

**Japanese Anime Heroines as Role Models for U.S. Youth: Wishful Identification,
Parasocial Interaction, and Intercultural Entertainment Effects**

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This paper uses survey methods (N=385) to examine the underlying processes through which U.S. fans create meaningful relationships with Japanese media characters. Specifically, this study tests an integrated model linking character perceptions, wishful identification, and parasocial relationships in the context of fans of shōjo, a heroine-centric genre of Japanese anime. Results suggest that liking a heroine's pro-social traits leads to greater wishful identification and more intense parasocial relationships with the heroine. Theoretical implications for reception studies and intercultural entertainment, and practical implications for role-modeling effects of positive female characters on young audiences are discussed.

Keywords: Media Effects; Japanese Anime; Wishful Identification; Parasocial Interaction; Pro-Social Effects

Entertainment has become an increasingly intercultural affair as media are exported and imported across national and cultural boundaries. This intercultural media consumption can generate significant effects: genres themselves change as a result of intercultural media consumption (Curtin, 2005; Havens, 2005; Kumar, 2005; Rao, 2010), media industries' economic structures are affected by intercultural entertainment (Moran, 2009), networks' programming line-ups can shift as a result of importing entertainment media (Kompore, 2010), and cultures and individuals can change through intercultural media exposure by adapting to and/or resisting the culture portrayed through media (Conway, 2010; Mittell, 2010; Somani, 2010; Su, 2010). Seeking to better understand how audiences interact with intercultural entertainment and recognizing that audience members experience a variety of media effects as they consume and interact with media, this study explores the processes involved as audience members watch intercultural entertainment and develop longstanding connections with characters from other cultures.

By focusing on the ways in which U.S. fans create meaningful mediated relationships with characters from Japanese entertainment, this study seeks to understand how impressions about Japanese heroines can develop into an integrated experience of wishful identification and parasocial interaction. Towards this end, it develops a model demonstrating how wishful identification and parasocial relationships are linked responses. Using empirical data from a cross-sectional survey of fans of a heroine-oriented genre of Japanese anime called *shōjo*, the model explains how pro-sociality perceptions of *shōjo* heroines influence fans' level of wishful identification with the heroine and their development of parasocial relationships with the heroine. This integrated model provides a glimpse into how fans interact with imported

entertainment, helping us better understand the processes through which audience members relate to intercultural entertainment and the media effects they experience.

Japanese Animation and U.S. Audiences

The U.S. has imported animation from Japan since 1963, when NBC began to air *Tetsuwan Atom* under its Americanized name, *Astro Boy* (Schodt, 1996). Since then, the U.S. has imported a wide variety of Japanese animation. Notably, Disney developed an arrangement with the prominent Japanese animation corporation, Studio Ghibli, gaining the rights to distribute their productions internationally (Pollack, 1996). However, these animated TV series—known as *anime*—are only half of the story. Many of these narratives originated from *manga*. Manga are Japanese graphic novels, which are published in black and white serial magazines and then often reprinted in paperback novel collections. Unlike U.S. comics, manga's artistic style emphasizes cinematic devices and favors clean lines and less dialogue (Nygren, 2007, p. 239; Schodt, 1996, p. 22-28). *Anime* series (which now air in the U.S. on cable TV and are available on DVD) are usually manga adaptations and follow manga's artistic style, except they are in color rather than black and white. They typically run for twenty-six episodes a season.

Manga/anime has a wide range of genres, which often have loyal fan communities. We were intrigued by the *shōjo* genre, since it is typically written by female authors and features relatively empowered heroines (Napier, 2005, p. 1). As such, *shōjo* manga has achieved surprising popularity within the U.S (Glazer, 2005; Masters, 2006; Matheson, 2004; Napier, 2005). For example, manga rose in popularity in the U.S. during the early 2000s as manga sales surged from approximately \$55 million in 2002 to \$125 million in 2004 (Glazer, 2005). *Shōjo* anime has also risen in popularity within the U.S. as demonstrated by box office receipts: Hayao

Miyazaki's shōjo films such as *Howl's Moving Castle* and *Ponyo* have steadily risen in popularity and Miyazaki's recent release, *The Secret World of Arrietty*, garnered approximately \$14.7 million in its first two weeks in U.S. domestic box office sales, which placed it in the top ten grossing U.S. films of February, 2012 (Fritz, 2012). As such, *The Secret World of Arrietty* had the "biggest opening" of any anime film released within the U.S. by the Walt Disney Studios (Kaufman, 2012). Moreover, shōjo fans are active on shōjo message board forums, online fan-fiction and fan-art sites. They create and purchase merchandise and imitate their favorite characters at large conventions held annually in nearly every U.S. urban center (AnimeCons, 2009).

The shōjo genre is characterized by the charming, the adorable, and the delightful: the plot lines are character-driven with romantic themes, the artistry utilizes soft lines and pastel colors, and scene transitions are often made with a flurry of flowers (Napier, 2005, p. 149; Schodt, 1983, p. 89). Modern shōjo predominantly features heroines as the central characters and usually tells coming-of-age stories, focusing on everyday life as the characters attend school, play sports, and do chores.. These heroines might cross-dress, for example, Haruhi from *Ouran High School Host Club* (Hatori, 2005-), or might be tragically orphaned, for example, Tohru from *Fruits Basket* (Takaya, 2004-2009), but they are invariably high-school-aged, remarkably mature, and, paradoxically, ditzy. Shōjo heroines are occasionally depicted as ditzy or *kawaii*. *Kawaii* is a Japanese cultural term that means innocent, infantile, adorable, and essentially cute (Shiokawa, 1999, p. 94). The artists display shōjo heroines as *kawaii* by depicting them with giant round eyes, sparkles, and flower/bubble backgrounds. Moreover, shōjo heroines make *kawaii* motions: they clasp their hands and scrunch their faces when hopeful, are occasionally

clumsy like toddlers, and blush and cry easily. Yet despite this kawaii nature, the heroines make decisions, take action, persevere, act boldly, protect others, and assume their own autonomy.

The shōjo genre is strangely elastic as these unquestionably cute characters delve into complex issues, making it “ambiguous at what point on the continuum ... *shōjo* ends and the more adult female begins” (Napier, 2005, p. 149). This, in part, derives from the heroine’s dual personality: shōjo heroines “display contradictory powers of aggression and nurturance” (Napier, 2005, p. 150). Shōjo heroines are highly competent: they are determined, loyal, brave, independent, and creative characters who take risks, see plans through to completion, and exhibit physical, mental, and emotional strength. Simultaneously, they are kind, nurturing, friendly characters.

Remarkably warm characters who maintain an indomitable optimism, selflessness, friendliness, and a clear vision of morality, shōjo heroines are engaged in *pro-social behaviors*. Pro-social behaviors are “desirable and beneficial to other individuals and/or to society at large” (Singhal & Rogers, 1999, p. 91). As such, pro-social characters are essentially positive role models. Shōjo heroines not only maintain pro-social behaviors, but they also teach the other characters to behave pro-socially. For example, in *Fruits Basket*, the heroine, Tohru Honda, first befriends an angry, bitter boy named Kyo, and then teaches him how to look for the good in others, start friendly conversations, and develop healthy relationships. Moreover, the heroines have pro-social mottos or slogans that they repeatedly state throughout the series. Using *Fruits Basket* as an example again, Tohru’s mottos are, “Be safe!” and “Tohru Honda never gives up!” (Daichi, 2001).

Given the surprising growth of this intercultural entertainment and the intense fandom surrounding shōjo, we narrowed our focus to the relationships that U.S. shōjo fans develop with

these Japanese shōjo heroines. Anime is an intercultural media phenomenon, accounting for approximately sixty percent of all TV cartoons worldwide (Napier, 2005, p. X), and within the shōjo genre, the heroines are significantly different from U.S. cartoon heroines. This cultural difference affects the ways in which U.S. fans interact with these heroines. For example, the U.S. cartoon, *Kim Possible*, which aired on the Disney Channel from 2002-2007, turns “girl power” into consumer power as this series centers on a mid-drift bearing heroine who spends her time shopping at the local mall when she is not saving the world from episodic super-villains (Hains, 2009). Shōjo, in contrast, usually delves into the heroines’ personal lives, focusing on their emotional maturity, relationships, and familial back-stories as these heroines go about their daily lives. Essentially, shōjo’s heroines and plot lines are substantively different from U.S. cartoons’ heroines and plot lines. As such, these shōjo heroines are unusual within U.S. popular culture, and U.S. audiences not only recognize these differences but appreciate shōjo’s distance from U.S. mainstream consumer culture (Napier, 2005, p. 6). Moreover, these heroines’ intense pro-sociality provides new opportunities for how U.S. fans relate to and interact with media characters. This research explores the underlying processes through which U.S. fans of Japanese anime create meaningful bonds with their favorite characters, and develops an integrated model of how U.S. audiences interact with these pro-social Japanese heroines.

An Integrated Model of Wishful Identification and Parasocial Interaction

This study seeks to demonstrate that wishful identification (WI) and parasocial interaction (PSI) can be integrated effects. Based on empirical research, it develops a model showing how audience members of intercultural entertainment can progress from liking a heroine, to wishfully identifying with her, and then participating in a parasocial relationship. Although wishful

identification, which typically refers to an audience member's ability to identify with a character they wish they were like, and parasocial relationships, which generally refers to an audience member's longstanding one-sided relationship with a media character, are often studied independently, Cohen (2009b) put the two theories into direct conversation with each other in order to better theorize "mediated relationships" as audiences connect with the "images of people they hear and see" through the mass media (Cohen, 2009b, p. 224). Following his lead, we hypothesized that wishful identification and parasocial relationships have an integrated relationship in which wishful identification could lead to and increase some of the effects of parasocial relationships. This research tests the relationship between wishful identification and parasocial relationships as audience members relate to shōjo heroines, proposing an integrated model of wishful identification and parasocial relationships. By researching the relationship between wishful identification and parasocial interactions as relates to intercultural entertainment, we seek to understand how wishful identification affects audience members' experiences of parasocial relationships. To better understand the implications of this proposed integrated model, we discuss the theoretical conceptualizations of wishful identification and then parasocial relationships.

Wishful Identification

Audience members often identify with media characters, forming empathic and cognitive ties to the character. This usually increases entertainment value as individuals imagine themselves inside the narrative by identifying with a media character (Cohen, 2006, p. 184). The process of identification is understood as a natural "merging of the self with a media character," thereby sharing the character's perspective and "internalizing their view of the world" (Cohen, 2009b, p.

229; Cohen 2001, p. 247-248). Identification has minimal room for judgment, since identification presupposes that there is little to no distance between the self and the other. That is, while identifying with a character, one does not judge the moral actions of the character or even judge if one likes the character because one's identity merges with it (Cohen 2001, p. 253-54).

As such, identification is typically theorized as a different type of media effect from parasocial interaction, since identification involves merging one's selfhood with the character, while parasocial interaction involves perceiving the media character as a friend and interacting with that character from a distance. However, since identification is a flexible state, as audience members typically move in and out of identification, "continually shifting from their role as viewers to their identification with character(s)" (Cohen, 2006, p. 185), the two effects are not theoretically incompatible, and this study will model a link between a type of identification, *wishful identification*, and parasocial relationships.

Audience members are more likely to identify with a character if they perceive similarities to themselves in "age, sex, and social class" (Cohen, 2006, p. 185; Maccoby & Wilson, 1957). However, beyond these demographic indicators, *role modeling* often invites identification as individuals identify with characters they "*wish to be like*" (emphasis added Cohen, 2006, p. 187; Feilitzen & Linne, 1975; Hoffner, 1996). Since shōjo heroines are strongly pro-social characters, and therefore good role models, this study tests the relationship between positively perceiving the heroine as a pro-social character and wishfully identifying with them. That is, instead of focusing on identification, which relies on the similarity between the heroine and the audience member—which seems unlikely in intercultural entertainment,—this research analyzes the progression from appreciating pro-social qualities in a heroine to wishfully identifying with her.

Parasocial Interaction

Parasocial relationships are long-term relationships in which audience members relate to media characters like friends. Audience members involved in parasocial relationships experience a variety of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral phenomena depending on the level of intensity and involvement they develop with the media character (Klimmt, Hartmann, & Schramm, 2006, p. 295).

While the term “parasocial relationship” refers to the one-sided relationship between an audience member and a media character, “parasocial interaction” (PSI) refers to the emotions and behaviors an audience member experiences while interacting with the media character (Cohen, 2009b). Emotional responses typically involve experiencing the same emotions the persona is expressing and/or experiencing an emotion as a result of watching the persona (Klimmt et al., 2006, p. 298-299). Behavioral responses are physical activities, such as *mimicking* or *gestures*, in which the viewer incorporates repeated or unique actions demonstrated by the persona, and *verbal utterances* in which audience members talk to the characters, about the characters, and/or repeat trademark words or phrases that the persona uses (Klimmt et al., 2006, p. 299-300).

The current study continues to explore cognitive, emotional, and behavior responses, positing that some of these effects can be understood as *maintenance behaviors*. Just as individuals engage in both strategic and routine maintenance behaviors, e.g. sharing tasks and assuring one another, to maintain an important relationship – such as an equitable marriage – we suggest that fans engage in maintenance behaviors to preserve their parasocial relationships (Canary & Stafford, 1992 & 1994; Dainton & Stafford, 1993; Duck 1988; Stafford, 2011). That

is, some of the behaviors currently measured in PSI (e.g. reading articles about the media persona) function to maintain the individual's connection to the media character.

These maintenance behaviors are significantly different from other PSI behaviors (e.g. directly imitating the media persona, or talking to the media character when watching her on TV). This distinction may be particularly important in intercultural entertainment, since maintenance behaviors can be more difficult to perform if the entertainment originated outside of one's local entertainment industry. For example, *shōjo* fans in the U.S. must shop in specialty stores to buy merchandise, are likely need extended cable packages to watch these series on television, and are unlikely to run into other *shōjo* fans at the proverbial water-cooler.

Distinguishing maintenance behaviors from other PSI behaviors provides for greater precision in understanding the interplay of effects within PSI. The present study conceptualizes parasocial interaction as an umbrella construct that is further divided into three inter-related types of viewer responses: (a) parasocial emotions (e.g. feeling happy when the heroine is happy), (b) parasocial maintenance behaviors (e.g. reading magazine articles about the heroine), and (c) direct imitation (e.g. adopting catch phrases the heroine uses or copying her characteristic gestures).

Moreover, fans that evaluate heroines positively and wishfully identify with them are more likely to engage in direct imitation of the *shōjo* heroine – imitation behaviors that can lead to *cosplay*, where audience members dress up in homemade costumes and attend conventions as the heroine (Cunningham, 2009). Here, we suggest that the three inter-related elements of PSI (parasocial emotions, parasocial maintenance behaviors, and direct imitation) can be affected differently by wishful identification. That is, the interplay of media effects may exaggerate some elements of PSI effects. For example, an audience member who experiences both PSI and

wishful identification may exhibit heightened levels of direct imitation as compared to parasocial emotions and parasocial maintenance behaviors.

The Hypothesized Model

U.S. fans of shōjo experience and participate in a variety of media effects as they shift between liking or being attracted to the shōjo heroine, to wishful identification and PSI. In order to explore the relationship amongst these different media effects, this research tests an integrated model that captures the inter-relatedness of U.S. fans' engagement with Japanese media characters. The current research hypothesizes that audience members who wishfully identify, thus experiencing an intense merging of self with a character they consider to be a role model, may also engage in parasocial relationships with the media character.

Combining these ideas into a complex, integrated model (see Figure 1), we hypothesize that U.S. audience members who develop an intense bond with Japanese shōjo heroines, move from appreciating the heroine's pro-social qualities, to wishfully identifying with the heroine, and experiencing a parasocial relationship towards her by expressing higher levels of parasocial emotions towards, more intense parasocial maintenance behaviors related to, and more direct imitation of their ideal shōjo heroine. All of these hypothesized relationships, both direct and indirect, are expected to be positively correlated. While audience characteristics, such as age and gender, are not our primary focus—this research focuses instead on the audience's perceptions of the heroine and their ensuing media effects—we do test whether audience-related characteristics moderate any observed effects.

Insert Figure 1 about here

The present study contributes to intercultural entertainment effects scholarship by drawing upon and extending prior research in several ways. It presents a composite model demonstrating the complex relationships amongst character perceptions, wishful identification, and parasocial interactions. Moreover, it offers a new conceptual and operational framework for studying parasocial interaction (PSI) by separating this construct into three components: parasocial emotions, parasocial maintenance behaviors, and direct imitation. Finally, by applying this model to the relationships that U.S. fans form with Japanese anime heroines, it provides practical insights for the role modeling effects that positive female media characters can have on impressionable audiences.

Method

To test audience member interaction with shōjo characters, we used a quantitative survey (N = 385) to examine the types and intensity of audience-heroine relationships in the context of U.S. fans for Japanese anime/manga content.

Participants

Survey respondents were recruited through anime/manga clubs and groups including, but not limited to, a club in a large southern university and a large anime fan club called *A-Kon Dallas*. This voluntary online survey was emailed to members of these clubs by the club leaders/organizers. Although these clubs had over 12,000 members, since their members were in various age groups and with interests in many different genres of anime, not all were eligible to participate. To be eligible, the respondents had to be at least 18 years old, consent to the survey,

and have either read or watched shōjo. The survey received 524 responses, which rendered 385 useable responses—respondents had to progress beyond the first twenty questions for the response to be considered useable. Of the 385 useable responses, 275 were female, 93 were male, and 17 refrained from indicating their sex. The mean age of respondents was 25.69 ($SD = 7.54$). Participants reported that they had been reading/watching shōjo for about 11.92 years on average ($SD = 6.11$). On a 7 point scale that measured current exposure to shōjo, participants averaged 3.20 ($SD = 1.88$), suggesting that they spent 1 to 1.5 hours a day reading or watching shōjo.

Measures

A five-point Likert scale was utilized throughout the survey, with 1 representing *strongly agree* and 5 representing *strongly disagree*. All of these measures were later recoded for ease of interpretation such that higher numbers indicated greater agreement. Participants' notions of an ideal shōjo heroine were assessed based on a list of heroine traits from existing scholarship. Their wishful identification with the heroine was based on the measure of identification with television personalities developed by Eyal and Rubin (2003). Parasocial interaction with shōjo heroines was assessed using items relating to parasocial maintenance, parasocial emotions, and direct imitation. The survey also included measures relating to demographics and shōjo usage habits.

Perceptions of the Ideal Heroine. Respondents were asked to consider fourteen characteristics, *Perseverance, Optimism, Encouraging, Friendliness, Kindness, Self-Sacrificial, Boldness, Determination, Loyalty, Domesticity, Values Life, Intelligent, Humorous, and Silly/Ditzy*, and indicate the extent to which they described their ideal shōjo heroine. Since no

prior studies had examined these variables, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted to assess how the fourteen heroine characteristics clustered together.

Principal components method was used to extract factor solutions, which were rotated using varimax rotation to make them more interpretable. To determine the number of factors to retain, we used the traditional eigenvalue of 1.0 as a cut-off. Items that loaded on more than one factor (with factor loadings separated by less than 1.5) or had factor loadings of less than .32 were dropped from the analysis (see Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

The following factors emerged (see Table 1 for factor loadings): the first clustered five items: *Encouraging, Kind, Sacrificial, Loyal, and Values Life* at a Cronbach alpha of .74 and was labeled *Heroine's Pro-sociality* ($M = 4.14, SD = .63$); the second factor clustered four items: *Bold, Determined, Persevering, and Intelligent* at a Cronbach alpha of .53 and was labeled *Heroine's Activeness* ($M = 4.46, SD = .48$). This second factor was dropped from further analysis because of low reliability. The items *humorous, domestic, optimistic* and *ditzy* were dropped because of cross-loadings.

 Insert Table 1 about here

Wishful Identification with the Heroine. Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with statements such as the following: *I wish I could be more like my FAVORITE shōjo heroine, and I'd like to do the kinds of things my FAVORITE shōjo heroine does.* Respondents were then asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed that *they wanted to be more like their favorite shōjo heroine* in the following areas: *Attitude, Actions, Character/Personality, Other – Please Specify.* A confirmatory factor analyses revealed that

these items did fit into a factor, as predicted. The seven items were grouped into a single index labeled *Wishful Identification* (Cronbach's alpha = .87; $M = 3.46$, $SD = .87$).

Parasocial Interaction with the Heroine. Using the PSI literature developed by Eyal and Rubin (2003), the survey measured the extent to which respondents developed parasocial interactions with shōjo heroines. Respondents were first asked to consider behaviors associated with maintaining a parasocial interaction, rating the extent to which they agreed with statements such as the following: *I look forward to watching/reading the next episode about my FAVORITE shōjo heroine*, and *If I saw a story about my FAVORITE shōjo heroine in a newspaper or magazine I would want to read it*. Next, in keeping with the literature on PSI (Klimmt et al., 2006), respondents were asked to consider their emotional involvement with their favorite heroine, rating the extent to which they agreed with statements such as the following: *I feel happy when the heroine is happy*; *I worry about what will happen to the characters in the next episode*; and, *I wish I could tell the characters what to do in some situations*. Finally, respondents were asked if *they have ever imitated* a shōjo heroine's *Attitude, Actions, Character/Personality, Characteristic Gestures, Characteristic Phrases, or Other – Please Specify*.

Similar to the heroine characteristics, a factor analysis assessed how seventeen items relating to parasocial interactions clustered together. The following factors emerged (see Table 2 for factor loadings): the first clustered six items relating to imitating heroine characteristics: *Actions, Gestures, Personality, Attitude, Phrases, and Appearance* at a Cronbach's alpha of .94 and was labeled *Direct Imitation* ($M = 2.61$, $SD = 1.14$); the second clustered six items relating to feelings experienced with the heroine: *Worry, Sad, Happy, Shocked, Tell Heroine What to Do, and Dislike for Characters Who Harm Heroine* at a Cronbach's alpha of .80 and was labeled *Parasocial Emotions* ($M = 3.88$, $SD = .72$); the third clustered four items relating to maintaining

a relationship with the heroine: *Re-read/watch Another Series, Read Article about Heroine, Heroine Makes Me Feel Comfortable, Look Forward to Watching/Reading About the Next Episode* at a Cronbach's alpha of .71 and was labeled *Parasocial Maintenance* ($M = 4.22, SD = .65$).

 Insert Table 2 about here

Results

Data Analysis

First, we conducted a series of preliminary t-tests to examine the role of control variables such as age, gender, and shōjo viewing habits on the primary variables of interest. After this step, several hierarchical regression analyses were conducted by adding the control and predictor variables to the basic model, one cluster at a time, in a step-by-step fashion to examine if successive models fitted the data better than the previous ones. Finally, a path analysis was conducted to simultaneously examine the direct and indirect effects of the exogenous variables on the endogenous variables in order to test the hypothesized composite model integrating wishful identification and PSI.

T-test Results

Preliminary analyses were conducted to explore the effects of control variables such as age, gender, and shōjo usage habits on the central variables examined in this study: perceptions of, wishful identification with, and parasocial interactions with ideal shōjo heroine. Results of the gender analyses indicated that females scored significantly higher than males on wishful

identification $M_{\text{males}} = 3.19$; $SD_{\text{males}} = .78$; $M_{\text{females}} = 3.55$, $SD_{\text{females}} = .85$, $t(381) = -3.63$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = .44$. There were no gender differences with respect to the remaining variables at $p < .05$ significance level.

Results of the age analyses revealed significant negative relationships between age and wishful identification, $r = -.24$, $p < .001$, parasocial emotions $r = -.14$, $p < .01$, and direct imitation $r = -.13$, $p < .05$. Age did not have any significant correlations with the remaining variables when $p < .05$ was set as the limit.

Results revealed significant and positive bivariate correlations between shōjo usage and perceived heroine pro-sociality $r = .16$, $p < .005$, wishful identification $r = .18$, $p < .001$, parasocial maintenance $r = .25$, $p < .001$, parasocial emotions $r = .20$, $p < .001$, and direct imitation $r = .16$, $p < .001$. Since age, gender, and shōjo usage were significantly related to many of the central variables under investigation, they were included as control variables in subsequent hierarchical regression analyses.

Hierarchical Regression Analysis

A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to understand the relative influence of control variables, heroine characteristics, and wishful identification on PSI. The control variables were entered in the first block because preliminary analyses revealed that gender (negative correlation), shōjo usage (positive correlation) and age (negative correlation) were significantly associated with wishful identification. For the second block, heroine pro-sociality was entered into the model. Finally, wishful identification was included in the third block. This analysis was run thrice using parasocial maintenance, parasocial emotions, and direct imitation as dependent variables. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

Path Analysis

As a further examination of the relationship between wishful identification and parasocial relationships, a path analysis was conducted using AMOS to examine the direct and indirect effects of the perceived pro-sociality of shōjo heroines on wishful identification and PSI. Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations for the central variables considered for the path model are reported in Table 4. Although the variables were reasonably correlated, they did not cause any concerns for multi-collinearity while running the hierarchical regression or path analysis, as evidenced by a low variance inflation factor (VIF).

Insert Table 4 about here

In line with existing literature on media enjoyment that suggests that positive character appraisals influence wishful identification and parasocial relationships with characters, the initial model included heroine pro-sociality as correlated exogenous variables that influence wishful identification, which in turn influences PSI. The final model was arrived at after excluding those path coefficients that did not achieve at $p < .05$ significance level. The goodness of fit for the models were determined by considering three criteria (a) a χ^2/df value of 5 or less, (b) a comparative fit index (CFI) value above .90, and (c) a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) value less than .06 (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Stephenson & Holbert, 2003). The final

model (see Figure 2) indicated an excellent fit as evidenced by χ^2/df value of .005, CFI = 1.00 and RMSEA = .000.

 Insert Figure 2 about here

Examining the specific paths in the model, pro-sociality of the shōjo heroine was positively correlated with wishful identification ($\beta = .34, p < .001$). In the next step of the model, wishful identification was positively correlated with all three dimensions of parasocial interactions: parasocial emotions ($\beta = .32, p < .001$), parasocial maintenance ($\beta = .21, p < .001$), and direct imitation ($\beta = .56, p < .001$). There were also direct paths relating pro-sociality of heroine to parasocial emotions ($\beta = .29, p < .001$) and to direct imitation ($\beta = .27, p < .001$), although not to parasocial maintenance. As expected, there were positive correlations between parasocial emotions and parasocial maintenance ($\beta = .41, p < .001$) and between direct imitation and parasocial maintenance ($\beta = .22, p < .05$) but not between parasocial emotions and direct imitation.

Although path analyses techniques do not allow us to test for non-recursive models, an alternative model was explored in which the direction of the relationships was reversed. This alternative model enabled us to check a different set of relationships: It assumed that parasocial relationships leads to wishful identification, which in turn leads to positive attitudes towards the heroine. In this reversed model, there was no significant path coefficient from wishful identification to heroine pro-sociality, suggesting that heroine perceptions influence wishful identification but that the reverse might not necessarily occur. Additionally, gender was included as a moderator by conducting a multiple group analysis that tested the equivalence of the model

for female participants as compared to that for male participants. No statistically significant differences were observed between the two groups, suggesting that the model presented here is valid for both females and males.

Discussion

The current study shows that U.S. audiences connect to shōjo heroines through a mixture of media effects, forming strong bonds with these animated characters by appreciating their pro-social traits, wishfully identifying with them, and developing parasocial relationships with the shōjo heroines. The findings demonstrate that wishful identification (WI) and parasocial interaction (PSI) can be integrated effects. Based on empirical research, it develops a model showing how audience members of intercultural entertainment can progress from liking a heroine, to wishfully identifying with her, and then participating in a parasocial relationship. Considering that, the implications of these findings for media effects scholarship in the context of entertainment are discussed below.

Implications for Entertainment Effects Scholarship

Prior research has demonstrated that audience members wishfully identify with media characters who serve as role models (Cohen, 2006; Feilitzen & Linne, 1975; Hoffner 1996) and that PSI involves cognitive, emotional, and behavioral effects (Klimmt et al, 2006, p. 295). The results reported above extend this research in three ways.

First, pro-sociality emerged as the most important set of character traits for predicting wishful identification toward Japanese shōjo heroines. Although other characteristics such as heroine's activeness and ditziness were recognized as relevant to these characters, these were not

included in the final model because of low reliabilities and also did not significantly contribute to identification with these characters for these U.S. fans. This finding is in line with prior research suggesting that a shōjo heroine's pro-sociality is a key trait that sets her apart from many of the mainstream American media characters (Napier, 2005). It is therefore not surprising that the participants in this study appeared to relate to this aspect of the shōjo heroine more than anything else. Singhal and Rogers (1999) found that entertainment can be a positive educational vehicle when characters are pro-social. This pro-social impulse is demonstrated in shōjo heroines as they model an empowered, happy, and considerate lifestyle. Audience members positively appraise these pro-social traits and develop wishful identifications with the heroines.

Second, results demonstrate preliminary support for the Integrated Model of WI and PSI where positively appraising a character as pro-social is correlated with wishful identification, which in turn is associated with parasocial interaction. Since these relationships are exploratory and correlational, they have to be interpreted cautiously. While heroine impressions are correlated with wishful identification and parasocial interactions, these relationships need not necessarily be causal. Also, it is equally possible that as fans develop intimate parasocial relationships with ideal heroines over a period of time, their wishful identification with the media character intensifies, making them perceive the heroine in an even more favorable light.

Third, by separating PSI into three components, parasocial emotions, parasocial maintenance behaviors, and direct imitation, this research provides a new conceptual framework for studying PSI. The argument here is that parasocial emotions, maintenance behaviors and direct imitation are three related but different types of effects. More specifically, audience members who experience PSI are unlikely to equally engage in these three effects. Interestingly,

wishful identification had the strongest positive correlation with direct imitation, then with parasocial emotions, and least with parasocial maintenance.

The findings suggest that liking the heroine—perceiving her as nice, good, optimistic, and encouraging—prompts audience members to imitate her behavior and to emotionally connect with her, but not necessarily to seek out additional access to the heroine (parasocial maintenance behaviors). Essentially, appreciating a character’s pro-sociality does not necessarily lead to continuing one’s exposure to the character. However, perceiving the heroine as pro-social did significantly predict wishful identification, which does lead to all three PSI elements—including maintenance behaviors which continue one’s exposure to the character. This finding leaves significant room for further research to explore what type of character attributes predict parasocial maintenance behaviors, where audience members seek out continued access to the character.

In sum, from a media audience perspective, this research suggests that shōjo appeals to those in the United States who are especially attracted to the pro-social nature of its central female characters. This audience seems particularly to appreciate positive, pro-social personalities such as boldness, intelligence, encouragement, and optimism that go beyond the more common portrayals of leading ladies in subordinating, sexualized roles in traditional U.S. comics. Perhaps this speaks to the need for incorporating strong heroine-centric narratives into youth-oriented entertainment media in ways that build the self-esteem and character of young viewers through wishful identification and role-modeling processes.

Conclusion

This research utilizes a survey design in order to better understand shōjo's reception among U.S. audiences. This exploratory analysis suggests that U.S. audience members both wishfully identify with the shōjo heroines and experience PSI. As Cohen suggested (2009b), wishful identification and parasocial relationships, while usually studied independently, are compatible media effects. The regression and path analyses suggests that the stronger the perceived pro-sociality of character, the greater the wishful identification and the more intense the parasocial relationships formed with the character.

Moreover, this research suggests that PSI has three distinct but interrelated components, parasocial emotions, parasocial maintenance behaviors, and direct imitation. These three elements are not experienced equally, and other factors can moderate their experience. For example, wishfully identifying with the shōjo heroine led to increased direct imitation for audience members who also developed a parasocial relationship with the heroine than for audience members who developed PSI without wishful identification.

Finally, unlike U.S. comic book protagonists who are supernatural heroes gifted with paranormal physical powers, shōjo heroines are normal girls with heightened pro-social traits. This enables them to function as relatable role models since they are similar to the audience members and yet exhibit consistent and thorough pro-social behaviors. Functioning as role models, these heroines generate strong wishful identifications and parasocial interactions as U.S. audience members interact with these Japanese characters.

U.S. fans have responded to this genre by developing strong fan communities in which audience members participate in message board communities, create fan-fictions, fan-art, and series reviews, as well as attending conventions and cosplaying (Otaku, 2010; AnimeCons, 2009). Future research could use ethnographic methods to provide deeper understanding of why

this Japanese art form draws niche U.S. audiences. Further experimental studies and longitudinal surveys could help understand the relationships amongst the variables, including an assessment of bi-directional and non-recursive causal models. This could combine email solicitations through anime clubs with other recruitment methods such as posting surveys online in anime message boards and discussion groups. Another avenue for potential exploration is the motivations of male fans who seek this type of content and the gratification they derive from it.

The growing popularity and interest in Japanese anime/manga as a transnationally accessible genre of comic series makes it an important area for future scholarship. As this study demonstrates, there are many interesting aspects about fans of this type of content such as cosplaying, attending anime conventions, etc. that distinguish them from fans of other types of media content, making their systematic study a significant contribution to fandom literature. We believe that comparative analyses of the way Japanese versus U.S. fans relate to anime/manga, as well as the way U.S. fans relate to Japanese versus U.S. fantasy media entertainment would be the next obvious steps for research in this area.

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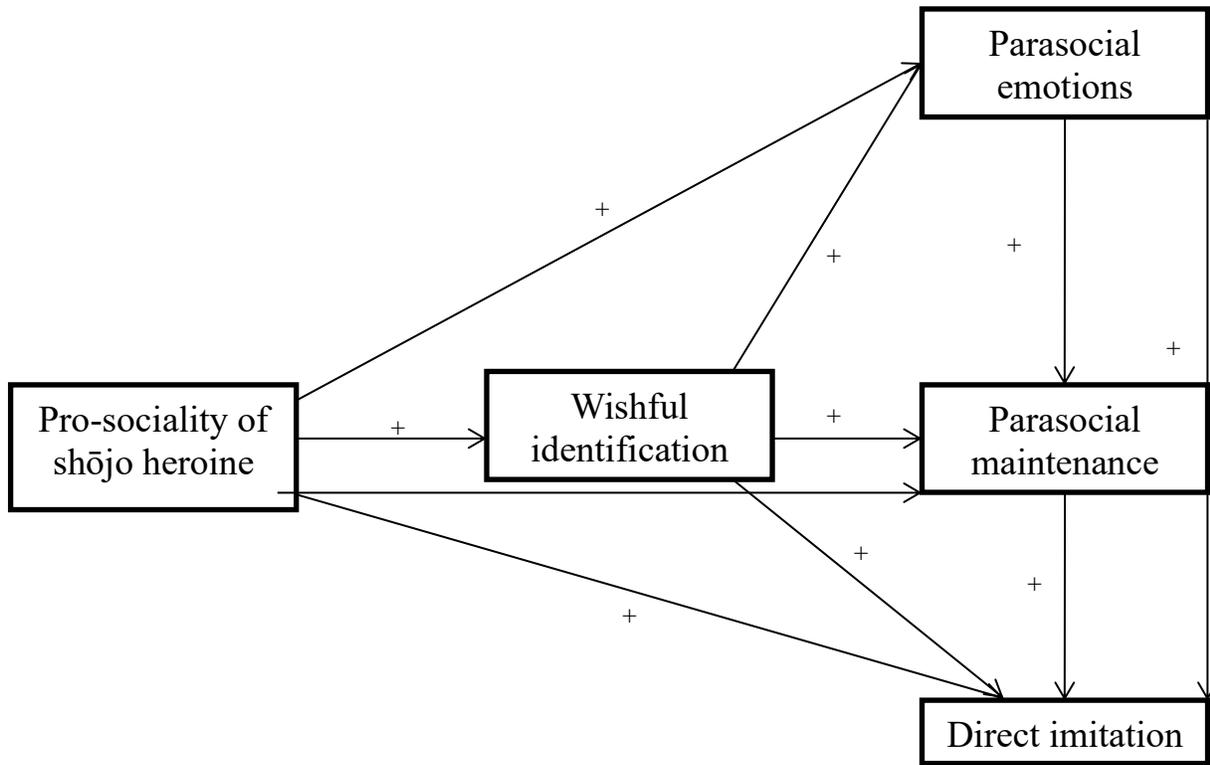


Figure 1. This figure illustrates the hypothesized integrated model linking a heroine's pro-social traits to wishful identification and positive parasocial relationships with the ideal shōjo heroine

Table 1. Final Rotated Factor Solution for Items Relating to Heroine Perceptions

Item	Pro-sociality	Activeness*
Kind	.78	.05
Self-sacrificial	.71	.04
Loyal	.67	.22
Encouraging	.61	.23
Values life	.53	.19
Bold	.10	.81
Determined	.21	.77
Perseverant	.09	.72
Intelligent	.20	.55
Eigenvalue	3.34	1.40
% variance explained	34.81	15.51

*Note: This factor was not included in further analyses because of low reliability.

Table 2. Final Rotated Factor Solution for Items Relating to Parasocial Interactions

Item (abbreviated)	Direct Imitation	Parasocial emotions	Parasocial maintenance
Imitated Actions	.90	.10	.11
Imitated Gestures	.89	.14	.07
Imitated Personality	.88	.15	.20
Imitated Attitude	.86	.12	.19
Imitated Phrases	.83	.15	.11
Imitated Appearance	.78	.13	.08
Worry for Heroine	.06	.77	.20
Sad for Heroine	.08	.75	.14
Happy for Heroine	.09	.69	.35
Shocked for Heroine	.08	.69	.28
Tell Heroine What to Do	.22	.62	.08
Dislike Characters Who Harm	.16	.59	.10
Re-read/watch Another Series	.17	.10	.79
Read article About Heroine	.05	.23	.74
Feel Comfortable	.26	.31	.58
Look Forward to Watching/reading	.12	.35	.54
Eigenvalue	6.19	2.80	1.10
% variance explained	38.70	17.29	6.86

Table 3. Heroine Pro-sociality and Wishful Identification as Predictors of Parasocial Interaction after Controlling For Gender, Age, and Shōjo Usage

Predictor Variables	Parasocial Maintenance		Parasocial Emotions		Direct Imitation	
	β	R ²	β	R ²	β	R ²
Block 1		.06***		.06***		.04**
Gender (0=M; 1=F)	-.12**		-.10*		-.13**	
Shōjo usage	.16***		.09 [#]		.05	
Age	.07		-.06		-.01	
Block 2		.11***		.18***		.11***
Pro-sociality of heroine	.10*		.27***		.15***	
Block 3		.29***		.29***		.33***
Wishful identification	.47***		.37***		.51***	

Note 1: $F_{maintenance} (5, 369) = 30.709, p < .001$; $F_{emotions} (5, 369) = 30.61, p < .001$; $F_{imitation} (5, 369) = 30.673, p < .01$.

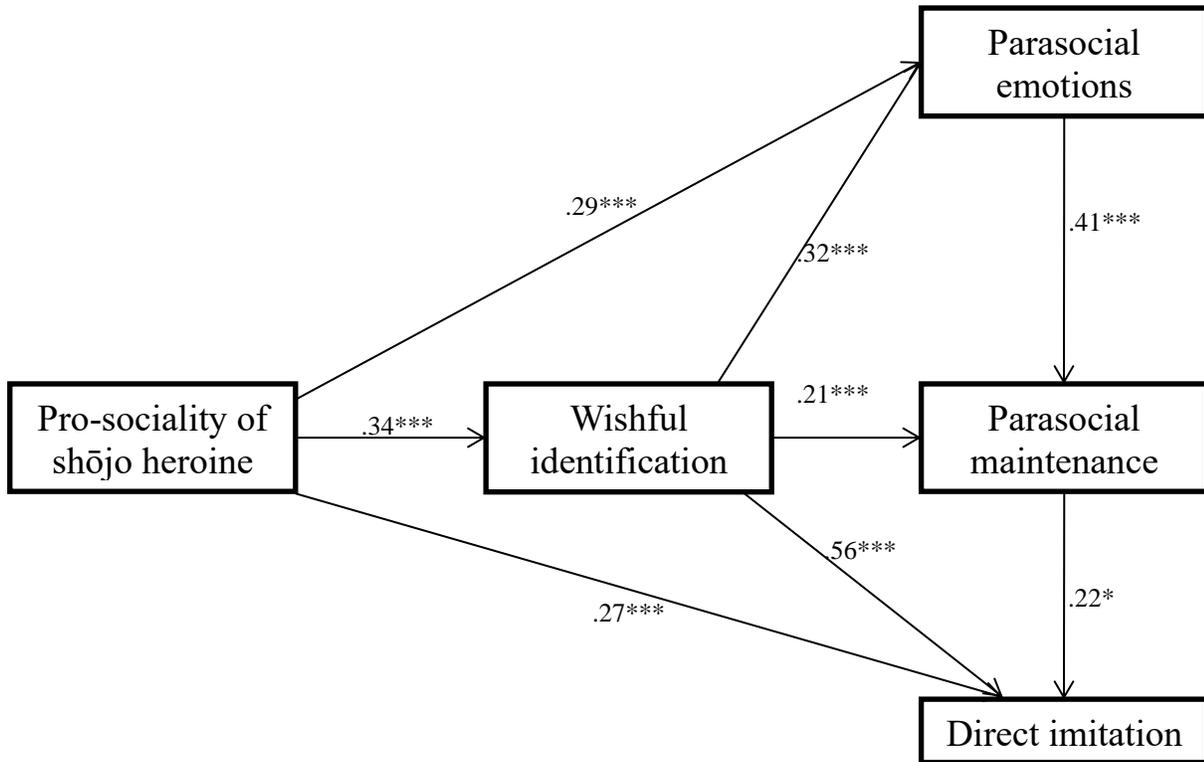
Note 2: # denotes $p < .10$; * denotes $p < .05$; ** denotes $p < .01$ and *** denotes $p < .001$

Table 4. Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Variables in the Final Path Model

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1.Pro-sociality of heroine	4.14	.63	--				
2.Wishful identification	3.47	.85	.25**	--			
3.Parasocial maintenance	4.22	.63	.25**	.49**	--		
4.Parasocial emotions	3.88	.70	.36**	.46**	.58**	--	
5.Direct imitation	2.62	1.11	.29**	.53**	.37**	.33**	--

Note 1: ** indicates that the correlation is significant at the $p < .01$ level (2-tailed).

Note 2: All variables were measured on a 5 point scale.



Note 1: * p<.05; *** p < .001

Note 2: χ^2 (df= 2, p = .875) = .268; NFI = .99; CFI = 1.00; AGFI = .998; RMSEA = .000 (90 CI: .000-.051).

Figure 2. The final integrated model linking heroine pro-sociality, wishful identification, and parasocial interaction with the ideal heroine