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Magical Girl Anime: How The Genre is Not Limited to the Adolescent Audiences

The first things that come to mind when someone says “magical girl” (or mahō shōjō in Japanese) are elementary or middle school girls transforming themselves into outfits composed of short skirts, ribbons and laces as well as being accompanied by a mascot. Not to mention these same girls fighting monsters once a week. These common stereotypes are what make up this genre, and it is because of these stereotypes that most people commonly make the misconception that this anime genre is targeted for little girls, just like how the Japanese genre name suggests (shōjo meaning “young girl”). This statement is definitely the case, but is it really accurate to say it is limited to only such an audience? Of course, the cast in this genre is mostly made up of women of all kinds of personalities suited for young girls who can somewhat relate to one of the main characters. Even the art style is portrayed in a pastel and bright-colored world that would usually come out of a children’s show. Almost about every element in a magical girl anime is presented in what people would consider children’s shows. Despite these details, however, it is possible to consider the opposite stance: Magical girl anime is not only limited to the younger girl audience, but rather to the older audiences as well. There are three points that will be discussed as to why this is the case: the reveal of the bodies during the magical girl transformation sequences, the skinny fit of the magical girl attire, and the diverse personalities of the magical girl characters.

The Underlying Reasons for the Intentional Use of Transformation Sequences

Most magical girl anime fans can confirm that the use of a well-animated transformation sequence is usually the main reason why they first became interested in the genre. It is what mostly defines magical girls to be a subcategory of regular shōjo anime. Witnessing the fighting actions as well as the transformations of the girls is what brings this genre to life, especially through animation. For example, in Naoko Takeuchi's *Sailor Moon*, the main characters of the story have transformation sequences that each and every Sailor Guardian (what the girls become when they are transformed) has to go through before being able to fight monsters. All of their transformation sequences depict the shape of the guardians' bodies covered with a white light to hide the body parts. It can be convincing to argue that this was done in order to make the anime considered kid-friendly enough for the young girl audience that it claims it is for, but if this is the case, then why show this in the first place? There could have been other ways to depict this sequence without the use of showing body parts underneath clothes to still be considered a transformation sequence. For example, the existence of the magical girl anime titled *Akazukin Chacha* has done this. In this anime, the protagonist Chacha is portrayed as a magical girl with a magical girl sequence that does not reveal body parts covered by a mysterious white light at all. The way she transforms into her combat outfit on screen is censored by the red clothing she wears in both her civilian form and transformed self. As Chacha rotates, the red hood briefly covers the screen and suddenly Chacha is now seen in place of the hood and is now wearing a red cape. Despite how Chacha herself does not do this like *Sailor Moon* and most magical girl anime during its time, the addition of this sequence still becomes effective to the audience. However, even *Akazukin Chacha* can be argued to be meant for audiences older than what the target audience is claimed to be. The possibility of this lies in the fact that Chacha ages

throughout her transformation, becoming much taller in figure and wearing the infamous short skirt like other magical girl anime. What raises an eyebrow even further is how the transformation scene as a whole is only depicted in the anime, but does not exist in the manga.

While the manga is pure comedy, the entirety of the anime is a magical girl anime with transformation sequences and/or the use of magical items. The reason for this is surely due to the use of branding. According to Marc Steinberg, “the concept of relationality was used with growing regularity during this time and is found particularly frequently in two aspects of marketing practice. The first concerns the connection between company products:

product–product relations and relations between the company brand and its individual products.

For example, the relations between individual brand and family brand and the debated subject of the brand image were major topics covered in marketing journals of the time” (Steinberg 138).

By cleverly branding this series into a magical girl anime to give fans the *Sailor Moon*-esque that was so popular at the time, it drew attention to several fans who were not aware of the existence of its manga. Adding this sequence not only attracts people to the anime, but the manga as well if it draws watchers into the series as a whole. Though the sequence is not present in the manga at all and may disappoint some fans, it would not disappoint all fans due to the fact that most of the same main characters that everyone gets to know and love are still present in the manga. By bringing it into existence through a transformation sequence, it can be used to draw attention to the manga. If something like this is that effective in the anime to be that desperate to want to know the characters more in the manga, then it can be concluded that Akazukin Chacha is not limited to young girls, but also older audiences in the way this magical girl comes into existence as a teenager rather than a child (despite not showing any body parts underneath clothing while transforming). On the opposite side of *Sailor Moon* however, there can be cases where body

parts within transformation sequences are entirely uncensored with no mysterious white light present. One example of this is in the anime titled *Moetan* (a play on words of moe, which is a Japanese word that implies the cuteness and innocence of a character to the point of wanting to be protected as well as -tan, a suffix used among girls. It is actually an abbreviation of “Methodology Of English, The Academic Necessity.”). *Moetan* as depicted by its title puts the spotlight on innocent-looking girls who teach the alphabet and say English words in the form of computer games and of course, anime. Despite how this series first existed as an English language learning aid for Japanese people, the way in which it disguises itself as a magical girl anime is odd, especially in the way it is executed through its animation. The transformation sequences are minimally censored by the background (whether this be hearts, ribbons, or stars) that slightly envelop the girls, but there is no more than that that reveals their body parts. The sequence even goes so far as to zoom in onto the girls as the clothes appear onto their bodies from the bottom up, showing every detail of the body with no white light present as it trails up the body. Not to mention that during the sequence, the mascots nosebleed in awe and perverseness when watching their partner transform. It is obvious through this anime that it was intended for older audiences and is warned to the public as such, and it can very much mean that other magical girl anime with censored transformation sequences are trying to imply this kind of presentation for this kind of audience.

The Revealing Outfit Types of Feminine and Masculine Magical Girls Alike

Magical girl anime tend to be easily identified through the masses of anime genres particularly due to the clothing they wear. Referring back to *Sailor Moon*, the sailor outfits that are worn by the characters are body suits with short skirts that are far above the knee. That way, the legs are able to be better shown to the audience. Not to mention the arms as well, which are

never covered by long sleeves at all. What is even more eye opening is how all of the Sailor Guardians complement one another. They match each other well despite having different color-schemes. According to Akiko Sugawa Shimada, the diverse cast of characters are “unified by wearing uniforms. In Japan, the uniform is one of the vital cultural devices for conceptualizing group conformity. Although differences signify positive images of the superior and powerful self or of individuality, extreme differences may cause ostracism in Japanese society” (Shimada 184). Wearing these uniforms is said to bring the characters together as a group, but, according to the eyes of this audience is this really the case? For example, one of the Sailor Guardians, Sailor Uranus, is a masculine woman who was originally mistaken to be male, despite wearing the same uniform as the other girls. This drastic difference can attract more than just the young girl audience it was intended for. Perhaps older males as well can relate to Sailor Uranus. Another possibility is through the eyes of otaku, which according to Patrick Galbraith, is the fact that ““otaku” began crossing gender/genre lines in consumption and appropriation of shōjo (for girls) manga and shōjo (girl) characters in manga and anime in the 1970s, and in imagining interactions and relations with bishōjo (cute girl) characters in the 1980s. One way to understand this is by viewing “otaku” as reluctant insiders of the hegemony of masculinity seeking alternatives” (Galbraith 10). These potential relationships are given through the use of how these characters are presented, mostly through their attire (in which Sailor Uranus wears masculine clothing). Another anime to make reference to in terms of this is *Magical Girl Ore*. In this anime, the female protagonists transform into magical girls in the form of men (hence why the official translation of the title is “Magical Girl Boy,” referring to the masculine “I” pronoun). The outfits still contain frills and short skirts, but rather than the skinny fit portrayed on the girls, there is a tight fit on men. According to Catherine Bailey, “the

reemergence of these texts is timely, given their complex portrayals of female superheroes who represent a range of sexualities and gender presentations. Activists and concerned academics alike are interested in the portrayal of fictional female-bodied individuals who challenge the norms of feminine gender performance and compulsory heterosexuality in part because they realise the influence of such representations on the societal acceptance of these individuals” (Bailey 218). Indeed, gender representation is at play in this anime, but perhaps the way in which the outfits are presented on the characters can indicate otherwise. Rather than for just the prime purpose of representing feminine and masculine aspects, an underlying theme of the outfits could lie in the sexual tension that comes from it. Because if such a thing was not the case, why would the outfits mostly consist of short skirts and arm exposure? Surely to give rise to feminine and/or masculine empowerment, but perhaps what could lie underneath the surface could be the fan service that comes with it. For instance, in anime coined with the genre “Ecchi,” this could indicate excessive fan service and nudity for an audience. By labeling it this way, it tends to drive most watchers away from it. If this term is disguised in the form of a magical girl, then both young girl audiences and watchers of the “Ecchi” genre can enjoy the series. It is because of this disguise in the genre behind the outfits that the magical girl genre has become rather successful. What could seem cute and cosplay-worthy for little girls on the outside could in fact also be intended to appeal to the older audiences that find it sexually pleasing to see more of the skin of the females and males alike. Just like how magical girls can be considered fan service for an older male audience, magical boys can be considered fan service for an audience of women. It is because of this that the outfits portrayed in magical girl anime can take on the idea that young girls watching this genre and enjoying the outfits are not the only ones, which is indicated by just how popular the genre is.

How the Diverse Cast of Characters Attracts A Diverse Audience

There are several character tropes that occur when it comes to the world of magical girl anime. One of course is the optimistic klutz, usually the protagonist. In *Sailor Moon*, this definitely fits Usagi Tsukino (the civilian name of Sailor Moon), as she is quick to cry and always fails her tests at school. This is what makes her a klutz, but she can be an optimist in the face of danger. If this optimism were not the case, the Sailor Guardians would always lose against the dark forces of evil. This may be placed in magical girl anime to get young girls to be their own person and be inspired to not give up in the face of adversary, just like these ordinary girls in the anime who were luckily given the use of this magical power. It is stated by Kayson Carlin that “by giving the character magical powers, they were literally giving them power to be strong on their own” (Carlin). Perhaps this not only applies to ordinary girls, but ordinary people as a whole. The inspirational things that are done by the characters despite living such ordinary lives outside of magical girl work can be picked up by older audiences who get discouraged too. Another example of this kind of anime is *Revolutionary Girl Utena*. In this anime, the protagonist Utena Tenjou is depicted in the way that a man would, even being referred to as a prince. To a young girl audience, this may seem strange or unusual considering the other types of magical girl anime out there as well as the stereotypes usually placed on magical girl protagonists. Unlike most magicals girls who fight with a staff or magical weapon of some sort, Utena fights with a sword. Usually the ones wielding swords are the men who take on the role of a prince or a knight in shining armor to protect their princess, which is exactly what Utena does but in a more abstract and more mature fashion. According to Susan Napier, she states, “As with *Sailor Moon*, *Utena* features shimmering pastel graphics, zany humor, and appealing shojō

characters, but its content is far more adult” (Napier 172). Because of these qualities, it would be rather difficult for a younger audience to grasp the concept entirely (though the use of unique artstyle and characters is possibly what makes the younger audience somewhat interested in it). Another more modern anime that this holds true for is the ongoing magical girl series *Pretty Cure*, or *Precure* for short. The fifteenth title in particular, *Hugtto! Precure* explores a wide variety of characters in a bit more depth compared to the other titles in the series. The themes of this title dealt with the future and destiny. This was depicted through the use of a baby, which has many futures it could take depending on how it’s raised and what it goes through in its lifetime. In this anime, the main character Hana Nono is a typical shojō protagonist who is a klutz, but is forced to take care of a baby from the future named Hugtan. Despite being dealt with this task, Hana herself has doubts about her own future, which become especially apparent upon working together with Saaya Yakushiji and Homare Kagayaki, who already have a great idea of what their future is like (though what makes them interesting characters is the struggles they go through within their field of interest). She became certain over the course of the anime that she wants to work in the fashion industry because it is what she admires, as well as to become a mother to a child just like in the way that she was for Hugtan. By transforming into Cure Yell, Hana is represented as the cheerleader of the team, and for several other characters in the anime who are having trouble and doubts about the future. Her cheering ability and sympathy for those in the anime who have doubts on their destiny even makes way for a redemption for one of the antagonists, RUR-9500, a robot modeled from the daughter of the scientist who created her. Throughout the middle of the anime, RUR-9500 took on the name Lulu Amour and lived as a normal civilian to spy on the Cures, but eventually became attached to the girls and doubts her own future. Thanks to Cure Yell’s efforts however, Lulu becomes certain that she wants to help

the Cures. This moment was very empowering in a magical girl anime, and is a recurring motif throughout some of the Precure series to give those characters a second chance and forgive their enemies. It can inspire not only a young girl audience to have hope in their own future, but rather an older audience on the verge of despair to try again too. The conflicts within the other characters were also relatable enough for audiences of any age to connect with. With Saaya, she is conflicted whether or not she should follow in her mother's footsteps to become a famous actor. Despite loving to act, she becomes a doctor in the future because it was what she was truly passionate for. Meanwhile, Homare has a passion for figure skating, but after failing to perform a jump and injuring herself at a competition, she became afraid to jump again. This doubt even carried over into the Precure's power rejecting her at first. Homare in addition to this also experiences the heartbreak of a first love, which was the human form of the mascot, Harry Hariham. Despite crying it out, she realized after the fact that she could become more honest with her feelings, which leads to self-acceptance. The conflicts and resolutions within each of these characters is enough to reach out beyond a young girl audience, but also to an older audience. These life lessons distilled in these unique magical girl characters can give inspiration to be themselves just as they are embraced in the anime as well as inspire them to keep fighting no matter how hard things get. The concept of a new ability or weapon tends to appear whenever these magical girls take another step in their character development, usually when faced with a great adversary where it seems like all is doomed. This magical power given to magical girls seems to indicate the strength welling up inside of girls (and in some cases, boys) alike in physical form. Though magic does not indeed exist in the real world, the genre seems to entail the fact that magic does exist in a more common form known as strength and hard work. Though

younger audiences would not be able to pick this up in their heads, it can be picked up in the older audiences who become inspired from this part of the genre.

Conclusion: Magical Girls Are Admired By People of All Ages

The magical girl genre is welcome to people of all ages, even if it is widely recognized as a genre for young girls. For the use of selling the genre out there, several methods are taken into account as explained earlier, even if it feels as if it is intended for only one thing. When it comes to selling media out there, there are usually multiple reasons behind why it would be the case, not just one singular reason. Each and every individual in the audience could have their own reasons for wanting to watch the magical girl genre, whether this is for the transformation sequences, the clothing, the character designs, the character bodies, the storyline, even as far as to make fun of the genre itself. Because of these various reasons to watch something, the clever creators of these magical girl anime must take into consideration all of these different reasons and how to appeal to such an audience. It could be this kind of thinking that led the creators to have the concept of a diverse cast of girls fighting in short skirts. It can raise controversy because of the different ways this can be depicted (because some of these ways are forbidden or not considered to be very normal in such a society, such as women saving the men in many kinds of situations). But in the same breath, it can draw inspiration out of people to do many things because of these very controversies. Even today, women are still looked down upon as being weaker than men, but in all actuality they can be on equal terms if women work that hard to do so. The same can be sparked inside of men as well, who believe they are weak as a human being. Magical girl anime can portray all kinds of feelings inside all different kinds of audiences, and it is because of this that it is invalid to say magical girl anime is limited only for an audience of young girls.

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