2019), "In 2018, the Japanese animation market recorded nine consecutive years of growth since 2010, with six consecutive years of record-breaking high sales."[6]

The globalization of Japanese Anime has been facilitated by the changing technological, social, and economic conditions of the current information age (Li, 2012).

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3. Amy Shirong Lu, "The Many Faces of Internationalization in Japanese Anime." *Animation* 3 (2) (2008), 172.

4. Amy Shirong Lu, "The Many Faces of Internationalization in Japanese Anime." *Animation* 3 (2) (2008), 176.

5. Anne Cooper-Chen, "Japan's Illustrated Storytelling: A Thematic Analysis of Globalized Anime and Manga. *Keio Communication Review* 33(2011), 44.

6. Masuda, Hiromichi, Tadashi Sudo, Kazuo Rikukawa, Yuji Mori, Naofumi Ito, Yasuo Kameyama, and Megumi Onouchi. "Anime Industry Report 2019: Summary." April, 2019. The Association of Japanese Animations, 2.

As Anime has become increasingly transnational, so too has its fandom, which can be referred to as otaku culture, a "manifestation of a distinctive mode of techno-culture--so-called geek culture" (vi). According to Li, Anime has produced a form of "distributive globalization," a new model of global cultural flow facilitated by the visual and narrative ways of Anime, which "provoke unique consumer experience of cybernetic pleasure and techno-intimacy" that are especially appealing to the cyber generation (vi). This, combined with the rise of otaku communities which are organized globally with massive user participation through vast computer networks, account for this distributive globalization and have led to an increase of a large-scale global "geekdom movement" (vi).

Japanese animation companies have targeted not only Western countries but also culturally conservative countries(particularly with regard to gender and sexuality) in the Middle East, such as Kuwait, to expand their business. Kuwait is both a Muslim-majority nation proud of its Islamic culture and a nation containing multiple generations who grew up watching Anime. In Kuwait, where Anime has been accessible since the 1970s, there is a high degree of circulation and consumption of Anime with a large and growing fan base. Simultaneously, the indigenous animation industry in the Middle East has grown substantially in recent years. The region has thus become a key site for the global animation industry in which local and foreign animation circulate. The region and Kuwait provide an opportunity to study how the circulation and consumption of Anime as objects of popular culture are shaped by this specific context.

Yet, while a growing body of literature has focused on the expanding industry of Middle Eastern animation, very few studies have considered the presence of Japanese Anime in the region and its reception by Arab audiences. There is a virtual absence of

scholarship on Anime's circulation and consumption in Kuwait. Based on data collected from questionnaires with 103 Kuwaiti anime fans and in-depth interviews with 27 Kuwaiti anime fans and other individuals in the anime industry in Kuwait, the present study aims to address this gap in the literature by investigating the forces that have shaped the circulation and consumption of Anime in Kuwait over time and how Kuwaiti anime fans' anime consumption practices and preferences may influence, as well as reflect, their attitudes and beliefs regarding gender and sexuality within the world of Anime and beyond.

This chapter proceeds in the following way. First, the background section provides an overview of the history and culture of the case study of Kuwait. It then situates the present research in the relevant bodies of literature, including gender and sexuality studies, media studies, and anime studies. Then, the theoretical framework, research questions, and research methods are presented. The chapter concludes with an overview of the present study and the content of each chapter.

Background on Kuwait

Located in Middle East, Kuwait is situated between Saudi Arabia and Iraq. As of 2019, it had a total population of 4.4 million people. Among them, Kuwait nationals represented 30 percent of the total population of Kuwait. In comparison, expatriates (foreign nationals) made up 70 percent, totaling 1.3 million and 3.1 million people, respectively (The World Factbook, 2019).

After the discovery of oil in 1938, the country entered a rapid upward development trajectory and modernization in a short period, fuelled by the high price of oil (Casey,

2007; Crystal, 1995).[7] However, in the late 1980s, the country faced several political, military, and economic challenges, including an attack and invasion by, and subsequent war with, neighboring Iraq (Long, 2009).[8] When the war ended, Kuwait implemented wide-ranging efforts aimed at restoring the previous economic achievements and redeveloping its national infrastructure, which had been left in ruins by the war (Casey, 2007; Crystal, 1995; Longva, 1997).[9] Presently, the country is characterized by a high GDP and productive economy primarily due to the revenues from its oil exports (The World Factbook, 2019). Its currency is the Kuwaiti *dinar*, currently the most valued currency globally (Remitr, 2019).[10]

The country is a constitutional monarchy and emirate, which has maintained a remarkable degree of political continuity over time, despite social and economic upheavals (Crystal, 1995). It has incorporated some democratic structures into its political system (Herb, 2009). The Constitution was promulgated in 1962, and it approves the election of members to the National Assembly (Casey, 2007). Kuwait's legal system is heavily influenced by various other nations; it features elements of the universal laws in Britain, civil laws of France and Egypt, and also incorporates Islamic laws (Al-Moqatei, 1989; Hussain, 2016).[11]

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7. Jill Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* . *(*Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995)

8. Jerry M Long, *Saddam's War of Words: Politics, Religion, and the Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait*. (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2009)

9. Michael S Casey, *The History of Kuwait*. Westport (CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007)

10. Remitr.. "10 Strongest Currencies in the World 2019." June 18, 2019

11. Mohammad Al-Moqatei, "Introducing Islamic Law in the Arab Gulf States: A Case Study of Kuwait." *Arab Law Quarterly* 4 (2) (1989): 138-148.

Kuwait Pre-Oil

Kuwait was established in 1716, consisting of 18th-century tribes from central and southern Arabia who journeyed towards the northeast coast of the peninsula to escape severe famine (Al Nakib 2016, 21).[12] One of the families who traveled there were known as the Bani Utub, who came from Najd, an Anizah tribal association. They had established plows preceding to their migration to the coast. When they reached the Persian Gulf around 1716, there was an expansive bay with a supply of fresh water there. There was no settlement community in the area, other than a few fishermen's huts, and only a fort that belonged to the Bani Khalid tribe, which had apprehended control of eastern Arabia from the Ottomans in the 1660s. The Utub set up their settlement on a small hill known as Tell Bhaiteh, which met the Bani Khalid's fort (21).

Kuwaiti society before the oil is divided into three categories: Townspeople, people belonging to agricultural and fishing villages, and nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples. As groups continuously settled in Kuwait, new social and economic routines reflecting these groups were established.[13] The urban areas experienced a demographic growth from the 1890s until 1920 due to an economic boom. The boom was caused, in part, by the increase in trade due to the arrival of British steamers in the Gulf, the overthrow of piracy in the region, and the opening up of Kuwaiti merchants in India and other areas in the Indian Ocean. The economic boom was also due to the pearl business, which was carried out during the early 20th century, primarily along the Gulf coast. This success

12. Farah Al Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed: A History of Oil and Urban Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), 21.

13. Al Nakib, *History of Oil and Urban Life, 26.*

came between 1910 and 1912, when Kuwait saw an extraordinary increase in the standard of living and wages.[14]

In 1938, the *majlis* (council) banned dancing and drumming inside the walls of the city, targeting the Al Sabah and their performance of Bedouin war dances in Al Safat. The *majlis* did, however, permit the playing of radios and gramophones in coffee shops in Al-Safat, which the ruler had previously forbidden. The radio played an important role in motivating the movement of Kuwaitis in the late 1930s. It was played in coffee shops as a way of spreading information to its listeners.[15] In 1942, the Basra public relations traveling cinema came to Kuwait for a couple of nights every month to screen films, which were projected onto a wall of the public security building. Ten thousand people attended the first events, sitting on the ground in the middle of the square, and the number of attendees doubled each time the cinema came to town. Therefore, Al-Safat became the town's first form of organized public entertainment, and everyone, regardless of their background, age, or sex, could attend for free.[16]

The interior of houses in Kuwait displayed a family's taste and style. In contrast, most houses looked the same on the outside because they shared boundary walls. The homes of prosperous families had up to five courtyards, each serving a particular part of the house: one for *diwaniya* (men's visiting quarters), another for the *harem* (women's visiting quarters), a family area, a kitchen area, and area for animals and storage.[17] The majority of houses were made of mud brick. Because it was comparatively more substantial, most houses were a single story as the walls could not handle a second

14. Al Nakib, *History of Oil and Urban Life, 27.*
15. Al Nakib, *History of Oil and Urban Life, 49.*
16. Al Nakib, *History of Oil and Urban Life, 50.*
17. Al Nakib, *History of Oil and Urban Life, 56.*

level.[18] The segregation of men and women in both public and private spheres can be seen across the Arab world, but Kuwait's oceanic activities made this arrangement all the more necessary and practical. Since they were not involved in maritime operations, the women were left alone in the home for several months at a time as their fathers, husband, brothers, and sons went pearling and trading. In addition to keeping men and women apart, these courtyard houses were designed by men to seclude, conceal, and protect their women during the men's absences.[19] Women also handled many of the neighborhood responsibilities. While Kuwaiti men were out at sea, it was the women who managed the family affairs and made sure that intruders would not come to the neighborhood.[20]

Kuwait after Oil

Oil was discovered in Kuwaiti in 1938. The first barrel was exported in 1946. The oil income went directly to the ruler, and he reasonably distributed the wealth to the people. With the accession of power by Abdullah Al-Salem in 1950, Kuwait went through a significant shift towards a greater social connection between the ruler and the citizens.[21] Kuwait's modernization efforts were focused on urban development and social welfare. The urban development included new neighborhoods, schools, houses, hospitals, roads, development of water and sewer supply lines, construction of water desalination plants, and the development of electric power plants, all paid by the government. Social welfare programs were developed, which included the provision of

18. Al Nakib, *History of Oil and Urban Life, 57.*
19. Al Nakib, *History of Oil and Urban Life, 62.*
20. Al Nakib, *History of Oil and Urban Life, 60-61*
21. Al Nakib, *History of Oil and Urban Life, 91.*

free education and health care, employment, provision of housing, issuing of marriage loans to young people starting their families, and funding water and electricity for the citizenry.[22] Therefore, Kuwaiti citizens became entirely dependent on the state, rather than the merchants or *farij* for their livelihoods.

The oil industry led to an increase in immigration by people from desert regions and neighboring Arab countries seeking new opportunities for employment. The influx of immigration led to the creation of a state welfare program, which, in turn, led to the development of a law which stated that foreign nationals could become citizens of Kuwait. Kuwait's first nationalization laws emerged in 1948 after the first wave of immigration in order to control the entry by foreign nationals. Families that had been living in the country since 1899 as well as children who were Arab or Muslims and born in Kuwait and had lived in Kuwait for a period of ten or more years were eligible to apply for Kuwaiti citizenship.[23] In 1959, a new nationalization law appeared, making the nationalization process stricter as immigration continued to increase rapidly. By that time, non-Kuwaitis consisted of 45 percent of the total population, and by 1961, they reached 50 percent .[24] Oil provided new opportunities for women. Women's education became available, including the ability to study abroad. More women entered the workforce, primarily joining the public service sector. Meanwhile, men worked in the oil industry and government services with fixed wages and higher pay and safer working conditions compared to their previous work pearl divers or sailors.[25]

22. Al Nakib, *History of Oil and Urban Life, 92.*

23. Al Nakib, *History of Oil and Urban Life, 94.*

24. Ibid

25. Al Nakib, *History of Oil and Urban Life, 95.*

Over time, many Kuwaitis came to reject the past in favor of the new and modern. The government convinced them that their old houses were dirty, unhygienic, infested with insects, and promised to build the new and better homes outside the city. Most Kuwaitis viewed the old town as a life of hardship, and the modern city symbolized progress and wealth.[26] Other sectors of the population, including non-Kuwaiti immigrants, pastoral Bedouin, and villagers, were excluded from inner suburbs, turning them into a clearly defined social group, referred to as *Hadar* (sedentary urbanities), differentiating them from newly urbanized Kuwaitis.[27] The only people who did move from the old town to the new neighborhoods were members of the ruling family. Rather than building the new suburbs together with the former townspeople, the Al Sabah bought large plots of land well beyond the old town wall for the building of their new palaces.[28] Non-Kuwaitis were also not allowed from owning property in Kuwait and, therefore, could only rent accommodations in privately owned multi-occupancy buildings.[29]

Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis were intentionally segregated from one another, serving the interest of the state.[30] This social segregation was motivated by the rulers' fears that mixing urban Kuwaitis with non-Kuwaitis would spread ideologies, such as Arab nationalism, that could threaten their rule. As non-Kuwaiti Arab expatriates with Arab nationalist sentiments moved to Kuwait to serve as teachers in local schools and hold significant positions in government agencies where Kuwaitis worked, the government did not want further mixing between Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis, prohibiting rentals in

26. Al Nakib, *History of Oil and Urban Life, 97.*

27. Al Nakib, *History of Oil and Urban Life, 134.*

28. Al Nakib, *History of Oil and Urban Life,136.*

29. Al Nakib, *History of Oil and Urban Life, 137.*

30. Al Nakib, *History of Oil and Urban Life, 138.*

the inner neighborhood units by non-Kuwaitis to prevent non-Kuwaitis from moving in and living side-by-side with Kuwaitis.[31]

After 1950, newspapers, magazines, and journals of diverse political slants proliferated, due to an increase in political freedom in the country. These publications allowed the public to no only hear the news via radio but also to express and exchange their views, debate issues, and influence public opinion without the constant need for face-to-face contact. Though the public sphere expanded after the arrival of oil, by the 1960s most of the spaces in which everyday politics played out were shifted outside the city limits and was, to some extent, privatized.[32]

The oil industry has dramatically increased the wealth and economic activity of the country, with the simultaneous development of roads, pavements, sewers, piped water, electricity, telephone cables, and new buildings. In 1944, before Kuwait's first oil was exported, Kuwait's population was 70,000. In less than a decade, by 1952, it reached 160,000. Five years later, when the first census was taken, the population reached more than 206,000, and by 1965 it doubled again to 467,000. Immigration was the main driver of the growth of the population but significantly improved living conditions also contributed to the increase .[33]

With the increase in immigration came a rise in xenophobia towards foreign nationals by Kuwaitis. In 1982, a social-residential survey conducted by Abdulrasool al-Moosa stated that, as a way to ensure to protect their identity and culture, Kuwaitis began segregating themselves from non-Kuwaitis in various ways. One idea was through the style of dress among Kuwaiti men. During the early oil years, young

31. Al Nakib, *History of Oil and Urban Life, 104-141*.

32. Al Nakib, *History of Oil and Urban Life, 163.*

33. Al Nakib, *History of Oil and Urban Life, 175*.

Kuwaiti middle-class men began wearing Western clothes, but by the late 1950s, there was a rise of traditional white *dishdasha* (long robe), especially when young men started working. This dress code served as a powerful mechanism to distinguish Kuwaitis from non-Kuwaitis since it proved difficult to tell them apart based on physical features alone. Wearing the *dishdasha* offered Kuwaiti men certain privileges associated with their Kuwaiti identity. For example, a Kuwaiti man dressed in jeans would be regularly stopped and checked by police, assumed to be foreign nationals, while a Kuwaiti man wearing a *dishdasha* who enters a store is typically served by the staff before the waiting non-Kuwaiti customers .[34]

Islamic Cultural Conservativism: The Legal and Cultural Influence of Islam on Gender Relations in Kuwait

A religious resurgence has emerged in the Muslim world, including Kuwait, over the last few decades (Ali et al. 2016; Charrad 2011; Haddad and Esposito 1998; Rizzo 2017). As Haddad and Esposito (1998) explain, the reassertion of Islam in personal and political life "has taken many forms, from greater attention to religious practice to the emergence of Islamic organizations, movements, and institutions"[35] Islamic laws continue to play a significant role in shaping the social and cultural values and customs of the Kuwaiti people (Ali et al. 2016; Al-Moqatei 1989; Haddad and Esposito 1998; Rizzo 2017).[36]

34. Al Nakib, *History of Oil and Urban Life, 180.*

35. Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck, and John L. Esposito. *Islam, Gender and Social Change*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 6.

36. Al-Moqatei, Case Study of Kuwait." *Arab Law Quarterly* 4 (2) (1989)

The revival of Islam in Kuwait has had significant impacts on Kuwaiti women. Some women in Kuwait have used Islam to justify women's rights to equality and public participation, challenging arguments that see Islam, democracy, and women's rights as incompatible (Rizzo 2017). In the context of Islamic cultural conservativism, interpreted by some as discouraging the participation of women in the public sphere, Kuwaiti women have struggled for political participation, including the right to vote and to stand for election (Al-Sabah 2014). Kuwaiti women obtained the right to vote in general elections in 2005 after a long campaign where extension of the franchise was opposed by members of the Islamic parliament, who contended that granting women the right vote was a religiously inadmissible action. Women candidates entered the national election race in October 2006 and May 2008. Although women comprised about 10 per cent of total candidates, none was elected to office. A Kuwaiti female was appointed as a cabinet member for the first time in October 2006 (Abdulrahim et al., 2009). As a result of these struggles, women have made significant gains in their participation in the public sphere and now occupy a range of roles in Kuwaiti society, including in government, education, employment, civil society, and the media (Al-Sabah).

Yet, Kuwaiti society has historically been and continues to be, patriarchal given the persisting high degree of male dominance: men dominate in virtually every sector of society including government, public institutions, schools, and the private sector (Al Mughni 1993; González 2013; Rizzo 2017; Solati 2017; Torki 1988). As a matter of custom, many Kuwaitis hold the view that males are the heads of households, responsible for the security and welfare of the family, while females attend to raising children and managing domestic responsibilities (Abdulrahim et al., 2009). Patriarchal culture and tradition have had wide-ranging effects on race, class, and gender relations

in Kuwait (Tijani 2009). For example, national laws discriminate between the two genders, permitting only Kuwaiti males to receive a $150 per month as an allowance from the government for each child in the family (Abdulrahim et al., 2009). Another example is that sons are typically more socially desirable than daughters. This is due to the widespread perception that sons, unlike daughters, can quickly develop social, political, and business contacts once they grow up, thereby improving the social status of the family and ensuring continuity of the family name, which is passed down through patrilineages (Al Mughni 1993; Joseph 2003; Solati 2017; Torki 1988).

Public Conduct, Entertainment, and Censorship

As a socially and religiously conservative nation, Kuwait has strict laws, rules, and restrictions regarding public conduct as well as entertainment (Ali et al. 2016; Haddad and Esposito 1998; Rizzo 2017). Alcohol is prohibited by law, as is prostitution. Movies are censored if they involve any explicitly sexual scenes (Webb 2016). Social norms that encourage displays of modesty dictate that men and women wear clothes that minimize the amount of exposed skin (Joseph 2003). In addition, due to cultural customs and Kuwaiti law, gender segregation predominates in both the public and private spheres (Solati 2017; Torki 1988). Traditions segregate females and males in the family and at social gatherings, at schools and sometimes even in the workplace (Abdulrahim et al., 2009). This means that, especially in public, men and women generally do not share space, interact, or communicate regularly.

Religion and tradition do exert an influence on the impact of foreign media in Kuwait. Values in the host culture serve as strong determinants of the degree of influence foreign media may exert (Kang, 1992; Kang and Morgan, 1988). Kuwaiti

culture is characterized as conventional and resistant to change, thanks in part to conventional interpretations of Islam which serve to maintain the cultural and social status quo. Many Kuwaitis reject Western values as morally corrupt even as they embrace Western innovations that they believe will improve their quality of life (Abdulrahim et al., 2009; Nydell, 2006).

The Rise of the Internet and its Socio-Cultural Impacts

The Internet is a global computer network that enables the connection of different computers in any place in the world through the use of servers and routers. Through a connection to the Internet, one can acquire virtually any kind of information sought. The Internet can be accessed through Internet-enabled gadgets, such as phones and computers. Over the internet, one can access different materials like videos, texts, and computer programs (BusinessDictionary.com 2018).

The Internet was introduced in Kuwait in 1998. The country hosted a conference on the "information superhighway" where different people from all walks of life were invited to launch the usage of the Internet. Today, the majority of Kuwait's population is under 25 years of age, estimated to represent 57 percent of the total population. The usage of the Internet is most prevalent among this group of people; they represent 63 percent of Internet users in Kuwait (Wheeler, 2003).

Young Kuwaitis have been reticent about using the Internet in the presence of the family members (Wheeler, 2003). This could threaten to erode family bonds as young people are always on the Internet instead of being with the family. They are more willing to use it in public places and share ideas with other people they may not have a personal connection with. Increased use of the Internet has enabled students to interact

with the members of the opposite sex in novel ways; it is against Islamic traditions for members of the opposite sex to communicate outside the family. Therefore, the Internet has enabled young people to interact in new ways resulting in an increase in online dating among young Kuwaitis. This, in turn, has led to increased cases of behaviors considered immoral and prohibited according to Islamic values (Wheeler).[37]

Kuwaiti youth have embraced the Internet as a tool to be used to challenge the conservative norms and values in the country. Conservative attitudes which have prohibited interaction between members of different sexes is currently challenged by people meeting online and then meeting in public as well as groups of people meeting online and gathering in public to organize for different activities to be carried as groups. The Internet also provides relief to the youth who feel are burdened by the strict norms and adherence to traditional Kuwaiti culture. Internet usage among the youth has enabled them to become self-sufficient and empowered as they are able to express themselves online than in their lives offline (Wheeler 2003).

Gender Studies

The Social Construction of Gender

Gender norms are a set of culturally prescribed rules or ideas about how each gender should behave (West and Zimmerman, 1987).[38] Gender is therefore commonly understood as a social construct, which means that "gender itself is constituted through

37. Deborah L Wheeler,. “The Internet and Youth Subculture in Kuwait.” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 8 (2) (2003): JCMC824.

38. Candace West, and Zimmerman Don H, “Doing Gender.” *Gender & Society* 1 (2) (1987):

interaction" yet may appear as inherently natural despite "being produced as a socially organized achievement."[39]

The notion that gender is a social construct is one that is located within the theoretical tradition of social constructionism. According to Jackson and Scott (2010).[40], social constructionism first emerged from two distinct theoretical bases: European social phenomenology associated with the work of Alfred Schutz ([1932] 1967) and North American pragmatic philosophy, from which the sociological tradition of symbolic interactionism was derived. Berger and Luckmann (1966), bring these two theoretical bases together in their book *The Social Construction of Reality*, where they offered one of the earliest explicit uses of the term "social construction."

Social constructionism examines the development of a jointly constructed understanding of the world that forms the basis for shared assumptions about reality. It argues that "our ways of understanding the world do not come from objective reality but from other people, both past and present" (Burr 2015, 10). According to Burr, social constructionists share at least one of the four following assumptions: (1) *a critical stance toward taken-for-granted knowledge* that challenges the view that conventional knowledge is based upon objective, unbiased observation of the world; (2) *historical and cultural specificity*, such that the ways in which we commonly understand the world, the categories and concepts we use, are historically and culturally specific; (3) *knowledge is sustained by social processes* such that people construct knowledge between them, through social interaction, particularly language; (4) *knowledge and*

39. Candace West, and Zimmerman Don H, “Doing Gender.” ,129.

40. Jackson, Stevi, and Sue Scott. *Theorizing Sexuality*. New York: Open University Press, 2010.

social action go together such that constructions of the world, bound up with power relations, sustain some patterns of social action and exclude others (2-5).

As a social construct, gender appropriately assigns men and women to certain segregated sets of acceptable social practices and behaviors', and is perpetuated as a norm through various platforms such as media, governments, and schools (Lorber 2010). Gender is not, therefore, a sole project over which the individual has complete control. To view gender as socially constituted means to view it, also, as socially legitimated, where "doing gender" is legitimated, or confirmed as "correct" through interaction. For a person to receive validation for successfully "doing" their gender, they must "produce configurations of behavior that would be seen by others as normative gender behavior" (West and Zimmerman 1987, 134).[41] Culture works to generate these gender categories and to constantly maintain them as the norm.

Gender Stereotypes

We are socialized into our gender from birth (Lorber 1994). Through the construction of gender-as-difference, institutionalized frameworks such as the media, the justice system, the education system, the government, and the healthcare system present gender as biologically essential (Butler 1990; Foucault 1978). With repeated iteration over time, these norms become culturally reified into gender stereotypes. Stereotypes then guide disciplinary practices along with all levels of society that are used to police, and often oppress, subjects within a culture (Butler 1990; Foucault 1978). In order to rationalize these stereotypes and the hierarchies they produce, they must be

41. Candace West, and Zimmerman Don H, “Doing Gender.” *Gender & Society* 1 (2) (1987), 134.

framed as natural and imbued with significance and meaning, believed to be inevitable and immutable (Lorber 2010).

According to Deaux and Lewis (1984), gender stereotypes have four components, all entrenched in a dichotomous paradigm: 1) trait descriptors, such as self-assertion/lack of empathy or concern for others/caring; 2) physical characteristics such as height or hair length; 3) role behaviors such as ambitious, nurturing, or aggressive; and 4) occupational statuses such as engineer or housewife. Gender stereotyping becomes problematic when stereotypes lead to expectations and judgments that restrict life opportunities for subjects of a social category" (Eisend 2010, 419). By presenting socially constructed notions of gender difference as natural, "the resultant social order, which supposedly reflects natural differences, is a powerful reinforcer and legitimator of hierarchical arrangements."[42] As such, gender roles, stereotypes, and norms can be viewed as a tool for subordination (Frye 1983)[43]. Women are subordinated by cultural notions of gender, which present them as deferent to men and as sexual objects for male consumption (Mulvey 1975; West and Zimmerman 1987).

Femininity and Masculinity

Through the construction of gender-as-difference and the perpetuation of gender stereotypes, dominant notions of femininity and masculinity develop, shaping our expectations of appropriate and acceptable thought, feelings, and conduct by women and men, respectively. As Connell (2005) explains, modern usage of the term masculinity generally, "assumes one's behavior results from the type of person one is.

42. Candace West, and Zimmerman Don H, “Doing Gender.” *Gender & Society* 1 (2) (1987) , 146.

43. Frye, Marilyn. *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1983.

That is to say, an unmasculine person would behave differently: being peaceable rather than violent, conciliatory rather than dominating, uninterested in sexual conquest, and so forth." [44]

This understanding highlights how notions of femininity and masculinity reflect the construction of gender-as-difference, as masculinity and femininity are defined in opposition to one another: to be masculine is to be unfeminine; to be feminine is to be unmasculine. This also means that the concept of masculinity is also inherently relational: "Masculinity" does not exist except in contrast with "femininity." [45]

Connell describes four major strategies used to define masculinity and the type of person who may be considered masculine: essentialist, positivist, normative, and semiotic. She then offers her own definition of masculinity, which goes beyond defining it as an object to consider it as "simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality, and culture." [46]

To define masculinity in a particular way is not to presuppose that only one form of masculinity exists within a given society. In gender studies, it is now generally recognized that a multiplicity of masculinities exist in relation to one another (Behnke and Meuser 2002; Connell 2002, 2005; Duncanson 2015; Hoel 2015; Kimmel 1993). Crenshaw's (1991) theory of intersectionality as it applies to masculinity highlights the intersections of multiple forms of oppression—such as those based on race, class, age, sexuality, disability status, among others—that create a multitude of subordinated

44. Connell, Robert W. *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2005), 67.

45. Connell, Robert W. *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2005), 68.

46. Connell, Robert W. *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2005), 71.

masculinities (Bartholomaeus, 2011; Christensen and Jensen 2014; Coston and Kimmel, 2012; Donaldson et al. 2009).

It is upon this recognition of a multiplicity of both dominant and subordinated masculinities that the concept of hegemonic masculinity first developed (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985; Connell 1995, 1983). Hegemonic masculinity, distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinated ones, refers to a pattern of practice that allows men's dominance over women to continue (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). As an analytical tool, the concept provides one method for studying the perpetuation of gender inequality as it manifests not only in terms of men's domination over women but also the power that some men have over other men (Jewkes et al. 2015). I provide a more detailed discussion of hegemonic masculinity later on.

The Social Construction of Sexuality

Like gender, sexuality has become a central way of organizing society, particularly in the way it connects the individual to the social: sexuality has become a point of entry to the psyches and lives of individuals and to the life and welfare of the population as a whole (Weeks 1989). Also, like gender, sexuality can be understood as socially constructed (Seidman 2009). As such, the two concepts are closely related, and, arguably, one cannot be fully understood without the other. Yet, they are not synonymous, and it is essential to avoid conflating them, as Gagnon, and Simon ([1973] 2005) argue in their pioneering work, *Sexual Conduct*, on the social construction of desire and of the sexual self. *Sexual Conduct* is considered the first thoroughly social constructionist approach to sexuality. As Jackson and Scott (2010) explain, Gagnon and Simon's theorization of the construction of sexual selfhood are of particular relevance

for feminists: "Rather than viewing sexuality and gender as inextricably interrelated . . . they argue that the sexual self is developed on the basis of the prior construction of a gendered self. In refusing to abstract the sexual from its wider social context, they avoided the conflation of gender and sexuality, thus providing a means of making an analytical distinction between them while exploring their interrelationship. How gender and sexuality are interrelated becomes then, a matter for exploration rather than being decided in advance." [47]

Gagnon and Simon's work explores many dimensions of the interrelationships between sexuality and gender. Their development of the concept of sexual scripts ([1973] 2005), central to their work, offers one powerful analytical tool for doing so. For them, "acts, feelings and body parts are not sexual in themselves but become so only through the application of sociocultural scripts that imbue them with sexual significance."[48] Thus, sexuality is the culmination of complex learning processes in which individuals develop the capacity to interpret and enact sexual scripts (Jackson and Scott). Sexual scripts enable us to interpret emotions, sensations, and situations as sexually meaningful. As such, they serve as resources that help us make sense of the sexual, providing motivation for sexual conduct while stopping short of *determining* sexual conduct.

Sexual scripts clearly demonstrate the interconnections between sexuality and gender, given that such scripts reflect dominant notions of femininity and masculinity. Gender identity "provides the framework within which sexuality is learned and through

47. Jackson, Stevi, and Sue Scott. *Theorizing (Sexuality*. New York: Open University Press, 2010), 15.

48. Jackson, Stevi, and Sue Scott. *Theorizing (Sexuality*. New York: Open University Press, 2010), 9-10.

which erotic self-identity is created."[49] meaning that gender identity shapes our learning of sexual scripts. As a result, men and women learn to be sexual in a different way and enact different roles in sexual encounters. Thus, sexual desire itself can be understood to be socially constructed, as it is "not aroused through a simple stimulus-response mechanism but through the attribution of sexual meanings to specific stimuli, and desire alone will not produce sexual behavior unless the actor is able to define the situation as one in which such conduct is appropriate."[50]

The Social construction of Heterosexuality:

Compulsory Heterosexuality, Heteronormativity, and Homosociality

As social constructionist approaches to sexuality developed over the decades, scholars have turned their attention to various dimensions of sexuality, such as the social construction of sexual orientation, namely heterosexuality (Beasley 2015; Beasley, Holmes and Brook 2015; Jackson 1999, 2006; Yep 2003) homosexuality (Kimmel and Llewellyn 2012; Seidman 2002; Richardson and Seidman 2002) and bisexuality (Haeberle and Grindorf 1998).

The Social construction of Heterosexuality

Sexual orientation is one dimension of sexuality that is particularly bound up with gender, as the very definition of sexual orientation involves identifying one's own sex and gender and that of one's object of sexual desire. And, like gender, sexuality is bound up in social hierarchies such that heterosexuality represents the dominant, and therefore

49. Jackson, Stevi, and Sue Scott. *Theorizing (Sexuality*. New York: Open University Press, 2010), 25.

50. Jackson, Stevi, and Sue Scott. *Theorizing (Sexuality*. New York: Open University Press, 2010), 47.

accepted, the form of sexuality. An examination of the social construction of heterosexuality reveals how gender and sexuality operate together to simultaneously maintain gender and sexual hierarchies. In particular, normative notions of masculinity and heterosexuality, perpetuated by practices of homosociality (Lipman-Blumen 1976)—same-sex relationships that are generally not romantic or sexual in nature—work together to produce interrelated phenomena of compulsory heterosexuality, heteronormativity, and hetero-masculinity, which, in turn, contribute to notions of hegemonic masculinity.

Heterosexuality, as a social construct, is a tool aimed at strengthening and maintaining the overarching socially constructed concept of gender: "heterosexuality privileges elevates and maintains the dominant social and material status of men at the expense of women and sexual others."[51] Sedgwick (1990) outlines the construction of the heterosexual/ homosexual binary, arguing that it works to legitimize heterosexuality by creating the delegitimized "other" (the "non-conforming"). Homosexuality is then used to prop up heterosexuality and divert attention from heterosexuality's own instability as a social category. Far from being a stable, autonomous category, heterosexuality relies on homosexuality for its Constitution, construction, and affirmation (Fuss 1991; Sedgwick 1990; Yep 2003). However, heterosexuality is inscribed within the culture as natural, reasonable, and a given – it is a powerful and often invisible force that pervades all aspects of society (Yep 2003). It is precisely because it is socially constructed and part of a binary that it must present itself as natural and necessary; only in this way can it achieve the status of "compulsory.

51. Yep, Gust A. *Journal of Homosexuality*. 45 (2-4) (2003), 20.

Compulsory Heterosexuality

Second-wave feminists have critiqued the normalization of heterosexuality, exposing the social construction of biologically-ordained male superiority (Willis 1984). For example, Adrienne Rich's (1980) theory of compulsory heterosexuality refers to the fact that heterosexuality is mandated and privileged, so much so that those who are not heterosexual are considered deviant. In this way, assumed heterosexuality acts as an institution that maintains women's oppression by keeping them confined within heterosexual relationships that preserve men's domination over women. Compulsory heterosexuality is a systemic structure that is supported by social institutions such as marriage, family, law, religion, and the economy that all work together to marginalize women and sexual 'others' (Tredway 2014). The theory of compulsory heterosexuality fundamentally challenges the cultural representation of heterosexuality as naturally evident by deconstructing the very notions of the gender binary and the assumption that heterosexuality is an inevitable result of biological differences (Tredway 2014). More recently, Monique Wittig (1990) has expanded upon Rich's theory of compulsory heterosexuality. Wittig argues that the profoundly culturally-rooted notion of biological difference between men and women is, in fact, an effect of language, used to legitimize the subjugation of women.

Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity arises "when the view is that institutionalized heterosexuality constitutes the standard for legitimate, authentic, prescriptive, and ruling social, cultural, and sexual arrangements. It is "a key site of male power and dominance."[52] which

52. Yep, Gust A. “The Violence of Heteronormativity in Communication Studies”, 19.

constitutes men as ‘‘‘real' men"[53] and "subordinates, degrades, and oppresses women" [54]. Those who are deemed to be falling "outside" of these heterosexual norms are marginalized and othered by an "invisible center," which works to reward those who accede to these norms and delegitimize those who do not.[55] The reinforcement and perpetuation of heterosexuality as the "norm" is "one of the primary instruments of power in modern society."[56]

Furthermore, the consistent pushing of a normative heterosexual agenda by the mainstream media is of tremendous violence: "Normalization is a symbolically, discursively, psychically, psychologically, and materially violent form of social regulation and control."[57] As such, heteronormativity is intrinsically linked to and constitutive of gender roles, norms, and stereotypes. Heteronormativity assumes an innate predisposition towards heterosexuality in men and women and is perpetuated through institutions such as the justice system, language, the media, the family, and the political system (Sedgwick 1994; Yep 2003).

Homosociality

Homosociality, a concept first introduced to gender studies by Lipman-Blumen (1976), plays a crucial role as a socializing mechanism in the construction and maintenance of hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity, which, in turn, create and perpetuate rape culture. According to Lipman-Blumen, homosociality refers to "the

53. Yep, Gust A. “The Violence of Heteronormativity in Communication Studies.”. 45 (2-4) (2003), 20.
54. Ibid.
55. Yep, Gust A. “The Violence of Heteronormativity in Communication Studies”, 18.
56. Ibid
57. Ibid

seeking, enjoyment, and/or preference for the company of the same sex."[58] Her observation that "men are attached to, stimulated by and interested in other men" and that traditional homosociality is practiced by men more than women, is explained by the fact that men control key resources in society, including those of an economic, political, educational, occupation, legal, and social nature.[59] Thus, men, "recognizing the power their male peers have, find one another stimulating, exciting, productive, attractive, and important since they can contribute to virtually all aspects of one another's lives."[60] The greater extent of homosociality among men serves as both a reflection of male dominance as well as a mechanism to maintain such dominance by "excluding women from important realms of society and by strengthening the cohesion among men."[61] As such, male homosociality can be seen as an important mechanism for the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity.

Homosociality serves as such a mechanism because of the fact that within homosocial settings, "men mutually determine what makes a (normal man)."[62] In other words, it is in male homosocial settings that men come to agree on the ideal of what it means to be "a man." Such agreement is not to be found in explicit discourse; rather, it is "embedded in the flow of talk about each and everything."[63]This also has implications for the construction and maintenance of masculine identities: "masculinity is largely a

58. Lipman-Blumen, Jean. “Toward a Homosocial Theory of Sex Roles: An Explanation of the Sex Segregation of Social Institutions.” *Signs* 1 (3) (1976), 16.

59. Ibid

60. Lipman-Blumen, Jean. “Toward a Homosocial Theory of Sex Roles: An Explanation of the Sex Segregation of Social Institutions.” *Signs* 1 (3) (1976), 16.

61. Kimmel, Michael S., and Amy Aronson.. *Men and Masculinities: A Social, Cultural, and Historical Encyclopedia,* Vol. 1. Santa Barbara, CA(2004): ABC-CLIO.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

homosocial enactment."[64] Both peer groups of male youth, as well as groups of adult men, serve as socializing agents that play important roles in the process of developing masculine identities partly because "being acknowledged by other men confirms a man's masculinity."[65]

This role that male homosociality plays in shaping men's masculine identities again demonstrates the important interconnections between gender and sexuality. Considering how masculine identity both shapes and is shaped by sexuality and sexual conduct, we see how male homosociality serves as a socializing agent for gender *and* sexuality among men. As a result, male homosocial groups have been found to powerfully influence the sexual relations that young, heterosexual men have with women, the meanings they give to their sexual involvements, and the narratives they construct about them (Flood 2008). As such, male homosociality contributes to the perpetuation of sexual violence by men against women (Boswell and Spade 1996; Rosen et al. 2003; Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997). As Flood (2008) explains, "it is not group membership *per se* but norms of gender inequality and other bonds that foster and justify abuse in particular peer cultures that promote violence against women."[66]

Gramsci's "Cultural Hegemony"

As discussed in the above sections, social constructionist approaches to gender and sexuality analyze the taken-for-granted understandings of how we "do" gender and sexuality, exposing the power dynamics that underlie such norms. Concepts such as heteronormativity, compulsory heterosexuality, homosociality, and hegemonic

64. Kimmel, Michael S (1996), 7.
65. Ibid.
66. Flood, Michael. “Men, Sex, and Homosociality: How Bonds between Men Shape Their Sexual Relations with Women.” *Men and Masculinities* 10 (3)(2008), 342.

masculinity help to reveal the gender and sexuality hierarchies that are maintained through dominant ideologies. The theory of cultural hegemony, developed by Antonio Gramsci ([1948] 1971), explains how positions of dominance are attained and maintained through relative consensus and consent rather than the use of force. As such, it serves as an important analytical tool to further investigate and uncover the mechanisms by which dominant ideas and practices around gender and sexuality emerge and become reproduced in society by both dominant and subordinated groups of people.

As a Marxist, Gramsci ([1948] 1971) was particularly interested in explaining how the dominant economic class maintained its control in society and achieved stabilization of class relations (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). More broadly, he aimed to investigate the complex relationships between coercion and consent in democratic capitalist societies and "how the possibility or threat of coercion and subtle uses of it are often integral to shaping and organizing consent."[67] His concept of "cultural hegemony" has made outstanding contributions to understanding how "common sense" regarding the state's activities is created, how dominant ideas in society reflect state and class interests, and how legitimacy ultimately lies in the realm of culture and ideas. Gramsci developed his concept of cultural hegemony by drawing heavily on the works of Karl Marx ([1845] 1998, [1867] 1976), particularly his ideas about ideology. Gramsci expanded on Marx's work to better understand how dominant opinions reflect the interests not only of the ruling class but also of the state. The concept of cultural hegemony is that the ruling class dominates subordinate classes by suffusing certain

67. Ives, Peter. *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci*. (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 98.

ideologies into common sense and everyday practices through institutions such as government, media, and law.

As Mark Stoddart (2007) writes: "Hegemonic power works to convince individuals to subscribe to the social values and norms of an inherently exploitative system that appears as the 'common sense' that guides our everyday, mundane understanding of the world. . . . Institutions such as the Church, schools, the mass media, or the family, are mostly responsible for producing and disseminating hegemonic power."[68]

For Gramsci ([1948] 1971), cultural hegemony emerges when the oppressed groups in society, such as the working class, come to believe that the interests of the state and the ruling class are indeed their interests as well. This occurs through the manipulation of culture (beliefs, explanations, perceptions, values) by the ruling class so that its worldview is imposed as the societal norm, perceived as a universally valid ideology benefitting all of society while, in reality, only helping itself. Gramsci writes: "Ideas and opinions are not spontaneously "born" in each individual brain: they have had a center of formation, or irradiation, of dissemination, of a persuasion group of men, or a single individual even, which has developed them and presented them in the political form of current reality."[69]

For Gramsci ([1948] 1971), the state must be seen as legitimate in the eyes of the polity. The state acquires this legitimacy through the instrument of cultural hegemony—through influencing the dominant ideas of society. Thus, Gramsci was centrally concerned with everyday cultural practices, such as language. Language,

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68. Stoddart, Mark C. J. “Ideology, Hegemony, Discourse: A Critical Review of Theories of Knowledge and Power.” *Social Thought & Research* 28 (2007), 201.

69. Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebook.* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, (1948) 1971), 192.

representing the linguistic elements of hegemony, plays a particularly important role in the organization of common sense and why people consent to the power of the dominant social group (Ives 2004). In developing his concept of 'normative grammar,' Gramsci was aligned with De Saussure's ([1916] 2011) synchronic perspective on language, which proposes that 'meaning is produced in the relationship among various elements of language operating synchronically,' including individual words, phrases, sounds and patterns.[70]

Gramsci's ([1948] 1971) notion of normative grammar, however, goes beyond De Saussure's ([1916] 2011) synchronic linguistics by exposing the social processes of how such grammars are formed. For example, grammatical correctness—what is considered appropriate and proper—is used 'to mark social distinction and thus power differentials between speakers'.[71] This "grammatical conformism" becomes a way to establish norms or judgments about correctness or incorrectness and involves informal processes and less codified rules that become enforced in everyday speech (Ives 2004). For Gramsci, "language is both an element in the exercise of power and a metaphor for how power operates."[72]

Part of how language serves as an element in the exercise of power is in how it influences the worldview of the subaltern—the oppressed groups in society. As Gramsci ([1948] 1971) explains, "in 'language,' there is contained a specific conception of the world"[73] He argues that while the subaltern maintains their own conception of the world, they lack a coherent philosophy and worldview to interpret the world—in other

70., Peter Ives, *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci*. (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 93.

71. Ibid.

72. Peter Ives, *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci*. (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 101.

73. Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebook.* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, (1948) 1971), 323.

words, they lack their own language. Rather, they work with a fragmentary "common sense" that does not "correspond sensibly to their own lives and experiences."[74] Gramsci writes: "In acquiring one's conception of the world one always belongs to a particular grouping which is that of all the social elements which share the same mode of thinking and acting…When one's conception of the world is not critical and coherent but disjointed and episodic, one belongs simultaneously to a multiplicity of mass human groups" (324; cited in Ives 2004, 79).[75]

The consequences of lacking a coherent conception of the world are central to how hegemony operates. As Ives (2004) explains, "subalternity and domination are not only physical domination, power and control over the use of resources. They are constituted by the inability to develop a coherent world-view, a 'spontaneous' philosophy that actually relates to your own life and place in society. This is not only an integral aspect of domination; it is also a key factor that prevents subaltern groups from being able to effectively resist physical domination and the exercise of power against them." [76]

Adopting conceptions from hegemonic social groups, the subaltern experience continual disconnections between their thoughts and actions. Gramsci ([1948] 1971) thus explains consent by the subaltern by presenting an entire system of view of which they are a part. The "common sense" values and ideas that they adopt reflect ideologies that are communicated through various institutions, including religion, school, family, and the media in ways that are not necessarily explicit or conscious (Ives 2004).

We can see such "common sense" values and ideas manifest in the realms of gender and sexuality reflecting ideologies—such as hegemonic masculinity and rape

74. Peter Ives, *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci*. (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 78.

75. Peter Ives, .*Language and Hegemony in Gramsci*. (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 79.

76. Peter Ives, .*Language and Hegemony in Gramsci*. (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 79

culture—that help to maintain the domination of certain groups over others, such as men over women, heterosexual men over gay men, white men over men of color. By adopting such "common sense" values and ideas, subordinated groups unwittingly consent to and perpetuate their own subordination.

Hegemonic Masculinity

Among the many influences that Gramsci's ([1948] 1971) concept of cultural hegemony has had on critical scholarship is its contribution to the development of the concept of "hegemonic masculinity," which itself has been widely influential in gender studies and beyond since it was introduced in the 1980s, first by Connell (1983) with further developments later on (Connell 1987, 1995; Carrigan, Connell, and Lee 1985; Kimmel and Messerschmidt 2005). Hegemonic masculinity is a concept that applies Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony to the realm of the gender order.

Following Gramsci's ([1948] 1971) thread of inquiry into the role of culture and ideology in the domination and subordination of certain classes, the concept of hegemonic masculinity is useful for conceptualizing the ways in which culture works to impose compulsory heterosexuality on other men (subjugated masculinities), as well as women, legitimating heterosexual men's domination (Connell 1995). As a concept, hegemonic masculinity emerged to enable the examination of hegemony involved in the patriarchal system of gender relations and how the hegemony of a particular form of masculinity, contrasted to less dominant or subordinated forms of masculinity, contributes to maintaining that system (Carrigan, Connell, and Lee 1985; Connell 1995). As Carrigan, Connell, and Lee write:

What emerges from this line of argument [on the heterosexual-homosexual ranking of masculinity] is the very important concept of hegemonic masculinity, not as "the male role," but as a particular variety of masculinity to which others—among them young and effeminate as well as homosexual men—are subordinated. It is particular groups of men, not men in general, who are oppressed within patriarchal sexual relations, and whose situations are related in different ways to the overall logic of the subordination of women to men. A consideration of homosexuality thus provides the beginnings of a dynamic conception of masculinity as a structure of social relations.[77]

As Carrigan, Connell, and Lee (1985) explain, because hegemony reflects particular circumstances in which power is won and held, "to understand the different kinds of masculinity demands. . . an examination of the practices in which hegemony is constituted and contested—in short, the political techniques of the patriarchal social order."[78] According to Hearn (2004), this means examining gendered processes and dynamics at play in various institutions, including mass media, advertising, work, the state, law, as well as fantasy and differential representations of masculinity.

Thus, hegemonic masculinity can be understood as the dominant version of masculinity in a given culture. For instance, in contemporary Western societies, hegemonic masculinity broadly refers to white heterosexual men; it is not a "fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. . . it is, rather, the masculinity that

77. Carrigan, Tim, Bob Connell, and John Lee. “Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity.” *Theory and Society* 14 (5) (1985), 597.

78. Carrigan, Tim, Bob Connell, and John Lee. “Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity.” *Theory and Society* 14 (5) (1985), 594.

occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations."[79] This assertion that hegemonic masculinity is not fixed has two important implications. One, while in Western societies hegemonic masculinity is primarily associated with white heterosexual men, it will not be associated with such men in all societies, such as those which have very different racial/ethnic schemes such that white men are either not prevalent or not seen as the dominant racial/ethnic group. Thus, white heterosexual men do not inherently occupy the hegemonic position simply because they are white and heterosexual. Secondly, in a society where white, heterosexual men *do* occupy the hegemonic position, men from other ethnic backgrounds (non-white), transsexual men, or homosexual men become marginalized (Connell 1995).

As discussed earlier, the multiplicity of masculinities is a complex matter that involves interplay between sexuality (homosexual masculinity), race (black masculinity), and class (working-class masculinity)[80]. According to Connell (1987), hegemonic masculinity is best described as practices, behaviors and body characteristics connected to an ideal of manhood that legitimates heterosexual men's domination over subordinated masculinities as well as women.[81] Hegemonic masculinity is, therefore, a fantasy, an idealized set of traits, both physical (i.e., muscular strength) and mental (i.e., stoicism, rationality, self-reliance), to which men aspire to.

Such aspirations do, however, come with consequences related to violence and, specifically, sexual violence. Given that hegemonic masculinity is a fantasy that, by definition, involves domination over others, various forms of violence, as expressions of

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79. Robert W. Connell, *Masculinities.* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1995), 76.

80. Robert W. Connell, *Masculinities.* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1995), 76.

81. Connell, Robert W. *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1987.

domination, become associated with hegemonic masculinity. Such associations can lead to the use of violence as a way to perform masculinity. This becomes all the more dangerous when considering the role that compulsory heterosexuality plays in hegemonic forms of masculinity, such that men may feel compelled to express their masculinity as a way of confirming their heterosexuality and may use violence, including sexual violence, to do so, as Jackson (1999) describes in her discussion of how sexual scripts, informed by gender socialization, contribute to rape. Such sexual violence inflicted upon women represents one way that heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity work together to keep women subjugated.

Media Studies

Media studies can be understood as comprising three levels of analysis: micro, meso, and macro (Byerly 2015). The micro-level, which has long-dominated media research, focuses on media content, including messages, images, and other properties associated with the content. Such research explores how "audiences connect with and react to ideas and meanings purveyed by the media through content."[82] The meso- and macro-levels of analysis engage the realm of media production. The meso-level involves content production and relations of production, including the location and experience of media workers within media organizations (Bielby 2015; Byerly 2015; Byerly and Ross 2006). The macro-level deals with the finance, investment, and ownership of media conglomerates as well as media policymaking and governance, or what is referred to as the 'political economy of media' (Aslinger 2015; Beale and Van

82. Byerly, Carolyn M. “Women and Media Control: Feminist Interrogations at the Macro-level.” In *The Routledge Companion to Media and Gender*, edited by Cynthia Carter, Linda Steiner, and Lisa McLaughlin, (Chapter 9. New York: Routledge, 2015), 106.

Den Bosch 1998; Byerly 2011, 2015; Byerly and Ross 2006; North 2009; Riordan 2002).

This overview of media studies will primarily focus on micro-level media theory and research, including the areas of structural linguistics and semiology, discourse and ideology, and representation. I will end with a discussion of media production at the meso- and macro-levels.

Media as Text

Arguably, the starting point in media studies is the media text, which can be understood as objects "produced with the explicit intention of engaging an audience."[83] Texts exist to produce meanings, which, far from being static or a given, are negotiated between the two key players involved in any media text: the media producer and the media audience (Hall 1980). According to Burton (2010), it is this production of meaning that makes media study such an important field of inquiry, in part because neither the reader of the text nor the text maker is entirely in control of the meaning produced, making the text an "interesting place of engagement."[84] This sense of limits on the media producer to control meanings of texts is also captured by the concept of 'meaning potential' of texts—their potentiality to produce meanings (Halliday 1971). "Meaning potential" suggests that the ultimate realization of purpose lies with the audience.

Such negotiated meaning-making does not happen in a vacuum; it is always located within particular contexts. The contexts of texts, media producers, and audiences alike

83. Graeme Burton, *Media and Society: Critical Perspectives*. (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2010), 6.

84. Graeme Burton, *Media and Society: Critical Perspectives*. (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2010), 5.

are hugely influential on the meanings that are produced. Such contexts range from conceptual, material, and environmental to social, experiential, and ideological.[85] The ideological context, echoing Gramsci's ([1948] 1971) concept of cultural hegemony, is one of the ideas and values that shape the text and the reader alike.

Structural Linguistics

Language is central to the production of meaning. According to De Saussure ([1916], 2011), language brings ideas into being; they do not exist prior to language. In his *Course in General Linguistics*, De Saussure introduced the field of structural linguistics, formalizing a systematic approach to the study of language with an emphasis on synchronic structure (Liu 2010, 319). A synchronic perspective on language emphasizes the relationship among the interconnected units of language, seen as the source of meaning. He argues that the linguistic sign—that which actually generates meaning for the reader—is composed of two elements: the signified and the signifier. While the signified refers to the abstract concept or idea, the signifier represents the perceived sound or visual image.

Signs gain their meaning from their relationships and contrasts with other signs. For De Saussure, "language is a system of signs that expresses ideas."[86]

Ferdinand De Saussure ([1916] 2011) also introduced several basic dimensions of semiotic analysis. The field of semiotic analysis, concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign, scrutinizes textual meanings in systematic ways through employing the analytical tools of codes—textual elements akin to language—and signs (Barthes 1972,

85. Graeme Burton, *Media and Society: Critical Perspectives*. (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2010), 9.

86. De Saussure, Ferdinand. *Course in General Linguistics*. Translated by Wade Baskin. Edited by Perry Meisel and Haun Saussy.(New York: Columbia University Press, (1916) 2011), 15.

1977; Burton 2010; Džanić 2013). In his work on mythology, Barthes (1972, 1977) builds on De Saussure's notions of the signifier and signified to propose that, in addition to these elements, all signs contain another layer of meaning: the deeper mythological meaning, or cultural subtext, of the entire sign. A semiotic analysis of advertising, for example, reveals the culturally constructed meanings contained within the ad and how signification is used to communicate and promote social myths (Barthes 1972). In other words, media messages influence what we know, believe, and do and contain "ideological silences" that support certain values and beliefs.[87]

Discourse and Ideology

This notion of "ideological silences" embedded in media messages demonstrates the close relationship between semiology, discourse, and ideology. Discourses represent systems of meaningful practices that form the identities of subjects and objects.[88] In essence, discourse is the "meanings we have about" its subject.[89] Discourses use language and the elements of language—its codes and signs—about a subject in order to produce particular meanings about that subject, which, in turn, shape how we understand our world and everyday life and relate to one another (Burton 2010).

As such, discourses are implicated in the production of ideologies—systems of ideas and ideals—and thus, the exercise of power, "as their constitution involves the exclusion of certain possibilities and a consequent structuring of the relations between

87. Elliot Gaines, *Media Literacy and Semiotics*.(London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 32.

88. Howarth, DR, Aletta J. Norval, and Yannis Stavrakakis, eds. *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies and Social Change.* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2000) 3-4.

89. Graeme Burton, *Media and Society: Critical Perspectives*. (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2010), 13.

different social agents."[90] Because most words do not have fixed meanings, language can be understood as inextricably bound up with ideology and, thus, "cannot be analyzed or understood apart from it."[91] In other words, discourse represents ideology in communicative action (Burton 2010). If, following Marx ([1845] 1998, [1867] 1976), we understand naturalization as one of the defining features of ideological structures—"according to the order of things"—then discourse represents a key mechanism for naturalization, whereby the ideological structures appear to be natural, to take place.

If discourse lurks within the text, then "the language of the discourse is the visible evidence of it—signs which emerge to link us with the invisible discourse and its meanings."[92] This becomes the task of discourse analysis: to recognize the discourses operating within a text and the features of language which uncover those discourses (Burton 2010) and to examine "their historical and political construction and functioning."[93] In other words, researchers use discourse analysis, in part, to uncover how ideologies are naturalized and realities are manufactured through the discourse of various media texts, such as cinema (Mozaffari, Rahimi, and Khodabakhshi 2015).

The relationship between discourse and ideology can also be found in the concept of binary oppositions (Barthes, 1972; Lévi-Strauss 1961, 1995). Binary oppositions refer to the notion that discourse is also marked by its opposition, can be full of oppositional meanings, and that sometimes the meaning of something depends on its opposite (Burton 2010). Lévi-Strauss's view was that "the nature of humankind is to

90. Howarth, DR, Aletta J. Norval, and Yannis Stavrakakis, eds. *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies and Social Change.* Manchester, (UK: Manchester University Press, 2000), 4.

91. James Paul Gee, *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses*. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 4.

92. Graeme Burton, *Media and Society: Critical Perspectives*. (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2010), 13.

93. David R Howarth, *Discourse*. (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2000), 5.

think, interpret, and make sense of the world and others in terms of binary oppositions"[94] Lévi-Strauss (1995) argues that it is through binary oppositions that mythical thought operates in the construction of the collective existence of society, which is bound by a set of norms of values. This collective existence directs the individual's thinking and behavior and determines his or her individuality. Anyone who threatens or challenges the collective's norms and values challenges the collective as a whole and is seen as negative and as an opposition, an "other" (Fourie 2012).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) applies a critical perspective to the unequal social relations sustained through language use, such as those created by binary oppositions. As such, CDA aims to examine the "dialectical relationship" between discourse and social systems and to "expose the way in which language and meaning are used by the powerful to deceive and oppress the dominated."[95] Established CDA methods, then, can be applied to the realm of the gender order to expose how discourse is implicated in unequal gender relations, as Lazar (2005, 2007) proposes with her call for feminist critical discourse analysis, representing the nexus of CDA and feminist studies. Recognizing discourse as a site of struggle where taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged, for Lazar (2007), the aim of feminist CDA is to advance "rich and nuanced

94. Pieter Jacobus Fourie, ed. *Media Studies: Media History, Media and Society, Vol. 1*, 2nd ed.(Cape Town, South Africa: Juta Publishers, 2012), 249.

95. David R Howarth, *Discourse*. (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2000), 4.

analyses of the complex workings of power and ideology in discourse in sustaining hierarchically gendered social orders."[96]

Narrative analysis, closely related to discourse analysis, represents another approach to analyzing the meanings and ideologies embedded within media text, a field that has grown in recent years (see, for example, Andrews, Sclater, Squire, et al. 2004; Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou 2013; Cavarero 2000; Hinchman and Hinchman 1997; Livholts and Tamboukou 2015; McQuillan 2000; Riessman 2008). The increasing interest in narrative research has led to a "narrative turn" in social sciences (Denzin 2004) and can be situated in the broader cultural and linguistic turn in the field "through which recognition has been given both to the shaping effects of cultural environments, and to subjective experience."[97]

Given the diversity of approaches to narrative analysis in the various disciplinary fields that use such methods—including sociology, anthropology, sociolinguistics, psychology, and psychoanalysis—defining narrative has not been straightforward: "narrative is the very term which narrative theory wishes us to understand but which it cannot explain"[98] Hinchman and Hinchman (1997) offer one useful definition based on what they consider to be the three key features of narratives or stories. First, they are forms of discourses that place events in sequential order with a clear beginning, middle, and end such that the sequence "adds up" to something—the units so ordered have an

96. Michelle M Lazar, "Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Articulating a Feminist Discourse Praxis." *Critical Discourse Studies* 4 (2) (2007), 141.

97. Andrews, Molly, Shelly Day Sclater, Michael Rustin, Corinne Squire, and Amal Treacher. "Introduction". In *The Uses of Narrative: Explorations in Sociology, Psychology and Cultural Studies*, edited by Molly Andrews, Shelly Day Schlater, Corinne Squire, and Amal Treacher, 1-10. New Brunswick, NJ: Transactional Publishers, 2004.

98. Martin McQuillan, ed. *The Narrative Reader.*(London: Routledge, 2000), 323.

intrinsic, meaningful connection to one another (xv-xvi). Secondly, narratives have a teller of the story and an audience to hear it. Thirdly, they do not simply mirror reality; rather, "storytelling inevitably involves selectivity, rearranging of elements, redescription, and simplification" (xv-xvi). As such, narratives evoke or create order and meaning.

Given these features, Hinchman and Hinchman (1997) propose that narratives (stories) in the human sciences should be defined as "discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way for a definite audience, and thus offer insights about the world and/or people's experiences of it" (xvi). In other words, narratives contain temporality, meaningfulness, and sociality. These features are reflected in the two major areas of narrative research: the event-centered approach and the experience-centered approach (Livholts and Tamboukou, 2015).

Representation and the Production of Meaning

The definition of narrative provided by Hinchman and Hinchman reflects how narratives, and discourses more broadly, are inherently intertwined with language and ideology in ways that, together, produce meanings. Here, we begin to see the important role of representation in the perpetuation of ideology through language and discourse (Hall 1997a, 1997b, 1997c; Hall, Evans, and Nixon 2013). Representation, simply, is the production of meaning through language.[99] And because language cannot be

99. Stewart Hall, "The work of representation." In *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, 2nd ed., edited by Stewart Hall, Jessica Evans, and Sean Nixon. Thousand Oaks (CA: Sage Publications, 2013), 14.

separated from ideology, "representations do the work of ideology."[100] In other words, representation, through language, is the means by which ideologies are produced.

Language, representation, and the construction of meaning

If culture is, simply put, about shared meanings, then language is the medium in which meaning is produced and exchanged, for "meanings can only be shared through our common access to language." [101] From a constructionist perspective, language constructs meaning—in other words, it sustains dialogue between participants, which, in turn, enables them to have shared understandings and interpret the world similarly. Language gives a sign to meanings we hold in a form that can be communicated to others. In other words, language externalizes the meanings we make of the world.[102] Language can do this because it operates as a representational system: "In language, we use signs and symbols—whether they are sounds, written words, electronically produced images, musical notes, even objects—to stand for or represent to other people our concepts, ideas, and feelings. Language is one of the 'media' through which thoughts, ideas, and feelings are represented in culture. Representation through language is therefore central to the processes by which meaning is produced."[103]

The term "representation" seems to imply a *re*-presenting of an object (or event), whereby it inherently has meaning, and *then* it is represented. However, as Stewart Hall (1997c) argues, the meaning of something depends on *how* it is represented. It has no

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100. Graeme Burton, *Media and Society: Critical Perspectives*. (New York: McGraw-Hill Education 2010), 13.

101. Stewart Hall, "Introduction." In *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, edited Stewart Hall, ed. Thousand Oaks, (CA: Sage, 1997b), 1.

102. Stewart Hall, *Representation and the Media: Featuring Stuart Hall*. Sut Jhally (Director). Color. 55 min. [Streaming video]. Media Education Foundation. Retrieved from SAGE Video, 1997c

103. Hall, Stewart, ed. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Thousand Oaks,(CA: Sage Publications, 1997a), 1.

fixed meaning *until* it is represented. As the representation of the object or event changes in place and time, so, too, will the meaning of the object; it does not exist meaningfully until it has been represented. Thus, representation is constituent to the object, part of the condition of its existence. The question then becomes one of how meanings enter into objects, how they constitute them. This, for Hall, is the essence of cultural studies. For, it is through this process of representation, of giving meanings to the objects and events around us, that enables us to share concepts, to make sense of the world in similar ways, to participate in a shared culture. Thus, culture can be defined as a shared 'conceptual map'[104] Both the conceptual map and culture itself, then, can be understood as systems of representation.

The production of meaning does not happen on its own; rather, practices must take place in order to give things meaning and to communicate that meaning to others. As Hall (2013) puts it, "meaning does not inhere in things, in the world. It is constructed, produced. It is the result of a signifying practice – a practice that *produces* meaning, that *makes things mean*" (10, emphasis in original). Language itself is a signifying practice[105] (Hall 1997b). While interpersonal communication remains the dominant signifying practice in the world by which, using language, the exchange of meaning takes place among individuals, institutional systems—such as the media—are increasingly taking the place of interpersonal communication. As a result, the circulation of meanings becomes widespread (Hall 1997c). This process of

104. Du Gay, Paul, Stewart Hall, Linda Janes, Hugh Mackay, and Keith Negus, eds. *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman*, London: Sage Publications, 1997.

105. Hall, Stewart. "Introduction." In *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, edited Stewart Hall, ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997b.

communication has traditionally been conceptualized by mass-communications research as a circulation circuit or loop (Hall 1980, 117)[106].

Power, ideology, and the relationship between media producer and audience

The circulation of meanings raises questions about power—who has the power to circulate such meanings, by what means, and to whom (Hall 1997c). We see, then, how representation, power, and ideology are bound up together: the individuals, groups, or institutions that have the power over the representations that are circulated are those who are able to construct and perpetuate ideologies for their own benefit and at the expense of others.

Returning to the concept of binary oppositions, particularly their operation in mythology, as Roland Barthes (1972) conceives it, meanings are sometimes produced through opposition, which speaks to the relationship between power, ideology, and difference. For Barthes, myth always contains particular communicative intentions and contributes to the creation of ideology through naturalizing concepts and beliefs. As he explains, "the relation which unites the concept of the myth to its meaning is essentially a relation of deformation."[107] by which the myth purifies signs and fills them with new meanings related to the myth's communicative intentions. Sometimes myths construct differences, or oppositions, in the service of ideology, and other times, they absorb or erase what is different or dissimilar (Durham and Kellner 2009). Binary conceptions of gender (masculine/feminine) and sexuality (heterosexuality/homosexuality) are examples of such oppositions that serve ideologies.

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106. Hall, Stewart. "Encoding/decoding." In *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79*, edited by Stewart Hall, Doothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Willis, New York: Routledge, 1980.

107. Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies.* (New York: Noonday Press, 1972), 121.

As Stewart Hall (1997c) explains it, using the example of an image of a black British Olympian holding the British flag, sometimes meaning has to do with the relationship between what an individual expects to find in an image (or other media message) and what is actually present in the image. In other words, absence also has meaning; it can signify as much as presence. In such cases, the meaning is about one's subverted expectations. In the given an example, Hall explains, the individual does not look like what one typically expects British athletes to look like. This reveals that, as part of the process of conveying meaning, there is a process of identification taking place. The image reveals an identity claim, a claim about who the person is, to which group the individual belongs. It is a process of recognition.

While a range of meanings for such an image is theoretically possible, ideology attempts to fix meanings, to assert that only one true meaning exists. For Barthes (1972), the power of the myth is the power to fix meanings. For Hall (1997c), the intervention of power into language is always about fixing meaning. Stereotypes serve as one such mechanism for this process of fixing meanings that are given to groups—they attempt to limit the range of characteristics that are possible for the depicted group or member of a group.[108] However, for Hall, despite such intentions, meanings can never be finally fixed. As stated at the outset of this section on media studies, while media texts exist to produce meanings, the actual meaning produced is far from straightforward, reflecting a negotiation between the media producer and reader (Hall 1980). The traditional conception of the circulation of meanings as a circuit or loop has been criticized for its

108. Richard Dyer, "The Role of Stereotypes." In *Media Studies: A Reader*, 2nd ed., edited by Paul Marris and Sue Thornham, 245-251. New York: New York University Press, 2000.

oversimplification of the relationship between producer and audience, assuming a linear and direct relationship between the sending and receiving of messages (Hall 1980).

As part of this critique, Stewart Hall (1980), utilizing a semiotic paradigm, proposes an alternative model of communication by which media messages are produced, disseminated and interpreted, first developed in his 1973 essay, "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse" and later modified. His highly influential encoding/decoding model suggests that audiences decode or interpret media messages differently depending on their socio-cultural backgrounds, resources, and experiences. He proposes a four-stage theory of communication of what he calls "linked but distinctive moments"—in other words, both autonomous and interdependent—which include production, circulation, distribution/consumption, and reproduction, with determining limits and possibilities at each stage. [109]

One of the key contributions of Hall's (1980) model is his assertion that "decodings do not follow inevitably from encodings"[110] For Hall, consumption is dependent on whether the message has meaning for the audience: "If no 'meaning' is taken, there can be no 'consumption."[111] For the message to have meaning, recipients must engage in the process of interpretation and translation of the coded information into a form that is comprehensible to them by giving meaning to the message's symbols. This is where multiple outcomes with regard to consumption are possible: if the recipient interprets

109. Stewart Hall, "Encoding/decoding." In *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79*, edited by Stewart Hall, Doothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Willis,(New York: Routledge, 1980), 117.

110. Stewart Hall, "Encoding/decoding", In Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79, edited by stewart Hall, Doothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Willis (New York: Routledge, 1980), 125.

111. Stewart Hall, "Encoding/decoding", In Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79, edited by Stewart Hall, Doothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Willis (New York: Routledge, 1980), 117.

the message differently from how the sender, or encoder, intended, distortions and misunderstandings result, and the communication is deemed unsuccessful.

Hall (1980) explains these various outcomes by conceptualizing three different positions that individuals can take upon decoding media messages: dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional. The dominant-hegemonic position represents cases of what Hall calls "perfectly transparent communication" in which the message recipient takes the meaning "full and straight"—in other words, exactly as the sender intended[112] The negotiated position contains a mixture of accepting and rejecting elements: "it acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations (abstract), while, at a more restricted, situational (situated) level, it makes its own ground rules—it operates with exceptions to the rule."[113] Lastly, the oppositional position reflects occasions where the recipient understands the intended meaning of the message but consciously rejects it. As Hall describes it:

Finally, it is possible for a viewer to perfectly understand both the literal and the connotative inflection given by discourse but to decode the message in a globally contrary way. He/she detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to totalize the message within some alternative framework of reference. This is the case of the viewer who listens to a debate on the need to limit wages but 'reads' every mention of the 'national interest' as 'class interest'. . . One of the most significant political moments . . . is the point when events which are normally signified and decoded in a

112. Ibid.

113. Stewart Hall, "Encoding/decoding", In Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79, edited by Stewart Hall, Doothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Willis, (New York: Routledge, 1980), 127.

negotiated way begin to be given an oppositional reading. Here the 'politics of signification'—the struggle in discourse—is joined.[114]

This passage, particularly Hall's (1980) proposal of the "politics of signification" as the struggle in the discourse, highlights the significance of his encoding/decoding model for media studies, cultural studies, and beyond. With his model, he convincingly argues that language is political and that the circulation of meanings is a site of struggle and negotiation between media producers and audiences. It is a site in which both sets of subjects hold power and, therefore, the outcome—the actual meaning of messages—is neither straightforward nor predictable. Such a stance perhaps reveals Gramsci's ([1948] 1971) influence on Hall, echoing Gramsci's insistence that cultural hegemony is not static, but rather, contested, unstable, and always open to change.

Media Production

As we have seen thus far, the plethora of scholarship on the micro-level of media studies has produced rich, nuanced analyses of the relationship between media texts, producers, and readers. Such analyses offer an array of theories and abundance of empirical evidence that clarify the complex interconnections among language and its components, power, and ideology in the construction of meanings, culture, our understandings of the world, and our place in it.

However, the dominance of micro-level analyses within media studies has been critiqued, with various scholars calling for a greater feminist analysis of the meso- and macro-level of mass communication (Beale and Van Den Bosch 1998; Byerly 2011,

114. Stewart Hall,., (New York: Routledge, 1980), 127.

2015; Byerly and Ross 2006; Nagrath 2001). The meso- and macro-levels are "where activities and forces responsible for production exist"[115] Meso- and macro-level analyses capture the complex dynamics and various dimensions of media production, illuminating how, why, and under what historical and structural conditions media content comes into being. Such analyses compliment micro-level analyses of media content, providing a fuller picture of the (gendered) power dynamics that underlie media content and clarifying the mechanisms by which media content comes to reflect hegemonic ideologies, particularly around gender and sexuality, as well as the key actors driving such ideologies and agendas.

Meso-level analyses: Relations and processes of media production

As mentioned earlier, meso-level analyses focus on the organizational level of media production, including the relations and processes of production. This is where content is 'imagined, made, imbued with meaning by those carrying out distinct practices in the creative processes and where that content is disseminated to audiences'[116] Such production processes occur within the relations of production of media companies and are the result of day-to-day decision-making concerning policy-making and product creation.

Research on the relations of media production reveals gender inequality and sex segregation throughout the media industry (Bielby 2015; Byerly 2015; Byerly and Ross 2006). In this context, gender inequality refers to the 'gender gap' in pay and employment in the media industry—the unequal distribution of pay between men and

115. Byerly, Carolyn M. "Women and Media Control: Feminist Interrogations at the Macro-level." In *The Routledge Companion to Media and Gender*, edited by Cynthia Carter, Linda Steiner, and Lisa McLaughlin, (Chapter 9. New York: Routledge, 2015), 106.

116. Ibid.

women and unequal level of women's labor force participation relative to men's—while sex segregation refers to the concentration of men and women in different kinds of work, with the division of labor determined by the worker's sex[117] Both gender ideology and the gendering of jobs contribute to the persistence of sex segregation (Bielby).

Carolyn M. Byerly and Karen Ross (2006) found a tiny proportion of women working in senior positions—including directors, executives, and board of directors—in film, satellite, and new media. Most women knowledge workers experience the "glass ceiling" effect, as few who start out in entry-level positions reach the decision-making tier of media organizations. Denise Bielby's (2015) research on the creative industries, which supply goods and services associated with cultural, artistic, or entertainment value—including books and magazine publishing, visual arts, and performing arts—revealed that organizational cultures contribute to such gender inequality and sex segregation. She found that, for example, stereotypes influence personnel decisions. Managers with unfettered discretion regarding hiring and promotion often rely on their own personal judgments to decide who is the "best fit" for the job, tending to match the gender, race, and age of those already doing the job. She argues that, given that the creative industries represent sites that produce representations of gender, they rely on idioms embodying cultural assumptions about gender that become embedded in the industry's cultures of production, including shared beliefs among workers about gender. Such beliefs, in turn, shape access to employment, earnings, and promotions. Once in place, "these systems are powerfully self-perpetuating"[118]However, women knowledge

117. Bielby, Denise D. "Gender Inequality in Culture Industries." In *The Routledge Companion to Media and Gender*, edited by Cynthia Carter, Linda Steiner, and Lisa McLaughlin, (Chapter 12. New York: Routledge, 2015), 23.

118. Denise D. ." In *The RoutledgeCompanion to Media and Gender*, edited by Cynthia Carter, Linda Steiner, and Lisa McLaughlin, (Chapter 12. New York: Routledge, 2015), 143.

workers at the meso-level do engage various strategies create change, such as contesting and shaping meanings in news and other content in their own interests (Byerly and Ross 2006).

Macro-Level Analyses

Finance, ownership, and the political economy of media production as mentioned earlier, macro-level analyses have not received the kind of attention that micro-level analyses have, nor, arguably, what they deserve, considering the crucial role that finance, ownership, policy, and governance within media conglomerates play in the production of media content with which audiences engage (Aslinger 2015; Beale and Van Den Bosch, 1998; Byerly, 2015; Byerly and Ross, 2006).

To the extent that analyses engage with the trends toward conglomeratization of the media industry, they usually do so through a gender-neutral lens, making it difficult to see how women and women's interests are implicated in this trend (Byerly 2015). Critical feminist political economic analyses clarify the relationship between who owns and runs media organizations and what is produced by them (Byerly); combined with praxis, such analyses enable change to what does not serve women's interests (Riordan 2002). By engaging with the dynamics of global capitalism, macro-level analyses reveal that "the ways in which media represent the female subject and the experiences of women working in media organizations themselves are the product of a world system of patriarchal capitalism" (Byerly and Ross 2006, 75).

Feminist analyses at the macro-level reveal the small degree of women's access to the production of media content. Byerly and Ross (2006) found that women have, by and large, not been able to fully enter the organizational and economic realms of most

media companies, representing a tiny proportion of those in finance, policymaking, and ownership roles. Such lack of access has important economic and cultural consequences. Not only are such realms sources of enormous wealth and economic power, they are also sources of profound ideological power. Applying Marx and Engel's class-based argument regarding the relationship between material and mental production to the gender order, Byerly (2015) notes that women's "realities have been shaped by the ideas of the men who owned the presses and, more recently, the communication industries and who thereby had the power to determine which messages and images circulated to broader publics." [119](107).

Anime Studies

The development of anime began in the early 20th century. The oldest films associated with anime was made in 1917. The pioneers of making these films during this period included Ōten Shimokawa, Jun'ichi Kōuchi and Seitaro Kitayama. These three men are now considered as the "fathers" of anime.

Many anime derive from manga (Japanese graphic novels/comic books). Osamu Tezuka is often referred to as the "Father of Manga," for his role in popularizing manga. Osamu Tezuka had a creative imagination and he drew over 150,000 pages of comics and created 500 different works, creating over 1,000 famous characters. One of his most recognized works is called "Mighty Atom". It first appeared in the series titled, "Ambassador Atom" which started in short installments from April 1950 until March

119. Bielby, Denise D. "Gender Inequality in Culture Industries." In *The Routledge Companion to Media and Gender*, edited by Cynthia Carter, Linda Steiner, and Lisa McLaughlin, (Chapter 12. New York: Routledge, 2015), 107.

1952 in the monthly boy's magazine, "Shonen (boys)", and was published by Kobunsha.

Japanese animators have been aggressively selling their products overseas, including Osamu Tezuka's work which reached worldwide markets abroad. Its huge success encouraged many Japanese artist to push their works abroad, spreading the anime culture (Yamaguchi 2004). According to the Association of Japanese Animations, 60 anime production companies provide their products to 112 countries, reaching to 87.2 percent of the world's population for an estimated total overseas sales in 2008 of 13.3 billion Japanese Yen (Nagata 2010).

After World War II, Japan was quick to rebuild economically after the devastating effects of the war. Anime was used to help rebuild its global image. This genre dominated the animation industry not only in Japan but across the world. This was made possible by translating the films made in Japanese into different languages by dubbing them over or providing subtitles in local languages. This enabled people from different parts of the world to enjoy these films in their languages, such as Chinese, Arabic, Spanish, Korean, French and English.

Gender and Sexuality in Anime

Japanese anime portrays gender roles and gender relations from a distinctive perspective. Most anime is highly gendered, with entire genres of anime targeting boys, girls, young men, and young women, respectively, producing a gendered anime market (Cooper-Chen 2011). For example, one popular genre of anime called shōnen (a Japanese term for "boy") depicts male protagonists as highly active, very competitive in sports, often embarking on a heroic journey. Meanwhile, female characters typically

play secondary roles, such as mothers, sisters, and occasionally girlfriends, to the male protagonist. Popular anime like *Dragon Ball* and *Slam Dunk* follow this pattern. Some anime idealize female characters such as *Video Girl Ai,* and the female characters are given traits such as motherly, aggressive, and wise. In recent years, female characters are increasingly depicted as the main protagonist in various anime. They are portrayed as performing the same tasks as male characters would, and this transformation has made these anime wildly popular (Napier 2005).

A number of studies have focused on audience reception and their interpretations of gender in anime, such as Yu's Shunyao (2015) study on how well-educated Chinese anime fans interpret the gender-role portrayals from anime and Bresnahan, Inoue, and Kagawa's study (2006) on the cognitive and affective responses of Japanese and American participants to the depiction of gender in a Japanese animé popular in both countries. Bresnahan, Inoue, and Kagawa found differences by nationality and gender, such that Japanese participants and males showed greater agreement with sex stereotyping in the depiction of characters than American participants and females. Furthermore, participants regardless of country, who held conventional views of gender perceived fewer stereotypes in the depiction of the characters.

Other studies have analyzed the gendered content in anime. Reysen et al. (2017) examined the extent to which popular anime series contained sexist content and tested whether anime consumption and genre preference were associated with viewers' ambivalent sexism, concluding that anime contains sexist content and that consumption of this content is related to sexist beliefs. The findings also illustrate genre-specific differences, likely driven by genre-specific content, a finding that is consistent with other research on media exposure effects (e.g., violent media and aggression). Upon

analyzing popular anime series, they found that women were underrepresented in anime and were more likely than expected to be sexualized compared to men and curvaceous and provocative compared to secondary characters. They further found that men were more likely than women to use a weapon but were not typically portrayed as hypermasculine. In measuring anime consumption, genre preference, and ambivalent sexism in a group of self-identified anime fans, they found that anime consumption was positively associated with both benevolent and hostile sexism. Hostile sexism was more prevalent among viewers with preferences for the hentai genre, while benevolent sexism was more prevalent among viewers with preferences for drama, a slice of life, mecha, and action genres.

Kaori Yoshida's (2008) work on anime enhances our understanding of mechanisms of subjectivity construction--including gender, race/ethnicity, and nationality--in relation to visual culture. In the contemporary mass-mediated and boundary-crossing world, fictional narratives provide us with resources for articulating cultural identities and individuals' worldviews. The animated film provides viewers with an imaginary sphere which reflects complex notions of "self" and "other," and should not be considered an apolitical medium. By looking at representations in the fantasy world of anime, we may see how media representations contribute both visually and narratively to articulating or re-articulating cultural "otherness" to establish one's own subjectivity, involving complex mechanisms of gender, racial/ethnic, and national identity constructions. Anime directed by Miyazaki Hayao demonstrate that media representation acts not only as an ideological tool that emphasizes conventional binaries (e.g., "Western" equals masculine, "Oriental" equals feminine) but also as a powerful tool for the "other" to proclaim an alternative identity and potentially subvert dominant

power structures. Miyazaki's anime also reveal the process of Japan's construction of both the West and the rest of Asia as "others," based on the West-Japan-Asia power dynamic. Yoshida (2008) argues that this reflects Japan's experience of being both colonizers and colonized, at different points in history, and that Japan also articulates "other" through anime to secure its national identity.

Other studies have specifically analyzed the depiction of femininity in anime. Reslie Cortes (2014) examined the multiple ways in which femininity is performed and how those performances intersect with race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality in the anime *Bleach* and *Samurai Champloo*, interrogating the implications of these performances in relation to hegemonic discourses of Japanese femininity in the U.S. as submissive, deferent, incompetent, and domestic. Cortes found that many performances of femininity reinforce this Orientalist ideology but can also alter viewers' perception of femininity and offer performances of gender identity that does not conform to hegemonic norms, concluding that anime can shape U.S. perceptions of Japanese/Asian Americans, which impacts intercultural relationships.

Kukhee Choo (2008) analyzed the trends of popular Japanese *shojo* (girl) manga in order to illuminate the gender dynamics in contemporary Japanese popular culture and media. In particular, she examined the portrayal of idealized femininity as depicted in contemporary popular shojo manga and anime texts in order to better understand how Japanese females construct their own concepts of femininity. Choo suggested that the emergence of the shojo manga industry during the 1960s to 1970s may have provided female artists and their viewers with a sphere where they could openly resist, subvert and reappropriate the limited social participatory roles to which they were confined but

that since the 1990s there has been a shift towards a domestic portrayal of femininity that seems to suggest a new formation of gender relationships.

Fandom

A number of studies have highlighted the shifting positionality of fans in the digital age and, with it, the shifting power dynamics between producers and consumers, providing fans with greater power and agency than they had previously. According to Mark Duffett (2013), fans used to be seen as an overly obsessed fraction of the audience, but in the last few decades, shifts in media technology and production have instead made fandom a central mode of consumption. Duffett argues that fan research is an emergent interdisciplinary field with its own key thinkers: a tradition that is distinct from both textual analysis and reception studies. He thus concludes that fandom is a particular kind of engagement with the power relations of media culture.

Patryk Galuszka (2015) suggests that the roles that fans have expanded in recent years to include sponsors, co-creators of value, stakeholders, investors, and filters. According to Galuszka, these roles are elements of new types of relationship between fans and artists, which are manifestations of the emergence of what the author calls a "new economy of fandom," defined as a condition in which empowered fan communities to use the democratizing potential of new social media to communicate and cooperate with artists, without the mediation of the traditional recording industry. Galuszka argues that the emergence of the new economy of fandom may lead to a redefinition of what it means to be a fan and to new types of relationships between artists and fans, applying the concepts of value co-creation, and "presumption" to help explain the ongoing changes.

According to Hiroki Azuma (2001) explains the term “otaku” as a general term referring to those who spoil in forms of subculture strappingly linked to anime, video games, computers, science fiction, special-effects films, anime figurines, etc. In this book, he identifies this form of subculture as “otaku culture.” Otaku culture, as demonstrated through comics and anime, still often upholds an image as a youth culture. However, the generation of Japanese people born between the late 1950s and early 1960s thirty- and forty-year old’s holding working positions within society is essentially its core consumers. They are no longer youths enjoying a period of post-college limbo and freedom before taking on social responsibility. In this sense, otaku culture already has some deep roots in Japanese society.

Though otaku culture has not extended to the same degree as “J -pop,” but it is far from irrelevant. Estimated from the number of specialist magazines, the size of the fanzine market, and the number of Web sites registered on Internet search engines, the number of consumers of otaku culture is at least several hundred thousand. And that’s just counting those active otaku consumers who buy and sell derivative works or take part in cosplay.

Azuma (2001), the phenomenon of otaku culture is not limited to Japan. The unique world that otaku has produced through comics, anime, video games have had a great impact on subcultures in Korea, Taiwan, and across Asia. Moreover, from the early 1980s, when closed online communities were the only form of computerized correspondence available to the present. The foundation of Japan’s Internet culture has been formed by the otaku. Their imprint can be seen both upfront and behind the scenes, not only in a large number of otaku Web sites and chat rooms but through providers who name FTP sites after anime characters and in the manuals of word processing and

spreadsheet software, where routes from “novel games” (computerized choosing your own adventure graphic novels). Originally “otaku” was used to refer to the supporters of a new subculture that emerged in the 1970s. Regrettably, the term became extensively known in connection with this incongruous incident, as a result otaku in Japan were largely associated with those with antisocial and perverted personality traits.

Roberta Pearson (2010) suggests that the digital revolution has had a profound impact upon fandom in various ways, including empowering and disempowering, blurring the lines between producers and consumers, creating symbiotic relationships between powerful corporations and individual fans, and giving rise to new forms of cultural production. Pearson argues that fans have always been at the forefront of media industry transformations and that the relationships between producer and consumer are being reconfigured in profound ways in the digital economy.

Ramasubramanian and Sarah Kornfield’s (2012) study on reception and intercultural entertainment investigates the role-modeling effects of positive female characters on young audiences by considering the underlying processes through which U.S. fans create meaningful relationships with Japanese media characters. They examine the relationships between character perceptions, wishful identification, and parasocial relationships in the context of fans of shōjo, a heroine-centric genre of Japanese anime. They find that liking a heroine's pro-social traits leads to greater wishful identification and more intense parasocial relationships with the heroine.

Lien Shen (2007) argues that the pleasure of viewing anime (Japanese animation) enables anime otaku’s playful practices and engenders an imperceptible politics in viewers’ own favor. Upon examining a number of anime works, Shen concluded anime images embody the pleasure of evasion and the pleasure of transgression as a form of

resistance to the regulatory power and the normative sexuality, providing a temporal revelation of social orders and body disciplines for viewers. She suggested that these evasive and transgressive pleasures empower anime otaku to go beyond image consumption, actively and constantly changing, manipulating, and subverting anime images in their practices, such as creating amateur manga, peer-to-peer networks and websites, and anime cosplay (costume-roleplay).

Carolyn Stevens (2010) challenges the association of fandom with social ostracism, instead situating it in a logical structure of historical consumer culture in Japan and in the West. By considering fandom within the hyper-developed context of a media-saturated, late-capitalist consumer society, Stevens sees fandom as a rational consumer strategy rather than a deviant psychological attribute. According to Stevens, fandom, when viewed from this perspective, can be distinguished from pathological behavior and focuses on pleasure, the pursuit of social capital, and individualized identity building, especially in a society where traditional corporate groups such as the family or the workplace no longer offer the same attraction.

Animation in the Arab World

While few studies have analyzed the presence and impact of anime on audiences in the Arab world--a gap the present study aims to address--there is a burgeoning animation industry in the region and corresponding literature tracing its rise and cultural and political influences. Understanding the state of the animation industry in the Arab world helps to situate the current study in its historical, geographic, cultural, and political context, even as its focus is on the circulation of Japanese anime in the region rather than indigenous animation.

While Egypt has boasted its own animation industry since the 1930s--the first Arab country to establish an animation production (Sayfo 2018)--generally, anime and other forms of animation first began to appear in the Arab world, including Kuwait, in the 1960s and 1970s with the emergence of television and national television channels. In the Gulf region, these channels served an important purpose for national authorities by enabling them to create local content that aligned with the culturally conservative societies. Yet, children were generally not seen as the primary audience for these government-run channels. Slots dedicated to children were filled with the "cheapest and fastest-produced content possible, mainly shows recorded with live participants" [120] Because animated cartoons were regarded as a "childish medium" by national authorities, establishing local animation studios were not prioritized; instead, cartoons from Japan, the United States, and Europe were imported and "made appropriate for the moral values of local traditions"[121] As a result, "many generations of Arab children grew up watching dubbed foreign animations," and Kuwaitis were no exception. According to Omar Sayfo, "choosing the sources of imported animations before the 1990s was often a political decision" and "the more capitalist-focused Gulf countries tended to import American products, mainly Disney serials and Japanese Anime"[122]

According to Paula Callus (2017), although it appears to be peripheral to the cultural space that film occupies in Morocco, Moroccan animation has circulated within different spaces on television and more recently on the Internet and mobile platforms.

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120. Sayfo, Omar Adam. "Local Minds, Foreign Hands: Animation in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf." In *Animation in the Middle East: Practice and Aesthetics from Baghdad to Casablanca*, edited by Stefanie van de Peer, 69-83. London: I. B. Taurus, 2017.

121.Ibid.

122. Ibid.

As artists adopt new technologies in their practices, digital animation pervades different genres, and Moroccan animators can be found contributing to games and visual effects.[123]

In her book *Enfoldment and Infinity: An Islamic Genealogy of New Media Art*, Laura U. Marks (2010) proposes that Islamic philosophy can offer fruitful ways of understanding contemporary art, drawing connections between classical Islamic art and contemporary new media art, noting how, in both forms, "one point can unfold to reveal an entire universe"[124] Marks traces the strong similarities, visual and philosophical, between these two kinds of art, showing that the "Islamic" quality of modern and new media art is a latent, deeply enfolded, historical inheritance from Islamic art and thought. Marks propose aesthetics of unfolding and enfolding in which image, information, and the infinite interact: image is an interface to information, and information (such as computer code or the words of the Qur'an) is an interface to the infinite. Marks demonstrate that digital concepts such as algorithms, pixels, and virtual reality are actually rooted in centuries-old Islamic art. Both Arab artists and the Islamic body of thought have acutely influenced European and Western culture.

Marks build on these connections between classical Islamic art and contemporary new media art in her 2011 article "Calligraphic animation: Documenting the invisible." Here, she examines calligraphy as a text-based art and animation, proposing that "calligraphic animation shifts the locus of documentation from representation to

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123. Callus, Paula. "Animation in Morocco: New Generations and Emerging Communities." In *Animation in the Middle East: Practice and Aesthetics from Baghdad to Casablanca*, edited by Stefanie van de Peer, 262-281. London: I. B. Taurus, 2017.

124. Marks, Laura U. *Enfoldment and Infinity: An Islamic Genealogy of New Media Art.* Cambridge,(MA: MIT Press, 2010), 64.

performance, from index to moving trace"[125] (307). For her, animation "is an ideal playing field for the transformative and performative qualities that Arabic writing, especially in the context of Islamic art, has explored for centuries"[126] (307). Marks shows how one of the most popular non-figurative Islamic arts--calligraphy--in many respects is itself animated: its written words or single letters encapsulate life and movement in their fluidity. Calligraphic artworks, while they do not depict living forms, do embody the movement of life itself.

Van de Peer (2017, 2) proposes that by following Marks' stance on the infinite enfoldment of art and its influences, we can see how such enfoldment and influences have flowed from both East to West and West to East, including the art of animation, complicating narratives of the origins of animation. However, van de Peer also acknowledges that animation arrived late in the Middle East and into a "complex context within which it now blooms"[127] (2). In places where Islamic law rules, this complex context of animation includes the relationship between film and religion, where animation is sometimes regarded as un-Islamic. As van de Peer elaborates: "Precisely because of its animated nature, the animated film takes man as the creator a step further. While the basic form and aim of animation, of lending the illusion of movement and a soul to a drawn body for its supposed young audience, is arguably why it has not always been appreciated in the East, in areas in the Middle East this under-appreciation has been ascribed to its allegedly un-Islamic nature. As Islam

125. Marks, Laura. U. "Calligraphic Animation: Documenting the Invisible." *Animation* 6(3) (2011), 307

126. Ibid.s

127. Van de Peer, S. "Introduction: Modelling Local Content for Animation in the Middle East." In *Animation in the Middle East: Practice and Aesthetics from Baghdad to Casablanca*, edited by Stefanie van de Peer, 1-28.(London: I. B. Taurus, 2017), 2.

declares that Allah is the only image-maker, the only creative and shaping being, for centuries, Islamic artists faced insecurities about representational arts" [128](2).

This "complex context" sometimes means that an infrastructure for film, including animated film, is lacking and cinemas are closed in countries existing under dictatorships, such as Libya, countries with strict censorship boards, such as Saudi Arabia, and countries contending with continuous political conflict, such as Algeria. Historically, high costs, lack of training facilities and infrastructure, a limited pool of production-ready talent, and the complete absence of government support for local initiatives have hindered the animation industry in the Middle East. Yet, despite such barriers, films continue to be produced "either clandestinely, slowly or in exile, and historically have had an enormous impact on the national identity formation of these countries" [129](van de Peer 2017, 3-4). The same could be said about the region's film consumption, as well.

In recent years, the animation industry in the Arab world has grown substantially. This has been aided in large part by the digital age, which has made a space for young people in animation and a spirit of entrepreneurship. As van de Peer (2017) describes, "Animation is now pervasive in commercial advertising, games, social networking and television, as well as artistic circles, where experimentation with the digital sometimes takes us back to ancient patterns. The computer and the possibilities offered by digital media have dramatically changed the relative neglect of animation and have ushered in a renewed interest in and favored attention for animation and related techniques and

128. Ibid.

129. Van de Peer, S. ".(London: I. B. Taurus, 2017), 3-4

practices in the cinema"[130] According to van de Peer, digital technologies have encouraged experimental practices and have altered the production, dissemination, and distribution of animation to countries in the region as artists "search for a common transnational animated identity" [131].

The animation industry has developed unevenly in the region, with the Gulf region leading the pack with its abundant resources. As van de Peer (2017) describes, "With the positioning of the Gulf as the source of most funding opportunities and production money as well as being the nexus of distribution and exhibition of animated (and other) films in the Middle East, entrepreneurial trends in animation reveal three strands here: advertising, TV serialized edutainment and children's films"[132] In particular, Abu Dhabi and Dubai are positioned at the forefront of film and animation production.

Anime in Kuwait

The continuous growth of the anime industry in Japan has had significant effects on different parts of the world where it is consumed. In Kuwait, anime has had an impact on the culturally accepted norms which influence gender perceptions and expression among anime fans. This has resulted not only in a major fan base of anime but has opened the doors to examining new ideas of gender expression and sexuality, inspiring art that has been seen as taboo in Kuwaiti culture. After anime was aired on Kuwaiti television networks, it was then made available via VHS cassettes, DVDs, Video CDs, Blu-Rays, and cinemas. Today, Kuwaitis easily access uncensored anime online in the privacy of their own homes or with their friends.

130. Van de Peer, S. ".(London: I. B. Taurus, 2017), 5.

131. Ibid.

132. Van de Peer, S. ".(London: I. B. Taurus, 2017), 7.

Globalization and Censorship

In the 1980s, as the global economy expanded, Kuwait and other countries in the Gulf region deepened their trade relationships with various trading partners, increasing trading activities between them. Though these countries had strong relationships with countries in the West, they were keen to ensure that Islam was not segregated from--or compromised because of--politics and economics. Kuwait, in particular, took severe measures to ensure that its culture and norms were not eroded by the cultures from the non-Islamic countries with which it engaged. As part of these measures, the Kuwaiti authorities implemented strict regulations to ensure censorship of the media, via the Ministry of Information, on content such as kissing, sex, immodest dress, violence, and behaviors considered immoral to protect the public from exposure to such content deemed contrary to the established norms, values, and culture in the country.

Animation in Kuwait: From American Cartoons to Japanese Anime

Before the 1980s, young Kuwaitis who had attended private schools had been exposed to animation in the form of cartoons. They were mostly American shows like *G.I. Joe*, *Tom and Jerry*, and *Thunder Cats*. Because they studied in private schools, which were either English-medium or offered excellent training in English, these Kuwaiti youth were able to understand the English language, which was being used in the shows. As a result, these Kuwaitis were influenced by some of the American values and customs depicted in the cartoons, including the masculinity of the male characters. They tried to copy the animation by imitating their favorite characters by displaying their masculinity.

When anime was introduced in Kuwait and other parts of the Arab world, it was dubbed in Arabic. Through dubbing, the Japanese voice actors were transformed into Arab voices, giving anime an easy introduction to the Arab world. The Arabic dubbed anime was even given a name: “Arabime.” Anime became hugely popular in Kuwait and other Arabic-speaking countries, primarily because the stories resonated with the general public as they represented a diverse array of relatable characters--good, evil, heroes--quite unlike the American cartoon shows whose characters bore little resemblance to people in real life.

Anime in the Digital Age: The Role of the Internet in Kuwaiti Anime Consumption

After the Internet started to appear in Kuwait, sales of anime VHS tapes and DVDs slowed and eventually came to a halt once high-speed Internet became increasingly accessible to Kuwaiti youth. High-speed Internet brought the creation of free anime streams and download servers, namely Napster, Kazaa, and Torrents. This was a significant development for the consumption of anime in the country, not only because anime fans were able to download anime for free, but they were also able to watch it in privacy. Computers offer more privacy compared to televisions. They also enable users to save files which they can watch later and share with different people. Over the Internet, users can easily download anime episodes and keep them. Also, they no longer need to wait for the anime to arrive in Kuwait as the Internet enables them to watch episodes the same day they are released in Japan. The development of the Internet has allowed fans to either read or watch their favorite anime translated into their languages of choice and also enabled them to access unlimited anime materials and acquire them in uncensored formats.

The Internet also fueled the emergence of a globalized Kuwaiti youth. Via the internet, which facilitates their consumption of global pop culture, these youth rapidly absorb cultural elements from the West which become reconfigured with cultural elements from other sources that have influenced them or that they bring into their identities and everyday lives, including Kuwaiti culture and anime culture (Botz-Bornstein, 2018). The presence of this globalized, pop culture savvy Kuwaiti youth, who are also the largest sector of Kuwaiti society, is made clear through the fact that Kuwait has the highest rate of Twitter users per capita and that Kuwaiti youth constitute the highest concentration of Internet users, representing approximately two-thirds of all Internet users in the country (Moncanu et al., 2013). More than older Kuwaitis, young Kuwaitis are involved with different aspects of high technology and the Internet. This segment has grown up with satellite technology that spread in the Arab world during the 1990s (Abdulrahim et al., 2009).

For the so-called Internet generation in Kuwait, the Internet has created a virtual space for the transgression of gender lines that are otherwise strictly enforced in Kuwaiti society (Botz-Bornstein, 2018). The Internet has given the young users freedom to express themselves and follow their curiosity where it takes them, giving them the opportunity to reconsider, challenge, and even redefine norms and values in Kuwaiti society. These experiences of transgression and freedom via the Internet extends to Kuwaiti anime fans who, over time, as technology advanced, had more and more freedom to consume the anime of their choice and in the language and format of their preference, rather than be dictated by the Kuwaiti authorities. This freedom creates opportunities for different meanings in the anime to be received by the anime fans, meanings that sometimes run contrary to ideological messages about gender and

sexuality circulating in Kuwait, which, in turn, creates the conditions for cultural conflict and the challenging of gender norms of the characteristically traditional and conservative Kuwaiti society by anime fans.

Globalization and the Impact of Global Media on Kuwait

This cultural conflict and challenging of norms that can result from the freedom experienced by Kuwaiti anime fan, created by the Internet and the intercultural exchange of globalization, raises questions about the impacts that global media have on Kuwait, and on the Arab World more broadly (Abdulrahim et al., 2009). The ongoing debate in the region has spurred multiple positions on the matter, including those who see global media as a largely negative influence on Arabs, serving to disseminate Western values and and instill in Arabs a sense of cultural and economic dependence on the West (Said, 1993). Others see the impact of global media as largely positive, giving Arabs the opportunity to explore new ideas and adopt constructive values that will prepare them to compete well in a global economy that is both dynamic and technology-driven (Alterman, 2002).

Media of diversification, of which anime is a part, was arguably introduced by the satellite television, which presented information and entertainment programs to audiences from different perspectives, leading to the diffusion of new and different lifestyles, subcultures, and ways of thinking in the Arab world (Sakr, 2007). This process of media of diversification via satellite television has been particularly significant in Kuwait, where the level of penetration of satellite television is very high (Jamal and Melkote, 2008). The degree of intercultural influence of global media at this moment when global interconnection is surging remains an open question to be

investigated further. What is clear is that there is a great interconnection and integration between the people of different cultures via media technologies more than ever before and that protecting the local political and ideological status quo from foreign influence is becoming impossible as global media outlets affect people worldwide in a variety of ways, intentionally or not (Abdulrahim et al., 2009). Satellite television and the Internet are attributed credit to the introduction and dissemination of new values, knowledge, and lifestyles in other countries (Katz and Liebes 1990). They also encourage local audiences to draw comparisons between what they consume on TV and online and what they have (Crabtree and Malhotra 2000).

East-East globalization

Most often seen as a power that flattens and erases local culture, globalisation tends to be linked to Americanization rather than considered as an East-East phenomenon. Arab culture has been credited with the ability of resisting globalisation and cultural imperialism because of its conservatism and traditionalism (Botz-Bornstein, 2018). Many Arabs refuse any acculturation of Western values that they think might negatively affect the social structures, status quo and the morality of youth (Al-Kandari and Gaither, 2011). However, such dynamics involve the transfer from West to East, yet the importation of Japanese cultural products in Kuwait involves an East-East exchange in which “Japanese-Kuwaiti cultural transfer implies a double resistance towards the local Kuwaiti culture and towards American culture” (Botz-Bornstein, 2018, 59). This double resistance can lead to a double marginalization that characterizes the anime subculture in Kuwait. Notably, resistance is not based on cultural closure and conservatism but rather on the willingness to engage with another (Eastern) culture, which offers an alternative to both Kuwaiti and American cultures. The paradoxical pattern of resistance

to the East through the adherence to another Eastern culture exposes the complexities that international subcultures can undergo in a postcolonial world. (Botz-Bornstein, 2018).

Japanese Culture in Kuwait

In Kuwait, the presence of Japanese culture is visible in multiple ways: universities have manga clubs, Japanese conventions anime and video game festivals like Comfest, Q8con, ComicCon, or PlamoQ8 draw thousands of people, cosplay competitions take place several times per year and the Japanese embassy organizes cultural events for young people. Then, of course, there is anime, which has developed a massive following of dedicated fans in Kuwait in the last few decades. All of this interest in Japanese culture and cultural products amounts to what Botz-Bornstein (2018) calls "Japanophilia in Kuwait" which is remarkable in part because it is so unremarkable to Kuwaiti consumers of Japanese culture, who, contrary to Western stereotypes about Kuwaitis living in an isolated culture steeped in a censor-heavy Wahhabist tradition, consider themselves to be worldly and steeped in global culture even as they maintain certain Kuwaiti traditions and values. And although we may speak of Japanese culture having a "presence" in Kuwait, the Internet has enabled a process of personalized globalization and deterritorialization for Japanophiles in Kuwait. Because of the Internet, Kuwaitis have direct access to Japanese cultural products, such as anime, and can receive and share new ideas with foreign friends through online communication (Botz-Bornstein, 2018).

The Popularity of Masculine Anime in Kuwait

Anime depicted forms of masculinity in the characters to which Kuwaitis and other Arabs could relate, further contributing to the popularity of anime in the region. In the cultures of Kuwait and other Arab countries, a strong emphasis is placed on masculinity and the masculine male. Most of the anime produced during the 1980s and 1990s depicted highly masculinist themes--highly active boys and young men who were strong, excellent fighters, and competitive in sports. These anime had very few female protagonists. The manga industry continued to grow during this time as well, serving as source material for many anime, with boy mangas controlling the market [133] (Johnson-Woods 2010). Examples of popular boy mangas that were converted into anime include Takehiko Inoue's *Slam Dunk* and *Baki the Grappler* by Keisuke Itagaki. *Baki the Grappler* portrays a young martial artist who becomes the best at his fighting style. Another example is *Ashita no Jo*, by Tetsuya Chiba--the male protagonist became the symbol of struggle in the 1970s as he fought his way from orphanage to boxing fame. *Dragon Ball Z*, by Akira Toriyama, focused on Son Goku the Monkey King, who was involved in martial arts and competed in tournaments to become the best in the land, was converted to anime in the 1990s and became one of the most popular anime of its time.

These male-centric, masculinist stories depicted hegemonic masculine themes, revolving around the exceptional abilities of the male characters, their service to the society, and achieving perfection of their characters, while female charactered typically played secondary roles to the male protagonists. While other genres of anime feature more female protagonists, the male-centric genres have proven to be the most popular in

133. Johnson-Woods, Toni. *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives*. New York: Continuum,

Kuwait. Most of the popular anime in the country has had this style, such as *Dragon Ball Z*, *Saint Seiya*, and *Slam Dunk*. These anime appeared to be popular because of their portrayals of "good" masculine male characters prevailing over "evil." They showcased male characters ably saving and defending the people they cared about, such as their friends, families, and communities, echoing the hegemonic masculine message taught to boys and men in Kuwaiti culture.

The Rise of Anime and Video Game Festival Tournaments in Kuwait

Anime and video game festivals have been a worldwide event in many countries around the world but are relatively new in Kuwait. Typically, attendees join the festival to view and participate in-game competitions, buy products, meet talented voice actors and artists, and cosplay their favorite characters. Since the arrival of anime and video games in Kuwait in the 1980s, the country has had an anime and video game community, but it largely lacked recognition due to the lack of media attention. Since 2010, there has been a gradual increase in the number of anime and video gaming events in Kuwait, growing steadily in popularity with both men and women participating. In 2012, four anime conventions were held. Consequently, Kuwait has come to be recognized worldwide as a country with a gaming and anime scene (Crasto, 2019; McWhertor, 2010; Red Bull Kuwait, 2018; Twofortyeightam, 2017). In recent years, four or more events have been held annually, hosted by different companies such as Fikra, Q8CON, Plamo, ComicCon, Q8, Comfest (Twofortyeightam, 2017).

In Kuwait, the increasing, and increasingly freer, circulation of Japanese cultural products such as anime over time has created a subculture with multiple types of Japanophilia in Kuwait (Botz-Bornstein, 2018). The majority of Japanophiles consume

Japanese culture like they consume other global cultural products, such as Hollywood movies, soap operas, and commercial pop music, without digging beneath the surface to find deeper connections and meanings. Another type of Japanophiles in Kuwait, a minority, does go deeper and in doing so, they discover a cultural background linked to products they consume and use that discovery to view, reflect on, and critique their own culture, and construct a more nuanced Kuwaiti identity for themselves. This study aimed to seek participation from Kuwaiti anime fans that fit into this second type of Japanophiles, the ones who take their anime seriously, engage with it as the cultural text that it is, and draw meaning from it that they apply in their everyday lives.

Research Aims and Questions

Although the Arab world has become a site for the global animation industry in which local and foreign animation circulates, very few studies have considered the presence of Japanese anime in the region, and no major study has examined its circulation and consumption in Kuwait. The present study aims to address this gap in the literature by investigating, through questionnaires and in-depth interviews, the forces that have shaped the circulation and consumption of anime in Kuwait over time and how Kuwaiti anime fans' anime consumption practices and preferences influence, as well as reflect, their attitudes and beliefs regarding gender and sexuality within the world of anime and beyond. This study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What meanings does anime have for Kuwaiti anime fans?
2. What characterizes the circulation and consumption of anime in Kuwait, and how has it changed over time?

a) What influence has anime censorship had on its circulation and consumption?

b) What influence has technological change had on its circulation and consumption?

3. How do Kuwaiti anime fans' anime consumption practices and preferences influence and/or reflect their attitudes and beliefs regarding gender and sexuality--namely, masculinity, femininity, men and women, gender roles, and gender relations?

   a) What characterizes their anime consumption practices and preferences?

   b) How do they interpret and respond to stereotypical and transgressed depictions of masculinity and femininity in anime?

   c) How do they interpret and respond to depictions of sexuality in anime?

   d) To what extent do these attitudes, beliefs, and responses reflect ambivalent sexism, benevolent sexism, and/or hostile sexism?

4. How does Kuwaiti culture influence the ways that Kuwaiti anime fans interpret and respond to depictions of masculinity, femininity, male and female characters, and gender roles in anime?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the study draws on gender and sexuality studies, media studies, and anime studies. In particular, it draws on concepts of the social construction of gender and sexuality, ambivalent, benevolent and hostile sexism, hegemonic masculinity, audience encoding and decoding, and fandom as a particular kind of engagement with the power relations of media culture.

Methodology

Participants and Procedures

Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with a total of 27 participants--23 males and 4 females (see Table 1.1). Interview participants included 22 self-identified anime fans (20 male and 2 female) who were recruited through anime/manga clubs and groups including, but not limited to, an anime club at American University of Kuwait and anime conventions in Kuwait. The majority of anime fan participants were Kuwaiti, and all had lived in Kuwait; one was from Lebanon, and one was from Syria. Three participants were involved in anime and manga sales, including the owner and manager of Al-Argham Video (both male Kuwaitis), which sells uncensored anime, and the (female Kuwaiti) owner of Enlisted, the first manga publishing company in Kuwaiti. One (male Kuwaiti) participant was a video game and anime event organizer in Kuwait. Two participants were professional anime voice actors (one male and one female, both non-Kuwaiti). To be eligible, all participants had to be at least 18 years old and consent to the interview. All participants were between 18 and 35 years old.

Table 1.1. Interview participant demographic information and interview details.

Name	Age	Gender	Nationality	Bio	Language of Interview	Location of Interview	Date of Interview
Mehdi el Moussaoui	26	Male	Kuwait	anime enthusiast	English	Kuwait	March 9th, 2014
Mahamed Samer Shaeen	23	Male	Syria	anime enthusiast	English	Kuwait	February 17th, 2014
Abdulla Al Kandari	24	Male	Kuwait	anime enthusiast	English	Kuwait	February 24th, 2014
Ali Methan	27	Male	Kuwait	anime enthusiast	English	Kuwait	February 24th, 2014
Jaffar Mansour	20	Male	Kuwait	anime enthusiast	English	American University of Kuwait, Kuwait	February 17th, 2014
Farhan	32	Male	Kuwait	anime/ game enthusiast; video game event organizer	English	online; Skype	September 19th, 2017
Abdullah	31	Male	Kuwait	anime/ game enthusiast; video game event organizer	English	online; Skype	September 19th, 2017
Hussain Al- Baghli	21	Male	Kuwait	anime enthusiast	English	Kuwait	February 17th, 2014
Mohamed	51	Male	Kuwait	manager, Al-Argham Video, sells uncensored movies/anime	English	Al-Argham Video, Kuwait	March 9th, 2014
Adham	24	Male	Kuwait	anime/video game conventions participant	English	Kuwait	March 18th
Tarek Al- Kandari	18	Male	Kuwait	anime/ game enthusiast	Arabic	nime Club, American University of Kuwait, Kuwai	February 17th, 2014
Fahad S. Oraifan	26	Male	Kuwait	anime/ game enthusiast	Arabic	Fahad Oraifan's house, Kuwait	February 21st, 2014
Waleed Bouresli	32	Male	Kuwait	anime enthusiast	Arabic	Fahad Oraifan's house, Kuwait	February 21st, 2014
Abdullah Kodor Attar	30	Male	Lebanon	anime enthusiast	Arabic	Fahad Oraifan's house, Kuwait	February 21st, 2014
Aziz Al- Suhely	30	Male	Kuwait	anime/ game enthusiast	Arabic	Fahad Oraifan's house, Kuwait	February 21st, 2014
Salah	22	Male	Kuwait	anime enthusiast	Arabic	Fahad Oraifan's house, Kuwait	February 21st, 2014
Abdulrahman Bin Nasser	21	Male	Kuwait	anime enthusiast	Arabic	Kuwait	March 4th, 2014
Mahammad Al Kandari	28	Male	Kuwait	anime enthusiast	Arabic	nime Club, American University of Kuwait, Kuwai	February 18th, 2014
Ahmed abu taleb	22	Male	Kuwait	anime enthusiast	Arabic	nime Club, American University of Kuwait, Kuwai	February 18th, 2014
Awatha Al Mutairi	21	Female	Kuwait	anime enthusiast	Arabic	nime Club, American University of Kuwait, Kuwai	February 18th, 2014
Awthah Al- Shalahim	19	Female	Kuwait	anime/ game enthusiast	Arabic	American University of Kuwait, Kuwait	February 17th, 2014
Hassan	55	Male	Kuwait	Owner, Al-Argham Video, sells uncensored movies/anime	Arabic	Al-Argham Video, Kuwait	March 9th, 2014
Yousef	35	Male	Kuwait	founder of Fikra; video game event organizer	English	video game convention, Kuwait	February 21st, 2018
Hisa Al Qaoud	34	Female	Kuwait	owner, Enlited, first Manga publishing co in Kuwait	Arabic	telephone	March 25th, 2018
Stefanie Joosten	27	Female	The Netherlands	video game voice actor; Comfest convention 2018 participant, Kuwait	English	Comfest convention 2018, Kuwait	February 21st, 2018
Quinton Flynn	26	Male	USA	anime/video game voice actor; Comfest convention 2018 participant, Kuwait	English	Comfest convention 2018, Kuwait	February 21st, 2018
Adham	24	Male	Kuwait	anime/video game conventions participant	English	video game convention, Kuwait	February 21st, 2018

I developed an interview guide to pose semi-structured questions to the participants (Denzin and Lincoln 2011; Edwards and Holland 2013; Rubin and Rubin 2012). Nineteen of the interviews were conducted in English; the remaining eight interviews were conducted in Arabic. Twenty-four interviews took place in Kuwait, while two interviews were conducted online via Skype, and one was conducted by telephone. All interviews were conducted between 2014 and 2018. Each interview lasted between one and three hours. All interviews were audio-recorded upon permission from participants. The identities of all participants have been kept confidential; all names are pseudonyms.

Semi-structured interview questions focused on obtaining participants' oral histories of their introduction to and engagement with anime over the life course. Specific topics included: the arrival of anime in the Middle East; why anime is popular in Kuwait; why masculine anime is popular in Kuwait; popular anime genres among Kuwaitis; age groups that watch anime; changes in anime viewership over time; stigma of watching anime; how friends and family respond to participants' anime fandom; how Kuwaitis watched anime when it first arrived in Kuwait; how participants first watched anime as children; first anime titles watched by participants; anime dubbing and

subtitles; anime voice actors; anime language preferences; first encounters with manga; first anime purchased; preferences regarding uncensored (uncut) versus censored anime; first uncensored anime purchases; anime censorship; online anime consumption; views on masculinity in anime; first masculine anime titles watched; changes to anime content over time; changes to depictions of masculinity and femininity in anime over time; fan service; genre preferences; character preferences regarding depictions of dominance and submission among male and female characters; character preferences regarding traits among male and female characters, including depictions of masculinity and femininity; complaints about the anime industry; Kuwaiti culture; how depictions of males, females, masculinity, and femininity compared to Kuwaiti cultural gender norms.

Upon completion of the interviews, I transcribed all of the audio-recordings and translated Arabic language interviews into English. I then coded the transcribed interview data using an inductive and deductive coding method in three phases (Campbell et al. 2013).

Questionnaire

participants included self-identified Kuwaiti anime fans recruited through online anime-related websites and through anime/manga clubs and groups including, but not limited to, an anime club at American University of Kuwait and anime conventions in Kuwait. The voluntary online questionnaire was emailed to members of these clubs by the club leaders/organizers. To be eligible, participants had to be at least 18 years old and consent to the questionnaire. The questionnaire received 103 responses. Out of the 103 responses, 83 were male, and 20 were female. The mean age of participants was 27.

Questionnaire questions asked participants about basic demographic information, including their sex, age, sexual identity, nationality, and whether they lived in Kuwait or abroad. Participants completed measures related to their frequency of anime consumption, preferences for different anime genres, media platforms used for anime consumption (e.g., television, cassettes, DVDs, online downloads or streaming, etc.), preferences for censored or uncensored anime, whether anime played a role in exposing them to mature themes and content, gender preferences regarding the main protagonist, preferences regarding the main character's sexuality, preferences regarding the gender traits displayed by main protagonists and whether they believed that those preferences were influenced by religion and culture. I analyzed questionnaire data using descriptive statistics (Bors, 2018; Holcomb, 2016).

Dissertation Overview

The questionnaire and interview data are presented in four chapters.

Chapter 1: The Rise of Anime in Kuwait: The Lure, Popular Genres, and Fandom provide an overview of the trends and patterns in anime consumption among Kuwaitis and other Arabs based primarily on the perspectives, experiences, and memories of the interview participants. The chapter considers the arrival of anime in the Middle East, the popularity of anime in Kuwait, including masculine anime and other popular genres, and characteristics of the anime fan base in the country.

Chapter 2: Kuwaiti Anime Consumption Practices over Time: Technological Change, Uncut Anime, and Censorship focus on the anime consumption practices of study participants and how and why they changed over time. It traces the government's censorship efforts and technological changes over the decades in Kuwaiti, which opened

up new formats for Kuwaiti anime fans to watch anime and provided means to avoid anime censorship and to access uncut anime, shaping how Kuwaitis consumed anime and what anime they consumed over time.

Chapter 3: Gendered Anime: Masculine Anime, the Feminization of Anime, and Sexualized Fan Service examine participants' views on the gendered dimensions of anime and how participants' anime consumption practices are themselves gendered. It considers the various ways in which participants define and think about masculinity and how it is depicted in anime, the changes to anime content over time--specifically, the trend towards feminization and sexualized fan service in the new generation of anime--and the current state of masculine anime.

Chapter 4: Gendered Preferences in Anime: Masculine Characters, Character Dominance and Submission, and the Sexualized Anime Industry take a closer look at participants' anime consumption preferences within the gendered dimensions of anime and how their consumption preferences are themselves gendered. The chapter considers participants' gendered anime character preferences, including masculine characters, male and female heroes, character dominance, and submission. The chapter also considers participants' responses to the sexualized fan service that characterizes much of the new generation of anime and the changes they would like to see made in the anime industry.

Chapter 5: Conclusion discusses the key findings and arguments of the study as well as the study's limitations and directions for future research.

Chapter 1

The Rise of Anime in Kuwait:

The Lure, Popular Genres, and Fandom

This chapter provides an overview of the trends and patterns in anime consumption among Kuwaitis and other Arabs based primarily on the knowledge, experiences, and memories of the interview participants. First, participants describe the arrival of anime in the Middle East and their earliest memories--as well as stories told to them by their parents-- about the early days of anime in the region, including when it first emerged and which anime was regularly seen on television. Next, the participants share their views regarding why anime is so popular in Kuwait and why masculine anime, in particular, has captured the attention and admiration of Kuwaiti audiences. Then, they broaden the discussion from masculine anime to all the genres of anime that have found audiences in Kuwait. Finally, they share their experiences and views regarding who watches anime in Kuwait--specifically, which age groups--and the stigma that is experienced by teens and adults who continue to watch anime, an activity largely regarded as childish albeit with signs of increasing acceptance of adult viewers in recent years. The chapter demonstrates that anime has a long and varied history in Kuwait and that the country possesses a distinctive anime culture shaped by local culture, religion, government censorship, and anime content.

The Arrival of Anime in the Middle East

All of the interview and questionnaire participants in this study were born in the 1980s or 1990s, so their own earliest memories of watching anime-only extend to those

decades. The majority of questionnaire participants--over 83 percent--believed that anime was first aired or released in Kuwait between the late 1970s and early 1980s (see Figure 1.1).

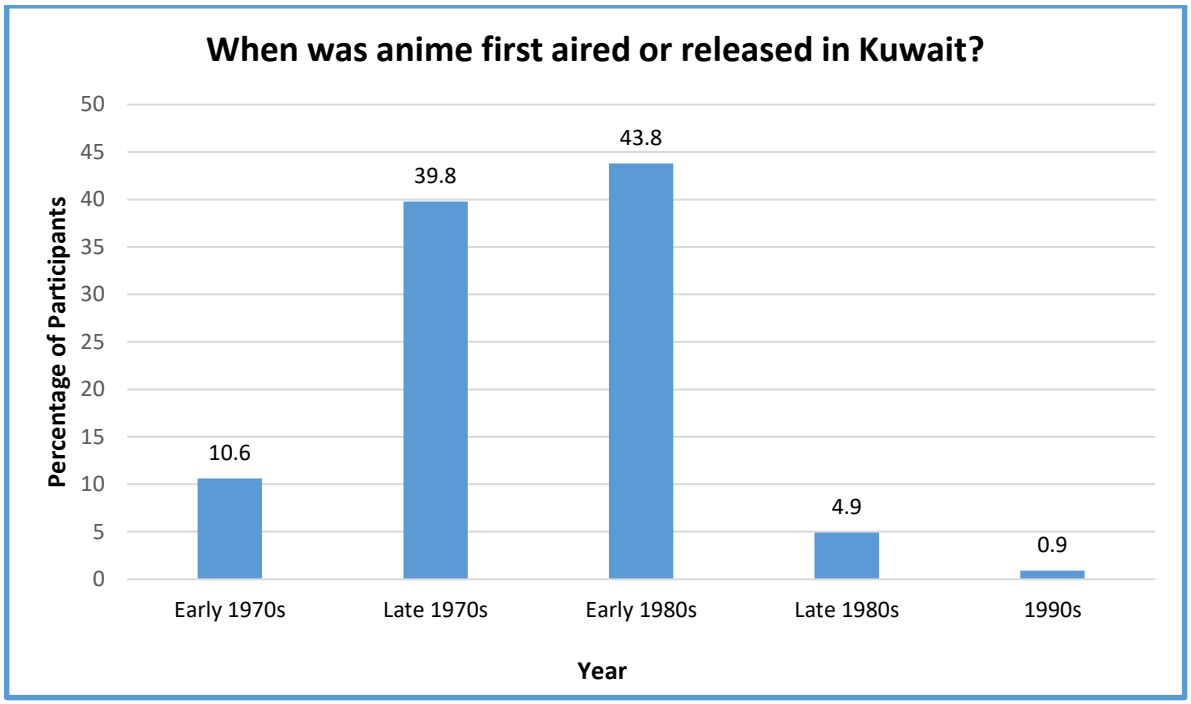

FIGURE 1.1. A time when anime was first aired or released in Kuwait, according to questionnaire participants.

Similarly, most interview participants had the impression that anime first arrived in the Middle East in the 1970s or early 1980s. Because some of their parents had watched anime before they were born, they heard stories of anime from the 1970s, such as Mahamed Samer Shaeen: “I think [anime arrived in Kuwait] even before I was born. I'm 23 years old, but I remember that my childhood, there were many anime shows on the TV that were translated into Arabic. My Dad even used to tell me about anime that he used to watch before then. . . . I'm definite that it's moreover 30 years old [in] the Middle East.”

Adham likewise concluded that anime was accessible in Kuwait in the 1970s based on the fact that the "older generation" of Kuwaiti anime fans knew of, and had watched, *UFO Robot Grendizer*. *Grendizer* was a famous Japanese super robot anime television series and manga created by manga artist Go Nagai and represented the third entry in the *Mazinger* trilogy, a long-running series of manga and anime featuring giant robots or *mecha*. The *Grendizer* television series ran from 1975 to 1977. As Adham explained: "I would say that anime did come in the 1970s because the older generations didn't know Grendizer or encourage us or are quite old. If I'm correct, *Grendizer* was in the late '70s. Mid to late 70s. And, the oldest generation is from the '70s do know *Grendizer*." Abdulla Al Kandari concurred, stating that anime arrived in Kuwait "maybe mid-'70s when things like, I would like to say the beginning started with *Grendizer* where things have been noticeable". Mahammad Al Kandari noted that "anime came in the 1970s and as well from the 1980s, where anime came such as *Mazinger*, *Grendizer*, and especially *Igano Kabamaru*."

According to Ali Methan, *Grendizer* and *Astro Boy* were some of the first anime to appear in Kuwait in the 1970s: "Well, things like Grendizer did set the grounds of what anime is, basically give people an idea of Japanese animation and culture. I think that maybe even *Astro Boy* was also one of the major pioneers. Most of Osamu Tezuka's work came to the Middle East. I'm guessing because, from what I understand, those are the first anime that had been made. He's one of the first guys to actually put his work out there and basically make the genre of anime itself."

While anime may have first arrived in Kuwait in the 1970s, the industry became increasingly popular in the 1980s when a slew of animated television shows from Japan began airing in Kuwait with Arabic dubbing, such as *Igano Kabamaru*, as Mahammad

Al Kandari noted. *Igano Kabamaru* is a Japanese manga series written and illustrated by Yū Azuki that was made into a 24-episode television series, airing between 1983 and 1984. Abdulla Al Kandari pointed out the lag time in the airing of many of the popular anime shows in Kuwait: “The '70s stuff came around in the '80s, so did the '80s [anime] came in the '90s.” He recalled watching a number of popular anime shows dubbed in Arabic during his youth in the 1980s and 1990s that were not always aired on television but were available for rent or purchase as cassettes, including *Three Kingdoms*, *Captain Tsubasa*, *Captain Majid*, which aired in Kuwait in the 1980s, and the ubiquitous and wildly popular *Gundam* in the 1990s.

Hussain Al-Baghli recalled watching numerous anime shows broadcast on Kuwait’s national television channel: “We watched [anime] at home on TV. The popular anime programs in the Middle East were *Captain Tsubasa*, *Combattler V*, which is in the Arabian version called *Khumasi*, *Space Conan Boy* (Hayao Miyazaki), and *Grendizer*, which were all dubbed in Arabic.” Hussain Al-Baghli noted that *Grendizer* and *Combattler V* were particularly popular in Kuwaiti culture at the time as well as “notable, perfect anime mostly from Studio Ghibli. . . . I do forget their names in the Arabic version. Still, there are a lot of famous ones specifically from Studio Ghibli.” As Waleed remembered it, while anime--especially *Grendizer* and *Manzinger* as others noted--was present in Kuwait in the 1980s, it became much more widespread and famous in the 1990s: “I started to watch anime when I was 4 or 5 years old [in 1986 or 1987], and anime came out which were *Grendizer*, *Mazinger*, and it increased heavily in the 1990s.”

Abdullah Kodor Attar noted an important development in the anime available in Kuwait between the 1980s and 1990s that coincided with its rise in popularity: the shift

from Arabic dubbed in the 1980s to Japanese dubbed in the 1990s. He said that when anime came to Kuwait in the 1980s, "it came out like, *Mazinger*, *Grendizer*, and famous anime from Miyazaki Hayao, which were dubbed in Arabic. But then it came again in the Japanese dub, in the 1990s, which first started at *Guyver* and then *Dragon Ball Z".* Salah echoed Abdullah's assessment, explaining that anime "came in two ways, the first way anime came when it was dubbed in Arabic, but when it truly came out, was in the Japanese dub, in the 1990s."

Individuals involved in the business of anime, rather than its consumption, offer a different perspective regarding its rise in popularity in Kuwait in the 1980s and 1990s. Hassan owns Al-Argham Video, a video store established in 1993 which sells anime and other films and videos (both cut and uncut--uncensored--versions) in Salmiya; a small coastal city situated 15 kilometers southeast of Kuwait City, the capital. He recalled the period in the late 1980s, before he was able to open his store when he sold anime and other videos on cassette in the parking lot of White Tower--widely considered among Kuwaiti video game and anime fans as *the* place in Kuwait to purchase cut and uncut video games, anime, manga, and their accessories. He had a lot of customers. His parking lot-based business was illegal, however, and he was cautious to avoid getting caught by the police.

Once he had amassed enough savings from the illicit sales of these videos, Hassan opened Al-Argham Video. His business boomed in the 1990s. Both Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaiti Arabs would flock to his store where he would sell them uncut versions of anime and other films at a lower price than those found abroad at the time; one cassette would sell for just 3KD (1000 Yen). Saudi anime fans were known to drive to Kuwait to buy his uncut videos, which were virtually impossible to find in Saudi Arabia at the

time due to censorship, and hide them under the seats of their cars and return to their country.

Mahamed, a manager at Al-Argham Video since it opened in 1993, also recalled those early days of the business and the surge in popularity of anime among Kuwaitis. “Anime started to grow in TV series, and people started to like and buy it,” he said. According to Mahamed, it all started with the release in Kuwait of *The Guyver: Bio-Booster Armor*, a 12-part Japanese anime original video animation (OVA) loosely based on Yoshiki Takaya's manga, *Bio-Booster Armor Guyver*, which aired between 1989 and 1992. The story centers on a teenage boy who merges with a suit of bio-armor to protect his world. As Mahamed explained: “We started [Al-Argham Video] in 1993, during the era of *Guyver*, *Hokuto no Ken*, and we recorded every episode of *Guyver*, one month per episode. . . . When we first released the first episode of *Guyver*, there were more than 40 people lined up to our store willing to buy the anime, and this was the start of the manga. After this was the start of manga movies.”

The eager customers did not just buy up copies of *Guyver*, but virtually all anime they could get their hands on. “Everything, they bought everything, the old school anime bought us heavy business sales, due to [the portrayals of] masculinity, everything in the past brought me profit... *Conan*, *Mazinger*, *Grendizer*, *Berserk*, *Captain Tsubasa*, especially the anime movies, then they formed on the series,” Mahamed explained.

Echoing Hassan, Mahamed stated that Al-Argham Video was popular with Kuwaitis and other Arabs. They crossed state borders just to obtain copies of their uncut anime and other films. “Yes, many came, all over the Gulf States, and it wasn’t only buying uncut movies because of sex, but because for understanding the story,” he recalled. “By this [time], the word of our store had been spreading, from Kuwait to

other Gulf countries." Anime fans traveled to their store from as far away as Saudi Arabia, where bans on various forms of entertainment and censorship ere were fierce: "We even had people coming from Saudi Arabia buying over 40 to 60 cassettes and putting them inside the trunk of the car and go back to their country to watch anime. . . . Since Saudi Arabia was too strict at that time that even cinema was banned, women driving are still illegal. Even TV channels were censoring Looney Tunes because of Porky Pig, a character seen as a pig which is viewed as a dirty animal in Islam, and these Islamic extremists censored it."

Why Anime is Popular in the Middle East

While the discussion above makes clear that anime was extremely popular among Kuwaitis and other Arabs during anime's arrival and spread in Kuwait and other parts of the Middle East in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, it is less clear *why* anime garnered such enthusiasm among Arabs during this early period. This enthusiasm has only grown over the decades in Kuwait, producing a large and diverse community of anime fans and an anime scene recognized worldwide. As a result, Kuwait has, in recent years, become a hub for large-scale anime events and conventions, attracting thousands of participants from around the world annually.

It begs the question: why is anime so popular in Kuwait? Study participants coalesced around several key reasons, ranging from the quality of art, design, animation, stories, and plots, the diverse array of exciting and well-developed characters, the escapism they offered through fantastical worlds, the exciting action they provided, their accessibility through Arabic dubbing, to the highly masculinist storylines and portrayals of main characters that resonated with Kuwaiti audiences. The range of

answers participants provided illustrates that anime offered Kuwaiti audiences a wide variety of reasons to be drawn to it, leading to a broad fan base in the country over the years.

Anime's Novelty and Originality: Quality of Art, Animation, and Storytelling

According to Fahad Oraifan and Salah, when anime first arrived in Kuwait, it offered Kuwaitis something entirely novel, which spurred its popularity. "Anime was something new to us," Fahad explained, "what made it unique was the plot scenes and story." Salah noted: "I noticed anime became famous because of the character designs, making each character unique with their features." Waleed Bouresli also commented on how the uniqueness of anime intrigued Arabs, coming from a completely different part of the world, and the depth given to the thoughtfully designed characters: "The anime which were first introduced had not only a huge impact on entertainment but also cultural acceptance. The Arabs were intrigued not on the idea that it came from the East, but on the originality of the story, art, emotions, personality, and masculinity which were found in the main characters. During the time of anime's growth in Kuwait, the series of greatest interest were *Mazinger Z*, *Grendizer*, *Captain Tsubasa*, *Igano Kabamaru*, *Sinbad the Sailor*, and *Combattler V*."

Hussain Al-Baghli emphasized the quality of the storytelling, the unique art, character design, and violence that characterized much of the anime of the 1980s and 1990s: "The reason why anime is famous in the Middle East is not just because of its focus on the story, but also the art style, which is very different and unique, the emotions, as well as the violence." For Aziz Al- Suhely, the storytelling, and diversity of complex characters that audiences could relate to created compelling and highly

watchable anime for Kuwaitis: “In Kuwait, anime became famous because of how they explained the story and the type of stories that would suit the person’s taste. You would also try to find a character that would suit you, so you can keep watching it. Every character has a personality, good to bad, bad to good, and you can feel that this character suits you. You would watch this anime because it would suit your personality.”

Comparing anime and American cartoons, several participants explained why Kuwaitis embrace the former over the latter in the early days of anime in Kuwait when both forms were present in the country. According to Mehdi el Moussaoui, anime was much more sophisticated and complex in virtually every way compared to American cartoons: “The art, the story, the depth, basically if you compare a Japanese robot to an American robot basically the American robot's like a bucket with eyes, in comparison the Japanese have unique conceptual designs, so there is no comparison by the way. This is one of the most things, one of the reasons. Besides that, the depth, the art, and let's face it, if you look at the cartoons in the past, in the US country, I give rating like three or four out of 10. In comparison to the Japanese, I have a high opinion for them.”

Waleed Bouresli concurred, pointing to the lack of diversity of plot lines in most American cartoons: “I see the difference between American cartoons to Japanese cartoons, American cartoons focus only on children, and it only has one scene. But in Japanese anime, there are many scenarios. A scenario of characters, background, and much more.” Abdullah Kodor Attar also noted the lack of diversity in plots and characters in American cartoons, which he attributed to its tighter focus on child audiences: “American cartoons were more focusing on children, but in Japanese anime, there are many varieties, children to adults. You can pick and choose too many varieties,

from romantic comedy, action, and much more. Especially anime has sexual scenes and violence."

Aziz Al-Suhely also emphasized the considerable difference in the level of diversity in stories and characters between anime and American cartoons which, for him, meant that audiences had many more opportunities to find characters they could relate to in Japanese anime, which, in turn, made them more engaging and widespread: "Anime itself shows different viewpoints when telling their stories, and the varied stories are from the creators themselves. You always tend to look at the story of the character. For example, you try to find a character that is similar to you, so you enjoy the anime more, and in regards to American cartoons, they don't use relatable characters, but in Japanese anime, they put the bad guys, the ugly, the hero, every type of personality you could find so that you can relate to the character."

For Abdulrahman Bin Nasser, what drew so many Kuwaitis to anime was the higher quality of the stories and animation compared to American cartoons: "It differs from person to person, the majority love the story, the passion [in anime], and the animation is much better than the American cartoons, and the story itself pulls people, same as *Grendizer*, *Tiger Mask*, *Voltes V*, *Sanshiro* and even *Iga no Kabamaru*."

Language Accessibility and Dubbing

A number of participants pointed to the language differences between anime and American cartoons as a principle reason for anime's greater popularity among Kuwaitis: while anime was typically dubbed in Arabic, American cartoons were shown in English, which were much more difficult for young audiences to understand given their limited

exposure to English and insufficient training in English in school. According to Abdulla Al Kandari:

[Japanese anime] was introduced [in Kuwait] in Arabic which made people interact with it more. . . . Not any traditional Arabic from any country which makes it easier for everybody from all the countries to like and to understand . . . kids, at least at my age, at my childhood, we'd scream more about Grendizer, maybe Pokemon . . . that showed up in Arabic rather than [the English language] Thundercats because people did not know English a lot. People didn't speak it a lot. We had a bad school. We had bad English programs, at least for the government school. So, we tend to the Arabic dub more easily.

Similarly, Jaafar Mansour Sheshtari theorized that *Grendizer* was as popular as it was in Kuwait and elsewhere in the Middle East mainly because it was dubbed in Arabic: "I believe anime is famous in the Middle East due to *Grendizer*. This was the first global anime to become famous in the Middle East. Our relatives watched *Grendizer*. My father, mother, grandfather, and neighbors all know and love *Grendizer* because it's in Arabic."

Escape to Other Worlds

Other participants attributed the popularity of anime in Kuwait to the fantastical worlds portrayed, which allowed audiences the experience of escapism through immersing themselves in such worlds where novel ways of moving and existing became possible. The popularity of fantasy world genre anime in Kuwait is illustrated by the

questionnaire participants' preferences for fantasy world anime, which was almost evenly split: 49.5 percent said that they liked fantasy world anime. In comparison, 50.5 percent stated that they did not like the genre (see Figure 1.2).

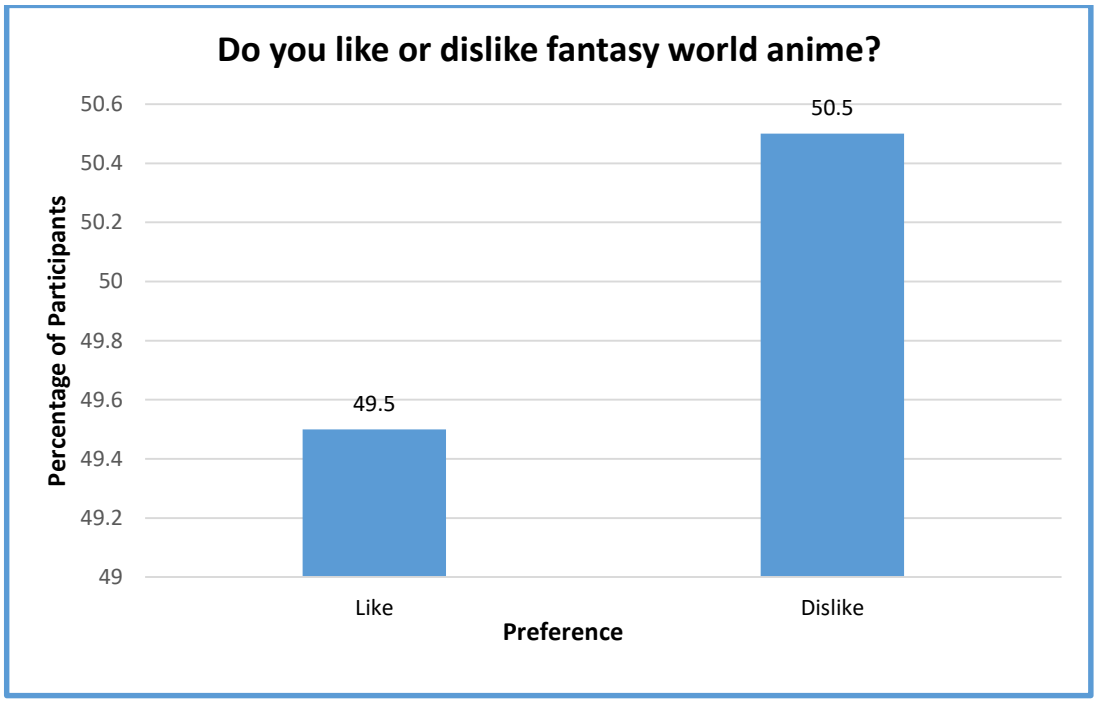

FIGURE 1.2. Percentage of questionnaire participant who likes or dislikes fantasy world anime.

Yet, despite the popularity of fantasy world animes, this genre and the school life genre of anime have dominated anime, leading the questionnaire participants to want more diversity with regard to the genre: Almost all participants--98 percent--stated that they wished to see more anime genres offered besides school life and fantasy world.

Reflecting on why fantasy world anime is popular among Kuwaitis, Mahamed Samer Shaeen explained: "I think it's the endless possibilities in the anime. You can't have these movements, and the things you see in anime, they can't happen in real life. Maybe that gives people an escape to another world, where anything can happen and

especially children, where they can be amused by the things that are going on." According to Hussain Al-Baghli it's "the story, the ideas" that draws Kuwaitis to anime. Using *Grandizer* as an example, he explained how audiences wished they could be like the hero in *Grandizer* and travel to the stars as he would: "The idea of, like, futuristic, mechanical machines. So, like, sci-fi. The fact that there's this hero, fictional hero that everybody wants to be. Like in the beginning, many people believe the idea that maybe one day they would go to the stars, sees the stars and everything. It's like one of those. fantasies of most people."

Ahmed Abu Taleb also noted the fantastical quality of anime which resonated with the popularity of fairy tales in the Middle East at the time: "I think at the beginning it was mostly kids that were interested in it, considered it cartoons, but as anime increased it became more popular, I think it is because of ideas and characters that give visual fairy tales to the people, at that time fairy tales were famous in the Middle East."

For Ali Methan, the heavy emphasis on action and adventure, combined with intricate character designs that characterized the anime available in Kuwait, which served as a stark contrast to the American cartoons that Kuwaiti audiences were exposed to contribute to its popularity in the country greatly:

The action and just the fact that it's a lot different from what the cartoons that you would see in America. Because in America, they do have action but also they have more physical comedy. Especially stuff like Looney Tunes and the old black and white Mickey Mouse cartoons and the cartoons that you'd see on Cartoon Network, at least from what I've seen...when I'm watching my younger cousins watch a cartoon, I think they pay more attention to the action of every cartoon show. I think that's the reason why they

like anime…because of the action and the fact that they have these really interesting designs for these creatures or these characters that they designed for every show. I think if it wasn't for [action heavy] shows like Captain Tsubasa, Grendizer and especially Pokemon . . . anime really wouldn't have been that big in the Middle East . . . Art style, action and at some points, maybe even the storytelling because I'm sure some people watch those shows that pay really close attention to the situation of each show.

Masculine Anime

Several participants pointed to the masculine portrayals in many of the Japanese anime that were available in Kuwait as the primary reason for their popularity in the country, which resonated with masculinist ideals in Kuwaiti culture and Middle Eastern culture more broadly. As Adham explained:

I would say that anime in the Middle East became very famous and popular because, basically, not just storylines, but…masculinity…For example, a very famous anime is Dragon Ball. It's quite famous in the Middle East. A lot of people love it. The old and the new generations because they see a lot of masculinity in it. People differ in what's masculine, but in the Middle East, because of the physical appearance in general of the characters, physical appearance and the mentality of most characters is masculine, so that became very popular. And, from Dragon Ball, other [masculine] anime, like Guyver…The Fist of the North Star is quite famous in the Middle East but by another name Saif Al Nar. In the Arabic dub, it's quite famous, and it was aired in the Middle East.

Mahammad Al Kandari explained that the masculine physicality of characters portrayed in many of the Japanese anime in Kuwait attracted a lot of viewers, including himself, stating, “I’d say the characters that tend to have masculine features grasped the attention of the anime fans in Kuwait. I watched [*Iga no*] *Kabamaru*, *Grendizer*, but what I love the most is Berserk, for the story and masculinity.” Tarek Al-Kandari agreed, emphasizing that, in Kuwait, masculinity was defined not only in terms of physical appearance but also in terms of the personalities of characters which resonated with Kuwaiti audiences: “What made people want to watch anime was because the characters had masculinity, because of the personality of the character. For example, Grendizer, Igano Kabamaru, and Combattler V, and Iga no Kabamaru, all their bodies look thin and feminine, but their personalities have masculinity.”

Why Masculine Anime is Popular with Kuwaitis

As the discussion above illustrates, according to some of the study participants, the heavy emphasis of masculine characters is one of the principal reasons why Japanese anime has been so popular with Kuwaitis and other Arabs. Why would Kuwait's and other Arabs be drawn to masculine anime in particular? Participants offered their analyses, explaining the association as either influenced by religion, culture, or the desire by viewers to see themselves in the masculine characters or to use the male characters as a guide or role model for how to be more masculine in their own day-to-day lives.

Religion

According to Ali Methan, Islam plays a role in why some Kuwaiti viewers are drawn to masculine anime. “When you see the anime characters that are extremely

masculine or whatnot...I'm guessing to a lot of people it's very inspiring," he stated, explaining that many practitioners of Islam see Prophet Muhammad as a masculine figure with admirable traits that they wish to emulate. He went on to say:

The thing is a lot of people look up to Prophet Muhammad and the Islamic religion because he was very reliable. He was very kind to others. But at the same time, he was very stern and tough and strict, and he had a lot of bravery…People look up to the Sahaba [literally "companions," referring to the companions, friends, and family of Prophet Muhammad] and Prophet Muhammad, because of those traits, those masculine traits. And when they see those same traits in anime characters, it's kind of inspiring to them. They become more relatable to them and in a sense that they want to be as manly as half of these characters and try to find a way to be their own man.

Mahammad Al Kandari acknowledged that religion plays a role in the strict separation between how men and women should behave in Arab culture, which, in turn, encourages Arab men to be drawn to masculine anime. "Yes, religion [dictates] that a man must be a man and a woman must be a woman, that they cannot change, and that each gender has its own unique and special ways. They must cross over to not being different, meaning the man shouldn't be a woman, and the woman shouldn't be a man." He believed that this ideology had shifted somewhat in recent years: "That ideology was from the 1980s to 2003, or so, but now ideology has changed a bit, but now women have started to become stronger, and the men have become normal."

Culture

Most participants downplayed the role of religion in the popularity of masculine anime in Kuwait and elsewhere in the Middle East. As Waleed Bouresli put it, “masculinity has nothing to do with religion, but with the man’s character trait.” They instead explained such popularity in terms of Kuwaiti and Arab culture. While some acknowledged that religion and culture are intertwined and that Islam has had an essential influence on Kuwaiti culture and other cultures in the Middle East, they ultimately concluded that the dominance of masculinity that characterizes many Arab cultures could not be explained by Islam alone, those other cultural influences are at play. They generally argued that the prominence of masculinity in Kuwaiti and Arab cultures and the alignment between portrayals of idealized masculinity in these cultures and in masculine anime from Japan explains why masculine anime is as popular as it is among Kuwaitis and other Arabs.

For Mehdi el Moussaoui, the strict gender segregation that is practiced throughout the Arab world contributes to the appeal of masculine anime by Arabs. Because of this gender segregation, men and women largely inhabit different social worlds. They often remain physically separated, which constantly reminds Arab men of their gender and the need to be masculine to be a proper man. Masculine anime fits this ethos well. As Mehdi el Moussaoui describes:

Arabs practice a segregated culture. Because males live in their world and female are in theirs except for marriage, that's the only place they can meet. I'm talking about the old fashioned ways, not now…The old fashion way, basically, men tend to stick together or stay together because they have to. There are no other options. The women are the

same…Your culture binds you by its rule. For example, men aren't allowed to mesh with women…to mix together. Except for specific occasions, for example, marriage or family visitors, that's it. You are not allowed…but you see each man in his own life, even you once in your life you said, "I wish I could live this" or "I wish I could have done something manlier."

Similarly, Mahamed Samer Shaeen explained that masculinity is a dominant characteristic of traditional Arab culture, which makes Arab men drawn to masculine anime. He pointed out that Islam is not necessarily male dominant, given the important roles that women played in the religion historically. For him, the dominance of masculinity today reflects changes to Arab culture away from the gender balances that existed in earlier periods of Islam: "I don't think that it's because of religion. I think it's traditional culture because personally, I think if we go back to the Hadith [a collection of traditions containing sayings of the Prophet Muhammad] and Islamic history, I think women had major roles; they had major positions. But now it's that through time we changed our culture and tradition. Now we're more focused on men, and you can see that especially in rural areas and Bedouin societies, they still have that. That's why I think we like masculinity."

According to Abdulla Al Kandari, "culture has a lot to do with" why masculine anime is popular in Kuwait. The masculine traits of characters such as the main character in *Grendizer* resonate with Kuwaiti men who are taught by their culture to develop similar characteristics to be a "proper" man, which goes beyond physicality. As he explained: "You can argue about [Grendizer] being skinny, but he was a manly man. He knew what to do…He had a personality. Maybe he did not have the strength because

he had Grendizer for that. But still, people see him in his suit with his helmet, and they would say "This one, this man is brave. This man is strong. This man can destroy anything that can harm Earth."

Abdulla Al Kandari did concede, however, that religion does influence culture and therefore influences masculine ideals that are communicated through culture and cultural artifacts, such as fiction. He went on to say: "Religion is not cultural. There are big differences. However, they do interact together. Our culture did come from a lot of religious rules; one of them is being a reliable man. Since we were kids, we heard about the prophets, the Sahaba…We heard about strength, we heard about bravery. We heard about adventure. We had stories about adventure and bravery. Even in fiction, like One Thousand and One Nights [Arabian Nights]."

Abdulla Al Kandari pointed out that some of the anime censorship in Kuwait itself demonstrates certain masculine ideals that are reinforced in Kuwaiti culture. "Having those [masculine ideals] embedded inside this society and bringing anime into it, you can see why they actually changed some of the stories. They accepted one anime but not the other," he explained. For example, the Ministry of Information heavily censored and altered *Igano Kabamaru* because it did not align with Kuwait's masculine ideals. "They changed the story of [*Igano*] *Kabamaru* because they didn't [think] a boy should live his life stealing food and falling in love with a rich girl," he said. As a result, the Arabic and Japanese versions of the show are starkly different.

However, other anime, like *Captain Tsubasa*, was allowed to circulate in Kuwait without much, if any, censorship because they upheld Kuwaiti masculine ideals. "They [the Ministry of Information] respected the strong-willed man who wanted to get things done, who wanted to save the world or win the championship," Abdulla Al Kandari

speculated. Conversely, romance-centric anime, such as *Igano Kabamaru*, “would go on the bottom because kids were not raised that way.”

According to Hussain Al-Baghli, cultural norms and “ethics” drives Arab interest in masculine anime. “Arabs prefer masculinity in anime,” he said, but “I don't think it's about religion. It's mostly about the cultural and ethical and what people think is the most logical thing possible.” He acknowledged that religion does communicate messages about what men and women should do--“of course, religion says that a man should not act like a woman. And a woman should not act like a man”--but for him, the notion that men and women should not act like each other is not necessarily based on religion but rather, “it's the logical, ethical thing. It’s what's normal.” Arabs enjoy watching masculine anime because the characters in those anime mirrors what is expected of men in Arab culture: “Middle Easterners enjoy watching a man doing what's right and being the hero and helping out people. Or maybe saving the girl.”

Like Hussain Al-Baghli, Ahmed Abu Taleb saw Arab culture as emphasizing that masculinity is associated with men and femininity with women and that each gender is expected to abide by strict codes but that this emphasis is not fuelled by religion alone. In fact, it has a long history in the Arab world. As he put it: “Society views masculinity only towards men, and they judge men to be on these specific conditions, and if he goes out of this condition, then it would break the rules. It’s more of a mix than just focusing on religion, of course, religion has a deep influence, but even in the Arab past, there wasn’t any religion but a strong, dominant male cultural ideology.”

Seeing Oneself in Masculine Characters (Or Wanting To)

Some participants concluded that the popularity of masculine anime in the Middle East was primarily driven by the desire by viewers to see themselves in the masculine characters portrayed in masculine anime and to see masculine characters as guides and role models for becoming more masculine in their own lives. As Aziz Al- Suhely put it, "in the Arab world, masculinity is seen as a dominant role, and since he is a man, he shouldn't be feminine, but strong and direct, not weak-minded. Overall, Arabs love masculine [anime] because they see themselves in that picture." Similarly, Abdullah Kodor Attar described: "Men have specific traits in them, and when a person views a character in an anime, he wants to find himself in one of the characters in the anime which represents their masculinity. It's more towards rule guidance on how to become a man or what is the traits of this character's masculinity, and thinking about his role."

Salah saw masculine anime as a way to explore new expressions of masculinity: "I want to see masculinity that would guide me towards new masculinity, not masculinity that I already know, not a male character who has no role or doesn't know what to do with his life, a person who is a simpleton, who doesn't know anything or knows only basic things."

According to Abdulrahman Bin Nasser, Kuwaitis are often drawn to masculine anime for the physical portrayals of masculinity which they regard highly as part of their notions of ideal masculinity: "In my opinion, they love masculinity for various reasons; for example, they like to see or visualize strong bodies of muscles. Especially towards action movies. They want to idolize it."

Popular Anime Genres in Kuwait

Japanese anime spans many genres and sub-genres. The major anime genres include: action; adventure; comedy; drama; fantasy; magic; supernatural; horror; mystery; psychological; romance; science-fiction (sci-fi). Popular sub-genres include shonen ("for boys," targeting boys and young men); shoujo ("young girl," targeting girls and young women); seinen ("youth," targeting young men); mecha (robot anime); ecchi (erotic but not pornographic anime); harem (in which a male character is surrounded and loved by many female characters); isekai (fantasy); Slice of Life (stories that observe everyday life as it is lived by an individual or group of characters); kodomomuke ("directed at children," targeting children). According to most participants, although a wide variety of anime genres and sub-genres exist, only a few are popular among Kuwaitis in particular and Middle Easterners in general. A number of these popular genres could be considered masculine anime, as discussed above, such as action, adventure, robot, and shonen anime.

Action, Adventure, and Robots…but Hold the Romance

Based on participants' responses, action, adventure, and robot anime seem to be the most popular anime genre among Kuwaitis. Mehdi el Moussaoui contended that most Kuwaiti anime fans prefer "action-adventure and action…Some do [like it] because of the style and uniqueness. But, in my case, I like the tough guys, the one with abilities and stuff like the *Fist of the North Star* or *Hokuto no Ken*."

Abdulla Al Kandari agreed, adding that romance is the least popular anime genre with his generation of anime fans:

I would say action, adventure. [Romance is] boring. It's too boring. Slow. [My generation] thinks it's slow… [they like] supernatural. I would still put romance and things like Slice of Lifeway in the bottom…Way down in the bottom. Maybe because I was a boy and raised in a typical boy…environment. But that's what we saw when we were kids. We didn't see Ranma 1/2 [about a 16-year-old boy martial artist who turns into a girl when he's wet with cold water] as a guy who went into the well and turned into a girl. We actually saw him as two different characters, Rama and Roma. Rama is the sister, and Roma was that boy that shows up out of nowhere and kicks everybody's asses, and that disappears. It was not really the Ranma half that's actually there. We were raised to see a hero [who] saves everybody and then disappears.

As Ali Methan pointed out, the popularity of specific anime genres varies by demographic, such as gender, with romance anime more prevalent among women and girls: "I think it's mainly, there are some girls that I've noticed that pay more attention to the romantic anime. I would say [my generation prefers] action and adventure definitely…Supernatural and mostly mix from what I've seen."

Ranking the anime genres from most to least popular in Kuwait, Adham concluded: "I would say action-adventure [is the most popular in Kuwait], and in a way, they're both in the same level. [Then] the comedy, horror, mystery, romance. From the top, I would say action, adventure, comedy, drama, romance, horror. Horror is the least famous because, from my experience, a lot of people don't know many of the horror anime."

According to Abdulrahman Bin Nasser, Kuwaitis "like action and then adventure, because of the explosive action, especially with Super Robots [genre]." As his comment illustrates, the various anime genres and sub-genres often overlap, with robot anime

often considered a sub-genre of action and adventure anime by viewers. Abdulrahman Bin Nasser offered a number of examples of the Super Robot anime genre that were popular in Kuwait: "Like *Grendizer* it was the best anime considered not only in Kuwait but in the Middle East. *Mazinger*, *Voltron*, *Voltes V*." Like others, Mahammad Al Kandari stated action is much more popular than romance in the Middle East, stating that "Arabs love action, but as for romance it is not popular. For example, *Combattler V*, *Grendizer*, but *Mazinger* and *Grendizer* were extremely popular not only in Kuwait but in the Middle East." Ahmed Abu Taleb concurred, noting the popularity of comedy anime as well: "I believe action, adventure and comedy are famous in the Middle East, romance is not so popular." Likewise, Awatha Al Mutairi concluded: "It is action, adventure and comedy, I would also say *Grendizer* and *Slam Dunk* is also popular. Robot anime is also popular in the Middle East." Mahamed, the manager at Al-Argham video, recalled that among his customers, "The type of anime they liked action and adventure, they disliked drama, and they admired characters that have male-dominant masculinity, especially the story that kept the viewer more surprised by the action view."

Echoing other participants, Awthah Al-Shalahim stated: "I would say Grendizer [is the most popular anime in Kuwait], as well as Slam Dunk. We watched it in Arabic dub, but the main genre would be action, adventure, and most robots. They didn't bring us the comedy genre because I don't think in the 1980s they thought kids could understand jokes, but mainly Arabs loved robot anime."

Shonen Anime

Globally, shonen is one of the most popular genres of anime. It is geared toward teenage boys and usually features a male protagonist who embarks on an adventure filled with challenges and thus can be considered to be a type of masculine anime. It is typically filled with several positive themes, such as believing in yourself and hard work paying off. The genre often crosses over with fantasy and action anime, and does not often focus too heavily on romance. A number of participants considered shonen to be the most popular anime genre in Kuwait, which, again, reflects the popularity of masculine anime in Kuwait, as described earlier.

According to Hussain Al- Baghli, shonen is popular among Kuwaitis. His answer reveals how the shonen genre overlaps a number of other popular anime genres, including action, adventure, and robot. His assessment that robot anime is popular because people have gotten used to it suggests that the fact that robot anime dominated the introduction of anime to Kuwait may have had a lasting effect in terms of its continued popularity today. As Hussain Al- Baghli explained:

I can speak generally that people like shonen. The idea of like the main character as like this hero that he likes to save the day. That's what the basic shonen genre is in Japan. That, I think Arabs prefer this genre more than it gives the idea that the hero has to do like this certain task to save the world or the people, which is the case like in Grendizer or like any super [robot], or any robot type animation. Any specific like Gundam or any of Go Nagai's [a Japanese manga artist and author] work, the super robot franchises. Particular Arabs love the robots because they've gotten used to the robot genre. As for what's general in the Middle East, a lot of people prefer action,

adventure and comedy. Though some people do prefer romance and drama. But the most I've seen from most of the people is action, adventure and comedy.

Abdullah Kodor Attar saw the divisions among anime genres differently than Hussain Al- Baghli, seeing shonen as part of the new generation and much of the robot anime as part of the "old-style animation". He also noted that action and robot anime are the most popular in Kuwait because of the desire for masculine and male-centric stories by Kuwaiti fans. As he put it:

We have two points of view, the first being that many people of the new generation are interested in shonen anime--male cartoons--and action, but in regards to the majority of anime fans who love the old-style animation, they mostly love robot anime such as Grendizer, Mazinger Z, etc. For action anime, it would be Fist of the North Star, Berserk, Jojo's Bizarre Adventure, Grappler Baki, Guyver, etc. So simply put, action, robot, and comedy. There is also a minority who would watch mystery and romance. There are people who watch comedic anime, but the majority watches action and robot anime due to the heavy fan base towards male masculinity which is found in the main characters…There are two types, there is one type that like shonen and action, but people who like old anime are robot anime and action anime, and also comedy is also watched, but rarely people watch romance.

Like Abdullah Kodor Attar, Salah saw shonen as genre part of the "new generation" of anime, which dominated the anime expositions he participated in: "Based on the

expos I went to, was shonen, for example, *Naruto*, *Bleach*, based on the new generation of anime, I didn't see any old generation anime, but it was rare, who see Berserk."

Anime Titles

A few participants described the popularity of particular anime genres in terms of specific anime titles. Mahamed Samer Shaeen noted that a number of popular titles had been dubbed in Arabic, suggesting that language accessibility is one-factor driving popularity, as discussed earlier. As he described, "There's *Detective Conan* [in Arabic dubbing] There's *Pokemon*, there's *Digimon*, I know the Arabic name *Adnan Wa Lina*, *Captain Majid*. [*Captain*] *Tsubasa*…And recently, *Naruto*, it's been translated into Arabic, and people have been watching."

Jaffar Mansour described the popular anime in terms of the "new generation" and "old generation": "The old generation, I know of Grendizer, Captain Tsubasa, Da Zhu Zai. . . Detective Conan. Also Pokémon and Yu-Gi-Oh!, it's now I think. But Pokémon and Dragon Ball also. This was the old generation, like in the '90s…The new generation now, [anime featured on] Space Power [TV, an Arabic TV channel featuring anime programs targeted at youth]…They are now… [putting] anime with translation Arabic [subtitles], Japanese voice acting."

As Tarek Al-Kandari explained, *Grendizer* was particularly popular, with parents encouraging their children to watch it over other anime featured in Kuwait at the time, such as *Combattler V*: "Most of the anime genre in regards to masculinity have action but towards the side of romance. Arabs are not too much into it, though. For example, in the 1980s in Arabic dub, it was Combattler V, but in the 1990s, it was Grendizer because, during Combattler's time, the anime was not as clear to people, but when Grendizer was released, parents would let their children watch it, so they wasted their

time watching anime instead of causing trouble at home. It also helped their imagination when they watched it on TV at home."

Not about Genres

A few participants are resisting the notion of ranking genres in terms of their popularity, suggesting that viewers are drawn to particular anime for a variety of reasons, not simply because they are associated with a particular genre. As Fahad Oraifan put it, what Kuwaitis like to watch "didn't depend on specific genres, but… focus on how close it is to reality. Things that you take from it and learn from it." Waleed Bouresli pointed to the idea that all genres have a fan base: "For me, there is no specific genre [most popular with Kuwaitis]; for any genre, there is a specific fan." Aziz Al-Suhely stated that, from his view, "for any type, there is there are many types of people who would follow any type of genre, some people would watch the anime regarding other for the character designs, other would be the story. It all depends on the person."

"Aren't You Too Old to Be Watching Cartoons?": Kuwaiti Anime Consumption by Age and the Presence of Age-Related Stigma

While the above discussion demonstrates *which* anime Kuwaiti anime fans tend to consume and why it has not elaborated much on *who* is engaging in such consumption, namely, which age groups. Although anime is often associated with childhood and children are often assumed to be the primary consumers of anime, globally, viewership is much more diverse in terms of age with fans in every age group. Although anime tends to be youth-oriented, many anime fans are lifelong consumers, watching

throughout their adult lives. Nevertheless, the association of anime with children means that adult anime consumers often experience stigma for watching anime, seen as immature, or not wanting to grow up. Study participants shared their observations regarding which age groups in Kuwait regularly watch anime, changes to viewership age over time, and the degree to which stigma exists for adult anime fans in Kuwait. Some contended that anime is still principally for children, while others argued that anime is for everyone. Still, others pointed to changes over time with regard to age viewership--which has to broaden--and associated stigma--which has declined. Some contend that stigma still persists for adult anime fans.

Anime is for Children

According to Mahamed Samer Shaeen, while today children still represent the majority of Arab consumers of anime, as was the case 30 years ago, the real shift has occurred in *which* anime they are consuming, with an increase in consumption of American cartoons compared to Japanese anime in recent years: “I think the majority of Arabs that watch anime are children may be under 12 years old. I think most children watch, especially now they have, not only Japanese anime, they watch American cartoons and stuff. Now it's more focused on the American culture than the Japanese in the Arab World in Arab channels. I think that's what children like nowadays.”

Adham explained that Kuwaitis are often first exposed to anime as children, watching programs on *SpaceToon*, a pan-Arab free-to-air television channel that specializes in animation and children programs, headquartered in Damascus and Dubai. These programs often served as “babysitters” for the children who would often be left alone while their parents went out. He said that because of this exposure as children, as

Kuwaitis grew up, they would continue to associate anime with childhood unless something or someone else intervened to make them realize that anime is not only for children, such as exposure to Eastern or Western cultures or doing research to learn more about anime. He went on to explain:

Usually, you'll have small kids, their age ranging from 5 to 11, 12…watching SpaceToon cartoons and anime, and [parents] would leave their kids in the apartment. But then, when they become 14, 15 years old, if they're not in a way open-minded or haven't done some research about the world, basically, the western world, or the eastern, and they're stuck in the home in the Middle East doing the same thing, they would just recognize Japanese anime as a cartoon, no difference between it, an American thing. They wouldn't make any difference at all. [Only if] their mother was western or eastern, or in a way, they came in contact with different cultures personally, or they did some research, they would be attracted to anime. [Otherwise, anime is] basically seen as children shows.

Anime is for Everyone

Based on their experiences and observations, some participants contended that anime is for everyone, regardless of age. As Hussain Al- Baghli pointed out, given that there are so many anime--some targeting youth and some targeting adults with adult content--what is perhaps more important is the rating of the anime that one watches, ensuring that it is age-appropriate. As he described, he knows both youth and adults who regularly watch anime, even as he acknowledged that some stigma exists for adult anime consumers in Kuwaiti society:

Actually, here I don't think it's a matter of age. Anyone can watch it really. It just depends on what anime [you are] watching. It depends on] the actual rating of the anime. But anybody can watch anime, and I know people from the ages of 30 and 35 still watch anime, even 40 [years old]. And I know even people [younger than] age of 10 [who watch it]. They still prefer anime. So, in the Middle East, there is not actual age difference. But in society, it's considered not normal for people to watch by this age [as an adult]. But if it's their preference, I don't think it's a problem.

Abdulrahman Bin Nasser's experiences echoed those of Hussain Al-Baghli, as he knows people of a wide range of ages who consume anime: "In my generation young people and older people watch anime, and even they buy comic. When I was in elementary school, even my uncles watch anime. There are no specific age groups." Mahamed, manager at Al-Argham video, also observed that "people of all ages bought anime."

Changes to Viewership Age: "New" versus "Old" Generations of Anime

A number of participants emphasized that there has been a definite shift concerning the age of anime consumers over time. Namely, before 2000, which is understood as the period of the "old generation" of anime, anime was strongly associated with children, and most children watched it. Then, after 2000, marking the emergence of the "new generation" of anime, viewership broadened dramatically in terms of age, as increasingly children and adults alike enjoyed regular anime consumption. With this

shift came an increasing acceptance of adult anime fans within Kuwaiti culture and, thus, decreasing stigmatization of this age group of anime consumers.

According to Mehdi el Moussaoui, “In the 1980s and 1990s above a certain age, you have an issue if you're still watching cartoons. Which is basically from 14, 15, 16 [years old] and above.” Then, after the turn of the century, specifically 2001, as he recalled, it “brought a whole different change and a new culture.” Before this period, however, watching anime as adults were highly stigmatized in Kuwaiti society: “Anything above even from my parents’ side or my uncles, when someone watches anime or cartoons as an adult age, he has an issue. That's what they used to say. But now there is, it's like a fact, everyone can watch… Nowadays, [all age groups watch anime].”

Mehdi el Moussaoui said that now, anime consumption has become so normalized among young men, it’s seen as one of three primary activities that become strongly associated with a person’s social identity: “Even sometimes [when] you see someone who doesn't watch anime, [you] say, ‘Okay you're either into girls or sports.’ So it's one of the categories, either anime, sports or girls.” Tarek Al- Kandari also noticed this shift in acceptance towards adult anime consumers over time: “Some parents found it embarrassing or rude to watch anime out of the home, [like] watching it at a friends’ house or in a video store because some people in the 1980s thought that if you watched anime at a mature age, like at 18 years old or older, it would be embarrassing and you would be looked at as a child, but as time progressed, from the 1990s and onwards, people’s mentality changed as they realized that each person was responsible for their own actions.”

Mahammad Al Kandari agreed, noting that the shift towards greater acceptance of adult anime consumers happened around the turn of the century, with gradual changes happening over the past few decades. He did acknowledge that the stigma associated with viewing anime as adults has not been wholly eradicated: "In the 1980s only children used to watch anime, 6 years old and lower, the parents were strict. The 1990s upgraded to 9 to 10 years old, and to some of the teenagers, from the age to 18 to 21 years old. After the year 2000, everyone could see anime. But sometimes the society would see him as a geek or nerd, and would judge him, that how can an adult watch anime, and judge him to be mentally sick."

Ahmed Abu Taleb's assessment was similar to Mahammad Al Kandari's, noting both the gradual changes over the last few decades and the broadening of viewership by the year 2000 as well as the persisting stigma directed towards adult anime consumers: "In the 80s, it was just children, and 90s, they reached till 15 to watch anime, then stopped, some were adults but very [few], but in 2000, many people start to watch anime, but society sometimes see them uneasy." As Awatha Al Mutairi put it, "In the 80s and 90s children used to watch anime, but after 2000 many people watch it, but sometimes society sees them as children because they watch anime."

Stigma

A number of participants recounted stories of their own or others' experiences with stigmatization and teasing for continuing to watch anime when they were no longer children. As Abdulla Al Kandari recounted:

The 2000s were okay because I was 10 years old [and not teased for watching anime]. I think it started being a problem with my parents [in] 2006. When I was 16 in High school. Apparently, everybody wanted or the society wants us to be grown, men. That might have included not watching cartoons, and we were used to it. We did not want to watch Arabic drama because it's repetitive, it's boring. There's no action…Well, I had friends that watched [anime], I had the friends that weren't that much interested. They were interested in other things like going fishing, sports, the other guy stuff. The thing is we never really had nerds like total nerds that are only interested in reading, at least not in my childhood. You can watch anime and you can fix a car and you can steal your mom's car. It was okay. Between my friends, I was kind of cool. Especially that you know some words and terms that you know your friends might not know. Knowing cartoons, it was like somebody who knew very good English…However, with the parents, they do undermine that. They think that people who are teens or young adults who still watch cartoons, I think they still do, are considered to be childish and not ready for the real world…People in the Mid-East do not prefer their kids to be animators because there are not a lot of animator firms.

Ali Methan said that he was often teased in high school for watching anime, his peers telling him “you are a kid” or “you are crazy”:

I've gotten that so many times during high school. You have no idea. I think it's around the pre-teens, around 11 to 13 is when [Arabs] stopped watching anime. For me, I was still into it when I was 12-years-old. A lot of people made fun of me for liking Pokemon, Digimon, and all this other stuff. I always got ridiculed. But as I got into high school, I kind of met more...I had one friend; he used to be with us at the university, who was one

of the very few people that I would talk to about anime. As time went on during high school, there were still people that would come up to me and say, "What, are you kid for watching cartoons or anime?" But, I even had friends that I would talk to that weren't into anime but would watch Disney cartoons, North American cartoons, which is what I also like to watch as well. My parents were cool with it. They would tell me not to be too obsessive about it, but they were cool with me being into it. When I told them I want to get into the animation business one day, they're supportive of it and they tried to give me some advice. Some of my other family members, I'm not sure; some of them are okay with it. Some of them, like one of them, would joke about me being too old for it, but I would just try to shake it off and not really notice it.

Jaffar Mansour and some of his friends received similar insults and stigmatization for watching anime as young adults that Ali Methan reported: “[They’d say to me] “You are a man, why are you watching cartoons?” My friend [who is 23 or 24 years old], he's suffered from his family. He’d want to watch anime, and he can't, his father doesn’t allow him to watch anime. Grendizer [dubbed in Arabic] is okay [for him to watch], I don't know why.”

Anime’s Long and Varied History in Kuwait

The participants’ stories of the arrival of of anime in Kuwait in the 1970s and 1980s and of their early memories of watching anime at home with their families as children demonstate the long and varied history anime has had in the country. Their stories also reflect the history of anime in the region as documented by the burgeoning literature on

Middle Eastern animation (Callus, 2017; Marks, 2010; Sayfo, 2017, 2018; Van de Peer, 2017).

The long and varied history of anime and animation in Kuwait extends to the Middle Eastern region as a whole. Egypt was in a league of its own, given that its animation production stretches back to the 1930s (Sayfo, 2017). Most of the Arab world was first introduced to animated shows and movies several decades later, starting in the 1960s, with the advent of television and national television channels in the region. According to Sayfo (2018), governments, particularly in the Gulf region, gave the national channels special importance given how they could be used to disseminate culturally appropriate content to the nation and messages of national importance.

Yet, those governments did not prioritize children's content on these channels and apparently saw no need to create local content for children's programs. As a result, there was little support to establish local animation studios. Instead, to fill the program slots, the governments imported animation content from abroad, primarily the U.S., Europe, and Japan, and dubbed it in Arabic for local audiences, such as in Kuwait. As they dubbed the content, they also edited it so that it would be "appropriate for the moral values of local traditions" (Sayfo, 2017, 69).

These decisions, according to Sayfo (2018), seem to have been influenced by political economic considerations, as the Gulf states primarily imported animation from the capitalist powerhouses of the U.S. and Japan, mainly in the form of Disney cartoons and Japanese anime. As a result of these decisions and national and international dynamics, numerous generations of Arab children, including Kuwaitis, grew up watching dubbed foreign animations. The stories shared in this chapter capture this phenomenon well. Participants emphasized that these new animated TV shows and

movies arrived on their TV screens almost entirely dubbed in Arabic in the 1980s and that the arrival in the 1990s of Japanese anime with English subtitles, rather than dubbed in Arabic, was a monumental development in the growth of anime in Kuwait at the time. As will be demonstrated later in the dissertation, the shift from Arabic dubbed-only versions of anime to dubbed and subtitled so significantly impacted the experiences of participants, many of them remember the first anime they watched in terms of dubbed or subtitled; that is, they have two "first" anime and they often displayed vivid memories of both "first" moments.

We can see from the literature and the responses from participants that in the early days of anime in Kuwait, its circulation in the country was highly regulated and controlled by the government. It did so in part through dubbing all imported anime into Arabic before releasing it to the public via its national television channel. That all anime at the time was dubbed in Arabic had two significant effects. First, it made the anime highly accessible to local audiences, setting it up for popularity; if the original spoken Japanese were left in tact, the stories would have been largely incomprehensible to Arabic-speaking audiences and likely much less popular. Second, the Arabic dubbed anime gave the government, guided by its interpretation of Islam regarding its duties and responsibilities to the nation, the opportunity to edit content so that the anime shown in Kuwaiti homes would align with the religious and cultural values of Kuwait. Consumers of anime in Kuwait at that time only had one option: anime dubbed in Arabic by the authorities. Therefore, audiences were only seeing the anime that the government authorized to be seen in Kuwait.

The government's tight grip on anime content when it first arrived was also due in part to the fact that audiences could only access anime via their televisions, mostly or

exclusively on government-run channels. Thus, the government chose the programs it aired on its channels and dubbed it into Arabic, altering its content. The strict government regulation of anime represented a significant force shaping the circulation and consumption of anime when it first arrived in Kuwait.

As the participants described, this tight grip began to weaken in the 1990s when audiences began to access anime that had not been dubbed in Arabic but rather left in the original Japanese with English subtitles. At the same time, video stores like Al-Argham Video, were springing up across the region, providing anime consumers with other means to access anime that had not been censored by the government, and increasingly, a wide variety of anime that the authorities would not have allowed to be shown on TV. As Hassan, the owner of Al-Argham Video, reported earlier in the chapter, when he first opened the video store, some customers would drive all the way from Saudi Arabia so they could purchase anime at the video store and smuggle it back into Saudi Arabia, where such content was illegal. The government's censorship efforts continue to this day but have changed and arguably weakened over time as more and more avenues for accessing anime content become available with the advent of the Internet, first meaningfully introduced in Kuwait in the early 2000s. We will see later in the dissertation how the participants and their peers would continue to, and to an increasing degree, circumvent such censorship efforts as time went on, but starting with earnest in the 1990s in response to technological changes, including the cassette and DVD, that made it easier to put anime in the hands of Kuwaiti consumers.

What has been demonstrated in Chapter 1 is how and why anime first took root in Kuwait and in the Middle East, based on responses by study participants. They shared their memories of first-hand experiences with anime in their childhoods during the

1980s and 1990s and of stories from their parents, usually their fathers, of their first experiences with anime when it arrived in the country in the 1970s. For them, the anime themselves that they watched as children marked the passage of time. *Grendizer*, for example, is considered by many to be the first anime that Kuwaitis became aware of, if not the first anime shown in Kuwait. Anyone who watched *Grendizer* as child is of a certain generation, which includes the study participants. That gives them the long view on the rise of anime in Kuwait, now into their third decade of consuming it. By considering the long view of these Kuwaiti anime fans, this chapter—and the dissertation as a whole—reveals the long and varied history of anime in Kuwait by tracing the participants' own long and varied experiences with anime over the years. Changes to anime content, as well as control of and access to such content, over time represent an important feature of this history.

Language has played a critical role in these changes regarding anime content in Kuwait. As discussed in the Introduction, language is key to the entire meaning-making process in texts such as anime because meaning is produced and exchanged through the medium of a shared language (Hall, 1997b). Two language versions of anime began to circulate in Kuwait in the 1990s: Arabic dubbed and original Japanese subtitled in English. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the accessibility created by the Arabic dubbed anime when it was first introduced in the country contributed to popularity of anime from the beginning. But the Arabic dubbed anime were also censored with altered content, and thus unable to communicate the original messages intended for audiences. Rather, the government, which intercepted the imported anime, had an opportunity to communicate the messages they wanted their audiences—that is, the nation—to hear. By appreciating anime as a media text, we remember that such texts

explicitly intend to engage an audience and produce meaning (Burton, 2010, Hall, 1980). Hall (1980) revealed how the production of meaning is negotiated between the producer and audience. That is, neither the producer nor the audience have total control on the meaning produced, whether the text is in Arabic, Japanese, or English.

In the case of anime in Kuwait, multiple producers exist: the Japanese producers of the original anime (voiced in Japanese) and the Kuwaiti government, when they dubbed the anime in Arabic and altered the content by removing and editing scenes and changing the script. While the Japanese producers intended to communicate a certain set of meanings to the audience (assumed to be Japanese as anime at that time were primarily produced for the local market) through the anime production, achieved through the visuals and the voices of characters, the Kuwaiti government sometimes intended to communicate a different set of meanings to Kuwaiti audiences through this imported anime. As access to uncensored anime grew in the 1990s, Kuwaiti audiences, for the first time, had the opportunity to engage with anime directly, without interference from the Kuwaiti government. Such changes to access influenced the nature of this negotiated meaning-making of the anime as text: as audiences gained unfiltered access to anime, they were able to engage with anime—and the Japanese producers behind them—in a different way, obtaining different meanings from it, meanings which were often important to those audiences and which fueled anime's rapid growth in popularity in the 1990s.

The changes to anime and to access to anime content have defined the history of anime in Kuwait, shaping the relationships Kuwaiti audiences have had with anime and the meanings they have derived from their consumption of anime. These changes over time represent a critical dimension of the context of anime in Kuwait; and the context

has a huge influence on the meanings that are produced. Another key dimension of the context in Kuwait is ideological, in which ideas and values shape the text, producer, and audience.

Kuwait's Distinctive Anime Culture: Influences from Local Culture, Religion, and Censorship

This chapter has highlighted the two key sets of players involved in the circulation and consumption of anime in Kuwait: anime producers and anime audiences. The above discussion illustrated the role that producers play in this and in the meaning-making process of the anime as text. In the case of Kuwait, both the original anime producers and the Kuwaiti government play key roles as producers, given the government's significant alterations of anime content via dubbing, editing, removing, and censoring. I now turn to the other key players highlighted in this chapter: the audience and their patterns of anime consumption that constitute a significant part of Kuwait's distinctive anime culture.

The ideological context mentioned above in which anime is situated in Kuwait is core to the makeup of the country's distinctive anime culture. Through the participants' responses, this chapter has highlighted key features of this ideological context, including local ideas and values, religion, censorship, and the messages communicated by anime themselves. The chapter also revealed a number of dimensions of Kuwait's anime culture, exploring the roots of its popularity and sources that continue to drive its growth and diversity in the country, such as its perceived novelty and originality, language accessibility via Arabic dubbing, the pleasure of escaping to other worlds, and masculine characters.

Gendered Synergies: Cultural Messages about Gender in Kuwait and in Anime

The above discussion highlights how the circulation and consumption of anime in Kuwait are highly gendered phenomena, given the centrality of masculine depictions in anime content to the genre's initial popularity in the country. The gendered dimensions of anime are also visible in the alignment between the masculine ideals portrayed in the most accessible and popular anime at the time, such as *Grendizer*, and those encouraged by Kuwaiti culture and local and personal intepretations of Islam. Kuwaiti boys and men, reported the participants in this chapter, reveled in seeing themselves in the (hyper)masculine male protagonist, ideal—or idealized—versions of themselves that they could connect with and aspire to become more like them. These male anime consumers expressed emotional reactions and connections to the anime content they love (and hate) most. Obviously, dominant Kuwaiti culture was by no means explicitly holding *Grendizer* up as the ideal masculine male to aspire to. Yet, based on what the participants shared, a synergy existed between the cultural messages these received via anime and via growing up in their homes, neighborhoods, schools, and mosques about what it means to be a boy, a man, the best version of a Muslim man, a Kuwaiti man.

The hypermasculinity of most anime in Kuwait in the early days seemed to be the main feature that grabbed the attention of the nation; boys and men in particular were mesmerized by the portrayals of strength, honor, protection, sacrifice, and other core traits and values attributed to masculinity in Kuwait, defined by its own hypermasculine culture. As the participants demonstrated in this chapter, and as we will continue to see in later chapters, the high degree synergy and alignment between the masculine portrayals in "early" anime and masculine ideals in Kuwait fuelled the popularity of anime and represent another critical force driving the circulation and

consumption of anime in the country. Participants spoke of how they and their families loved the masculine characters. As Adham put it when explaining the high popularity of *Dragon Ball* in the early 1990s in Kuwait, “A lot of people love it. The old and the new generations because they see a lot of masculinity in it.” In his view, the Middle East has a particular definition of masculinity that matched the popular anime: “People differ in what's masculine, but in the Middle East, because of the physical appearance in general of the characters, physical appearance and the mentality of most characters is masculine, so [*Dragon Ball*] became very popular”.

When Synergy Becomes a Culture Clash: Anime Consumption and Age-Related Stigma

Kuwaiti anime fans experienced a type of cultural tension in their consumption of anime while living in Kuwait because, in watching anime, they received different, oftentimes contrary or even contradictory, cultural messages when compared with the cultural messages they receive across realms of Kuwaiti society. They simultaneously responded to the Kuwaiti cultural messages around gender and sexuality and to the messages transmitted via the gendered storylines and depictions of masculinity and femininity, males and females, in the anime they loved to watch, which sometimes aligned and sometimes clashed.

One way this clash became visible was through the way in which watching anime was seen not only as a gendered activity (for boys, not girls) but also a children’s activity (for kids, not adults). Age-related stigma associated with anime consumption in Kuwait has emerged as another key feature of the country’s anime culture. In this chapter, participants recounted how they were teased, even ridiculed by peers and

family members, and otherwise stigmatized for continuing to watch anime past childhood. According to them, dominant Kuwaiti culture has historically seen anime as a type of cartoon, which are exclusively for children; thus, anyone who is not a child, even adolescents, who is found to watch anime is seen as childish and immature and judged harshly for it. By watching anime, Kuwaiti adolescents and adults challenge age-related norms that dominate Kuwaiti culture, which contributes to its subculture status in the country.

Participants also noted that the age-related stigmatization of watching anime decreased somewhat when the “new” generation of anime emerged in Kuwait around the turn of the century, which drew huge appeal from an even wider swath of Kuwaiti society. Increasingly, anime is not thought of as exclusively kid’s entertainment. As Mehdi el Moussaoui explained in this chapter, watching anime has become so normalized among young men, it is now among the primary activities that are often used to display one’s social identity: “Even sometimes [when] you see someone who doesn't watch anime, [you] say, ‘Okay you're either into girls or sports.’ So it's one of the categories, either anime, sports or girls.” This statement also illustrates how watching anime is a form of doing gender, given how it is now so closely identified with teenage boys and young men; these days, to be a young man in Kuwait is, oftentimes, to be an anime fan. This further complicates their interpretation of, and relationship to, the messages they receive from Kuwaiti culture and from anime when they appear to be different or contradictory.

Conclusion

This chapter offered an overview of the trends and patterns in anime consumption among Kuwaitis and other Arabs based on the perspectives, experiences, and memories of the study participants. As participants described the arrival of anime in the region and country, the reasons for its popularity, the popular styles and genres, who watches anime and how they are perceived in Kuwaiti culture, it is clear that anime has a long and varied history in Kuwait and that the country possesses a distinctive anime culture shaped by local culture, religion, government censorship, and anime content. The next chapter builds on these findings by exploring how and why anime consumption practices among Kuwaitis have changed over time, examining the important roles that technological change, censorship, and increasing access to uncut anime have played in shaping such practices.

Chapter 2

Kuwaiti Anime Consumption Practices over Time: Technological Change, Uncut Anime, and Censorship

Moving from an examination of rise of anime in Kuwait and trends and patterns regarding anime consumption among Kuwaitis broadly in the last chapter, this chapter tightly focuses on the anime consumption practices of study participants and how and why they changed over time. Participants shared how technological change over the decades in Kuwaiti opened up new formats for them to view anime--from programs shown on the national broadcast channel on the television in the 1980s to cassettes and DVDs in the 1990s to the emergence of the Internet in the 2000s bringing streaming and torrenting to anime fans and making anime--included uncut or uncensored versions and titles not previously available in the country due to censorship--and information about it, more accessible than ever before. As one of the participants, Awatha Al Mutairi, succinctly summarized it, Kuwaitis first watched anime "through TV, then came into cassettes, CDs, then online."

Exposure to uncut anime through renting or purchasing cassettes from video stores in the 1990s led many anime fans to seek out more opportunities to watch uncut anime at the same time that censorship of anime by Kuwait's Ministry of Information ramped up. As this chapter traces, all of these forces circulated and interacted in ways that had profound influences on how Kuwaitis consumed anime and what anime they consumed over time, gradually leading to more and more freedom to practice anime consumption in their preferred ways.

Watching Anime in Kuwait: The Early Days

When anime first arrived in Kuwait in the 1970s and 1980s, it arrived on television. Even when other formats became available through technological advances, according to Abdulla Al Kandari, television remained the primary medium by which Kuwaitis consumed anime. He provided a succinct summary of the changes to technology and corresponding changes to consuming anime over the decades: "[Kuwaitis] watched [anime] by television…[in the] '80, '90s, 2000s. I bought cassettes [in the 1990s]. We started online [in 2000s]. TV was still the major thing. [In the 1970s and 1980s] TV…then, there were cassettes, there were CDs. . . Blu-rays came later. [In 2000] there was the anime stream, there was Dailymotion, then we started seeing websites that are devoted for animation."

Ali Methan's chronology of events was similar to Abdulla Al Kandari's: "[In the 1970s and 1980s] they watch by television. TV. Major TV. Then, there's cassettes, CDs, DVDs, Blu-rays…So did I [buy cassettes in the 90s]. [In the 2000s, TV] was basically [still the primary way Kuwaitis watched anime]. Then, [the Internet] slowly started to become a very mainstream source of…entertainment for most people when torrenting started to become a huge thing in the Middle East."

In the "early days" of anime in Kuwait--1970s and 1980s--television was the only medium by which Kuwaitis could consume anime. Exclusively directed at children, the anime show first aired on the national broadcast channel dedicated to children's programs and aired with Arabic dubbing, both of which made viewing highly accessible for children. As Aziz Al- Suhely explained, because anime was new at the time and because most anime shows were dubbed in Arabic, whenever an English language anime was aired in Kuwait, people did not understand it or even know what it was. But,

now, after decades of being exposed to anime, Kuwaiti adults today realize what their children are watching when they watch anime. As Aziz Al- Suhely recalled: “When anime first appeared on TV, it appeared in Arabic dub, but there are few anime shows that were presented in English. People didn’t know what it was, and they used to call any cartoon or anime, “Popeye”. But when adults see their children who watch anime, or if they become 12 or 15 years old, they would see it reasonable because adults used to watch it and understand it.” Adham stated, “before it was always aired on TV. Because back then, they didn't have internet. They just got internet [in the 2000s]. It was very limited to TVs and DVDs, stations with the channels.” As Mehdi el Moussaoui described, “In my time, as for me personally [watching anime on TV] was free as water…I could watch it wherever I wanted.” As he recalled: “I don't remember the old generation, but I remember from my childhood, there used to be on the Kuwaiti channel or the Syrian channel. They used to have like specific timings for children programs, and they used to play the programs in those times on it, but I used to watch them.”

According to Jaffar Mansour, the two television channels dedicated to anime--SpaceToon, followed by Space Power, were important media for exposing Kuwaiti children and their families to anime, as was the fact that the anime was shown with Arabic dubbing, making them easy to understand. Such easily accessible content came with a price, however: heavy censorship. Being forced to watch censored anime on TV prompted Jaffar Mansour to seek out uncensored versions of the shows he liked, first at video stores, and then on the black market and online. As he recalled:

In the beginning, we used to watch anime by TV broadcast, which was dubbed in Arabic so viewers could easily understand it. Around 1995 to 1998, a special TV channel

called SpaceToon was created. It showed anime in Arabic, but sadly, most of the material was censored, so we bought VHS tapes from the local video stores, but these were also censored. But going back to SpaceToon, it made a new channel called Space Power in 2005 or 2006, where they showed anime in Japanese but the subtitles were in Arabic, which was a new thing. Sadly though, it was still cut (censored), and that's the reason why I decided to buy un-cut anime from black market video stores, as well as the reason I tend to watch my anime streamed online.

Back when television was the primary medium for consuming anime, it encouraged Kuwaiti families to watch it together, making anime consumption a family and communal affair. Perhaps because it was novel, anime seemed to appeal to adults and children alike, as some participants remembered their parents watching anime without the children around. Participants had fond memories of watching anime with their families on TV as they grew up in the 1980s and 1990s, especially *Arabian Nights: Sinbad's Adventure*. As Ahmed Abu Taleb reported, Arabs used TV in the beginning to watch anime, and I remember my parents told me they would watch anime in the morning. The first anime I saw in Arabic dub was *Sinbad*, and I was 6 years old." Likewise, Fahad Oraifan remembered that "It appeared on the TV, and I watched it with my family. We were all intrigued by it and enjoyed based on its story and art, and it was shown Arabic dub in the 1980s."

Abdullah Kodor Attar also watched anime with his family: "We used to watch it on TV, and everyone used to watch *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Adults also used to watch anime as well as children. We also used to watch *Arabian Nights: Sinbad's Adventure*." In Waleed Bouresli's household, watching anime was undoubtedly a family

affair with members of his extended family coming over to together, making anime viewing an event: “In the beginning, it was aired on TV, my aunty and her children used to watch anime together with us. We watched Sinbad and Grendizer, anything we would watch. We used to watch anime, from the end of the 1970s to even late 1980s.”

In some cases, the custom of watching anime at home was also influenced by the stigma that surrounded anime with parents concerned that neighbors would pass judgment on their children for viewing it, as Mahammad Al Kandari reported: “[Kuwaitis] first watched anime in the beginning by using the TV. Also in the 1980s and early 1990s they won’t allow their children to watch anime outside their home, but instead inside their home, because they didn’t want the neighbors to talk about them being just kids, especially if an adult watches anime it would be considered embarrassing.”

Hussain Al- Baghli did first not watch anime on television but rather by cassette and then in the following formats as the technology advanced. “I watched the Arabic voice by cassette. As for the Japanese, I watched them either by CD, DVD, or, by online, from many other specific websites.” As is evidenced by his comment, the changes to dubbing and subtitles generally followed evolutions in technology, with anime in Arabic dubbing available in a cassette in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In contrast, anime with the original Japanese with English subtitles began appearing more readily with the introduction of CDs, DVDs, Blue-Rays, and online streaming. For Salah, understanding the difference between anime and cartoons was not evident in the early days when it was only available on television. It was only when he made a move to purchase anime on cassettes that he began to realize how different anime was: “We watched it on TV, but I didn’t know the difference at that time if this was anime or

cartoon, but I started to feel this was anime when I started to collecting tapes, but if my parents see this as something childish, but I see this as art."

First Anime Watched

Many of the participants had clear memories of the first anime they watched as children of the 1980s and 1990s, demonstrating that these early experiences left strong impressions on them and often sowed the seeds for love for anime that exists to this day. While participants viewed a range of anime as children, there was clear overlap in their responses, illustrating that there was a distinctive canon of anime that available to Kuwaitis when it was first introduced in the country which arguably shaped their consumption practices, carving out particular trajectories of anime enthusiasm that were formed by growing up with anime in Kuwait.

The early days of anime in Kuwait--the "old generation" as many of the participants called this period--were dominated by a few titles that seemingly everyone who watched anime as a child in the 1980s and 1990s knew. All of the participants who were introduced to anime as children in the 1980s first watched anime in Arabic dub. Japanese "dub" as the participants called it, meaning Japanese voice actors speaking in Japanese with Arabic or English subtitles were not available in Kuwait until the 1990s. When participants recalled the first anime, they watched as children, and they distinguished between these two phases of anime in Kuwait: Arabic dub and Japanese dub. They mostly remembered their "first" for each language, indicating that language was a critical component of their viewing experience. In fact, almost without exception, whenever participants mentioned any anime title they watched, they said the language

in which it appears--whether Arabic, Japanese, or English. English dubbed versions seemed to be less frequent than Arabic or Japanese.

As Hussain Al-Baghli recalled the “early days”, he mentioned several of these seemingly ubiquitous titles, most notably *Captain Tsubasa, Combattler V, Grendizer,* all of which came up again and again with participants: “The anime industry came to the Middle East in 1970s or 1980s, and we watched it at home on TV. The famous anime programs in the Middle East were Captain Tsubasa, Combattler V, Space Conan Boy (Hayao Miyazaki), and Grendizer, which were all dubbed in Arabic.” Mehdi el Moussaoui’s assessment of those early days and the most important anime for his generation was similar: “I'm not sure what my father's generation, but my generation's was mainly Combattler V, Mazinger Z, Grendizer, what do you call it [Dr.] Slump Arale-chan also we had...a variety of old, old anime. But these are the main ones that left a huge impression…[on] the whole generation.”

Grendizer was a spinoff of the popular *Mazinger Z*, a robot anime television show that first aired in Japan from 1972 to 1974. A number of participants recalled watching *Grendizer*, *Mazinger*, or both, suggesting that this series was formative for the generation of anime fans who grew up in the 1970s and 1980s. Aziz Al-Suhely described his early memories of *Grendizer*: “The first anime I watched in Arabic dub was *Grendizer*. At a young age I was interested in the robot’s masculine design as well as the story.” Abdulrahman Bin Nasser recalled: “The first time I watched anime was by TV. The first anime I saw in Arabic dub was Grendizer, and I was young, about one-year-old. The first Japanese anime I saw in Japanese dub was Naruto. Because that was the most popular at my time, my generation, then later, I didn’t like Naruto as much.”

Awatha Al Mutairi's "firsts" were the same as Abdulrahman Bin Nasser's: "My first Arabic dub anime was Grendizer, and my First Japanese dub anime was Naruto." Mahammad Al Kandari explained his trajectory from Arabic dub to Japanese dub, the latter of which he was exposed to much later than most of the other participants: "In the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, most of the anime were Arabic dub, until after 2000, I started watching online which was Japanese dub. My first anime, which was Arabic dub was Mazinger. The first Japanese dub anime I saw was in 2007, and it was GTO [Great Teacher Onizuka]."

Mehdi el Moussaoui's trajectory from Arabic dub to Japanese dub involved some English dub along the way, also highlighting the popularity of *Combattler V* at the time: "In my case mostly my old childhood was always Arabic. Then I jumped straight to Japanese. No, some of them were English, but then I evolved into Japanese immediately. My first cartoon, I think it was maybe Combattler V I think. Maybe. . . Khumasi [Combattler V in Arabic]. . . [which was in] maybe in the '90s. . . or at least at the end of '80s. . . [I also watched] Ja Zora. . ."

Abdulla Al Kandari's early memories of anime illustrate the cultural and religious tensions that surrounded anime in some Kuwaiti households: "[I remember watching] Devilman…in English dub. I took it from a cassette for my cousin and my dad didn't like it because my dad was religious. He thought the people who watch that are going to get possessed. There was some kind of a concern. I remember when I was young, my sister would watch Captain Majid in Arabic, and I wasn't paying much attention to that. I remember seeing the Mowgli anime that was popular."

Ali Methan's early experiences with anime were distinctive from other participants because he spent part of his childhood in Kuwait and role in the United States, exposing

him to different titles. His report suggests that anime was more prevalent among his friends in Kuwait than in the United States and that his time in Kuwait was more formative for his interest in anime. As he described:

I think [the first anime I watched] was [Jungle Book] Shōnen Mowgli, I think in Japanese. But when I moved to the States, my first anime that I paid full attention to was a Hayao Miyazaki's My Neighbor Totoro. It was the first English dub that was released in the '90s. I rented it from a library in America, and then I watched Kiki's Delivery Service…That's became one of my all-time favorites from my childhood, and then the Pokemon craze hit. Of course, eventually, I got into Dragon Ball Z, Digimon. And then, when I came to Kuwait, I started learning more about different anime. I did have stuff like Ronin Warriors and all these other shows in America, and even Gundam Wing and Outlaw Star because these were being broadcast in America…I remember hearing about [Cowboy Bebob] when I was eight-years-old. Then I'd come back to Kuwait, I learned about all these other different anime and the art styles…I remember watching Digimon…My Neighbor Totoro was basically what got me into anime…

Hussain Al-Baghli remembered watching anime before he even understood what anime was: “Most of [the first anime I watched] are in Arabic. That was before I knew what anime was but historically this was [my] first anime. It was either Tiger Mask or Igano Kabamaru. . . in Arabic. Grendizer, I knew about it after. These are the first [anime] that I watched in Arabic. Then afterwards I've learned about the Japanese [dubbed], I think it was around 2005.”

Like Hussain Al-Baghli, the first anime Waleed Bouresli recalled watching was *Tiger Mask*, an anime about professional wresting and one of the oldest running anime television series, originally airing from 1969 to 1971: “The first Arabic anime I watched was Tiger Mask, which I loved so much due to its story, stage appearance of the character, the mixing of reality and fantasy, as well as the masculine heroes and villains. The first anime I watched Japanese dubbed was Ranma 1/2.”

Adham’s first anime was unsurprising, given the popularity of both *Captain Tsubasa* and *Dragon Ball Z*. *Dragon Ball Z* first appeared in Kuwait in the 1990s and seems to be one of the first anime in Kuwait shown in Japanese dub. Perhaps that is why it was the first Japanese dub that several of the participants recalled watching. It seems that both the language and the story made a lasting impression for this generation of anime fans. As Adham described: “The first anime I watched in Arabic, it's a very famous anime. It's Captain Tsubasa…I was extremely young, around seven-years-old, eight-years-old. [I watched it] on TV. It was in the mid-'90s. I would say 1996, 1997. The first anime I watched in Japanese [Japanese dubbed and English subtitled] would be Dragon Ball [Z]. I watched [Dragon Ball Z] both in English dubbed and Japanese, both. That was the 1990s as well.” Mehdi el Moussaoui stated: “Of course [all anime I first watched were dubbed in Arabic]. None were Japanese or English. [The first Japanese dub with English subtitles that I watched] was Hokuto no Ken. No, actually, it was Dragon Ball Z. It was in ‘97, I think.”

Dragon Ball Z certainly left an impression on Aziz Al- Suhely as his first Japanese dubbed anime: “As for the first Japanese dubbed anime subtitled in English [that I watched], it was Dragon Ball Z, the movie where Goku battled Frieza. Dragon Ball Z had by far one of the best masculine fighting scenes I had ever seen in my whole life

and it showed a new atmosphere and some battle scenes no one could ever think of before." Jaffar Mansour also watched *Dragon Ball Z* and clearly remembered the significant development in anime in Kuwait, when the Space Power channel began airing anime in Japanese dubs: "[I watched Dragon Ball Z] in Arabic [dub]. The new generation [of anime] now [aired on] Space Power They are now…[for the] first of time [in our] lives they put anime with translation Arabic, Japanese voice acting…Not every anime, some specific anime like One Piece, I think like that. [They are] unfortunately cut [censored]."

Guyver left a similarly strong impact on Fahad Oraifan as the first Japanese dubbed anime he watched as a child, with its masculine overtones: "The first anime I watched was in Arabic dub, and was Igano Kabamaru, but the first anime I watched in Japanese dub was in the 1990s when I was seven-years-old and watched the Guyver the OVA [original video animation] series, subtitled in English, which showed me a clear picture of masculinity based on how a person defends and saves the people he cares about."

Guyver was Abdullah Kodor Attar's first Japanese dubbed anime as well. He also remembered watching *Arabian Nights: Sinbad's Adventure* in Arabic dub with his family, based on the children's book *Sinbad the Sailor*, which is how he referred to it: "The first anime I watched was Romance of the Three Kingdoms, which was a movie, and also Sinbad the Sailor, in Arabic dub. My family and I mostly watched Sinbad the Sailor. As for the first Japanese dubbed anime we watched, it was Guyver, and that was the first time I bought a VHS tape."

Language Preferences: Dubbing, Subtitles, and Voice Actors

As discussed above, the language of the anime titles the participants watched mattered enough that they almost always mentioned the language in which the anime appeared along with the title they discussed as a way of signalling important information about the particular title. Once they became exposed to Japanese dubbed and English dubbed titles, they came to realize that the language in which they watched the anime mattered for their experience of it. Thus, some participants developed strong preferences for the language in which the titles were shown as well as the voice actors, in large part because the original story is preserved. When dubbed in Arabic, they learned that the anime was not just dubbed but censored, sometimes dramatically altering or distorting the original story. The realization of these alterations is what often led the participants to seek out uncut, or uncensored versions of the titles, wishing to see them in their unadulterated forms, as will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Here, a few participants shared their opinions and preferences regarding dubbing and voice actors. Hussain Al-Baghli simply stated, “The Arabic voice actors of the past were much more talented than today’s voice actors.” Regarding his dubbing preferences, Mahamed Samer Shaeen said without hesitation: “Japanese. Of course, Japanese. I think because that's the original language of the director, the person who wrote the whole thing. So I think that's why it comes out more original in Japanese, and Arabic when you translate things always get lost in the way.” Jaffar Mansour had similarly strong feelings about dubbing:

I like the Japanese. I am with the Japanese. Neither English…English only if you want to speak to me. English only for Dragon Ball. Not anything because it fits within

English Dragon Ball only. The voice acting is fantastic. But the rest of anime, I am telling you the truth that I hate Arabic or English touched anime. I like the Japanese because Japanese they tell everything seriously; nothing less or more. And they don't even cut anything. Even for English [speaking] countries, they have Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. There's an episode they removed it because it has too much violence. There are cartoons; they remove the episode. And as for [Arabic dubbed] Detective Conan I hated it because most of the series, like 200 episodes, they cut it because it's too much episodes. And for new generation robot [anime], the Famous Four, Gundam Wings in [Arabic dubbing]. That is the thing I hate most about it. The old anime [like Gundam Wings], they are just dubbing it [in Arabic] right now.

Mahamed, manager of Al-Argham Video, offered his perspective on the dubbing trends in Kuwait based on what his customers demanded: “The Arabs first started to like English dub Anime, now they like Japanese dub anime with Arabic subtitles, due to the Japanese voice actors. So, from 2005 we started the sales of Arabic subtitles, before 2005 we sold many English subtitles.”

First Manga

Although most anime are based on manga, interestingly, most participants, while avid anime fans had little or no interest manga or at least had little opportunity to encounter it in Kuwait. The few who had any experience with manga had a casual relationship with it, reading one or two here and there or keeping a small collection. The only participant who expressed enthusiasm for and a long history with manga was Ali Methan, who spent part of his childhood in the United States and was exposed to much

of the manga there. Adham noted that manga was not sold in Kuwait or elsewhere in the Middle East when he was growing up. It is possible that the lack of engagement with manga by most participants reflects a lack of access first and foremost rather than lack of interest.

Ali Methan recounted his first exposure to manga and growing interest over the years, facilitated in part by his mother who would sometimes buy manga for him through the school where she worked:

The first time I remember reading manga was when I was like seven-years-old and that was before what I knew what manga was. I just knew it was comic, or cartoon and, the thing is, what was it? It was when I was in America there was, of course, Pokemon had various manga that was either based on the anime, based on the game. The one manga that I remember reading was the one that was based on the anime called, it's known in Japan as Pikachu, Denki Pekichu, or in America it's called Pokemon: Electric Boogaloo Pikachu. I think from then on I actually remember buying that and then reading that, and I thought it was kind of interesting that there's a different interpretation of what we saw in the anime, and it was different. Then the first time I actually read something that was a manga that turned into an anime was Dragon Ball Z when my Mom bought [it for] me. Like one of the books for the manga from the scholastic things that was going on in her school as well as one of the issues [Weekly] Shonen Jump [a best-selling weekly Japanese language shōnen manga anthology magazine] had that was released in America. I thought it was interesting seeing all these different anime and learning about them from like from the magazine and just reading about it. Then I started reading stuff online like Norberto and in some cases

The One Piece and some the other stuff that I thought was kind of interesting. When I first got my Pokemon manga was 2000, and then when I got The Dragon Ball Z and Shonen Jump was 2003. I actually bought the Pokemon thing from a store in America and then I bought Dragon Ball Z and Shonen Jump from this book order thing, which I think was from online.

As described above, the other participants who had any experience with manga had only mild engagement with it compared to Ali Methan, such as Jaffar Mansour: "I read some chapters only [online]…My cousin and I saw some manga when I was 14, 13 [years-old]." Abdulrahman Bin Nasser remembered the first manga he read: "It was in 2010 and the manga was called *Gungrave* and it was in Rehab [Mall] where I bought the manga in a store called Taz." Abdulla Al Kandari did not watch much manga but read it to a limited extent, though it seemed to not be memorable enough for him to remember the titles: "I read the [Berserk] manga, but I didn't finish it, but yes, I saw it…When I read the whole manga and finished it. It's mostly online. I think it's 2008 I was reading something, it was either Kenichi or what's his name? Grappler, Baki The Grappler."

Hussain Al- Baghli, like a few of the other participants, first encountered manga online. He was the only participant to mention collecting manga: "I believe it was when I was like 16, 17 [years-old]. It was not too long ago, like during my high school year. My first encounter with manga was online. But I saw actual [paper-based] mangas from where I live [in Kuwait]. And I saw people actually buying mangas. They collected. There are some shops that do sell mangas. So yeah, I did witness people buying mangas. I do have a minimal collection of mine. I do collect them, but not frequently."

Living in Kuwait, Adham reported that he could not buy manga when they were only available in hard copy. Even though they are now easily accessible online he still questions their value compared to anime: “Manga, unfortunately for me [I’ve never read them] because manga couldn't be sold in the Middle East, and reading manga on the Internet is something I'm still looking forward to doing. But the thing is, it's almost like an imitation. Why would I read manga if I can watch the whole thing as a movie animation and have scenes and everything?”

First Anime Purchased

The first anime that participants purchased--almost invariably on cassette, given that these “firsts” happened during the 1990s before DVDs and Blue-Rays came out and still years before Internet was widely available in Kuwait--were meaningful events, both for them and this study. It is a display of enthusiasm with the form that goes beyond watching anime on television. To purchase anime is to make an intentional effort--spending money and taking time, sometimes acting contrary to the wishes of their parents who did not approve of anime--to bring anime into their lives. Turning on the television at the right time to catch one’s favorite anime series on SpaceToons requires much less effort and sacrifice.

Purchasing anime also marks a shift in assuming greater control in what they are consuming-- acquiring the series of films that they enjoy most as well as in the language they prefer (often Japanese dubbed with English or Arabic subtitles) and in uncut, or uncensored, forms. Much like the sequence of being exposed to Arabic dubbed anime before Japanese dubbed on television, many of the participants first anime purchases were Arabic dubbed with purchases of Japanese dubbed coming later, suggesting that

Japanese dubbed anime were increasingly available for purchase as time went in--late 1990s rather than early 1990s. Also, much like the way they described watching their first anime by distinguishing the language in which it appeared, many of the participants described their anime purchases similarly, noting which ones were in Arabic dub and which were in Japanese or English dub. When asked about the first anime purchases, they would often initially respond by asking, “In Arabic or Japanese?”

Many of the participants would make similar distinctions between cut and uncut versions of anime they purchased, almost always noting whether it was censored when describing their purchase. Together, language and censorship profoundly shaped participants’ experiences of the anime they watched and purchased, and they paid attention to these characteristics as they strove to shape their anime consumption according to their desires. At some point in their viewing, participants would realize that the Arabic dubbed versions of their favorite anime series shown on television were censored in ways that altered the story or left out important parts of it. They would then learn that they could purchase uncensored versions at local video stores or in more hidden ways on the black market. Such realizations served as a strong motivation to seek out these “pure” versions and often led them to their first anime purchases. The move to purchase anime thus represents an important phase in the development of participants’ enthusiasm for anime and autonomous and self-directed anime consumption practices.

One of the anime consumption practices that may have served as a bridge between watching anime on television and purchasing anime cassettes was recording anime shows on blank cassettes when they aired on television to be watched on the VCR at one’s leisure. Jaffar Mansour remembers his father doing just this for his favorite anime,

Grendizer: “To be specific, my father [was] born, God bless his soul, in the ‘60s. But I don't know which year he watched Grendizer. So, he told me stories that he [would] buy some videos for watching anime. And now he just recorded in a VCR, so he won't miss any show of Grendizer.” Adham was slow to purchase Japanese or English dubbed anime because he was content to memorize the time that they aired watch on television and ensure that he tuned in at the right time: “The first anime that I owned would be Captain Sabasa. . . It was Arabic dubbed. [I bought it in the 1990s.]. . . No, [I didn’t buy any Japanese or English dubbed anime] because I had certain anime that I loved, that I was watching TV just waiting for the right time during the day to watch them. Why would I buy the cassettes? I guess it's different because when I was a kid, I really loved it with a passion. I watched them on TV [before there was Internet]. For me, Internet wasn't accessible.” Like Adham, Abdulla Al Kandari’s first anime purchase was in Arabic dub: “[It was called] Raj al Al-Mukanaa. I bought the whole set. [The Arabic version of] Tiger Mask. It consisted of 18 cassettes, believe it or not. I was maybe seven and a half, maybe eight [years old]….[My first Japanese dubbed, English subtitles] I bought them late '90s. No, maybe 2000 that I purchased. It was something old, and I actually got it from my sister, it was Fruits Basket, because I couldn't find it [to purchase].

Hussain Al-Baghli was around the same age as Abdulla Al Kandari when he bought his first anime, also in Arabic. The participants who bought their first anime when they were younger--before they were teenagers--tended to buy them in Arabic dub, likely because they were not yet old enough to read subtitles in Arabic or English. As Hussain Al-Baghli recalled: “I believe when I was a kid, like when I was like seven, eight years old. When I was like, by that age I bought cassettes [in Arabic]. I was born in 1992. So

by that time, it's like either like by the end of the '90s or just a little bit before...I actually started buying cassettes of these specific shows."

Ali Methan became increasing interested in anime in the 1990s during the time when Pokemon was reaching its height of popularity, so "of course, the first English [dub] cassette tape I bought was *Pokemon*. And then Arabic [dub], I think it was *Digimon* because that's when I started getting into *Digimon* really. Japanese [dub] was *Naruto* back in 2005." Mahamed Samer Shaeen's first anime purchase came much later than most of the other participants: "I was in Syria seven years ago…That was the first time that I actually paid for an anime and I bought a *Bleach* at the time. I think I was 17 or 16 [years old]."

Jaffar Mansour fondly recalled the first anime he bought in Arabic and Japanese, including an uncut purchase on the black market in Kuwait:

First of all, the first time that I bought anime like Kaiketsu Zorro. The blonde guy was Zorro. There's also a Zorro, a child Zorro. One of them. It's the most fascinating anime that I have ever seen. Is better than the American Zorro to be honest…[I watched it] in Arabic, I had all of it [on] video but I bought a video of this and also Gunger Mahada in Arabic. There's a train [that] transforms into a robot…But I bought Kaiketsu Zorro, also Detective Conan. Then in Japanese, I bought Dragon Ball collection, a DVD collection…uncut scene. [I got it] in black market [in Kuwait]. A DVD collection of a entire anime, Dragon Ball [uncut]…[In year] 2000 and above.

The first anime that Abdullah Kodor Attar and Mahammad Al Kandari owned was the same: *Iga No Kabamaru*. "The first anime I bought was *Iga No Kabamaru*", said

Abdullah Kodor Attar. Mahammad Al Kandari explained, “Well, I didn’t buy my first anime, but my cousin bought it for me and my first anime was *Iga No Kabamaru*, which I believe was in the 1980s.” Like Mahammad Al Kandari, for a few participants, their first owned anime was not one they purchased themselves but were given to them by friends or family. Ahmed Abu Taleb reported, “My family bought me my first anime, in maybe the mid-1990s or end of the 1990s, but I bought my own anime in 2016.” Awatha Al Mutairi recalled, “It was in 1999 was the time I bought my first anime. [Before then] I never bought them I always got them from someone else.”

A few of the participants were eager to purchase anime in Japanese dub. Aziz Al-Suhely said, “My first anime cassette, which was Japanese dub, which I bought in White Tower, and it was uncut in 1995.” Salah’s first Japanese dub was also uncut and purchased at the other location besides White Tower widely known for its uncut anime and video games: Rehab Mall. As Salah described, “My first anime dub which I bought in Arabic was *Sinbad*, then my first Japanese dub anime [was] *Berserk* which was uncut, [purchased] in a store called Hobby Japan, which was in Rehab Mall.” Abdulrahman Bin Nasser recalled, “I think I was 10 or 11 years old when I first bought anime, Japanese dub. The first time I bought anime was in Al Argham Video. My family are the ones who introduced me to [that] video store.”

For some of the participants, rather than seeking to purchase uncut anime, their first anime purchases unintentionally exposed them to uncut anime when they unknowingly purchased uncut versions of anime, shocked to find depictions of explicit violence and sex. Stumbling upon uncut anime in these ways were eye-opening experiences that showed them the full extent of censorship of their favorite anime and led them to seek

out uncut anime going forward, not necessarily (or only) for the sexual and violent content, but to enjoy the stories in their original, unadulterated forms.

Mehdi el Moussaoui remembered how he how his first anime cassette purchase in the mid-90s turned out to be uncut: "It was Hokuto no Ken the movie, there was so much gore and to me this was a whole new experience. . . it was by mistake, it was sold to me by the Funoon Shop there [in the city of Salmiya]. . . What they do, they brought the manga company product and they used to sell them in cassette. . . It was sold to me by mistake. Usually they get the anime, they edit it for any pornographic scenes or whatever, then they give it to you. I got the undubbed by mistake, and that was my first one." Since this incident, Mehdi el Moussaoui said he prefers watching uncut: "I want to watch uncut…I just want to know the whole story."

Fahad Oraifan described his accidental discovery of uncut anime:

At the first time, me and my friend wanted to buy an anime cassette, which was a video store located inside Rehab mall, and it was Street Fighter 2 Animation, at that time I was nine years old. So, we bought 2 copies of the same anime, and I didn't know there was un-censorship, because it was action which meant violence so it has to be censored. Anyways, when I watched my version of the copy of the anime in English dub in my home there were scenes that were not shown in my friend's Japanese dubbed version when I watched the anime in his home.

It was only because Fahad Oraifan and his friend purchased the exact anime and he had the opportunity to watch his friend's version that he realized they had actually

purchased different versions, making it very clear that one was censored, the other very much uncensored. He went on:

They were erotic scenes and it was the battle between Vega vs Chun-li, and it was when Chun-li was doing her flying spinning bird kick, I could see her pantie shots as well a close scene of her vagina. I was shocked by it because this was when I noticed that there was adult content in cartoons, as well when I watched Shindobatto no Bouken there was an episode where the main character was fully naked and in a crucified scene as his capture as a sacrifice, and what surprised me more, it wasn't in cassette when we watched this, but in Kuwait's TV channel.

The fact that Fahad Oraifan happened to see uncensored anime on television demonstrates that there were flaws in Kuwait's censorship system at the time in monitoring both television content and cassette content, as allowing such explicit content to air on television ran counter to the Ministry of Information's objectives. While he understood later that he was too young to view such explicit content at that time, the experience nonetheless drove him to seek out un-cut anime going forward, both for the depictions of sexuality as well as to preserve the integrity of the original story. As he explained: "Later I realized much [more] deeply that this was something that I should not see at this age, but as I grew older, I wanted to see more un-cut anime because of the story scenes that are found mixed between sexuality and action scenes. They tend to cut out the important scenes in the story which makes me miss out and see what happened."

Waleed Bouresli's story of unintentionally purchasing uncut anime was similar to Fahad Oraifan's. In Waleed Bouresli's case, it happened not once but twice. The first time was when he was purchasing an Arabic dub, his very first anime purchase: "My first anime cassette which I bought was *Iga no Kabamaru* in Arabic dub and to my surprise *un-cut*." He then described how he unknowingly came into possession of an uncut English dubbed anime with his brothers, purchased at the infamous Rehab Mall, which only increased his interest in anime, realizing it could have adult content:

In the beginning, when anime was first aired on television, some scenes were censored, and Arabs always questioned that asking, what's to censor in a cartoon? I never understood the reason until the 1990s, when I visited a mall called Rehab, and in there was a video store where my brothers and I bought an anime called Ranma 1/2, which was English dubbed. What we realized was that the owner of the video store forgot to censor the anime, so we had the uncensored version. This was a big shock to us because it contained nudity, sexuality, and masculinity, all at once, which made us more interested in anime since we never realized that there would be a mix of female sexuality and male masculinity. However, we had to be careful about where to watch it and when to view it.

Uncut Anime: Finding Their Way around Censorship

Questionnaire participants were unanimous in their preference to watch violent scenes in anime that were uncensored rather than censored (see Figure 2.1). While a vast majority of questionnaire participants--just over 90 percent--wished to view uncensored scenes containing nudity, a notable minority of only under 10 percent of

participants preferred to watch such scenes censored (see Figure 2.2). The different preferences regarding censorship in violent and nude scenes suggest participants do not wish for censorship to be abolished across the board.

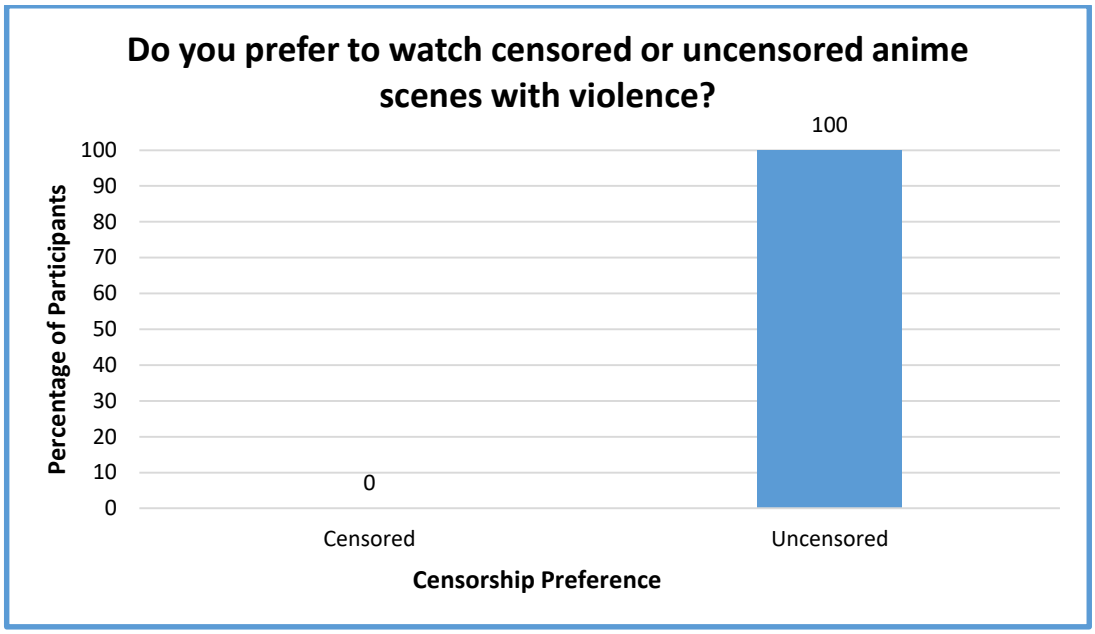

FIGURE 2.1. Percentage of questionnaire participants who prefer to watch censored or uncensored anime scenes with violence.

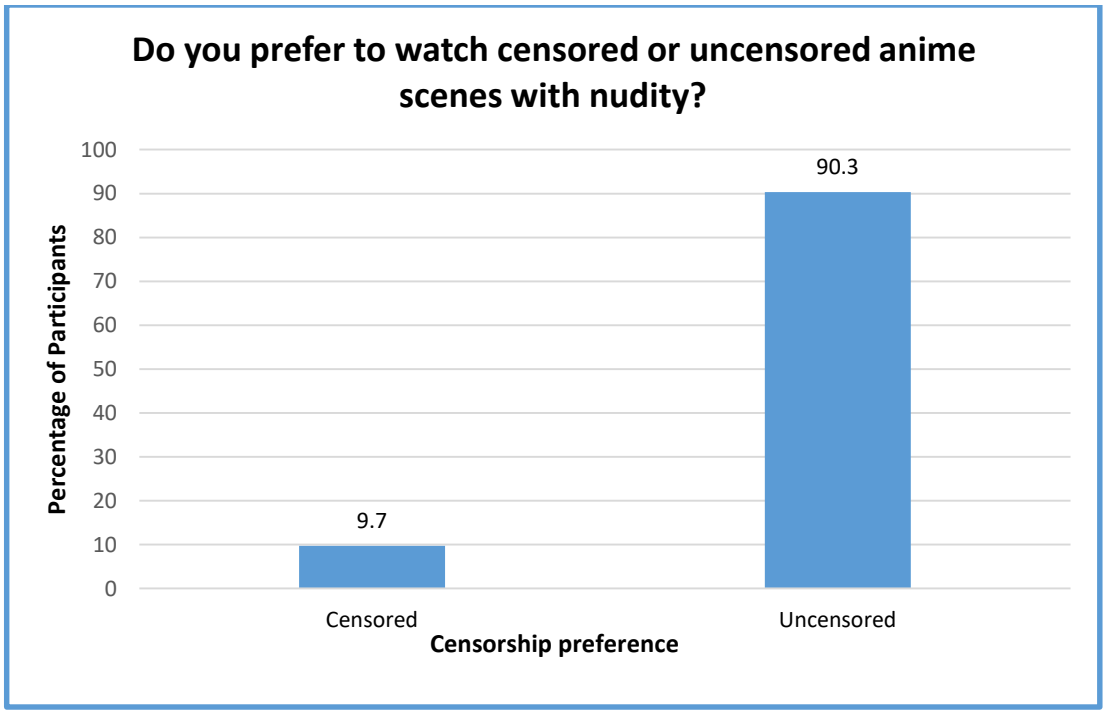

FIGURE 2.2. Percentage of questionnaire participants who prefer to watch censored or uncensored anime scenes with nudity.

Responses from the interview participants shed more light on the practices and preferences of Kuwaiti anime fans regarding censored or uncensored anime and the reasons behind such choices. For Mahamed Samer Shaeen, the first time he watched uncut anime coincided with the first time he ever watched Japanese anime, back when he was still living in Syria: “That was when I was 16 [years old]...That was when I started watching Japanese anime. It was a copy that wasn't original. It was a video CD, actually. It costs less than a hundred Fils maybe. It was a DVD. Inside, it had like 10 episodes or 20 or 15, between 10 and 20 on each DVD.”

Abdulla Al Kandari remembered his first uncut anime: “Well, *Tiger Mask* was uncut. They didn't cut it...there wasn't nudity. There was the fighting, there was the gore, the blood, but it wasn't that much of a gore.” Like some of the other participants, watching cut versions of anime led him to seek out the uncut versions, realizing that entire scenes were removed and the stories dramatically altered:

Devilman was kind of cut. Yeah, there was a lot of cut scenes like whole scenes. I got it from my friend, cassettes...It was dubbed in English. It was my first English cassettes…Well, I wanted to know what happened because they used to cut the whole scene. They go to a situation where they just entered the room. Then, somebody comes out with half his body. Like, what's happened? Also if you saw Lupin the Third, they cut so much of it. I bought three movies…in Kuwait. It was dubbed in English. They cut so much of it [that I didn’t understand anything].

Abdulla Al Kandari said that “of course” he prefers watching uncut anime. He recalled how, back in Lebanon, the censorship of anime only emerged in the 1990s and increased gradually over time, largely due to an increase in access in Lebanon to channels from the Gulf states, which censored more than Lebanon. But he also noticed that even in Kuwait there was not much censorship of anime until the 1990s:

There was a lot of [uncut anime] because before the '90s, people did not cut anything like in LBC [Lebanon Broadcast Channel]. Nobody cut anything because it's a Lebanese show. I think it was okay for them. When we started seeing Gulf City channels for cartoons, then do we start seeing cuts. Even in Kuwait when they used to put the shows from LBC, they used to buy I think the shows, it was uncut. And then when the '90s or maybe mid '90s, they started cutting them. Like, for a very known channel, Spacetoon, it was cut and now they made another channel, Space Power [a channel in Kuwait where the anime are dubbed in Japanese and subtitled in Arabic.]. That was cut. Some shows are technically 10 minutes. They had Shinobi…the story is completely different…In Naruto [they would censor out the pig]. The girls that would wear shorts or have short sleeves, they would cut that and actually just zoom into to the face and then you have the scenes as just some chick [girl] talking.

Awatha Al Mutairi, who preferred uncut anime, watched her first uncut anime on LBC in “2005 or 2006”, further suggesting that Lebanon was not as aggressive as Kuwait and other Gulf states in censoring anime: “Surprisingly it was in an Arabic channel, and it was on LBC (Lebanon Network Channel), the anime was *Rurouni*

Kenshin, and the uncut scene was the blood, violence, and there was romantic scenes also."

Ali Methan also experienced differences in censorship practices in different countries, having spent part of his childhood in America and part of it in Kuwait. His keen eye as a child led him to notice differences in the cut and uncut versions of his favorite anime and to learn more about how the censorship affected the anime he watched:

For me, I think my first uncut tape was something I bought from America…Thing is, I was 10 years old, I didn't even know. It was Dragon Ball Z…I didn't notice it [was uncut]. I started noticing it however, because I looked up some information on my favorite shows and what they would take out from, because I was a curious 10-year-old. I like to see what's the difference between the Japanese and the English versions or even Arabic. I noticed that apart where someone basically flips off another character, they do that a lot in Dragon Ball Z in some occasional scenes, I was like, "Okay, yeah, that's uncut. That's definitely uncut."

Ali Methan also noticed differences in the anime *Digiomon* when he watched it in Arabic dub in Kuwait, realizing some of the scenes had been changed from the English dub version he watched while he was living in America. The fact that he lived in two countries with different censorship practices gave him a unique perspective compared to most of his friends in Kuwait, having the opportunity to watch different versions which tipped him off to the heavy censorship taking place in Kuwait: "When I used to watch Digimon [in Kuwait], it was completely different. It was called Abdal al Digital in

Arabic, and I was like, I'm used to the English dub because I grew up with that before I came to Kuwait. I'm like, 'Why are they showing the same scene whenever they 'Digivolve'?' I learned years later, oh, they changed because I didn't understand Arabic at all. I learned from online and from a few friends. They turned it to them, calling out for their brother."

Once Ali Methan became more aware of the anime censorship in Kuwait, he began to pay more attention to it, realizing that many of the anime he watched in Kuwait were censored: "I started noticing different anime, even things like Beyblade…Keroro Gunso, Sargent Frog, is a comedy anime that had these like little alien frogs, and it was dubbed in Arabic known as Kero, instead of Keroro. There was a scene where a female character was wearing this caveman outfit, but her legs were changed to pants or something like that. It looked out of place. It was weird."

Getting to experience both cut and uncut versions of his favorite anime, Ali Methan developed a clear preference: "Definitely uncut because I don't like when they take out things. Especially if they make a name change, I prefer authenticity. That's just me."

Jaffar Mansour recalled how his enjoyment of *Pokémon* clashed with messages he heard about it growing up in Kuwait, where some people opposed it on religious grounds. This led him to question the religious opposition of it and to defiantly challenge the ban on it in Kuwait, which seemed inspired by a similar ban in Saudi Arabia, by finding ways to watch it anyways:

I like Pokémon. The Bedouins [the desert tribe people, one of the main ethnic groups in Kuwait] said it's haram [considered forbidden by Allah in Islam]. From Saudi Arabia [where they banned Pokémon], rumors came to Kuwait. When I was young, they said,

"don't watch Pokémon, it's a new creation. The only person who creates an animal is God."...I didn't give any [thought] about, I didn't care about the [Islamic] court, so I moved out [on] my own, I watched Pokémon, I didn't care [about] anything. So, it is still going on, Pokémon. So, no matter what, if it's abandoned, they didn't allow Pokémon in Kuwait. So, I watched it, and it's amazing still. I don't believe it is [haram]... You are creating a character. So, God only creates human, now you're creating a character. What's the difference?

Hussain Al-Baghli said that he did not knowingly watch uncut anime "until like 2005 when it was actually online." He explained that, as a child, it was hard for him to tell the difference between cut and uncut. Still, he assumed the anime aired on television in Kuwait was mostly cut to protect children from adult content: "I was a kid so I wouldn't really remember or recognize it was uncut or not. But I'm pretty sure most of the anime's were cut so for the children so there wouldn't be any inappropriate for them. So I didn't really see any uncut footages of anime before that time."

Hussain Al- Baghli was one of the few participants who did not have strong opinions about anime censorship and seemed to generally prefer the cut versions, either because he did not enjoy watching graphic content or because he preferred to watch what the majority of Kuwaitis watched. He seemed to trust the Ministry of Information to cut what they deemed necessary to reduce. This position was quite different from most of the participants, who seemed to view censorship as impinging on their freedom to consume anime in the ways they prefer. "[My preference for cut or uncut] depends on the anime itself, in my opinion. It's like, depending on cuttings like the graphic scenes. If it's very graphical, I prefer not to see it because they were cut for a reason. I prefer

watching what was published by the national TV. So for that, in my opinion, I prefer watching what most people watch."

Adham, who prefers "uncut, of course" remembered a short period in the 1990s when SpaceToon showed uncensored anime about World War II that left an impression on him: "As a kid in the '90s, I watched several anime that was about World War II, about the American bombing of Japan. Unfortunately, I don't remember the names. There was this one movie that shows the effects of the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki showing how people melted…It was aired on TV. It was subtitled [in Arabic with Japanese dub]. Sometimes, they would have movies that have subtitles. Yeah, it was subtitled [movie anime in Japanese]…It was [on] SpaceToon. They didn't last long on SpaceToon"

For participants who became aware of the differences between cut and uncut anime before purchasing any anime cassettes, they generally had to ask friends where to go to purchase uncut anime. In Kuwait, there were a few places that were known to sell uncut anime and that virtually all anime fans would go to buy their anime: White Tower, Rehab Mall, and Al Argham Video.

As Salah reported, "My first Japanese dub anime Berserk which was uncut in a store called Hobby Japan, which was in Rehab Mall." Similarly, Tarek Al-Kandari stated: "I would buy [uncensored anime] from two places, one is located in Al Argham Video store, but I remember there is a place that would sell adult anime, which was located in a place called, White Tower."

Abdullah Kodor Attar realized that a much more extensive array of anime content existed, including adult content such as graphic violence and sex, not by purchasing uncut anime by accident but by happening to see trailer of an anime in one of the cut

anime he had bought. The trailer showed the type of content typically censored by the Ministry of Information. At this moment, he realized that the world of anime was much larger than he had previously known and was eager to learn more about it from his friends which eventually led him to White Tower to purchase his first uncut anime:

The first time I noticed the idea of an uncut anime was when I first bought Guyver, which was the OVA series. It only had one episode, and inside that episode there was a manga commercial trailer showing anime scenes of various anime that have violence, nudity, sex, kissing, and that's when I realized, wow, this is new, strange and never seen before. [I didn't know] cartoons would have a concept of violence and sex, and I had to know about this more. So, as I investigated further and talked to my friends, I was led to a place called White Tower where I can find a bootlegger that would sell me uncut anime.

Since he began purchasing uncut anime and recognized the huge differences between the cut and uncut versions, Abdullah Kodor Attar preferred to only watch uncut anime, citing the way that censorship distorts the anime and hampers his experience of the story: "For me I prefer to watch anime uncut because as a customer if I bought something cut, I feel I am cheated for not being able to watch the whole movie, for example, if you would cut a scene from Hokuto No Ken the concept of blood and violence, then you have killed the movie as a whole."

Aziz Al- Suhely followed in the footsteps of the other participants, like Abdullah Kodor Attar and Tarek Al-Kandari, to purchase his first uncut anime: "My first anime cassette which was Japanese dub, which I bought was in White Tower, and it was uncut

in 1995." His reasoning for purchasing uncut anime echoed that of Abdullah Kodor Attar, explaining, "I also prefer to buy it uncut because it would ruin the story and you feel that you are robbed since you paid for something and you get it not complete."

A number of other participants expressed the same preference for uncut anime, all citing the way that cut versions distort the original story. Notably, very few of the participants explicitly said that they preferred uncut anime because they enjoy adult content, such as violence and sex. It seemed they were reluctant to admit that they did enjoy the explicit depictions of sexuality, nudity, and sex. Instead, most explained their preference for uncut anime in the same terms used by Aziz Al- Suhely and Abdullah Kodor Attar: censorship alters the story and it is vital for them to see the story in its original form, as the directors intended. Mahammad Al Kandari said simply, "I never really liked to watch anything censored." Abdulrahman Bin Nasser recalled his first uncut anime--"It was Samurai Deeper Kyo"--and regarding the issue of uncut versus uncut anime, he said, "I prefer to watch it uncensored because the story is important and there is an important that happens, and when it cuts it ruins the story." Ahmed Abu Taleb first watched uncut anime when he saw *One Piece* and *Guyver.* "I bought them on CDS," he explained, "which was pirated CDS which were sold in Kuwait." He said he preferred to watch "uncensored, because they would cut out one of the most important scenes that would let me miss out from the story."

Aziz Al- Suhely and Waleed Bouresli pointed out that the anime industry in Kuwait, particularly the production of anime, deteriorated over time, leading to more heavily censored and poorer quality Arabic dubbed anime. As Aziz Al- Suhely described: "There were two studios, Al Wisam and Studio Venus, and Studio Venus is a Syrian company, that would ruin the Arab dub anime and would create their own story that is

different from the story of the Japanese manga director. For example, Al Wisam Studio would follow the same exact story line and would rarely censor, but Studio Venus would change everything and censor everything and it simply ruined the Japanese anime."

Waleed Bouresli remembered purchasing his first uncut anime during the period when it was easier to purchase uncut anime and when Arabic dubbing was high quality. He lamented how the anime industry in Kuwait deteriorated in quality over time, leading him and others to begin seeking out uncut anime on their own, something that accelerated once Internet became widely available in Kuwait:

The first anime which I bought incomplete series in Arabic, and were un-cut, was Iga Kabamaru. I was lucky to buy it at that [time] when there was an old company by the name of Wisam, which brought the anime un-cut as well the company had good Arabic voice actors. But as time progressed, a new company came and took over Wisam and the company was called Studio Venus, which is a Syrian company. This was the first studio that ruined the Arabic anime company, which brought untalented voice actors, censorship, the same anime stories but were rewritten and changing the scenarios by changing the dialogues to their own desire. This was the also a reason why many people who watched anime stopped watching the Arabic anime, and started buying copied uncut anime, and when the Internet came, we stopped buying and watched anime in our privacy at a quick speed, without waiting for the anime to be recorded on cassette, as well [as] free.

Again, Mahamed, manager of Al Argham Video, one of few places in Kuwait to purchase uncut anime, provided a different perspective than the other study participants, being on the retail side of selling uncut anime rather than the customer side of buying and consuming it. He offered insights into the industry of uncut anime in Kuwait, how the anime black market operated and evaded censorship by the Ministry of Information, and how selling uncut anime became more difficult over time as scrutiny increased and laws tightened.

In the early 1990s, when Al Argham Video first opened, Mahamed explained, demand for uncut anime was high, not just in Kuwait, but in the Gulf region as a whole: "Many came, all over the Gulf States and it wasn't only buying uncut movies because of sex, but because for understanding the story." It is notable that Mahamed gave the same motivation for purchasing uncut anime as most other participants: not for explicit depictions of sex but for the original story. In those early days, the store obtained the uncut anime from America with ease, given the lax screening at customs: We used to buy our anime online, American websites and they would ship it to us by DHL and the customs did not check." This, however, began to change in the late 1990s when customs began to realize what was in those DHL packages: "[Customs] started to check on 1998 or 1999, because of the Ministry of Information when they checked the manga video cover and noticed there was sexual covers or design on the cover of the video, they realized it was strange and started to check the DHL boxes."

Mahamed said that as anime grew in popularity in the 1990s in Kuwait, Kuwaitis began seeking out the uncut versions from places like Al Argham Video, which the store continued to provide, despite the increased censorship: "anime started to grow in TV series, and people started to like and buy it, even if the Ministry of Information tried

to censor, there were ways we could get them uncensored…As people realized it, we started in the video store, we bought the anime original tape, and we recorded many copies of it and sold it for the people that like anime."

Because the store was purchasing only one copy of each anime title and burning additional copies onto DVDs, it was violating American copyright laws. The store was hardly alone in this illicit practice: during this period. Up to today, the Middle East is known worldwide as the region with some of the most widespread copyright infringement activities--of anime, other movies, television shows, video games, and music. In 2000, as the American authorities became aware of such violations in Kuwait and elsewhere in the region, they put pressure on the Kuwaiti government to put a stop to it. At this point, censorship became even more strict, banning not only explicit sex scenes and nudity but any depictions of sexuality or immodest attire. Mahamed described the shift:

Before 2000 we usually sold at ease, and the government or copyright people did not bother us. Still, after 2000, a law made by America complained to Kuwait on copyright infringement that any Western movie should not be sold illegally…A long time ago, there wasn't any strict form of censorship from Ministry of Information, no strict rules of cutting, only on sex and nudity there was censorship, but now kissing and bikinis are being cut. [By] the end of January 29, 2001, America released a rule to the Middle East Gulf States that were buying illegal copies of DVDs because the people wanted to see the movie un-cut. The Middle East was number three in the world for the copyrights [violations].

Getting caught selling uncut anime or other movies resulted in fines, which increased over time as scrutiny on the black market of uncensored entertainment intensified, as Mahamed explained: "Before the 1990s if they catch us selling uncut movies, we would pay a fine of 100 KD (355 USD) and a warning. The second time they catch you, the fine will be doubled, but in 2005 or 2007, the fine will be 500 KD (1,777 USD) on the seller who sells the videos, and the owner of the video store pays 500 KD. . . For example, Silver Video, which was our rival video store, went out of business because they got caught many times, business was slow and even our store Argham was caught the first time in 2000." He explained that the high degree of distortion of the original anime or movies that resulted from the strict censorship, in which significant scenes or substantial portions of content were, removed along with the sex scenes, pushed customers to purchase uncut versions:

The reason is for the story, because when they cut, they [the Ministry of Information] used to cut even before there would be a sex scene, two minutes before they would start the sexual scenes. Even after when they censor the scene, two minutes after it they would not censor it, as simple to say they would censor a long time and censor things which are not supposed to be censored, it will ruin the film, and you won't be able to understand the movie, and maybe inside the sexual scene there would be a specific scene that if they cut it you would not understand the film.

According to Mahamed, as new technology developed in the 1990s and 2000s which changed how Kuwaitis consumed anime and other movies--from cassettes and DVDs to satellite dishes and streaming online--a distinct split emerged between what he

called the “old generation” of consumers and the “new generation”. While the old generation only had cinema and television, which were subjected to strict censorship, the new generation could easily evade such censorship as new platforms for watching anime and movies arose: “The old generation is different from the new generation and that is before many people went to the cinema, but now new generation do not bother to go because the movies were censored, and it was better and cheap to buy uncensored. Even people today would own a special satellite dish and would watch movies uncensored. Before people used to get satellite for sex movies like erotic channels, but after the Internet appeared, they stopped buying satellites due to the Internet. The Internet is the gateway for sex, free sex.”

Online Anime

The Significance of the Internet for Kuwaiti Anime Fans

The arrival of the Internet represents the most significant technological change for Kuwaiti anime fans, impacting their anime consumption practices in profound ways, in terms of how what, where, and when they watched anime. The 1990s was the decade of purchasing anime as cassettes, and then DVDs became widely available in Kuwait, and with them, significant developments in viewing uncut anime, as fans were able to purchase uncut anime on the black market in a number of locations in Kuwait. The 2000s was the decade marked by the arrival of the Internet in Kuwait and watching anime online. The move from cassettes and DVDs to online continued and intensified the trajectory of increasing autonomy with regard to Kuwaitis’ anime consumption practices. With cassettes, Kuwaiti anime fans got used to being able to purchase and

which the anime they wanted to, in the form they preferred (overwhelming uncut as demonstrated earlier).

Once they began to have access to the Internet in the early to mid-2000s, they were not only able to watch their favourite anime in their original, uncensored forms, but they were able to do so with much higher privacy, often on personal laptops rather than relying on their families' VCR or DVD player hooked up to the television in common areas. Additionally, the anime they downloaded or streamed online were usually free. Furthermore, the Internet provided an incredible array of content about anime as online anime fan communities sprung up which enabled Kuwaitis to learn more about their favorite anime and new anime alike, deepening and broadening the world of anime for them significantly. It also increased the community of Kuwaiti anime fans as more Kuwaitis became exposed to anime for the first time.

As the questionnaire participants illustrated, access to the Internet has had significant impacts on their anime purchasing practices. The vast majority of participants--97 percent--stated that they no longer purchase anime in hard copy formats and only watch it online. The reasons they gave were various: censorship, no local stores in Kuwait sell original, uncopied anime, Arab anime production companies are not dubbing fast enough, or Arabic voice actors have no talent. Furthermore, the vast majority of participants--more than 85 percent--stated that they do not purchase anime at all, even online, and instead watch it for free via online streaming (see Figure 2.3). Over nine percent of participants stated they purchased anime online, three percent bought it abroad, while only 1.9 percent bought it in a local video store. The majority of participants--80.5 percent--stated that they did not purchase anime while 19.5 percent stated that they did purchase anime.

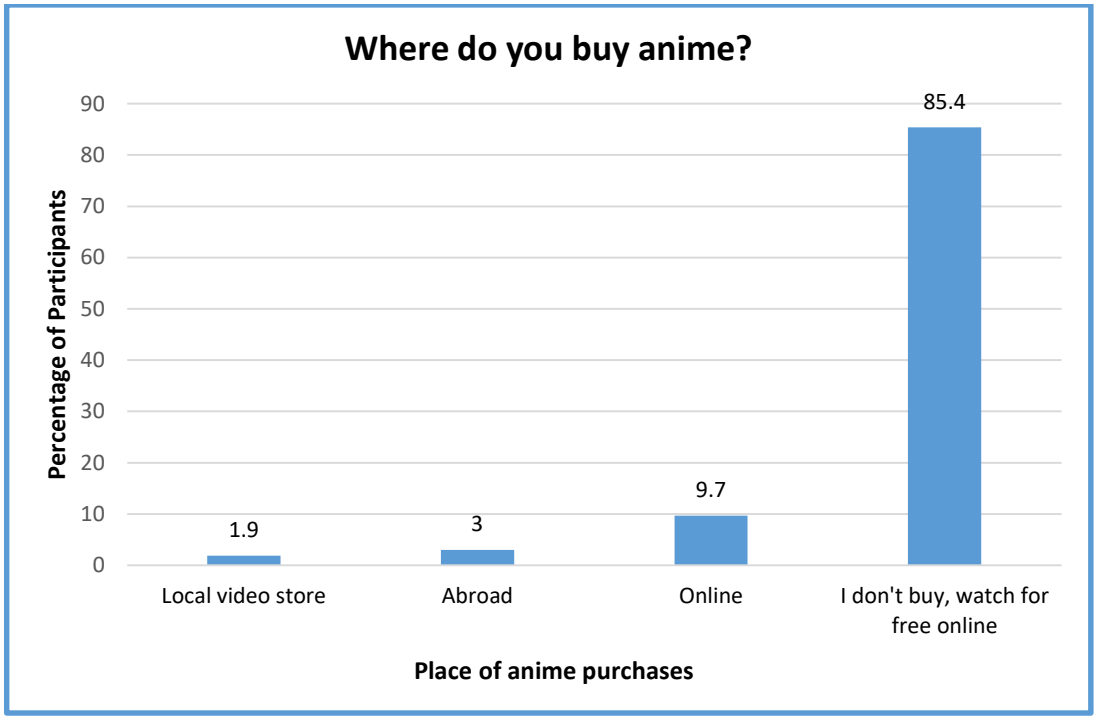

FIGURE 2.3. Where questionnaire participants buy anime.

A few interview participants offered reflections on the meaning and significance of the Internet for Kuwaiti anime fans. Tarek Al-Kandari explained, “Anime became more famous in the Middle East because of the Internet. In the past, it wasn’t that popular because not many people had access to the Internet, but now, with the use of streaming, this is possible.” Waleed Bouresli pointed out the numerous benefits offered by the Internet: “. . . when the Internet came, we stopped buying. We watched anime in our privacy at a quick speed, without waiting for the anime to be recorded on cassette, as well as free.”

The ability to read up on the various anime online represented a significant shift in the anime consumption practices of Kuwaiti anime fans. Abdulrahman Bin Nasser stated, “Anime became famous [because] of the Internet, from there people would try to research more deeper about anime.” Similarly, Awatha Al Mutairi explained that once Kuwaitis had access to the Internet, they became exposed to a much wider variety of

anime than they had known about through watching on television and could learn more about the stories and characters: “Back then [in the 1980s and 1990s] we didn’t have access to TV channels that would provide many types of anime, but specific anime were being shown, but due to the Internet, a huge variety of anime was being researched and examined, and people started to understand anime deeper for its storyline and character designs.”

For Jaffar Mansour, although he had watched anime on television for years, he did not even know it was called “anime”--he had always called them “cartoons”--until he first went online. While some of his friends in Kuwait had still called anime “anime” because of mixed Kuwaiti/Japanese parentage, for him, it was only through the Internet that he realized that Japanese anime represented a distinctive category of animated shows and movies:

When I reached 15 years old…I started to [call] those cartoons “anime”. But there are older than me, and they know it is the anime maybe the first day born because they are hybrids. Some of them, their mothers are Japanese. They know this is anime from the first place. . . I have some friends, they are hybrids. . . Kuwaiti and Japanese. Have both nationalities. So, maybe he knows that this is an anime from the first place. That's what I think. So, there are a lot of people that they know this is anime. . . I know this is anime when I reached 15 because the first time that I choose to open the Internet, when I was 15 years old, that then I know this is called anime.

Between the multiple benefits offered by the Internet--increased access to uncut anime, increased privacy, and lower costs--many Kuwaiti anime fans made the switch

from purchasing cassettes and DVDs to downloading or streaming anime online as soon as they could. Yet, among study participants, there was variation with regard to when they stopped purchasing anime on cassette or DVD and started downloading or watching them online. The switch to online happened in three waves: for some, it was the early 2000s, for others, the mid-2000s, and for others yet, the late 2000s. Furthermore, transitioning to online happened for participants at various ages. While most participants first starting downloading or streaming anime online when they were teenagers, they ranged from as young as 11-years-old to as old as 22-years-old.

Early 2000s

The first wave of participants to begin consuming anime via the Internet--the "early adopters"--started doing so around the turn of the century. Abdullah Kodor Attar, at age 16, said, "I stopped buying anime after the year 2000, and from there I started downloading them and started watching anime for free." Mahammad Al Kandari remembered, "I stopped buying [anime] when I bought a laptop, and I was 14 years old. So after the year 2000." Abdulla Al Kandari made the transition in "2002. 12 [years old]. *Naruto*, *Bleach*, the big stuff."

Mehdi el Moussaoui transition to online anime consumption illustrated how, for many Kuwaitis, it was gradual. In his case, he benefitted from the Internet before he actually started using it himself, as his cousin would download anime and share them with him in 1999 when he was just 11-year-old: "I started to get [anime downloads] from my cousin, like WMA files. Then gradually the technology became available and gradually I started to download, and I've been addicted since then. . . I didn't download

them, my cousin used to download them, and I just take them from him until I got my PC. . . in 2001."

Like Mehdi el Moussaoui, Waleed Bouresli's experience in transitioning from cassettes and DVDs to online was gradual, as Internet technology improved and became more widely accessible in Kuwait. He first started downloading anime online when he was 19 or 20 years old: "I started to watch anime online between maybe 2001 or 2002 to download anime, because at that time there was DSL connection, but in 1998 there was Internet [but] it was too slow. I used to also go to Internet cafes to download anime, and I save them in my USB flash drive, and then I would upload it to my PC so I can watch them online."

Adham was 14-years-old when he first began watching anime online on YouTube: "In the late 90s and 2000s, I stopped buying cassettes. Yeah, I started watching [anime in 2003], but then I stopped for a long while. [The first anime I watched online] was Dragon Ball…live stream. 2003, I believe I watched it online when we were just a family. I watched it online because 2003 has YouTube, and they have several options like that. I remember in the early 21st century; I started watching online. I was still in intermediate school."

The Mid-2000s

The majority of participants began using the Internet for anime consumption in the mid-2000s when Internet was much more widely available in Kuwait, and Internet speeds were faster. More of their friends and family members, such as cousins, had made the transition themselves and made them aware of it and guided them in downloading and streaming.

The increase in popularity of consuming anime online in the mid-2000s was evidenced by the marked decline in business for Al-Argham Video. As Mahamed described, the store proved to be weak competition for online anime and sales plummeted as customers realized they could get what they wanted online for free and no longer bothered buying it from stores like Al-Argham:

During 2005 we lost heavy number of customers, because due to the Internet, everyone watches it for free, and it was quick, fast, and uncut. This made our anime business decline greatly, because before the Internet we sold to our customers the anime, now with the internet in place, our business declined. . . The sales were excellent from 1993 to 2003, but since 2005 business was extremely low, because of the Internet. Manga, movies, anime everything found on the internet. . . The anime itself gave us a monthly profit no less than 2000 KD (7,135 USD), and we sold one cassette for 3 KD (10 USD).

Abdullah2 pointed out that once the Internet emerged, it made businesses like Al Argham Video irrelevant because now anime fans could do for free what they had previously paid video stores to do: download uncut anime and burn them onto DVDs: "There wasn't any place to sell [uncut]--even the places that sell these, they also download these, put it on a CD and sell it. So why buy it if you can actually download it?" The pirated anime DVDs were rife with errors, which is what led Ahmed Abu Taleb to stop buying them and start downloading them online: "I used to buy the CDs when I was 15, and I stopped buying anime when I was 17, and I stopped due to the faulty CDs."

Aziz Al-Suhely and Salah, like other participants, made the transition to online anime consumption gradually, by first downloading and then streaming, as online streaming became more available over time. Aziz Al-Suhely recalled that he made the switch as a 22-year-old: “As for me stopping to buy anime was in 2006, and I started to download anime and watch it by a stream.”Salah was 14 years old when he first went online for anime: “I stopped buying when the Internet got released, which I started to download first in 2006 and then started to view it online stream from 2007 and onwards.” Like Aziz Al-Suhely and Salah, Awatha Al Mutairi started using the Internet for anime in 2006, saying, “I never bought [anime] I always got them from someone else, and I started to watch anime online from 2006.”

Ali Methan also started watching anime online in 2006 when he was 19 years old. However, unlike the other participants, he continued purchasing DVDs even after he started going online, as he enjoyed collecting anime memorabilia. As he explained:

I have to say I do buy DVDs and whatnot because I like to have a little collection in my room. I love collecting stuff, video games, the typical stuff, but I mainly want to watch online. I think I started watching online around 2006 when I started watching things like Jing: King of Bandits, Naruto. I've watched a little bit of Love Hina, and that was right when I was 13 [in 2000]. I think it was 2006 when I started watching it online like with YouTube and whatnot. Series like Naruto, Love Hina, various stuff…It was all thanks to YouTube basically.

Late 2000s

A fewer number of participants represented the third wave, transitioning from purchasing anime on cassettes and DVDs to online consumption in the late 2000s. Fahad Oraifan said, “After the Internet appeared, I stopped buying anime [and watched online] which was in 2008.”Abdulrahman Bin Nasser remembered, “First time started to watch online was in [2009] I was 16 years old in grade 9 high school.” For Mahamed Samer Shaeen, “That happened five years ago [in 2009]. I was in Canada, and I started watching on a Crunchyroll, Crunchyroll is it? I started watching *Naruto* on that website.”

As Hussain Al-Baghli and Jaffar Mansour demonstrated, in many cases, the move to online anime consumption was facilitated by friends or family members. Hussain Al-Baghli first started watching anime online when he was 15- or 16-years-old: “Presumably by 2008 or '09 when most people started saying, like, why would you buy a cassette when you can just watch it online? I started shifting from cassette to DVDs to online. And since then, I've been watching it online. And then most anime that you want to watch nowadays are found online. Quicker, faster, and I think you can get more anime online than on DVDs and cassettes now…Since the age of technology, everything has shifted to online.”

Jaffar Mansour’s transition to online was also gradual. He was first introduced to online anime streaming in 2006 and 2007 by his cousin. But it was only when he was given a laptop as a gift that he stopped buying anime on cassettes or DVDs altogether in 2009, at age 15: “I watched [anime online] when I was 13 years old and also at my cousin's house. Then when I bought my laptop, I watched it when I was 15 years old—Naruto [was the first online anime I watched online]. My friends showed me. One

Piece, Bleach, and Death Note. I didn't catch any of them but just not because of the first episode that I watched with my cousin, that's why I watched Naruto. Then I moved on with my own. I downloaded anime with my own."

Jaffar Mansour said that once he got the laptop, he enthusiastically quit watching anime on television altogether, long fed up with the censored content, poor quality Arabic dubbing, and having to wait for his favorite shows to be aired: "I got a gift, a laptop gift, so I canceled every TV, watching TV, started watching from the laptop…uncut [anime]. Kuwait TV because cut scenes and the voice actor are too lazy. That's what I hate the most, and I should wait, wait, wait."

Jaffar Mansour explained that one of the benefits of watching anime online was that he could watch them as soon as they were released in Japanese dubbing. The Arabic dubbed versions that appeared on television took time to translate and produce and it was hard to wait. "Some of them, no, I can't wait because I adore this anime," he said.

Language, Censorship, and the Production of Meaning in Kuwaiti Anime Consumption

Structural linguistics, as we saw in the Introduction, takes as its premise that language is central to the production of meaning. Ideas emerge because of, and following, language (De Saussure [1916], 2011). Applied to the present study, I argue that, with regard to anime as text in the Kuwaiti context, language plays a central role in the meaning-making process, whether Arabic or Japanese "dubbed" anime, interacting with producers (Japanese anime producers and Kuwaiti government) and Kuwaiti audiences in distinctive ways, producing distinctive meanings, and audience responses to those meanings. That is, at times, an anime that has been dubbed in Arabic, edited,

and censored by the Kuwaiti government communicates different messages and conveys different meanings than the original, Japanese “dubbed” as participants called it, meaning, the versions with characters speaking in Japanese accompanied by English subtitles.

Participants reported strong preferences for Japanese dubbed anime, lured by their desire for what they called the “authentic” story, the one untouched by Kuwaiti authorities, not because they necessarily wanted to rebel against their government but because they craved to capture the true meanings of the stories told in the anime they loved to watch. This illustrates that participants were well-aware of the importance of language and that something important could get lost in translation. The problem of translation between Japanese and Arabic was compounded by the active and aggressive censorship efforts by the Kuwaiti authorities, who, according to reports from participants, deleted scenes excessively. According to one participant, not only would scenes containing partial nudity or sexual content be cut, but oftentimes, the scenes before and after the banned scene would be cut as well, rendering the show or film incomprehensible.

The relationship between language and meaning that Kuwaiti anime fans seemed to be sensitive to in their anime consumption practices and preferences is one contemplated by all linguists. Linguists like De Saussure ([1916] 2011) contended that language is a system of signs that expresses ideas, signs which gain their meaning from their relationships, contrasts, and references to other signs. According to Barthes (1972), signs also contain a deeper mythological meaning, or cultural subtext. The signs that constitute language can be used by the media to communicate and promote social myths, argued Barthes, such as those around gender and sexuality.

Such signification evolves into discourses which become implicated in the production of ideologies around gender and sexuality. We see a clear example of this process in the Kuwaiti government's dubbing and censorship of imported anime. Dubbing on its own is largely a language issue, and how words, phrases, and meanings in Japanese can be effectively and accurately translated to Arabic. However, in the case of Kuwait, dubbing is paired with censorship. The anime are not simply translated directly, as best as possible, from the original Japanese. Rather, the Kuwaiti authorities edit and sometimes rewrite parts of the script for the Arabic dub, with the changes intended to reflect what they consider to be appropriate for upholding Kuwaiti culture and values. What initially looks like a straightforward act of translation from one language to another— Arabic dubbing—turns out to be a vehicle for discourses promoted by the government that support their ideologies on a range of issues, including gender and sexuality. The use of Arabic dubbed anime as a discursive vehicle appears to have served as a powerful ideological tool to the Kuwaiti government, reinforcing ideological structures to the point at which they appear natural (Marx, ([1845] 1998, [1867] 1976), such as displays of masculinity and femininity and messages about gender roles in the public and private spheres.

A discussion of discourse and ideology necessarily involves representation, which refers to the production of meaning through language and therefore serves as the workhorse for ideology (Hall 1997a, 1997b, 1997c; Hall, Evans, and Nixon 2013). Representations, through language, produce ideologies. That is, language is a representational system that constructs meaning used in the production of ideologies. All meaning-making can only be accomplished through our common access to language (Hall, 1997b). It is through language, according to constructionists, that we can share

understandings and interpretations with one another. Language is one of the “media” through which thoughts, ideas, and feelings are represented in culture. It is through practices, stressed Hall (1997c), that meaning is produced, the exchange of meaning taking place among individuals. The media circulate these meanings more widely, raising questions about power and the ability to circulate meanings, illustrating how representation, power, and ideology are bound up together (Hall, 1997c).

Applied to the present study, the language of the anime, whether Arabic dubbed or voiced in Japanese with English subtitles, can be seen as a vehicle by which messages are transmitted from the anime and meaning is generated for the audience. Different messages will be conveyed by different languages. Arabic dubbed anime served as a convenient vehicle to distribute messages deemed appropriate by the Kuwaiti authorities. In this case, the Kuwaiti authorities held the power to circulate meanings, including those around gender and sexuality, via anime aired on government-run television channels.

The discourses and ideologies around gender and sexuality communicated by the Kuwaiti government via Arabic dubbed anime, as well as those communicated by Japanese anime producers, are constructed with the support of binary oppositions, which suggest that the meaning of something sometimes depends on its opposite (Barthes, 1972; Lévi-Strauss 1961, 1995). The concept of gender clearly relies on binary oppositions given the construction of gender-as-difference and ideological messages transmitted from across society’s institutions that gender is biologically essential (Butler 1990; Foucault 1978) and that male and female, man and woman, masculinity and femininity are defined in opposition to one another, with masculine meaning unfeminine and vice versa (Connell, 2005). Over time, such messages produce

rigid gender stereotypes, which also rely on binary oppositions (Butler 1990; Foucault 1978). Dominant notions of sexuality are also reliant on binary oppositions, with heterosexuality and homosexuality defined in opposition to one another (Sedgwick, 1990; Yep, 2003) and with the prevalence of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980; Tredway, 2014) and heteronormativity (Sedgwick, 1990; Yep, 2003).

During the early period of anime in Kuwait, the government has significant power over the circulation of anime in the country which enabled it to dispense its ideologies around gender and sexuality by supporting anime that did the same and editing and otherwise censoring anime that challenged these ideologies. The removal of scenes with nudity, sex, or even sexually suggestive content are common examples of the government's censorship activities that targeted content that contradicted its gender- and sexuality-based ideologies. But as the participants illustrated in this chapter, as technology continued to advance, first with the cassette, then the DVD and Blu-Ray and finally the internet, audiences had increasingly easy access to uncut anime, which they largely preferred over censored anime. That is, as the audience's power to circulate meanings strengthened via their consumption of anime that they accessed directly, the government's power to circulate meanings diminished via anime it had altered through dubbing and censorship.

This dynamic between producer and audience in the circulation of meanings and the meaning-making process which, in the case of anime, has been dramatically disrupted by technology over the last three decades, illustrates Hall's (1997c) contention that meanings can never be fully fixed and only result from the negotiation between media producer and audience rather than controlled by the producer alone. Thus, while the Kuwaiti government's power to circulate meanings via Arabic dubbed and censored

anime was significant, enabling it to construct and perpetuate ideologies—which serve to fix meanings—for its own benefit and for what it deemed as beneficial to the nation, this power was ultimately incomplete. Furthermore, in Hall's (1997c) view, the act of consumption only takes place when a media-transmitted message has meaning for the audience. And messages can only have meanings for the audience when they interpret and translate the coded information that comprise the message into a form that makes sense to them. This means that Kuwaiti anime fans, as the audience in this case, play an active role in producing the meaning of the anime they consume. This role continued to expand as technology made it easier to put the anime that they preferred to watch in their hands, in the language they preferred to watch it in, giving them greater and greater influence over the circulation and consumption of anime in Kuwait.

Anime and the Transmission of Gender and Sexuality Based Ideologies

Anime, whether Arabic or Japanese dubbed, has served as an effective vehicle to transmit these hegemonic messages about gender and sexuality to Kuwaiti audiences. Here, we see the areas of overlap between ideologies around gender and sexuality in Japan and Kuwait: although the Kuwaiti government made significant alterations to the the imported anime content through dubbing and censorship, much of the original content remained in tact, including the depictions of male and female characters and masculinity and femininity more broadly. Such depictions typically included dominant male heterosexual protagonists who were physically stronger and mentally sharper than female subcharacters, echoing the patriarchal messages about hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity in Kuwaiti culture.

This alignment between the messages circulating in Kuwaiti culture around normative gender and sexuality and the messages transmitted via anime to Kuwaiti audiences represents a critical force that has driven much of the popularity of anime in Kuwait, particularly in its early days in the country. That is, from the beginning, Kuwaiti audiences have been drawn to anime imported into Kuwait from Japan in large part because of their depictions of masculinity and of male dominance which echo the hegemonic depictions of masculinity these audiences are steeped in since childhood as members of Kuwaiti culture. Kuwaitis have learned to value the traits associated with hegemonic masculinity in Kuwait as part of their socialization process and when they saw these same traits depicted by the characters in the anime, they felt an affinity for the characters, whose behaviors resonated with them deeply. Kuwaitis learned to aspire to possess the traits that define Kuwait's definition of an ideal masculine man and then found powerful visual and audible representation of such an ideal in the form of masculine male protagonists in their favorite anime. The synchronicity between the messages about gender and sexuality already circulating in Kuwaiti culture and those transmitted by the imported anime led to a strongly positive reception by Kuwaiti audiences, as the appeal of anime reached far and wide in Kuwait.

Anime Fandom, Technological Change, and the Freedom to Consume

Both supply and demand for uncut anime within Kuwait grew, starting earnestly in the 1990s. The freer flow of anime on cassettes empowered the black market where the uncut versions were sold. As a result, anime consumers were increasingly able to bypass the government's censorship activities and consume unaltered, "authentic" anime content. Participants reported that the desire for authentic, uncut anime drove them to

the black market more than a desire to view racy, sexually explict, and other mature content banned by the Kuwait authorities. Once they were exposed to uncut anime and could compare it with the Arabic dubbed, censored version they watched on television, they realized the extent to which the authorities were altering the content, not merely translating from Japanese to Arabic. This first moment of realization of the extent of the censorship was, for many participants, like a glimpse into an entirely different world—still a world of anime but one untainted by the government's agenda. With this glimpse, they wanted more, and reinforced their efforts to seek out and consume only uncut anime going forward.

The technological changes that came starting in the 1990s would facilitate these efforts by Kuwaiti anime fans to access uncut anime, fueled by their insistence watch anime on their own terms. First, as participants recounted in this chapter, they could illegally purchase or rent cassettes. Then came the DVDs and Blu-Rays. Their access to uncut anime exploded once the internet became increasingly available in Kuwait the early 2000s. Participants reported that they transitioned their anime consumption online in three phases during the 2000s: early adopters, middle adopters, and late adopters. By the end of the decade, Kuwait anime fans were comfortably consuming most, if not all, of their anime online and skillfully navigating the cyber anime worlds created by the internet, to purchase and consume anime, and to interact with other anime fans. They had achieved a milestone by reaching the point where they felt they had total control over their anime consumption, free of any filters or mutations created by censorship. Reaching this point gave them a sense of freedom in their consumption and a deeper and more meaningful connection to the content they consumed.

This newfound freedom to consume marks a shift in the positionality of Kuwaiti anime fans in the digital age. It is a shift that began three decades ago when cassettes became available and they no longer relied solely on television programs on government-run channels for their anime consumption. What we see in the digital age, with fans enjoying widespread access to internet-based anime, is a significant shift in power dynamics between producers and consumers in Kuwait, providing fans with greater power and agency than they had previously (Pearson, 2010). This shift illustrates that fandom is a particular kind of engagement with the power relations of media culture (Duffett, 2013). The shift may even suggest a "new economy of fandom" which supports new types of relationship between fans and artists and proposes new ways of thinking about what it means to be a fan (Galuszka, 2015). As the participants made clear in their descriptions of their anime consumption practices and how they changed over time, technology facilitated their consumption and drove its change. That is, the two sets of changes—changes in technology that enabled anime consumption and changes in consumption itself—happened in tandum, consumption patterns following technological advances in how to watch anime. The participants also demonstrated that as their consumption became freer, uninhibited by censorship, they could extract new meanings from the messages transmitted by the anime, creating more meaningful relationships with anime characters and stories.

Conclusion

This chapter explored how and why anime consumption practices among study participants have changed over time, examining the important roles that technological change, censorship, and increasing access to uncut anime have played in shaping such

practices. Participants traced changes to viewing formats--from the early days of television to cassettes and DVDs, to online downloads and streaming. They recalled their first encounters with anime and manga as children, described the language preferences they developed over the years. They explained how they negotiated with censorship of anime content and found ways to watch anime on their terms through accessing uncut anime facilitated by the black market of uncensored cassettes and DVDs and the emergence of the Internet.

Based on the data collected and the conducted interviews, it has brought to the conclusion that the Kuwaiti anime consumption has been altered and changed within time by the advancement of technology, which made a significant impact on how the Kuwaiti anime fans have various means to view their anime and more freedom to practice anime consumption towards their leisure. The next chapter builds on these findings by examining participants' views on the gendered dimensions of anime and how participants' anime consumption practices are themselves gendered.

CHAPTER 3

Gendered Anime:

Masculine Anime, the Feminization of Anime, and Sexualized Fan Service

While the last chapter explored the anime consumption practices among study participants, this chapter examines participants' views on the gendered dimensions of anime and how participants' anime consumption practices are themselves gendered. First, participants discuss the various ways in which they define and think about masculinity and how it is depicted in anime. Next, participants share their recollections of masculine anime they watched and loved as children. Then, participants report on their observations regarding the changes in anime content over time, explicitly, the trend

towards feminization and sexualized fan service in the new generation of anime and the current state of masculine anime.

The chapter reveals that how participants define, interpret, and respond to depictions of masculinity, femininity, and sexuality in anime are informed both by dominant ideas and practices regarding gender and sexuality circulating in Kuwaiti culture and by the anime content itself to which participants have been regularly and heavily exposed since the 1980s and 1990s. As such, both Kuwaiti culture and anime culture--itself reflecting numerous aspects of Japanese culture--interact in a variety of ways to inform participants' views of gender both within the world of anime and beyond.

Views on Masculinity in Anime

Reflecting on how they define and think about masculinity and how it is depicted in anime, participants offered a range of perspectives with notable areas of overlap. One key distinction among responses was whether participants believed that physicality--physical strength and prominent, large muscles--represented an important component of masculinity in anime characters. While none of the participants suggested that physicality alone defined masculinity, there was a clear split between those who insisted that it was, at least sometimes, a key characteristic of masculine among others related to personality and deeds and those who did not mention physicality at all in their descriptions of masculine anime characters, focusing exclusively on personality traits and deeds.

Upon analysis of the participants' responses, some common themes related to physicality, personality, and deeds emerged in the ways they described masculinity. By

physicality, participants generally meant physically strong, muscles, and powerful. Personality traits consisted of being a “man among men”, moral, independent, serious, fearless, ideas, responsible, strong in mind, and/or wise. For those for whom masculinity consisted of deeds, or actions taken by a protagonist, participants mentioned keeping one’s word, sacrifice, following through to the end, being a leader, powerful, protecting and rescuing others, and fixing one’s mistakes.

Personality and Deeds

Sacrifice

Many of the participants mentioned sacrifice as one of the defining features of masculine anime characters. Jaffar Mansour saw both self-sacrifice and the ability to rescue others as part of his definition of a masculine hero, stating, “like Detective Conan…he rescues his wife.” He went on to say, “If it happens sometimes, sacrifice it's okay. Sometimes a female sacrifice herself, that's the most tragedy ever...[If a man sacrifice himself for a woman], I see it as masculinity.” He elaborated, explaining that sacrifice and protecting or rescuing others are not the only ways that masculinity can be expressed:

It depends. Sometimes [it’s] not sacrifice, sometimes just go on, fight and fight with all he got and they win…Let me say, in Naruto, the most I like about the Naruto anime is Rock Lee, he's normal human. He tries so hard to be a man of war himself. Even though he don't have a jutsu, but he's still powerful. He sacrifices himself when he opened the new gate…He's still alive…[he] sacrifices his bloodline, I mean, not his life directly. So,

he said he don't give a shit and takes the new gate, and his health become slower, slower, slower. Maybe he's dying. That's the masculinity part.

For Mehdi el Moussaoui, a number of characteristics represent masculinity: “Strength, justice, kindness. I mean, resolve to do something to the end, whatever the consequences is, he just goes through with it and sacrifice, benevolent stuff like that. This is my ideal ones.”

Living Up to His Word

Mehdi el Moussaoui’s view that masculinity involves “resolve to do something to the end” even if it means personal sacrifice echoed that of several other participants who insisted that a masculine character is one who lives up to his word and does what he says he’ll do “to the end” even if it entails excellent personal sacrifice, even death. For them, living up to one’s word and sacrifice often go hand in hand among masculine characters. Abdullah Kodor Attar illustrated this view well when he said, “It’s like the man should take responsibility for what he says and what he does till the end. He must do it, till the end, even if it cost him his life. He must be up to his word.” Similarly, Salah stated, “The man must be a man among men, and he must take his position to protect and keep his word, and that is the position of a man who has masculinity, even if he has muscles or not.” For Aziz Al- Suhely, keeping one’s word to the point of sacrificing their own life represents just one of several traits of the masculine character. In his view, it also involves leadership and fixing one’s mistakes. Overall, it is about taking responsibility which includes living up to one’s word and bringing things to completion as promised, regardless of the consequences. As he described:

It's like the person, he must do all the things that he must do for others and himself. If he says he will do it or thinks he will do it. He must be a leader, people should depend him and look at him as a leader. Even if he made a mistake by saying it, he must fix it. He must take responsibility even if the hero is about to die he must finish or complete what he said, and even if he died and he completed his task, that it proves till the end that he is a man among men and that he proved himself till the end.

Other Personality Traits

Participants also discussed other personality traits they associated with masculinity. As Jaffar Mansour explained: "Masculinity is, like, courage, noble and…if everybody laughs at you and you cry, it's not feminine, it's masculine in my opinion. Why? Because he suffers from his heart. [Sometimes it means becoming famous] like Goku in Dragon Ball. He was a normal human but it appears that he's a Saiyan and he saves the earth and now he's famous."

Jaffar Mansour also insisted that any action/adventure masculine hero "mustn't have so much drama. I hate drama and romance, I hate." For him, a little drama woved into an action anime can make sense for the story but it should not overwhelm the action and should not devolve into romance. Ultimately, an action/adventure masculine hero must be engaged in response: "We want some anime, we want some action, not just drama. Drama, okay, his family died, okay. Now he never give up, that's okay, fine. No drama, love, I love you; no, not that."

For Waleed Bouresli, "masculinity is a man who must face forward and not look back." Ahmed Abu Taleb emphasized that even if the character is not physically healthy, they can still display masculinity in other ways: "It focuses on the person or characters

design…for example, Guyver really affected me, because he wasn't firm with his body, but when he took the machine, he became powerful."

Awatha Al Mutairi pointed out that masculinity is really about physicality and thus, is not reserved only for men: "It doesn't mean only masculinity comes to men, but also a woman can become masculine, and it doesn't mean he has muscles, but it depends on his personality and how he acts, and as for the woman also, it doesn't mean just her appearance, but towards more her ability and power. Attitude is also important."

Physicality, Personality, and Deeds

Most participants expressed the view that masculinity is composed of various characteristics and can look different in different contexts, including physicality, personality, and deeds. However, they differed in the traits they emphasized.

Abdulla Al Kandari and Mahammad Al Kandari maintained that masculinity is primarily about physical strength. As Mahammad Al Kandari put it, "In my opinion, as a man, he must have muscles, it doesn't mean extremely huge, but you can show me some muscles, but it mainly focuses on the body. As well, his personality must be strong, not weak." Abdulla Al Kandari largely echoed these sentiments, saying: "Always it's about muscular men that don't have a problem going through a wall…They can be intelligent, but they don't have to be. As long as they get things through even mostly with violence, like Jojo…Kenshiro also…The high school of men…It's also about this high school that basically teaches you to be the man. I think it's from the same artists who made Kenshiro…[the principle is] a male. Whenever he says his name, something happens. Like all the windows in the school breaks."

Ali Methan said that masculinity could be displayed in a variety of ways, emphasizing physicality, personality, and deeds: “I think it can be. . . various. . . different from person [to person] though. It can be the muscles, and how basically [for] some men, masculinity is basically trying to overcome yourself, trying to overcome your own limits. And in terms of personality, it also happens to be like, not being afraid of anything. Try to overcome your own fears. Basically try not to care what anyone else thinks and try to do everything that you can. Always try to be proud of the decisions that you make and...yeah, stand your ground and basically never back down from a fight.

Hussain Al- Baghli concurred, explaining that it depends on the anime or the character and includes a wide range of traits: “A mighty man…I believe masculinity is everything. Everything has to do with either attitude, looks, abilities, see any personality specifics, anything that gives you the essence and…like if the aura or the feeling that this character is masculine…it depends on everything. Then…some people are masculine by their body shape. Some people are masculine by their ideas, by their personalities. Some are masculine by their abilities…it depends on which anime or how the person is.”

Adham also emphasized both the physical and personality aspects of masculinity with views that were clearly informed by definitions of masculinity in Middle Eastern culture, which he said emphasizes seriousness: “I would say masculinity is a combination of both [physicality and personality]. Your personality…How you see morality, or ethics, your principles, how you live basically. As well as physical appearance. Like, if you're willing to sacrifice if you're awful if you're the same way…Like, if you're a serious person, because in the Middle East, being a man who

rarely jokes or usually is professional in the way he deals with people and doesn't know humor, joke a lot, is seen as a very mature, masculine person. And, appearance does play a role."

Similarly, Abdulrahman Bin Nasser insisted that "masculinity is both mind and muscles." He elaborated: "I would prefer to see someone strong in both mind and body. I love an example of masculinity in the anime called JoJo. The protagonist uses his brain and [is] wise. He mostly depends on himself, not heavily towards others. Even though the protagonist looks old, but he is actually young."

For Fahad Oraifan, a key component of depictions of masculinity involves the way that men and women relate, suggesting that masculine men are not overpowered or controlled by women: "In my opinion, masculinity is a man who is strong and willed power that he would take things deep and responsible that proves his position. Where the woman should not order the man or try to abuse him or even try to control. Every person has a role, and the male has his own role and the female has her own role."

First Masculine Anime Watched

Participants' views on the defining features of masculine anime characters were further demonstrated when they shared their memories of the first masculine anime they watched and their favorite masculine anime throughout childhood.

Hokuto No Ken

Several participants expressed great affection for the anime *Hokuto No Ken*, citing various aspects of the series that, to them, made it one of the most masculine anime available. Abdullah Kodor Attar said emphatically, "*Hokuto No Ken* was, in my opinion,

the best anime…even the main protagonist or even the evil characters, were all masculine." Mehdi el Moussaoui said that this anime-influenced his future anime consumption: "Hokuto No Ken, this is the most masculine thing I have ever watched…Incredible. Actually, from that, I started to watch lots of gore because the animation itself circles around gore scenes but overall, this was the manliest thing I ever seen."

Fahad Oraifan cited one of the protagonist's physical battles against enemies as evidence of his masculinity: "My first anime which I saw was a Hokuto No ken the movie, and I loved it. The main character Ken which I loved and the sub-character was called, Rei, who I thought he was feminine, but after he took off his hoodie, he showed his true masculinity when he battled against his enemies." Adham, again citing seriousness as a masculine trait in Middle Eastern culture, said that the main protagonist in *Hokuto No Ken*, Kenshiro, fully embodied this ideal:

Hokuto No Ken is quite spectacular. It's ideal [for the man to sacrifice to save the woman he loves]. To save the woman he loves, to avenge, to help people, to help the needy. The absolute manhood, and one thing that if you noticed in Kenshiro personality, is that he's serious. He's most of the time, 99 percent of the time in the series, was that he was fighting someone or he's serious, which adds to his…How can I say this? To his prestige or personality because in the Middle Eastern cultures, for some, the more you show you become humorous, the more you talk, that decreases your masculinity.

Grendizer

Grendizer, one of the first anime to make its appearance in Kuwait in the 1970s and 1980s, left a lasting impression on many Kuwaiti anime fans. According to Abdulla Al

Kandari, along with *Hokuto No Ken*, *Grendizer* represented the height of masculine anime: “I'd still put Grendizer [as] the first [anime that I watched] that I would consider masculine. The first I would look up to and I say, this is a man that I want to be like. Well when it turns to muscle, I would say Kenshiro…But yes, they were people that I wanted to be like…So I would say Grendizer, Hokuto No Ken and Romance of the Three Kingdoms.” Aziz Al- Suhely cited the masculine features of the robot in Grendizer: “The first anime I watched in Arabic dub was Grendizer. At a young age I was interested in the robot’s masculine design as well as the story.”

Dragon Ball Z

When *Dragon Ball Z* was released in Kuwait in the 1990s, it was one of the first anime in the country to be shown in Japanese dub; previously, virtually all anime were shown in Arabic dub. It thus marked an important turning point for anime in Kuwait, exposing Kuwaitis to the original production with the original voice actors speaking in Japanese. Because it was not dubbed in Arabic, it was also subjected to less censorship than other anime and the original story was generally maintained. Combined with the fact that it had heavy masculine overtones popular with Kuwaiti audiences, *Dragon Ball Z* quickly gained iconic status among anime in the country.

When recalling the first masculine anime he watched, Jaffar Mansour had two responses: one for Arabic dub and one for Japanese dub, demonstrating yet again the important role that language played in many Kuwaitis’ anime consumption: “When I was young, young, young, either *Detective Conan or Kaiketsu Zorro* [in Arabic]. And *Dragon Ball* in Japanese when I was 13 years old.”

For Ali Methan, watching *Dragon Ball Z* was not merely a form of entertainment but a source of inspiration and guidance for how to be more masculine in his own life, in which he was a victim of bullying, and to learn how to be healthy and stand up for himself:

The first masculine anime that I remember watching was, of course, a Dragon Ball Z. I thought it was interesting. The thing is I kind of got picked on a lot when I was younger, and I've always wanted to be strong as half these people. They never really backed down and try to prove myself, to be the best that I can and basically like…not really fight, possibly just try to, like, defend myself in various dangerous situations and try to think of a smart way to overcome myself and try to get out of that situation as quick as possible. 'Cause [in] Dragon Ball Z…whenever there's a massive attack that's coming at them, and they try to find a way to deflect that attack. For example, there was a scene in the Buu Saga where Vegeta is fighting Super Buu and Vegito is trying to get this massive ball of energy off of him because he's, like, trying to push it back and he basically ends up finding a way to...he basically uses all of his might to push it back and off of him. And I think onto Buu in which Buu basically dodges it.

For Hussain Al- Baghli, *Dragon Ball Z* represented the first masculine anime that he watched and really loved: "That was in, I think 1999 or at the beginning of 2000. Ever since I started watching it until now, I still love it. It's standing, and the idea is just perfect. About how masculine and how the characters are, how they're interpreted. Each character is more masculine than the other at a certain point."

Adham recalled that *Dragon Ball Z* was the first masculine anime that made him think "this is masculine", citing the seriousness with which characters addressed problems and their willingness to sacrifice themselves for others:

[The first anime] I thought it was masculine was basically Dragon Ball when I was a kid. When I was a kid, I saw Dragon Ball as masculine because you had characters who sacrificed themselves to save others, and some people…They would have contradiction their personality where you being humorous, have them see them turn. Then they turn, they're facing a problem. They take it seriously. That's a sign of masculinity right there. You have characters who, for example, are weak. When they're facing some antagonist, they find out that they're weak, so what they do is that they go back and deal with that problem, or they train, train, and train hard. They push themselves beyond their limits to become stronger. They don't just break down and start crying, which is disgusting.

For Aziz Al- Suhely, what made *Dragon Ball Z* masculine was its physicality depicted during battle scenes: "As for the first Japanese dubbed anime subtitled in English, it was Dragon Ball Z, the movie where Goku battled Frieza. Dragon Ball Z had by far one of the best masculine fighting scenes' I had ever seen in my whole life, and it showed a new atmosphere and some battle scenes no one could ever think of before…In my own opinion, I loved Dragon Ball Z, because of the hero's personality, Goku. Where he did not give up till the end and show amazing battle scenes that no one would ever think about."

Berserk

Salah also enjoyed watching *Dragon Ball Z* but found *Berserk* to be more mature, with more nuanced storylines and depictions of masculinity, which went beyond physicality to include ways of thinking: "In my opinion, I preferred Dragon Ball Z, but it wasn't mature, but when I saw Berserk, not only the main character was masculine but also the army that was following Griffith, who was also another main character but became evil, had also masculine trait of thoughts, that they would follow the leader till the end. The storyline was deep, and the same goes with the ideology."

Abdullah Kodor Attar loved Berserk for its masculinity: "I would say the characters that tend to have masculine features, grasped the attention of the anime fans in Kuwait. I watched Kabamaru, Grendizer, but I love the most is Berserk, for the story and masculinity." Similarly, Mahammad Al Kandari cited Berserk as the first masculine anime he ever watched: "For me, it was *Berserk*, because the main character had everything that a man should be or can be able to be. He didn't give up, he was a straightforward, strong personality, and trained hard to be able to be strong."

Guyver

Guyver was also known for its depictions of masculinity among Kuwaiti anime fans. For Ahmed Abu Taleb, it represented the first masculine anime he watched: "I would say Guyver, because he wants to save his uncle and his girlfriend, and so he was battling so much enemy and sacrificed so much of his own body to save the people he wanted to protect." The series was formative for Fahad Oraifan's ideas about what masculinity means, who first watched it when he was still quite young: "The first anime I watched in Japanese dub was in the 1990s when I was 7 years old and watched the

Guyver the OVA series, subtitled in English, which showed me a clear picture of masculinity based on how a person defends and saves the people he cares about."

Other Anime

In spite of the huge popularity of the anime discussed above, the wide variety of anime available in Kuwait when the participants were first exposed to masculine-heavy anime meant that participants cited a range of anime that they remembered as being the first masculine anime they had watched. Like the other anime discussed in this section, the participants' responses illuminated their views on masculinity and what it meant to them. Awatha Al Mutairi said, "For me, it was *Rurouni Kenshin*, not with the way his body was, but on how he was and he used his masterful skills to attack and protect his friends." For Abdulrahman Bin Nasser,"it was *JoJo*, most of the characters have unique bodies, and even the weakest characters are still considered masculine."

Like Awatha Al Mutairi and Abdulrahman Bin Nasser, Waleed Bouresli's definition of masculinity emphasized personality and deeds over physicality, citing the protagonist *Conan the Future Boy: The Big Giant Robot's Resurrection* and his commitment to his grandfather, seeing it to the end: "In my opinion, I prefer the story of the main character which was designed by Miyazaki Hayao, called, Conan the Future Boy: The Big Giant Robot's Resurrection. Based on his masculinity not body features but his personality and towards his decision. The main character tries to follow his grandfather's will, or his request, and he follows it to the end."

For Mehdi el Moussaoui, *Captain Majid* was the first masculine anime he remembered watching, seeing it as source of guidance: "I liked it because it was very famous and it used to give me a role model that, the kid started off in small clubs and he

gradually became a famous player. I think I liked the action to the whole movements. Even though it took a long time for him to make a shot, to take a shot, I really liked it."

He elaborated on his preferences regarding depictions of masculinity in his discussion of a number of other anime he has watched, preferring muscle anime over gore. Regarding *Shigurui*, he said: "[It's] gore-ish, but I didn't like them because I don't like this, I like the muscle structures, I like the muscles. But I didn't like the captivated stuff and the sword in the foot and et cetera, et cetera." Regarding the anime *Bailisk*, he had this to say: "Basilisk, no, not masculine, it was really borderline Hentai [anime pornography]…Too much nudity and too much hentai and also too much gore and sadness. I don't mesh with sadness too much…A lot of drama. Stuff like that. What I do like is the anime from the 70s, 90s, 80s, these are my top favorite. Even if I didn't watch them at my own time, I still watch them now, and I still collect them like crazy."

Many of the "old" generations of anime to which Mehdi el Moussaoui referred--those from the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s--are widely recognized among Kuwaiti anime fans as being masculine-heavy. Hussain Al- Baghli, who has watched a wide variety of masculine anime, assessed the field of masculine anime similarly:

There's a lot of other anime's [that I watch that are masculine]. Okay, specifically from Hokuto no Ken or Fists of the North Star, you have JoJo's Bizarre Adventure. There's an anime that not many people know about but it's from the same creator of Fists of the North Star. It's Sakigake!! Otokojuku. That's also a very masculine anime. Another masculine anime, it's like mostly from the '90s and '80s. That's most anime I've actually seen that interpret masculinity there. 1980s and 1990s. That's most of the anime's I can think of right now that are in, that pop in my head right now.

Gendered Changes to Anime over Time:

Feminization of Anime, Sexualized Fan Service, and the New Masculine Anime

For most of the questionnaire and interview participants a clear split exists between anime before and after 2000. The changes cited were wide-ranging--including style, plot, character design, as well as an overarching feminization of anime, with more female protagonists and female-driven stories and an emasculation of male characters. While some participants preferred these changes, others felt that they amounted to a decline in quality of anime overall. Among the questionnaire participants, 20.4 percent expressed a preference for the new anime, while slightly more, 25.2 percent, preferred the old anime, and the majority--54.4 percent--expressed no preference, liking both the old and new anime (see Figure 3.1).

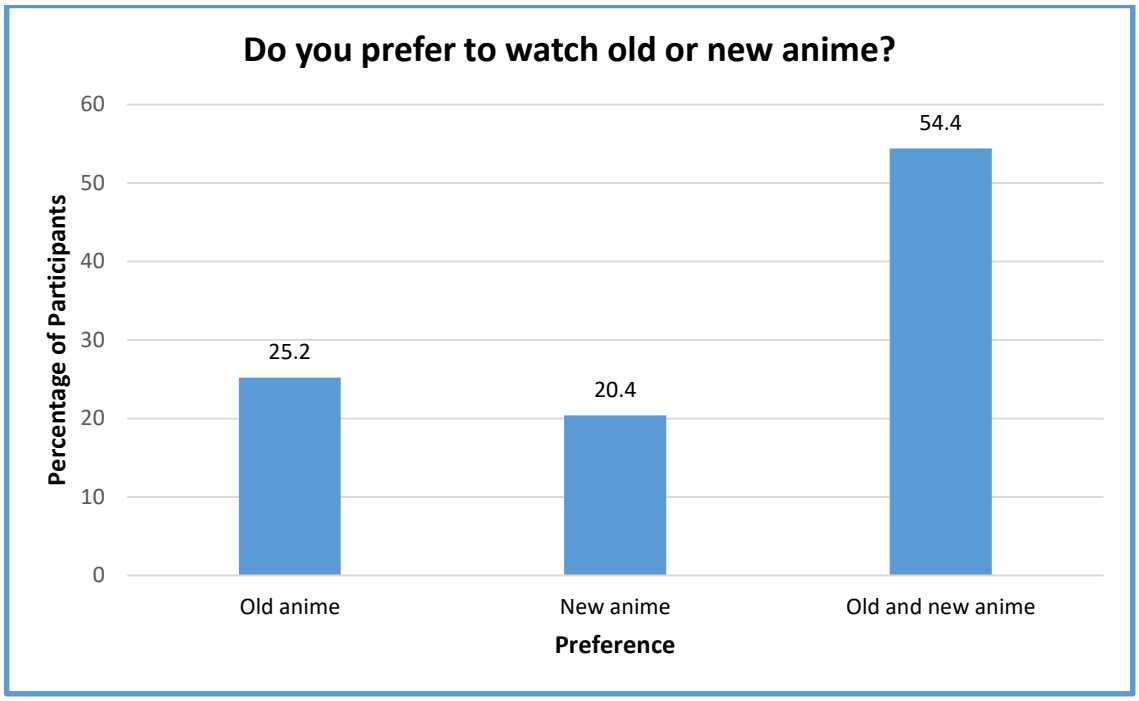

FIGURE 3.1. Preferences for old and new anime among questionnaire participants.

The interview participants expressed mixed reactions to the changes as well. Some, like Farhan, believed that since the turn of the century, the quality of anime has

diminished. As Farhan put it, "'80s was the best! '90s was WOW. 2000 was…for me, it's like, the best anime you've ever seen was like 2000 and before. It's different [now]."

Abdullah2 concurred, noting how the change has led him to dramatically reduce his anime consumption: "It changed. It changed a lot. [anime since 2000 are] so so…I used to watch four or five anime series that I would watch regularly, every week. Now, only two." Acknowledging that many of the new anime depict female characters who are stronger than the male ones, he stated, "I don't mind the girls doing that but don't make the main character a weak one. Give him a character, give him a personality--a good personality."

According to Abdullah2, the changes he noticed to anime around the turn of the century were largely due to an increase in censorship in Kuwait, citing numerous titles that were censored after 2000:

Censorship actually changed. That's actually one of things that I draw from watching anime. The sources from Japan, [Kuwait's Ministry of Information], censored the animation. The blood, the cuts, the fight scenes…I don't know when it started, but there was one, and I went and watched it, and I was like, why is the whole screen black?…Tokyo Ghoul [was] censored, Terraform [was] censored. There's…Deadman Wonderland, that was the one, maybe one of the first animations that came to Kuwait. It was something different. The first [scene] was totally black. I couldn't see anything. When I went to, I searched online. Then it came up as the whole class room was filled with dead bodies. That's why they censored it. I think…Eternity Blood maybe was censored. Cuz it's all, you know, cutting and blood.

One shift Abdulla Al Kandari noticed in the new generation of anime is the increased use of comedy: “There's that big need for comedy. Like in Kenshiro...Sagoor al Arth…Even Grendizer, Gogaiger, Gundman. The older generations, they did not have that much. They had the story, but they didn't have the comedy. Now, the comedy scenes, even this, at least the small scenes are being very, very essential.” He also noticed a bigger presence of idols in today’s anime, such as in Macross, in which the male hero has blue hair, two main female characters, with lots of singing and flashy colors: “The idol representation. They do have that. Yes…[females actually help to stop the aliens.] If you took, there's this enemy, there is about idols and aliens that basically generate noise. And the idols actually are basically superheroes that use the songs to defeat them. I think that's kind of the same thing. Idols are becoming more of a bigger element in animation.”

The use of flashy colors in Macross seems to represent a trend in newer anime towards brighter colors, as Ali Methan noted while questioning whether the change has come at the expense of quality storytelling: “That is definitely true [since 2000 anime are mostly focusing on cool or fashion]. Like there's a lot more colorful anime out there. The thing is though they're trying to make it look very appealing... And it does...I mean in some cases it does look kind of appealing, but another case it's just, where's the story?”

The Feminization of Anime: Changes in Depictions of Masculinity and Femininity

Both the questionnaire and interview participants were virtually unanimous in stating that they have noticed an increasing “feminization” of anime since the 2000s, which encompasses significant changes to both male and female characters and the

storylines. Depictions of masculinity and femininity have changed, as male characters are now often portrayed as weak or as lacking the traditionally masculine traits associated with the “old generation” of anime, while principle female characters are increasingly common. Female characters are often portrayed as stronger than the male characters, as overpowering male characters, or even as abusing them. Female characters rescue more than they are rescued.

The vast majority of questionnaire participants believed that male protagonists began to appear as more effeminate at one point in time or another, while only 5.8 percent of participants did not see such a change. Most participants--92.3 percent--stated that they believed male protagonists in anime started appearing more effeminate after 2000. 7.8 percent reported that the trend started between 2000 and 2005, 13.6 percent said it started between 2005 and 2010, while the majority--44.7 percent--believed it started in earnest between 2010 and 2015 and 26.2 percent stated that it started more recently, between 2015-2020 (see Figure 3.2)

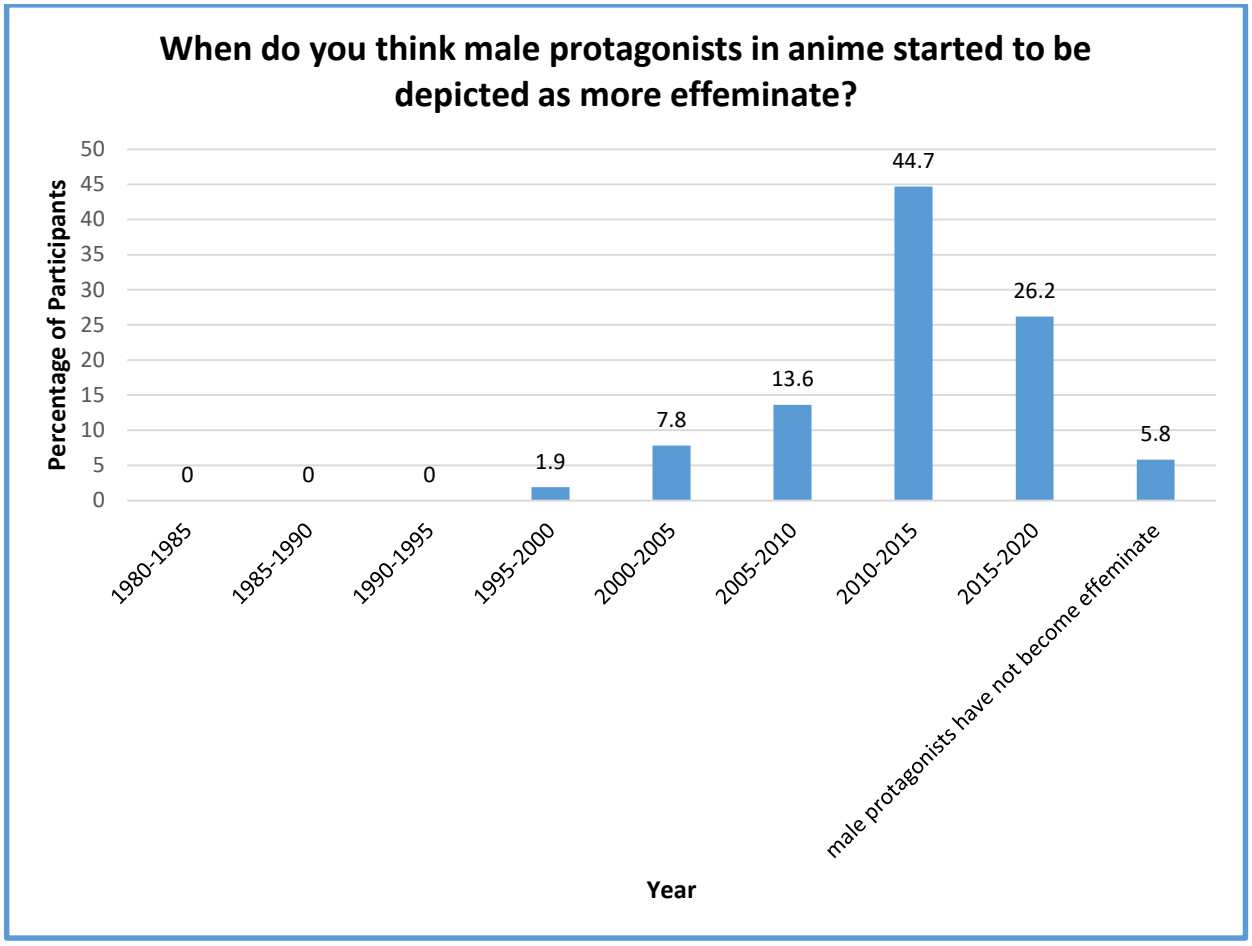

FIGURE 3.2. Time when male protagonists in anime started to be depicted as more effeminate, according to questionnaire participants.

Furthermore, most questionnaire participants--89.3 percent--believed that anime protagonists--both male and female--are increasingly depicted as gender transgressive (see Figure 3.3). That is, they found the male protagonists have become more effeminate while the female protagonists have become more masculine. Only 10.7 percent of participants did not believe such a trend in anime has been taking place.

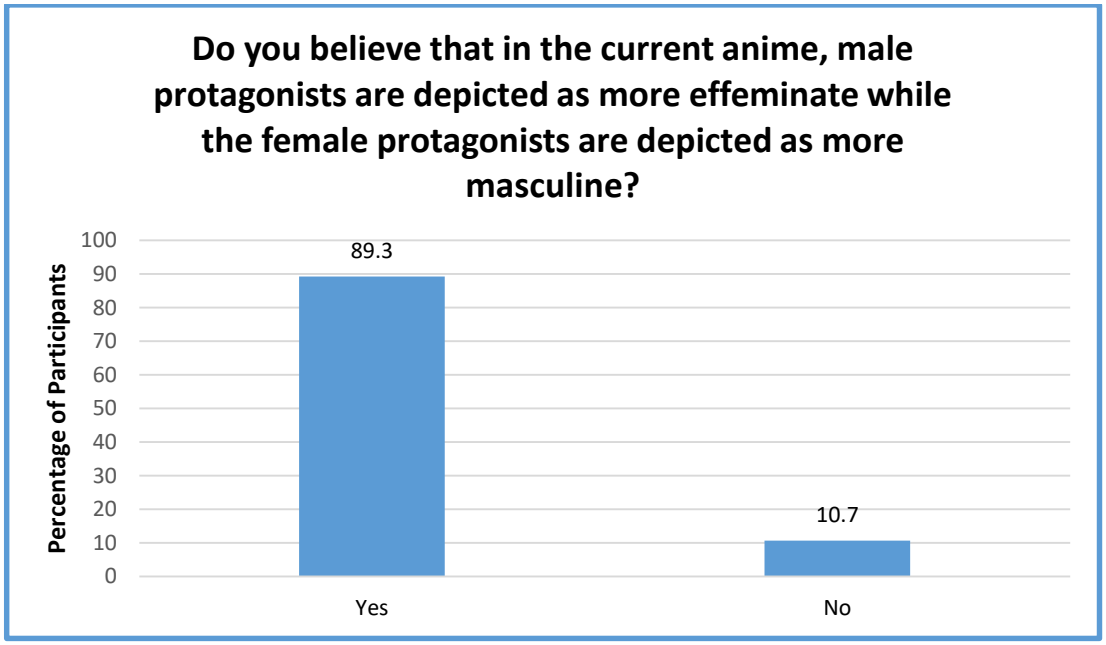

FIGURE 3.3. Percentage of questionnaire participants who believed that in the current anime, male protagonists are depicted as more effeminate while female protagonists are depicted as more masculine.

The interview participants largely concurred with the sentiments of the questionnaire participants. Hussain Al-Baghli offered a couple of examples of newer anime that demonstrate this female-centric shift: "I think it's called *Witchcraft Work[s]*. That's one example. I think there's another anime… focuse[d] on female characters, *Kill la Kill*. That does fit, that focuses on female characters more than actual male characters." He elaborated on his observations of the trend, noting that this feminization of anime included the creation of anime targeting women and girls, which was new: "I think [depictions of masculinity in anime] decreased a lot during the, not the beginning of the 2000s, actually by mid 2000s, 2005 and onwards. I think that this is the point where it actually decreased. By that time, from what I've seen in the new anime franchises is that they, this is the point where they actually started creating, like, female anime. Like, girlie anime, something that is not what we're used to."

Adham noticed that anime became more feminine starting around 2000, noting the substantial number of anime fans who are women and girls during this period and, like Hussain Al-Baghli, the anime that target them:

I've watched several anime of that type…like Mirai Nikki. Every time I just say Mirai Nikki, I just feel my brain cells are committing suicide one after the other. I would say that anime industry start to become feminized from…2000. Wasn't Sailor Moon [a girl-targeted anime in the "magical girl" genre featuring girls who use magic or possess magical powers] made in 1999?…I understand there is lots of female anime fans…I understand that it's becoming a huge trend where the masculine is diminishing. To give an accurate date, I cannot really say that but know, from 2000, masculinity started to go down. I think one of the last masculine work of the last century was Berserk, which was made in 1999. Basically, toward the final days of the golden age. For example…Curse of the Vampire. There are other anime like that.

Mahamed Samer Shaeen said that he believed that Japanese anime has become more feminine. "I've noticed that in the anime nowadays," he stated. He offered one explanation for the shift: "I think it's because of globalization. All that woman's rights and stuff that started a long time ago and now it's showing the results in the things we watch, in the books we read, movies not only anime, everything else we can see that and it's only reflecting in anime."

Similarly, Jaffar Mansour attributed the changes in anime to differences in culture, specifically, the increasing prevalence of gay and transgender children around the world:

"Look, before in the old ages--'90s--it was masculine, or more masculine. Why? Because you're a man. Nowadays, you see children; they act like gay…children in real life. Over the world. Yeah, and there are gay, there are shemales. So, that's why they made [feminine] anime, and now nobody complains about it. Why? Because the children are like their styles. And emo style, like Sasuke, emo style. It's like feminine, I believe, not male. Yeah, there were changes."

Aziz Al-Suhely offered his explanation for the shift away from masculinity in anime: the culture has changed such that it is simply not profitable anymore. He elaborated:

The anime industry now is focusing heavily on market value, and focusing on what people want, in order to gain profit and not about masculinity. What the people want, they give. Masculinity did fall not just in anime but in society, because men these days have become soft, and men today doesn't want to become a man and want to protect, and now society has started to believe that men and woman are not so much different, but in fact men and women are very different. Today's society only believe that you are a man if you are born a man, because you have hair in your face and genitals.

For Aziz Al-Suhely, the new, emasculated anime is simply a reflection of the emasculation occurring in the culture more broadly. As he saw it, masculinity has diminished in society at large--in which men are "soft," "don't want to become a man", and don't "want to protect"--such that the differences between men and women have been deemphasized in the culture. To him, it seems that a man is now only defined by his physical characteristics, including facial hair and genitals, not by any personality

traits or deeds that he would consider masculine. His insistence that “in fact, men and women are very different” shows that he disagreed with this cultural shift towards minimizing the differences between men and women. For him, the changes to anime are unsurprising, given these cultural changes, as “what people want, they give”.

Mahamed, manager of Al-Argham Video, noticed the shift away from masculine anime, which also resulted in reduced business. At his store, the older generation of anime was much more popular: “Everything, they bought everything, the old school anime--Conan, Mazinger, Grendaizer, Berserk, Captain Tsubasa, especially the anime movies--bought us heavy business sales, due to masculinity, everything in the past brought me profit, but now the anime consists of less masculinity.”

According to Mehdi el Moussaoui, “after the 2000s…2005, 2003 or four, everything changed dramatically”. For him, the most significant changes regarded the depictions of masculinity and the design of male characters:

The whole masculinity things has degraded...For example now usually you see a hero, he's one of four types. Either he don't care, he have a strong ability but he doesn't don't care, he's just lazy. Or he's focused in his work but he doesn't have an ability. Two, he's loved by a million girls and he doesn't care about anyone [like in the harem genre of anime]…And the third one he has everything but he hates the world for an accident that's happened to him. One of these four and there is always that has to be cool, long haired, sharp eyed, and that's it.

He noted that depictions of femininity, the design of female characters, and the relationships between male and female characters have also changed: “There has to be

always a feminine companion which kicks him. For example, she either dies, she either fell in love with someone else, she either fell in love with him, she either hates him. There is definitely one of these character stick to the main character, which basically is the whole use."

He explained that the quality of the artwork has declined which has influenced a change in the way he engages with anime and his motives for watching it: "Basically to be honest I watch anime now just to see the story. Arts is a secondary thing now, like the story I watch, [if] I don't like it I just delete it."

Abdulla Al Kandari described the changes to anime and to the male and female characters this way:

It's not just...the art and the current change. The action changes the story change. Before 2000 I would say, or 2005 something like that…there was a [masculine] man who wanted to save the world and did everything he can and most of the time, they would succeed. The female was still the prize of the battle. However, now, yes, we do see the ignorant, stupid…naive, hard-headed maybe, man--or boy, most of the time now…high school boys, 16, 17 [years old] maybe--they come up, they encounter a lot of problems that they can't solve either an enemy or a situation and the girl take care of this situation.

He went on to explain the changes he has noticed in the depictions of masculinity with weaker depictions of male protagonists, largely as a result of fan service and more sexualized depictions of female characters:

It's not about the muscles and the action anymore. It's about [personalities]. It's about events, and it's about personalities, it's about fan service. You see there's a lot of...I can't even count them. There is a lot of anime where they see two girls or a girl and a monster getting in a fight and the clothes get ripped off and something shows…There's a lot of nudity inside the fight…FAN SERVICE. Because I actually did not like some of the new anime that came in that had a very good potential, that had a very good story, but that extra package would, it kind of ruined it to us. For instance…Sword Art Online…He is a wuss. I would say he is a wuss. His level 999 but he's still a wuss… It's not like [Gogaiger] it's not Grendizer, it's not Sugoor al Arth anymore. There's all those anime where they put this incompetent, unworthy men and then they put, not necessarily the girls, somebody else that is just stronger than him.

Describing the anime *Break Blade*, a mecha (machines) anime, Abdulla Al Kandari noted that while it had some masculine elements that characterized mecha anime of the 1980s and 1990s, it also depicted a weak male character, a common feature in post-2000 anime: "I've seen [Break Blade], [it's] about the mecha [machines] that works with quartz…He's not masculine as in terms of muscle, but it's a mechanism. It's a Mecha cartoon. It's a Mecha anime. So you focus more on the machines more than the person. Although he did have an old rusty machine. It was powerful. He did some action. He did kill some--or destroy--some Mechas. [The masculine element] was kind of there. Although there's still, there's still the girl element, the guy who is stupid, incompetent."

He also noted a shift in the portrayals of female characters and corresponding depictions of femininity. One change was the emergence of harem anime, in which a male character is surrounded by many female characters who adore him and even fight

over him: “I think [the increasing feminization of anime] started in the 2000s where we see harem a lot. There's a lot…There is even in those, like even Evangelion, the girls are always fighting for him. You can see that…with Kenichi. The whole dojo and everybody is fighting for him.”

For Abdulla Al Kandari, this shift also encompasses a different way of situating female characters in relation to the male characters in which they have more agency, strength, and active roles in the storylines: “The girl is more...brought to light. She's no more...no longer the prize. She's no longer…the motive for the guy who saves the world. She's actually a playing role. Sometimes she's the hero. [For example, the female character Sakura in Naruto] she has like super strength.”

In discussing the anime *Blue Gender* and *Blue Seed*, Abdulla Al Kandari noted similarities and differences in the portrayals of male and female characters in the two anime. While in *Blue Gender*, the female characters played much more central roles than male characters, Blue Seed “was different because…the man does play a role.” He acknowledged, however, that the principal female character was depicted as dominant: “Although the girl did have the tactical knowledge, the talent, she knows how to drive a mecha [machine]. She had to teach him actually. She actually kind of raised him to be the hero.”

The changes in the depictions of male and female characters according to Abdulla Al Kandari, could also be seen in their physical appearances, stating that since the 2000s, the body styles of males and females were often very similar with females portrayed as more muscular and more significant than before:

They're very close when you compare it from the 90s, yes. Because before from…the '70s, '80s, '90s, the men are huge. They're muscular. They're usually darker in color. They're brownish. And the woman were small, they're tiny. Add some animation like Sugoor al Arth and Fist of the North star, there were huge. The woman were basically handheld. And yeah, that changed. Now they're almost the same size. Well, there's one anime I kind of liked: Air Master. The female, she was huge. She wasn't very muscular, but she had a lot of good muscle. She had strength, and yeah, it's changing.

Ali Methan has made similar observations in the newer anime he's watched. "I've noticed that with stuff like Naruto...It's focused on him, but yet Sakura is far ahead of him in talent [and she's stronger]." He has also noticed increasing attention paid to the female characters. But for him, this has sometimes occurred at the expense of the storyline.

In some aspects…she's more focused on…like, at least in Shippuden. And the thing is, we have characters that we're supposed to be focusing on. Yet our main characters are, like, overshadowed by other characters or even female characters. Like, there was an anime that I remember watching called Magikano…I just did not like that anime at all. I was like, so wait, we're starting with this male character that we're assuming is the main character yet, the focus is then changed to these female characters, which the writing is okay, in some episodes, but just the main idea was kind of annoying and the fact that we're not supposed to let the male character know about magic because he ends up becoming like this thing that destroys reality and they have to reverse…

Ali Methan elaborated that he did not have a problem with the more prominent roles that female characters were playing in, the newer anime. However, given that the principal character was still generally male, more focus on the secondary, female characters confused the plot:

As for me, I don't mind 'cause, the thing is, I grew up with like cartoons where it was either the male that was the main character and was saving the female…but I grew up also with scenarios in which the male was in trouble. And it had to be the female that had to save him…The thing is, I don't mind if the female character is there to help them out in moral support or if they both help each other out. But when it comes to a point where you focus on the secondary characters or the female character more than the main character, it's like, the focus is kind of lost.

For Jaffar Mansour, the portrayals of female characters in the newer anime are not always welcome, such as when they become selfish, which he seemed to see as contrary to femininity. He had this to say about the principle female character in the anime *Bleach*: "Rukia, I hate her. The character Rukia. She's like Sakura from anime Naruto. Okay, she's selfish, she fights and sometimes she has a feminine side but selfish most of the time. I hate selfish characters. But if it were for the men, they make jokes. I like selfish characters [sometimes], but in feminine no, I hate when they become selfish." He said he preferred the kinds of portrayals of female characters found in older anime, like *Dragon Ball*: "There's a character in Dragon Ball when Goku was young, too much young, there's a female, whenever she sneezes she has another… form…when she

sneezes, she becomes a normal innocent girl, sneeze again, she becomes more [of a] man and [violent]. But it's more fun. That I see [is normal].”

Jaffar Mansour said that he also preferred female characters that “beautiful but straight”, meaning heterosexual. He has noticed an increase in gay characters in the newer anime, which he said brought welcome comic relief to anime. He said he did not have a problem with gay characters as long as they were not the principal characters: “Masculinity has changed [starting in 2000]. Gatchaman Crowds in the old ages, the character wasn't gay; now it was. The character was gay, or the main character was gay, or there was a specific character that was gay. The old generation, there weren't any gay characters. [When there are gay characters in the anime], I laugh. There is now, and they make anime more interesting because I laugh. They make me want to see it more comedy. But I don't want a gay character to become the main character.”

Adham acknowledged this gender reversal trend in which femininity and female characters are emphasized rather than masculinity and male characters: “Yeah, masculinity has been decreasing. Females are seen as the ones protecting the male, and the male rarely decides to take action to improve himself.” He illustrated his observations using the example of the anime *Mirai Nikki*:

For example, Mirai Nikki, a certain episode, you have this weak person who defiantly stood against the female, the lady. I forgot her name that was basically…harming [his] friends, and he decided to do what a man does, step in and stop her from harming his friends. Just the next day, he returns back to her…basically reducing his masculinity by a billion percent. Now, you stopped her from hurting your friends, and you slapped her.

I'm not saying slapping is something masculine...But, he took something, he use impact, and now you're robbing of that impact by turning back to her.

In these scenes, Adham highlighted how an action by the weak male character that he interpreted as masculine--protecting his friends from harm--was uncut when the male character "turn[ed] back to her". To him, such scenes represented this trend towards diminishing masculinity in anime, one which, in this case, prompted him to alter his anime consumption, as he quit watching this anime, which, he found out through reading up on it later, only got worse: "Once I reach that point, I just stop watching the anime. I just read what happened, and to my [dismay], he becomes a god, and for 10,000 years, in the end, he does nothing but cry over her and sitting and moaning over her. He's a god who can create worlds, life, and he does nothing...for 10,000 years. Until finally, the OVA was released where the other version of her in another world, unites with him, and he's happy, and now he lives happily ever after as a god. Which is a complete, utter disgust for me."

For Adham, it was despicable to portray the principal male character as distraught over an absent love interest, especially as a god. The juxtaposition of being all-powerful and having the ability to "create worlds, life" while simultaneously displaying such weakness by "doing nothing but cry over her and sitting and moaning over her" was beyond the pale in his view and seemed to represent the worst of this trend towards feminization. What seemed to offend him the most was that the god was only happy once he was able to reunite with his love interest, which suggested a dependency on the female character for his happiness--an extreme display of weakness and lack of masculinity which left Adham disgusted.

Adham offered another example of depictions of diminished masculinity in Elfen Lied, a science fiction and horror anime with extreme violence, gore, and nudity with a female principal character. It was a television series that was released in 2004. As he described, one of the male characters displayed extreme weakness in the face of murderous female characters, one of whom he even kissed, even though she violently murdered his family members:

In my opinion, he wasn't the main hero. In my opinion, he was a sub. Why on earth are you here? I think the anime is about a lady with psychological issues understandably. The girls are turning people into meat pies…His masculinity has been reduced so much to the point that [I wondered]: What's your role? What are you doing? Kissing her? That's it? You kiss her, and...Seriously. She decapitated your own father. Ancestor. And, all you can do is grab her shoulders and tell her to stop? What logic is this? No…I think finally, he found out that when she came back to him after she escaped from the lab and stuff that she's the one that butchered his father and sister, and for her to live with him, like wow.

Clearly, this male character did not act in ways that Adham would consider masculine. He kissed and even lived with, a woman who killed his father and sister, acts that seemed to shock Adham. The male character displayed weakness by not doing more than "grab her shoulders and tell her to stop" in response to her decapitating his father. What seemed to offend him most was the depiction of abuse by a sub female character of a main male character who seemingly does nothing to stop it:

[There are] many types of anime in which actually the lady can abuse the [man] the point that it preaches that she is abusing the man. She's abusing him, and all it can do is whine, and scream, and yell, and do nothing basically, as just under her fingertips. It's absolutely crazy, especially if it's supposed to be a protagonist or some sort of support character, not an antagonist. The main character [is being] abused. [The girl is a sub character] and she's abusing him? It's like, what the hell? I understand that there is all this creativity [in the new anime].

For Adham, portrayals of weak characters are not inherently problematic. Rather, the problem arises when the character stays weak when there is no development from weak to strong, which, in his view, is perfectly exemplified by *Mirai Nikka*: "[If] they want to make an anime about someone who is weak, of a weak personality, which with time changes and a stronger personality, that's understandable. But for example, what happens in Mirai Nikki? Zero character development. Absolutely zero. I dare anyone to tell me what's the difference between--I forgot his name, and I don't want to remember his name--[in] the beginning of the anime, and in the end when he becomes the god, what changes in his personality? What?. . .What's the difference? He loves her in the end? That's it? What?" It is clear that, for Adham, for the male character to simply express his love for his love interest at the end was insufficient character development and perhaps even demonstrated his continued weakness, as discussed earlier.

Ali Methan shared Adham's view regarding character development: a weak male character is acceptable when they develop their strength and grow into their masculinity with the help of other characters throughout the series. As he put it:

The thing is, what I like about some anime is that they have characters that there are characters that you can have started as weak like Simone from Gurren Lagann. And I saw him as a weak character, and he kind of looked up to his brother. But when his brother died, he slowly kind of grew into this character that became really, tried to be more independent, and he tried to lead a whole team of people. And yet there were people that helped him out on the way. And that's what I like about a lot of anime is that, things like Dragon Ball Z and eve, to an extent Naruto and Bleach. The element of other characters is trying to support the main character and thus expanding his masculinity in a way.

Abdulrahman Bin Nasser expressed similar ideas about the meaning of masculinity and femininity as Adham, pointing to the "high school boys" anime--ubiquitous in the new generation of anime--as an examples of the feminization of anime: "In my opinion, I feel the characters have become more feminine, for example, he doesn't know how to act, he wants to find someone to help him or guide him. But you could say, it's a temporary excitement especially characters that are considered 'high school boys'. These high school boys really annoy me, these weak-minded personalities." In this description, Abdulrahman Bin Nasser only highlighted personality traits--weakmindedness, passivity, dependency on others--not physicality, in his judgment about the lack of masculine characters. This reflects the earlier discussion around the participants' definitions of masculinity, that sometimes, they view masculinity in terms of personality, other times in terms of physical appearance. To show that not all new anime are emasculated, he contrasted these "high school boys" anime with another anime that came out during the same period: "There is some anime after 2000, called

s-CRY-ed. Even though the protagonist doesn't have muscles, but his personality is wild, and he doesn't give up."

Again, his description of the protagonist in *s-CRY-ed* demonstrates the varying ways in which the participants view masculinity. He again emphasized personality traits over physical appearance--even though the character did not have muscles, he had a "wild" personality and "doesn't give up", two traits that he associated with masculinity. Yet, when he elaborated on the high school boys anime, he demonstrated this his definition of masculinity does include both personality and physicality. When asked when he felt anime became emasculated, he responded by saying: "It's about time I felt when anime has started to increase the majority of heroes who tend to be high school boys, weak-minded, no muscles, just skin. No strong will, nothing…The new generation consists of just personality, not masculine traits, high school boys, and lots of fan service. The old generation anime has a story, masculine traits, and personality as well."

As his statement makes clear, the lack of physically masculine traits that characterizes much of the new anime illustrates this trend towards feminization and emasculated male characters. Thus, for him, physicality is ultimately one aspect of masculinity, along with personality. He described the high school boys as "weak-minded, no muscles, just skin", combining personality and physicality to make his point that they have become emasculated. For him, the old generation of anime was better than the new not only for its physical depictions of masulinity--"masculine traits" but also for the masculine personality traits and substantial stories.

Mahammad Al Kandari's assessment of the new anime was quite similar to Abdulrahman Bin Nasser's, considering them to be more feminine, evidenced by the

physical weakness, with bodies that look like female bodies, and also using the high school boys as examples of this trend: "[In] anime before, you can tell easily the male character were big and strong, now it mainly focuses on high school boys [who are] thin and look weak. For example, in Naruto, the body structure you don't see them masculine, but just see them on their base of powers, the male body looks similar to the female bodies. You cannot compare the body structure of Berserk to Naruto. Even Naruto personality is weird, where the main character transforms into a female to sexually tempt other male characters, kind of [makes me] question…Naruto's sexuality."

Both Ahmed Abu Taleb and Awatha Al Mutairi also singled out the high school boys anime to illustrate the split between the old generation and the new generation of anime. Ahmed Abu Taleb stated that while he did not think that post-2000 anime had been "fully" emasculated, "I noticed it". He summed up the difference between old and new anime as one between an emphasis on *shonen* (boy) anime with the former and *shōjo* (girl) anime with the latter: "Before 2000, most of the anime I saw was shonen, but most of the shonen characters considered to be masculine, but now it focuses more towards shōjo, that is maybe one of the reasons, but even if it wasn't shōjo, I believe it has to be with the increase of high school boy themes."

Similarly, while Awatha Al Mutairi could not say that the depictions of masculinity in anime necessarily "decreased" after 2000, she acknowledged, "but as you look at the character designs, you cannot see the main character to be strong and masculine, and as I noticed most of the characters now tend to be young and high school."

Sexualized Fan Service

For the majority of participants, fan service in anime--material which is intentionally added to please the audience--represents one of the primary drivers of the changes seen in the new generation of anime. Fan service includes any material which has no relevance to the storyline, but is designed merely to excite and titillate viewers. Although a broad range of material can be classified as fan service, including cool robots, big explosions, and battle scenes, it most commonly includes racy and sexualized depictions of female characters, such as scantily-clad outfits, cleavage shots, panties shots, and nude scenes.

Most participants believe that much of the fan service is targeted at a specific sub-group of anime consumers: the *Otaku*. *Otaku* is a Japanese term with multiple meanings but generally refers to the "obsessive" anime viewers. The Otaku subculture represent a large and critical portion of the anime fan base; as such they appear to wield a significant amount of influence on the types of anime that are created and their content.

The vast majority of questionnaire participants--93.2 percent--believed that anime has changed such that there is often less story and more fan service (see Figure 3.4). Only 6.8 percent of participants did not believe such a change has been taking place.

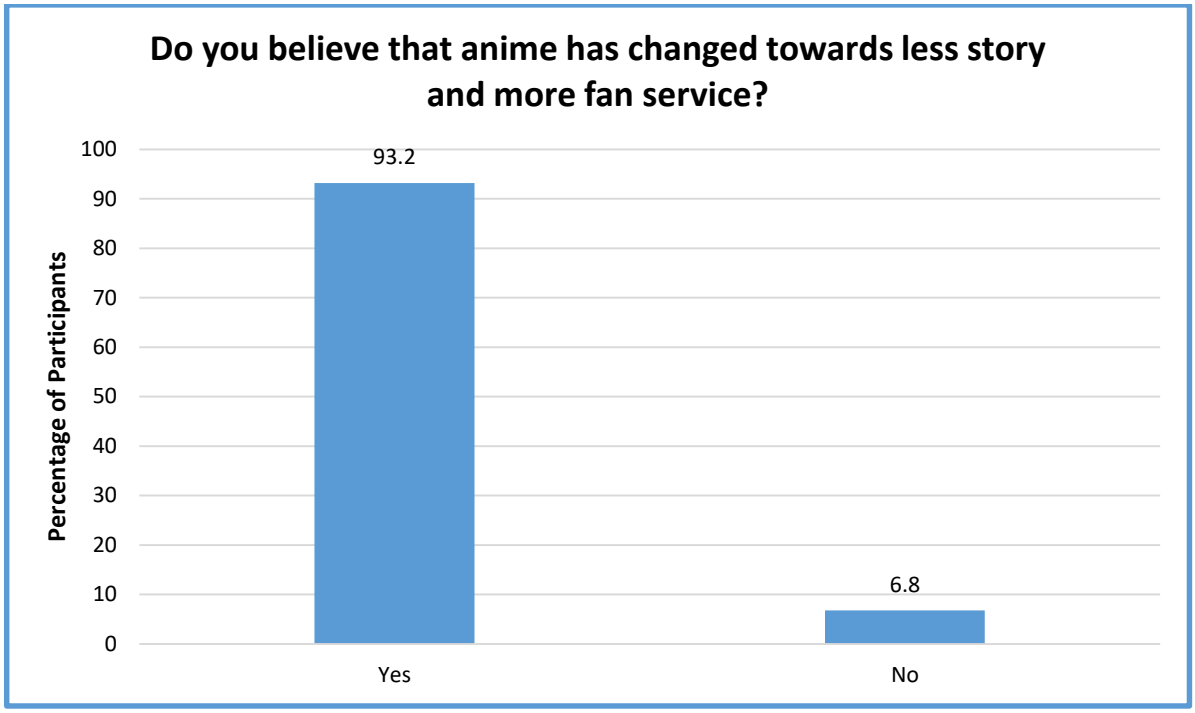

FIGURE 3.4. Percentage of questionnaire participants who believe that anime has changed towards less story and more fan service.

While 5.8 percent of participants started to see an increase in fan service in anime in the 1990s (between 1990 and 2000), most participants--92.2 percent--saw the increase after 2000. 10.6 percent of participants noticed an increase between 2005 and 2010, while 52.4 percent saw the increase between 2010 and 2015, and 26.2 percent saw the increase more recently between 2015 and 2020 (see Figure 3.5). Almost all participants--over 96 percent--believed that too much fan service ruins anime while slightly less than 4 percent did not believe anime is ruined by too much fan service (see Figure 3.6).

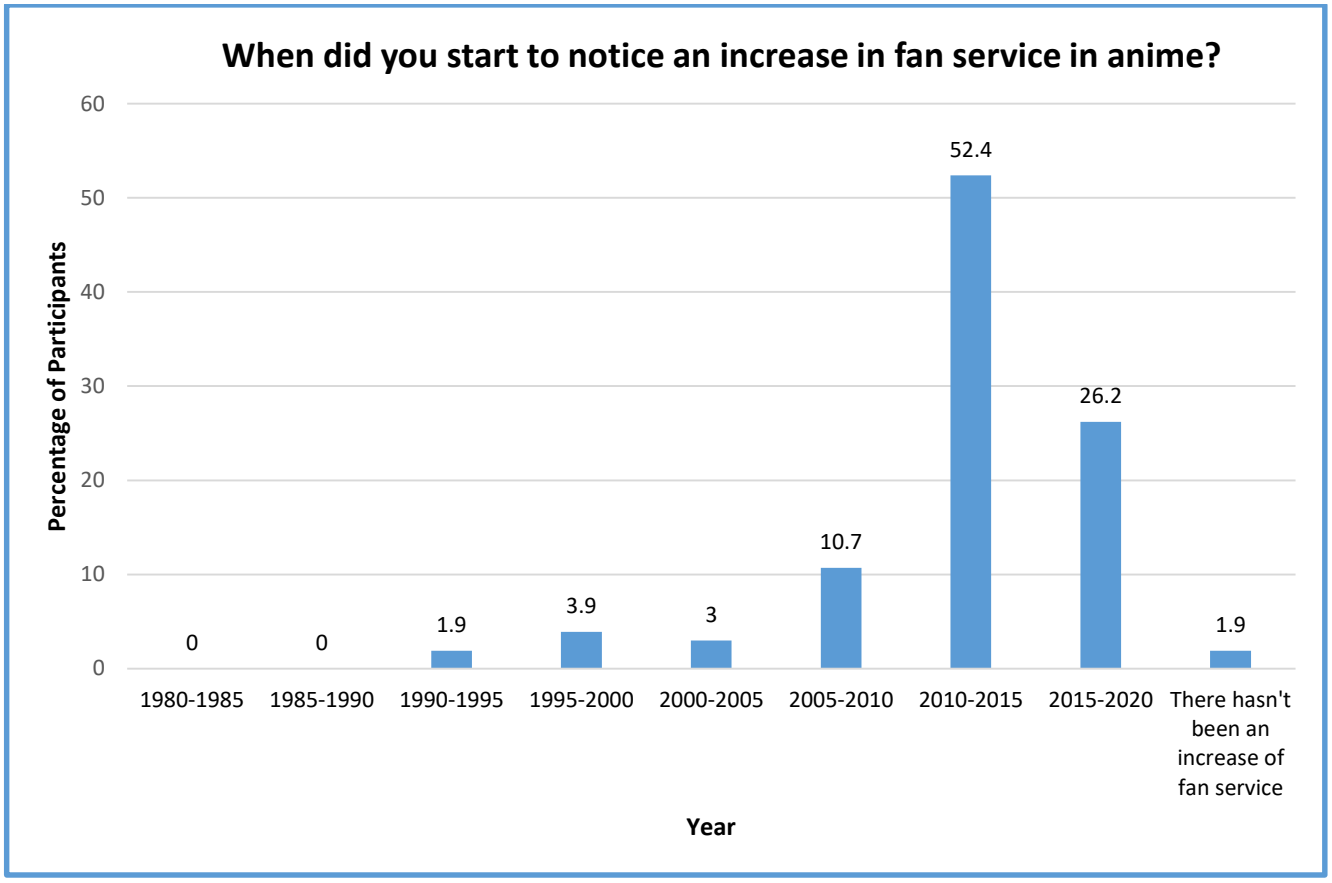

FIGURE 3.5. Time period when questionnaire participants started to notice an increase in fan service in anime.

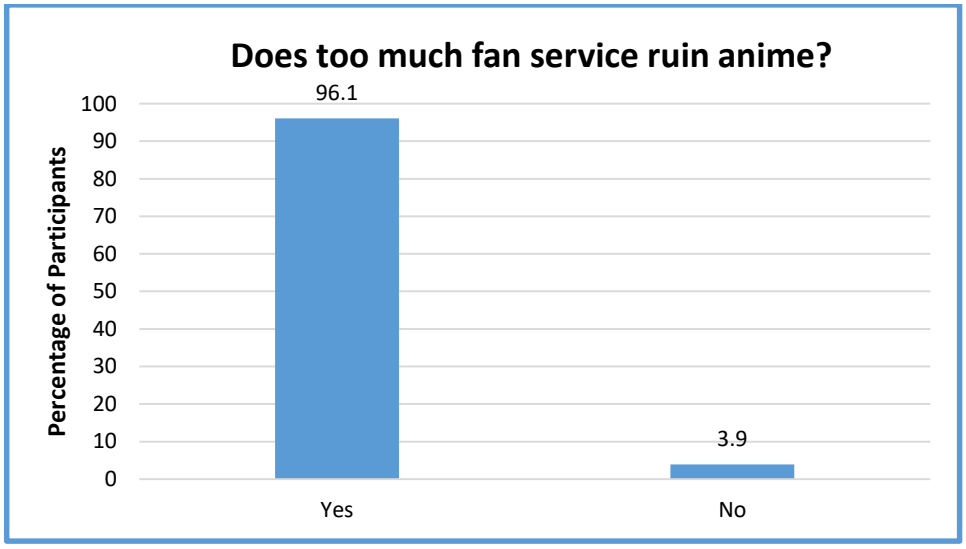

FIGURE 3.6. Percentage of participants who believe that too much fan service ruins anime.

However, the sexualized fan service seemed to offer some benefits to participants. When asked if they had gained new insights on sexuality from watching anime, such as through depictions typical of sexualized fan service (e.g., Japanese school uniforms, kissing, sex, as well as gender transgressions) most questionnaire participants--85.4 percent--responded affirmatively while 14.5 percent of participants stated that they had not (see Figure 3.7).

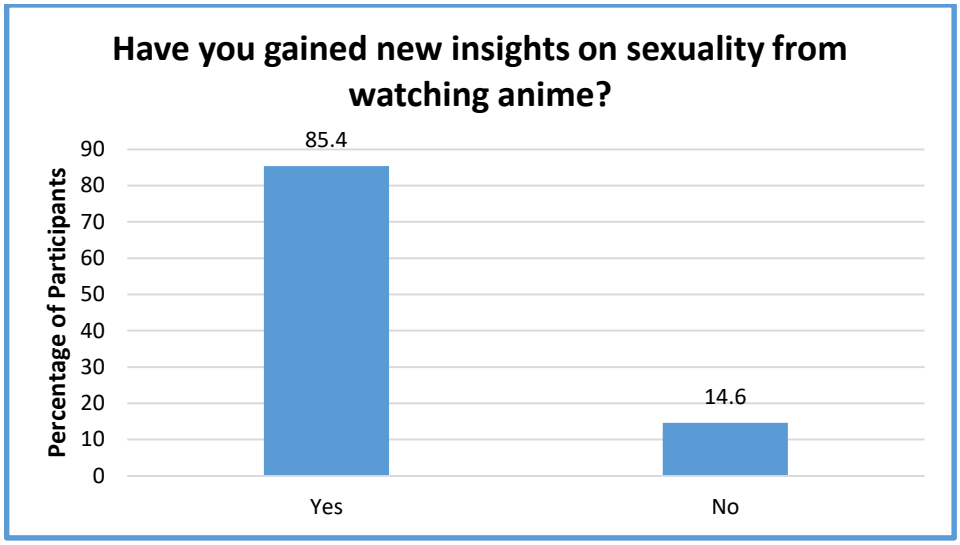

FIGURE 3.7. Percentage of questionnaire participants who report gaining insights on sexuality from watching anime.

Regarding the issue of Otaku, most questionnaire participants--75.7 percent--believed that "Otaku" has a definite meaning in Kuwait while 6.8 percent believed it had a negative or very negative meaning. 17.5 percent of participants believed that its meaning is "neutral" in Kuwait--neither positive nor negative. Furthermore, most participants--62 percent--did not describe themselves as "Otaku" while 38 percent did describe themselves as "Otaku" (see Figure 3.8).

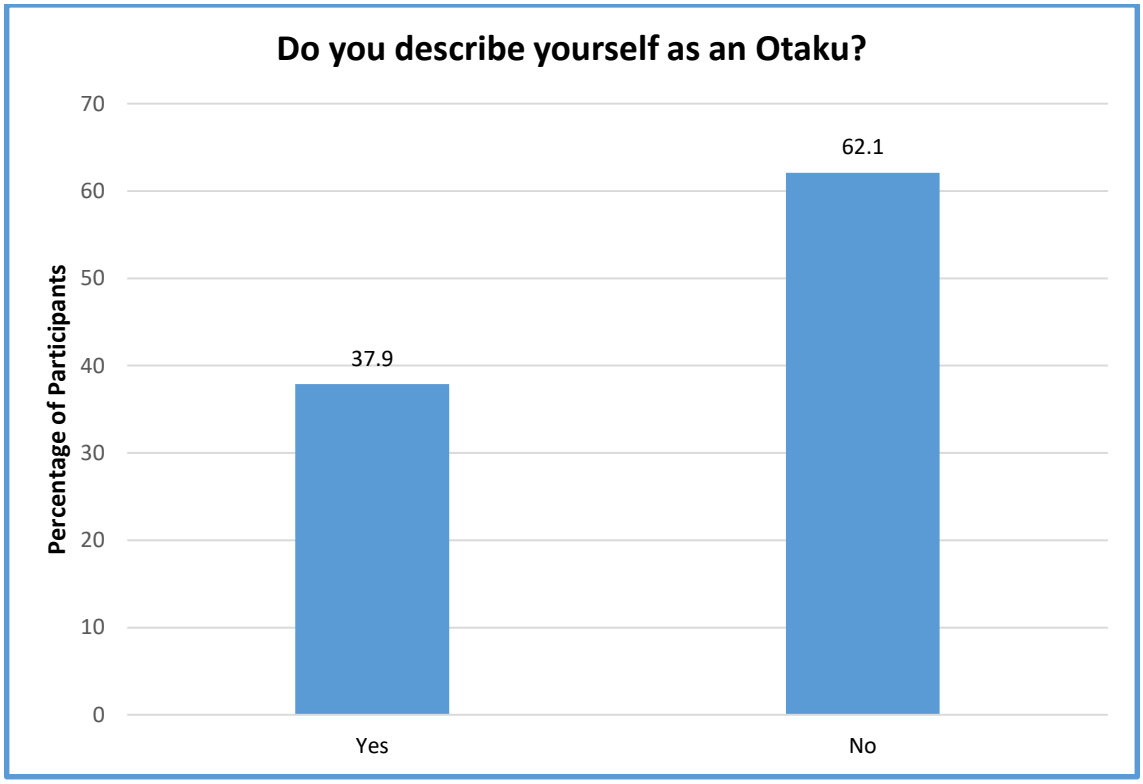

FIGURE 3.8. Percentage of questionnaire participants who describe themselves as an Otaku.

Interview participants largely agreed with the sentiments of the questionnaire participants regarding fan service and the changes it has brought to the anime industry. In Mehdi el Moussaoui's view, anime after 2000 became "extremely" degraded with the otakus "definitely" at fault for its demise. He suggested that their viewing preferences have shaped the production of anime that is more feminine and less masculine: "I actually haven't found an Otaku who likes male characters...Most of them are always feminine characters." He found anime with heavy fan service to be a "suffocating" viewing experience for him, in which craft and story were substituted for images of naked women. He used the anime *Ikki Tousen*, a television series about high school rivalries which aired in 2003 that he described as "pornographic", to illustrate his point:

Ikki Tousen was an interesting idea, but there is one big difference for me. There is war, lots of pornographic scenes in it…lots of fan service which suffocating. I want to see an idea, I want to see a fight. Basically, they are [converting] the Romans of the Three Kingdoms *into a modern high school fight, martial art fight…But they are putting too much service in it which make it suffocating. In Japan, yes, they watch it, many people view it, but I don't like lots of fan service. Give me the story, let me appreciate your work instead of mocking it for its cheapness. For example, if you see a woman fully clothed, you wish to see her naked, but once she's naked, you feel that she's degraded.*

According to Abdulla Al Kandari, fan service is driving production decisions and the kind of content seen in the new generation of anime because, at this point, anime is big business. It has become highly commercialized, which means that it's not just about selling the anime itself but all of its paraphernalia, the merchandise. So an anime that does not perform well with audience's means a lot of lost revenue and profits in merchandise as well. He suggested that producers take fewer risks with experimental anime than they did in the past for considerations of profit. As he explained: "There's a lot of fan service [in the 2000s]…I think before they were focusing about the stories. They were focusing about putting something new. Let's try this. Maybe they will like it, maybe they won't…There is the otaku. There's the fan service. There's the woman element. Yes, there is the merchandise things. Like, there's always those [sexual] pillows stuff and posters that comes with an anime, and songs…Most, if not all, most the anime come with OSTs or original soundtracks. So there is that."

Abdulla Al Kandari has also noticed some new trends in anime that seem to be driven by fan service and targeting the otakus: "I'm beginning to notice how there's this

new type of anime where they take an otaku girl and see how she lives…Now we have women otakus. First, we had the men. And I think that will be the new trend…High school boys, high school girls…I think it's what people relate to most for some reason. It's closer. There are some new features you see here and there, but it's still about your neighbourhood. Still about your school. It's about your friend. It's about being noticeable."

As other participants described earlier, there has been an increasing number of female anime fans in recent years. Here, Abdulla Al Kandari took note of the new phenomenon of women otakus, that otakus are not limited to men anymore. Given these trends, it makes sense that more anime are being produced that would appeal to these audiences. Also, like other participants, Abdulla Al Kandari has observed that a lot of the new anime take place in high schools with high school characters. In his view, they are popular because viewers, many of them high schoolers themselves, relate well to them.

Abdulla Al Kandari, who had a large manga collection, also noted that many brilliant mangas have not been made into anime, again, because of fan service and producing anime that target the otakus. And even when a manga is converted into an anime, much of the content, especially the fight scenes, do not carry over for the same reasons. He contended that the anime audiences today do not like to see graphic violence, unlike the audiences that loved the old generation of anime that was known for gore. As he described:

They put only 5 perfect, I would say. Maybe 10 percent of the fights. I would go home right now and bring you my full hard drive of mangas that I love, and there is no anime

for it. There's a lot of them…They are focusing on otakus. There is no doubt. It's a fact…Those [old generation] anime, I feel that they're being forgotten. That people who watch that stopped watching anime altogether. And the market is being filled with people who do not appreciate these kinds of stories. They don't like gore anymore. Even when you have a garish anime now, it's mostly censored. There aren't really body cuts. It's just lots of, lots of, lots of blood…They are looking at the Japanese market.

Adham agreed with Abdulla Al Kandari, and many of the other participants that anime focused on high school boys have dominated the new generation of anime. Adham insisted that it is a result of fan service: "High school boys, High School of the Dead…Death Note. Yeah, it's getting repeated. Bleach, it's high school boy…It's insane. It's absolutely insane. Yeah, it's repetitive…Definitely, a billion percent there's fan service. High School of the Dead is the pinnacle of fan service. Like, the protagonist. He does some actions, yes, sure, but the females...You always see the reference to female body parts."

Like other participants, Tarek Al-Kandari saw that one feature that clearly separated the old generation of anime from the new was the former's central emphasis on good storytelling. He believed that the lack of story that predominates the new anime is due to fan service that targets the otaku: "Anime changed, because society changed. Before in the 1990s, I remember anime had a main goal, a story. Now anime changed to no main story, but mostly focused on fan service. Furthermore, I believe even in the male character have become more feminine and weaker and the female heroines have become stronger. It seems there is an increase of simps [simpletons] in the society, which I believe are the otaku."

Tarek Al-Kandari theorized that the changes seen in the new anime could have multiple sources, including, as other participants suggested, a concern by anime production companies for the "bottom line" and producing anime that will be popular, even if they lack in quality: "…I believe not only the economy has a main statement…but society also plays a role. Maybe due to the increase of divorce rates and single mothers that have increased in society and that plays a major role, and also feminism also plays a major role. I also believe due to online piracy, which led to anime companies just focus on the otaku people since they mostly tend to buy anime. Hence, they tend to focus on their taste." Here, Tarek Al-Kandari suggested that online piracy, an inevitable feature of the Internet era of anime, which compromises the revenues of anime production companies, has pushed them to increasingly target the otakus who still purchase anime instead of merely obtain pirated copies online for free.

Fahad Oraifan suggested, like Tarek Al-Kandari, that the otaku are "simps" with no taste who seek only fan service--namely sexualized female characters and scenes--and anime focused on high school life: "It is clear as the sun that anime now has changed because the anime industry has now started to focus on otaku market rather than what people want. These otaku have no taste in what good anime is, and rather focus on fan service and school life. It is rare to find good anime, but there are some, which is an anime that gave me some faith or some hope, and that anime is called *Red Line*."

A number of other participants came to the conclusion that fan service often ruins the anime. Many of them declared that they watch anime largely for the story which is interrupted and often weakened by the introduction of fan service. As Salah stated: "I would like to say the anime industry has started to focus on teenage movement. Focusing on school life mainly. Yet also the industry is focusing on otaku, where there

is so much senseless fan service that would destroy the anime." Waleed Bouresli said, "I believe the anime market has now strong control and paved a role for the otaku." Mahammad Al Kandari asserted, "too much fan service is not for me, I'm here for the story, not for the sex." Ahmed Abu Taleb stated, "I don't like to watch fan service, that's why there are specific anime, I discontinue it, which consist of fan service." Awatha Al Mutairi concurred: "I dislike [fan service]. For me, story is more important, when fan service is being shown, then it would derail your mind from the story." Discussing the anime *Freezing*, Mehdi el Moussaoui reported that, "the main character had potential but somehow I lost him in all this boob, so I said, 'bye-bye'".

"New" Masculine Anime

Indeed, as Awatha Al Mutairi and Ahmed Abu Taleb would not classify the new anime as being completely devoid of depictions of traditional masculinity found throughout the old anime, a number of participants described what they considered to be the masculine anime of the post-2000, new anime era. That is, while the new masculine anime at times departed significantly from the old masculine anime, there did exist numerous titles that could be considered masculine anime in this new period.

Abdulla Al Kandari compared and contrasted the features of the new and old masculine anime using *Basilisk*, an anime television series, released in 2005, about two Samurai ninja clans, as an example:

Basilisk yes [it is masculine]. Basilisk…didn't view masculinity as [Kenshiro] and Fist of the North Star… But it had a different view of it. It had that either a man can change even his physical state to get what he wants, which is mostly mortality or ultimate

power. There is the guy that always regenerate, which is the final villain. And yes, he was masculine. And the hero is masculine, but not to the degree [of] the pre-2000 animation. But there was that element of intelligence. There was that element of maybe a strategist. He knew what he could do. Maybe if he didn't, he would find out. There were people that can go through walls, people that hide in the shadow. There was that different variety of powers and abilities. Same as when you think of a Naruto, Bleach, Hakusho, everybody had some sort of different skill or technique. And he just develops himself into it.

In the above description, Abdulla Al Kandari highlighted a variety of traits that he considered masculine. While acknowledging that the depictions of masculinity in Basilisk were different than those of old masculine anime such as *Hokuto no Ken*, in which Kenshiro was the main protagonist, and Fist of the North Star, he noted that the characters in Basilisk portrayed a variety of masculine traits, including the ability to change one's physical state, regeneration, intelligence, a strategist, and a "variety of powers and abilities", something that Basilisk shared with other new masculine anime, such as Naruto, Bleach, and Hakusho. Ultimately, even with these numerous examples of masculine depictions, he concluded that they did not amount to the degree of masculinity portrayed in the "pre-2000 animation". Thus, for Abdulla Al Kandari, while new masculine anime most certainly exists, it cannot compare to the old masculine anime.

Abdulla Al Kandari also used the example of *Gun Sword*, (which he called "Gun X Sword", the "X" referring to the crossed swords that appear in the title on the poster) anime television series which came out in 2005, to further demonstrate how the new

masculine anime differ from the old, such as *Hokuto no Ken* and its protagonist Kenshiro. He did not consider the principle character of Gun Sword to be masculine yet acknowledged some masculine elements in the style that could be interpreted as similar to Kenshiro.

He's not masculine…he does [have a personality of just vengeance]. He's a stupid cowboy that wanted to kill somebody because he came and ruined…his wedding day and killed his wife. [Having no mercy] was some form of masculinity. It's kind of the same form as Koshiro if you think of it, but Koshiro kind of takes it to a different level. He had more elements. The earth was going into a bad situation. People are dying. He wanted to help everybody. Gun X Sword did kind of do that. There were people that are being saved every episode. And eventually, yes, he does get what he wants. He does get his revenge…But the difference between it is that he gets babysat. You know, there's still that for Gun X Sword. Gun X Sword was stupid…He was very naive. He was being taken by a 12-year-old or a 16-year-old. Kenshiro did not.

Here, Abdulla Al Kandari made it clear that vengeance and violence are not necessarily masculine traits. Rather, in his view, masculinity includes acts of heroism, pointing to Koshiro's desire "to help everybody" and to the fact that Gun Sword's protagonist saved people "in every episode". Ultimately, the Gun Sword protagonist felt short of the degree of masculinity portrayed by Koshiro because he did not exhibit intelligence--rather, he was "stupid" and "naive" and fell into a trap set by teenagers, something that would never happen to Koshiro. Abdulla Al Kandari's mixed reaction to the masculinity depicted in Gun Sword further illustrates the sentiment of most

participants: while masculine anime did exist in the new generation, they seemed to never achieve the same level of masculinity for which the old generation of anime were known.

According to Jaffar Mansour, some positive developments have emerged in the new generation of anime regarding depictions of masculinity. The characters are different, and he said, “like a super robot, Shin Mazinger.” He elaborated: “The Japanese voice actors [are different now]… Because in the old times, the character…was courageous, but the voice wasn't so much clear. Now the voice is clear, he shouts more than before. That's what I like.” Like other participants, he has noticed that the body styles of male characters in today’s anime are similar to those of the female characters to the point at which it’s easy to confuse the gender of characters, as happened to him when watching Hunter x Hunter as a 15-year-old: “[In] Hunter x Hunter, there's a character named Kurapika, I thought he was a female. I [was] shocked [that the character looks feminine], but now I'm okay with that.”

Jaffar Mansour has also noticed an increase in gay characters in the new anime, a feature completely absent in the old anime: “Also with new generation, every anime, there's a guy acts like gay…The old generation, all of them are not gay. Gatchaman Crowds [is one example of new anime with gay characters]. In One Piece there's also a gay character. Each anime, there must be a gay character.” For him, the gay characters are a source of laughter, and he welcomed them as such; but they have no place as main characters:

“[It’s] a new style, but it's amazing; after all, we laugh…I feel annoyed if this character is the main character…But if it's a comedy, that is something else. Comedy, laugh. So, let them do whatever they want with this comedy. After all, we laugh.”

Adham has observed a clear difference between the old masculine anime and the new, particularly in terms of how the male characters dealt with challenging situations. Male roles in the new anime are much more emotional, expressed through yelling, than their old anime counterparts: “In the old generation of masculinity, you would see that most of the characters, especially the ones that went through shock...Berserk, beginning of the anime, he gets shit-talked. He stays calm…during big fights, he's calm. Now, you have the new anime, a new generation of masculinity, usually has some guy bursting into anger, yelling and screaming loud, yelling at his opponents, and doing things like that differs from how the old masculine characters would deal with situations.”

He elaborated on this point, suggesting that the heightened violence and emotional outbursts among the male characters in the new anime reveal a lack of patience, wisdom, and stoicism that typified the old masculine anime: “In my opinion, you have Naruto, you have Bleach, you have Attacked Titan…[Attack on Titan] sacrificed a lot of things, but I'm speaking about the way they act to issues...Because of the young age, they do it violently, extremely violently. They go into anger, rage…The way they react is basically...How can I say this? There's no patience behind, no sign of wisdom. Kenshiro and Berserk from their experience, they would be calm before attacking their opponent or doing a violent action. They are calm. They wouldn't explode into anger, rage, yelling, stuff like that, except rarely.”

He attributed the difference in depictions of masculinity between new and old anime to be, at least in part, due to the age differences. The male characters in the new anime are often much younger than those in the old anime. By pointing to their “young age,” Adham suggested that immaturity leads to the heightened violence and emotion seen in the new anime. He again compared a male character in Attack on Titan to

Kenshiro of *Hokuto no Ken* to illustrate the apparent differences between the new and old masculine anime:

In Attack on Titan…Arin, he screams, and he yells every episode…It's the attitude and the atmosphere…[the show] is really good, compared to the other work that I've seen, it's incredible, really. But, for example, Arin has been known to…when he fought the barracks with the guy who wanted to join the police, the king's bodyguards…you can see that he was yelling, screaming at him. I think, let's replace him with Kenshiro. How would Kenshiro react? Kenshiro would be calm. He would discuss it calmly. Arin just explodes because, as I said, [they're young]. Because of age.

Abdullah Kodor Attar said that although he has given the new masculine anime a chance and he could identify masculine elements in some of the original anime, he ultimately found them to dissatisfying in comparison to the old generation of anime:

I focus on anime based on the art style and also based on its character design. As I tried to see the new anime generation such as Naruto, I tried to watch it, but I threw it away because something was missing. One Piece I couldn't be able to watch it because of its character design but it did give off good story and masculinity. Though Bleach, I saw it and completed it, it gave off some aspect of masculinity which I could bear to watch it, between masculinity and personality. You would see characters who have masculinity and masculine thinking. You cannot compare the old generation anime to new generation anime.

For him, what makes an anime watchable includes more than just masculine portrayals. Because the art style and character design are also important to him, many of the new anime simply did not live up to his standard, even when they had decent depictions of masculinity.

Gender in Anime: Kuwaiti Audience Interpretations and Responses

This chapter traces, through participant narratives, how the gendering of anime content changed over time via the feminization of anime, sexualized fan service, and the new masculine anime. All of these trends began at the turn of the century which marked the birth of the "new" anime, creating a bifurcated anime culture in Kuwait. Participants shared extensive details about what masculinity in anime looked like and what it meant to them. They also shared their opinions and reactions to the "feminization" trend in anime, characterized by a significant diversification and liberalization within anime regarding gender and sexuality.

Starting in the late 1990s and early 2000s, anime increasingly targeted female audiences, presenting female-driven stories with female protagonists, male protagonists and subcharacters with feminine traits (whether physical or behavioral), emasculation of male characters, gay and lesbian protagonists and subcharacters. The new anime also depicts other non-normative (that is, non-hegemonic) depictions of male and femle characters, masculinity and femininity, and characters' sexual identities and behaviors. Most participants were young adults when anime's feminization wave hit Kuwait, well into their second decade as consumers of anime and, by this time, deeply entrenched and dedicated fans. They grew up with the "old" anime, the *Grendizer* era of anime in Kuwait, and that is the anime they came to love and know so well. Some of the "new"

anime, with its “weak” and “skinny” male protagonists or female characters physically and emotionally dominating male ones, were shocking, even dismaying, to many of the participants. In this chapter, the participants described how they responded and adapted to this new wave of anime and even embraced it. In their view, there was much to be praised about the new anime, including the artwork, design, and overall aesthetic as well as the new storylines and unique characters that broke new ground in the genre. One important new element, emphasized Abdulla Al Kandari, was the comedy, which was mostly absent from the old anime. “There's that big need for comedy,” Abdulla Al Kandari stated. “The older generations, they did not have that much. They had the story, but they didn't have the comedy. Now, the comedy scenes, even this, at least the small scenes are being very, very essential.”

Yet, as we have seen, participants also expressed disappointment with the new anime, citing a decline in overall quality, and nostalgia for the old anime. They described the old anime as much more traditionally masculine than the new anime—that is, reflecting traits considered to be hegemonic masculine in Kuwaiti culture. In this chapter, they fondly described in detail the first “old” masculine anime they remember watching. They also described characters that, in their view, were highly masculine, most of which were from the “old” anime. In these discussions over the meaning of masculinity and masculine anime had for them, a number of common themes emerged among their responses related to physicality (physically strong, muscular, powerful, large), personality (a “man among men”, moral, independent, serious, fearless, ideas, responsible, strong in mind, wise), and deeds (keeping one’s word, sacrifice, following through to the end, leadership, protecting and rescuing others, fixing mistakes).

The participants' mixed reception to the the new anime is captured well by the questionnaire data presented in this chapter. The data showed that, among questionnaire participants, only 20 percent preferred the new anime, over a quarter preferred the old anime, and more than half preferred both old and new anime. This finding demonstrates the participants' ambivalence over the changes, with most embracing much of the new while still holding onto the old.

The participants found the new anime to be, on the whole, contaminated by fan service, most notably the inclusion of sexually suggestive or sexual content, such as nudity, or "panty shots", that are irrelevant to the plots of the shows and included only to please and tantalize audiences. For serious anime audiences such as the participants, fan service was a destructive force, ruining the anime industry. They bemoaned the loss of compelling storylines and interesting characters that defined the anime of the 1990s, the "golden era" of anime. In one example, Abdulla Al Kandari described how the fan service has creeped in so much it now appears in the middle of a fight scene, like when female characters fighting monsters rip their clothes in the battle, turning it into a nude scene. "There's a lot of nudity inside the fight," he lamented.

Participants described the changes that they have witnessed to the anime scene in Kuwait that mark the transition from "old" to "new" anime, characterized by a reconfiguration in the presentation of gender and sexuality in anime content that marked a significant departure from the ideology of hegemonic masculinity in Kuwait. The synergy between the discourses and ideologies around gender and sexuality transmitted by anime producers via anime and those circulating in Kuwaiti culture that, I argue, led to the explosive popularity of anime in Kuwait in the 1980s and 1990s was diminishing. Most of the new anime swerved far away from the traditional masculinity of the the old

anime into new, gender transgressive territory that unsettled many longstanding Kuwaiti anime fans, including the participants.

In analyzing participants' narratives, I found that that their interpretations of and responses, on display in this chapter, to the perceived changes to depictions of gender and sexuality in the new anime content revealed a number of important findings. First, I found that the anime content they consumed was highly gendered. Second, I found that their anime consumption practices represented a form of "doing", or performing, gender. Third, I found that their interpretations of and responses to gender in anime were simultaneously influenced by two important forces: Kuwaiti culture and anime culture.

Responding to Gender Norms, Doing Gender as Anime Fans in Kuwait

The cultural messages that Kuwait anime fans receive about gender are part of the system of gender norms, simultaneously at play in Kuwait and in the imported anime, with its own dynamics of meaning-making production around gender and sexuality between producers and audiences. Gender norms, according to West and Zimmerman (1987), represent a set of rules or ideas—culturally prescribed—about how each gender should behave. For them, this makes gender a social construct, one produced through interaction between people. Importantly, gender segregates socially acceptable practices and behaviors for men and women, and becomes ingrained in the culture through the deployment of gender norms, which reinforce these expectations in everyday interactions until they seem natural to us. This deployment of gender norms takes place via important social institutions, including the government, schools, and the media.

As a form of media in Kuwait, anime can be understood as one platform (among many) where gender norms are displayed to popular audiences, a subculture in Kuwait with wide appeal—youth and adults, men and and women, religious and non-religious alike have been drawn into the world of anime in Kuwait. Applying West and Zimmerman's concepts to the present study, I suggest that, based on the responses from participants in this chapter, Kuwaiti anime fans respond to the conforming pressures of gender norms in various realms of everyday life, including anime consumption, by "doing gender", in which their performance of gender is regarded as legitimated or not by others during interaction. That is, they are seen by others as performing normative gender behavior, which they generally feel encouraged to comply with in order to feel like they belong to the group.

In Kuwait's hypermasculine culture, for boys and men this meant displaying traits often stereotypically associated with masculine men, including strength, bravery, honor, truth, noble, protector, sacrifice. Watching anime as children, while they were first absorbing these messages from their families and communities about what it means to be a man and a woman in Kuwaiti society, reinforced many of these messages given that many of the same masculine traits were portrayed in the anime. Mimicking the heroic masculine male protagonist as they liked to do helped them develop the masculine traits encouraged by their culture.

Watching anime itself became a form of "doing" gender as the masculinist anime were assumed to be the terrain of boys and men. The mimicking that came after represented another form of "doing" gender in which the anime consumers attempted to incorporate the traits of the protagonist they admired into who they think they are and who they want to become. Using Hall's (1980) language, the Kuwaiti anime fans, as the

audience, responded to the content produced by anime producers (and Kuwaiti authorities in the case of Arabic dubbed or censored anime), creating their own gendered interpretations of what they watched, reacting to it, proclaiming strong preferences for a particular type of gendered content (e.g. strong male, rather than female, protagonist; male dominance over females).

Such gendered interpretations, reactions, and preferences of a sample of Kuwaiti anime fans are on full display in this chapter and throughout the dissertation, illustrating again and again and in a variety of ways how watching anime is itself a form of doing gender. The act of "watching" anime is understood here (again, via Hall's typology of producer and audience), such that it includes both the act of viewing, of consumption itself, as well as the interpretation of that consumption. We have seen that the Kuwaiti anime fan participants create meaning in the anime they watch, or consume, through the act of interpreting it, which they do in a variety of ways, such as through the contemplation and discussion with fellow fans. Arguably, the participants also engaged in meaning-making through the acts of considering and responding to questions in interviews for this study. This also points to one of the reasons why the fan community is so strong, and why fan discussion boards are so popular: audiences seek out others to help them with the meaning-making process. They want to understand together what messages are being communicated by the anime, what meaning they can take from what they saw and heard into enhancing their own lives.

Challenging and Upholding Hegemonic Masculinity through Anime Consumption

As they absorbed cultural messages from multiple sources, Kuwaiti anime fans experienced a type of cultural tension in their consumption of anime while living in

Kuwait because, in watching anime, they received different, oftentimes contrary or even contradictory, cultural messages when compared with the cultural messages they receive across realms of Kuwaiti society. They simultaneously responded to the Kuwaiti cultural messages around gender and sexuality and to the messages transmitted via the gendered storylines and depictions of masculinity and femininity, males and females, in the anime they loved to watch, which sometimes aligned and sometimes clashed. When they clashed, the participants challenged notions of hegemonic masculinity in Kuwait. When they aligned, the participants upheld such notions of hegemonic masculinity. In both cases, the gendered dimensions of both anime content and anime consumption practices were revealed by the participants' responses.

The gendered dimensions of anime content consumed by participants were made clear when participants upheld hegemonic masculinity in their responses. Hegemonic masculinity is represented in anime content and operates in part through the interpretations by audiences who deem the content to be appropriately and normatively masculine. The way participants defined and thought about masculinity and described changes to depictions of masculinity and femininity in anime over time revealed, to a large degree, an adherence to the ideology of hegemonic masculinity promoted in Kuwaiti culture. Definitions of masculinity offered by participants echoed those they grew up learning through socialization. Their reactions to the ways in which masculinity is depicted in anime use Kuwaiti hegemonic masculinity as a reference point, measuring the appropriateness of the depictions based on what is normalized in Kuwaiti culture.

The gendered anime consumption practices were revealed by participants who reinforced the dominance of hegemonic masculinity when they expressed their approval or disapproval, preference or rejection of gendered anime content based on the degree to

which it aligns with the ideology of hegemonic masculinity as it is defined and communicated in Kuwait.

Conclusion

This chapter examined participants' views on the gendered dimensions of anime and how participants' anime consumption practices are themselves gendered. As participants discussed how they define masculinity in anime, shared memories of their first and favorite masculine anime as children, and offered their assessments of the gendered changes to anime over time, including the trends towards feminization of anime and sexualized fan service and what masculine looks like in the new generation of anime, they demonstrate how their definitions, interpretations, and responses to depictions of gender and sexuality in anime are informed by both Kuwaiti culture and anime culture, which together inform participants' views of gender both within the world of anime and beyond. The next chapter builds on these findings by exploring participants' anime consumption preferences within these gendered dimensions of anime and how their consumption preferences are themselves gendered.

Chapter 4

Gendered Preferences in Anime: Masculine Characters, Character Dominance, and Submission, and the Sexualized Anime Industry

While the last chapter focused on participants' views on the gendered dimensions of anime, this chapter takes a closer look at their anime consumption preferences within those gendered dimensions and how their consumption preferences are themselves gendered. First, they discuss their anime character preferences in a broad sense, including what they look for in masculine characters and whether they prefer male or female heroes. Next, they delve into details regarding character dominance and submission, namely, whether they prefer to watch--or are even willing to watch--anime that depict female characters who are more powerful than their male counterparts and vice versa. Then, they share their thoughts on how the sexualized fan service that characterizes much of the new generation of anime has shaped the anime industry and the changes they would like to see the anime industry make to bring new anime into greater alignment with what they want to watch.

The chapter reveals that while participants express a range of preferences regarding the types of masculine characters they enjoy watching, depictions of masculinity are much more important to them than representations of femininity and thus, they generally disapprove of the trends towards feminization and sexualized fan service and how masculine anime has changed with the new generation of anime. Their preferences seem to be informed by their desire to watch anime that reflect the realistic or idealized forms of masculinity they have developed over time, through exposure to Kuwaiti culture and anime culture and their willingness to watch anime in which they can

project themselves or from which they can take inspiration regarding how to be masculine in their own lives. As such, growing up in dominant male society, the male participants, in particular, were tolerant at best--rather than enthusiastically embracing--and often wholly intolerant of depictions of dominant female characters who were portrayed as more reliable and more powerful than their male counterparts. Their character preferences revealed their views on the appropriate relations between men and women in society but also suggested that the increasingly common depictions of strong female characters and diversification in the presentation of male characters in the new generation of anime have influenced their views on gender relations. Thus, similar to the findings in the previous chapter, this chapter demonstrates that both Kuwaiti culture and anime culture interact to inform participants' views of gender and sexuality both within the world of anime and beyond.

Gendered Character Preferences: Masculine Characters and Male and Female Heroes

Masculine Characters

Participants discussed their anime character preferences, namely what they look for in masculine characters. Their responses largely echoed discussions in the last chapter regarding how they defined masculinity and what characterized masculine anime and anime characters. However, here, they focused on their personal preferences regarding masculine characters--the types of masculine characters they enjoyed watching and those that they refused to watch. Like the earlier discussion on masculine anime, participants' responses varied in terms of the particular traits they identified as

masculine and preferred to watch, to range from physical characteristics to personality traits to deeds, discussing a variety of examples of masculine anime to demonstrate their preferences.

Among the questionnaire participants, most--almost 75 percent--stated that they did not like to see a hero with a “weak body” while just over 25 percent stated they liked to see a hero with this type of body (see Figure 4.1). Furthermore, over 90 percent of participants stated that they liked to see a hero with a “masculine” body while nearly 9 percent stated they did not like to see a hero with this type of body (see Figure 4.2).

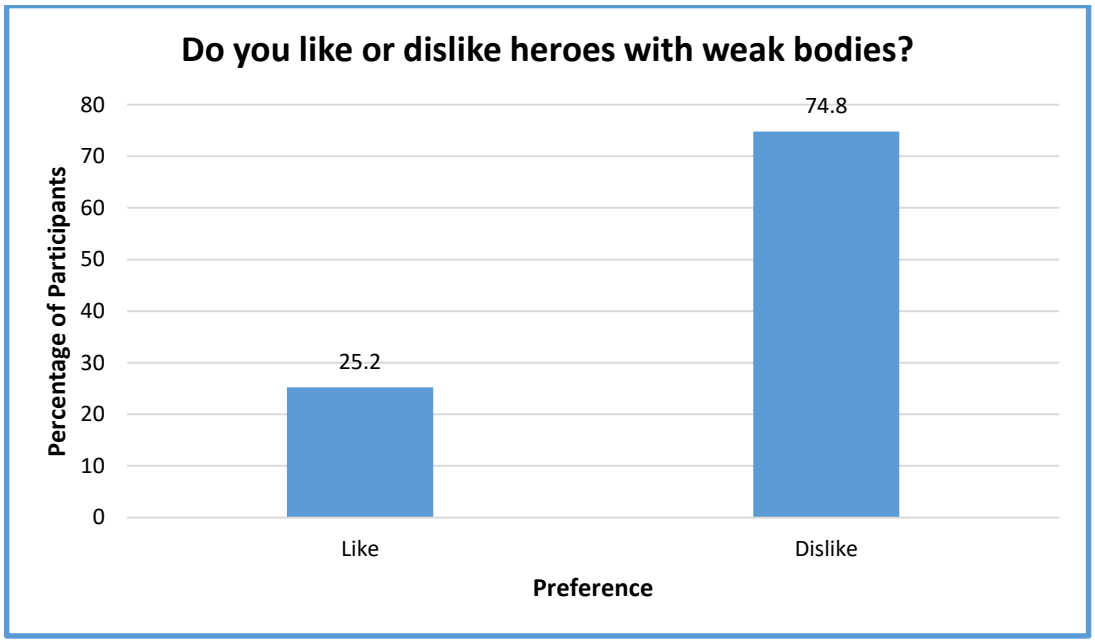

FIGURE 4.1. Percentage of participants who like or dislike heroes with weak bodies.

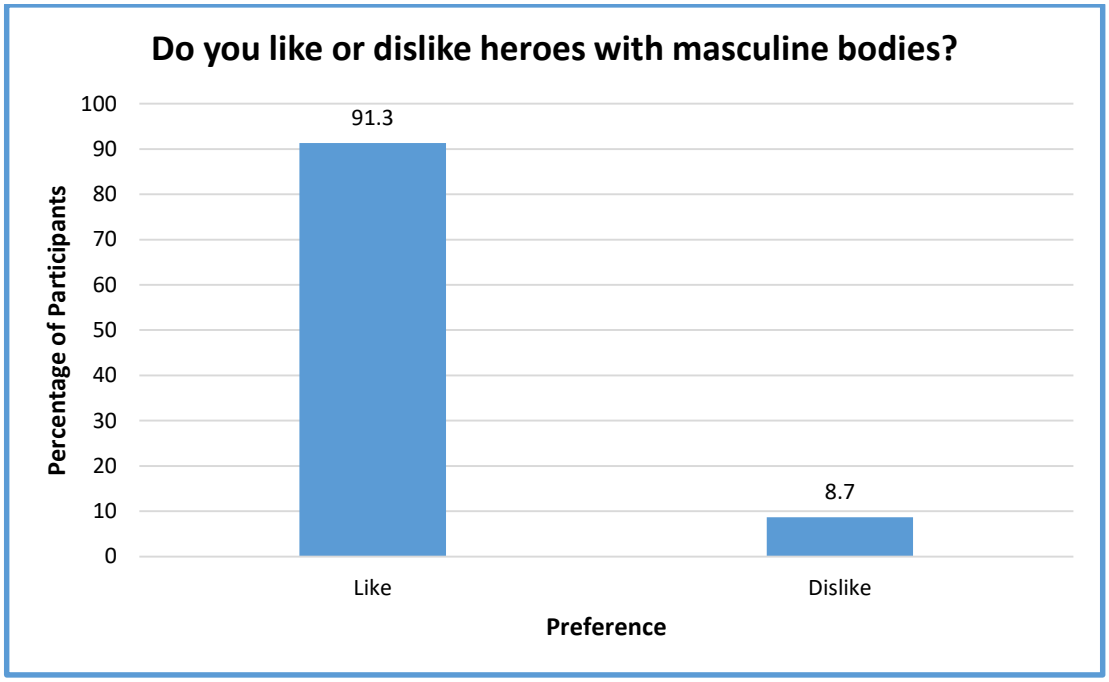

FIGURE 4.2. Percentage of participants who like or dislike heroes with masculine bodies.

The interview participants elaborated on such preferences. Both Fahad Oraifan and Mahammad Al Kandari stated that both physicality and personality traits of the main male character are important for the types of anime they wished to watch. Fahad Oraifan said, “There are two points, one is by appearance, which is having a beard and mustache, and it gives me great interest, and what I love is the personality is that he is patient and wise.” As Mahammad Al Kandari put it, “Body and personality in protecting his friends and his girl.” Other participants emphasized personality and deeds over physical appearances, such as Ahmed Abu Taleb: “How he acts and what he does to protect the people around him.” Awatha Al Mutairi said, “His personality and his decisions.” Waleed Bouresli explained, “Masculinity is based on events and appearance doesn’t really matter.” Aziz Al-Suhely stated, “I believe that appearance does not concern masculinity, but based on events on the character. So, let’s look at *One Piece,*

and there is a character by the name of “Mr. 2” and his personality…has a masculine trait.”

Mehdi el Moussaoui expressed a strong preference for masculine characters with “over the top” abilities, strength, and other outward displays of their masculinity with little regard for the psychological aspects of the human condition. In describing what he looked for in masculine characters, he stated:

His ability, just as his thoughts. [For example, in] Sakigake!! Otokojuku, [it’s a] school of men, basically there is a head principal, he's called Edajima Heihachi. What I like about them is the teacher instruct them that they say if we had only three of him Japan would have won the war. I like this kind of masculinity. His ability is so much over the top. I like these kind of things. Also I like Raoh in Hokuto no Ken you know? The ultimate form of strength. . . . Souther . . . had a huge father complex issues…he even built his pyramid just for his father. Then the process killed millions of people because they have a pure blood or whatever shit. . . . I like this kind of masculinity. But I don't like the issues. . . . I like the male, I like everything but I don't like the shitty, what do you call it? The psychological effect he has.

Conversely, Mahamed Samer Shaeen emphasized the psychological dimensions of masculinity over physicality and the importance of watching characters with personalities to which he could relate:

What I really like in a character is the ideology, the way they think. I've never been a fan of muscles to be honest. If you take, for example, Detective Conan, he doesn't have

any muscles. It's weak even, all his work is through his intelligence. I think ideology is very important to me. What really interests me in a character is the way they think and the past they pursue. What really turns me off about a character is, I guess, if they're naive . . . stupid. . . . I think it depends on how real the character is in terms of personality, if a character seems fake and silly and maybe stupid, that turns me off. If the character is real, shows real emotions, real character--Not necessarily serious, but it's real. Regardless of the actions and the fiction and the anime. If the character itself and personality is real, I think that attracts me most and it shows that...I can relate to that. So if I can relate to the character, I really like it. If I can't relate, if I think that it's silly, if it's naive, if it's something like that, I don't really like it.

For Abdulla Al Kandari both personality and physicality were essential to see in a masculine character. He wanted to watch characters that displayed strength in both body and mind: "He needs, well, he doesn't have to be over muscular like [in] Fist of the North Star, but yes, he need to have some sort of muscle there. . . . He should not look like a 10-year-old. He should be independent. He should know what to do when something happens. He shouldn't be the guy who's just chasing other characters and asking them questions like he doesn't know what's going on."

In his discussion of the wildly popular anime *Bleach*, Abdulla Al Kandari elaborated on what types of masculine characters he liked, highlighting a number of characteristics that he deemed masculine, including physical strength and wisdom:

Not in a million years [would I consider Naruto to be masculine]…I like Bleach, because it has that variation…It is style…There is the style element, but because there is a lot of characters, you would see there is a lot of… variation. There's age. There is style. There is intelligence. There is strength. For instance, [one of the characters in] 12 Captains. . . . The older one. He's muscular. . . . The one with the . . . pink kimono. I would consider him kind of masculine because he does have that grown man, I-know-everything-so-I-don't-care- so-I'm-going-to-go-chase-after-chicks-all-day element. You have the other one with the sick guy with the white hair…that coughs. He's also wise. He's not as energetic as the other one, but he knows what to do when something bad happens. You don't see that in the other characters. You see, that is very rare. I wouldn't see it in Ichigo, the main character. He does not have those qualities. He does have a small bit of masculinity, but not to compare them.

In his observations about the differences between Ichigo, the main character, and one of the sub-characters that he considered "wise" and how the former was portrayed as less masculine than the latter, Abdulla Al Kandari noted that this represented a shift from how main characters were previously depicted: as always the strongest, and thus, the most masculine. He went on to say: "Even if you take people who love Bleach, and if you compare the characters, would you tell them that Ichigo is a stronger character there? They would say no. They would choose a lot of different characters . . . [including the sub characters]. Which is kind of weird, because before it was only the first [main] character. The first character was always the strongest. He always wins."

Like Abdulla Al Kandari, Ali Methan also emphasized wisdom as one of the traits he looked out for in the types of masculine characters he enjoyed watching. For him,

personality traits--the ability to remain calm rather than burst out emotionally along with wisdom--were more important than a muscular body to demonstrate masculinity, but the ability to fight well, regardless of physical strength, was also important to him: “I think a character that's masculine is someone who is . . . very calm about everything. I mean, he can be big or muscular, or he can be, he doesn't have to be muscular but he can. Still, he can still hold himself up in a fight. But he can also be as wise ‘cause I think that's the thing about masculinity is wisdom as well. That's one of the main things about being a man is having to understand everything about life and not get mad easily.”

He elaborated on the importance of these traits--calmness, wisdom, and fighting well--by using the example of Edward, one of the lead characters in the anime *Fullmetal Alchemist*, a television series which aired between 2003 and 2004 about two brothers who are searching for the Philosopher's Stone so they can regain the bodies they lost in a failed attempt to bring their dead mother back to life as he described: “Because that's the thing when you look at a character like Fullmetal Alchemist. You see Edward, he's kind of a bit of a hothead, and that does get kind of annoying, though. But at times, he does show some signs of masculinity as in he doesn't back down from a fight. And he’s sort of muscular, and he also tends to have some words of wisdom despite being a hothead. And also people that are looking for adventure and looking to . . . experience new things in their life. That's . . . also kind of what makes them interesting as well.”

For a number of participants, the arc of character development was important for them to continue watching. For example, Abdulrahman Bin Nasser felt that if a male character starts strong but becomes weak, he would stop watching: “I would [stop watching] some anime, not in the beginning but in the middle of the anime, when the

main character is so strong and compares himself to other characters who is also in another level, that he then loses all his power, will, and strength. That the main character level of power became lower than trash."

Other participants wished to watch a main male character who starts out weak and develops strength over time. Hussain Al-Baghli, however, expressed no interest in watching anime with a weak male lead, regardless of his character development over time:

What . . . I really want to see in an anime is his personality. It's like, his own personality. If he has a really strong personality and if his ability or power is like unique and special in his own way. . . . What pisses me off in an anime is like a very, very, very weak personality character where the main character does nothing and leaves, like, another character, male or female, to do most of the things for him. . . . But the idea is where a main character is worthless and he tries to progress to become a better person or a better character, I don't think that's really much of a good thing in an anime. Because we don't . . . okay, some people prefer watching him progress. But if you start off with a weak character, with a weak personality, why, what's the point of continuing watching it? If . . . he's really boring from the beginning . . . what's making him interesting in the end?

Hussain Al-Baghli also discussed his love for the anime *Bleach* in which he demonstrated how personality was more important to him than physicality in the male characters he enjoyed watching: "In terms of muscles, I don't think [*Bleach*] has as much muscles…pretty much, like now, no muscles at all. I think Tite Kubo designs,

always draws, like, skinny people…that's his way of drawing. But I prefer *Bleach* to have masculinity in their abilities and personalities. Some personalities are amazing in *Bleach*. That's why I . . . love *Bleach* actually. I'm a huge fan of *Bleach*. As for *Naruto*, it's the same. But it, I think it changed a little bit more throughout the story."

Although he enjoyed watching the anime *Naruto*, Hussain Al-Baghli made it clear that the degree of masculinity displayed by Naruto, the main male character, could not compare to that of the characters of popular old generation anime. When asked if he thought Naruto's degree of masculinity was the same as *Berserk*, *Hokuto no Ken*, or *JoJo*, Hussain Al-Baghli responded emphatically: "No, never. Never. . . . Never." For him, these old anime belonged to a completely different class of masculine anime than Naruto, or any of the new generation of anime for that matter: "I believe that *JoJo*, *Berserk*, *Hokuto no Ken* . . . they're like in a different level of masculinity. And if, if you can go up any close to it, that's amazing. But I don't think I've seen any anime go over that limit or beyond that for any, for a while. I've not seen an anime that actually beat them in terms of masculinity in my opinion."

Abdulrahman Bin Nasser reacted similarity to Hussain Al-Baghli when he was asked to compare Naruto's masculinity to some old generation anime, also commenting that these old anime were in a class of their own: "I don't [compare *Naruto*'s masculinity to Jojo, Grappler Baki, Fist of North Star] because there is a different type of levels of masculinity, a different universe. You cannot compare *Naruto* to these types of anime [Jojo, Grappler Baki, Fist of North Star]."

For Adham, physicality, personality, and deeds are all important characteristics of the type of masculine character he enjoyed watching. Perhaps most important for him was for characters to not display signs of weakness, particularly cowardice: "Basically,

when I see a person who is willing to take risks, who is willing to sacrifice himself, is willing to go through a world of pain to prove his point, to defend, or to prove something, not to cower down, no cowardice. Fear is understandable, but to be a coward, to run out of battle, to basically cry down when he faces something that he hates is absolute no. Step one, character. Step two, physical appearance. If I say appearance, I mean basically body structure, like broad shoulders, physical intimidating appearance."

Adham elaborated on what he looked for in masculine characters, highlighting the importance of independence and how they respond to situations. Through his example of the main character from *Attack on Titan*, he revealed that physicality was not always required for him to deem a character masculine: "Appearance and deeds, things he did…how he deals with it. How he deals with a situation. . . . He isn't being controlled by a woman that influences him negatively, or is influenced by anyone. His actions are independent, made by him. Influenced by events, life, sure. But, it is his decisions. . . . Attack on Titan, he doesn't have the physical appearance, but he is masculine."

Abdullah Kodor Attar also emphasized the characters' qualities of wisdom and the ability to handle situations well in the masculine anime he deemed as "good": "In today's generation [of] anime, it is hard to find a good anime that has masculinity. But masculinity depends on his situation on what he does, where he is placed in a position, and when he takes the position and does it wisely and perfected, then he has caught the viewers' attention."

He elaborated on his ideas on what makes--or breaks--a masculine character by discussing the anime *Berserk*, a television series which originally aired in 1997 and was remade in 2016. For Abdullah Kodor Attar, once the main male character was raped, he

permanently lost a part of his masculinity, a view he believed was representative of the Arab world. As he put it:

But let's look at Berserk's main protagonist, where he is masculine and strong, and he sacrificed so much for his friends and the army, but when the main protagonist was in a position when he was young and got raped, I would like to say, what's gone cannot be returned. Meaning, once a man has been raped, then his masculinity has disappeared. I do appreciate the main protagonist masculinity where he did sacrifice his eyes and his arm, and he did gain new masculinity but, when he was raped, he lost a part of his own masculinity. This is the Arab world's ideology. For example, if he lied to someone or to the people, then his first image is ruined, and even if he wants to change then it won't matter because the people will only look at him at what he did firstly [and] not forget.

According to Salah, masculinity is not restricted to male characters but also extends to female characters as well: "It is okay for men to be masculine, but at the same time, women should be masculine, and that they shouldn't whine a lot, and not be childish. For example, an anime called Lain, and she knows what to do and what was her goal, this is the type of strong woman that knows what to do."

Male versus Female Heroes

Participants also discussed their anime character preferences in terms of whether they preferred male or female heroes. The vast majority of questionnaire participants--93.2 percent--stated that they preferred to watch animes with male protagonists over those with female protagonists (see Figure 4.3). Only 6.7 percent of

questionnaire participants stated a preference for female protagonists. Among the interview participants, while a few strongly preferred male heroes and only one expressed preference for female heroes, a number of participants stated that enjoyed watching both male and female heroes and the majority stated that their preference heavily depended on the details of the plot.

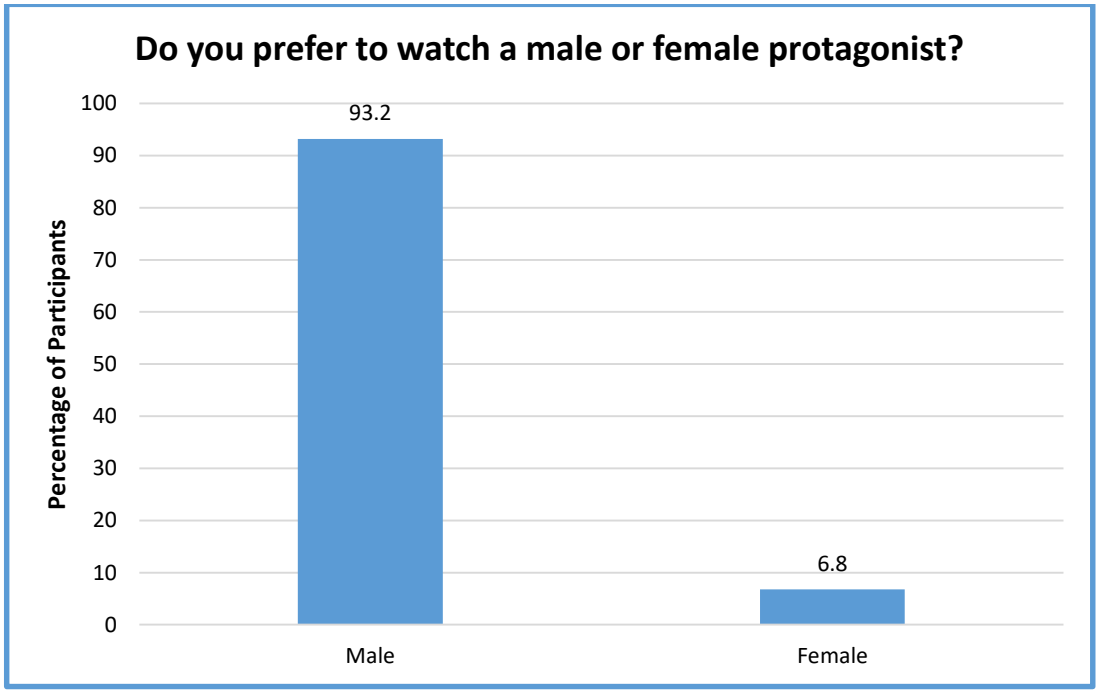

FIGURE 4.3. Percentage of questionnaire participants who prefer to watch a male or female protagonist.

Prefer Male Heroes

For the participants who always preferred to watch male heroes, their preferences seemed to reflect their views regarding gender relations, namely, that men must be more powerful than women, protect women, or dominate women some of which seems to

stem from their cultural upbringing. Abdullah Kodor Attar stated simply, “I prefer a male hero.” Tarek Al-Kandari’s preference for male heroes seemed to stem from his desire to watch heroes in whom he can see himself: “I prefer male heroes, because that’s who I am, that’s what I was raised to be--strong, masculine, and straight forward. I dislike weak and naïve heroes. It just makes me cringe.” Mahammad Al Kandari also cited culture--specifically male dominance--in explaining his preference for male heroes: “Male, because I believe that in our culture, the one who must protect the female is the male. Okay, maybe in the anime, he might be naïve or not powerful, but in the process, he must be stronger than the female.” Likewise, Abdulrahman Bin Nasser stated, “I prefer if the male character is the hero. Because I want the male character to be the person in control.”

Mehdi el Moussaoui’s preference for male heroes seems to be connected to the heavily sexualized fan service that characterizes many of the new anime, which has resulted in almost invariably sexualized, scantily clad depictions of female heroes: “[I prefer a] male hero. Amon Devilman, I actually liked. . . . I really did. I liked the punches, I liked the art. . . . It's really evil. This is what I like, I like male. I like these kind of characters. I like male because he can do stuff. The female will always be . . . half naked. . . . This is what I don't like. You don't see a naked hero or someone want to make you naked. This is one of the things. Mainly I like male heroes.”

Prefer female heroes

Awatha Al Mutairi--one of only two female participants--was only participant to invariably prefer watching anime with female heroes: “Before [I preferred] male [heroes], now female. After 2009, I started to watch female heroes, has an interesting side of story, like *Toaru Kagaku no Railgun* [A Certain Scientific Railgun].”

Prefer Both Male and Female Heroes

A number of participants stated that enjoyed watching both male and female heroes, recognizing that both female-driven and male-driven stories can be interesting. Ahmed Abu Taleb stated that he preferred “both” [male and female heroes] because the male hero only story can be different than the female hero stories, so having both can be interesting.” Ali Methan also said he preferred both, given that he has seen several good anime with female leads. He said he enjoyed watched female heroes go through the kinds of trials as male heroes. As he explained: “I definitely would like both. I've seen a lot of strong cases of stronger females in anime. For example, Kill la Kill, and of course Panty and Stocking, even though that's . . . kind of an odd choice, but they're characters that you see them kind of go through a lot of situations. . . . I like ideas of stories where you see a female character go through trial and error. And she goes through the same situation as the male characters. And it's kind of interesting to see, what you would see a character of any gender do in any situation.”

Ali Methan elaborated his point, stating that, for him, it is interesting to watch heroes of different genders and different ages,using the examples of *Pokemon* and *Digimon* to illustrate what he meant:

And then the same thing with when it comes to kids. When I was watching Pokemon as a kid, and even Digimon, I remember you see all these younger characters having to go through several trials, and they have to overcome them, be it male or female. And Digimon, especially, tried different episodes where they would focus on different members of the team . . . be it male or female, older or the younger ones. And you saw . . . how they dealt with the situation, because that show, Digimon, for a kid show

was a show that tried to do the best it can with the storytelling. Especially the first and second season, because you saw how they handled situations, how they work together with their Digimon to defeat the other Digimon basically, and what tactic and technique did they use. And I liked that. I like characters that grow into much wiser and better roles.

Preference Depends on Plot

The majority of participants stated that their preference heavily depended on the details of the plot. A few simply stated it depended on the plot without elaborating further. For Fahad Oraifan and Salah, a clear plot was more important than the gender of the hero. Fahad Oraifan said, “It really doesn’t matter, as long as the plot is clear.” Salah stated, “It doesn’t matter, as long as the directing and the plot is clear.” Similarly, Waleed Bouresli stated, “It depends on the plot.” Aziz Al-Suhely had no problem with a female hero as long as the male hero was still stronger than her: “It depends on the story, if the female is a hero, then I prefer a male hero must be stronger than the female hero.”

Both Abdulla Al Kandari and Hussain Al-Baghli acknowledged that some female-driven anime have been enjoyable to watch but that they generally prefer male heroes because that is what they are most familiar with, given that the vast majority of anime from their childhood were male-driven. As Abdulla Al Kandari explained: “It depends on the story. . . . I still like a lot of anime with female heroes. *Air Master* is one of the tops. There's [good ones] here and there. But yes, I've always liked as mostly the guy being the hero. Maybe it's because that's how we started, and that's how we're used to.

Hussain Al-Baghli stated: “I prefer mostly male characters but . . . I have no problem with female [characters]. . . . I prefer more male characters because I'm used to it. . . . I'm used to the '90s and '80s anime. Female characters, they do have a spark. Sometimes they do actually show new ideas. From time to time it is good to at least watch like one or two. It wouldn't really hurt. But in my preference, I still prefer like a male character over a female character.” He elaborated on his preference for male-driven anime, stating that he preferred seeing the male character defend the female character because it was what he was “used to”: “In term of sexuality and gender differences, I'm not . . . sexist . . . or anything. It’s a taste. I prefer the male defending the female . . . because . . . I'm used to this. It's something I’ve been watching since when I was a kid. I’ve gotten used to it. I can’t really change. It’s been . . . around . . . even before I was born. I can’t really help that. It’s what I'm used to.”

Like Abdulla Al Kandari and Hussain Al-Baghli, Jaffar Mansour said that he generally preferred to watch male heroes but that, from time to time, it could be enjoyable to watch a female hero. He was sometimes convinced to do so by his friends, such as with the anime *Kill la Kill*, a television series set in a high school with a female lead which aired in 2013 :

It depends on the anime itself. Like Kill la Kill. Female, she's a hero. It's okay. It depends on the anime. If the anime is good, I said it's [okay if it’s] a female. . . . I don't have any problem [with a female hero] but what I like, male. [I prefer] male over woman but sometimes if it is a female, I said what the hell and watch the anime. Because, it's [very] famous and most of my friends watch it so I said, “what the hell”,

and watch the anime like Kill la Kill. . . . And it made me tell my mind that I want to watch it . . . it made my mind and then I watch Kill la Kill.

Adham acknowledged that with certain storylines, a male hero fit better while in others, a female was a better fit. His preferences regarding which types of stories were more appropriate for male and female heroes illustrated his larger views about the appropriate roles for men and women in society and that, ultimately, men must be seen as stronger than women:

It depends on the content of the anime, the storyline, because in some anime, the male is a good option, and while others you have a female as a better option. I like anime with men, especially in action…because it shows the strength of a man, what a man is supposed to do because in our culture, the man is supposed to be facing all the dangers. And, to minimize the lady from facing it as much as possible. For me, I think ladies, female characters, are good in mystery, horror genres because you have this lady. . . . Let's say she doesn't have the physical strength of a man facing horrors and mystery.

Straight versus Gay Heroes

Questionnaire participants also discussed their anime character preferences in terms of whether they preferred straight or gay heroes. The vast majority of participants--over 94 percent--stated a preference for anime with a straight protagonist over those with a gay protagonist (see Figure 4.4). Only one participant--less than one percent of the sample--expressed a preference for a gay protagonist. Nearly five percent of participants

stated no preference, meaning that they would watch an anime with either a straight or gay protagonist.

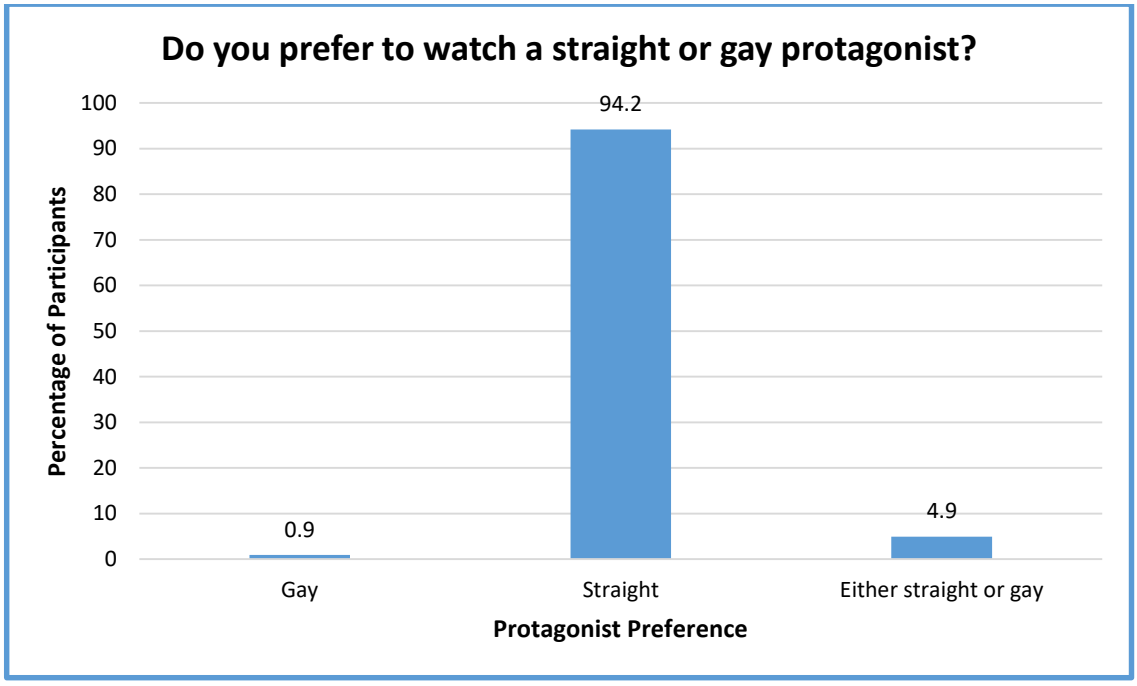

FIGURE 4.4. Percentage of questionnaire participants who prefer to watch a straight or gay protagonist.

When asked if they would want to watch a gay protagonist, only two participants--1.9 percent of the sample--responded affirmatively while 98.1 percent stated they would not (see Figure 4.5). While still a minority, more participants--8.7 percent--stated that they would want to watch a lesbian protagonist than with a gay protagonist while over 91 percent expressed they would not want to watch a lesbian protagonist (see Figure 4.6).

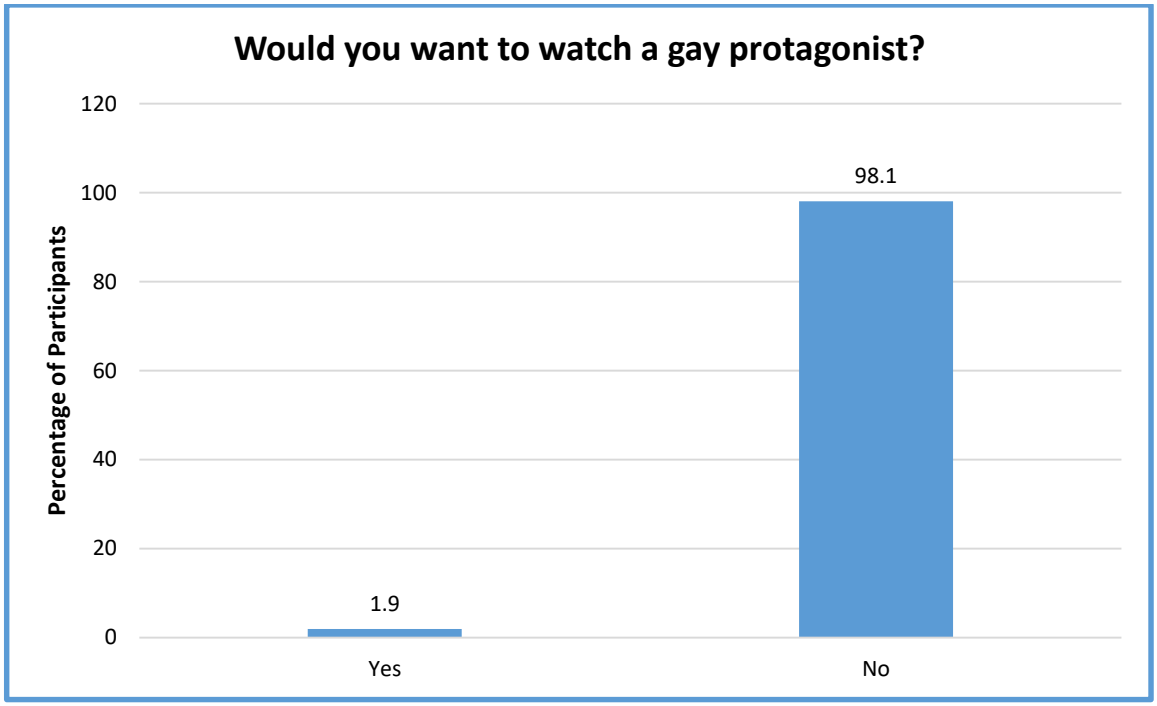

FIGURE 4.5. Percentage of questionnaire participants who would want to watch a gay protagonist in anime.

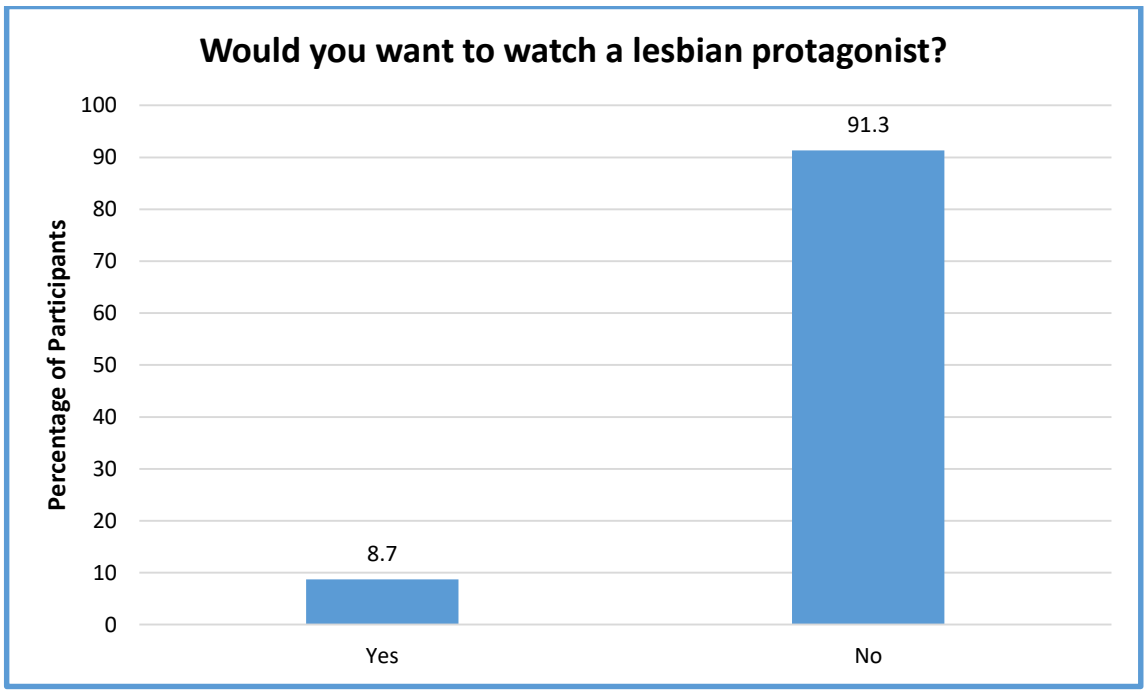

FIGURE 4.6. Percentage of participants who would want to watch a lesbian protagonist in anime.

Anime Character Preferences: Dominance and Submission

Participants shared their preferences--often in great detail--regarding character dominance and submission, namely, whether they prefer to watch--or are even willing to watch--anime that depict female characters who are more durable than their male counterparts and vice versa.

Among the questionnaire participants, when asked whether they preferred to see an anime with a weak male hero and strong female hero, only 3 percent responded affirmatively. The vast majority of participants--97 percent--preferred to see a male hero depicted as either strong or as having "medium-strength". Only 19.4 percent of participants expressed a preference to watch anime in which the male and female heroes were depicted as having equal strength--that is, "medium-strength". A smaller percentage--14.5 percent--preferred animes with a strong male hero and weak female hero. Most participants--63 percent--preferred animes with a strong male hero and a female hero with "medium-strength" (see Figure 4.7).

These findings suggest that the questionnaire participants overwhelmingly prefer a male hero who is not weak--either strong or of medium strength--and that while most participants they prefer the male hero to be stronger than the female hero, they also prefer that the female hero is not weak, just not as strong as the male. That is, most participants prefer to watch heroes of either sex depicted as either medium strength or strong but not weak and prefer male heroes displaying greater strength than female heroes. Below, the interview participants describe their preferences regarding the dominance and submission of male and female characters, offering a more detailed picture of Kuwaiti anime fan preferences and the reasoning behind such preferences.

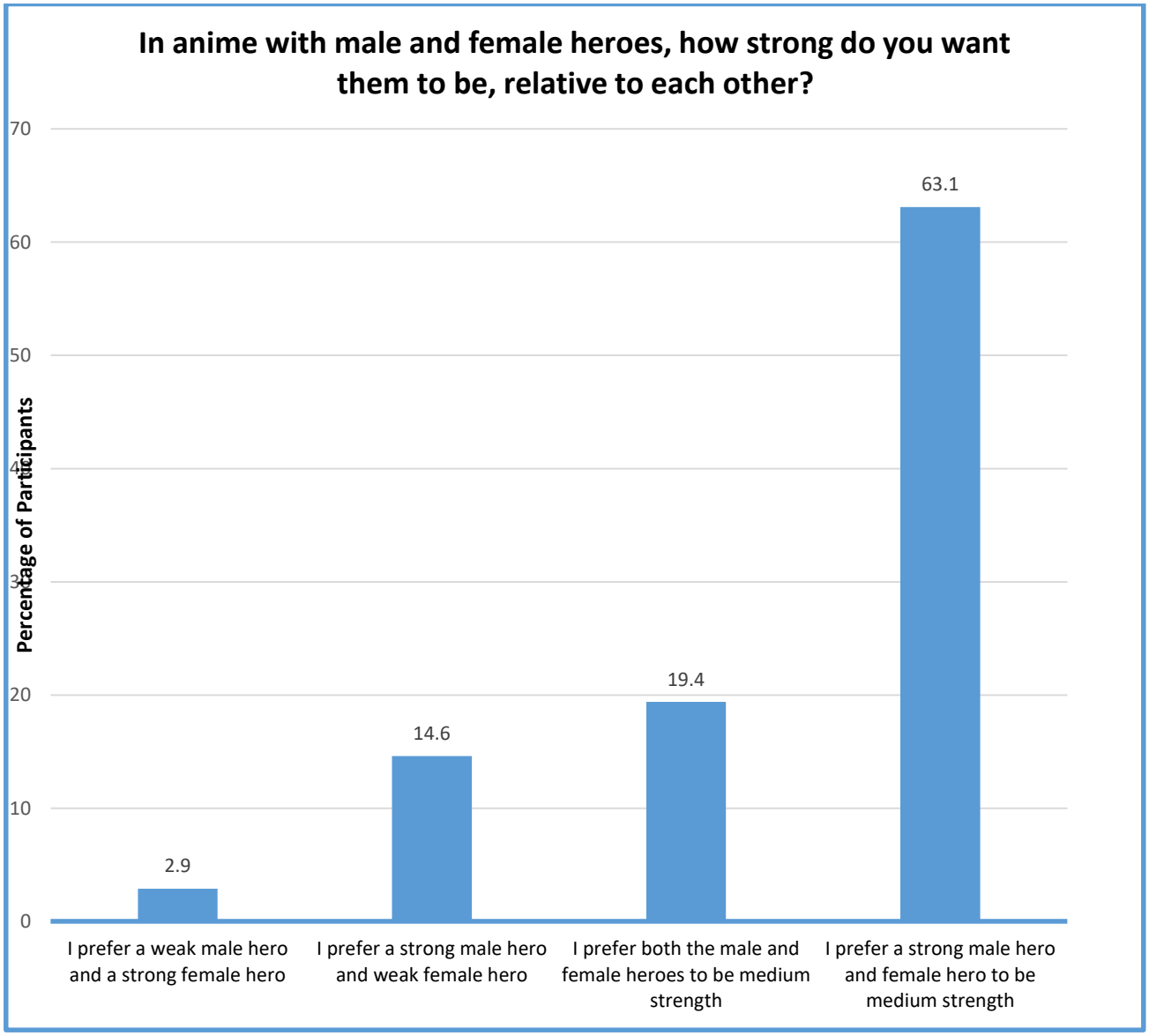

FIGURE 4.7. Questionnaire participant preferences regarding the level of strength of male and female heroes, relative to each other.

Preference for Dominant Male Characters

A small number of participants had strong preferences for watching anime with dominant male characters and, with a few exceptions, utterly refused to watch

female-dominant anime. They generally seemed to take greater issue the notion of a weak male character than with a strong female character. Waleed Bouresli simply said, “If the man is not worth anything and the female is doing everything for the man and is in the main picture, I would not bother myself to watch it.” With a few caveats, Mehdi el Moussaoui was quite adamant that he would not watch anime depicting female characters who were stronger or more dominant than the male characters. He said, “Generally no,” he would not watch a female-dominant anime where the male character was depicted as weak, “but if . . . for example, I see an interesting ability in the main character, which I hope he will develop, I will watch it . . . if there is a [male] character with . . . the potential to grow stronger, yes, I will watch it.” Another caveat: “Throughout, also [the story is] just focusing on him, not her.” But if the male hero is weak and cannot do anything, would he watch it? “Absolutely not. Nope.” But if the female character were strong, “as long as he can beat her, yes [I’d watch it]”. Basically, the male character must become stronger than the female character over the course of the story for him to be interested in watching it:

Unless he has an ability, but other than that, if he [is] just trying to get stronger but he won't, he won't be and she [is] still [stronger than him], nope [I won’t watch it]. [If] it will be still a female-based [story], I won't watch it. [The male character must become] much stronger [than the female for me to watch it]. . . . What I prefer is that the character's already powerful enough . . . from the beginning. And he can get even stronger or each episode he unleash some of his hidden potential, his held-up power. This is what I like. . . . Unless he . . . has something like for example he has, like, dynamic vision or he has a hidden element potential, or a jacket, or whatever,

something that makes him valuable, at least to me, other than that, no [I won't watch it].

Mehdi el Moussaoui could imagine a few limited scenarios in which he would tolerate watching an anime with a dominant female character, ones which supported the male to become stronger or to otherwise support his powers: "If [the female character is guiding a male hero] for him to become stronger, okay, fine by me. Everyone starts from zero. . . . And [if she] protect[s] him, it's okay, that's fine. . . . For example, if the hero has an ability that could destroy the whole world…and when he gets angry or emotional, she can protect him from himself, that's okay, fine by me."

Fahad Oraifan largely agreed with Mehdi el Moussaoui's positions, also allowing for plots that depicted women supporting the men, such as providing guidance. And while he generally would refuse to watch anime that depicted women as stronger than men, for him, wanting to see the male character as dominant did not seem to be about disrespecting the female characters but about protecting them justly: "If the male is weak and the female is strong, I would not watch it. But to some degree, if the woman is, like, a teacher who is guiding the male character I would understand, such scenes from Neon Genesis Evangelion, where Shinji, the main protagonist, needs guidance. I won't even watch an anime if the female is the same level as the male. But if the male is stronger than the female and defends the woman with justice, then I would watch it."

Preference for Dominant Female Characters

Mahamed Samer Shaeen was the only participant who stated that he would watch anime with strong female characters without adding a litany of conditions for the plot

for him to do so. He explained that he preferred for women to be depicted as strong in anime “because women are strong. That's my opinion. I think women are strong and they should be strong in anime as well. [I want them] to be strong, just plain strong. They shouldn't be weak.” Yet, with that said, he ultimately still preferred to watch male-led anime, justifying his position by stating that anime should reflect the real world, which is characterized by male dominance: “The main character, I prefer to be a man because . . . that's the world. I've argued with so many people about this, but in the world, the truth is men dominate more than women and that's why . . . in anime, it should reflect that as well. . . . It could happen both ways [whether a man protects a woman or a woman protects a man], but eventually, the one who has the influence on the world should be a man.

Preference Depends on Plot

While most participants expressed that their preference for watching male or female dominant anime--or, in most cases their tolerance, rather than preference per se, for watching dominant female anime--depended on the plot, they generally had extremely specific plot requirements for them to continue watching in cases where the female was more dominant than the male character. That is, they generally embraced watching anime which depicted male characters as more dominant than the female ones while they generally only tolerated, rather than embraced, watching female dominant characters and only when the plot met certain conditions, largely to do with the characteristics and development of the male character and the particular ways in which the female and male characters related to each other and interacted.

Abdulla Al Kandari acknowledged that the new generation of anime brought with it a significant shift in the gender relations between male and female characters: "[It's a changing of gender roles]. In the case of *Witchcraft Work*, it is a change of role. It's a major change." For him, one of the most important features of an anime in which the female character is stronger than the male character is that the two do not eventually develop a romantic relationship. He seemed to be accepting of situations in which the female was more dominant than the male if the relationship was platonic, such as a sister or teacher, but such female dominance would become problematic if the relationship turned romantic. As he explained:

[Whether I prefer the male character to be stronger than the female], I think it depends on which girl it is. Because if we take it…the armor animation, the armors from the Greek mythologies, [called] Saint Seiya…Although it is a long animation, we can say that he actually took his time getting the armor first. But…he was guarded first. He was weak. He was being protected by his teacher. So I think that was okay because there was no development [of] a [romantic] relationship. She was still his sister. She was still his master. However, the new ones, I do see that girls that defend the hero end up falling in love with him first. Or in the end. And most of the time, the character does not even reach her level.

Abdulla Al Kandari elaborated on his thoughts about male and female dominance by using the examples of *Infinite Stratos* and *Air Gear*, suggesting that in some cases, like *Air Gear*, the depiction of female dominance is a result of fan service that is done in a way that ends up compromising the story. He went on:

If the female keeps pushing until the male becomes as strong [as her], I feel that the female failed, because you don't need a stronger character unless he's stronger than you. If you can do exactly what he can do. For instance, Infinite Stratos, he does develop skills. Maybe not as good as some of the characters, but he does become good, but not significantly. Not especially strong. There's nothing new about him. There's nothing overpowered about him. So I think it's kind of a waste. Although it was potentially good. Things like Air Gear, he does start weak. He does get protected by a bunch of girls…they were[at a] way higher [level of strength]. And eventually, he gets there. He gets powerful…He gets over the girls at one point…But that's, like, in the last, what, 20 episodes? And I think like even in the manga, it's still around girls being the protectors…for fan service. And I think that kind of does spoil the story. They took things too slow.

For Abdulla Al Kandari, in anime where the female character was more dominant than the male one, not only was it important for him to see the male character become stronger over time rather than stay weak, but it was also important that it not take a terribly long time for him to do so, as happened in the case of *Air Gear*: "[I would] never, never, never, never [watch an anime where the female is stronger than the male and it takes a long time for him to build up his strength]. That's why I stopped watching things like . . . *Air Gear*. It takes very, very long [time to build up]. [I want the build up to be] not necessarily quick, but, not too long. And eventually he reaches somewhere where he actually gets to the top. He wouldn't stay somewhere. . . . He has to be higher [than where he starts]."

Likewise, Ali Methan said he would watch an anime with a weak male character and strong female one as long as the male gradually became equal to the female in strength. As he put it, “I mean, I don't mind if male [starts out weak but] grows as strong as the female.” Like a number of other participants, he said he enjoyed the arc of character development, watching a weak character become strong or likeable. Also like other participants, the amount of time it takes for the male character to develop was important for whether he decides to continue watching the anime: “If he takes too long [to develop into a stronger character], then I get impatient and [it gets annoying]. And I just stop watching.” His interest in the characters went beyond whether or not he is strong but lay in the character’s full personality--for him, likeability was ultimately more important than strength. He elaborated: “I actually like watching character development. . . . Well, at least to a point where he becomes a lot more likeable. I mean, if he has qualities about him when he’s [weak] where if he's likeable, then I might enjoy him. The thing is, I don't judge the character based on how weak or strong he is. I like to see how his personality or her personality is, and if he's likeable, if he's going to get annoying. And then I'm, like, nope, not watching the rest of this.”

However, Ali Methan stated unequivocally that he would refuse to watch an anime in which the dominant female continuously beat or abused the submissive male for no justifiable reason:

When it comes to the female character constantly beating him, that sounds very . . . the thing is, when it comes to the female character constantly hitting the male, that's kind of just . . . annoying. And is it patronizing? Is patronizing the word I would use? I'm not sure how to describe it. It's just, I've never liked that quality, like, that aspect of any

anime, where the female always has to hit the character. If it's for a reason if he's an idiot, sure, but if it's for no reason at all or if it just because I just never liked that. And to see that, that doesn't really make a strong female character, to have her constantly hit the male character, you know?

Ali Methan was open to the idea of watching a female character defend or protect a male character, as long as it made sense in terms of the plot, and it was not due to the male character's all-around weakness: "It depends on the situation and what's being written. To me at least. Like, if she has reason to defend him, like if he's injured or if he has something wrong with him where he can't fight, then that would kind of set an interesting idea for their relationship in terms of how they interact with each other and what not. But if he's just a weak character, and he has the ability to fight but chooses not to, then that's just silly."

Ali Methan said that he enjoyed watching anime that depicted characters making sacrifices--the notion of "sacrificing yourself to gain something back or sacrificing something"-- whether they were male or female, seeing sacrifice as more of an element of maturity rather than masculinity per se:

One thing that's important [is sacrificing] to kind of teach a good lesson, though. It's not just for masculinity, it's more or less for maturity. 'Cause you have to learn that, you have to let some things go to gain something else back. That's a good idea, to basically teach people that if you want to gain it back, you have to work for it. In the process of working for it, you end up losing something, and you'll lose either your time

[or] some other things, but you'll eventually gain that thing [back] that you've wanted your whole life.

For Jaffar Mansour, the amount of time he had already invested in watching an anime would trump any deviation from his character preferences, including the introduction of a female character who was more dominant than the male character: "Look, if the female was much stronger than a man, let me tell you straight, I am still watching it. Why? Because maybe I just watched 50 episode of it or 100 episode. Now you want me to cut it off immediately? No, I can't. [I'm going to watch it to the end.]"

Regarding the notion of a female character protecting the male character, the genre of anime mattered for whether he would watch it: if it's a comedy, yes, if it's action/adventure, no. And in cases where the female character beats the male character, it would only be tolerable to him for a few episodes; the male character must become strong at that point. For Jaffar Mansour, the most important feature of a plot featuring a weak male character is that he becomes strong over time: "[anime where] the woman protects [the man] . . . if it is a comedy show, it's okay, but [if] it is adventure and action, no, it must man. Even so, maybe in the first three episode a woman beats a man, okay in the first three but he maintains himself, he became powerful, now no woman can stand in his way. That [type of] anime, I like it."

Jaffar Mansour said he liked watching anime that depicted the male and female characters are possessing equal amounts of power, neither dominating the other. But again, anime with dominant females had to meet certain plot conditions for him to continue watching. He would not simply watch an anime with a dominant female unless it made sense for the plot--usually entailing her occupying a supportive role for the male

character, as other participants described--and the plot could not dwell on female dominance for long; the male character would have to become strong over the course of a few episodes in order to him to keep watching: “If he and the female are the same equal, I say, okay, because both of them…help each other. I like the anime that way. Not the female [stronger than the male]. I feel awkward. Seriously. . . . Okay, maybe in [the] first episode, maybe she's a provider, she's a professional, she's bigger than him, she helps him in the first three times. Then he grows up with his own, and I like this type [of anime].”

Jaffar Mansour also understood that there were plots in which it made sense to depict a strong female, such as one who is strong-hearted and who stands up for herself: “For [the] female to become stronger, maybe they want to make [a] female [character] that [is] still strong in their heart…Say, if your husband shouts at you, you stand by, and you shout to him back.”

Hussain Al-Baghli largely shared Ali Methan’s views regarding depictions of female characters beating male characters. He explained that, particularly when the male character is the main character, such violence must be justified in terms of the plot and the male character must demonstrate growth in strength over time otherwise it would be pointless to place him as the main character:

When the female character beats the male character, it feels like the character is worthless…The fact that you have a character and…if you're trying to show people that [she’s] stronger than him and [she] just beat[s] him up for no apparent reason and he's the main character where he's supposed to be, like, powerful, than what's the point of just giving it to him? I mean, you're just making him a little bit weaker and weaker.

Shouldn't you give [hiim] a chance or opportunity to show how powerful he can be, how strong can he get? There are some anime where they don't really progress at that point or they just focus on other characters.

Hussain Al-Baghli used the example of a scene from *Dragon Ball Z* in which a female character beats a male character to further illustrate his position on the matter, again emphasizing that such violence must not be pointless in terms of the plot:

I don't really prefer it as much [to watch a female character hit the male character]. I have like a nice example [from] Dragon Ball Z. There was the fight [between] Vegeta and Android or Cyborg 18. In that fight, Vegeta thought he could actually beat [Android], but it turns out he actually lost the fight 'cause . . .she has more strength than him. I don't mind that as long as they give a challenge to both sides. But, if you're just exploiting it . . . that will be just annoying 'cause I don't prefer that. . . . If you wanna do it, do it with a reason.

Hussain Al-Baghli further explained the importance of character development if the male character is depicted as weak. Like many of the other participants, seeing a character develop and progress over time is one of the key factors that will decide whether he continues to watch the anime. As he put it, "it depends on the story but if [the male character] will not progress, then what's the point of watching it?" He used the examples of the anime *Attack on Titans* and *Tengen Toppa Gurren Lagann* to elaborate his point, suggesting that if the main male character does not progress over time, then

perhaps a female character should be positioned as the main character, illustrating that he was not adamant about the main character always being male:

A nice example [from] Attack on Titans, the character…he began with the worst possible condition ever. Then he progressed through time. The reason I'm watching it is because of how much he works. Even though he has limitations, he still keeps on going up and up and he's not limited to one point and all the other characters progress while he just stays the same. In other anime like . . .Tengen Toppa Gurren Lagann . . . the anime is basically each time he reached a new ability or new potential . . . even though there are people who are far more stronger than him, he still keeps on reaching and reaching and . . . he always expands his abilities. He reaches his potential and even expands it, even goes beyond it. Which is, I mean, amazing. But . . . if a character would never progress while other characters would progress, then why . . . what's the point of having him the main character? Why won't you let the female character be the main character instead?

Hussain Al-Baghli further elaborated on his point, emphasizing that portrayals of a weak male character need to make sense in terms of the plot for him to keep watching it. That is, such weakness, such as being beaten, must not come across as pointless but rather, must be part of a complex, compelling story with interesting characters:

To be honest, if the plot, the story, is very, very good and complex…okay [I would watch it if the character starts weak and gets stronger]. If there's supporting characters that actually do make the anime look interesting, aside from the character being

worthless . . . I don't mind it as long as the show itself at least gives me a reason to watch it. I'm not going to watch a show where he gets beaten up and progresses and there's no actual point in the end . . . there's no reason for it. I prefer if . . . they're, like, supporting cast that actually help out and then a nice story to cover it up . . . I have no problem. But if its focus is just on that, I'm not going to watch it. In my opinion.

Similarly, Hussain Al- Baghli was open to the idea of an anime depicting a male character who started out as masculine and over the course of the show became emasculated, again, as long as it made sense in terms of the plot. For him, such a scenario represented one example of a common plot device in which a character goes through ups and downs. That is, going from masculine to emasculated is one way that a character can experience ups and downs: "[The idea of a masculine character becoming emasculated] I have no problem with it since the character from the beginning is masculine. Of course, there has to be a point in time where he has to be demasculined [emasculated] to actually help out in the plot. Okay, let's be honest here. Not many people have to be masculine every time throughout the entire story. There has to be a certain point in the story . . . where they get down. [How far down] depends on how the story's going."

He used the example of the anime *Berserk*, in which the male character gets raped, to demonstrate his point about emasculation and the ups and downs of a character. As he suggested, rape represents an ultimate form of emasculation but, unlike other participants, he did not believe that such emasculation was permanent, that he permanently lost a part of his masculinity. Rather, the character emerged from the incident stronger than ever, which sparked a profound curiosity about such a journey in Hussain Al-Baghli as a viewer:

In [the] Berserk case where he gets raped, I think that's, like, a [real] turning point to most fans. But, in the end, he rose back up and . . . becomes even more famous than he was before. I have no problem with that as long as he knows how to get back up and how well it was interpreted. And I prefer if it's interpreted very well. In that case, I wouldn't mind continuing [to watch]. I'm actually more interested in why was he raped. . . . I would like to know why. . . . I know he's a very masculine man. What's the reason for that? I [do] not know but, it interests me. I want to see why. How was he demasculinized [emasculated] and became an even more masculine character than before?

For Adham, he would watch an anime that portrayed the female character as stronger than the male character under a number of conditions. While it was not important for him that the male character became as strong as, or stronger than, his female counterpart--something that was important for many other participants--like other participants, it was important for Adham that the male character still displayed masculine qualities and developed himself as the series progressed: "The question [of whether I'd watch an anime where the female is stronger than the male] depends on the relationship of the lady and the guy. What's the relationship? . . . He's a badass but weak, or weak? If he's masculine, I would [watch it]. [By] masculine, [what] I mean is that he doesn't count 100 percent on her to do everything for him…I would watch it to the end. Even if he doesn't become as strong as her, I would still watch it to the end as long as he has the personality . . . of masculinity."

Adham used the example of the anime *Bleach*, in which a weak male character became strong, to demonstrate his point: “A good example of [of a weak character becoming strong over time] is Bleach. For example, you have him at the beginning of the anime, he was just a normal, technically normal, human, a high school boy who got the powers of shinigami. He lost the powers, but then started from scratch until you see what he became.”

And while Adham could be patient enough to watch the male character develop his strength over time, like other participants, there were limits to his patience: he would not wait forever. Having to endure dozens of episodes for such a character arc to develop would be agonizing for him, joking that it could even frustrate him to tears: “I wait until he takes the action of improving [but] . . . it would annoy me to hell if he’s going to wait until episode, let's say [episode 25]. Episode 10 is acceptable, but episode 20, 25, 30 is absolute pain. I might watch it while crying.”

Adham also shared his views on depictions of female characters abusing male characters. For him, it was important that such scenes also showed strength on the part of the male character and did not simply accept the abuse, such as in the anime *Black Lagoon:* “In an excerpt, perhaps in the 4th or the 5th episode, the female, the protagonist, was sitting with this person who she always ridiculed, and made fun of, and basically he stood up in front of her and yelled at her. He showed her that he demands the respect that he deserves, and that's when she ended up smacking him. She outright punched him in the face, but he didn't cry or run away, or apologize. He just stood there in front of her after she punched him.”

Adham went on to explain that such depictions of abuse would be acceptable to him if the male character developed himself over time and learned to stand up for himself:

"This guy was actually, like, an accountant. I don't remember exactly, but he was working for a company that she and her friends kidnapped some of the employees, including him, so at the beginning of the anime, he was a hostage. But later on, the company abandoned him, and he joined them. All the time, she used to ridicule him [and abuse him]. But after the fight, they both understood, but they show signs that she started to respect him because he showed his personality that he has character. That he will not sit there and accept abuse."

Conversely, if the male character were accepting of the abuse, which would be an egregious display of weakness in Adham's view, he would refuse to watch the anime, unless it was showcasing domestic abuse to educate audiences. He felt the same about watching a female character accept abuse. As he explained:

I'm sorry, I cannot continue watching an anime where a man accepts the abuse…and you can ask me, "Would you watch an anime of a woman accepting an abuse?" Huh-uh [no]. . . . If she's the main character, I would expect her to stand up and not accept [the abuse]. Basically, a man or a woman that accepts abuse is weak, is fragile. Unless I'm doing an anime to show how family abused, domestic abuse, okay, that's fine, because I understand about domestic abuse. But if it's not related to that, I wouldn't [watch it].

To contrast with *Black Lagoon*, he used the example of the anime *Mirai Nikki*, which also depicted abuse of a male character by a female character. In this case, the male character accepted the abuse, prompting him to question, as a viewer, why he should continue watching it, suggesting that depictions of a weak male character who does not show any sign of strength is not worth watching: "For example, [in] *Mirai*

Nikki, [the male character] keeps accepting that abuse and does nothing to permanently improve . . . and he stays there accepting the abuse? Why the hell should I watch it? At least in *Black Lagoon* . . . she's tougher, stronger, she's better than him in almost everything except diplomacy because she isn't better than that, but regarding strength and everything, she's stronger. But, he manages to stand in front of her and said, "enough is enough".

Adham elaborated on the importance of character development and not depicting characters as weak throughout the series, again using the example of *Mirai Nikki* as one anime which, in his view, failed on this count:

If [the male character] stays weak the entire series, but does have personality, does not accept to be abused, acts like a masculine man, sure I would watch an entire series. But, he is weak, he gets abused, he cowers [then I would not watch it]. . . .This reminds me of Mirai Nikki . . . because I think the makers of Mirai Nikki decided on purpose to antagonize and make me suffer. [There's] one episode where there are two couples who are facing him. They're trying to kill him, and they noticed how this crazy woman . . . is defending him. The man who's fighting the childish hero tells him, "You're not a man." He tells him, "You're supposed to be protecting her, not her protecting you." One of the antagonists [said that]. What happened then? Then, [did] the protagonist change? I'll be honest, I just reached episode 18 out of 24, but I have skimmed through it, and I didn't see any changes. Even if he did become masculine at some certain point, the ending is enough that he is not a masculine man.

A number of other participants took a similar position as Adham regarding the notion of a female character having more strength or power than a male character: as long the male character demonstrated some level of strength, developed himself over time, tried his best, and demonstrated masculine qualities, they would watch it. For some, like Mahammad Al Kandari, they would only watch, however, if the male character eventually becomes stronger than the female character: "I would watch [an anime where the female is stronger than the male], but the male character must have a developing process, if he doesn't [progress], I will discontinue it, and he must be stronger than the female." For others, such Abdullah Kodor Attar, they would watch even if the male character never achieved the level of power of the female character: "If the female is stronger than the male, because the female has super natural powers and he doesn't have [any], but if the male protagonist doesn't give in or give up, and tries to protect her and show his position as a man or show his masculinity then I would watch the anime, but if he doesn't do this type of event of showing his manhood, then the whole anime can burn."

Aziz Al- Suhely largely agreed with Abdullah Kodor Attar and Adham on this point, not requiring the male character to ever reach the level of strength as the dominant female as long as it made sense in terms of the plot, but insisting that he make an effort to become strong and not stagnate in his weaknesses: "If the woman is stronger than the man, then, therefore, there must be a reason, but if the male character is a wimp, and he cannot do anything then I refuse to watch it. But if she has special powers, but he is trying to become strong and doesn't give up, focus forward and has a strong personality, then I would watch it. I also don't like if the female would do some of the work and he completes it, but instead he would complete everything by his own."

Likewise, Abdulrahman Bin Nasser would accept a dominant female character but would want to see a weak male character become strong quickly; otherwise, he would not bother watching:

It would annoy me if I have to wait for a long time [for the male character to become strong], and I don't prefer the male character to be weak, but he has to build up quickly. I would actually watch both cases [male character stronger than female and vice versa], but if the female have something that the male doesn't have, like a knowledge that the male doesn't have, I would understand, but if she is in a whole complete strength level and he doesn't build up and doesn't become stronger, I won't watch it.

Ahmed Abu Taleb also insisted on character development--of both the male and female characters: "If the male hero has no development, then I would discontinue it. It depends on who is the hero--if it's only male [and no female], and there is no character development, then I would discontinue it. If [it's] both [a male and female hero], then they both must be developed to become strong."

Awatha Al Mutairi, too, was open to watching an anime with a dominant female character. Like other participants, the development of the weaker male character was important to her, but also, the way in which the development happens. For her, such development must be portrayed organically--that is, it must be believable--otherwise, she would not be interested in watching: "[If the female is stronger than the male] I would watch it, even if the male would reach the same power as the female to become equal, but if he develops slowly to become strong I might watch it, but if all of a sudden he becomes powerful I won't watch it, because it might be cheesy."

Sexualized Fan Service: What They Would Change within the Anime Industry

Participants shared their thoughts on how the sexualized fan service that characterizes much of the new generation of anime has shaped the anime industry and the changes they would like to see the anime industry make in order to bring new anime into greater alignment with what they want to watch.

Mehdi el Moussaoui spoke directly to anime industry players in his plea for less sexualized content. “Please no more harem,” he said, referring to the harem genre of anime which invariably have sexual overtones. “Please, just save me the boobs and the titties and the asses and everything. Please,” he continued. He would also like to see an end to the abundance of anime depicting incestuous relationships between family members, which he found deeply disturbing: “And please stop making shitty anime about the sister who has a brother complex or a brother [with] a mother complex. . . . Even one of them, I forgot the name but he actually slept with his sister. They were both silver-haired and they moved out of the country and he fucked her, and she liked it, and they become lovers. Then their schoolmates found out, they hated them. Then suddenly they supported him. What the fuck…They were blood-related, 100 percent.”

To reduce the sexualized fan service, he suggested that Japanese anime companies broaden their focus in terms of targeted audiences to the global anime market rather than remain tightly focused on the Japanese market, which drives the demand for this type of fan service. Likewise, he suggested that the influence of the otakus should be diminished.

Abdulla Al Kandari agreed with Mehdi el Moussaoui that the otakus shape the new generation of anime too much and should not have such a large influence, given that, in his view, they do not represent the interests of the larger anime community and what

they want to see. When discussing the ubiquity of harem anime today, he acknowledged that “guys should not be taking care of girls all the time” and the harem anime--featuring numerous women adoring and doting on a main male character--offer a respite from such notions of male obligation as well as a source of love and affection to which audiences can relate. “I think that's what [the otaku] are searching for. I think the otaku that is building those, that are making those [harem] animation and have a need of love and care from someone and they just not receiving it.” Ultimately, he saw the otaku as cut off from the world, producing only the types of anime they wish to see: “[The otaku] keep themselves inside their rooms, they keep [to] themselves and . . . at some point just got out of hand. It's not what you want to see anymore.”

Adham concurred with Abdulla Al Kandari and Mehdi el Moussaoui that the otakus have too much influence over the anime industry and that something must be done to address it, pleading with anime industry players directly: “I know that otakus are controlling the industry, but…please try to do something. There must be another way of making income than getting investments paid by otakus. Seriously.” Like Abdulla Al Kandari, Adham believed that part of the problem with the otakus’ influence is that they are a separate group which does not represent the interests of the broader anime community which means that most anime are targeting a narrow group of people, leaving most anime fans unsatisfied: “I just think otakus are closed. . . . They close themselves and things like that, but seriously. They're listening to people who are shut off themselves from the world. Yes, they do have money, and they spend it willingly, but seriously. . . . They shut out the world. What would the world think? Because, this world doesn't only have otakus. It has the rest of people who would be watching anime,

and if you're going to focus on otakus only, you're doing anime, in general, a big . . . you're making a big mistake."

Abdulla Al Kandari's comments about the problems with fan service more broadly echoed Mehdi el Moussaoui's sentiments, stating that fan service ruins much anime which otherwise show excellent potential: "I would say that they're doing it wrong. . . . First thing, they need to stop the fan service because you see a lot of good stories that can make a very good impression, that can make a very good anime, but you just fill it with those extra packaging, extra fan service stuff and they do ruin it."

While he remained fond of the depictions of masculinity that typified the old generation of anime, Abdulla Al Kandari recognized that greater diversity of male characters found in the new generation of anime was beneficial because it allowed for a wider array of stories to be told: "When it comes to masculinity, the cool element can still stay, I mean you can't keep watching the same enemy, the same buffs all the time. You can have those skinny, but also muscular men from . . . [like] *Gun X Sword*. You can still have those even from *Gurren Lagann,* and they do have that muscular [look]."

As problematic as he found much of today's fan service, and believed there should be less of it--"less, a lot less"-- Abdulla Al Kandari acknowledge that some level of fan service was beneficial to the stories, especially given the comic relief it often provides. In his view, fan service can play an effective role but only if used sparingly and in ways that do not distract from the story or the main characters. He elaborated: "I wouldn't say cut it all the way. I mean there [is] some comedy related to it, but you should cut down some a little bit. You should focus more on the story and the characters, other than the side characters. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't, most of the time it doesn't.

Especially when it comes to our harem thing because the focus is actually on the side characters, which I don't like."

A number of participants stated that they would like to see the old generation of anime brought back into circulation in one form or another, expressing their longing for anime known for their excellent storylines, complex masculine characters, exciting action scenes, and little sexualized fan service. Some suggested actual remakes with new technology to make them even more visually appealing, such as Mehdi el Moussaoui, who said, "[Bring] the old generation back [from the 1990s]. . . . If they brought them back with the new technology, they would be masterpieces."

Likewise, Hussain Al-Baghli suggested "rebooting" the anime from the 1990s: "What do I want? Exactly what I want is that not bring the '90s back. . . . I want you to actually remind people why the '90s was a great era. Remind the people how good their anime were. If you can actually recreate them, reboot them. Not in the ways of the Atakos, how it was actually being interpreted in the '90s. Just in, like, better quality. Or just that in terms of rebooting."

Others, such as Abdulla Al Kandari, instead suggested that some of the plot and character elements that defined the old generation of anime be introduced in today's anime. As Abdulla Al Kandari suggested, the masculine traits featured in many of the male characters in the old anime--such as protecting others and fighting well--could be blended with some of the traits common in the male characters in new anime as a way of restoring a greater sense of masculinity that he felt has been missing in many of the new anime: "You can bring the 90s [anime] back. That would be nice. . . . [Bring back some elements of '90s anime, like the male protecting the female.] The man should know what to do and should protect everybody and protect the female. He can be cool,

he can be sometimes naive, he can be like, for instance, One Piece, he's still naive, and he’s still full. He still likes, you know, bugs and things like that. But when it comes to a fighting situation, he changed to be that man that can . . . help, that can stand his ground.”

Hussain Al- Baghli also made some suggestions similar to those of Abdulla Al Kandari in which some of the defining features of the old generation of anime--including its depictions of masculinity--are woven into the new anime, which he felt have become repetitive and often look too similar to one another:

I prefer if you actually do bring back some elements of masculinity. Like you actually bring back the same elements you provided in the '90s during this time 'cause, because most anime in my opinion, they just look the same. They all look the same. The characters look different. The story I think is different. But in my opinion, they look exactly the same, just slap in a different name, put in, like, different coloring systems and that's a new, different anime. In this era . . . I don't think there are many new ideas. Some ideas are from either famous writers or manga artists. They just did a new story or a new idea. But, but because they were famous before . . . but I have not really seen someone, as recent like the creator of Attack on Titans, his impact was huge.

He suggested that some of the ideas and approaches that made old anime, like *Attack on Titans* or *Jojo so* successful be brought into the new anime--not that they should be merely replicated but rather, applied effectively to improve the quality of new anime that would make them as memorable as some of the classic old anime:

I prefer people to actually bring something like his ideas. Like, it doesn't have to be like Attack on Titans. I'm not saying exactly like it but the same feeling that I had for Attack on Titans. The same feeling I had for JoJo…I want to have the same feeling that I had for these same anime. Not for their story. Their stories are amazing. But in terms of how interpreted, how well performed it was. How the interpretation was perfect, how the characters were actually memorable, aside from the new anime where you actually forget who the main character was sometimes. And if they could actually bring back old anime, I wouldn't have a problem. Or just create new anime with the same idea.

For Ali Methan, one of the problems with many of the new anime is the poor quality of writing which leads to the ubiquity of "fillers" in the plot--much of it sexualized fan service--which he found pointless and often ruined the stories:

There's also those animations that are very badly written. They're very badly made, and of course, the ending is going to be bad...That's the thing with Naruto, too as well. Even the manga was like being written a few years before the anime was being made, and they still like have all those fillers going on. It's just like, what are you even doing? I mean with Dragonball Z there was an excuse with them having fillers cause the manga and the anime were being done at the same time, but with Naruto the manga was way ahead of the anime. Why do you have all those fillers for it? There's no point.

Abdulrahman Bin Nasser felt similarly about much of the fan service he has seen in the new anime, suggesting that fan service is inserted clumsily into plots because "there are no new ideas", suggesting, like Ali Methan, that the quality of writing has

diminished: “I don’t like to see in a good anime, where there is an increase of fan service, where they increase too much service over nothing. A great example would be *High School of the Dead*. It had a good story, but the [fan] service ruined it. I dislike fan service. For the other side, the hero being a normal school boy, naïve and weak, always pushed around, and then all of a sudden, he gets something to make him powerful by just a snap of the finger. There are no new ideas.”

While Ali Methan felt that there is too much fan service in general, he was careful to acknowledge that fan service can include a wide variety of content, some of which is not always detrimental to the story. He specified that the sexualized fan service involving female characters, in particular, should be reduced: “I would say less fan service, but the term fan service, it can vary by what you're meaning. Like having a certain person [be a] character from a different [anime], like having a character have a cameo and a certain anime or certain scene. I think if we focus less on the sexual aspect of the female characters and just try to focus more on why they're likable.”

Instead of being portrayed as overly sexual, he suggested that female characters should be developed into much more complex, likeable characters that better reflect the realities of real women today. He recognized that such approaches have been taken by a number of recent popular anime which have successfully depicted female characters that are strong, mature, likeable, and not reduced to sexualized caricatures:

If you knew this person in real life, for example, what about her would you like, her personality and what does she do that appeals to you? That's what I think they should try to do with these female characters. Kawasaki does have a point though, I mean his female characters are very likable because they are very strong-minded, they know

what they're doing, you see them kind of grow into these very mature characters. . . . Princess Mononoke, Spirited Away, Chichiro is a very good example of a very strong independent character that goes from rather weak to someone who's very confident. Just a lot I can name and they're good examples [of] really strong characters that have a good motivation.

Ali Methan elaborated on what he wished to see in the new anime, emphasizing a reduction of fan service and an increase in mature characters--both male and female--that work together, suggesting ways for male and female characters to relate that do not involve sexualized fan service but that respect the integrity of both men and women. He used the example of the anime *Sherlock Hound* to illustrate this type of anime which goes beyond stereotypical masculine traits of muscularity, provides a meaningful role for the female character that is not reduced to a sexualized caricature, and a way for the male and female characters to relate respectfully without involving sex or romance:

Less fan service and making characters that at least know what they're doing. Making characters that are very mature. There's an anime I remember watching a few years back called Sherlock Hound--or it's known in Arabic as Sherlock Holmes--and . . . the main character was pretty masculine cause he knew what he was doing. He was very mature, he actually always found a way to solve situations. I mean, he didn't have to be muscular, but at least he was a very competent and really well-rounded character. Even the female character, she had her moments to shine in some episodes where you learned about her past, and she helps out the main character defeat the villain at the end of one

of the episodes. . . . Try to have a symbiotic relationship with the female and male character more so where they both help each other out in any situation. 'Cause again, teamwork is a really strong thing I liked about anime. It's like, sure, we're different but we can at least overcome this. You take away these differences and try to help find a way to help out each other.

"Doing" Hegemonic Masculinity

"Doing" gender can be understood as a performance of gender: We construct gender and gender identities through repeated acts in which we "perform" our gender and observed performances of gender by others (Butler, 1990). By joining this concept of gender as performance to another critical feminist concept, hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987), we can see the ways in which hegemonic masculinity becomes performative. That is, "doing" hegemonic masculinity means performing hegemonic masculinity. As discussed in the Introduction, hegemonic masculinity is an open concept insofar as it refers to the dominant version of masculinity in a given culture, rather than a specific, fixed set of traits (Connell, 1995). The concept suggests that multiple, even numerous, expressions of masculinity are present within a culture but that one among them will dominate the others (making them subordinate masculinities) and be widely seen as the ideal form of masculinity.

Applied to the Kuwaiti context, we can see that a hegemonic form of masculinity persists in the longstanding patriarchal culture, one which emphasizes mens context, we can see that a hegemonic form of masculinity persists in the longstanding patriarchal culture, at work, at the mosque, in schools, in the media, within all of the major institutions which play a role in one's socialization process. When Kuwaiti

children first learn gender norms from their families, friends, and teachers, they are learning about hegemonic masculinity. They also see it on TV, in movies, music, and other forms of popular culture. As the participants in this chapter reported, as they were growing up in a distinctly Kuwaiti culture, they were simultaneously growing up with anime, first introduced to it as young children who have remained devoted fans ever since. In growing up with anime, they grew up being exposed to cultural messages about gender and sexuality transmitted by those anime.

As discussed earlier, when anime was first introduced, the Kuwait government altered the content so significantly via dubbing, editing, and censoring that it is appropriate to regard them as producers in this negotiation of meaning of anime between producers and audience. Over time, when anime consumers increasingly found ways around the dubbing and censorship and could more easily access “uncut” versions, the influence of the Kuwaiti government on the anime industry, and the messages transmitted by it to Kuwaiti audiences, waned. As a result, the original messages of the anime intended by the anime producers were not longer blocked and a different type of meaning-making within anime took place, deepening its popularity among Kuwaiti youth.

Hegemonic masculinity is at play in a number of ways within these dynamics that Kuwaiti anime fans find themselves in. First, there is the hegemonic masculinity they face in Kuwaiti culture. Then, there is the hegemonic masculinity they face in the anime they watch, reflecting, to some degree, the dominant forms of masculinity valued and practiced in Japan. I argue that they respond to these multiple forms of hegemonic masculinity, situated as they are as Kuwaiti anime fans, largely by reproducing them in the ways in which they consume the anime, including their interpretations of meaning

and their anime preferences. When a Kuwaiti anime fan states that his favorite anime are those that portray a physically strong, large, courageous, sacrificial man—as many of them did during the course of the interviews for this study—he is communicating a number of things simultaneously.

First, in his description of the type of protagonist he looks out for in anime, he is demonstrating that there is clear overlap between the portrayals of hegemonic masculinity in anime and in Kuwaiti culture. Such traits are clearly represented in the Kuwaiti notion of hegemonic masculinity and they are also clearly represented in anime from Japan. I argue that the synergy between the notions of the ideal masculine male in Japan, reflected in its anime exported abroad, and in Kuwait largely explains the immediate popularity of and affinity for anime when it first showed up in Kuwait.

Second, the Kuwaiti anime fan is type of protagonist he looks out for in anime, he is demonstrating that there is clear overlap between the portrayals of hegemonic masculinity in anime and in Kuwaiti culture. Such traits arey in Kuwait. For example, in this chapter when Abdulla Al Kandari described the masculinity of Grendizer, the protagonist in the anime of the same name, I argue that he was simultaneously communicating what hegemonic masculinity looks like in Kuwait, and furthermore, that he was a proponent of this dominant form of masculinity, the approval itself a performance, a way of "doing" hegemonic masculinity: "You can argue about [Grendizer] being skinny, but he was a manly man. He knew what to do…He had a personality. Maybe he did not have the strength because he had Grendizer for that. But still, people see him in his suit with his helmet, and they would say 'This one, this man is brave. This man is strong. This man can destroy anything that can harm Earth.'"

When Abdulla Al Kandari said “he was a manly man. He knew what to do”, he was using the language of hegemonic masculinity which suggests notions of “the man’s man”, the ideal form. “He knew what to do” means he had the intelligence and cleverness to know how to act next and that he had a take charge spirit, all traits of Kuwaiti hegemonic masculinity. Highlighting the character’s bravery, strength, and unwavering ability to protect Earthlings from harm similarly communicated Abdulla Al Kandari’s own ideas about what masculinity looks like. By drawing other people into his description, “people see him in suit with his helmet, and they would say, “this one, this man is brave…”, he generalized his interpretation of Grendizer, imagining how Kuwaitis across the board might respond to the character, which communicates the way he thinks Kuwaitis in general think about masculinity which is an expression of hegemonic masculinity.

In arguing that Kuwaiti anime fans are “doing” hegemonic masculinity when they watch, or consume anime, I am suggesting that the act of consumption itself is a form of doing gender. More specifically, it is a form of doing hegemonic masculinity—that is, consuming anime is a performance of masculinity. As performative, the consumption of anime becomes the vehicle by which the consumers perform their gender and sexuality *vis-à-vis* hegemonic masculinity within anime and within Kuwaiti culture. Participants in this chapter explained that the popularity of anime in Kuwait was due, in part, to the desire by Kuwaiti anime consumers to see themselves in the masculine characters portrayed in the anime they watched. Abdullah Kodor Attar described the phenomenon well: “Men have specific traits in them, and when a person views a character in an anime, he wants to find himself in one of the characters in the anime which represents their masculinity. It’s more towards rule

guidance on how to become a man or what is the traits of this character's masculinity, and thinking about his role."

This statement illustrates that indeed there is a performative aspect to the consumption of anime among Kuwaitis. They draw on the compatibility of messages in the anime and in Kuwaiti culture regarding gender and sexuality, and find inspiration in the anime characters. They interpret these characters as displaying hegemonic masculine traits that they have learned about as members of Kuwaiti culture. Having learned to admire these traits through socialization into Kuwaiti culture, these anime consumers wish to be more like these characters. Some even adopt their favorite character's traits in their everyday life as a way to get closer to the ideal masculine male valued most in Kuwaiti culture.

Conclusion

This chapter examined participants' anime consumption preferences within the gendered dimensions of anime. As participants discussed their preferences regarding masculine characters and male and female heroes, preferences regarding character dominance and submission, and responses to the sexualized fan service in in the new generation of anime, participants revealed their views on the appropriate relations between men and women in society but also suggested that the increasingly common depictions of strong female characters and diversification in the presentation of male characters in the new generation of anime has influenced their views on gender relations. Ultimately, I argue in this chapter that the participants' consumption preferences are themselves gendered and that participants are "doing", or performing, hegemonic

masculinity in their consumption, leading me to the conclusion that the act of consumption itself is a form of doing gender.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The present study has examined the anime consumption practices, preferences, and beliefs among Kuwaiti anime fans and other non-Kuwaiti Arab anime fans living in Kuwait. It has done with the aim of addressing gaps in existing literature by investigating the forces that have shaped the circulation and consumption of anime in Kuwait over time and how Kuwaiti anime fans' anime consumption practices and preferences may influence, as well as reflect, their attitudes and beliefs regarding gender and sexuality within the world of anime and beyond.

Strong Preferences for Strong (Male) Protagonists

The study participants displayed strong preferences with their anime consumption: they know what they do and do not like. They may not always know why they hold the preferences they hold. But they know how their preferences make them feel. They know when they are excited, inspired, disgusted, or bored. They demonstrated strong preferences related to the gendered dimensions of anime, the depictions of male and female protagonists and sub-characters, and the depictions of masculinity and femininity.

The participants generally embrace stereotypical depictions of males and masculinity (which is the masculine male) and of females and femininity (which is the feminine female) and resist transgressive portrayals--any hint of femininity in the male characters or masculinity in the female characters. Although their resistance is most

durable with the former: they bemoan the emasculation and feminization of male characters, especially protagonists, while tolerating and even sometimes embracing the masculine traits of female characters. The qualities and traits they most admire and enjoy watching in characters--both male and female--are those associated with stereotypical, hegemonic masculinity and that align with their definitions of masculinity: strong, fearless, courageous, solving problems, protecting others, intelligent, clever, noble, having integrity, keeping their word, fighting to the end, fighting well, sacrifice, not overly emotional, and keeping their cool in difficult situations. In fact, their notions of masculinity seem to be rather complex and nuanced, going well beyond qualities and traits associated with hegemonic masculinity. For them, masculinity is not merely about physical strength, though, for most, that represents one component. For them, personality and deeds matter as much as physicality, if not more.

Hegemonic Masculinity: In Anime and Kuwaiti Culture

The clear preferences and beliefs the participants have about portrayals of gender and sexuality in anime and about gender and sexuality beyond the world of anime--that is, the world of everyday life--seems to be influenced both by Kuwaiti culture and anime culture. The particular manifestations of hegemonic masculinity and femininity that exist in Kuwaiti culture inevitably influence Kuwaiti anime fans' ideas about gender roles, gender relations, and their definitions of what it means to be a "proper" man and "proper" woman. The gender politics in Kuwait are distinctive if not entirely unique. Kuwait is a place where gender segregation is the norm, where modesty is valued and where public displays of sexuality are taboo, where the predominant religion, Islam, has a wide array of instructions for men and women regarding how to properly

conduct themselves and interact. Such practices and beliefs have undoubtedly shaped the way that Kuwaiti anime fans interpret and respond to the anime content they consume, particularly the depictions of male and female characters, and masculinity and femininity.

Likewise, the anime consumed by Kuwaiti anime fans has also undoubtedly shaped not only the way they interpret and respond to the anime content, including its gendered dimensions but also developed their practices and beliefs around gender and sexuality more broadly--again, from the world of anime to the world of everyday life. In fact, tracing the source of Kuwaiti anime fans' anime consumption practices and preferences, their beliefs around gender and sexuality, is hardly a straightforward endeavor. Has watching anime shaped Kuwaiti anime fans' practices, preferences, and beliefs around gender and sexuality? Has growing up in Kuwaiti culture shaped Kuwaiti anime fans' practices, preferences, and beliefs around gender and sexuality? Has watching anime shaped Kuwaiti anime fans' anime consumption practices, preferences, and beliefs? Has growing up in Kuwaiti culture shaped Kuwaiti anime fans' anime consumption practices, preferences, and beliefs?

Arguably, the answer to all of these questions is: yes. For, while Kuwaiti anime fans were growing up in Kuwaiti culture they were simultaneously growing up with anime. As has been clearly illustrated in the previous chapters, the participants in this study have had a decades-long relationship with anime, starting when they were young children. One participant claimed to remember watching anime when he was just one-year-old. Thus, two powerful influences--Kuwaiti culture and anime culture--have been operating on these Kuwaiti anime fans for basically their entire lives. It would be virtually impossible to fully tease them apart.

The fact that they cannot be pulled apart reveals a key insight to the study: not only were Kuwaiti culture and anime culture twin forces acting upon the participants in the study, they were compatible, mutually reinforcing forces, particularly in the realm of gender. It seems that it is precisely because of the alignment between the way that gender is portrayed and encouraged in Kuwaiti culture and the way that it is portrayed and encouraged in anime in the "early days" of anime, also referred to as the old generation of anime--that is, pre-2000 anime--that anime found such an enthusiastic and dedicated audience among Kuwaitis.

In particular, the hegemonic masculine portrayals in anime from the 1980s and 1990s that the study participants were first introduced to and grew up with resonated strongly with them, reflecting the messages they were simultaneously receiving from Kuwaiti culture about what it means to be a proper man or women, what it means to be masculine or feminine. That is, the hegemonic masculinity portrayed in Kuwaiti culture aligned with the hegemonic masculinity portrayed in the anime of the 1980s and 1990s and it is for that reason that the anime from this time period was wildly popular among Kuwaitis.

And the fact that most participants have bristled at the changes to anime that seem to have started around the turn of the century, many of which involve gender transgressions, further illustrates that what the participants loved most about the anime they grew up with was its hegemonic masculinity. As this hegemonic masculinity started to wane in the 2000s, with female protagonists, depictions of dominant female characters and submissive male characters--females stronger than their male counterparts--the participants became increasingly ambivalent and even weary of the "new" anime. While depictions of masculine male protagonists still exist in the new

anime, the participants widely acknowledged that they bear no comparison to those in the “old” anime, the pre-2000 anime. Much of the new anime that they now watch is at odds with their culture in terms of the depictions of males and females and the definitions of masculinity and femininity. They now contend with a culture clash around gender that previously did not exist.

Contradictory Preferences: Sexual Modesty and Uncensored Anime

Depictions of sexuality are another matter, however. Interestingly, despite the extent to which gender and sexuality are inherently intertwined, the Kuwaiti anime fans who participated in this study have made clear demarcations between the two phenomena. The very fact that the participants spoke much more freely about gender than sexuality is itself telling. In the early days of anime in Kuwait, while it seems there was a great degree of alignment between depictions of gender in anime and in Kuwaiti culture, this did not extend to the realm of sexuality. Any sexually explicit--or even implicit--content in anime, including scantily clad female characters, partial or full nudity, sex scenes, even scenes with kissing or other physical affection displayed between male and female characters, was subject to censorship by Kuwait’s Ministry of Information.

Yet, once the participants became aware of such censorship activities and the extent to which it shaped their viewing experiences, they more often than not took matters into their own hands and did what they could to obtain uncensored copies of the animes they watched. This included purchasing uncut anime on cassette or DVD clandestinely in local video stores and open-air markets where the black market of uncut anime thrived. And when the Internet became accessible to them, they had even more freedom to

purchase--or increasingly, watch for free--the anime they wished to watch. So while the participants left the gender roles encouraged by Kuwaiti culture largely unchallenged in their anime consumption, they boldly defied the restrictions placed on them around sexuality by seeking out and watching uncut anime with depictions of sex and sexuality that were forbidden in their culture.

While a few participants admitted that the sexual content of uncut anime they watched was titillating, most insisted that they preferred uncut anime because they wanted to watch the "original" story, untainted by censorship by the Kuwaiti government. They lamented over how the censorship often, if not invariably, "ruined" the anime because of the ways in which the cut scenes--or Arabic dubbing for that matter--altered the story, at times leaving it utterly incomprehensible and impossible--or at least pointless--to watch. It does raise the question to what extent they were truthful in their interviews--or even to themselves--about the motivations for watching uncut anime. Was it just for the sake of preserving the original story? Or was it also because they enjoyed that the original story contained sexually explicit content?

The fact that most participants lamented fan service almost as much as they lamented censorship suggests that the participants were not drawn to anime primarily for the sexual content, given that most fan service involves depictions of sexuality, nudity, and sex scenes aimed to please the viewer. It is possible that they denied the enjoyment of the sexualized fan service during the interviews or even denied it to themselves. But there is plenty of data from these interviews to suggest that these anime fans were, overall, very committed to what they considered quality stories and characters. For them, the depictions of sexuality were usually a distraction from the plot, but, according to them, much good anime happened to contain such sexual content, and

they would not refuse to watch an anime simply because it had such content. That is why they would go out of their way--even breaking the law--to obtain uncensored copies of the anime they watched. It seems that, although fan service is, inherently, targeted at fans, these particular fans are not the prime targets. So even though they were willing to watch anime with sexual content that went against Kuwaiti and Islamic laws, the fact that the participants did not display enthusiasm for such content, and even displayed disdain and disgust for much of the sexualized fan service in the new anime suggests that the sexual modesty encouraged by Kuwaiti culture is reflected in their responses to sexual content in anime.

From Stereotypical and Transgressive Gender Roles to Benevolent and Hostile Sexism

The participants' interpretations and responses to stereotypical and transgressive depictions of masculinity, femininity, male and female characters seemed to reflect ambivalent, benevolent, and hostile sexism. That is, stereotypical depictions of male and female characters were typically met with benevolent sexism, while transgressive depictions of male and female characters were typically met with hostile sexism. They expressed attitudes of benevolent sexism when describing their preference for male characters depicted with hegemonic masculine traits and for female characters depicted with hegemonic feminine traits, such as when the male characters are portrayed as physically and intellectually stronger than the female characters, protecting or rescuing them, and when the female characters play a supporting role for the male characters, helping him lead, solve problems, bring the crisis to resolution.

They expressed attitudes of hostile sexism when describing their aversion to male and female characters depicted as gender transgressive, such as weak male characters, especially in the presence of strong female characters. Very few participants expressed a

preference for watching “strong” female characters if they were accompanied by weak male characters; a number of participants emphatically refused to watch anime with such gender role reversals. While the participants generally embraced storylines with strong male characters, most had extremely detailed and nuanced conditions for the plot if they were to watch an anime with strong female characters, especially in cases where the female character was stronger than the male character. In most cases, the participants were wholly intolerant of depictions of weak male characters, especially in cases where he showed no character development over the course of the series or movie.

Context Matters: The Forces that Shape Anime Circulation and Consumption in Kuwait

This study has been centrally concerned with the circulation and consumption of anime in a particular location: Kuwait. As such, it has examined how this locale, with its specific historical, geographic, cultural, religious, and political contexts, shapes its circulation and consumption, as well as its very meaning, within the country. As anime is first and foremost a Japanese cultural product, its circulation and consumption in Kuwait represents an importation of Japanese culture. What happens when these two cultures--Japanese culture and Kuwaiti culture--collide, intersect, interact, intermingle? Yet, the forces that shape the circulation and consumption of anime in Kuwait go beyond culture, extending to the realms of politics and technology. Both censorship and technological change have proved to play significant roles in shaping how anime circulates in Kuwait, which anime content circulates, how Kuwaiti anime fans consume and experience anime, and even the very meaning that anime has for them.

As the participants have shown, in the early years of anime in Kuwait, censorship by the Kuwaiti government through the Ministry of Information--through Arabic dubbing, cutting scenes deemed inappropriate for Kuwaiti audiences, and regulating and

banning imported anime--profoundly influenced the anime content that Kuwaiti anime fans encountered. When participants were limited to watching anime on television, as was the case in the 1980s, when most of them were young children, they were only able to see what the Kuwaiti authorities would allow on their government-controlled channels. Virtually all anime was dubbed in Arabic, further allowing the government to influence the content that was aired.

When participants began to purchase their anime on cassettes and then DVDs, they came to the realization that there two forms of anime circulating in Kuwait: censored and uncensored. Sometimes, this realization happened by accident, such as when they unknowingly purchased uncensored versions of anime. Once they knew that uncensored anime existed, they sought it out. Even though censorship was widespread, so too was the black market for uncensored anime. As the participants reported, anyone who wanted uncensored anime could always find a way to get it.

The increasing freedom that Kuwaiti anime fans experienced with their anime consumption practices was enabled by the technological change that took place in the 1990s and 2000s. As anime became more widely available on cassette, DVD, Blu-Ray, and finally, the Internet, it dramatically expanded the worlds of Kuwaiti anime fans as they gained greater control over the anime content they consumed. Coupled with these technological changes was the increasing circulation of anime without Arabic dubbing, preserving the original voice performances in Japanese, accompanied by English subtitles. This, too, expanded their worlds of anime, as the stories were often better preserved than they were with Arabic dubbing, which sometimes significantly altered the content. These changes meant that, over time, Kuwaiti anime fans became

increasingly autonomous in their anime consumption, less and less hindered by the restrictions associated with the cultural, religious, and political contexts of Kuwait.

Study Contributions

The present study makes several important theoretical and empirical contributions to gender and sexuality studies, media studies, anime studies, and Japanese cultural studies. Theoretically, I bring together two critical concepts in gender studies—"doing" gender and hegemonic masculinity—to consider how Kuwaiti anime fans' practices and preferences represent a form of "doing" hegemonic masculinity. The concept of doing hegemonic masculinity, that is, performing hegemonic masculinity, applied to the context of anime in Kuwaiti, offers a unique theoretical approach and understudied context. With this framework, the study explores how the very act of anime consumption is gendered and how the anime consumption practices and preferences among participants are performances of gender, specifically, performances of hegemonic masculinity, upholding ideologies of the ideal masculine man of Kuwaiti culture. This framework also enables the study to reveal how the participants also engaged in counter-hegemonic, gender transgressive performances in their anime consumption when the content of that consumption challenged hegemonic gender ideals, like much of the new anime with its emasculated male protagonists with notably absent muscles or or signs of physical strength. The study demonstrates that as Kuwait anime fans engaged with anime from Japan, they interpreted and responded to it in ways that were influenced by Kuwaiti culture and anime culture. The study shows how technological change led to increased agency by anime consumers in Kuwait to consume uncut, uncensored anime freely, making contributions to the fandom literature.

Limitations and Future Directions

As the first study of its kind on the circulation and consumption of anime in Kuwait, this study has several limitations. First, the data were collected from small samples of participants: 103 questionnaire participants and 27 interview participants. Second, the samples were heavily skewed towards male participants: only 20 of the questionnaire participants and four of the interview participants were female. Third, the samples included a narrow age demographic of participants, who ranged from 18 to 35 years of age. These characteristics of the samples limit the generalizability of the findings and conclusions, which should be viewed as merely a "first glimpse" into the practices, preferences, and beliefs of Kuwaiti anime fans. Furthermore, the data from the study does not allow for definitive conclusions regarding the *causes* of Kuwaiti anime fans' consumption practices, preferences, and beliefs, nor can it state definitively that anime has caused changes to Kuwaiti culture around gender and sexuality. Rather, it draws attention to patterns across participants and over time, and draws correlations between their practices, preferences, and beliefs, the culture in which they grew up, and the anime culture to which they were exposed since childhood.

Future studies on anime in Kuwait should include much larger samples of anime fans, more women, and more diversity concerning age, gender, class, ethnicity, sexual identity, religiosity, anime practices, and years of anime consumption. Future directions could include an exploration of Kuwaiti anime fans' consumption of animation produced in the Middle East in order to compare and contrast their reception of Japanese anime and Middle Eastern animation and their responses to the gendered dimensions and depictions of male and female characters of those media. Future studies

could also further investigate the influences of anime culture on gender norms in Kuwait and of Kuwaiti culture on anime consumption practices, preferences, and beliefs around gender and sexuality by conducting quantitative studies with large sample sizes and statistical analyses that would provide statistically significant evidence regarding the strength, quality, and direction of these relationships. Future studies could also investigate these relationships through ethnography and participant observation to shed more light on how these influences operate and the various meanings of anime for Kuwaitis and Kuwaiti culture more broadly.

Conclusion

The study's findings suggest that the anime consumption practices, preferences and beliefs displayed by the Kuwaiti anime fan participants illustrate that watching anime is a form of "doing gender", reproducing and challenging ideologies around gender and sexuality presented to them through anime and through Kuwaiti culture. The study concludes that that a variety of forces have shaped the circulation and consumption of anime in Kuwait over time, including Kuwaiti culture, the larger cultural, religious, and political contexts of Kuwait, censorship and technological changes. The study further concludes that both Kuwaiti culture and anime culture--as twin forces that acted upon participants' as they developed their anime fandom over the years--interact to inform participants' attitudes and beliefs around gender and sexuality both within the world of anime and beyond.

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