Chapter 12
Making Meaning of Maturity Ratings in Manga:
A Multimodal Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The researcher completed a qualitative multimodal content analysis of teen manga that examines how adolescents are portrayed within manga and as the intended audience. An analytical tool was developed using multimodal, semiotic, social semiotic, and youth lenses to understand representations of adolescents in teen manga for the publishing company Viz Media. The rating system Viz Media uses to label its manga is used to identify what is in the contents of the stories. The researcher discovered that some manga are not rated correctly based on how Viz Media defines teen manga. Further, depictions of adolescents are potentially problematic due to various factors including the mistreatment of adolescents by adults, toxic masculinity, and sexism.

INTRODUCTION

Many people consume popular media such as television, books, and video games (McBride & Toburen, 2000). While often seen as a distraction or harm to a student's education, popular media can have positive impacts by linking information to students in meaningful ways (Gee, 2004). For example, graphic novels help motivate readers, teach content area material, and promote literacy skills (Cook, M. P., & Kirchoff, J. S. 2017; Hughes, King, Perkins, & Fuke, 2011). Therefore, popular media can be utilized for classroom instruction by 21st-century educators.

These media are essential to understand because their content affects the beliefs and lifestyles of people who participate with them, including students (McBride & Toburen, 2000). Adolescent literature is representative of the audience who reads it and the intentions of those who write and produce it. The writers and publishers create these works with adolescents in mind (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019). The idea of what an adolescent should be is present both within stories and in the intended audience for

these stories (Petrone, Serigianides, & Lewis, 2015). How people write, teach, and publish adolescent literature depends on how they view adolescents. These views are dependent on various intersectional and contextual factors adolescents embody, such as age, race, class, and historical context (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019). Adolescent judgment occurs in manga (Japanese comics) with an age rating system for their recommended audience on their back covers. These rating systems are unique to each production company.

When searching for a manga sample amongst top retailers, the researcher discovered that the most popular manga are from Viz Media. Viz Media is a company that claims it is "at the forefront of America's Japanese pop-culture phenomenon" and reaches "one in four millennials and half of all GenZ manga readers" (VIZ, n.d.). Considering these factors, this study aims to 1) examine manga through theoretical lenses to identify visual and textual representations of adolescence; and 2) build an understanding of the relationship between adolescent representations in manga and manga rating systems through multimodal analysis and document analysis. The following questions guide this study: 1. How are adolescents represented in teen manga for Viz Media? A) How do the image and text evoke meaning potentials about adolescence? 2. How do the teen rating and its definitions align with what is within Viz Media manga?

MANGA

While comics had their first emergence in American popular media in the 19th century, manga, the Japanese version of comic books, have been present since the 18th century (Johnson-Woods, 2010; Van Lente, 2012). Manga first appeared in the United States in the 1970s and has grown in popularity since its introduction by making appearances on best-seller lists in recent years (Johnson-Woods, 2010). This response in favor has led to manga being present in schools and public libraries, which has caused a growth in comic book scholarship.

Scott McCloud (1994) defines comics as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer." In its most basic form, comics are art in sequence. Manga fit this description as a comic medium. However, manga is read from right to left while comics are read from left to right. This difference is because Japanese text is written and read in this direction. Further, manga has genres different from those seen in the United States. Unlike traditional American literary genre labels, manga has the following genres: shonen (boy's manga), shojo (girl's manga), seinen (men's manga), and josei (women's manga) (Johnson-Woods, 2012).

MANGA CENSORSHIP, STIGMA, AND DECISION-MAKERS

Comics have a reputation for being enjoyed by adolescents while having little educational potential (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019). Beyond this, comics are thought to be easy to interpret and are not worthy of further study or interpretation to qualify their merit by educators (Gardner, 2012). However, comics as a literary medium are beginning to gain recognition for their value in a multimodal context (Serafini, 2014). For example, the graphic novel *Maus* by Art Spiegelman won a Pulitzer prize in 1992 for its representations of the holocaust. It made a case for the literary merit of comics and graphic novels (Chun, 2009).

Because manga has a history of being stigmatized by the general public, manga publishers have had to work around this to sell their products (Goffman 1963; Lopes 2006). These issues arise when a product

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