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Access and the construction of fan identity: Industry images of anime fandom

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Abstract:
Access to content is a concern for many American anime fans, who view themselves as responsible for attracting content from Japan. In this context, American anime distribution companies have constructed two images of anime fandom: disciplinary and participatory. The former focuses on fans self-policing for the economic success of the industry and the latter positions the company and the fans as equals in a shared community. The online discourse of two anime distribution companies, FUNimation and Crunchyroll, are analyzed for the ways they rhetorically construct these images in order to persuade fans to support the economic success of the industry.

Keywords: access, anime, fandom, identification

Anime distribution companies in the United States have long sought ways to persuade the niche audience(s) that exists for anime and related fan interests to purchase their products. A look at anime advertisements in the magazine *Animag* from the late 1980s to early 1990s reveals heavy use of text describing the VHS tapes the anime series and movies were available on, pictures of the tapes themselves, a short blurb about the series or movie, and a small picture of a character or group of characters (O'Mara, 2010). This style of advertising would be familiar to fans of comic books, sci-fi novels, and model kits who might be interested in anime as well. A dedicated anime fandom was not the focus at this time of the industry's advertising efforts, but magazines in the late 1990s and early 2000s, such as *Animerica* and *Newtype USA*, show a shift in advertising strategy to featuring large, glossy pictures of the characters that were meant to attract the attention of anime fans who are assumed to be heavily invested in those characters and the elements that make them up (for more on the relationship between fans and characters, see Azuma, 2009: 53). Along with fan convention panels and magazine publication, advertising was a way for anime

distribution companies to try to identify with anime fans up to the early 2000s. As anime fandom and distribution began to move online in the late 1990s,[1] a new channel of communication was opened up between anime distribution companies and fans. Just as advertising constructs certain images of fans, how companies communicate with fans online constructs other images through different processes of identification. The focus of this article is on the attempts by two American anime distribution companies to create identification with fans through their construction of particular images of fans in their online discourse.

In this essay, I analyze the images of anime fandom constructed by two U.S. anime distribution companies, FUNimation and Crunchyroll. With the focus of such companies on the online distribution of content, access to that content becomes a site through which the companies interact with fans. Access to content is one of many concerns and practices that shape American anime fandom.[2] Anime fans in the United States have a history of taking matters into their own hands when access to content is not provided, primarily through fansubs, fan-distributed videos of anime content with subtitles added in the fans' native language (Leonard, 2005: 282). Anime distribution companies seek to create identification with fans around the issue of access in ways that benefit the companies through support of the officially licensed content. Two unique images of fandom are constructed in the attempt to create identification between the fans and the companies: disciplinary and participatory. Disciplinary fandom, grounded in Michel Foucault's conception of discipline as directing individuals to be part of a productive whole (1995: 164), involves persuading fans to police their own consumption and the consumption of other fans in a way that benefits the company itself. Participatory fandom positions the company as equals within an active fan community, thus having the fans' best interests at heart because they are all members of the same community. Together, the two images of anime fandom attempt to create identification through appeals to the legality of streaming video as a distribution method and to general support for the industry, which some fans embrace but others push back against as infringing on their autonomy.

In order to analyze the different images of anime fandom constructed by the anime distribution companies, this article utilizes a rhetorical approach to identification (Burke, 1969: 21). Through statements covered in news reports and blog posts on the companies' websites, the companies come to shape identification with fans in ways that serve their own interests. I begin with a discussion of a rhetorical approach to identification and its applicability to fan identity. I then make the case for why access is a concern of American anime fans. Finally, through the statements and actions of FUNimation and Crunchyroll, I analyze the two images of anime fandom constructed by the two companies as ways of creating identification between fans and the companies.

Identification and Anime Fan Identity

In his discussion of constitutive rhetoric, Maurice Charland notes that identification precedes persuasion (1987: 133-134). Through rhetoric, the boundary is defined between

who is included and excluded in a group (1987: 136). For Kenneth Burke, identification is the means through which individuals find common ground with each other while maintaining their differences (1969: 21). It is through identification that persuasion is possible through rhetoric. Differing views on the meaning of anime fandom are the subject of intense debate among fans. Individual fans are hailed by the message about anime fandom that appeals to them, and the originator of the message then seeks to use this support to apply that specific message to all anime fans. Identification begins once a subject enters a rhetorical situation. Anime fans may respond differently to the statements made by the different anime companies because of how they feel they are being addressed.

Identification is grounded in interpellation, with subjects, in this case, being hailed through the two companies' messages and recognizing themselves within that discourse (Althusser, 1971: 174).[3] Identification also exhibits performative qualities of citationality (the reference back to and subsequent shaping of cultural identities), with fans and companies generating images of anime fandom through repeated action and recognition of themselves in that action (Butler, 1997: 87). The differing constructions of anime fandom seek to construct anime fans in a manner that reflects particular notions of the relationship between fans and media texts. Magazine advertisements that focus on the characters, for example, are built on the idea that characters are what matter most to fans, which is reinforced through such fan practices as cosplaying, decorating a bedroom with wall scrolls featuring characters, and shipping relationships between characters as a primary draw of a text. While the goal of messages like these is to construct the group in a particular way, it is important to remember that subjects are consubstantial in that they are identified with each other through a (perceived) shared interest while still maintaining their differences (Burke, 1969: 21). Character-focused magazine advertisements claim a love of characters that is shared by the company and the fans while fans may also be interested in a work because of its story or well-directed action scenes. People exist as a collective, therefore, only as long as the 'rhetoric that defined them has force' before becoming nothing more than a collection of individuals (McGee, 1975: 242). If any of the differing constructions of anime fan identity expressed through online discourse fail to maintain rhetorical force, the construction loses the power to define anime fans in any meaningful way.

Through the analysis of discourse, the self as constructed through the text can be understood (Leff and Utley, 2004: 38). In an analysis of a text, the first persona is the 'author implied by the discourse' and the second persona is 'the implied auditor' (Black, 2000: 192). Ana Kilambi, Michel Laroche, and Marie-Odile Richard are interested in the first and second personae found in corporate construction of brands. Companies create brand communities, very similar to the fandoms that develop around entertainment content, through the rhetoric of advertising (2013: 50). Advertising signals the identity of the company (first persona) and the identity of those users who become part of the community (second persona) simultaneously (2013: 50). Crunchyroll and FUNimation can be seen as making similar appeals to community; they communicate their conceptions of themselves and their fans with the expectation that fans will readily adopt the constructed identity. Like the

rhetoric of brand communities (2013: 58), Crunchyroll and FUNimation seek for anime fans to adopt their conceptions of what fandom means rather than determining through their discourse who already meets the expectations of a fan. Fan identity established through corporate discourse is a mantle to be taken up, not a quality within oneself to be identified. The terms used to address a rhetorical subject do not merely describe her or him. Instead, they position the subject in a particular way in relation to the discourse (Charland, 1987: 140).

The tensions that exist between media companies and fans over the consumption of media texts create space for constitutive paradoxes, in which certain qualities of a group are presented by the rhetor as intrinsic to them while being understood as extrinsic by members of the group (Zagacki, 2007: 276). Many fan studies scholars address this tension by defining fandom according to what fans do with the texts of large media companies beyond just consumption (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998: 140; Fiske, 2010: 13; Jenkins, 1992: 14). Sara Gwenllian Jones pushes back against this characterization of fans as the only ones who are able to extend the original media texts through their practices, pointing out the many ways that media companies fill in the gaps as well by encouraging fans to purchase products such as books, DVDs, actions figures, and other spin-off merchandise that helps to expand the world of the text (2003: 166). Fan identities are reflective of the media environments in which they exist, and fans create their identities based on the products of capitalistic media industries that focus on turning everyday life into a spectacle to be watched and consumed (Sandvoss, 2005: 50-53). Fan practices also reflect local contexts within the constraints of global flows of images and artistic styles (Lamerichs, 2013: 170-172; see also Chin and Morimoto, 2013: 99). Since their identities are created within these spaces, fans' identities are reflective of the ideologies guiding the media industries. Can fan identities truly be resistant when created within the space of dominant power structures?

Ian Condry offers an avenue for considering resistance in the context of anime fandom and access to content through the concept of 'dark energy' he employs in his analysis of fansub production, 'an energy that arises in the space between the viewer and the content' (2013: 169). Finding value in the product of the fansub episode outside of market value, fansubbers combine an interest in providing access to content and promoting the anime industry with desires for aesthetic recognition from the fan community and competitiveness with other fansubbers (2013: 174). Fansubbers receive pleasure and a sense of community in return for their investments of time and effort in the project (Lee, 2011: 1137). A code of ethics for fansubbing, which focuses on ceasing distribution when a series is licensed and not selling fansubs, is a prominent part of the online discourse of anime fandom, though whether all anime fans continue to (or ever did) abide by the code is debatable (Denison, 2011: 459-460). Regardless of how strictly all anime fans adhere to a code of ethics, the existence of a code reflects the practice of anime fans to structure their behavior around the community's ethics rather than copyright laws, a practice which helps them justify the distribution of content by fans online while maintaining 'a deference toward ideas of promoting the anime industry' (Condry, 2013: 162). Anime fandom's dark

energy, in which a community creates its own code of ethics that positions the translation and distribution of content by fans in violation of copyright law as a means of promoting the anime industry itself, allows for a deeper understanding of a particular fan practice that goes beyond just economic considerations to more fully understand how fans relate to the existing power structures at work in the media industries.

As further evidence of the nuanced relationship that exists between media companies and their fans, Leora Hadas and Limor Shifman, in their analysis of *Doctor Who* fans, find that the fans' rhetoric begins to mirror that of the producer, even at the expense of the power that might accrue to them as the most engaged and knowledgeable audience members (2013: 284). They adopt a view in line with the producer that certain fan practices could be detrimental to the quality and popularity of the series and begin to distinguish between good and bad fan groups as a way of self-identifying with proper fan behavior (2013: 284-286). Fans may be becoming more engaged as audience members and more powerful in the fan-producer dynamic, but this does not mean that fan practices and discourse will always run counter to that of producers.

Despite this potential alignment of fan-producer rhetoric, companies often misunderstand and overestimate how consumers use their products and what aspects they find appealing; in terms of media, companies generally argue for more centralized control, but consumers have regularly resisted it (Strangelove, 2005: 60), from cable's spread of television networks to new areas of the United States to recent victories surrounding consumer groups advocating for certain protections of open access to the Internet collapsed under the umbrella of Net Neutrality. Tensions exist over the meaning and use of media texts not only between fans and media companies but also within fan groups. Derek Johnson found that conflict occurs frequently among fans based on differing interpretations of a media text and that these interpretations are 'constantly shifting, never unified or maintaining the same valences over time' (2007: 290-291). Media producers also often assert their authority over interpretation of a text as a means of 'reframing "normative" fandom within "proper" spheres of consumption' (2007: 294). When FUNimation makes appeals to fans to support the official releases or Crunchyroll encourages fans to become more participatory on its website, both are seeking to reframe the normative construction of anime fandom.

Fan identity is constructed within the tension that exists between the rhetoric of fans themselves and of media companies. Constitutive paradoxes are created when the different groups assign different qualities as intrinsic and extrinsic to fan identity. One quality that has frequently been identified as important to American anime fans is access to content.

Access and Anime Fan Identity

Concerns over access enter into the anime community, and any community centered on the sharing and enjoyment of pop culture texts, by functioning as what Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green term a 'system of appraisal' (2013: 87). Anime fans want access to

content so they can decide for themselves what value to give a text rather than relying on others (media companies) to make that decision for them. Streaming has provided access to more content than was possible with physical media (DVDs, Blu-ray discs, etc.), but the system is not complete because fans still do not have the complete access to content necessary to assign value to the texts for themselves. Media companies still make choices, fewer choices than before but still choices, when deciding what series to license for streaming. Fan practices like the production and distribution of fansubs will persist as long as fans feel the need to take matters into their own hands when community desires for complete access to content are not fully satisfied.

Removing content from streaming video sites, providing content only through sites managed by media companies, and labeling (and prosecuting) uploaders and viewers of copyrighted material 'pirates' are examples of media companies working against complete access to content. As access is removed or limited, users seek out alternative means for viewing content. The digital archive, the persistent accessibility of media content through online streaming and downloading, has made users acutely aware that there is no time limit on access to digital content (Kim and Park, 2008: 140); this recognition has made users less likely to tolerate actions that restrict access, such as Hulu's practice of removing videos after a certain number of weeks. Mark Cenite et al. found that access to elusive content was one of the many motivations identified through their interviews with file sharers in Singapore (2009: 213). Price is also not the only determining factor but one of many that lead users to illegally download or stream content (Wang & McClung, 2010: 668). 'Access is the mantra of the YouTube generation. Not necessarily free access. Access' (Lessig, 2008: 46). Issues of access have also characterized the history of anime in America.

Sean Leonard terms the networks created by fans to share anime a 'proselytization commons,' which he defines as 'spaces where media and ideas could be freely exchanged to advance a directed cause' (2005: 282). After an introduction to anime in the 1960s and 1970s through TV series like *Astro Boy* and *Star Blazers*, American and Japanese companies soon began to doubt the potential of the American market and left the growth of anime to the fans. While the fan view is that the fans themselves brought anime to America, evidence exists of prominent Japanese anime companies and creators, particularly prolific manga author Tezuka Osamu, making attempts at engaging with fans and eliciting American interest in anime properties in the 1970s and 1980s (Clements, 2013: 182). Because of the (perceived) lack of commercial support for anime, fans felt it was left to them to spread the enjoyment of the content. The proselytizing by fans worked to fill the void created by a 'cultural sink' (Leonard, 2005: 283); in the case of anime, the sink was created by the view held by most Americans that animation is only for children. Cultural sinks are notable for the pull they have on other media content. As fans searched for more mature animation, anime was pulled from Japan to fill the void (2005: 282).

Fans proselytized anime through the sharing of videotapes. The tapes were initially raw, unedited footage from Japan but soon, enterprising fans with video-editing experience began to add subtitles to the video, creating what came to be known as fansubs. While

fansubs may have violated copyright, both the Japanese and American companies did not actively work to defend their copyrights (Leonard, 2005: 287-288). While Leonard limits his analysis to videotape fansubs, Internet distribution has increased the number of fansubs available and the audience for them.

Anime fans argue that fansubbing is (partly) an attempt to satisfy their desire for access. American anime fans 'do not rely on authorized sources of product information and distribution but have established their own self-defined networks of information and trade' (Eng, 2012: 100). Most fansub groups argue that the reason they create fansubs is to share the newest series from Japan with American fans, not to make a profit. This claim is supported by the fact that most groups do not charge for their fansubs, though you will occasionally find distributors who will charge unsuspecting users for access to a download site or for a burned DVD of fansubs. The fansub groups also often remove their fansubbed series when they are licensed for release in America, though as Leonard points out (2005: 294-295), this does not prevent distributors from continuing to distribute the content. Among the fandom as a whole, downloading fansubs is seen as a way to view a new series. It is clear that fans want access to this content, and in the absence of commercially available alternatives, fansubs were created and continue to persist.

The decisions made by American anime distribution companies directly affect access to content for anime fans. In their analysis of the Australian anime distribution company Madman Entertainment, Jason Bainbridge and Craig Norris identify the anime distributor as a 'point of convergence between fan and commercial cultures' (2012: 13). Distribution is the point where fan interest in a text and commercial interests come together. The result can either be antagonistic, with fans feeling that their interests are being exploited, or cooperative, with fans' interest and attention being acknowledged while still generating revenue for the company. Streaming video was adopted by the anime industry as a way to compete directly with fansub groups in getting content to fans as quickly as possible and to challenge the ethics of fansubbing, with many of the arguments made in support of fansubbing centering on access to content and speed of distribution (Denison, 2011: 455). Streaming video makes it possible for content to be available in America soon after it has aired in Japan, negating many of the arguments made by fansub groups. The value fansubbing added to the anime community, however, should not be overlooked now that anime companies have adopted streaming video (Ito, 2012: 201). Through the production, distribution, and consumption of anime content through fansubs, anime fans play an active role in the distribution and spread of content and view their participation as a way of making a contribution to the community. Another motivation behind anime fan practices like fansubbing, which is generally done for free, is social recognition from others in the larger fan community of the fansubbers' contribution to the sharing of anime around the world (Condry, 2013: 171; Napier, 2007: 150; Schules, 2014). It is important for anime companies to find ways to make fans still feel like active participants in a community when asking them to take part in industry-driven consumption through streaming video.

Anime fans have built a strong community around the consumption of content and expressions of passion for that content. Through fansubs, anime fans have proved themselves capable of accessing content without the need for industry support. American anime fans were long ignored by the media industries in Japan and the United States. Anime distribution companies have since sought ways to tap into the passion and sense of community among fans. Appeals by the companies to anime fans remain focused on access to content. The next section focuses on the very different rhetorical approaches taken by two companies, FUNimation and Crunchyroll, in their response to fan desires for access.

The Rhetorical Construction of Anime Fan Identity

Identification as a framework focuses on the ways group identity is formed and communicated rhetorically. Any constructions of anime fan identity must take into account the shared history of American anime fandom that views itself as the primary force behind bringing anime to America in its current form. The dominant constructions of anime fan identity circulating today seek to embrace or change this shared history and take on two forms: disciplinary and participatory fandom. In this section, I analyze the rhetoric of FUNimation and Crunchyroll for the ways they illustrate these categories through news articles and blog posts on company websites. I begin by analyzing the disciplinary fandom of FUNimation.

Disciplinary Fandom: FUNimation

FUNimation Entertainment was founded in 1994 (Anime News Network, n. d.). Its founder, Gen Fukunaga, sought to fill the void Leonard labeled a 'cultural sink' (2005: 283), and his company has grown to be the leading distributor in the American anime industry ('From Dragon Ball Z,' 2008: 42). In December 2008, FUNimation launched streaming video on its site (Anime News Network, 2008), with an 'elite subscription' version added to stream high-definition video for a monthly fee in October 2011 (Anime News Network, 2011d). FUNimation has primarily hosted streaming video of its extensive back catalog on its site, though, in recent years, the company has become more committed to pursuing currently-airing simulcasts. The site allows fans to watch full episodes of many FUNimation properties and cuts down on some of the delay between the licensing of a series and its release on DVD and Blu-ray by uploading episodes of a series in advance of a physical release. This also addresses the piracy concerns of the content providers by allowing fans to sample a series before deciding to purchase it, and it raises awareness of the series in anticipation of the pending release, though streaming video may now constitute the sole consumption of a series for many fans. The site launched with a proprietary player and without ads, but ads have since been added at designated spots in the video.

Through its statements related to the streaming of anime content, FUNimation has constructed a disciplinary fandom that focuses on convincing fans to make sure their own consumption and that of other fans conforms to the available content provided by the

industry. Disciplinary fandom fits Michel Foucault's conception of discipline as a system of ever-present surveillance in which subjects come to monitor their own behavior for its adherence to the expectations of those in power (1995: 202-203). Compared to other examples of disciplinary power that sought to establish external controls on consumers, such as the inclusion of DRM software in physical media, disciplinary fandom encourages fans to monitor their own behavior lest any observed deviation lead to the loss of access to content or social exclusion from the fan community. One way FUNimation tries to convince fans to adopt disciplinary fandom is by vigorously defending their copyrighted material and that of their producing partners by issuing 'cease & desist' letters to fansub groups. In 2011, for example, FUNimation sued 1,337 BitTorrent users for illegal distribution of copyrighted material, specifically episodes of the popular series *One Piece* (Anime News Network, 2011b).[4] Eventually, all but one of the defendants was dropped from the suit (Anime News Network, 2011c), but the message was sent that this behavior does not meet FUNimation's image of fandom and will not be tolerated as within the norms of anime fandom.

Another example of FUNimation's construction of disciplinary fandom is seen in the decision by FUNimation and its representatives to participate in a series of 'The Death of Anime' panels at conventions across the United States in the late 2000s (Donovan, 2010: 11). The purpose of the panels was to discuss the impact of fansubs on the declining sales of anime through physical media (Denison, 2011: 462). Fansubs, and, by extension, the fans who created and consumed them, were identified as the primary cause of this decline that would lead to the eventual death of the industry as a whole, both in America and Japan. Hope Donovan argues that what is at issue is conflict between capitalist and gift economies, between viewing fansubs as 'illegal' versus 'a labor of love' (2010: 11). Lance Heiskell, a marketing director at FUNimation, said of fansubs at one such panel, "Back when there were, when nothing was out there, it spread the word . . . Groups would promo anime, but now the fansubbers have become more of a status project. It had a use in the 80s, but that use has pretty much ran its course" (quoted in Donovan, 2010: 20). While acknowledging the historical importance of fan's historical view of themselves as drawing content from Japan, participating in these panels allowed FUNimation to take their message of disciplinary fandom directly to the fans, warning them away from consuming fansubs by arguing that fansubs themselves were no longer relevant in an age of streaming video. Fansubs were transformed through such rhetoric from an active expression of fan engagement to a harmful action taken against the fan community by risking legitimate access to content.

The clearest example of disciplinary fandom can be seen in FUNimation's response to the streaming of the series *Fractale*. After acquiring the streaming rights for the series in January 2011, FUNimation was informed by the Japanese production company (the Fractale Production Committee) after the first episode aired that the streaming of future episodes of the series would not continue until all fansub copies were removed from the Internet (Anime News Network, 2011a), an impossible proposition that seems to be more about making a point than actual terms of a contract. Fans' anger was initially directed at the

Japanese production company for removing access to the content, but FUNimation's response to the situation did little to appease them. In a blog post on FUNimation's website entitled 'Anime Simulcasts, Territory Rights and the Future,' marketing director Lance Heiskell chastised fans for viewing the series illegally and argued that the only way fans would ever get the complete access to content they claim to want would be 'if more of the anime fan base becomes self-policing online and if everyone would adopt watching the official simulcasts.' Heiskell's statement made it clear to many fans, who were not initially upset with the company, that FUNimation's loyalties lay with the Japanese license holders, even in light of their impossible demands. By arguing that access to content was dependent on fan monitoring of other fans' means of viewing, Heiskell and FUNimation as a whole constructed a specific image of anime fandom in America, particularly in relation to the anime industry. In this view, a fan is someone who actively supports the industry by viewing content only through official channels and repudiates those who access content through other means. This image of anime fandom deviates in many ways from the focus of anime fans on their productive role in bringing anime to America.

Heiskell states that his goal is to address criticism of FUNimation and the Japanese production company when, instead, he believes 'the frustration should be directed towards those who distributed the episode illegally without any permission from the rights owners.' While not all anime fans consume fansubs or condone their distribution, the history of anime fandom discussed earlier is constructed around the view that anime fans themselves brought anime to America through their own efforts to distribute the content since there was a seeming lack of interest in releasing the content by the media industries. Heiskell's positioning of fansub distributors goes against this accepted history and creates a constitutive paradox, discussed in more detail below.

After a discussion of territory rights and the control over access to content for different regions, Heiskell argues that the danger of fansubs and other forms of unauthorized distribution is that the content 'is out in the wild with no permission or controls.' It is not surprising that a content producer or distributor would want to maintain control of their content, but Heiskell then identifies the role of the fan in maintaining this control. 'The only way we can get to 100% is if more of the anime fan base becomes self-policing online and if everyone would adopt watching the official simulcasts.' In an appeal to the fans' desire for access, he also positions them as solely responsible for maintaining this access. It is important to note that he says that the 'anime fan base' must become 'self-policing online.' It is not just about individual fans policing their own behavior but about the fandom as a whole policing its behavior. Not only must fans control their own consumption, they must also seek to control the consumption of others. In this blog post, Heiskell offers a vision for a disciplinary fandom, a fandom focused solely on consuming officially licensed products and eventually doing away with unauthorized distribution completely through its own self-policing. This creates a constitutive paradox by going against the view of anime fandom held by many fans themselves.

The statements made by FUNimation in regards to anime fans needing to police the consumption of content online may appeal to some fans while making others feel their options are being constrained in order to support the profits of a single company. In line with Kenneth Zagacki's discussion of the differing qualities that are seen as intrinsic and extrinsic to a group by a rhetor and members of the group (2007: 276), FUNimation created a constitutive paradox in their response to the *Fractale* situation; in order to accept the construction of anime fandom being offered by the company, fans would have to accept their own continued responsibility for the lack of access to content, a responsibility that does not fit with the self-conception of many anime fans. Heiskell's blog post presents this responsibility as an intrinsic part of anime fan identity while it is understood by many fans themselves as an extrinsic quality thrust upon them by a company in response to a particular situation. The image of fan identity offered by FUNimation figures responsibility for lack of access to content as an inherent aspect of anime fan identity, not just the cause of the removal of access to an individual series. This runs counter to the perspective on anime fan history in which anime fan activities (primarily fansubbing) are seen as the sole provider of access for decades before companies showed interest in the content. Making attribution of blame for the lack of access an inherent part of anime fan identity results in a constitutive paradox.

The purpose behind Heiskell's blog in response to the *Fractale* debacle is as much to construct an image of anime fans that involves exclusive consumption of official releases as it is to respond to the crisis at hand. In regards to FUNimation in particular, addressing anime fans as the source of the problem that led to decreased access to content does not fit the image many anime fans have of themselves and of the fandom in general. Accusing fans of reducing access to content flies in the face of their own history of making anime texts available to other interested parties when no company had any financial interest in the content. FUNimation attempted to reorient the history of anime fandom and address a new group of anime fans who have only experienced content through official means and who have no experience with or investment in the image of the anime fan as provider of access to content. This attempt to construct a new ideal anime fan, though, only served to alienate the existing fan base. Disciplinary fandom does have its appeal to certain groups within anime fandom, and FUNimation and other companies need to determine whether this appeal is the result of blanket support of the anime distribution companies' rights to profit from the distribution of content as part of a capitalistic industry or if it is the result of the fear of discipline for seeking content outside of official channels if they plan to continue supporting this image of fandom.

Disciplinary fandom supports the control of content by media companies by rhetorically constructing an image of fandom that rejects any access to content that exists outside of officially licensed products. Other examples of this include the Recording Industry Association of America's attempts to control the spread of online music downloads through litigation and Disney's decision to classify all existing works in the *Star Wars* universe outside of the films non-canon in order to maintain control of the official narrative. Actions

like these support an image of fans as needing to be suspicious of each other lest they lose their desired accessed to content. A more participatory relationship between media companies and fans, though, can be seen in Crunchyroll's rhetorical construction of a participatory fandom.

Participatory Fandom: Crunchyroll

Crunchyroll has focused since its launch on the concurrent release of anime through simulcasts and positions itself as a larger part of the fan community as part of constructing a participatory image of fandom. The site, like YouTube, began as a way for friends to share anime videos. The decision was made in 2008 to focus on offering streaming video of copyrighted content, so user-uploaded fansubs and the ability for users to upload videos were removed (Shinji, 2008). Xiaochang Li argues that Crunchyroll's initial business model is an example of a company trying to profit from the sharing economy-based work of fans (2009: 23-24). Fan dissatisfaction with this violation, as much as the possibility of greater profits, may have prompted Crunchyroll's transformation into a streaming video service for officially-licensed content. Since the change, the site has been devoted to streaming as many series from each new season in Japan as possible.[5] Most of the content on Crunchyroll is free, but the site does offer premium content; for a small, monthly fee, users get access to the streaming anime videos a week earlier than non-paying members, without ads and at higher resolution. Lessig argues that access, whether it is free or not, is the desire of the YouTube generation (2008: 46), and Crunchyroll is testing that desire for access with its premium membership. Immediate access is what anime fans have always wanted; Crunchyroll offers that for a small fee or users can wait a week a view the content for free.

In contrast to FUNimation's disciplinary fandom, Crunchyroll promotes a participatory fandom by seeking to position itself as an active part of the fan community, doing everything it can to provide access to as much anime content as possible and providing a space for connection and communication between anime fans on its forums. The site has streamed at least five new series each season since the summer 2010 anime season, reaching a high point of fifty-one new series in fall 2016. Providing access to a large number of series each season positions Crunchyroll as more in line with anime fandom's conception of itself as playing a vital role in drawing content from Japan than FUNimation's disciplinary fandom and its focus on fan self-policing. Building on this positioning of itself as consistent with the fan view of their role, Crunchyroll's rhetorical construction of participatory fandom can be seen in its positioning of messages regarding news and updates related to the site. All news related to the site is posted as part of the site's forum, the location of fan discussion. While the news and updates receive prominent featuring on the site's homepage that fan discussions do not, the content itself is still located within the forums; clicking on a link to a site update takes you to a forum post, not a special news section. The company's employees also adopt usernames, such as *tiffako* and *lugiamania*, and avatars consistent with the ways fans present their own identities on the site. Even the company's founder goes by the username *shinji* when posting information on the site. This

positioning is an important aspect of participatory fandom because it communicates that the company and its employees are equal to the fans.

Along with the location of its site announcements, the style and tone used by the company also construct an image of Crunchyroll and its fans as equals in the same fan community. Brand manager *tiffako* begins an announcement of new licenses for the spring 2015 season with 'Hey hey! Good morning everyone~!♪♪' The casual tone and use of musical notes as punctuation is more associated with texting or social media messages than with official announcements by a media company. Brand manager *lugiamania* ends a similar announcement with the message 'Don't blink, because we have more announcements coming your way for Crunchyroll's Spring 2015 lineup!' The message encourages fans to continue to participate actively in the site or else risk missing the latest announcements. Given the importance of access for many anime fans, appealing to fans as active participants who will get the latest news as a result of their participation is an effective strategy.

The tone and style of Crunchyroll's messages changes, though, when it comes to any delays in content. While providing access to a high number of simulcasts each season and positioning the company rhetorically as an active part of the fan community creates a participatory fandom that draws many fans to the site, the delay of content is a continuing issue the company faces. After announcing the acquisition of the series *Amagi Brilliant Park* on May 20, 2015, for example, the company was forced to remove the episodes the next day and delay their release for over a week. The message posted on the series' page read 'Availability Information: Due to technical issues, the streaming of Amagi Brilliant Park will be delayed from the previously announced time. We thank you for patience and understanding.' In an example of Josh Heuman's entanglement of norms and laws in the discourse surrounding fan engagement with media content (2013: 189-190), this message regarding delayed access is more legal in tone compared to the casual tone of the license announcements. The positioning of the message was also completely different. Compared to the homepage positioning of the licensing announcements, the message about the delay of access to *Amagi Brilliant Park*'s episodes could only be found on the series page, meaning that fans would have to specifically seek out information about the series in order to find the message. The series is also not an exception as Crunchyroll routinely positions information about delays only on a series' individual page, never on the site's homepage. If Crunchyroll truly embraces the image of participatory fandom it has constructed, it must maintain this image even when the situation might upset fans. The positioning of messages regarding delays of access when compared to licensing announcements implies that Crunchyroll is only truly committed to participatory fandom when it is able to give fans what they want, retreating to legalistic discourse whenever problems arise. Being an equal part of a fan community requires being open and honest with fans at all times. Crunchyroll must consider all that being part of a fan community implies if it wants to continue to appeal to fans through the image of participatory fandom.

Participatory fandom can provide tremendous rewards in the form of an extremely engaged consumer base, but it has its perils in balancing the interests of the community

with the realities of content production and distribution. Crunchyroll's handling of delays in access reveals some of the limitations in a participatory fandom advanced by media companies in that they want the fans to think of them as equal members of the community but only on their own terms. Crunchyroll is happy to encourage fans to actively participate in the community created through their site, but when it comes to actual information about the content fans love, Crunchyroll becomes tight-lipped. Fans are left to speculate while Crunchyroll maintains total control over information and access.

Participatory fandom positions the company and fans as equals and may help the company appear to be an active part of the fan community, but it also opens the company up to criticism from fans when unexpected delays or other situations arise. The funding of media content and other projects through sites like Kickstarter is another example of participatory fandom in that through their contributions, fans are able to see themselves as active contributors to the success of a product. Together, disciplinary and participatory fandom provide two contrasting examples of the images of anime fandom adopted by anime distribution companies in their online discourse.

Conclusion

The differences in the messages presented by these two anime distribution companies in their online discourse aim to construct contrasting images of anime fandom: disciplinary and participatory. Disciplinary fandom positions fans as responsible for policing their own consumption and the consumption of other fans in order to support the economic success of the industry while participatory fandom seeks to position the company and the fans as equals, both active parts of a shared fan community. While an individual company or fan group may be predisposed to a particular image of fandom, either can be adopted to respond to a particular situation.

The introduction of the ideas of disciplinary and participatory fandom contributes to fan studies by focusing on the images of fans constructed through their consumption of media content, not the fan practices engaged in in response to that content. Future research should focus on applying the different constructions of fandom to different fan groups and companies focused on media content other than anime. Another useful focus of future research would be the analysis of internal communications of media companies to determine their awareness of these differing images of fandom. The ability or failure to recognize the image of fandom being employed might help to determine the success of a media project.

The constructing of different fan identities through the deployment of particular images of fandom also contributes to the existing literature on identification and rhetoric by advancing the notion that different, opposing ideas can be offered of what it means to be part of a group. Much of the existing scholarship focuses on single identities that are offered for confirmation or denial by group members. Identification does imply a contested identity, thus the need for rhetoric to help define the identity. The existing scholarship, however, has generally focused on one prominent identity construction that has been advanced instead

of on multiple competing identity constructions that have been advanced by important constituencies within the larger group. Future research should focus on determining if this is a stage that the rhetoric of all groups goes through as they establish a clear group identity or if there is something unique about anime fandom or fan identity as a whole that leads to this lack of clarity.

Access to content is an important feature of rhetorical constructions of anime fandom. FUNimation responds to desires for more access by arguing that anime fans must learn to self-police their consumption while Crunchyroll positions itself as seeking only to provide fans with what they want since they are both equal members of the community. In September 2016, Crunchyroll and FUNimation announced a partnership that involves Crunchyroll streaming subtitled simulcasts while FUNimation focuses on English-dubbed versions (Anime News Network, 2016). This new partnership may change the rhetoric of the two companies, but the images of anime fandom they advanced will continue to circulate among anime fans. These competing constructions will continue to shape the available images of anime fandom for the foreseeable future.

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Notes:

[1] The move online is important to consider because, as Paul Booth and Peter Kelly point out, 'the online world is often welcoming to new voices, new experiences, and new perspectives' (2013: 62). While it is not a focus of this article, the effect of the shift online for fandoms the originated in offline interactions should not be underestimated.

[2] Access is not the driving force for all anime fans, not even all fans in America, but it is important for many fans. For example, method of release, whether streaming, physical media, fansubbed, or dubbed, may matter more to some fans rather than how quickly a series is released. Access may not matter at all to other fans who prioritize other fan practices, such as creating a cosplay costume for a favorite character, chatting with friends about a series on an online fan forum, or learning to play a song from a favorite show with a band.

[3] Fans are also hailed by messages from other fans, of course, but it is the attempts to create identification between fans and anime distribution companies that are the focus in this article.

[4] The choice of number of defendants was purposeful as 1337 is a deliberate reference to leetspeak, an internet lexicon that replaces letters with numbers; 1337 is the general spelling of 'leet' in leetspeak (leet being a reference to 'elite'). Those who use leetspeak to communicate online position themselves as expert users of the Internet and are conflated here with the audience for fansubs so suing this specific number is a direct reference to the kind of person expected to create and consume fansubs.

[5] There are four seasons in which anime airs in Japan over the course of a year: winter (January-March), spring (April-June), summer (July-September), and fall (October-December). Spring and fall are the most popular seasons in which the highest-profile series debut. It has become more common now for series to last for only one season of 12-13 episodes, with another series of similar length replacing it for the next season, though some series still air for two seasons of 24-26 episodes or even longer.