‘OBSCENE’ AND ‘ORIENTAL’: A STUDY OF THE WEST’S RESPONSES TO ANIME AND MANGA

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Abstract

Anime and manga are now mainstays of modern entertainment. These Japanese forms of media are currently estimated to be worth almost US$23 billion and are expected to double by 2030. However, their growth has not come without resistance from Western power. This thesis explores how Western responding to anime and manga is reflective of deeply rooted orientalism using a semiotic approach. The West have systematically disenfranchised anime and manga in an attempt to prevent their growth. There are three main examples of this. The first is how the West use pixelation as a way to communicate obscenity. Over-pixelating anime and manga in the media leads an audience to believe that the mediums are obscene. The second method of disenfranchisement is through developments of law, morality, and social boundaries. Laws have been used as a way to both reflect and influence the public’s moral sentiments and function to show ‘correct’ social behaviour through notions of ‘average’. Laws have labelled anime and manga as obscene helping the Western public assume that the ‘average’ person should not consume them. The final example is how the media have reacted to anime and manga. The West’s media producers are fearful about losing their audience to a foreign, ‘oriental’ version. The media have targeted obscene themes in anime and manga despite the same themes being produced by Western media due to their popularity. Ultimately the framing of anime and manga as problematic serves to preserve Western intentions and prevent the ‘orient’ becoming an equal.

Keywords

Anime, Manga, Obscenity, Orientalism, Pixelation, Semiotics, Law, Morality, Social Boundaries, Media Reponses

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Glossary

Anime	Japanese animation
CEM	Child exploitation material
Hentai	Pornographic anime and manga
Kawaii	Cute stylisation of characters in anime and manga
Lolicon	Genre of anime and manga that involves young and prepubescent girls
Manga	Japanese graphic novels
Otaku	An obsessive anime and manga fan, associated with being single and recluse
VCEM	Virtual child exploitation material
Weeaboo	A Western person who is obsessed with Japan and Japanese culture

Introduction

“Anime help[s] accustom Americans to a subordinate position in relation to Japan.” This was the conclusion Annalee Newitz (1994) came to when looking at the popularity anime was gaining withing her student cohort at UC-Berkley. Anime refers to works of Japanese animation which can be original ideas or have been adapted from manga, Japanese graphic novels. For Newitz, anime is less about the stories being told but more a way for Japan to enact “cultural imperialism” on America. At the time of Newitz’s writing, anime was beginning to cater to a more mature audience, especially in the West. The release of *Akira* in 1988 and *Perfect Blue* in 1997 showed that anime had come a long way from the child-friendly *Hello Kitty* and *Pokémon* (Alt 2020: 195). No longer was anime solely associated with bright lights and pretty colours it now also possessed the ability to tell mature stories. This is not to say the bright lights lost their appeal; *Pokémon* and *Hello Kitty* have become some of the biggest global franchises, rather anime now has something for everyone (Laato and Rauti 2021: 1). A recent report by Precedence Research (2021) places the market size of anime at almost US$23 billion and is expected to double by 2030. These numbers suggest that Newitz’s fear has been realised but on a much larger scale than she thought: anime and manga have become global cultural forces. Newitz’s reaction was not an isolated feeling, rather it reflects the ever-perpetuating orientalist perspectives continually maintained by the West through their approaches to, and representations of anime and manga.

Current Debates on Anime and Manga

As with anything that garners popularity, debates ensue about the impacts of the content. Much debate focuses on why anime and manga[1] have become so popular in the West. Researchers were curious as to why an animated medium – which was traditionally associated with children’s media through the likes of *Disney* – had suddenly captivated adult audiences despite their cultural and language differences (Alt 2020). It was easy to see the appeal of anime for younger audiences. For children, anime offered a cutely stylised, or *kawaii*, look that extended beyond the shows themselves: merchandise, video games, and

[1] Notably, the popularity of manga has been comparatively less explosive but remains intrinsically linked to anime being viewed as its counterpart. Anime is thought to be the entry point for fans as it is both easier to consume and source (Clements 2013: 75).

aesthetics all spawned from the shows and helped them become cemented within Western culture (Alt 2020: 104). No longer was a show just bound to the TV screen, instead these anime offered its audience the ability to participate in unique ecosystems that had enveloped every avenue of their lives (Clements 2013: 186). But anime also began to cater to mature audiences. *Akira* was the West’s first true look at how “cutting edge” anime had become (Alt 2020: 212). The story itself focuses on a post-nuclear Tokyo, referred to as Neo-Tokyo, and offers the audience a striking contrast between colourful and lively cityscapes and the violent, anti-authoritarian bike gang leading protagonist Kaneda (Alt 2020: 214). Never before had anime, at least in the West, been so evidently ‘raw’. The mature audience felt recognised as now content was being made for them which was especially relevant as those who grew up on *Pokémon* and *Hello Kitty* wanted to keep engaged with the mediums. So not only did anime create an ecosystem for a young audience it was also growing with its consumers.

As popularity mounted, debates began to focus on the effects anime and manga have on the behaviours of those who consume it (Berkowitz 2020; Sallehuddin and Omar 2011). These debates take influence from previous behavioural studies on the impact of violent media, whether it be film, music, or video games (Anderson 1997). Akin to these debates, those studying anime and manga believed that consumption incited aggressive or violent behaviour, at the very least within those that were predisposed to violence (Sallehuddin and Omar 2011: 1). The issue with these debates has always been the long-term borderline irrelevance of their findings. As scholarship has evolved the overall conclusion is that forms of violent media have little to no effect on the behaviours of those consuming it, but the assumptions created by the initial research are still prominent (Przybylski and Weinstein 2019: 1). Regardless of what recent scholarship finds, violent forms of media will remain associated with violent behaviour. At this point, the associations are too deeply rooted to be changed by conflicting evidence (Przybylski and Weinstein 2019: 1). While anime and manga may be relatively young in the field of behavioural studies, their sudden conflation with violent media means that previous assumptions are carried over into assessments of the novel medium. This is important as it negatively labels anime and manga in a market in which they are a relatively unknown quantity. The only known quantity is its popularity with younger audiences, thus anime or manga became targeted for its influence on children in the same ways violent movies and video games had done previously (Anderson 1997).

With the rise of mature anime and manga, debates have become obsessed with the potential of the content itself being problematic rather than the effects it has on consumers. Newitz (1994) was worried that anime was actively displaying messages of cultural imperialism which undermined the West’s superiority. This notion then means that fault does not lie with the consumer: anime is actively aiming to influence their behaviours and beliefs (Newitz 1994: 1). Obscenity in anime and manga became seen as the catalyst for someone’s unsavoury deviance rather than being the result of already existing behaviours. People became worried that anime and manga were acting as steppingstones for people eventually causing them to recreate what they consumed in the real world (Lightfoot 2014). Despite obscene content existing comfortably within Western mediums, they are excessively problematic when depicted in anime and manga. While these debates will be unpacked in the literature review chapters, their inclusion here is to show that anime and manga have become targeted as a whole genre.

The Analytical Approach

A semiotic approach is the primary analytical tool used for this thesis. Barthes (1993) used semiotics as a way to understand signs. Signs refer to anything that can carry a meaning beyond their denotative meanings (Barthes 1993). A rose is a sign for the fact it signifies, and has become synonymous with romance. To ensure signs maintain their meanings across differing discourses a series of codes are employed. Codes are applied to everything that holds connotative meaning to make sure audiences are interpreting them in the same way (Chandler 1994: 13). For behaviour psychologist’s anime and manga are signifiers of aggressive and violent behaviour: for Newitz (1994), anime and manga signified the end of American superiority and the feminisation of consumers. In both cases anime and manga have garnered negative connotative meanings. When these meanings are adopted by a wider audience any mention of anime and manga will be associated with either negative influences or unsavoury content.

While Barthes’s (1993) original theory is important, I am using it alongside other theoretical developments within semiotics. Both critical and feminist semiotics are drawn upon to round out my analysis. Critical semiotics offers the idea that signs are tangible tools where those in power can activate or de-active them for use whenever needed or relevant.

This means that the negative signs associated with the content of anime and manga can de-activate when Western alternatives are being promoted and vice versa. The feminist approach uses semiotics to look at the experiences of those who are the subjects of signs, placing their experiences as participatory rather than observatory, rather than using knowledge from those who are similar to the sign makers. For representations of anime and manga this approach looks at how both consumers and producers are positioned by sign makers and the connotations that follow.

Alongside semiotics, Said’s (2003) notion of orientalism is central to this thesis. Orientalism, in short, is the Western characterisation of the East. The West views itself superior and will position itself as an authority on any chosen topic regardless of its actual knowledge. Anything Eastern is not allowed to exist independently, instead everything has to have a Western comparison (Said 2003: 45). The West defines the East by a presumption of cultural domination and precedence (Said 2003: 25). As anime and manga originate from Japan it would have been ignorant to not incorporate orientalism into the analysis. The fact that the West already had popularised their own cartoons and comics means that their sense of superiority was at the forefront of their reactions (Clements 2013: 159). When anime and manga spiked in popularity the West could not fathom the reasons behind a ‘lesser’ product being more popular than their ‘superior’ versions. Reactions to anime and manga became influenced by the anxieties the West has always held when approaching the East, especially when their market was under threat (Said 2003: 324). The sign economy that has become associated with anime and manga, and Western reactions to the product, is heavily influenced by notions of superiority that go part-and-parcel with any approach to the East and has caused a string of labels to become common place in current discourses (Kinsella 2000: 3).

Structure of this Thesis

This thesis will explore how Western responses to anime and manga are reflective of long-standing orientalist perspectives. It is divided into six sections: literature review, methodology, chapters on “pixelation,” “law, morality, and social boundaries,” and “media responses,” and a conclusion. Here I will briefly explain each section to provide an overview of the broader arguments made throughout the writing.

The literature review begins with a focus on how anime and manga have been positioned by behavioural studies in relation to violent behaviour and pornography. Consuming anime and manga were believed to be the cause of aggressive behaviour especially within younger age groups. Following these studies, behaviouralists looked at whether anime and manga were the catalyst for sexist tendencies and how these then related to trends of sexualisation and the consumption of pornography. The theoretical portion argues that behaviouralist theory has mispositioned anime and manga. A sub-cultural approach is used instead as it allows for anime and manga to be positioned within Western culture rather than being a separate commodity. Due to the nature of anime and manga, orientalism is used in tandem with sub-cultural studies to help unpack the rationale behind Western responses.

Following this review, I explain my methodological choices. As mentioned above, semiotics is used to analyse the meanings that have become associated with anime and manga. The first portion of this chapter unpacks some of Barthes (1993) original approaches to semiotics with the initial understandings of signs and signifiers. Included in this portion is a discussion about the two developments relevant to my semiotic approach, feminist and critical semiotics. The second portion explains the relevance semiotics has to anime and manga. Here I go over the different types of data analysed and how they were sourced as well as the different codes that reoccurred across the textual materials. The chapter concludes by discussing some potential limitations I faced through the use of semiotics.

Three analytical chapters follow: Pixelation; Law, Morality and Social Boundaries; and Media Responses. The first chapter, pixelation, focuses on how the obfuscation of content has become problematic. This chapter discusses how pixelation has come to communicate obscenity. Pixelation has become a myth as it has become so deeply rooted in the media’s discourse that it is always presumed to have positive intentions when used (Barthes 1993; Fuggle 2015: 230). This chapter is divided into four parts. The chapter begins with a brief overview of how pixelation is currently used in the media as well as the two key schools of thought surrounding its purpose. At its most basic level, pixelation claims to be a way to protect an audience from obscene and unsavoury content without jeopardising the context in which it is shown (Fuggle 2015: 227). This section also discusses two key theoretical understandings about the purpose of pixelation. For the purpose of this thesis pixelation is a tool that helps people reaffirm their position within society. The second section explores how pixelation has developed as a myth looking at is usage to depict anime and manga. Here I explore how pixelation has become engrained in social discourses.

The third section looks at the denotative meaning of pixelation. Pixelation is believed to protect the audience from unsavoury content. This is reinforced through common sentiments surrounding the inclusion of children in the media and picks up how CNN capitalised on these sentiments to demonise anime and manga in news reporting. The final section looks at the importance of audience autonomy in maintaining the myth of pixelation. Here I argue that people believe their conclusions are their own despite them being tailored by the use of pixelation. CNN’s choice to pixelated manga covers made the audience assume that the manga contained obscene materials. The audience then believes they are securing their social position by demonising the content the preserve their inclusion in common sentiments.

The second analytical chapter looks at law, morality, and social boundaries and is divided into four parts. This chapter explores how law and morality function as institutions to maintain social boundaries and the implications they have on approaches to anime and manga. The first section focuses on law and morality. Here each institution is broken down in ways of their functions, structure, and purpose to establish their differences and how they interact with each other. Law functions as a way for states to legitimise their power through force whereas morality aims to present a ‘natural’ order of correct behaviours which is established through more interpersonal interactions. At times law and morality work against each other as laws can provide legitimacy to behaviours that morality has historically established as unsavoury. Conversely, law and morality can also influence each other as laws will capitalise on moral sentiments to garner support and moral sentiments will develop based on what behaviours the law is criminalising.

The next section focuses on legal fetishism. Legal fetishism uses Marxist understandings of fetishism to explore how laws have become solely focused on results. Marxist approaches looked at how commodities were only understood by their end results, people ignore the production process behind them as long as the commodity maintains significant value (Iacono 2016: 109). For laws people only see their results, i.e., the punishment for committing murder, rather than the context which allowed the behaviour to exist in the first place. This is evident through legal approaches to obscenity. When content has the potential to be ‘obscene’, or possesses aspects of ‘obscenity’ they are ‘tested’ by the court. These tests are carried out by ‘average’ people despite the notion of ‘average’ being a legal fiction that exists to ensure the law can be carried out smoothly (Fix 2016: 72). The idea being that an ‘average’ person would have the best understanding of society’s consensus on

morality. Consumers are positioned outside of ‘average’ and moral as they are now thought to be obscene, perverted, and immoral. This is due to both the presumptions of the ‘average’ person and what lawmakers suggest about the content.

The third section of the chapter looks at how legal fetishism feeds off an underlying anti-Asian sentiment within the West. Anti-Japanese sentiments date back to the early 20th century in America but over time have become less overt than previous iterations (Daniels 1997: 106). Instead, subtle suggestions have become preferred as they avoid labels of racism while achieving the same vilification of the East. Here we see how the law can legitimise moral sentiments. Lawmakers at the time aimed to remove the Japanese from American society by limiting their ability to participate economically and legally. These laws were seen as the state supporting the sentiment that the Japanese were harmful to American infrastructure (Daniels 1997: 106).

The last section looks at how the three previous parts influence Western responses to anime and manga. Legal fetishism has led to obscenity laws focusing on notions that feed off common moral sentiments. As such, content is labelled as ‘obscene’ due to assumptions about the characters involved. The specific targeting of characters who appear to be young due to their stylisation causes the ‘average’ person to presume that the content is perpetuating the exploitation of children. While it vilifies the specific examples used in courts, it also demonises anime and manga as a whole as now the genre has become conflated with ‘obscenity’. Thus, anyone that consumes this content is no longer ‘average’. This also means that anti-Asian sentiments are provided state legitimacy again as Japan is being specifically targeted for the production of permissible ‘obscenity’.

The final analytical chapter looks at how popular media has responded to anime and manga and is divided into four sections. This chapter looks at how Hollywood, and other pop culture media providers, felt threatened by the rise of anime and manga and the tactics used to undermine its growth. The first section explores Hollywood’s response to the growth of Bollywood. Here the focus is on how the West approached a foreign threat to their market while exploring some of the counter-measures used to undermine Bollywood. Importantly, Bollywood did not necessarily ‘steal away’ a Western market; instead, the West had failed to capitalise on the rapidly growing Eastern audience (Punathambekar 2013: 83). The second portion explores the rise of anime and manga. Here I explore what made anime and manga so popular in the West by looking at early examples such as *Pokémon* and *Astro Boy* and how

they catered for a younger audience. I also look at how anime and manga began to garner popularity outside of younger audiences with the rise of mature themes and stories. Within this section there is also discussion about what audiences West were comfortable with giving away to anime and manga and the issues that arose when anime and manga expanded beyond these.

The next portion explains why the West did not take the same approach to the rise of anime and manga. Anime and manga pose a similar “threat” as it is an Eastern media form directly competing with the West. The difference is that anime and manga are thought to be ‘stealing’ away Western audiences whereas Bollywood capitalised on an untapped market. Here the West attempted to claim superiority, but anime and manga were inherently more Western looking than Bollywood’s films, so it was harder for the West to create any distinct differences between them (Daliot-Bul and Otmazgin 2017: 39). Instead, the media pushed the narrative that anime and manga were being used as vehicles for exploitative material.

The final portion unpacks the contradiction between the West’s rationale behind demonising anime and manga while promoting the same content through their shows. An anime or manga that is deemed too violent has the same themes as the latest ‘trendy’ show: claims that Japan is promoting incestuous materials are pushed simultaneously to the popularity of step-sibling pornography in the West. Simply, the media wished to maintain its dominance over every genre imaginable and the popularity of anime and manga threatened this, so they began to demonise it while promoting the exact same content themselves (Hannaford 2007: 2).

Literature Review

This chapter explores the current literature surrounding anime and manga. The first section looks at effects research that typically correlates consumption and negative behaviours. Effects research looks at three main behaviours: aggression, sexism, and the consumption of pornography. To preface this section, I explore how violent media has traditionally been analysed in effects research. The second section of the chapter offers an alternative approach to the analysis of anime and manga. Sub-cultural studies offer the ability to position anime and manga in a wider Western context. This section first discusses the rise of cultural criminology before exploring its application to the sub-cultures of BDSM and Afro-American jazz. These two examples adapt existing theories, gender performance and orientalism respectively, to help explain their function as resistance groups. This is then used to justify the usage of orientalism as the lens to analyse anime and manga. The chapter concludes with where my thesis is situated within the current literature.

Effects Research

Anime and manga are hardly novel concepts within academia by this point. Their introduction into Western markets has been analysed numerous times over the last decade (Alt 2020; Clements 2013; Daliot-Bul and Otmazgin 2017). Much like academic research on violent video games and movies, scholars started exploring how behaviour may be impacted by the consumption of anime and manga (Anderson 2004). This section will cover three approaches that behavioural research took toward anime and manga initially: impacts on violent behaviour; impacts on sexist behaviours; and the correlation between anime and pornographic content consumption.

Before exploring anime and manga specifically it is important to briefly cover some of the research surrounding violent media. Anderson’s (1997; 2004) preliminary research on both violent movies and video games found that the consumption of these forms of media caused heightened levels of aggression in consumers. This research set in motion a belief that violent media causes aggressive behaviour, which has since been held by many people (Przybylski and Weinstein 2019: 1; Strasburger and Dinnerstein 2014: 721). This is in large part due to their association to mass shootings (Strasburger and Dinnerstein 2014: 721). The

most notable example is the Sandy Hook shooting in 2012 which reignited the violent video games discussion. This was due to the revelation that the gunman owned and enjoyed FPS (first person shooter) games which in turn caused the Obama administration to re-invest into behavioural research, reaffirming the association between consumption and behaviour in a very public and official manner (Granic, Lobel, and Engels 2014: 66). Conversely, over the last decade research has begun to push against Anderson’s claims arguing that violent media consumption does not correlate with aggressive behaviours (Granic, Lobel, and Engels 2014; Kühn et al., 2019; Przybylski and Weinstein 2019; Strasburger and Dinnerstein 2014). This research has argued that behaviour and consumption are not linked in the way Anderson originally claimed. Despite this research the assumptions made about violent media causing negative behaviours still remain as correlation alone is enough for people to imply a causal relationship.

Anime and manga were quick to become a focus for behavioural research. At the time of its rise, the primary comparison for anime and manga were children’s cartoons which were already subject to scrutiny for negatively impacting the behaviour of children (Blumberg, Bierwirth, and Schwartz 2008; Kirsh 2006; Zhang et al., 2019). From its inception anime and manga had garnered negative associations by being seen as too ‘mature’ to be a cartoon (Hinton 2014: 54). What made anime and manga an easier target were the overt use of nudity, violence, and sexuality - especially when compared to the initial wave of popular anime like *Astro Boy* and *Pokémon* which were predominantly marketed toward children (Hinton 2014: 54; Sallehuddin and Omar 2011: 1). Borrelli (in Chambers 2012: 98) found that most people believed anime and manga to be a “violent” art form, in part due to the assumption that they were mediums for children. As such, people believed the content unsuitable for young people as, much like other ‘violent’ media, it was believed to negatively influence behaviour.

Whether anime and manga does influence younger audiences is still contentious. Sallehuddin and Omar (2011) found that school children felt increasingly aggressive during and after watching anime, especially if it included a fight scene, but also reported not wanting to participate in a fight or act on their aggression unless provoked first. Berkowitz (2020) discusses these findings but with manga as the focus and found that American children, on occasion, would base their expectations about education on the portrayal of schools in manga. For Berkowitz (2020: 113), however, his findings suggest that reading about violence, in the form of bullying, had a cathartic effect allowing the reader to have their experience validated and have the feelings of isolation stemming from victimisation dampened. With each

example, the idea that anime and manga is too ‘mature’ for children comes across as ignorant as both Sallehuddin and Omar (2011) and Berkowitz (2020) agree that anime and manga are capable of creating content catered toward younger audiences.

Behavioural studies on anime and manga extend beyond young children. One major criticism levied against anime and manga focuses on how women are represented within the content. As such, studies focused on whether anime and manga were heightening the consumer’s levels of sexism (Reysen et al. 2017: 285). These studies have found that consumers are more likely to seek out content that aligns with their beliefs about gender rather than heighten the levels of the observer (Reysen et al. 2017: 285). When asked about gender roles, Japanese participants, both male and female, and Western men agreed with them and related them toward real world expectations (Jiang Bresnahan, Inoue, and Kagawa 2006: 207). As Reysen and colleagues (2017) state, Japanese gender roles align with ‘old school’ views where women are placed subservient to their male counterparts, thus their depictions in anime and manga resonate better with those who still hold sexist beliefs in the West. In part these roles are due to the male dominated nature of anime and manga. The creators produce content which caters to the majority of the market leading to scenes of “fan service” where women are only portrayed for a male audience (Wittenfelt 2020: 12). As such, those that already hold sexist beliefs will reinforce them through their consumption of anime. Research here has focused on whether these themes are the catalyst for sexist beliefs to flourish or are a product of a sexist environment. As Hinton (2014) explains, the ‘sexist’ themes in anime are not novel in Western media - the only difference is the medium in which they are presented.

These gender concerns are exemplified by the alleged relationship between anime, manga, and pornography. Pornography has previously garnered negative associations as an industry being tied to sexism, sexual violence, and ‘deviant consumption’ (Perry 2016: 441). This has been especially the case when associated with anime due to their ‘cartoon’ nature as they, again, are seen to be catering pornographic content toward a younger audience (Owens et al. 2012: 99). Shots of cleavage, underwear, and partial nudity are all commonplace in anime and manga and woman characters will often be used but no more so than their usage in Western shows (Hinton 2014: 54; Wittenfelt 2020: 12). Studies focusing on the sexual aspects of anime and their pornographic counterpart *hentai* often depict it to be taboo due to it being ‘cartoon’ pornography (Achmad, Mardliyah, and Pramitha 2018: 83; McLelland 2011: 1). Achmad, Mardliyah, and Pramitha (2018: 83) found that the majority of parents were

surprised to find anime could contain adult themes let alone be pornographic in nature. They suggest that parents need to control what anime is consumed in the home as there is no distinction between ‘regular’ anime and *hentai* anymore (Achmad, Mardliyah, and Pramitha 2018: 83). With this logic, ‘regular’ Western shows are indistinguishable from pornography as well but do not receive the same attention as it is supposably easier for a parent to recognise whether their child is watching Western porn or just TV. Consequently, Park, Blomkvist, and Mahmut (2021: 12) state that there is no difference between *hentai* and Western pornography consumers but remained insistent on future studies arbitrarily separating them from ‘primary’ pornography consumption. Due to them not being a live-action medium, anime and manga are seen to be normalising pornographic tropes of sexism and sexual aggression to a younger audience (Park, Blomkvist, and Mahmut 2021: 12).

Cultural Studies Approach

Effects research lacks the nuance necessary to fully discuss anime and manga. The studies above are solely focused on the causal relationships between the content and subsequent behaviours that may occur. The content is viewed to exist in isolation. In attempting to prove this relationship, effects research has relied on laboratory settings when recreating behaviours. Should a causal relationship be found, it is highly unlikely that it would be replicated in a real world setting as the laboratory disregards anything that has longer-term influence: “sociological, psychological, and cultural influences” all play their part in shaping behaviour but are ignored in the lab (Ferrell, Hayward, and Young 2015: 126). While there have been attempts to move effects research beyond the lab, researchers are so focused on finding a specific behaviour that they ignore other potential factors. As Ferrell and colleagues (2015: 126) state, the idea that “scary TV cultivates scared people” neglects to recognise any other social ‘effect’ that exists which would help cultivate fear. As such, effects research is an ineffective tool to analyse anime and manga as they exist within a wide eco-system that goes beyond its content.

Instead, it would be beneficial to situate anime and manga as part of a broader sub-culture. Doing so would accommodate the wider social influences that exist within the content and its consumption. Indebted to cultural studies, cultural criminology is an emergent field within criminology. It suggests that much contemporary criminology remains obsessed

with placing findings in neat lines and boxes which makes it unfit to approach modern issues (Ferrell, Hayward, and Young 2015: 204). Research then became stale and repetitive as everything had to be controlled for or correlated to a bigger picture rather than being allowed to exist as part of day-to-day living. Cultural approaches aim to undress the capitalistic approach that has become the standard (Ferrell, Hayward, and Young 2015: 205). Responses to criminality are cultural processes that overlap with notions of morality, ethics, politics, and emotions and for any criminological approach to be useful these notions need to be recognised for their importance rather than trying to make a neat answer for why crime occurs (Ferrell, Hayward, and Young 2015: 206). Consumption, agency, and resistance are then all-important factors in why responses to criminality occur in the way they do. This section explores how cultural studies have been applied to different sub-cultures and then use these, in combination with Said’s (2003) theory of orientalism, to explore the inclusion of anime and manga within this space.

A cultural approach allows me to apply differing theories to seemingly unrelated topics or groups by “stealing [their] more useful elements”, for example applying feminism to the analysis of news reporting (Johnson 1986: 38, 40). While there are many ways to approach cultural studies there is one feature that is intrinsic to its function: its levels of interaction. As Johnson (1986: 49) explains, the study of culture requires a researcher to look at both its context in relation to other cultures and how it functions. By ‘stealing’ aspects of other theories, culture can be explored holistically. Take again the example of feminism and news reporting. Were the impacts of news reporting to be studied without feminism there would not be any attention paid to social identities nor the news as entertainment, the feminist approach provides the framework needed to explore these ideas by focusing on who is impacted by current news reporting (Johnson 1986: 38).

Sub-cultural studies functions the same but often explores how groups aim to work against the dominant culture (Williams 2009: 22). Simply, sub-cultures are groups of people that have positioned themselves outside of social norms (Williams 2007: 573). These studies take the notions set out by Johnson (1986) but apply them to those in resistance to the norm rather than general culture interactions (Williams 2009: 22). Early sub-cultural studies explored overt resistances to power by general groups (Williams 2009: 20). Williams (2007; 2009) looked at how young people resisted social norms through sub-cultures like goth and rave culture but generalised them all as youth culture despite their differences. More recently research has shifted to position these sub-groups as independent cultures and focus on groups

previously ignored (Stiles and Clark 2011: 159). However, due to the esoteric nature of some of these groups the need to take the ‘best parts’ of other theories has increased as there is a lack of existing research to draw from. For example, Judith Butler’s (in Simula and Sumerau 2019: 2) theory of gender performance has been used to explore how BDSM practitioners counter traditional notions of gender. Butler’s original theory was not made for BDSM, but its application allows for a novel understanding of how the sub-culture functions. Studies on BDSM are nothing new but, much like with the media examples discussed above, research tended to focus on the effects of participation (Simula and Sumerau 2019: 3; Stiles and Clark 2011: 160). Gender performace is used to understand how BDSM practitioners navigate their identity when interacting with various different groups due to its ‘taboo’ nature as a sub-culture (Simula and Sumerau 2019: 2). Certain performances are required of BDSM practitioners to avoid being subjected to negative stereotypes by those that are less receptive to the sub-culture.

Anime and manga can easily be framed as a subculture. While its rise in the West is relatively recent, anime and manga fandom has existed as a sub-culture in Japan since the genre’s inception (Galbraith 2019: 5). In Japan, the most ‘hardcore’ fans are called *otakus* and are seen to have “extraordinary knowledge” about a specific interest but lack social skills (Kam in Galbraith 2019: 5). As Galbraith (2019) explains the use of *otaku* as a label for general anime and manga fans in the West is misinformed. *Otaku* refers to very specific fans in Japan that are seen to be ‘extreme’,[2] often referring to the excess “perversions of ‘male’ fans” (Galbraith 2019: 6). Despite not having the same form of *otaku* culture, the West still has anime and manga fandom. At its most ‘hardcore’ it is called *weeaboo* culture, colloquially referred to as *weeb*, wherein some fans are obsessed with Japanese culture to the point of wanting to become Japanese (Lacuesta and Fallon 2020: 6). *Weeaboo* culture could then be classified as a facet of *otaku* culture. ‘Extreme’ fans are giving up their social identity by creating their own “perversions” and becoming obsessed with Japanese culture (Galbraith 2019: 6; Lacuesta and Fallon 2020: 9). The nature of both the original *otaku* and Westernised *weeaboo* is its own form of resistance against the ever-increasing pressure to adhere to cultural norms in where these men are expected to socialise, marry, and begin a family while maintaining a career. Such an obsession with anime, manga, and – in the case of the *weeaboo*

[2] A connotation that stems from fans being “intimately” involved with fictional characters and publicly carrying out their affection. Because of this, otaku garnered a negative connotation and began to be used to describe the most ‘degenerate’ of fans (Galbraith 2019: 5). See also the *Otaku Killer* which helped establish the negative connotations.

– Japanese culture, is seen to be anti-social, perverse, and often weird when its reality often lies within a sense of social dissatisfaction (Lacuesta and Fallon 2020: 9). Both *otaku* and *weeb* have become used as insults often preceded by terms like filthy, perverted, and disgusting due to their anti-social associations and ‘extreme’ obsession with anime and manga. However, within the anime and manga community the negative nature of these terms has been removed as fans will often use them as forms of ironic endearment (Galbraith 2019: 6).

Following the logic of cultural studies, the analysis of anime and manga would benefit by situating it within a larger theoretical context. Said’s (2003) orientalism is fitting for this. In short, orientalism focuses on how the West depicts, understands, and discusses the East. The orient, and the oriental, does not exist outside the West, they are Western inventions (Said 2003: 1). The terms of orient and oriental encompass the almost erotic mysticism the West believe the East to entail (Said 2003: 1). For Europe, the ‘Orient’ represents a long history of colonisation and wealth and was used to fuel claims of a ‘superior’ society as the East was always seen to be underdeveloped (Said 2003: 2). For America, orientalism has less of a history but claims of ‘superiority’ are still prevalent. Rather than colonial claims, American orientalism is built off of their military and economic ‘victories’ over the East in World War II and the Cold War. As such, the West feel the need to “teach” the orient about ‘correct’ society to both help prevent the East ever challenging their position in the market and reinforce capitalist dominance (Said 2003: 316; 324). Orientalism has come to represent the lusting for the West to always be ‘superior’, culturally or otherwise (Said 2003: 25).

Over time, orientalism has been adapted from its original context to help analyse different sub-cultures. At its core, orientalism is a commentary on the West’s perception of “race, nation, and global politics” and how these have influenced attitudes, cultures, and writings (Mullen 2004: xv). Mullen (2004) uses orientalism to draw parallels between Said’s writing on the East with the lived experience of black Americans to create, as he coined, “Afro-Orientalism”. To develop ‘Afro-Orientalism’, Mullen heavily drew upon the argument that the West continually positions itself above cultures it believes itself to have ‘conquered’, a cornerstone of the original iteration of orientalism (Mullen 2004: xvi; Said 2003: 7). While the comparison Mullen drew required little expansion upon Said’s (2003) original theory, it is still an important development as it opened up the applicability of orientalism beyond the subject of the ‘Orient’ (Said 2003: 7).

Mullen (2004: xvi) does not aim to reinvent orientalism but to show that it can be applied in any situation where minority groups are marginalised by the West. Afro-orientalism has then been applied to African American sub-cultures, namely jazz (Ngô 2014). Ngô (2014: 5) discusses how jazz artists were orientalised as a way for them to be marketable to white Americans. The fascination and popularity of jazz within white America focused on how minority groups were fetishised as a ‘display’ as opposed to performers. Similarly to Mullen’s (2004) approach, Ngô (2014) adapts orientalism to look internally within the West as opposed to how the West perceives the ‘outside’ East as explored by Said (2003). Here, the attempt to create a space of resistance for African Americans to perform in became co-opted by white America as it was seen to be ‘exotic’ and ‘fascinating’. Orientalism is used to understand the targeting and commercialisation of a ‘minority’ sub-culture by the West, in this sense it can be used to explain the reactions to anime and manga’s growth in the Western market.

This is not to say orientalism has only developed for ‘human’ contexts. Ueno (1999) uses orientalism as a way to explore how capitalism has repurposed popular understandings and depictions of the East as a way to undermine their development. Techno-orientalism has developed as a way to reflect the “models of information capitalism and the information society” in the same way traditional orientalism used the orient to define ‘culture’ (Ueno 1999: 97). Commercial developments within Japan following World War II posed a threat to traditional notions of capitalism, so images of ‘cutting-edge’ and ‘cyber-punk’ were invented to cover the West’s inability to claim superiority (Ueno 1999: 98). Japan then shifted from being a country per say to becoming a “cybersociety” which is simultaneously erotic to the West while still remaining as lesser because it is culturally specific while still not being ‘Western’ (Ueno 1999: 98). This, according to Antonia Levi (in Ueno 1999: 98), is why anime and manga become so popular within America as it was culturally specific to Japan and offered a window into the culture without the viewer needing to opt into ‘being Japanese’. For Ueno (1999: 102), this comes to fruition within rave culture as the music choices, use of neon lights, and fusion of different Eastern cultural designs all lend themselves to the idea that the West aims to co-opt aspects of oriental cultures that are perceived to be ‘quirky’. For anime and manga this is relevant as it has become a dominant form of media within the West that is not controlled by traditional Western avenues. Exploration of it, then, needs to use orientalism as a way to explore both the fascination with and disdain toward Japanese culture similar to Ueno’s (1999) approach to rave culture.

My Argument

From a cultural studies approach, it is apparent that the problem of anime and manga cannot be reduced to concerns with consumption. The West’s issue with anime and manga stems from its development as a genre. Thus, anime and manga require sub-cultural analysis to position it within a broader context to explore how and why the West responds in the way it does. Anime and manga have become a sub-culture and exists as a distinct group within the West. Because of this, the problems blamed on anime and manga reflect deeper Western power structures aiming to demonise an ‘out’ group. As seen with research on sub-cultures the primary cultural group targets ‘out’ groups for not fitting in with the social norms (Mullen 2004; Ngô; 2014 Ueno; 1999 Williams 2009). In turn, sub-cultures further isolate themselves to protect their existence, preserve their identity, and rebel against dominant cultural norms. Anime and manga go against numerous social ‘norms’ causing them to become vilified. This vilification is in large part due to the belief that anime and manga are selling ‘mature’ and obscene content to an impressionable younger audience. Consumers are then pushed outside of moral boundaries because they are thought to be supporting and enjoying harmful content (Achmad, Mardliyah, and Pramitha 2018: 83). From this, those that enjoy and those that produce anime and manga are seen to be ‘degenerates’ that encourage the perversion of sexualised content being sold to younger audiences (Galbraith 2019: 6). The consumption of anime and manga then follows typical notions of resistance through rituals where they play into the stereotypes given to them by the West. As the West is going to claim anime and manga as perverse, consumers of anime and manga will playfully label themselves as degenerate.

Thus, the sub-culture of anime and manga becomes seen as ‘perverted’ as too does Japan since it is the source of the content. Orientalist perspectives underpin the associations held about anime and manga as the content is not inherently ‘Western’. As such, the East can also be put at ‘fault’ for the production of content that violates Western social ‘norms’. This thesis will explore how approaches to, and representations of anime and manga have become reflective of enduring orientalists and anti-Asian sentiments within the West.

Methodology

In this chapter I explain the methodology employed to analyse the data. In short, a combination of feminist and critical semiotics has been used to approach the data. The chapter begins with an overview and brief history of semiotics before looking into both feminist and critical semiotics in more depth. The section looks at how semiotics is applied to anime and manga. In this section I also explain my choice of data, including the total amount sourced and the analytical questions that were asked to unpack it. Finally, I discuss some of the limitations of semiotics and how I went about remedying them.

Semiotics

This thesis is grounded in semiotics, an analytical tool that explores what is represented beyond surface level meanings. It can be considered the study of signs (Chandler 1994). These signs convey meanings beyond themselves by signifying something to an audience. Semiotics is often associated with Barthes (1993), who posited that there are different orders of signification. At first order, a sign will consist of signifier and that which is signified. This order refers to the denotative, or surface, meaning of the sign. A red rose represents itself as a red rose at this level. Through the second order of signification, signs will take the previous denotative level, both the signifier and signified, as the signifier and attach additional significations to it. When the second order occurs, signs develop their connotative meaning. Connotation refers to the implied or ‘deeper’ meanings of signs by looking at what they represent. Here the red rose would become both a flower and a symbol of romance. While the rose example is simplistic, it serves as a straightforward way to understand what Barthes (1993) aimed to explain as roses, despite being recognised as flowers, have developed connotative meanings of love and Valentines, their own signification, over the course of commercialisation.

Codes communicate the meanings of signs (Chandler 1994: 13). Codes allow “intelligible discourse” to exist by acting as recognisable procedures within the social (Chandler 1994: 13; Hall 2001: 131). These codes create a standardised set of accepted connotative meanings for signs that are easy for people to use and understand. While signs often hold personal or more sentimental meanings, these are still derived from the codes used

by their wider social setting (Chandler 1994: 13). As such, codes are always meant to be obvious to the audience so that meanings, whether denotative or connotative, are not missed. Most commonly, these are done through langauge, spoken, or written, where codes are directly told to whomever is observing them. Codes are also supported by the contexts in which they appear as to promote a specific connotative meaning. To make an audience aware of a shift in meaning the context the code is presented in is changed as well (Chandler 1994: 13). Using the example of a rose again, its romantic meaning is often promoted through the use of language, enforcing its association with Valentine’s day, via advertising and media creating a distinct code that has become commonplace in social discourse. When a rose wants to be a rose its related codes use context, a surrounding field of flowers for instance, to ensure the audience notices the shift of meaning. Both these codes have been normalised to the point that their interpretations are not conscious as whoever is consuming them will pick the most relevant meaning automatically.

Semiotics has historically been male dominated and has ignored how signs impact and relate to the subordination of women (Godard 1998). Pioneered by Kristeva (1980), feminist semiotics works to place women as the subjects of their experience with the sign economy rather than passive consumers. Kristeva (1980) asserted that the current subordinate state of women was important to understanding the extent signs can work as tools of social control. She argued that the majority of scholars, and men in general, could not experience, and therefore write on, the extent of signs as they were not subject to them (Kristeva 1980). To understand how signs affected those who were the objects in them, one has to have an intimate knowledge of their experiences (Godard 1998). Thus, feminist semiotics allowed for the development of ‘non-verbal semiosis’, meaning making beyond language, and created opportunity for heterogeneous approaches to develop. It has allowed for semiotics to take a holistic approach looking not only at how signs are created but how they impact those who are targeted by them.

Following feminist semiotics, critical semiotics arose. This approach takes notes from broader critical theory where the subjectivity of the analysis is called into question (Buchanan 2018). As with feminist semiotics, the critical approach states that the previous academic approach has only ever come from one perspective. However, critical semiotics is concerned with the standardisation of the relationships between signs and signifiers despite its original claims of being a subjective discipline. By questioning the subjectivity, the theory allows for analysis into how society has splintered into different, unjust, sub-systems and

why this continues to occur. Critical semiotics focuses on the subjective nature of signs and the dynamic interactions people have with them (Simpkins 1998). These dynamic interactions stem from the ability of signs, and semiotics as a whole, to either connect or disconnect to and from anything it needs to at any given point (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 7). Where Barthes’ original perspective positioned signs as fixed and continually perpetuating within society, critical semiotics claims that signs ‘activate’ whenever they are needed and ‘deactivate’ when challenged or unnecessary (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 7). ‘Activatable’ means signs are always able to be referenced as meaning is a pseudo-physical thing (Lyotard 1993: 43). According to Lyotard (1993: 50) this allows signification to exist as a living, everchanging system made to adapt to the whims of social systems. This is important as signs can ‘deactivate’ when they would pose a threat to those in power and ‘reactivate’ when applicable to another group.

Semiotic Approach to Anime and Manga

Representations of anime and manga cannot be analysed in a vacuum. Thus, a blend of the aforementioned schools of semiotics was required to analyse the data. Western signs cater for the mainstream Western audience without thought to how they impact those outside this group. Feminist semiotics provides the foundation for analysis here. The presentations of anime and manga fall beyond verbal semiosis as codes become communicated through the non-verbal mediums of: pixelation; law, morality, and social boundaries; and media responding. These signs become tools to subordinate the ‘other’ and, as explored by Kristeva (1980), require an understanding that this is a cultural process. Analysis, though, is not only about how those ‘othered’ are effected by signs; it is also needs to explore who benefits from them. Each of the non-verbal mediums that anime and manga interact with operate with the public, and with the East, though different sub-systems. Because of these interactions there are a myriad of benefits for the West depending on when they ‘activate’ each sign. Despite having similar objectives, each sign, and its associated code, is ‘activated’ or ‘deactivated’ for a different reason depending on the medium they exist in and their purpose. Simply, the combination of feminist and critical semiotics allows for analysis of the activation of signs at multiple levels; signs are to be analysed in conjunction with the ‘othering’ effect they have within social settings.

This approach was then applied to my data. My data set consists of 50 textual materials. These materials were split as follows: 30 books; a total of 12 blog posts and newspaper articles; and 8 other sources spread across NGO reports, laws and legal articles, and dictionary definitions. Blog posts and newspaper articles were all found online and were around 1 page of length per article. As for the other 8 sources, the most up to date version was used whenever possible to provide the most accurate statistics, specific wordings and phrasings, and definitions as possible.

The majority of the information regarding controversies came from outside of academia. I was already aware of three large controversies prior to my initial research from a YouTube channel by the name of “TheAnimeMan” as well as my research for my honour’s dissertation following a personal interest in anime and manga. The mainstream arguments surrounding controversial anime and manga were constantly repeated across different outlets and focused on the sexualisation of the characters and content. For example, Australia’s attempt to ban the import of anime related sex toys was supported by the same politicians and groups that had attempted to remove certain manga from store shelves the year prior. Both arguments were rationalised by claiming the content was ‘sexualised’ and either promoted the ‘sexualisation’ of young people or posed a threat to the ‘purity’ of young people. Globally, other controversies followed similar trends where ‘sexual’ themes or usage of young characters were the reasons for restricted imports, sales, and consumption.

A series of analytical questions were used to interrogate the data. The first series of analytical questions were focused on the denotative meanings present in the data. Denotative meanings were found by taking each piece of data at face value. Fundamentally, I asked what conclusions were found and what data was used to come to these conclusions. These conclusions were used to create temporary categories of data. Once the denotative meanings were established I began to question the connotative meanings of the data. The initial line of questioning focused on finding what was implied by the data. Was there anything ignored, on purpose or accidental, within the data that helped it reach its conclusion? In line with my semiotic approach, I then asked who is impacted by this conclusion? This involved looking at how signs were interpreted across the data and consolidating these perspectives to find the most common interpretation. Thus, the connotative levels revealed by the data tied back to larger structural issues that had contributed to previous analysis creating distinct categories by theme.

On top of these questions, I focused on specific codes that reoccurred throughout the data. The largest of these codes was obscenity. Obscenity is used as a way to label a product as unsavoury, meaning that its consumption is frowned upon. In this, there were two distinct types of obscenity: permissible and unacceptable. Permissible obscenity looked at anything that was sanctioned by the West, such as the likes of Western pornography, sports, and violent TV shows. Unacceptable obscenity was tied to anything deemed too perverse to be ‘socially acceptable’, these included content that could be associated with children – either the content included children or was marketed towards them - or had been created outside of the West. In the West, animated and drawn content have become associated with young audiences as cartoons and comics were predominantly marketed toward children. Anime and manga were consistently used with reference to cartoons and comics to ensure they remained in the same class. Any differences were disregarded as they became another form of children’s media.

Pixelation was another code that was prominent in the textual materials and carries on from obscenity. Pixelation is associated with anything that was too ‘unsavoury’ for an audience. Content that became associated with pixelation was therefore assumed to be obscene. Here, pixelation communicated to the audience that they needed to avert their gaze lest they consume something that was too obscene for ‘regular’ TV. Under pixelation there was frequent discourse about the West as a protector. Pixelation worked to protect its audience from depraved content, the West worked to protect society from being exposed to the same content. The West presents itself as a moral authority while using pixelation to spell out which content is good, and which is evil. The overall argument explores how Western orientalism has perpetuated an anti-Asian sentiment that is highlighted through approaches and responses to anime and manga. Within this argument the three main areas of exploration consist of pixelation; law, morality, and social boundaries; and media responding.

Limitations

By no means is my approach flawless. There were three key limitations that needed to be addressed during writing. The first issue involves the subjectivity of semiotics. Historically semiotics has attempted to sterilise itself to ensure that all researchers have the same interpretations (Cook in Chandler 1994). This was ineffective as it is impossible to

standardise interpretations as every researcher has different theoretical tools available to them for analysis (Chandler 1994: 174). These tools can be anything from the researcher themselves - location, background, and identity – to the contexts they are researching in (Bryman, Stephens, and Campo 1996: 353). Such contexts can relate to either their physical location or academic context as both are able to influence what approaches are taken when researching any given topic. All of these impact the analysis of signs as, person to person, they each favour different ways of thinking. Should a sign require ‘big picture’ analysis then the tools used will vary with each researcher across contexts. As such, one sign may have a myriad of interpretations solely based on who is conducting the research. One person’s belief may be contradicted by another’s based on who they are and how they approach their research. Often the basis of interpretation is grounded in the context it is taken, removing it from said context removes the rationale behind it. A contemporary approach does not have the privilege of intimately understanding the original context so any attempt to modernise the original meaning lacks authenticity (Bryman, Stephens, and Campo 1996: 353). This is not to say older sources should be disregarded. On the contrary, older approaches act to frame what was believed to be the zeitgeist at the time and avoiding their usage completely would hinder the extent of my analysis. Without previous semiotic analysis the research would lack both legitimacy and foundation as, despite the issues, these seminal interpretations helped establish current thinking patterns.

The second limitation concerns how researchers make assumptions about audiences. Scholars assume there is a message, and that an audience receives this message, but there are very few ways to verify that the audience received it as intended or if they were receptive to it at all. Audiences have different tools available to them when consuming signs that heavily influence how they are interpreted (Chandler 1994: 174). As such, researchers standardise signs as a way to assume what the audience interpretation will be. Researchers can guess which interpretation will be most probable given an audiences context but it is impossible to accurately accommodate every possible interpretation. As Stuart Hall (2001) notes, audiences will often do one of three things with the message: they will either accept it wholeheartedly; partially accept the message while disregarding other aspects; or reject the message and its ideological implications entirely. Each reaction is dependent on the audience member’s affinity to the message being displayed. The more the message resonates the more likely it is that the audience member will accept it. A researcher cannot claim that their interpretation of a sign is “correct” if the majority of those interpretating it perceive it differently.

The final limitation that faced my analysis involved the data available to me. To remedy the previous two limitations, a range of textual materials were employed in an attempt to account for a spectrum of perspectives and interpretations. However, these materials were limited to English printings. On occasion there were translations available for relevant Japanese materials, academic or otherwise, but they were unable to convey the author’s message accurately enough to account for nuance. This meant that there was no ‘true’ Japanese perspective in regard to how an audience will interpret the signs. As such, certain assumptions were required when talking about Japan based off the information available through the textual materials used. While this is limiting in its own right, as discussed above, it meant that I could talk about different perspectives holistically rather than ignoring important audiences.

Pixelation

Pixelation refers to the “deliberate blurring of parts of a television or photographic image for purposes of censorship or to maintain the anonymity of the subject” (OED Online, 2021). This removes cases where something is pixelated due to the low quality of an image or accidental cases such as pixelated faces through CCTV cameras. Pixelation has been a mainstay of news media outlets for some time now. It has allowed news media to report on gruesome content without it ever being completely shown to the audience. This chapter looks at how pixelation communicates to an audience that the content being obscured is obscene, irrespective of the content itself.

This chapter is divided into four parts. The first part looks at what pixelation is. Here I discuss some of the key issues with the implantation of pixelation in the media. This covers issues with how something is pixelated and how pixelation is used to help bolster viewership by legitimising ‘tabloid’ media. The second part of the chapter looks at the development of pixelation as a semiotic myth. Here I argue that as pixelation has become normalised in the media, audiences are unwilling to challenge its motivations and prefer to accept its usage at face value. As such pixelation has developed a distinct connotative meaning: anything pixelated is thought to be obscene. From this, people can use pixelation as a form of social reaffirmation by validating their moral position against those being publicly slandered through pixelation. The third part explores the denotative claim that pixelation is used to protect audiences. This section builds off the notion that anything pixelated is obscene. Here I use a CNN article as an example as to what people presume to be behind the pixelation. The audience believes itself to be protected from obscene content and, in turn, that Japan is openly producing said content. The final part discusses the importance of the audience’s autonomy in pixelation becoming a myth. Here I argue that pixelation creates one conclusion that the audience can come to without it feeling forced by correlating anime and manga to assumptions and sentiments about representations of children in the media.

What is Pixelation

Pixelation obscures. At the denotative level, this is done to protect either the audience or the subject of the content. In the case of protecting the audience, pixelation is used to hide potentially offensive or perverse content while still presenting it within its original context (Demanet et al. 2007). As such, it is used to obfuscate things deemed unsavoury such as violence, gore, and nudity to make them palatable and presentable. On the other hand, pixelation can be used to protect the subject. In this case, the identities of witnesses and interviewees or matters of personal privacy such as vehicle number plates and street addresses are obscured (Fuggle 2015: 227). Pixelation, in the news and mainstream media, takes precedence over freedom of the press - the term used when discussing a journalist’s ability to report stories without risk of censorship or ‘outside’ interference (Ahrend 2002). The subject’s right to privacy is prioritised as freedom of press is predominantly focused on preventing censorship of information rather than the source of the information (Demanet et al. 2007: 262). While pixelating the subject may put their legitimacy in question, news media is required to pixelate should the subject be deemed in direct danger or there is risk of implicating people beyond the subject (Fuggle 2015: 227).

A crucial issue with the current pixelation process is who is responsible for its implementation. While the need to pixelate is not entirely subjective, as it is used either at the request or need of the subject, how it is done and to what quality is left in the hands of the media. Ideally, pixelation should encourage people to present their perspective in cases where they usually would not as it becomes harder to be associated with a particular event. Yet, without proper care being taken with pixelation, someone is only hidden to those with no knowledge of the context. Currently, the journalists decide whether the subject is pixelated, or unrecognisable, enough to be published (Demanet et al. 2007: 262). For pixelation to work effectively, the pixelated subject needs to be completely unrecognisable to everyone, especially those with intimate knowledge of the subject. This is because the more intimately someone potentially knows the subject the more likely they are to recognise them through their pixelated presentation (Bindemann et al. 2013). Notable features, such as glasses, hair styles and skin colour, can give away a person’s identity when combined with the context in which the media is presenting them. If they are being presented as a key witness to something, the field of potential subjects behind the pixelation would be drastically narrowed due to the limited pool of people who would have been present. This leaves the aforementioned markers as easy ways to determine who is on the screen potentially putting

them in harm’s way with the others involved in the situation (Bindemann et al. 2013; Demanet et al. 2007: 262). Realistically, media outlets and journalists lack both the time and expertise to develop the required relationship with people to pixelate them completely (Bindemann et al. 2013).

Pixelation also lacks legitimate alternatives. The current presentation of pixelation is all that the media has presented to the audience. This is unlikely to change as there are not any better examples of obfuscation or any incentive to improve the current version (Bindemann et al. 2013). Journalists are seen to be ‘experts’ as the audience trusts the media to be an authority on the issues it is reporting on, so whatever is being presented is taken as the ‘correct’ representation (Stocking and Holstein 2009: 1). The audience then gives the media a large amount of benefit of the doubt as they completely trust their presumed authority (Simon 2015: 65). Then, Western media can present anything as ‘fact’ despite their ignorance (Said 2003; Simon 2015: 65). Thus, anything presented is taken at face value. As there has only ever been one form of pixelation in the media and because it seems to work, it is never improved upon as the audience trust that the media knows what it is doing (Demanet et al. 2007: 262). These issues are relevant to my thesis as they show that the current form of pixelation is deeply rooted in media discourse despite how flawed it is. By being so accepted by audiences, representations of pixelation are never thought to be harmful or problematic. The media is in the position to capitalise on the audience’s trust by manipulating pixelation as a way to push whatever narrative is deemed fitting.

As pixelation is generally accepted, the media is able to use it to their advantage. Pixelation provides the opportunity for news outlets to display gruesome or obscene content without coming across as distasteful or tedious (Newhagen and Reeves 1992: v). Traditionally, ‘distasteful’ content is incredibly popular but is seen to be the hallmark of tabloid media rather than ‘respectable’ news (Gamson 2001: 185). News media can then capitalise on the popularity of the ‘distasteful’ without losing their ‘respectable’ image (Gamson 2001: 185). As Baum (2002) argues, the use of ‘soft’ or tabloid tropes by mainstream news grabs the attention of an audience that would normally be inattentive. For instance, when a sex scandal occurs involving a public figure, news outlets will use the images of the compromised figure in combination with pixelation to provide the audience with a reason to engage with the content without them feeling uncomfortable (Baum 2002: 91; Gamson 2001: 185). Effectively, the news can sell ‘tabloid’ content under the guise of a ‘respectable’ topic such as politics or conflict. Without the ability to pixelate content related

to the stories, news outlets would either lose the selling point of many stories or lose their credibility by showing something ‘distasteful’.

There are two different understandings as to why pixelation has become a tool. The first being that pixelation allows the audience to engage with content that is beyond traditional moral boundaries without repercussion. This school of thought focuses on media as an institution. Pixelation is used by the media to avoid reputational damage while allowing people to engage with their deviant desires. ‘Deviant’ themes are the quickest way to attract an audience’s attention and have them engage with what is being presented (Blair et al. 2006). People enjoy seeing ‘powerful’ people humanised and also have a morbid curiosity for traditionally stigmatised themes, pixelation provides them the ability to see both through a ‘legitimate’ channel. As Blair and colleagues (2006) discuss, pixelated media allows an audience to comfortably engage with content that would otherwise be seen as ‘deviant’ By utilising the audiences desire to see something perverse without presenting it as such, news outlets are able to exploit the popularity of tabloid and fictional media without becoming associated with anything that may affect their credibility (Baum 2002: 91). The news positions itself to be a ‘legitimate’ provider of ‘obscene’ content allowing an audience to not feel at risk of losing their social standing (Fuggle 2015: 227).

The second school of thought views pixelation as a way for audiences to validate their ‘moral standing’. Here, pixelation is used to allow an audience to validate their morality through the creation of public ‘villains’. This can be seen through the obscuring of nudity in different countries. One country may require the protection of privacy and therefore blur out the face of the nude person, the other country may pixelate the nudity in an attempt to protect the audience from the ‘obscene’ content (Nelson and Paek 2008: 715). By ‘protecting’ the audience, the subject has their identity compromised and becomes a target for public slander (Nelson and Paek 2008: 715). People want to know that they fit in with the defined moral boundaries as they are not participating in the behaviours that the news is lambasting. Here a woman’s sexuality is traditionally expected to either be non-existent, assuming their role as an ideal wife or mother, or commercialised, sex appeal in advertising and porn. When it occurs outside these two realms the audience can validate their position by judging those who are outside the ‘norm’ (Jewkes and Linnemann 2017: 179). There is an ‘at least I am not like them’ mentality from the audience. By allowing the audience to see the face of the offender for cases of female nudity they are allowed to both judge the offender for not fitting the traditional roles while reaffirming their own position within them (Jewkes and Linnemann

2017: 179). Pixelation provides a clear example of what behaviours are not culturally or morally acceptable.

I believe that this second school of thought is more applicable. Pixelation allows the audience to reaffirm their social position by giving them clear examples of what the moral boundaries are. While there is a strong argument that pixelation does provide an opportunity to engage with otherwise ‘deviant’ interests; the increasing popularity and normalisation of sex and violence has meant that people are expected to be engaging with ‘deviant’ themes anyway and no longer need the news to give them that opportunity. This means that pixelation has to be reserved for ‘truly abhorrent’ acts which are far beyond morbid curiosity. Depictions of these acts in the media allows the audience to confirm their position within the in-group as they feel ‘moral’ disgust towards the content. This becomes especially relevant when looking at depictions of anime and manga and the associations that pixelation has created between the content and its audience.

The Myth of Pixelation

Underpinning the arguments above is Barthes’ (1993: 143) concept of myths. Myths are the second-level of signification, the connotation of a previously established sign. Myths culminate from converting an established sign into a signifier and then adding another level of meaning to it (Barthes 1993: 109). For myths to be effective they need to be simple and deeply rooted in the culture they occur in as they take the denotative meaning of something and create a connotative meaning behind it. Barthes uses a soldier’s salute as an illustration of this idea (Barthes 1993: 109). Denotatively, the salute is just that, the event of the soldier saluting. Connotatively, the salute represents the soldier’s subservience to a nation deemed superior. As an audience, we imply the existence of a flag as that is what saluting is associated with. The flag represents something larger than the solider despite not being present in the image. While people know that the flag - and by relation the solider - are not perfect, the contradictions are ignored as the social norm is a stronger sign than those that oppose it (Barthes 1993: 70). The flag and soldier also represent war and conflict, but these are accepted as necessary to protect the social (Barthes 1993: 42). It is important that myths fall back on persisting cultural values to ensure they are never questioned and help obscure unsavoury aspects of what they have come to represent (Barthes 1993: 121). Myths ensure

anything can become innocent and accepted as their representations are nothing more than common sense (Barthes 1993: 143).

Myths become accepted via naturalisation (Barthes 1977). Naturalisation is the process of making cultural and historical values seem organic and normal within society regardless of how these values are maintained (Barthes 1977). While the inception of a myth takes time, the more it is used in common discourse and public forum the more accepted it becomes as a cultural norm. When Barthes’ (1993: 43) wrote on myths, he used the church as an example of the naturalisation process. The church was ignorant to the poverty that people were experiencing despite their pious messages, but because it was perceived to be righteous and just, the contradiction was ignored in favour of the positive depiction (Barthes 1993: 42). The church became naturalised in society by using religion to legitimise itself as a moral compass (Marx and Engels 2012: 33). By consistently conflating ‘goodness’ with their teachings the audience began to formulate their sense of self around the desire to follow the church (Marx and Engels 2012: 33). Claims of the clergy abusing their power were dismissed as it went against what had been naturalised as the church’s purpose (Marx and Engels 2012: 33). Through naturalisation, the church, and its messages of morality, have been cemented as a way for people to guide their way of living by providing purpose to their lives (Barthes 1993: 43; Marx and Engels 2012: 33).

On the surface it seems like pixelation conflicts with other myths. Namely, myths of ‘deviant’ content and social inclusion. The content being pixelated labels the consumer as perverse which would normally alienate them from the ‘normal’ side of society. This alienation occurs despite how popular perverse content has become through the normalisation of pornography and violence in the media. Yet showing it via pixelation suddenly makes it okay and normal. What is important here is that myths are often contradictory. The audience should never be exposed to contradictory myths simultaneously, or be able to recognise the contradiction in any given myth. If this were to happen, it is more likely that myths would be questioned (Barthes 1993: 70). For example, war is inhumane except for when it is started under the guise of protection (Fuggle 2015: 222). Pixelation is no different. On one hand, the content that is being pixelated is unsavoury, something the ‘average’ member of society should not be participating in. On the other hand, the same content is commodified to ensure an audience is engaged and can reaffirm their moral boundaries (Fuggle 2015: 222). Both myths exist simultaneously despite the irony of those commodifying the content being the ones to condemn it (Barthes 1993: 70). Should the audience notice the contradiction it is

often dismissed quickly as the myth seems natural to them. As myths become more entrenched, they become harder to challenge as criticism lacks the familiarity that ‘reputable’ myths hold. Criticism is always met with scepticism. The audience will opt to ignore conflicting evidence to preserve the myth’s integrity. It is easier to paint the negative as an outlier than it is to come to terms with the potential dissonance within their beliefs and understandings.

Pixelation has become its own myth. The pixelation process has taken obscene content, the sign in this case, and added further meanings to it by suggesting that obscene content is only digestible when pixelated and sold through the news. Any consumption of or engagement with this content beyond its pixelated form means that the consumer no longer fits within established moral boundaries. Obscene content on its own is ‘distasteful’ but by pixelating it the content becomes acceptable, permissible, and sellable (Blair et al. 2006: 110). The signification of obscenity does not appear when pixelation is present because pixelation seemingly addresses the concerns of the audience. Here you have the audience being told that there is no risk of social exclusion should they consume unsavoury content through a socially approved medium. This also means that the audience does not question the reason behind the media showing such content. Where Barthes (1993) used small ‘evils’ as protections from larger ones, the media uses small ‘evils’ to provide social validation without ever presenting enough ‘deviant’ content to seem suspicious. As such pixelation has come to represent obscenity. Rather than protecting the audience from abhorrence, pixelation serves to lure the audience in with the promise of feeling better about passing their own moral judgements. Whenever an image is pixelated the first thought is that whatever is being obscured should not be viewed. The audience assumes the content is ‘obscene’ and perverse regardless of the context it is being shown in purely due to it being pixelated (Fuggle 2015).

Western reporting illustrates this presumption of obscenity. A report on manga in Japan by CNN in 2014 was heavily pixelated due to the videographers claim of it being child exploitation material (subsequently referred to as CEM) (Ripley, Whiteman, and Henry 2014). Figures 1A, 2, and 3 are taken from the video included with the CNN article where the reporter claims that they had to turn the cameras off due to how “sexually explicit” and “disturbing” the manga were (Ripley, Whiteman, and Henry 2014). To further this, the reporter claimed the majority of manga being sold included “young girls in often violent sex with older men” which “[fuelled] the desires of sexual criminals” (Ripley, Whiteman, and Henry 2014). Figure 1A is the cover of a manga the reporter focuses on during his reporting

and Figure 1B is the same cover unpixellated (Galbraith 2014). Figures 2 and 3 focus on the store itself. Figure 2 shows how the reporter decided to depict the inside of the store and Figure 3 is the stores sign on the street, again, pixelated by the reporter.

Figure 1A: Pixelated Manga Cover (Taken From Video at 00:18) (Ripley, Whiteman, and Henry 2014)

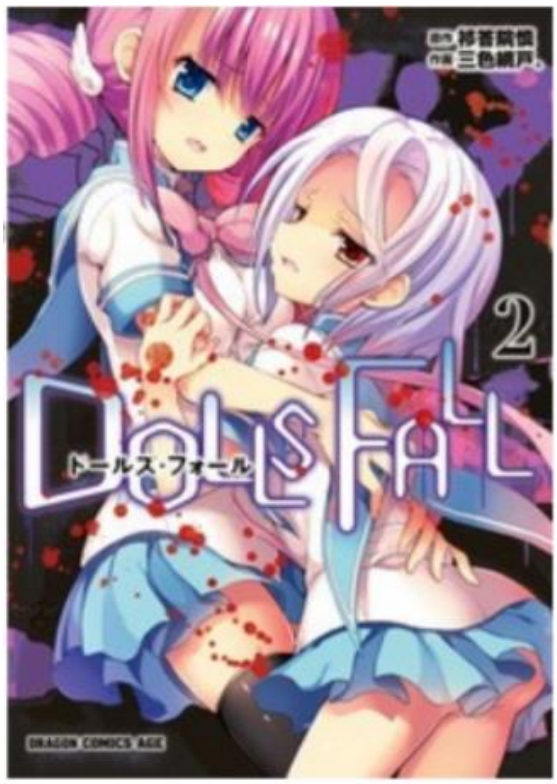

Figure 1B: The Unpixellated Cover Shown in Figure 1A (Galbraith 2014: Slide 22).

Figure 2: Pixelated Manga Covers Taken Inside a Store (Taken from Video at 00:21) (Ripley, Whiteman, and Henry 2014).

Figure 3: Pixelated Store Sign (Taken from Video at 00:28) (Ripley, Whiteman, and Henry 2014).

Before unpacking CNN’s report, it is important to discuss how connotative and denotative meaning’s function. In *The Fashion System* Barthes (1990) discusses how depictions of fashion informs a wide range of social trends by assigning purpose to clothing. Clothing allows people to develop their own identities and subsequently, stereotypes about both fashion and others based on mainstream trends (Barthes 1990: 226). This was possible due to the seemingly arbitrary nature of clothing, leading it to be ignored as it developed its sign economy (Barthes 1990: 215). By remaining unchecked, those influencing the signs were able to change them year-in-year-out without anyone realising it. Seasonal fashion is one such sign. Clothes from previous seasons are seen as out of date, so those that wear them follow suit. The clothing itself seldom changes, a shirt remains a shirt, but the descriptions and representations of them build from and conflict with each other (Barthes 1990: 215). Fashion is able to hide behind its denotative meaning (i.e., its functional use as clothing) to prevent people from consciously thinking about the connotative meaning. Often thoughts related to signified meanings are automatic, any ‘conscious’ thought poses a threat to their purpose (Barthes 1990: 226). By being automatic, the deeper meaning behind the thoughts appears to be driven by the individual rather than the sign system. Myths will keep perpetuating so long as individuals are convinced that the narratives they are participating in are original to themselves (Barthes 1990: 226).

The CNN article represents how pixelation is used to a similar effect. While pixelation is not random – it is an active choice to pixelate something – it hides behind ‘obvious’ meanings in the same way fashion does. Ripley, Whiteman, and Henry (2014) chose to pixelate Figures 1A, 2, and 3. Such excessive usage of pixelation did not seem out of place as the audience has become incredibly familiar with the process (Demanet 2007: 261). By becoming so familiar, pixelation is able to hide behind its denotative meaning while pushing its connotative meaning as subtly as possible, much like fashion has.

‘Protective’ Pixelation

Denotatively, pixelation claims to protect people. The pixelation process is used to either protect the audience from something or protect something, identity, or sensitive information, from the audience. This is the explanation sold by news networks as the audience’s interests are always presented as the priority. The use of protection means the audience will

continually buy into the ‘good-nature’ of these networks helping to maintain the myths pixelation have developed (Barthes 1990: 225). To the audience, it does not make sense that anyone willing to put protective process in place would have alternative motives. Pixelating Figure 1A aimed to prevent the audience being exposed to CEM as something so abhorrent should not be consumed by the ‘moral’ Western audience (Adler 2001: 256). This sentiment was carried through Figures 2 and 3 as the pixelation aimed to prevent the audience being exposed to the same “disturbing” images the reporter was (Ripley, Whiteman, and Henry 2014). For Figure 2 the ‘protective’ argument holds more weight due to the front-facing book display but even in this case the pixelation of the shelf is excessive.

By ‘protecting’ the audience in this way, it is believed that the pixelated content is obscene. Figure 1A serves as the basis for the assumptions that the audience is expected to make about anime and manga throughout the rest of the piece. In this case the manga is shown to be the catalysts for violence against children and the publication of such material actively incentivises potential offenders to act (Galbraith 2014; Ripley, Whiteman, and Henry 2014). Subsequent pixelation is used to help reinforce and reiterate Figure 1A’s message. There is very little reason to pixelate Figures 2 and 3 as they primarily consisted of the stocked shelves and the store sign outside of the shop. In both cases the majority of the visible content is written in Japanese. The Western audience would likely not be able to, or be bothered to, translate the text were it left un-obscured but by pixelating them they become conflated with Figure 1A (Simon 2015: 65). Neither Figure 2 nor 3 has ‘obscene’ imagery. Figure 3 is simply the stores signage, and while it may claim to sell lewd manga, it would be in Japanese. It can be argued that Figure 2 has the potential for obscenity due to the front facing display. Should this be the case, the extension of the pixelation to the spines of the manga on the left is unnecessary. The pixelation of Japanese outside of the selected cover serves to remind the audience that what they are viewing is ‘obscene’ and by excessively obscuring images the perceived amount of ‘obscenity’ drastically increases.

Galbraith (2014) supports this idea as he argues that the pixelated cover in Figure 1A was unnecessary, as the only connection it has to CEM is the use of children and blood on the cover. The manga in question, *Dolls Fall,* is a horror manga set in an orphanage and focuses on children ages 12-14. Within all genres listed for the manga, pornography, or any related genre, are not present (Galbraith 2014). The manga itself has no scenes in it which would be out of place within Western fictional media, as children are consistently used within the plots of horror films, but becomes targeted due to its foreign nature (Buksyk 2015; Galbraith

2014). Such claims of obscenity predominantly stem from assumptions as to what anime and manga should contain due to Western comparisons, cartoons, and comic books (Daliot-Bul and Otmazgin 2017: 30). These assumptions will be explored further in Chapter 6 (“Media Responses”), but they are important to note here for the purposes of how CNN have spun their depictions.

The Role of the Audience

CNN’s use of pixelation tells the audience what their opinion should be. In Figure 1A the background is left unpixellated allowing the audience to see other covers displayed in the store. Pixelating half of a manga cover, while leaving everything else unpixellated, fails to actually protect the audience despite the reporter’s ‘attempt’. Within the frame there is another cover that fulfils the reporter’s criteria for “disturbing”, a childlike character shown in a ‘compromising’ position, but remains unpixellated. If the reporter was aiming to ensure the audience remains protected from ‘obscenity’ it would have made sense to pixelate the background covers as well. By showing that the ‘issue’ extends beyond the central manga the audience feels fulfilled in their ‘moral’ superiority (Fuggle 2015: 227). The Western audience does not ‘indulge’ in these themes so openly and thus feels ‘better than’ Japanese consumers (Said 2003: 316). The pixelation here is less about preventing the audience from seeing obscenity but more to cement narratives of the superiority of Western values (Fuggle 2015: 230). Full pixelation would have just signified obscene but not fitted with the reporters claims. Leaving the faces visible ensured that the audience knew the content was a step above ‘obscene’ as it involved children. The reporter has positioned themselves as someone who suffered from looking at the full image for our benefit (Fuggle 2015: 227). The truth is not questioned as we presume the reporter has seen it in full while simultaneously ensuring the audience is never exposed to it at the same level (Fuggle 2015: 227).

What helps propel pixelation to this position is the ignorance of the audience. The verbal narrative provided by the reporter helps to further establish this link but is not required nor necessary to guide the audience’s opinions. Were the audience to just hear the narrative without the associated stimulus they would question the legitimacy of the proclaimed “disturbing” images (Fuggle 2015: 227; Ripley, Whiteman, and Henry 2014). This is because the audience wants to feel validity in coming to the opinion themselves, telling them what to

think directly would undermine their intelligence. They know to feel disgusted by ‘obscenity’ involving children as it fits into what is proper in society (Janowitz 1975: 82). Those are the established moral boundaries given to them. The audience has no other point of reference to the content outside of knowledge of ‘CEM’ as there is no information given to them beyond manga being Japanese comics. This allows the reported to push narratives based on the audiences predispositions about cartoons and comics. If the reporter told the audience what opinion to have directly the message would be hindered, by allowing the audience to feel autonomous the message becomes valid (Janowitz 1975: 82).

Barthes (1993: 36) discusses the importance of audience autonomy for myth formation, as the audience wants to feel part of something for having it ‘click’ by themselves. Pixelation both facilitates and restricts the audience’s intelligence by giving them the ability to claim their opinion as original while gatekeeping the full picture from them (Barthes 1993: 36; Fuggle 2015: 227). The audience is never given the ability to drive the narrative. They are given just enough to participate in the message by their own means but never enough to reach an original conclusion. By doing this, the functionality of pixelation as a myth becomes increasingly efficient because it is now playing a background role acting as a facilitator for the audiences opinions (Fuggle 2015: 227). Pixelation then guides the audience’s options by compounding their ignorance with how CEM is framed. While the audience feels independent in their conclusions, it is ultimately predetermined by the usage of pixelation.

The choice to leave the faces of the characters unobscured helps ensure that the audience maintains their autonomy. When a photographer presents something as shocking the impact of the image is lessened (Barthes 1997: 71). This happens because the photographer is putting themselves as a substitute for the viewer and presuming what will create shock (Rudge 2017: 8). While it may seem like the CNN reporter is entering that role by telling us that the manga is ‘disturbing’, pixelation offsets this effect. Whatever is unobscured becomes highlighted. For instance, the pixelation of the bodies in Figure 1A draw your eyes to the faces of the characters (Fuggle 2015: 227). The audience sees pixelation, the signifier for obscenity, and the childlike features of the characters leading them to assume an association between the contexts thus creating the reactions mentioned throughout this chapter (Adler 2001: 256). This is supported by the fact that, for Barthes (1997: 73), news media is presumed to be naturalistic, that is without a photographer’s intent. Where a photographer aims to control what the audience sees, the news aims to inform the audience on what is

going on in the world. As such the audience will buy into the messages being shown by the news without doubting their legitimacy.

This result would not have been attainable had the faces of the ‘children’ been obscured while leaving the bodies unobscured. The obfuscation of faces prevents the audience from actively participating with the presented story (Rudge 2017: 2). Butler (in Rudge 2017: 2) argues that viewing the faces of the “other” is a charitable act that allows the audience to show recognition to “those who live precarious lives”. An audience is, for the most part, aware of global plights but will actively try to ‘forget’ who is suffering by minimising their humanity. Minimisation is done by making those suffering only identifiable by features like race, country, religion (Rudge 2017: 3). Such disassociation makes the media’s usage of faces that much more potent for an audience. The infrequency of exposure to and usage of the faces of these people amplifies their ability to engage the audience (Rudge 2017: 4). When compounded with the inclusion of youth or children the effect amplifies further (Adler 2001: 257). This compounding occurs due to the scarcity of children in the media especially the news. When children are in the media their vulnerability is highlighted as the audience feels the need to protect their ‘innocence’ as they do not ‘belong’ in the public eye (Adler 2001: 256; Hancock 2000: 78).

Plainly, the faces of children elicit sympathy and incite dramatic response. The audience feels obligated to overreact to the horror of the content. This is to again reaffirm the audience’s position within social moral boundaries while also compensating for the ethical distancing that allows them to ignore it on a more regular basis. We feel the need to be seen to care lest we have our social position questioned (Chekroun and Nugier 2011: 479). Because of this, anything that aims to create a feeling of disgust from the audience will work more effectively. CNN used this sentiment to create a sense of abhorrence from the ‘obscene’ manga cover. By placing a ‘vulnerable’ face in a dangerous setting conflated with CEM, as seen in Figure 1A, the audience was led to believe that the content was obscene.

By now it is apparent that pixelation is not used to protect its audiences from obscenity. Connotative meanings are most effective when the myth has become entrenched in society as there is no doubt to their functions and usages nor do they receive any criticisms (Barthes 1993: 109). Audiences have no desire to challenge the current connotative meaning of pixelation as there are few direct consequences from its consumption for them. To the audience, pixelation serves to benefit them by protecting them from consuming something

‘obscene’ and ensuring that they are complying with social boundaries. Constant exposure to pixelation has cemented it as part of society. There is little incentive for the audience to question the intentions of pixelation as long as they are not the ones experiencing any of the negative consequences. Pixelating anime and manga does not impact the majority of the Western audience as, despite its rising popularity, they are not the primary audience (Daliot-Bul and Otmazgin 2017: 30). Any portion of the Western audience that is impacted by the connotations of pixelation are not ‘mainstream’ enough to be visible to the wider audience, any criticisms they have toward pixelation stay in their own group (Daliot-Bul and Otmazgin 2017: 30; Prough 2010: 65). Were the media to apply pixelation in the same way to Western TV shows or comics when reporting there would be audience backlash (Prough 2010: 65). The criticism would come as now the primary producers and consumers are being targeted for the consumption of supposedly ‘obscene’ content. The distance the audience has from anime and manga ensures that they can claim cultural superiority by being ‘beyond’ the consumption of morally reprehensible ‘obscene’ content (Said 2003: 316).

Conclusion

Pixelation is more than the simple act of obscuring an image, it communicates obscenity. It has become a tool the media can use to sell content it otherwise would lose credibility for showing. Sex, violence, nudity can all be sold by news media without the audience ever questioning its depictions as long as the content is obscured. Pixelation functions to reaffirm someone’s place within social moral boundaries by providing examples of ‘obscene’ content that breaches the norm. People can validate their reactions and ensure that they remain in check with what everyone else is feeling. While it is valid that pixelation allows people to engage with content that would otherwise be demonised, the increased ease of access to ‘obscene’ content in the West - through the likes of pornography and violent TV - means that news media no longer needs to act as a glimpse to the ‘deviant’ for an audience.

In turn, pixelation has become a myth. Much like traditional myths, pixelation has seamlessly become normalised and commonplace within society. Seeing content pixelated is no longer surprising to an audience, and thus means that an audience is unwilling to question its usage. This is only furthered by the notion that news networks are established to be ‘authorities’ of the truth which ensures that pixelation is given added legitimacy. Here we see

the levels of connotation pixelation has developed. The first being that pixelation helps people reaffirm their moral boundaries by seeing what is said to be ‘obscene’. The second being that anything pixelated is ‘obscene’. Pixelation now signifies obscenity due to being repeatedly associated with ‘obscene’ content. Any content that is pixelated is assumed to be abhorrent, otherwise it would not need pixelation. Thus, the media can now pixelate anything and allow the audience to convince itself that the hidden content is obscene. CNN used the audiences trust of pixelation to present anime and manga as permissible, state sanctioned versions of Japanese CEM. To achieve this, CNN chose to pixelate everything except the faces of the child-like characters on the covers. In doing this, CNN suggested that the children on the manga covers were frequently involved in obscene content and deviant interests. Pixelation, then is used to convince an audience of what opinion to have without them realising it is not an original thought. Plainly, anime and manga have become targets for ‘moral justifications’ by providing people an outlet for social validity. Anime and manga allow people to get upset about content seemingly containing ‘CEM’ and ‘obscenity’ without ever requiring proactive responding. The next chapter unpacks how these feelings are reflected through law, morality, and established social boundaries.

Law, Morality, and Social Boundaries

Law and morality function as social ‘guides’ both informing how people function within social boundaries. These notions exist as two sides of the same coin. In a sense they both create a ‘norm’, the baseline of people’s actions. These norms are then used to help people feel the ‘correct’ way about different behaviours. Over time everyone is expected to share the same sentiments due to both moral boundaries and the law vilifying what is deemed ‘incorrect’. This chapter looks at how law and morality have worked in tandem to cultivate an insurmountable sentiment towards themes of ‘obscenity’ and how anime and manga have become the main targets for these feelings. The first section discusses how law and morality operate as unique institutions both with and against each other. The second section then looks at legal fetishism and the theatre of law. The third section explores how law, morality, and legal fetishism have fostered permissible anti-Asian sentiments within the West. Finally, the chapter concludes by looking at how anime and manga have become targeted for ‘obscene’ themes and the implications of this.

Law and Morality

The state establishes law to assert control over a population (Lemaitre 2002). To do this efficiently, the law needs to seem natural; something that is not made up by the state rather something that the state adheres to. People need to think the law “fell from the sky”. While people know laws are man-made they possess power that people would not willingly give to another person (Bingham 2011: 13). The law then needs to feel equal and fair, but this is seldom the case (Tamanaha 2012: 233). In Marxist scholarship, laws reflect class interests. Those in power will use laws as a form of social control to maintain class disparities.

State law has to look and feel legitimate otherwise it would lose its power (Dicey in Bingham 2011: 14). Laws are enforced through direct force (Hershovitz 2011: 15). Force allows the state to easily show its people that the laws are effective at maintaining social order. Usages of force are thought to be permissible as they are seen to be tackling a larger problem (Hershovitz 2011: 15). This is also why prisons feel legitimate as a punishment, those who are incarcerated are seen to have violented state norms thus their punishment seems fair. Punishments do not have to be logical. The use of the death penalty contradicts

the illegality of murder but again feels legitimate as the crimes feel severe enough to warrant its use (Hershovitz 2011: 15). Notions of class disparities are prevalent here too but as long as people can justify them these inequalities are permitted. Over-incarceration of Black Americans does not seem problematic since they have been associated with rampant crime (Walker and Mezuk 2018). The law’s purpose is not questioned as it is believed to be true to society’s best interests. Denotatively, the law claims to be protecting society, yet it really signifies a way to divide a population based on seemingly ‘unsavoury’ behaviours.

Morality has a similar function; it serves as a way for people to live ‘correctly’ in social boundaries. The largest difference, however, is who is legitimising morality. Unlike laws, morality is not necessarily state defined: there is not one ‘true’ source for what is and is not moral (Joyce 2001: 206). Instead, morality hinges on beliefs. What someone believes to be the right way to act becomes their version of morality, often guided by the believed ‘natural’ order of things (Joyce 2001: 206). Despite these claims of ‘natural’ order, morality is still ‘man-made’ and can be tailored to benefit certain groups. Religion uses morality as a way to position itself as a ‘guide’ helping keep society within their understood social boundaries (Nöth 2004; Barnes 1978: 1). To become legitimate, religion uses the charisma of its leaders to convince an audience that the church’s beliefs are reflective of the ‘natural’ order. As such, religion is not enforced through force but rather through fear. Going against the ‘natural’ order is punishable through excommunication and ostracism wherein the offender is both excluded from the community and, more importantly, from the afterlife (Barnes 1978: 1). As such, people then use morality as the basis for prejudice. For example, deviance is used to label people who are ‘ostracised’ (Chekroun and Nugier 2011: 479). Anyone labelled as ‘deviant’ is now known to have transgressed against moral norms; in the case of religion this is applied to anyone who has gone against ‘true’ religious values. People are able to then use this to reaffirm their own position within morality by agreeing with the ‘punishment’, the more ‘abhorrent’ the act the stronger the moral justification becomes (Britto and Noga-Styron 2014; Innes and Innes 2018).

It is important to note that law and morality can lack harmony. Laws are often superseded by moral claims (Habermas 1988: 228). The state became instrumental as an institution due to its separation from ‘moral’ agencies like religion. Thus, laws are supposed to been seen as removed from ‘human’ biases or emotions. The issue here is that people tend to prefer something they can relate to (Innes and Innes 2018). In part is due to the way law and morality are enforced, charismatic leaders a more inter-personal than the state is so they

resonate with people more. As such, any disparities between laws and ‘natural’ order results in resistance from people who believe one to be superior. If something becomes legalised, that thing is granted legitimacy via the state. The legalisation of gay marriages gave it ‘legitimacy’ as it was now state recognised (Hart-Brinson 2018: 10). For some, the ‘official’ legitimisation of something suggests that it is not problematic. People who were unsure about gay marriage are reaffirmed by the state recognising it as legitimate (Hart-Brinson 2018: 10). However, religious groups have been strongly opposed to this as gay marriage is thought to go against the ‘natural’ order of things (Hart-Brinson 2018: 10). For these religious groups, legalising gay marriage meant that their position of moral superiority was questioned. The state was legitimising something deemed ‘incorrect’, moral prejudices then began to lose credibility as there was no longer harmony across institutions.

Despite possible dissonance, law and morality often overlap. There is an almost symbiotic relationship between the two institutions in many respects. Moral sentiments can influence lawmakers (Madill 2015). When people feel strongly about something there is then a pressure for the state to legitimise these sentiments. State interests need to at least feel like they are reflective of the population. We can see this in legislative approaches to depictions of children in the media (Adler 2001: 256). Moral sentiment is that children need to be protected from ever being put in a situation that has the potential to be interpreted as perverse. This started with the inclusion of ‘regular’ photos – for example, family photos taken at the beach, of the children in the bath, or children playing sports - of children becoming used as evidence for CEM in courts (Adler 2001: 260). The criminalisation of ‘normal’ photos stems from the need to protect children at all costs, should a photo have the potential to be CEM it needs to be punished as such. Since Adler’s (2001: 260) original example, the moral pressure to update and create law has continued to mount. Section 1466A of the U.S. code states that “a visual depiction of any kind” is subject to punishment if it “depict[s] a minor engaging in sexually explicit conduct” or “depicts an image that is, or appears to be, of a minor” that is engaging in obscene sexual activity (Cornell Law School n.d.). The characters just need to “appear” as a child to have the potential for malicious consumption. As children become increasingly common in the media, laws that reflect the moral desire to protect their ‘innocence’ are only going to become more common as well (Galbraith 2011: 85).

Adler’s (2001) notion of the paedophilic gaze is important here. The paedophilic gaze argues that any media containing children is seen under the assumption that someone may be using it with depraved intentions (Adler 2001: 257). Children are expected to hold a specific ‘innocence’ both in media and in regular society, so everything is then looked at based on how much threat it may pose (Adler 2001: 256). People believe children to be ‘pure’ and ‘uncorrupted’, so they need to be kept separate from ‘adult’ themes. When Calvin Klein ran an underwear advert in 1999 involving two children the public were quick to claim it as child pornography (Adler 2001: 257). Within the day, Calvin Klein had to take down the billboards due to public pressure. Critics of the campaign admitted that the photos in isolation were no more harmful than those a mother might take of her children, the problem was in their publication (Adler 2001: 258). The consensus was that Calvin Klein was inadvertently exposing these children to potential harm as they may be consumed maliciously through the publication of the photos. Had lawmakers failed to support this sentiment, the public would begin to turn on the state as it would be seen jeopardise childhood ‘innocence’

The relationship between morality and law also works the other way around. Laws can produce moral sentiments. This functions in a similar way that pixelation does in the previous chapter. Pixelation has come to communicate to an audience that the content being obscured is obscene. Laws communicate to an audience that whatever is being criminalised does not fit within social boundaries. The criminalisation of characters that “appear” to be children tells the audience these mediums are selling new forms of CEM. Any content that has a character appearing to be a child is then placed under the same scrutiny that Adler’s (2001) examples received. Less so for the protection of the character but for the fact that someone will be viewing it with malicious intent. This relationship becomes more relevant when I look at the interplay between law, morality, and anime and manga later in this chapter.

There are issues that arise from the symbiotic relationship between law and morality. When law reflects moral sentiment they often function more to placate the social group rather than resolve the root of the issue. This is achieved by finding easily punishable examples (Gersen 2007: 247). The theatre of law is as important as its functionality (Hershovitz 2011: 5). CEM is a complex topic and has become a prevalent issue across multiple platforms from pornography to forums and message boards, but these are harder to track and punish so do not give off the same theatre as other examples do (Holt et al., 2020). The use of law simply shelters the population from the reality and extent of the problem rather than tackling the

deeper issues by choosing to offer rapid justice through resolved cases (Gersen 2007: 247). The façade exists to suggest that something is being done about the issue, helping to maintain the continual support that society provides legislators and the law (Gersen 2007: 247). Should there be no visible result of the law, the legal system would quickly lose its support as it is no longer supporting the moral sentiment (Hershovitz 2011: 5). By appearing to do something about the issues of CEM the law looks successful but leaves the substantive problem more or less untouched.

Legal Fetishism

To understand how law and morality have become intertwined it is important to look at legal fetishism. Legal fetishism has a long history. Its first definition, coming from Francois Gény, focused on the obsession with the practice of law in a pseudo-religious fashion and the contradictions that follow (Lemaitre 2002: 7). For Gény, legal fetishism focused heavily on how the law carries itself to preserve its iconography. The issue with this approach is that it relied upon the audience being passive consumers of law. While it is important for the law and the state to maintain a sense of legitimacy, Gény’s approach did not consider the ways in which people interacted with and understood laws. As such, approaches to legal fetishism have developed over time. Rather than focusing on the legal aspect, scholarship shifted to look at Marxist notions of fetishism.

For Marx, commodity fetishism was the notion that people only saw a final product rather than understanding the production process (Iacono 2016: 109). As long as the consumer was enamoured by the finished product it did not matter how it was created. Effectively the product became asocial (Iacono 2016: 109). The same sentiment can be applied to law. People only see the end result - in this case the end results are both the laws themselves and their resulting punishments. Much like with commodity fetishism, there is very little concern given to the production of laws and the behaviours that they target as long as the results hold value to the consumers (Iacono 2016: 99). Laws are seen to ‘correctly’ punish unsavoury behaviours for the benefit of society, the context as to why the behaviours are occurring in the first place are irrelevant when compared to the perceived value that laws provide. Should laws be aiming to curb specific behaviours they would be focusing on the context in which they occur rather than the results (Hershovitz 2011:6). However, targeting

the context of behaviours does not lead to the same immediate results that punishing behaviour does. It is a lot easier to link punishment and behaviour together as it provides something tangible for people to look at. As noted in the previous section, laws need to be seen to work to maintain their legitimacy and targeting behaviours provides this opportunity. As long as laws appear to “work” or “do something” their purpose is harder to question.

Approaches to obscenity exemplify legal fetishism. Obscenity offers a clear result for lawmakers to punish as it creates two distinct ‘villains’, the content and those that consume it. The legal definition of obscenity is vague, often used for anything that goes against accepted moral standards of decency, and relies on judicial discretion when being applied to content (Fix 2016: 72). In the United States, the Miller test was adopted in 1973 as a way for courts to determine the obscenity of ‘questionable’ works (Main 1986: 1159). The Miller test claims to decide whether a piece of content is past the point of ‘acceptable’ obscenity (Fix 2016: 72). The test itself consists of three parts. Importantly, each part is prefaced by the condition that “an average person, applying contemporary community standards” has to find each condition to be true (Main 1986: 1159). First, an average person must find the work, in its entirety, to contain excessive sexual interest. Second, the person must deem the content to be depicting sexual matters in legally offensive ways. In other words, the work needs to breach already established law. This step of the test applies to content that is seen to include themes such as child exploitation, virtual or otherwise (henceforth referred to as VCEM for virtual child exploitation materials and CEM for child exploitation materials), rape, and bestiality (Fix 2016: 72). The final evaluation is that the work as a whole, including content that may be outside of the sexual aspects, must be seen to lack “serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value” (Main 1986: 1159).

While the Miller test was not a novel way to tackle obscenity, it provided some crucial changes from its predecessors. The first attempt to tackle obscenity was the Hicklin rule which defined obscenity as content with the capacity to corrupt those who consume it, which resulted in most adult content becoming legally classified as obscene (Fix 2016: 73). The case of *Roth v. United States* then claimed that a work had to be “utterly without redeeming social value” for it to be classified as obscene (Main 1986: 1159). Should a piece of content be able to argue it holds slight social value it would then be protected under the first amendment (Main 1986: 1160). The Miller test changed “utterly without” to “serious … value” as a way to remedy this issue. With this change, content had to have a serious argument for providing value rather than having any value at all. The Miller test also shifted

away from using national standards as the framework for what is acceptable (Fix 2016: 74). Rather than assuming there was one way to interpret obscenity, the Miller test took the “average” person’s outlook on the topic. Both sets of changes claimed to create a test that would determine obscenity based on its context in relation to regular society.

Despite these changes the Miller test is still problematic with issues now stemming from its connotative meaning. Denotatively, the Miller test serves to protect society from obscene content by using the community ‘average’ as its benchmark. ‘Average’, then, signifies a tangible social norm that guides everyone in the same way. With this comes the idea that every community is the same across the board to allow both an ‘average’ person and an ‘average’ view of obscenity to exist. (Fix 2016: 74). As Fix (2016) notes, content that is distributed through the internet is separate from physical communities so does the standard then come from the community in which it was consumed or in which it was produced. In this case the ‘average’ person would be significantly varied based on their exposure to the internet (Fix 2016: 75). Even the internet community itself is not homogenous and only provides another impossible ‘average’ to try quantify. Thus, an ‘average’ community is unobtainable as it continues to expand outward beyond physical boundaries. While juries attempt to remedy these differences through randomisation, they also show that the system already recognises that ‘average’ is not an achievable goal (Cornwall and Hans 2011: 667).

Assuming ‘average’ exists, it would still exclude anyone unable to participate in such a system. While Fix (2016) noted that ‘average’ was impossible to find between communities, they missed exploring who is actually allowed to be ‘average’. Social, economic, and educational statuses have all been found to influence the likelihood someone will participate within a jury setting (Cornwell and Hans 2011: 681). Those of lower status are less willing to participate as they often feel outclassed or threatened by those of presumed higher status due to the supposedly ‘expert’ knowledge that is associated with the criminal justice system (Cornwell and Hans 2011: 681). Ethnicity also influences jury participation. While minority groups, specifically Black American’s, are often more vocal in the jury settings compared to white jurors, they are underrepresented and generally excluded from the jury selection process (Cornwell and Hans 692). So, despite the fact that their perspective is often influential toward a truly ‘average’ result, there is seldom the opportunity for them to offer it. To be selected for jury service there are certain requirements a person must have met that help push out so-called ‘undesirable’ perspectives (Yancy 2016: 42). The most important requirement to note for this example is the “never have been convicted of a felony” (United

States Courts n.d.). In the United States between 35 and 40 percent of the prison population is Black, but Black people constitute roughly 12 percent of the total American population (Carson and Anderson 2016). These statistics show massive exclusion of an already under-represented group of people if a large proportion of them are unable to meet a requirement to be selected for duty in the first place. Combined with the fact that a person must be over 18 to serve on the jury over half of the total Black population is ineligible to be selected in the first place (Carson and Anderson 2016).

There are also barriers which prevent eligible people from participating. Should someone be selected there are socio-economic factors that prohibit their participation as well. Adequate transport, taking time off work, finding family support are all systemic barriers that often impact participants that lack socio-economic support (Yancy 2016: 42). These systemic barriers prevent ‘average’ from ever coming into existence as the perspective only reflects a small proportion of the population. As juries continue to purposefully exclude different groups, ‘average’ has simply become ‘bourgeois’, focusing on internal preservation rather than its intended community representation (Yancy 2016: 42). The system of choosing who constitutes ‘average’ is built to present an idealised community rather than accurately display social structures. Affluent ‘whiteness’ is seemingly strived for within the system as, especially within an ‘expert’ field such as law, it has come to represent the correct ‘theoretical’ approach (Yancy 2016: 52). The same air of superiority that legal fetishism represents is replicated through this system as those perceived to understand the intricacies of legality are given centre stage. By giving the ‘average’ person the ability to judge value, anyone unable to provide such an evaluation then lacks the ability to understand what would be beneficial to society (Fix 2016; Yancy 2016: 42). Thus, issues related to anything non-Western are met with Western resolutions as neither adequate research or care is given to the topics from the ‘average’ group nor are the groups that are involved in the issues represented (Yancy 2016: 42).

‘Average’ is not an accurate representation of the population; rather it exists to reflect the dominant social perspective. Legal fetishism has also allowed lawmakers to determine what constitutes as ‘average’. If someone or something does not agree with it then they are no longer an ‘average’ member of society. Take again the example of obscenity. If the ‘average’ person labels something obscene, then others need to find it obscene to remain within social boundaries. Whether or not the content is actually obscene becomes irrelevant as people will prioritise aligning themselves with both moral and legal norms to preserve their identity.

Obscenity commands a strong moral sentiment from people especially if it can be related to children in some way. Lawmakers capitalise on this sentiment to further develop their notions of ‘average’ as few wish to deviate from the moral norm. Not only would a person be removed from the ‘average’ they would no longer be seen as morally sound.

Anti-Asian Sentiments

Laws have also validated anti-Asian sentiments in the West. Approaches to the East are underpinned by orientalism, anything that originates in the East is reconstructed in the West under Western ‘expertise’ (Said 2003: 115). As such, the Western perception of superiority is inevitable as there is a belief that anything Eastern can be improved by the West’s knowledge. If it comes from the East the West are sure to either dismiss it as sub-par or reconstruct it as ‘better’ (Said 2003: 115). Lee (2005) argues that orientalism has become “hemispheric” in the sense that it is now occurring predominantly within Western countries rather than being exported to the East. Chinese immigration into the U.S was spearheaded by American “expertise” which, in turn, influenced Canada and the U.K. to approach the Chinese immigration “problem” in the same way (Lee 2005: 237). Such spill-over replicates and perpetuates the Orientalism of old where Western knowledge is presumed to be the band-aid fix that problems require. Where it differentiates itself is that hemispheric orientalism has a heavier focus on internal Western hierarchies (Lee 2005). As it is occurring within Western boarders, those who claim to be ‘experts’ are given more legitimacy when presenting justifications for orientalism (Lee 2005: 237).

Anti-Japanese sentiments are a facet of such orientalism (Lee 2005). Since the onset of Japanese migration into the West, sentiments against them have existed. Daniels (1997: 106) notes that anti-Japanese sentiments have been deeply rooted within the U.S since the early 20th century specifically along the West coast. California had a large concentration of Japanese citizens due to its coastal setting which had allowed for easier immigration from Japan (Daniels 1997: 106). The concentration of a ‘Japanese problem’ meant that the anti-Japanese sentiment was equally as concentrated. This sentiment came partly from their inclusion in the work force and partly from how distinctive the Japanese were as a cultural group compared to white Americans. The ‘takeover’ of the work force by the Japanese was seen to be a direct threat to American livelihoods, the easiest way to try reclaim jobs was to

undermine the competitors (Daniels 1997: 106). On the other hand, marked racial differences created distinctive groups and made it easier to create the us versus them narrative especially following the onset of World War II when Japan became the ‘enemy’ (Lee 2007: 538). The war offered America an excuse to slander the Japanese without fear of being slated as racist (Heale 2009: 19).

Law was then used to legitimise these ‘moral’ sentiments. If the law agrees with a view, that view can more easily be regard as ‘normal’. So, when anti-Japanese laws were pushed, those holding the same beliefs felt validated (Daniels 1997: 99). Despite the guise of diplomacy, the voting systems at the time were heavily rigged against the Japanese preventing them from having a voice against the laws that were targeted against them (Daniels 1997: 99; Heale 2009: 47). The laws targeting the Japanese were economic sanctions that hindered their ability to buy land or own business, which, at the time, was how you were allowed to participate in the legislative process (Heale 2009: 47). Even post World War II, American law began to develop that sought to prevent Japanese interference in the free market (Heale 2009: 47). Here, the law reinforced moral prejudices against the Japanese. The Japanese were now ‘legitimately’ different as the state had decided that they could not participate at the same levels that ‘true’ Americans could. Anti-Asian sentiments were no longer just a ‘feeling’ and had become state assured points of view giving orientalist senses of superiority a place to continually develop.

Law, Morality, and Responses to Anime and Manga

Newitz (1994) encapsulates, almost ironically, the ‘legitimised’ anti-Japanese sentiments completely by claiming that Japanese influences were committing “cultural imperialism” and were stripping Americans of their patriotism. What is interesting is that Newitz (1994) places anime and manga as key vehicles that Japan are using to disempower and ‘feminise’ the American people in the same way that the Japanese land and business ownership had done previously. During their rise, anime and manga they were viewed as representations of Japan’s wildest fantasies (Hann 1999). Obscene themes were believed to stem from Japan’s strict restrictions on sexuality, pornography, and even gun laws and thus anime became a fantastical escape tool (Hann 1999). What drove the negative sentiments from the West was the dichotomy between the seemingly strict official nature of Japan compared to the content it

was producing. The strict laws shifted from presenting an abiding society to representing a group of people that needed to be ‘tamed’ under laws lest they act upon their ‘obscene’ desires (Hann 1999; Newitz 1994). Those that enjoyed Japanese influence were labelled *otakus* and became associated with the internet and obsession with fantasy, akin to the images of the Japanese (Alt 2020: 257). Because the media vilified anime and manga, *otakus* created their own space to enjoy their hobbies serving to further reinforce their pre-existing mainstream image as they retreated deeper into online spaces in a time where the internet was still becoming familiar (Alt 2020: 259). There has always been a push to alienate the Japanese from American society through both systemic delegitimisation and the undermining of Japanese content, society, and ways of living.

In a contemporary setting, the delegitimisation of Japan has taken more subtle tones. The representations mentioned above are still present. If anything, the idea that Japan is depraved and degenerate has become the norm. The rising popularity of *lolicon* as a genre began to present Japan as producers of CEM (Galbraith 2011: 83). From a legal standpoint, *lolicon* sits on the fence of traditional obscenity as the younger looking characters are not identifiable as minors as ages are often not provided to the audience. Beyond their age, the ‘imaginary’ nature of anime and manga also distinguish the content from ‘real’ media forms. Simply because the character has a flat chest, large eyes, or small frame does not make them a child. Conflating these traits to children can be damaging to woman who share these traits as it can invalidate their identities (Galbraith 2011: 83). From a Western standpoint *lolicon* represents, at its most extreme, permissible CEM (Galbraith 2011: 83). This representation has only been further supported by geopolitical discussions about Japan in relation to production of CEM. ECPAT, an organisation dedicated to combatting the sexual exploitation of children, claims in its reports (2009; 2018) that Japan produces CEM in the form of anime, manga, and video games consistently despite it posing a threat to children. The reason why CEM can be presented in these forms, according to ECPAT (2009; 2018), is due to the desensitisation of its audience who are already fans and avid consumers of these media types. Such an approach assumes that desensitisation or consumption of these forms of media is equivocal to failing to see CEM as a social issue. This failure means that anime and manga are often claimed to be catalysts for CEM fantasies (Madill 2015). In actuality, this reinforces Adler’s (2001) idea that children, or depictions of children, can no longer exist as they are now seen to signify obscenity and perversion. CEM has historically been used to delegitimise Japan, notably during their global socio-economic resurgence of the late 20th and early 21st

centuries (Leheny 2006: 83). During this time, 80% of the world’s CEM production was Japanese and this association is still used in discussions today (Leheny 2006: 83). ECPAT’s approach misrecognises the issue of CEM by claiming that anime and manga are obscene ‘gateway’ mediums.

The ‘average’ person would want to demonise this content. Anime and manga are obviously obscene if they are selling ‘permissible’ CEM. These mediums are often scrutinised due to presumptions that they are rife with obscenity (McLelland 2005). By repeatedly applying the Miller test to anime and manga, lawmakers are suggesting that the genres as a whole fall beyond ‘average’: the content is vilified for being obscene but so too are anime and manga as they are the medium for its sale. If the ‘average’ members of society consistently find anime and manga to be obscene then anyone that consumes and enjoys the mediums are no longer ‘average’. Despite its rising popularity in the West, anime and manga are still seen as separate to pop-culture and somewhat ‘nerdy’ or underground (Daliot-Bul and Otmazgin 2017). The ‘average’ Western person would be aware of anime and manga but would not consume it (Daliot-Bul and Otmazgin 2017). So, if anime and manga are labelled to be obscene, in that an ‘average’ person has found them so, then the primary audience is no longer included in the Western standards of average. This is the result of the presumptions of what it is and who it is made for. As the only Western comparisons are cartoons and comics thought to be for children, anime and manga are thought to have followed suit. When confronted with ‘promiscuous’ content that is combined with tropes of ‘traditional’ obscenity, typically issues of CEM or sexual violence, interpretations of anime and manga are often conflated with Western presumptions of what cartoons and comics should be (Galbraith 2011: 83). By assuming this, the need to prevent obscenity only intensifies as the preservation of childhood ‘innocence’ has become increasingly fetishised (Adler 2001: 256). As CEM has become increasingly prevalent within legal discussions, the way we perceive children in media has shifted drastically as it acknowledges the possibility that children may be sexualised or exposed to sexuality (Adler 2001: 257).

As Madill (2015: 6) notes, Japanese stylisation – *kawaii* - of characters in anime and mange uses aspects that, at least to the West, are seen to depict the characters as young and childish with their large eyes and sense of style. This makes it almost impossible to verify the age of characters unless they are explicitly stated which can be especially problematic for cases of *hentai,* pornographic anime and manga, where these characters will appear sexually without much introduction (Madill 2015: 6). Consequently, small breasts are also a common

stylisation and are often perceived as a sign of the character being pre-puberty as opposed to just small chested (Galbraith 2011: 84). So were an ‘average’ person presented with examples of these images, especially taken out of context of their original medium, there is a strong tendency to presume that the subjects are underage due to their stylising alone. This presumption extends from what Hartley (in Galbraith 2011: 84) refers to as “juvenation”, the idea that youthfulness has become so heavily fixated on throughout media channels that “child” is required to be a unique and separate category that exists to create consumers. As these kids exist in such a space they have to simultaneously coincide with adult spaces, for example fashion modelling is traditionally flirtatious and sexy, while ensuring that the “child” remains intact to ensure that they remain a spectacle for consumers (Galbraith 2011: 85). Children have to exist in ‘adult’ spaces but maintain their identity as a ‘child’, so should a character be perceived to be a child they are instantly expected to function as one.

The consumption of anything thought to be promiscuous or obscene is then labelled as perverted. Labelling anime and manga in this way is helped by the unfamiliarity of the genres. The inability to comprehend what the content is as a body of works, especially when examples are removed from their context, means that they cannot generalise what is being depicted like they might be able to with Western content (Madill 2015: 6). So, were an ‘average’ person to conflate such content with CEM, those that consume it would not only no longer be ‘average’, but also perverse as they are seen to be consuming content under a paedophilic gaze (Adler 2001: 257). ‘Child’ has come to signify untouchable innocence which has ensured that preservation and protection are always placed first and foremost. This creates a situation where any depiction of them is comes under scrutiny to try prevent it being maliciously consumed. ‘Average’ people have to maintain this perspective as it is required to remain in the in-group of society less they become social outliers.

By having these associations so prevalent within Western society, as well as reaffirming it by claiming it is ‘obscene’ within legal settings, anime and manga become increasingly seen as perverse and beyond ‘average’ (Matthews 2011: 165). Thus, any time someone consumes said media, regardless of whether or not it contains ‘questionable’ content, there is still the looming idea that they no longer fit in with what the ‘community’ is supposed to look like. This idea also helps to establish a level of disdain for those that created the content in the first place. Such a notion re-exemplifies anti-Japanese and anti-Asian sentiments within Western society as consistently conflating anime and manga with CEM within the legal setting demonises the medium as a whole and begins to signify that Japan is

perverted (Galbraith 2011). Negative moral sentiments harboured towards Japan are now, once again, given legal validity as it is the Japanese that are the producers of content that is so ‘obviously’ perverted.

These issues of obscenity with relation to anime and manga are not American specific. While not relating specifically to the ‘average’ person, lawmakers aim to capitalise on the strong moral sentiments surrounding children. The UK’s *Dangerous Cartoons Act* was implemented in 2010 as clauses under what constituted prohibited images of children (Corners and Justice Act 2009). Under the act, the image of a child refers to whether the “impression conveyed” is that of a child or the “predominant impression conveyed” is a child with some “physical characteristics shown are not those of a child” (Coroners and Justice Act 2009). This is problematic as it relies on the impression conveyed over anything else. In 2014, this act was used to prosecute a man for “illegal images of cartoon children” (Lightfoot 2014). Despite the images not being “termed as paedophilic images” instead being “cartoons” he was still prosecuted as there was no way to verify the age of the subjects of the image (Lightfoot 2014). According to the judge the images were designed to suggest that the subjects were children and because of this it was better off to pass punishment in attempts to deter others rather than let it pass (Lightfoot 2014). Due to this presumption about the age of the characters there is a sense that “this is material that clearly society and the public can well do without” (Lightfoot 2014). Much like the Miller test, the content is judged using a generalise assumption as to what constitutes CEM and obscenity. Thus, those that consume it fail to fit under the ‘average’ and are made out to be perverted as the content seemingly lacks social value.

Australia has had similar issues. Its law targets content that “appears to be a child” but does not make note of whether a purely fictional child is included under this umbrella (Al-Alosi 2018: 121). This approach was implemented to challenge production of material manipulated to become CEM, referred to as “pseudo” images, to help protect the right to privacy of a child (Al-Alosi 2018: 121). According to the law, pseudo images are believed to encourage the demand which then puts real children at risk (Al-Alosi 2018: 134). However, the cases where this law is used largely involve an offender with previous convictions of CEM, implying that the use of pseudo images was not the encouraging factor to their behaviour (Al-Alosi 2018: 141). These laws have become the foundation for attempts to ban pseudo images as a whole. Anime and manga have become the perfect scapegoat for such pushes due to similar reasonings mentioned in the US and UK examples. In 2015, a judge in

Adelaide claimed that “anime images [are] not a big leap to viewing child pornography” (Marcus 2015). The assumption is that ‘obscene’ anime and manga could potentially be the catalyst for real-life behaviours. This reflects the issue seen in both the US and the UK in where any comparison that can be drawn between CEM and anime or manga leads it to be enough evidence for punishment (Marcus 2015). The fact that the images appeared to be a child and are being judged under the presumption of ‘obscene’ pleasure creates a tendency to demonise them as direct relatives to familiar representations of CEM.

These issues are still ongoing in Australia. In 2020, a major controversy around anime and manga emerged. Connie Bonaros, a member of the SA Best party, asked distributors to cease selling manga that was “undoubtably [depicting] the abuse of children” (Walker 2020). Bonaros states that many of the anime and manga she found should have “not got past the Classification Board” (MacLennan 2020). Each of the manga pulled included a character that appeared to be a child, or lacked age verification, in situations with ‘adult’ themes, sexual or otherwise. One such manga, *Eromanga Sensei,* was pulled as the story revolved around a brother and sister who write and illustrate *hentai* together. As the sister is seen as younger combined with the sexual content she illustrates the manga gets labelled for ‘obscenity’ especially when taken out of context (Walker 2020). Contrary to Bonaros claims, the Classification Board gave *Eromanga Sensei* a MA15+ rating due to the context of the strong themes (MacLennan 2020). What is interesting here is how Bonaros and her colleague, senator Stirling Griff, chose to frame their argument. The titles offered up by Bonaros were all selected by her based on the themes she thought they portrayed without her reading them (MacLennan 2020). Griff claims that “experts” have agreed that “explicit” versions of anime and manga are paedophilic tools used for grooming, yet does not state who the experts are nor how they would be used as tools (MacLennan 2020). Instead, Griff’s comment aims to provoke an audience through similar moral signification that supports legal fetishism as those who do not find the content ‘obscene’ are social outliers (Fix 2016). Bonaros’s claims did lead to an attempt to ban the importing of *hentai* from Japan due to its overt pornographic nature. Due to the inability to consistently verify age, *hentai* and *hentai* related products were lumped together and looked to be placed under “illegal porn” (Butler 2020). As of writing, this attempted ban has neither been fully committed to nor rescinded.

Across all jurisdictions, these laws exist to prevent ‘obscenity’ polluting Western societies. Law, morality, and legal fetishism have created an environment in which lawmakers have to provide results to ensure moral sentiments are validated (Fix 2016: 74).

Due to ‘obscenity’ involving such pressing social issues – sexual violence and CEM – it would be problematic if laws did not exist that prevented its distribution (McLelland 2005). When ‘obscenity’ issues arise in relation to anime and manga there is a need to create new or tweak existing law to accommodate for new ‘obscenity’. Should laws not adapt, people would think that the state is allowing ‘obscene’ content to exist despite it conflicting with the common moral consensus (Bingham 2011). Anime and manga presented legislators with novel ‘obscene content’. Repeatedly applying laws in this manner reaffirms the assumptions made by the West by confirming anime and manga are problematic (Galbraith 2011).

Here we see the issues that arise from the relationship between law and morality. Laws need something to punish. Targeting anime and manga is more theatre than problem solving as the law relies heavily on the image of being in control. By appearing to do something about the issues of CEM and sexual violence the law looks successful but leaves the substantive problem more or less untouched. These laws do not resolve the root of the issue, they simply serve to show that people can feel safe in believing that the exploitation of children is evil. The issue of ‘obscenity’ is not unique to anime and manga, nor has it become more common as the popularity of anime and manga has increased. While there are cases of CEM existing in these mediums it is no more common than CEM existing in the Western pornography industry (Holt et al., 2020). The continual fetishisation of the law simply shelters the population from the reality and extent of the problem rather than tackling the deeper issues by choosing to offer rapid justice through resolved cases (Gersen 2007: 247).

What, then, is the purpose of heavily criminalising potentially ‘obscene’ anime and manga over tackling the source of production for its Western counterparts? The angle currently taken is to assume characters are underage (Al-Alosi 2018: 141). Targeting content in such a way implies that the content itself is problematic. This is not to say that there should not be laws around potential distribution of CEM (Adler 2001: 257). On the contrary, failing to have laws around CEM is just as problematic as it would fail to provide punishment for abhorrence. But does this mean that the decision of ‘obscenity’ should fall on the shoulders of the ‘average’ person (Fix 2016: 84)? Due to the nature of the content, and how strongly people react to it, are those judging it able to separate their personal opinions from the potential social ‘value’ of the content (Fix 2016: 84)? To both questions, the answer is ‘probably not’. These are issues driven by emotion and outrage. As it is expected for an ‘average’ person to feel this way, they cannot be expected suddenly capable of subverting these emotions to judge the content impartially. The conflation of ‘obscene’ to whole

stylisations and genres of content is achieved by ‘community standards’ that are lacking in both representation and nuance leading to a one-sided ‘average’

Conclusion

The complicated relationship between law and morality have led to the development of anime and manga as a ‘villain’. Both law and morality are socially constructed but position themselves as something ‘superior’ or ‘higher’ than the social. The state uses law to dictate to society what is thought to be problematic whether this be a behaviour or a group of people. States then use these laws as the justification for overt uses of force, when a behaviour is labelled as unlawful the use of force against those acting in this way feels warranted. On the other side of the coin, morality serves a similar purpose. Morality lets people feel like they ‘fit in’ within social boundaries. It does this through convincing people about the ‘natural’ order of things. Rather than force, morality is typically sold to people through charisma and enforced via threat of exclusion and excommunication. Law and morality do not always align. Morality tends to supersede the state as laws provide legitimacy to behaviours that have been traditionally sold as deviant. The legalisation of gay marriage undermined religious notions that homosexuality was ‘unnatural’ by giving it ‘official’ legitimacy. Despite this, law and morality often work off each other. Moral sentiments can pressure the state to pass laws or target certain behaviours. Conversely, laws can develop moral sentiments by telling people that certain behaviours are no longer welcome within social boundaries.

From law and morality comes legal fetishism. Legal fetishism focuses on the results of the law and shows a desire to ensure that law is seen as moral. People would be less willing to follow the law if it did not reflect their own beliefs about what is ‘right’. There is never anything revealed to the public beyond the laws themselves, no processes, motivations, or contexts are shown. As long as the law ‘works’ people will presume they are moral as they validate the feelings of right and wrong that are commonly held. As such, the law has to work otherwise the state loses legitimacy. This has led to ‘easy’ targets becoming the sole focus of the law rather than the deeper contexts and infrastructure behind the behaviours. Obscenity is one such target. The Miller test functions to ensure that results are achieved through manipulating moral sentiments through notions of ‘average’. ‘Average’ does not exist to give

a voice to everyone but to ensure the legal system runs smoothly. Community boundaries cannot exist if ‘average’ is not a tangible concept as there is now no way of assuming a consensus. If ‘average’ is not established then those who go against morality would remain in society as who is to say their view is not correct. Legitimate punishment hinges on the concept of ‘average’ in the same way it hinges on notions of ‘responsibility’ and ‘free will’. Without these notions the system itself has to take responsibility for the actions of its citizens: punishment becomes problematic if the system passing judgement is also recognised as the causal factor. Thus, a common enemy is needed to ensure that laws can present a working theatre for society.

For ‘obscenity’, anime and manga were an easy enemy to make. Japan had already been an ‘enemy’ in the past so rekindling the label did not require much effort. By ensuring obscenity law did not require much analysis, characters just needed to appear as a child, those in power could churn out cases that vilified anime and manga. Anime and manga fans are already associated with being ‘degenerate’, lacking social sensibilities at conventions, so the content is blamed to be the source. It is easier to show the results of laws rather than the process that allows the behaviour to exist in the first place. If the character looks like a child then the law makes it a child and by removing any context for the ‘average’ person to look at, ‘obscenity’ became the logical conclusion. Morality around children is unwavering in the West, juvenation and the paedophilic gaze have assured that anything related to a child in the media is immediately related to unsavoury themes. After all, what if a paedophile is consuming the content? If the ‘average’ person has been brought up in an environment with these themes engrained into them it is only natural that they would pin ‘obscenity’ onto Eastern media as all they see is a child-like character. Add any theme of sexuality or violence to these depictions and anime and manga is suddenly peddling CEM. Making anime and manga signify obscenity ensured that orientalism has remained simultaneously unchecked and prominent within legislative approaches. The next chapter explores how these sensibilities have been co-opted by Western media and their responding to anime and manga.

Media Responses

This chapter focuses on how Western centres of cultural production (e.g., media companies) have responded to the rise of anime and manga. Western media has historically been the main producer of blockbuster films on a global level. As such, they hold a huge chokehold on the market. Threats to this chokehold challenge the West economically and culturally as their image of ‘superiority’ is called into question. This chapter looks at how the media have disenfranchised anime and manga by associating it with lower quality and obscenity. The chapter begins with a look at how Hollywood responded to Bollywood. Here I discuss how the West has typically dealt with threats to their market share. I look at how Bollywood’s initial rise was not seen to be a threat until the West began to lose its share in the market which caused it to appropriate what it thought to be the cause of the popularity. The film *Slumdog Millionaire* is used as perhaps the most evident example of the West trying to cater to the East without jeopardising Western beliefs which led to a very capitalist take on issues local to India. This section shows some of the tropes the West rely on when they begin to feel threatened by the East.

The second section looks at how responses to anime and manga differed to Bollywood based on the differing target markets. Bollywood is Indian, and while it did cater to a wider Asian audience, it did not cause the West to lose any of its native audience. Anime and manga were poised to take its audience directly away from the West as it was not an ‘Asian’ form of content, instead it was seen as an improvement on the Western alternatives. Here I begin by looking at why anime and manga became so popular in the West and outpaced consumption of Western products. Following this, I argue that the label of ‘obscenity’ became the main tool used to undermine the growth of anime and manga as the West realised the approaches they used for Bollywood were ineffective. A key part of this labelling process is how the West have positioned anime and manga as forms of content made exclusively for children which has helped to both invalidate them as mature forms of content and to make ‘obscenity’ a more prominent label.

The final section explores the irony behind this labelling process. Here I look at how the West is currently creating the content that it is demonising. The main focus of this section is the extent of the monopoly the West currently holds on media. The obscene content that is demonised is the same content that the West has the best success with but only with a mature audience. The examples used in this chapter look at how obscene themes were unacceptable

in the manga *Goblin Slayer* but became used as a selling point in shows like *Game of Thrones* and *13 Reasons Why.*

Challenging Western Media: Bollywood

The popularity of foreign media should come as no surprise to Western producers. Since Bollywood’s explosive growth between 1989 and 1999, India has overtaken America as the world’s largest film producing country (Thussu 2008: 98). In 2019, India produced 2,446 films whereas the US produced 933 (Screen Australia 2021). Bollywood capitalised on an Asian market that was craving relatable media (Thussu 2008: 100). In 2017 Asia, as a collective of 68 countries, represented roughly two thirds of the global population sitting at almost 5 billion people (Khanna 2019, 1). Of this 5 billion, India records a population of roughly 1.3 billion. Hollywood assumed that everyone would want Western media regardless of how relatable they were to the audience’s lived experience. All Bollywood had to do in such a context was offer a relatable alternative. Providing relatable content bolstered engagement as it helped to validate the audience’s lived experiences (Thussu 2008: 100). It is important to note that Hollywood has historically conflated the different cultures and languages in India into one Indian people when attempting to represent them in films (Punathambekar 2013: 84). Bollywood’s culturally accurate presentation means it is no surprise that it became so popular, films are now easily accessible and digestible for a market typically neglected by the West (Thussu 2008: 100).

What was a surprise to the West was that the wider Asian market also jumped to Bollywood productions (Punathambekar 2013: 83). Western producers attempted to rationalise this popularity by claiming it was due to the geographical proximity of these countries in relation to Bollywood (Athique 2019: 475). It would be ignorant to claim that proximity was not a factor in Bollywood’s wider growth: pre-existing trade routes and relations did help distribute the content (Athique 2019: 475). Yet, proximity is not solely geographical. As Straubhaar (1991) argues, countries are influenced by ‘cultural proximity’. Cultural proximity is the idea that when a country is unable to produce certain content or media themselves they turn to countries that produce culturally ‘similar’ content (Straubhaar 1991). While there is a preference for media that is ‘native’, should it be unavailable or unachievable, these countries then feel a strong affinity to representations that appear to be

closer culturally, ethnically, and linguistically to their own (Athique 2019: 475). Consumers would rather see something ‘close enough’ over nothing at all and Hollywood was far from relatable.

Bollywood became the ‘close enough’ medium (Athique 2019: 480). The distinct void of ‘native’ media from surrounding Asian media coincided with Bollywood’s expansion (Athique 2019: 476). This is not to say there was nothing produced outside of India, as there were ‘native’ forms of media being created in wider Asia at the time, but the industry supporting Bollywood was unrivalled in terms of funding and production, at least in the East (Punathambekar 2013: 181). Beyond the surface similarities, Bollywood represented a distinctly non-Western voice. A key thread that tied a majority of these markets together through cultural proximity was colonisation (Punathambekar 2013: 110). Western produced media has upheld and reinforced cultural colonialism, that is the attempt to delegitimise foreign culture by replacing it with a “correct” culture, in its exports to the east (Rowe and Tuck 2017: 6). The cultural differences between Bollywood and ‘native’ media became secondary to a sense of voice against cultural and physical colonialism (Athique 2019: 480). Despite Bollywood productions not necessarily being anti-colonialist, they signified the possibility of resistance against Western impositions (Rowe and Tuck 2017: 11). By supporting Bollywood, these countries were backing an alternative, relatable, representation of themselves in the media (Rowe and Tuck 2017: 11).

Hollywood’s slow omission from the East did not go unnoticed. America was not simply losing its film market but its cultural foothold in the East as well (Ibbi 2013: 94). Countries once “tainted” by American culture were beginning to develop an on-screen native identity (Ibbi 2013: 96). Hollywood films sold the East on a Western way of living from fast food to fashion and even familial structure (Ibbi 2013: 94). These exports fall under the process of Hollywoodization. Hollywoodization caused Asian films to adopt Western production, dress and names in order to become popular (Rodman 2010: 190). To undermine Bollywood’s growth, Western producers argued that popular Eastern films were only popular because they copied Hollywood’s blockbusters (Rodman 2010: 190). The West had to remain ‘superior’ to alternatives.

Orientalist senses of ‘superiority’ are evident in responses to Bollywood. Rodman (2010) writes about Hollywood’s success while simultaneously undermining foreign film makers. In the brief section he dedicates to Bollywood, Rodman (2010: 189) pins foreign

success on films being “clever re-makes” of Hollywood blockbusters. He claims that the Bollywood hit *Chachi 420*, released in 1998, was only popular due to it being “lifted” from *Mrs Doubtfire* that was released five years prior (Rodman 2010: 190). To justify these claims Rodman (2010: 189) argued that as Hollywood made up 80% of global film revenue its influence was equally proportional. Outside of this section Rodman’s writing focuses on how Hollywood will continue to remain at the head of the film industry due to its superiority in technology and production. By no means peculiar, this idea reflects the presumption of the East being a step behind the West as Hollywood’s influence was what helped Eastern productions gain traction (Ibbi 2013: 96; Said 2003: 316). Western producers failed to understand that the loss of an audience was their fault. Instead, they needed to place themselves as originators in any film related movement that came about to maintain some semblance of superiority over the market (Said 2003: 316). Any less and the West would have to accept that the East was becoming an equal.

Contrary to its pioneering claims, Hollywood has attempted to play catch-up. While undermining Eastern media deterred the Western audience from jumping ship, Hollywood needed a way to reclaim its lost foreign market (Mudambi 2013: 276). Indian inspired films were the answer Hollywood found. At the forefront of these films was *Slumdog Millionaire.* Despite being based in India, the movie was made for the Western audience. As such, its representations were not required to be accurate as Hollywood was deemed to be an ‘expert’ on whatever topic they chose (Barthes 1993: 143). Due to this trust, the film originally received praise for attempting to tackle the rising problem of poverty in India despite its lack of nuance (Sengupta 2010: 599).

Yet, Hollywood’s interpretation was far from realistic. Hollywood Westernised India’s slums by reducing them to individual spaces rather than whole communities (Sengupta 2010: 613). The movie is heavily reliant on both capitalist notions that poverty is an individual’s failure to thrive in its market and of Christian ideas that poverty provides virtuousness to people (Sengupta 2010: 613). This becomes problematic when looking at the number of Westerners who viewed the film. When such a large quantity of people are relying on Hollywood to be the ‘experts’, whatever is depicted is taken as the truth (Sengupta 2010: 613). Depictions of anything foreign are expected to be exotic and tantalising but remain palatable to a Western audience (Mudambi 2013: 279). These representations let the audience feel as if they ‘understand’ the plight that faces India’s impoverished without them being ‘too much’ to stomach. In turn, the audience feels satisfied for ‘educating’ themselves about

colonial consequences and grants themselves moral credit (Mudambi 2013: 276). ‘Education’ voids the audience of any guilt about being associated with colonisation without actually working to remedy the issues.

A similar sentiment was carried by the director during filming. In an interview with CNN, the director showed a disconnect from the reality of India and what he wished to portray (Mackay 2009). He claimed that everything was “extreme” in India, from the food and drink to how people carried themselves but states that all these extremes are “wonderful for drama” (Mackay 2009). India itself was secondary to what the Western audience wanted to see. As the director carries these sentiments, it is only natural the audience does as well. *Slumdog Millionaire* sold India through optimistic joy in which any individual could escape poverty through its own capitalist ideals, and made poverty, and in turn, the nuance related to Indian slums, an aesthetic (Roy 2016: 173). Poverty is romanticised as the knowledge gained from plight is the same knowledge that ensures the money is won in the film. India, then, became re-orientalised as capitalist interpretations of poverty created new stereotypes for the West to shoehorn Indians into (Mudambi 2013: 279). The West doubled down on creating a “master’s image” in the hopes that it could remain, at least in appearance, superior (Said 2003: 316).

From the Silver Screen to Cells and Paper

The rise of anime and manga took the West by surprise. Effectively, anime and manga became direct competition to the Western counterparts of cartoons and comics. The West were concerned with losing their native market to anime and manga as there is no cultural distinction like there was with Bollywood (Lu 2008: 182). Manga drastically outsells comics and nearly all fiction globally (Davis 2016: 5). The most popular manga, *One Piece*, sold over three million copies globally in 2013, almost nine times more sales than the most popular DC or Marvel comics in the same year (Davis 2016: 5). This success has led to the *One Piece* series grossing upwards of USD$20 billion, selling 430 million copies since its inception, with 70 million copies being sold outside of Japan (Kopper 2020: 504). A key reason for this success is the longevity of the series. It is not uncommon for manga to be published for an extremely extended period of time. *One Piece* was first published in 1997 and is still being published almost weekly (Davis 2016: 8). While not every manga has such

longevity, the ‘big three’ that were exported to the West – *One Piece*, *Dragon Ball,* and *Naruto* – had decades worth of publishing with the latter two manga getting multiple spin-offs following their original conclusions.

It is not just longevity that makes manga popular. Western comics have been serialised for similar lengths but not with the same consistency of manga. While *Batman* for DC or *Spider-man* for Marvel have been around since 1939 and 1962 respectively they have been restarted or remade countless times (Davis 2016: 6). The characters remain fundamentally the same, but the storylines are often independent of each other. Manga uses a series of ‘arcs’ to tie together one overarching plot. For the case of *One Piece,* these arcs are tied to the different locations the characters visit on their way through the main plot. The audience becomes as invested in the world as they are the characters as they have been a part of it as it has developed. Manga, especially the long-term ones, also matured with the audience allowing them to feel like a part of the characters’ growth (Daliot-Bul and Otmazgin 2017: 38). Such inclusion is not as available in Western comics as the story lines are too brief to show much development. Manga invites its audience to be part of the story whereas comics place the reader as an observer.

As for anime, *Astro Boy* is considered the first major title to become popular in the West after being imported from Japan during the 1960s. However, exact viewership numbers are unknown but as it was shown on NBC, one of the three major TV networks at the time, it is safe to assume it was viewed all across America (Davis 2016: 193). Some may point to *Pokémon* being the most popular anime of all time, currently having grossed over USD$90 billion, but this is largely due to its commodification extending beyond being an animated show (Clements 2013: 188; Laato and Rauti 2021: 1). *Astro Boy’s,* and to a similar extent *Pokémon’s,* popularity has been attributed to the appeal they had on young people and children. These anime were, and still are, bright and colourful while following the trope of young characters triumphing over some form of ‘bad guys’ (Davis 2016: 278). The closest comparison the West had at the time was cartoons. Cartoons in the West, at the time of anime’s initial rise, were almost only made for children (Kelts 2006: 208). As such, anime became intrinsically linked with childishness as it was assumed to cater for the same market just with a different approach leading to claims of *Pokémon* being Western (Clements 2013: 188). Despite the growing popularity of ‘mature’ anime in the West the comparisons to the massively popular ‘children’ shows are still prevalent. The recent release of *Demon Slayer: Mugen Train,* deemed mature due to violence and ‘adult’ themes, in theatres grossed over

USD$45 million in the United States alone but as the original *Pokémon* movie grossed more, USD$85 million, the notion that anime is made for children is still prevalent (Davis 2016: 278; Valentine 2021).

Hollywood has attempted to stake its claim over the success of anime and manga. Walt Disney and Max Fleischer, early American animators, are claimed to have provided Japan with the production and tools needed to develop anime ‘properly’ (Daliot-Bul and Otmazgin 2017: 107). These claims came from the fact that Hollywood had worked in partnership with Japanese animators on numerous occasions to produce media for the West (Daliot-Bul and Otmazgin 2017: 89). Yet, Hollywood’s contribution was less collaboration but more a forced cultural ‘colonisation’ (Clements 2013: 74). Following World War II, the United States, during its occupation of Japan, had lifted the pre-existing bans on American media that had been prohibited under Japan’s Film Law in 1939 (Clements 2013: 74). America did this to flood the Japanese market with Hollywood productions, namely Disney films, choking out native Japanese productions. Manga publications were also severely affected as America began to censor anything deemed to be of sexual nature in printed media, this obviously impacted pornography but began to restrict any depictions of nudity, genitalia, and even pubic hair (Kinsella 2000: 24). As such, manga moved underground and had to be distributed through alternative means. Any help the West provided to bolster anime and manga production was undermined by Western efforts to sanction anything Japanese made.

The West perceived the growth of anime and manga to be encroaching on their market. Bollywood was inherently Indian and thus was dismissed as a unique market; anime and manga however are thought to be “ethnically neutral” (Daliot-Bul and Otmazgin 2017: 39). The West struggled to push the same narratives of orientalism that were used against Bollywood onto anime and manga as there was no clear ethnic divide, anime and manga had made their way into the American household despite being ‘foreign’ (Clements 2013: 189). Bollywood’s market was largely based in the East whereas anime and manga became popular within the West’s own boarders and even began to change Western approaches to animation and comic drawing (Daliot-Bul and Otmazgin 2017: 2; Lebovic 2017: 44). This influence has helped create the differences between the media’s response to anime and manga and the response the West had to Bollywood. It did not matter what the ‘orients’ did within their own boarders as the West could always claim superiority. For the West to see that their content was now being directly influenced by ‘oriental’ versions suggests that their superiority no longer exists, they would have to accept the fact that the ‘orient’ is no longer less than and

instead either an equal or even a pioneer in their domain (Daliot-Bul and Otmazgin 2017: 3; Said 2003: 316). Claims of influence were only used to undermine Japan’s capabilities, when their influence led to the popularity of anime and manga the West had to repurpose it as a way to prevent the ‘orient’ becoming equal (Said 2003: 316).

When ‘polite’ justifications failed, the West moved to demonisation. As mentioned in previous chapters, anime and manga became characterised as obscene. This obscenity is catagorised as violent and pornographic, extending to child exploitation material (CEM) and virtual child exploitation material (VCEM) (Leheny 2006: 51). This correlation comes from Japan’s laws around CEM. Japan banned the production and creation of child pornography in 1999, and then targeted the possession of CEM in 2014, but left VCEM - which includes anime and manga - out (Fox News 2015; Leheny 2006: 51). The West quickly used this to demonise Japan and anyone that consumed anime and manga. CNN’s reporting claimed that these pornographic and obscene forms of media were easily accessible and were “apparently involving minors” (Ripley, Whiteman and Henry 2014). Despite not verifying the age of the characters or content in the manga, the authors argued that all the titles they picked up had “shocking sex scenes” and “violent sex acts” (Ripley Whiteman and Henry 2014). These claims stemmed from the belief that choice to exclude VCEM in law meant that Japan was permitting such ‘obscene’ content to be produced. The media ran with the idea that anyone that consumed anime and manga must be indulging their ‘obscene’ desires.

It was not just those in America forming these associations either. Australia, around the same time, had articles published in a similar vain. A judge in Australia claimed that viewing supposed VCEM through anime and manga was “not that great a step to then move onto viewing material of actual children” (Marcus 2015). In 2020 a South Australian senator pushed to review laws around anime and manga claiming a “dark” and “disgusting” side to them as they depicted, what he believed to be, the abuse of children (Coughlan 2020). While Marcus’s (2015) article did not provide any examples beyond them being “anime”, Coughlan’s (2020) article discusses the manga *Eromanga Sensei* which the senator had claimed was the “worst” he had seen being sold to the public. *Eromanga Sensei* revolves around a pornographic manga writer and his sister who helps illustrate the panels, the controversy comes from the sister being twelve-years-old and being associated with obscene themes. The pushes to ban the content hinge on the idea that censorship will prevent someone unwillingly being exposed to obscenity either in a bookstore or on TV (MacLennan 2020). Much like how CNN framed its reporting of manga in the Pixelation chapter, these reports

only showed the covers of the manga, or the young characters in them, without providing any further context. As the reports are discussing CEM, the manga are presumed to be CEM. Not only do anime and manga become demonised for supposedly containing CEM, but so too does Japan as the West begins to criticise and vilify the lack of action taken by its citizens to de-platform such ‘abhorrent’ content.

Within this approach there comes across a distinct fear that anyone, especially young people, will stumble across this type of content and become ‘corrupted’. Anyone could walk into a bookstore, pick up an ‘obscene’ manga, and inexplicably be exposed to abuse, violence or even CEM (Mulholland 2013: 60). After all, seeing this content may be the catalyst for someone to take the next step and “play out a sick fantasy” in real life (Beauman 2007). By allowing people to have random access to it in stores the chances of more vile acts should then only increase (Beauman 2007). Someone being randomly exposed to ‘obscene’ anime or manga in any setting is equivalent, by the logic above, to them being exposed to Western ‘obscene’ content in the form of violent TV or pornographic content (Mulholland 2013: 5). In the West, pornographic and violent content has reached a point where exposure to it has become normalised (Mulholland 2013: 5). Seeing sexual adverts from clothing to food ‘porn’ and violence in every flavour-of-the-month TV show and on the news has normalised ‘traditional’ depictions of ‘obscene’ content. But the West is not as concerned with their content being ‘stumbled upon’, rather the worry stems from the potential of losing their market for it.

This mentality is only reinforced by the audience’s perception of children in the media (Galbraith 2011: 83; Kelts 2006: 163). Children in society have become ‘pure’ to a point where any abnormal situation they are placed in has the potential to be perverse (Adler 2001: 256). Adler (2001) argues that as children, and CEM, have become more prevalent in the judicial system the perception of children has shifted. As Western media has increasingly become pornified, the desire for children to maintain their ‘innocence’ has intensified (Adler 2001: 256). Children in the media are uncomfortable to look at as they are now intrinsically linked to CEM. This has become an issue with media representations of children in general as advertising is constantly scrutinised for allowing “provocative” depictions of children to exist, potentially encouraging depraved behaviours (Adler 2001: 257). Due to judicial cases of CEM being increasingly connected to ‘regular’ images of children, e.g., family holidays or sports photos, any representation of a child in the media has the potential to be viewed as obscene (Adler 2001: 260). If every depiction of a child has the potential to be obscene it is

both impossible to define what prohibited speech is and easy to label anything as CEM (Adler 2001: 260). If the same holiday album taken by a mother has been used in a case of CEM is the law then required to punish the mother for possessing ‘obscene’ images? (Adler 2001: 260). Children in any setting run the risk of becoming ‘pornified’ as it always has the potential to be consumed in unsavoury ways.

The audience is led to feel doubly disgusted at anime and manga due to the combination of ‘pornification’ and Japan’s perversion. The disgust felt when a child is thought to be the subject of ‘obscenity’ is conflated with the same feelings harboured toward Japan as they facilitate this content. Japan has begun to signify sexual deviance (Barthes 1993: 42). By exposing the audience to select ‘evil’ portrayals of children in anime and manga, the West claimed to be protecting them from the larger evil that is the Japanese production of future ‘deviant’ content (Barthes 1993: 42). It is easy to claim a position of moral supremacy when the topic is so universally despised. The West has been able to condition its audience to feel disdain towards Japan while creating a strong affinity to their own productions as they claimed they could never become so morally corrupt (Barthes 1993: 121).

Beyond these claims of protection lies an insecurity about Japan’s shift away from being perceived as ‘Eastern’. Anime and manga tend to not look “Japanese” (Davis 2016: 53). This has led to there being cultural ambiguity in the stories of anime and manga that more easily allow a Western audience to connect and identify with the characters and themes. The stylistic choices of anime and manga, namely wide eyed and ‘cutesy’ or *kawaii*, do not align with what the West think the Japanese look like. Stereotypes of the Japanese, bureaucratic, ‘yellow’ skin, slanted eyes, are not as apparent in its exported media (Davis 2016: 52; Lu 2008: 182). This has led to Western consumers not realising that the anime and manga they enjoy comes from outside of America (Davis 2016: 53). As such, Japan began to position itself as an “ersatz Western country”, that is an attempt at being Western following its success in the West (Lu 2008: 182). Lu (2008) explores this positioning as a form of internalised orientalism. By becoming devoid of traditional Asian features, Japan began to project the orientalism it had experienced onto other Asian countries, namely China (Lu 2008: 182). This notion was carried through to anime and manga as the villains of popular stories tended to resemble either the Chinese or Koreans at the time (Lu 2008: 180). This made it harder for Western audiences to associate anime and manga with the East as they began sharing a common ‘enemy’ (Lu 2008: 180).

For the West this became problematic as a country that was once the ‘orient’ was now trying to pass the label onto other countries (Lu 2008; Said 2003). An ‘oriental’ country claiming other countries were ‘oriental’ just did not make sense to the West. Traditional orientalism relied on the West positioning itself in as many relationships with the East as possible while remaining hegemonic at all times (Lu 2008: 182). By ‘orientalising’ themselves, Japan prevented the West from applying the label to them which began to strip away some of the power the West was exerting (Lu 2008: 179). This notion was hard for the West, and America in particular, to comprehend as they had been ‘triumphant’ over Japan in World War II. Japan’s ‘loss’ to the West should have permanently prevented them from ever becoming an equal (Lu 2008: 176). The West feared Japan’s transition to ‘equal’ as it represented the potential for Japanese media to find itself an equal foothold in the market. No longer could the West claim anime and manga were ‘behind’ Western comparisons as they were no longer products of the ‘orient’.

The Market Ain’t Big Enough For The Both Of Us

The West wanted the whole market. Japan had already begun to push out the West in the automotive and technological industries with companies like Hyundai, Mitsubishi and Nintendo becoming cornerstones of their respective markets. Anime and manga’s rise to popularity represented the sense that the West were beginning to lose its chokehold on the media industry. Hollywood had held domestic hegemony for so long it was unfathomable to have any internal rivals, so any loss of market was impactful. There was now a major, internal competitor to Western products. The demonisation of anime and manga was necessary to try maintain monopoly over the media market. If the West could tarnish anime and manga enough a Western audience would avoid it. Afterall, the West produced the same content with the superiority of not being ‘oriental’ (Said 2003: 324).

Anime and manga also gave Japan a platform to sell itself to a Western audience. While not being ‘ethnically’ Japanese, anime and manga were often depicting stories based in the history and culture of Japan (Prough 2010: 65). From stylised representations of cities and food to the scenery and samurai, anime and manga served as an effective tourism campaign for a Western audience. This ties into the inability of the West to see the ‘orient’ as equal. It was unfathomable that the more ‘advanced’ Westerner would be inspired by, let alone want

to travel to, Japan (Said 2003). The loss of market dominance represented a potential loss of cultural dominance within the West’s own borders as people were beginning to be fascinated by the ‘orient’ (Nester 1997). The West felt shut out as its own audience was no longer interested in its culture. This became especially prominent when Japan restricted the amount the West was allowed to export into its boarders while upping its own exports into Western markets (Nester 1997: 195). Japan was beginning to shoehorn itself into Western markets while removing the West’s ability to do the same (Nester 1997: 195). The West, as a whole, held a global monopoly by claiming that they diversified the market enough through an oligopoly, a small collection of competitors in the shared market but the success Japanese imports had begun to challenge how diverse the market really was (Hannaford 2007: 2).

As noted above, the West demonised anime and manga. However, they only demonised anime and manga when it moved past what cartoons and comics were supposed to be. Cartoons and comics were for kids, anime and manga aged with its audience (Daliot-Bul and Otmazgin 2017: 137). America had no issues with anime and manga imports when they were thought to be solely for younger audiences. In fact, the American media market encouraged it as it was cheaper than the production of Western counterparts at the time (Prough 2010: 57). For the West, losing the young market to Japanese imports was not as worrying as they were reliant on their parents for their contribution to the economy. In turn, the West could still lace these productions with Americanised adverts that would allow them to consistently compete with the Japanese influence as it aired (Reidenbach and Goeke 2006: 23). Were anime and manga to remain for children there would not have been any future issues as the threat it posed was manageable and contained to a small aspect of the overall market.

What made the West unhappy was the loss of the mature market. The issues started when fans, in America, begun to import anime and manga that was ‘adult’ and distribute it themselves (Prough 2010: 65). Cartoons and comics at the time lacked any depth as it was restricted to the young market or was used as satire. Anime and manga were rivalling the ‘complexity’ of Hollywood movies as they were not shy to depict death or complex moral issues even in their children’s shows (Davis 2016: 37). *Astro Boy* was renowned for humanising the main character constantly presenting him in situations of vulnerability or defeat, a trope that was thought to be traditionally Western with underdog stories (Davis 2016: 39). American cartoons and comics were simply good versus bad and, while enjoyable, provided little for its audience to engage with (Davis 2016: 39). The West expect the

audience to shift back toward Hollywood live-actions when the desire for depth occurred and thus were not producing anything to match the ‘maturity’ of anime and manga (Daliot-Bul and Otmazgin 2017: 137). By letting the audience have early exposure to Japanese media it should not have been a surprise to the West that they would be happy to keep engaging with it, especially as it catered to their maturing tastes.

There is a traceable shift of attitude towards Japan within American, specifically animated, media. Following the initial boom of anime in America, American producers began to produce ‘mature’ cartoons in the form of *The Simpsons* (1989) and *South Park* (1997) which were not shy of being seen to be ‘edgy’ with violence and sexuality (Daliot-Bul and Otmazgin 2017: 108). These shows were not necessarily meant to be direct competition to mature anime, as they largely served as satirical takes on American mass media, instead they suggest that the rise of anime showed producers the untapped potential mature cartoons had. Had anime not gained such popularity with the adult market there is a chance that the producers of these shows would not have taken the route they did during creation (Daliot-Bul and Otmazgin 2017: 111). Both these shows have had episodes dedicated to Japan. Despite the satirical takes, both shows provide good insight into what Americans believed about Japan. For example, in the episode “Thirty Minutes over Tokyo” from *The Simpsons* (1999), the creators depict Japan in a way that emphases the belief that it is strange and obscene through parodies of Japanese TV, culture and a suggestion that America is regressing to post World War II colonial ideals (Daliot-Bul and Otmazgin 2017: 111). *South Park* (1999) used the popularity of *Pokémon* in their episode to highlight and satirise the concern Americans had of becoming culturally over-run by Japan. Again, we see the general fear that neo-imperialism was beginning to faulter as the ‘orient’ was retaliating against the West (Daliot-Bul and Otmazgin 2017: 112).

Do as the West Say, Not as the West Do

The demonisation of anime and manga is ironic in the sense that the West produce comparable genres and themes within its own content. Violence and obscenity are not novel to Western media. The controversy and attempt to pull *Goblin Slayer* (2020) over a rape scene in its initial manga volume and anime adaptation for fear of being too much for an audience is offset by the inclusion of rape scenes in American produced shows, for example,

Game of Thrones (GoT) (2011-2019) and *13 Reasons Why* (2017-2020). Reactions to these shows suggested that the inclusion of rape added a level of realism and lived experience to the story helping make them ‘edgy’ and ‘challenging’ (Thompson 2017: 287). As Thompson (2017) argues, Western media has largely served as a medium to portray violence, physical and sexual, as a commodity. An audience is able to disconnect themselves from the content as it is ‘just TV’ or justify their morality by feeling educated and acceptably shocked by it when it is a ‘true story’ (Thompson 2017: 288). By being ‘graphic’ these shows were given the authority to feel legitimate in the media as ‘over the top’ depictions of sex were seen to be unnecessary and created a negative response from the audience (Thompson 2017: 296). People wanted a sense of reality. In turn, violence becomes seen as a way to educate and inform others about the realities and consequences of, in this instance, rape. While there is often some level of criticism and controversy around these American depictions the overall consensus is that they are ‘ground-breaking’ and ‘challenging’ rather than ‘obscene’.

Goblin Slayer’s depiction of rape is arguably no less ‘obscene’ than that seen in *GoT* or *13 Reasons Why* (the scene in question involves a horde of goblins raping and murdering a group of young adventurers before they are all killed by the protagonist). But there is a notable difference in responses from audiences. With the Western examples, the audience claimed to be able to separate the reality of rape from how it was depicted. The depictions of rape serve a purpose in educating the audience about the consequences it can have on people (Thompson 2017). Rape has become visually acceptable as long as the audience can internally justify its use. *Goblin Slayer* was not given the same benefit of the doubt. The idea that someone had drawn these scenes personalised them to the author rather than to the story (Kinsella 2000). This is not to say the American examples did not have any relation to the author, on the contrary the author of *GoT* George R. R. Martin is attached to every episode, it is more the distinction between supposed plot value and bigger picture purpose. As the *GoT* books are marketed as an epic, the violent scenes are seen to establish, or be the consequence of plot across all the books (Thompson 2017). Anime and manga are not seen in the same light, these are mediums perceived to be for children so any creator putting obscenity into this content is perverse and twisted, as seen through justifications for attempted bans (Coughlan 2020; Fox News 2015). Where *GoT* appeals and markets itself to adults, *Goblin Slayer*, and manga in general, despite intended audience, is always associated with a younger market (Davis 2016: 5). Had *Goblin Slayer’s* scene been included in a show like *GoT* it is highly likely it would have been acclaimed as it resolves with the hero saving the damsel in distress.

The abhorrence is resolved, and the audience would feel gratified by justice being served (Thompson 2017).

The difference in response, arguably, is not disconnected from the question of who gets the profit from such media productions. America cannot profit from Japanese obscenity in the way they can from their own productions. A large part of the backlash to anime and manga comes from its supposed sexualisation of content or characters, especially when it revolves around perceived incestuous familial themes or the age of characters. As mentioned previously, *Eromanga Sensei* garnered criticism for being perceived as incestuous. It is not uncommon to see a story centred around a main character suddenly being integrated into a new family following their parent remarrying. *Kiss x Sis* (2008-2015), *Oreimo aka My Little Sister Can’t Be This Cute (*2008-ongoing), and *Citrus* (2018) all gained a sizable following outside of Japan despite ‘obscene’ familial themes (Lamarre 2013: 134). Despite levying criticisms about incest and the façade of morality by the West, Western pornography is dominated by the same themes. Step-sibling porn is consistently one of the most searched for genres on porn sites despite using the same themes anime and manga are demonised for (Vincent 2016: 143). On top of this, ‘teenage’ and ‘school-girl’ pornography has consistently been popular within the industry. The West claiming that age verification is an issue begins to fall short when met with the self-promotion of ‘barely legal’ aesthetics (Vincent 2016: 143). While the actresses are often older than the age they present themselves as, the selling of the aesthetic should be as problematic as the arguments used against anime and manga as they could also be entertaining the perverse. As this pornography is being produced in the West it is marketable and acceptable. The depictions in anime and manga represent competition to the market despite them not necessarily being pornographic rather using implication or the audience’s imagination (Vincent 2016: 143). It has become less about creating ‘safe’ content but more remaining the sole provider for any content, regardless of obscenity, that the Western audience can desire. If there is seen to be a market for any content, obscene or not, the West feels the need to be the sole source of it.

Conclusion

Overall, the rise of foreign media is not a novel concept to the West. Bollywood served as an example that the media market extended far beyond what the West was catering to. By offering more accurate representations of Eastern cultures, Bollywood capitalised on a market that had been neglected by the West. As such, Hollywood was required to play catch-up. Even in their attempts to cater to the East, film producers prioritised upholding their orientalism driven understandings. *Slumdog Millionaire* signified India as the West wanted it to be as depictions of poverty and hardship are what the Western audience assumes India to be. Bollywood showed the West that foreign media is both valid and popular but rather than learning from this the West aimed to re-orientalise the market to assure the Western audience that they were still the superior media provider.

The insistence on using orientalist understandings of the East carry over to the media’s responses to anime and manga. However, anime and manga posed more of a direct threat to the West. As anime and manga was gaining Western fans the West saw it to be imposing on their media stranglehold. Anime and manga signified that Japan was no longer the ‘orient’ the West wanted them to be, they had ‘caught up’ to the West. Claiming that they were the reason anime and manga had been able to develop did work in the short-term for the West at reasserting orientalism, but in the long run the rapid success anime and manga saw surpassed anything the West was capable of producing. As the media was now under direct threat of losing their audience and therefore their market share, the West began to disenfranchise anime and manga. This was done in two ways. The first being the forced association that they are a children’s medium. Anime and manga are just different forms of cartoons and comics and therefore cannot be legitimate forms of media for a mature audience. The second being the labelling of it as ‘obscene’. As anime and manga are meant for children it would not be right to let them stumble across it in a store or on the internet. After all children need to be protected from corruption. But the themes demonised in anime and manga are already sold, promoted even, in the West. Rape? Sex? Violence? All neatly bundled up in *GoT* or any number of ‘edgy’ flavour of the month shows. Claims of selling incestuous content or unverified ages hold less weight as production of step-sibling or ‘teenage school-girl’ pornography are the largest sellers in the market. It does not matter whether the content is problematic or not, the producers of media in the West seek to ensure that the ‘orient’ cannot damage their ‘superior’ image.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored how orientalism has underpinned the Western adoption of anime and manga. To do this I focused on portrayals of anime and manga in three different areas: pixelation; law, morality, and social boundaries; and media responses. In each of these areas, anime and manga became a way for the West to reaffirm their beliefs about social norms and reassert their believed cultural superiority. A semiotic analysis was used to explore how anime and manga became signifiers of these beliefs.

At its simplest, pixelation is the process of obfuscating content to maintain the anonymity of a subject or to protect the audience from unsavoury content. Despite pixelation aiming to be a protective tool, it is flawed. In the case of anonymity, the pixelation process requires intimate knowledge of the subject but is carried out by journalists who are often interacting with the subject for the first time. This is because there are no alternatives to pixelation in the media thus making its current use the industry standard. The media are seen to be the authority on whatever they report so their presentation of pixelation is trusted. From this, the media has begun to use pixelation as a way to boost engagement as ‘obscene’ content is tantalising for viewers. With cases of nudity, this way of framing pixelation allows the media to take liberties with the privacy of the subject depending on the country it is being shown in. Audiences are more attentive and receptive to news media that engages with ‘obscene’ content. Pixelation then allows the media to sell this content without it losing credibility.

There are two major schools of thought as to why pixelation works in this way. One school of thought sees pixelation as a way for the audience to engage with content that is otherwise demonised (Blair et al. 2006). Content that is seen to be ‘worthy’ of pixelation is assumed to be outside of traditional moral boundaries for what is permissible to consume. This presentation is done under the guise of ‘protection’ where the audience is given just enough ‘obscenity’ to safely entertain deviant interests. The consumption of this content outside its controlled setting labels its audience as ‘perverse’ and ‘improper’ as it is something that those within the moral boundaries would not go near. The other school of thought positions pixelation as a way for the audience to reaffirm their sense of moral boundaries (Jewkes and Linnemann 2017: 179). When an audience sees someone associated with pixelation they simultaneously reinforce their social position while alienating the subject for their deviation from the social norms. While this argument does agree that pixelation

engages the audience, it argues that ‘obscene’ content has become commonplace in the media so the desire to entertain deviant interests has waned. It is this second school of thought that better explains pixelation within the context of this thesis.

This has led to pixelation becoming mythologised. Repeated exposure to the current form of pixelation has led audiences to believe it is nothing more than a simple process and an innocent tool. On the surface pixelation serves to protect its audience from ‘obscenity’ but is then sold back as a way to maintain engagement. Any criticism levied against this contradiction is dismissed due to the trust pixelation has garnered. Pixelation became a signifier of ‘obscenity’. People believe that pixelated content has to be obscene otherwise it would not warrant obfuscation. CNN played on this belief when they reported on what anime and manga were being sold in Japan. Anything with a semblance of obscenity was obscured but any faces displayed on the covers were left untouched. The main focus of the report was a horror manga featuring two schoolgirls. The reporters denotatively claimed their use of pixelation was to prevent exposing its audience to horrific images of exploitation. Connotatively, pixelation is used to tell the audience that the manga cover they see is obscene due to it needing obscuring. This is then reinforced by the choice to leave the faces unobscured as it suggests to the audience that its obscenity is two-fold due to it involving children. Had the pixelation been reversed the manga would have lost its sense of obscenity as the audience is now seeing blood and a uniform which is not novel within Western media. It is not uncommon to use the faces of children to manufacture reactions because the audience believes that a failure to react will jeopardise their social position. As such, any agency the audience thought they had with their reaction was dictated by the reporters.

The second substantive chapter focused on the interplay between law, morality and social boundaries. Both law and morality act as unique institutions that benefit from and contradict each other. The law acts as the state’s way to justify the use of force. Laws function to provide the state a way to ‘legitimately’ target behaviours deemed socially unsavoury. People then believe that uses of force, no matter how excessive, is valid as the behaviour is now seen to breach social boundaries. On the flip side, morality legitimises itself through the ‘natural’ order. While morality cannot use force, it can exert power by threatening excommunication. Anyone that breaches moral norms is pushed outside of social boundaries by the ‘in-group’. Issues arise between the two when the state legitimises ‘immoral’ behaviours. When gay marriage was legalised, those who believed it to be ‘unnatural’ were upset as the state was now directly contradicting their moral message. By

providing gay marriage state ‘legitimacy’ it demystified the behaviour as those who were unsure about it now found no issue with it as the state said there was nothing wrong with the behaviour. Importantly, the law and morality can feed off each other. Laws can and will be influenced by moral sentiments and prejudices. If there is unanimous moral sentiment about a behaviour the state will feel pressured to criminalise it. The state needs to follow moral trends to ensure that it maintains public support. However this also works the other way. Should the state repeatedly associate something to deviant behaviours, people will now find that example immoral. The state’s labelling of deviant behaviour makes the public believe that anyone associated with it is also deviant.

From this interplay comes the notion of legal fetishism. Akin to commodity fetishism, the public focus on the product in isolation without regard to its production (Iacono 2016: 109). Thus, the law has to provide results for people to keep buying into it. As long as the theatre of law keeps functioning, those in power continually punish anything. Approaches to obscenity are rife with legal fetishism. Obscenity creates an easy ‘villain’ for lawmakers to target as it punishes both the content and the consumer. The Miller test for obscenity has become a way for lawmakers to rally moral sentiments through notions of an ‘average’ person. An average person does not exist. A large portion of the American public cannot participate in the legal system to begin with, so they are not provided with the opportunity to be ‘average’. Instead ‘average’ is a legal necessity to create a sense of community when enforcing law. Notions like ‘average’ create a sense of belonging for people, so if the ‘average’ person finds something obscene then others can follow suit and fit into the wider social group. The test in itself is phrased in such a way that it forces people to agree with the expected outcome otherwise they will no longer be ‘average’.

While the obsession with results is damaging in its own right, the law’s power to legitimise ‘moral’ sentiments is also important for approaches to anime and manga. Orientalism has been provided legal legitimacy in the United States. The early 20th century saw anti-Japanese sentiments become popular due to the immigration of people from Japan. The Japanese were thought to be ‘taking over’ California at the time threatening the ‘true’ American lifestyle. Laws were then used to validate the feeling that the Japanese were not equal participants in American social spheres.

These anti-Japanese sentiments are important as they have carried on through to how the West respond to anime and manga. Newitz (1994) encapsulates American sentiments

through her claims of Japan committing “cultural imperialism” through their export of anime and manga. Anime and manga fans have historically been slandered through labels of obsessive, perverse, and *otaku.* More recently however, Western attempts to undermine both anime and manga and Japan are more subtle in nature. The law has become obsessed with the representation of ‘young’ characters in anime and manga as there is often no easy way to verify their ages. This sentiment is present around the World. In the U.K a reader needs to have been given the impression that the character is a child for it to be punishable under law (Coroners and Justice Act 2009). In Australia the character just needs to “appear to be” a child for it to be classified as CEM (Al-Alosi 2018: 121).

As such, anime and manga are repeatedly associated with CEM. This is in part because characters are stylised in a way that, to the West, equates to children. Should a character have large eyes or a flat chest they are thought to be children. Importantly, this plays off of notions that Japan has previously been the world’s largest producer of CEM and their unwillingness to criminalise VCEM (Leheny 2006: 83). Anime and manga have become representative of ‘gateways’ to actual CEM consumption. An ‘average’ person will want to demonise content that places children in harms way. Anime and manga are thought to be combining tropes of CEM with mediums that are thought to be reserved for children, animation and comics. Children are expected to exist in ‘adult’ spaces in ways of advertising and media without ever compromising on being a child. This leads to the instance of labelling anything with the potential for harm as perverted. Repeatedly associating anime and manga with CEM in a legal setting leads to the public’s moral sentiment shifting to vilify the mediums. Despite the obsessive targeting, the issue of CEM still exists. These laws are not resolving the production of CEM as that is both too difficult and lacks the ability to provide an accessible villain for the ‘moral’ public. Rather, anime and manga can be targeted as the ‘average’ member of society has no vested interest in the medium and already expect it to be perverted due to its Japanese origin.

The final substantive chapter focused on how the media responds to anime and manga. This section explored how the West felt like they were losing their native markets to foreign media. Hollywood has always seen itself as a bastion of Western media production as there were very few competitors globally. Yet, Bollywood’s initial rise not only drew a huge Indian market but also catered better to a broader Asian market. Suddenly, Hollywood was not only losing their foreign footholds but were poised to lose a substantial part of Asian demographics within the West. Obviously, Hollywood movies and Western media would still

be popular, but it was the fact that there was now a real competitor to their market chokehold that scared producers. This competition also signalled the start of a challenge to the on-screen representations of the East.

One of the key reasons Bollywood became so popular was that the Eastern audience had an easier time relating to the content as it was by the East for the East. In an attempt to claw back recognition Hollywood began to claim itself as a forefather. Any hit film from the East was ‘inspired’ by the West or would not have been possible without Western influences. There is no more obvious display of orientalism than the West delegitimising foreign success by claiming they were playing catch-up to Hollywood. Were the West truly ‘ahead’ there would not have been such a desperate attempt to regain the Eastern market. Surely, products that are so pioneering would garner popularity from their merits alone. Instead of focusing on what made Bollywood popular, Hollywood thought that they just needed to make films set in the East. For this, Hollywood leaned on what the West associated with and assumed about the East: poverty, slums, and backwardness. Here, Western approaches to Bollywood show two things. The first being that foreign markets are only thought to be legitimate when they begin to threaten Western capital. The second being that Western responses are contingent on orientalist perspectives as depictions of the East are built from expectations rather than realities.

Where anime and manga differ is how popular they became within the West. Anime and manga were postured as direct competition to cartoons and comics rather than an independent market as Bollywood was. The adult themes common in anime and manga meant that they could cater to a wider audience than cartoons and comics could at the time yet were viewed to be made for a younger audience. To claim itself as a pioneer, Hollywood argued that anime and manga would not be where it is today without the Western tools they provided. Again, the East is always seen to be one step behind the West. While these claims did garner legitimacy for Western cartoons and comics they did not undermine anime and manga to the extent that was hoped for. In an attempt to undermine anime and manga the West began to correlate the mediums with obscenity. Much like with the previous two sections, conflating obscenity with a genre thought to be for children meant anime and manga were vilified for seeming perverse. Across the globe, anime and manga became perverted due to their usage of what was thought to be children. Australia made public pushes to remove manga from stores so their children could not just pick up and read such smut. In the media,

children are portrayed as do-no-evil type figures where their age is the embodiment of innocence. Anything that may threaten their innocence is immediately slandered.

On top of this the West did not appreciate the lack of ‘Asian-ness’ in anime and manga. Yes, the stories have commonalities with Japanese life from eating habits to school designs, but the stories that become the most popular in the West are often dissociated with what is thought to be ‘typically Japanese’. None of the stereotypes the West associate with the Japanese can be seen in the character designs. Characters are not always shown with slanted eyes nor are they shown with yellow skin especially in the stories that become popular in the West. Japan was seen as ersatz Western. For the West, the question was how an ‘oriental’ country had worked its way into the Western fold. Japan was just more interesting to the Western audience. But this suggested that if the West cannot maintain its own audience how could it be a global leader. Anime and manga were not a problem when they were for children as *Pokémon* and *Astro Boy* became mainstays in households. They only became a problem when they catered to the wider audience. The West could not lose its adult audience. On one hand, you have the West lambasting an anime for a rape scene; on the other, popular shows get praise for including graphic rape scenes due to them being ‘real’ or ‘hard-hitting’. Sex and violence are commodities, and the West could not stand having a competitor let alone an oriental one. Manga is banned for having themes of incest while the porn industry has had incredible success with step-sibling and step-parent content. The West could not care less about obscenity itself; the West are scared of losing its monopoly on ‘deviant’ content to ‘oriental’ versions. So, it is not that the West wants to protect its audience, it is more that the West wants to be the one selling what they have otherwise dubbed as poisonous.

It is not hard to see the running theme throughout my analysis. The West believes itself to be superior in every way, shape, and form compared to the East. Anything sold by the East should never be able to compete with the Western version. Said’s (2003) orientalism is as prevalent as ever within Western discourses. Approaches to anime and manga reflect a deeper desire to reassert superiority in every form possible. This is not done randomly either, the West took a multi-faceted approach to disenfranchise anime and manga. Pixelation works to create an association between obfuscation and obscenity or abhorrence. This is powerful in ensuring that the media can create narratives about who or what is dangerous to the audience. This meant that people bought into the belief that anime and manga are nothing more than a

way for Japan to produce and an audience to enjoy content of unbelievable abhorrence that even included children.

Law and morality have ensured these associations remained. By ensuring that laws reflected morality and stayed ‘true’ to what the West desired, anime and manga became increasingly cemented as abhorrent. Anime and manga became easy targets for the state to produce legislative results which ensured people that the system ‘worked’. What better way to do this than by playing off of common moral sentiments. People want to protect children. Children exist in a strange limbo as they need to be ever present in adult media without ever losing their ‘innocence’. As such anything that includes a ‘child’ is always assumed to have the potential for ‘deviant’ consumption. Laws do not require a character to be a child rather they just need to look like a child. Using ‘average’ as the determinant to obscenity ensures that anyone who does enjoy the ‘obscene’ content is no longer an ‘average’ member of society. If an ‘average’ person finds the content obscene then those who enjoy it are now no longer ‘average’.

There is a sense that audiences need to be ‘protected’ from this type of content. But what are they being protected from? It is obviously not the obscenity itself as the West excessively markets the same content to people. Is it then protection from CEM? The CEM associations stem from the assumption that if a character appears as a child then they are as such. As CNN’s article proved, if the cover has a child on it you can assume the content involves something related to CEM. All the reporters had to do was pixelate half of a manga cover for people to believe that Japan was selling CEM on its shelves. Anime and manga act as a vehicle for legislative theatre to make it seem like laws surround CEM are working instead of focusing on approaches that are less ‘flashy’. A less flashy approach would not give the same display that current laws do as they would be slower and not able to fabricate a villain to target. It does not matter if the issues of CEM production or obscenity are resolved as long as the state can be seen to be providing ‘results’. If protection is from neither obscenity nor CEM then where does anime and manga differ from any comparative Western media?

Ultimately, it is “not Western”. How demeaning it must be for a country thought to be ‘conquered’ to be creating media that is only increasing in popularity in the West not just within Japanese communities. After all, the ‘orient’ is supposed to be behind, not an equal nor a competitor. It is then not the audience that needs protecting but the West itself.

However, outwardly choosing, and claiming to, protect itself would fracture the West’s image of superiority. It would act as a public admittance stating that Japan, and subsequently the orient, is no longer ‘behind’ the West. It would be impossible to claim superiority while simultaneously admitting there are equals. The West has to be on top. The audience simply acts as a way for the West to protect itself while maintaining its image as protecting its citizens is what is expected from those in power.

But what does this amount to? Well, anime and manga are not going anywhere. If anything, its popularity is only going to rise as Western animations begin to shift into more ‘adult’ areas. *Netflix* has started, and seen incredible success with, producing and adapting manga into their own animated titles. They are not creating Western anime; it is through and through true to the Japanese titles they choose but shown on Western streaming services. Should the current approaches continue the West will only alienate an ever-growing portion of their own market. It is not-feasible to keep targeting anime and manga, so the West needs a new ‘villain’. This is evident in responses to Covid-19 as anti-Asian sentiments have been drummed up and encouraged by those in power to avoid being blamed for the mismanagement of the pandemic. Until the West can swallow its pride, orientalism is going to keep driving responses to anything foreign.

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