Sexual Violence Against Women in Shoujo Manga

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It is the first day of high school and you are a young girl on the cusp of adulthood. This is an important time in your life, new experiences are abound and your body is changing. Perhaps this is the first time you’ve really considered finding love, getting into a relationship with a boy. It might be a difficult time in your life as you have to deal with new types of stress, but love, real romantic love, could be just around the corner. When you round that corner though, what you find is a tall, good-looking boy who proceeds to pin you to the wall and forcibly kiss you. Even if you cry and resist, your first kiss is gone. This isn’t how love is supposed to go, but the boy is cute, and he might be a bit possessive, a bit aggressive, but he really seems to love you. Sure, he might enjoy feeling you up, humiliating you in public, but this is love, you are in love. You might also be starring in a shoujo manga.

Before I get into a discussion of what constitutes a shoujo manga, and the issue of sexual violence within the genre, it is important to outline the critical issues at play within this paper. Indeed, shoujo manga is only one of the topics to be addressed, and although it is the original topic and basis for the research I conducted, it is only part of the story. This paper will not only examine the issue of sexual violence, but also the process that led to writing this paper. The process itself becomes important as this research was conducted under the banner of two separate disciplines, English Studies and Anthropology. The methodology I used during my research, how I have presented this research in various settings, and how I came to understand my struggle to deal with this material arose from the interplay between these two disciplines. Throw in a bit of the avant-garde discourse, and you have the foundation from which this paper is built.

In order to ensure proper understanding of the terminology that will be used within this paper, I must first address the issue of manga. Simply put, manga are Japanese comics. Although newspaper “funnies” do exist, manga often refers to the narrative style, similar to American narrative comics such as Superman. As a medium, manga constitutes a form of mass media. Though most use the term mass media to refer to television or newspaper, the relation to manga is not so far-fetched, and is integral in relation to the issues of sexual violence at the center of this paper. Approximately 20% of all printed material in Japan is manga, accounting for over 4 billion dollars every year (Pink). Not only is manga a widespread and popular medium in its own right, it also serves as the basis for other media. Most commonly, manga are adapted into television shows, either live action or anime (cartoons). Most manga are published in manga magazines, which run every week or every month, and are sold in convenience stores. As Daniel Pink remarks in his article on the manga industry, “In many parts of Tokyo, you can’t walk more than two or three blocks without encountering comics.” This highlights the availability of manga within Japan.

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11 The term manga is the Japanese word used to refer to any comic material, not just the narrative form I have used for this research.
In their article on multimodality in comic book literacy, Adam Swartz and Elaine Rubinstein-Ávila highlight five “spheres” of manga (44). I refer to these spheres as genres, and instead argue that there are six. The division of these six genres relates to sex and age, though within this paper only one particular genre is of important I will outline the others for the sake of discussion. The kodomo genre, which is the sixth genre ignored by Swartz and Rubinstein-Ávila, is also the first introduction to manga for most Japanese children. It is a non-gendered genre targeted at children below the age of ten. Perhaps the most famous kodomo manga is Doraemon, which although created long ago became a national image and is still a popular image in more recent manga. After kodomo, shounen and shoujo become the center of attention, targeted at young boys and girls respectively. Shounen is the most popular genre both within Japan and abroad. These stories “appeal to boys and men by stressing values such as friendship, perseverance, and winning” (44). Even within America, famous shounen manga such as Dragonball Z are well known from their anime counterparts. Shoujo, on the other hand, is less well known abroad, and even within Japan caters to a far small audience. As the target of this study, I will delve into the issues within the shoujo genre, both in terms of content and the issues of the target audience later in this paper. The final two genres that fit into this system are seinen and josei. Although similar to shounen and shoujo these two genres target an older audience, usually above the age of twenty. The final genre is not really a genre, though it is included in most discussions, including Swartz and Rubinstein-Ávila’s article. Ero manga is derived from the word erotic, and refers to the wide variety of pornographic manga printed in Japan. These six genres divide up the medium of manga, and through this division mark the various distinctions in target audiences.

As mentioned previously, one of the issues within this paper is how to deal with manga. This is an issue on multiple levels, stemming not only from my place within the anthropology department, but also as an academic. From the above discussion, it is obvious that manga is a popular form of media with a wide range of audiences. This places manga within the sphere of what is generally referred to as popular culture. The study of popular culture is perhaps most related to the field of cultural studies, and with this in mind one might automatically assume a set of methodologies for approaching the material. As John Storey notes in his introduction to Culture Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader, “The problem is this: cultural studies has never had one distinct method of approach to its object of study” (x). This was the beginning of the second issue within this paper: how do I study manga? Although I inevitably found a way to approach this material, this realization introduced a new conflict, the issue of popular culture as exotic.

In order to justify this project, I had to come to terms with the basic criticism of not only popular culture in general, but specifically manga within academia. Even though I might get some leeway within the field of English Studies, I was also attempting to deal with this project in terms of anthropology. As a professor of mine explained, paraphrased, “it’s cool because they’re comics.” As an academic, this was one thing I could not allow, my research could not be justified just because no one else knew what I was talking about and it looked “cool.” I realized I had placed myself in the center of a controversy, a conflict between the institution of the academy and the institution of the popular, and these were indeed two separate things. Although popular culture studies have grown, it is still a field that is perhaps considered unconventional. It was quite fitting that this issue should arise from a foundation based in the avant-garde, a discourse dealing not only with the issue of power, but also the issue of the minority. Institution
is also a major target for the avant-garde, for it is the institution that attempts to frame the avant-garde, the so-called “death of the avant-garde” as proclaimed by scholars within the field. One might imagine then that this was enough to justify a project that by its nature exists in a space between institutions, between the popular and the academic, between English Studies and anthropology.

With so many discourses surrounding this topic, at least one would be able to justify a project that I found myself increasingly having to justify. As it turns out, my answer was only found after I had finished my research, presented it once, and realized that the justification came from the results and the struggle. There was no way to explain the project until after I had already finished it; even the avant-garde is not too fond of the popular as I found out. So, why does it matter? Why does a project studying a form of popular culture in another society, targeted at a specific minority audience, and dealing with sexual violence matter to us academics here in the United States? The answer, as I have said, will come at the end, after the research has been explained, and the methodology analyzed.

Anthropological Study

The core of this project became the actual study I conducted. Although it was only part of the whole methodology that I inevitably used to address the issue of sexual violence in shoujo manga, the study became the focal point for many of my efforts, and many of my problems. Anthropology as a discipline, especially within the work of an ethnography12, often relies on the use of data, survey, and analysis in order to come to a conclusion or to present an issue. Since this project was designed to address the use of sexual violence in shoujo manga, one of my first tasks was to actually show a pattern of sexual violence within the genre. Using a single case would hardly constitute the mass media issue I was suggesting as my hypothesis at the beginning of this project. Although, from my experience with the medium, I knew such a pattern existed, without actual data I wouldn’t be able to formulate an effective argument. Thus, one of the first stages of this project was to collect enough data to make my claim.

Methodology

In order to look at sexual violence, I had to first decide what exactly constituted an act of sexual violence within the context of shoujo manga. At the beginning of the project, I began by dividing the issue into one of violence and sexual violence, distinguishing between the two based off the context of the situation. Sexual violence became centered on the male character’s intent, often for pleasure, rather than violence, which related more to anger or control. In reality, this distinction was complicated, and although I maintained the focus on sexual violence I ended up not using the data on violence, though I will include it within this paper as a comparative point.

While looking at sexual violence, the issue of consent became the most important. Since not all sexual acts within the manga might be nonconsensual, especially as a series progressed, I only included data on sexual acts where the female character did not give visible consent, which might include resistance or lack of response. The latter arose in cases where the female character

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12 According to the anthropologist Conrad Kottak, an ethnography “provides an account of a particular community, society, or culture. During ethnographic field work, the ethnographer gathers data, which he or she organizes, describes, analyzes and interprets to build and present that account” (3).
might just give up, or play dead, a case that arose in some specific manga. As well, from the original distinction between sexual violence and other violence, the issue of intent, specifically the intent of the male character also became a distinguishing factor in determining if an act constituted sexual violence. Since some stories were premised on the idea of accidental romance, cases where the male character did not expressly act were not counted as instances of sexual violence. Along with these distinctions, I divided up instances of sexual violence into light and heavy acts. These were primarily based on an idea of social threat, how an act would be perceived within a social setting. Something like an unthreatening hug, holding hands, or even slight acts of voyeurism, such as flipping up a skirt would constitute a light act of sexual violence. On the other hand, heavy acts would often be something more threatening and inappropriate within a social setting, including forced kissing, molestation, and rape.

A final distinction within the study actually involved determining what manga to examine. Since shoujo and josei have similar art styles, and are even exchangeable at times, I relied on knowledge of the origin of each series studied. In this way, I only included manga series that originated in shoujo magazines such as Sho-Comi, Hana to Yume, etc. Although it is often best to get a random sample for mathematical studies such as this, due to limitations I ended up deciding to focus on series that were easily accessible. The final sample number was twenty series, most of which were completed series rather than ones that were still ongoing. For those that were ongoing, I read as many chapters as possible given availability and time constraints.

**Data**

The total sample size was twenty different series, constituting 103 chapters overall and 3,695 pages. A chapter ranged from between 20 and 50 pages depending on whether the original source was a monthly or weekly publication, and how long the series had been going. Overall, I counted 61 instances of sexual violence and 46 instances of other violence. This was divided up into 38 cases of light sexual violence and 23 cases of heavy sexual violence. These numbers suggest a high prevalence of light sexual violence, which although might seem contrary to my hypothesis, mark an important pattern I will note in the conclusion of this study. When looking at the rate of occurrence overall, the data suggests approximately one scene of sexual violence every 60.57 pages, and one scene of other violence every 80.33 pages. This rate does not take into account series without any instances of sexual violence. If I remove the series without any scenes of sexual violence, eight of the twenty series, the rate of sexual violence within shoujo manga that have sexual violence is one scene of sexual violence every 46.77 pages. This reveals the skew in the data with respect to the series without any scenes of sexual violence. As well, of the twenty series surveyed, only twelve had scenes of sexual violence, or 60% of the series surveyed contained sexual violence. Below are graphs examining the spread of the data and analysis of different variables.
Instances of Sexual Violence in Shoujo Magazines:

- Asuka
- Betsuiomi
- Cheese
- Deluxo...
- Hana to Yume
- Lala
- Lala DX
- Margaret
- Nakayoshi
- Ribbon Original
- Sho-Comi
- Unknown

Instances of Sexual Violence in Shoujo Publishers:

- Hakusensha
- Kadokawa
- Kodansha
- Shogakukan
- Shueisha
- Square Enix
- Unknown

Instances of Sexual Violence in Shoujo Manga:

- 1/1 no Kesshi
- Akuma e Hana
- Baby
- Beast Master
- Billion
- Boss
- Enn En
- Hana no Neko
- Kyoushi no
- Oko no Shichwa
- Tamago no Kuni
- Tenjou no Koi
- You
- You're My Girlfriend
Looking at the above graphs, there are several patterns that appear. In regards to Graph 1, the three major peaks are Hana to Yume, Lala DX, and Sho-Comi. This coincides with the number of series taken from each magazine; three series were taken from the first two, and two series, including a longer one, from Sho-Comi. In particular, Sho-Comi was named “the number one manga magazine that should not be read by children” by the Japanese PTA, highlighting the high ratio of sexual acts within many of the series contained within (Comi-Press). Considering the above graph outlines only two such series, and contains the highest rate of heavy sexual violence this assessment might well be correct. In terms of publishers, Graph 2, both Hakusensha and Shogakukan comprised over half the titles within the sample, which is reflected in the number of instances reported in relation to the two publishers. Rather than suggesting that these two publishers focus on material that contains sexual violence, it might be more appropriate to relate this graph to the number of series, and magazine, each publishes.

The final graph encompasses the data collected, reflecting the occurrence of sexual violence as it related to each of the series within the sample. Of particular note are Bloody Kiss and Kyou Koi Hajimemasu. Bloody Kiss contained not only the highest number of instances of sexual violence, but also the highest rate of occurrence, one scene every seventeen pages. This can be contributed to the small size of the series, only six chapters, and the actual storyline, which involved vampires. The sexualization of the vampire bite drastically increased the number of instances of sexual violence according to the definition used for this study. Kyou Koi Hajimemasu is notable as it was published in Sho-Comi, and was the longest series used for this study, twenty-two chapters were read. Although the number of instances overall was high, the length was a contributing factor to this. A final note is the series Yokujyou Climax, which only had instances of heavy sexual violence. Only five chapters were read, although the series itself encompasses forty-seven chapters in total. Due to time constraints, more data was not collected, but the use of sexual violence within this series seemed to be perhaps the highest out of all the series surveyed.

Conclusion

This study hints at a pattern of sexual violence in shoujo manga, supporting the original hypothesis. 60% of the sample had at least one scene of sexual violence, and some series had numerous instances of sexual violence. Even though this study does offer some evidence there are also some critical issues that arose, and go so far as to question whether or not this data is usable. The first problem is the small sample size. Considering the large number of shoujo series available, a limited sample does not truly reflect the actual state of the genre. A larger sample would have suggested a different rate of occurrence, and many of the series used in this study were less than ten chapters in length. This leaves a whole for longer series, which might include a longer development for the relationship and thus more acts of sexual violence. A second major issue came from how the instances of sexual violence were counted. The scenes of sexual violence were only counted once per scene, regardless of how many pages were used to show the action. In the case of an involved rape scene, this could count for four of five pages per act, drastically changing the rate of occurrence. What is apparent from this research, however, is the often casual ease at which violence is introduced, and then accepted without critical attention. The violence becomes commonplace, unnoticeable within the landscape of the manga, and thus does not receive appropriate attention. This study suggests that the pattern of sexual violence in shoujo manga is quite real.
A key idea within anthropology allows this data to be expanded to address not only the basic issue of sexual violence in shojo manga, but also the sexual violence in Japanese culture. The focus on culture in anthropology is one of the keys to this project, moving it beyond just manga to deal with the issue of how a culture teaches children. As Conrad Kottak explains in his textbook on cultural anthropology, “enculturation is the process by which a child learns his or her culture” (41). The learning process is often passive, a child learns from watching how adults or other children interact, and especially in Westernized societies, through interfacing with the mass media. In Japan, as I have said before, manga is a form of mass media, and shojo manga is targeted at young girls who are still learning about their culture. Even more than that, the young girls in question are going through puberty, a time when their bodies start to change, and many of the readers might be interested in finding their first love. As the data suggests, the love they read about, that they are enculturated to include acts of sexual violence by romantic partners. This suggests an acceptance of sexual violence within the larger context of Japanese culture, and one might expect to see a high rate of domestic violence, which would coincide with this assessment.

According to at least a few surveys conducted in the past twenty years, domestic violence in Japan is indeed an issue. Rita Weingourt, et. al. examines several of these past surveys as well as conducting a new one in her article “Domestic violence and women’s mental health in Japan.” It is commonly accepted amongst many anthropologists that women in Japan often have a lower status than men, a reflection of a traditional ideology that appreciates women as good wives and mothers rather than equal partners in the family. Even today, Japanese women are expected to be humble, passive, and polite, an ideology that breeds a culture of silence. The use of sexual violence within shojo manga reinforces this idea. The girls in shojo manga do not talk about the sexual violence that occurs, it is not reported, and is even accepted within the context of the relationship. Weingourt’s recent survey found that 67% of the women surveyed reported some form of domestic violence, physical, sexual, or mental. Perhaps more telling than this, the survey in question only had a response rate of 27%, meaning that only 27% of the women surveyed responded. This reflects not only a high rate of sexual violence, but also a lack of response from those surveyed, supporting the idea that Japanese women are being enculturated to accept sexual violence and keep quiet about it. Anthropology allows us to look at manga as a tool of enculturation, reflecting a broader cultural issue, but this alone does not fully allow the sexual violence in shojo manga to be explained.

Reading the Manga – Textual Analysis

As I mentioned within the introduction, this project became as much about the process to find a methodology and disciplinary space as the actual topic of violence in shojo manga. The previous section highlights what was part of my answer, an anthropological study to prove a pattern existed. With that pattern in mind, I now had to find a way to explain it. This is part of that explanation, an analysis of manga as a text.

Within the field of English Studies, the second discipline used as the framework for this project, the methodology of reading a text, applying theory, and using the analysis to make a claim about the text is at the core of the discipline. The act of close reading is one of the first methods an English student learns, and though it serves a purpose, in this case close reading a shojo manga might bring up too many issues. Indeed, in order to maintain the focus on sexual violence I realized I had to actually look at the scenes where sexual violence occurred. How is
the violence depicted and why? Using my background in feminist theory, I knew applying feminist theory, with a sprinkling of the queer, would perhaps find an answer, but it wasn’t enough. This is where I finally found a space for the avant-garde.

It might seem strange to think this project came out of the avant-garde, especially since finding a space for the avant-garde within what was becoming a very traditional paper was difficult. Indeed, this project for at least the majority of its existence was thoroughly trapped within the confines of a one discipline approach. It wasn’t until I thought of how to present my analysis in a meaningful way, how to explain the issue of sexual violence beyond the data, that the avant-garde offered me the necessary tools. The blending of disciplines and institutions is right along with the struggle of the minority, the relationship between those in power and those struggling to find power. These concepts allowed me to look at the issue of sexual violence outside of the cultural lens I had been using, and examine it from the theoretical perspective. Following in the tradition of English Studies, I decided to analyze four scenes from a particular series, namely *Yokujyou Climax* by Ayane Ukyou. These four scenes highlight the particular issue of sexual violence and the theoretical concerns that arose during my research. The pages are included at the end of this paper for reference.

The first image was taken from the very first chapter of the series, often the longest as it serves as the introduction of the characters and basic plot. This scene in particular occurs right after the female protagonist was forcibly grabbed and kissed by the male character, who serves as her romantic partner throughout the series. The image reveals several important aspects of the scenario, specifically the expression of possession, the use of money as a means of that possession as well as the sexual connotations from the stolen kiss, and the obvious difference in power between the male and female characters. Echoing sentiments from both feminist theory and the avant-garde discourse, this scene is designed to express the lesser status of the female character, who is the protagonist, and the dominant status of the male character. The male character is wealthy, physically powerful, sexually alluring, and obviously in control of the situation. The female protagonist on the other hand is poor, unable to resist, and through her expression unable to mentally comprehend the situation she is in. This scene seems to play into the male fantasy, the powerful masculine character and the weak, accepting female character. It is important, however, to remember that “shoujo manga [is] a genre for women, by women, and about women” (Ogi 784). The targeted audience and the majority of the readers are women, so the idea of male fantasy should not necessarily be in play.

In fact, this conflicting message is difficult to address. From a feminist perspective, this scene does seem to fall in line with what is generally considered stereotypical male dominance, and even more the idea of the male gaze. This first image, however, does offer an alternative reading, one that takes into account the female readership. It is based, however, on a somewhat controversial idea, the idea of eroticism for women. It is common to assume that pornography is strictly for men, and in fact much has been written on this subject. Even so, shoujo comics, and this scene in particular suggest a type of female pornography, though obviously not so explicit. The male character, though displaying aggressive traits, is also designed to be appealing, an ideal construction of a male character whereas the female protagonist is more on the side of normal. This is a reverse of what one might consider the male fantasy, a normal boy and a very attractive female. Even the difference in power can be read in favor of the female protagonist, she is able to attract such an idealized male character, even though her own standing is far lower. While
this might be an alternative reading, it still seems to construct the female character’s worth, at least at this point, entirely based on her attractiveness.

The second image is also taken from the first chapter; it highlights the further interaction between what has now become the romantic couple for the story. It is important to note that the previously unknown male character is in fact a well-known, and popular, boy from the protagonist’s school, and more important the one who owns the land she lives on. This further extends the power aspect of their relationship, in a way he controls everything in her life. What’s more, at this point, even her mother approves of the male character, leaving the female protagonist with few options. Although this seems to continue the male dominance discussed previously, the alternative reading from the female gaze also begins to gain more credence. It should be noted that this image highlights female pleasure rather than male pleasure, something that is common across many of the series examined. Even though this pleasure is being derived from an aggressive, even sexually violent act, the female character is shown as at least unintentionally enjoying it. Though this alternative reading does offer an interesting explanation behind the sexual violence within shoujo manga, it is still overwhelmingly accepting of the male aggressor.

The third scene, from much later in the series, is perhaps not related to this study at all, but is an anomaly in itself. When dealing with sexual violence within shoujo manga, and understanding not only the cultural issue, but also how the text itself is constructed, the idea of the readership is obviously important. The alternative reading of this series I have suggested allows for some enjoyment from the female reader as she considers the male character, though aggressive, as a sexual object. In this scene, however, the male character is removed, and the female body is further sexualized for the reader’s pleasure. This scene involves two female characters, one of which is fondling the other’s breasts. I cannot, at least not within this discussion entirely explain this, and the fact that it occurs in other shoujo manga, and within the shounen genre as well, is puzzling. At least within the framework of shounen, where the male gaze is in play, this type of scene becomes a very clear play of voyeurism by the male reader into a private female space, and eroticizes this space. With the female reader, however, the pleasure derived from this scene is difficult for me, as a male reader, to truly understand. Even with a background in feminist theory, I cannot find a way to explain this scene except as an expression of male fantasy, targeted at female readers. Whether or not I can be satisfied by this assessment is debatable, but of all the examples I have given so far, this one in particular seems to suggest an inherent aspect of male ideology being targeted at women. The female reader is thus experiencing a scene derived from the aforementioned enculturation, a direct display of the male fantasy within Japanese culture as a whole.

The final scene is at the end of the series, and though not an act of sexual violence, it is perhaps the best example of the change in the relationship, highlighting both the alternative reading and the very issue of this paper. The final scene obviously changes the power relations for the couple; the female protagonist has gained some dominance over the male character, exploiting his weakness by taking his glasses, and making demands. Even though this suggests a redistribution of power, it also follows along with the general acceptance of sexual violence within the relationship. Rather than breaking up over the abuse earlier in the series, the couple is now firmly “in love” and the sexual violence has now become a part of their romantic relationship. Even though the power within the relationship may have changed, the original acts
of sexual violence are also a part of it, and even within the very next page the male character is once again pinning the female protagonist down, though she is the one desiring this. The female reader is thus allowed to witness the final scene of romance, playing into her fantasy, while at the same time reinforcing culture ideals of behavior.

This close analysis of a shoujo manga reveals not only the acceptance of sexual violence within the text, but also an alternative reading designed to focus on the female gaze. Although it might seem a bit strange, since the male gaze is often the focus of feminist theory, within shoujo manga it is not necessarily surprising. Even though female characters are portrayed as passive at times, and support the male dominated ideology of the culture, the male characters are even more sexualized, exposed, and voyeuristically shown to the female readers. The ideal masculinity fashioned within shoujo manga is another topic entirely, but it plays into the female reader’s fantasy. Shoujo manga is indeed a genre that attempts to appeal to girls, which especially in Japan have a minority status. With limited political and individual power, shoujo manga become a form of resistance to the male cultural hegemony, attempting instead to offer images for women, to offer a place for women. The shoujo industry is dominated by women, giving them a place of power and cultivating new generations of skilled artists. While manga authors (mangaka) are traditionally a male profession, shoujo manga allows girls to have a way to compete on equal footing. Even with this, however, the male dominance that so pervades Japanese culture finds an outlet in shoujo manga in scenes of sexual violence and images that seem to appeal to an absent male gaze. This examination of the text allows us to understand how shoujo manga functions as a medium in general, the images and ideology that are present, as well as the theoretical concerns we as academics should consider when looking at manga.

**The Combined Methodology**

At least half of the answer should now be apparent; the issue of sexual violence in shoujo manga is complex, and was not easy to approach, but through applying various disciplines I was able to discuss how the sexual violence works within the culture, and within the medium itself. This is the first half of the answer, and admittedly the majority half, but it doesn’t really justify this project. Even with my anthropological study and close reading of the text, I was only able to really address the issue of sexual violence within shoujo manga, it still wasn’t enough for me to fully justify this project. After all, the study of popular culture is not a field of itself throughout the academic world, and even though there are journals dedicated to the field very few departments of popular culture exist. So, even with the project done, I still had to find a way to justify, not only to my peers, but to myself. The full answer, as it turns out, was not just the combined methodology I used to understand my material, but also the very struggle I had gone through in order to write this paper.

First, though, I should properly explain why using just one discipline was not sufficient. Anthropology and English Studies both deal with culture, the latter mostly through text, so it might not be so surprising that I ended up using both disciplines to understand my material. Why not just use one though? This question has two answers: I did use just one and this project isn’t about just one.

I have as of now given two separate presentations on this material. The first was at an anthropology conference, the second targeted at English majors. It would be a mistake to say that either group really was able to experience the full project. When I presented this as an
anthropological project, there was no close reading, I didn’t attempt to analyze and explain the actions within the text in terms of feminist theory. It was, as this very paper shows, the anthropological side of my research. The same goes for the English presentation, which didn’t include an analysis of the data or discussion of the pattern, but rather the use of theory and analysis. These two separate presentations mean that it was possible to separate this project into two parts, a failure on my part, but at the same time neither presentation really revealed the full extent of this project: the data, the reading, and the interdisciplinary struggle.

Each discipline has its own limits, and at least for anthropology the limits have to do with what anthropologists like to study. In the words of Anne Allison, a cultural anthropologist who has done research on Japanese popular culture:

I am faced with a major and unwieldy task. I also feel that there are few, if any, models I can follow. I am dealing with a place that does not fit easily or cleanly (as perhaps no place does these days) into any one theoretical or ethnographic paradigm. Japan is non-Western but no longer ‘traditional’; it is at a late stage of capitalism but in a form that is recognized by many to be culturally ‘Japanese’; sexuality assumes patterns here in sites as different as the family and mass culture; and gender relations are incredibly complex in ways both real and phantasmic. (xxiii)

This echoes my very own issues of studying shoujo manga within the field of anthropology, there is little place for it, and little to go by. Many cultural anthropologist prefer more traditional societies, the Balinese in Indonesia or the Gebusi from Papua New Guinea. Looking at a modernized nation, and looking at popular culture in general, is no simple matter within traditional anthropology. Even within English Studies though, culture is an issue. It isn’t, however, the same issue as within anthropology. Culture in English comes from the fact that the text, which is the center of all English Studies, is cultural by nature, and so the study of the text reflects the study of culture. It is, however, only capable of going so far. The methodology of English Studies often has little to do with mathematical calculation, and even with some cultural studies included, it is a different discipline from anthropology. In other words, restrained to only one discipline, much of this project would have been lost, and through my experiences has been.

As I said, this project does not deal with just one discipline, the interplay between English and anthropology was a key concern, especially as the avant-garde comes into play. This project arose from the avant-garde, even if it involved material that really has no place within the field. Mass culture, popular culture, these are things that have little to do with the innovative, antagonistic, and tight knit avant-garde. So, how does this project inevitably come back to the avant-garde? It is true that issues of power and the minority status of women play into the general discourse of the avant-garde, but more than that this very project, this very segment of this paper, is avant-garde. The study of shoujo manga is not something that is being done, not in anthropology or English Studies. Even if there are some other scholars out there interested in the field, I consider myself a member of the vanguard for the study of Japanese popular culture. There are few of us, we lack a specific place, a unified methodology to approach our subject, but we continue to struggle to point out the value and issues within Japanese popular culture. It is against the academy, which places popular culture outside the accepted topics of study, against the strict definition of a discipline, for this project is both anthropological and based in English Studies. Indeed, this project became not just about the
research, but my position as a scholar, and the struggle I had to go through to get this project recognized and to accept it as academic. It was something of a personal struggle, a struggle against people saying “So what?”. This project is at the forefront of interdisciplinary work because it recognizes that understanding the struggle of being interdisciplinary requires an analysis of the process, a recognition of the frameless, even liminal space this project has to occupy. This paper is a way to express that struggle, a paper that is conventional, and yet through this conventionality is able to cross borders, to bridge gaps between disciplines. It is a paper that is both an anthropology paper and English Studies paper, and a Japanese popular culture paper.

Even though this paper is concluding, the project itself is not put down so simply. The issue of sexual violence is one that continues to present an issue. The data collected is far from complete, and although the pattern is indeed noticeable, it is tempered by the most important, perhaps even founding concept within anthropology. As a feminist scholar, one who lives in the United States, how much of this critique of shoujo manga is derived from my own ethnocentric view. My belief, as an American, that women should not learn to be submissive and accept violence colors this project, but it is a belief that I think applies to Japanese culture as well. Shoujo manga, although it continues to present images of sexual violence against women, is a medium that expresses the freedom and power of women. It is a form of media for women, and that in itself suggests that my ethnocentric view might not be entirely off. The change is gradual, and as long as women remain a minority within Japanese culture I doubt we will see any change within shoujo manga. Mass media is a tool of enculturation, and children learn how to live in their society based off of what they learn through the various tools of enculturation. The sexual violence in shoujo manga is a complex issue, and difficult to sum up in a single paragraph.

Even more complex is the very struggle of this project, the struggle to study Japanese popular culture. Although it wasn’t my intention in the beginning, this struggle became a centerpiece within this project, and this project became more than just a study of sexual violence in shoujo manga. It is an example of the struggle to work outside the normative framework of the academic, to open up the boundaries between disciplines and strive to find a methodology that is able to explain something that many people might not understand, or even realize exists. I was able to justify this project in the end because I couldn’t justify it in the beginning. There was no answer in the beginning, there was no issue. Only through realizing the failure at nearly every stage of the project, and then finding a way to make it succeed was I able to really understand what I was doing. It is a project about violence, sexual violence, violence against normal research and presentation, violence against the academic limits of single disciplinary work. I formed an amalgamated discourse, one that brought in a variety of other disciplines; and through this I found a way to talk about something I couldn’t talk about in any other way.
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