

Guided by superpowers: Building role models out of geek culture

*Mi norte tiene superpoderes:
Construyendo modelos de conducta
a partir de la cultura friki*

*Meu norte tem superpoderes: Construindo
modelos a partir da cultura geek*
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This paper addresses geek culture in Mexico and looks at how fandoms are integrated, as well as the processes through which role models are shaped out of the fantastic narratives at their center. Using ethnographic methods, it was observed that geek culture consists of fandoms grouped together around a variety of different fantastic narratives (comics, anime, videogames), and these, in turn, inspire specific behavioral models, according to their stage of life and specific needs at that time.

KEYWORDS: Geek culture, fandoms, behavioral models, fantastic narratives.

Este artículo explica qué es la cultura friki en México, cuáles son las comunidades de fans que la integran, así como el proceso a través del cual los frikis construyen sus modelos de conducta a partir de las narrativas fantásticas que la conforman. Mediante el método etnográfico se pudo observar que la cultura friki está constituida por comunidades de fans de ciertas narrativas fantásticas (cómic, anime, videojuegos) y que los frikis construyen sus modelos de conducta inspirados por ellas, en función de su etapa de vida y de las necesidades de guía que requieren en ese momento.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Cultura friki, comunidades de fans, modelos de conducta, narrativas fantásticas.

Este artigo explica o que é a cultura geek no México, quais são as comunidades de fãs que a compõem, bem como o processo pelo qual os geeks constroem seus modelos a partir das fantásticas narrativas que a compõem. Utilizando o método etnográfico, foi possível observar que a cultura geek é formada por comunidades de fãs de determinadas narrativas fantásticas (quadrinhos, anime, videogames) e que os geeks constroem seus modelos de comportamento inspirados nelas, com base em sua fase de vida e nas necessidades de orientação que eles exigem naquele momento.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Cultura geek, comunidades de fãs, modelos, narrativas fantásticas.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, researchers from several disciplines of Social Sciences and Humanities, like Communication, Sociology, Anthropology or Literary Studies, have become interested in studying the phenomenon that theoreticians like Jenkins (2009) or Hills (2002) have referred to as *fan cultures of mass media*. Whether they focus on the analysis of the cultural products which create these types of expressions (such as comic books, book series, movies, television series or videogames), or try to understand the way fans appropriate, redefine, or share these narratives in communities of meaning, both on and offline. Among these fan cultures we can find geek culture,² understood as a group of fan communities or *fandoms*, which includes fans of Japanese anime or manga (*otaku*), videogames (*gamers*), cosplay (*cosplayers*), comic books and movies, television series and/or literature mainly from the fantasy, science fiction or horror genres (Camacho Quiroz, 2021).

Even when, as time goes by, this culture has consolidated itself in Mexico, as evidenced by the existence of “Frikiplazas” in various states of the Mexican Republic or the organization of comic books, anime and videogames conventions throughout the country, available research on that culture which addresses it as the community of fandoms that it is reduced³ and, in general, it focuses on a specific fandom, be it the *otaku* or the *gamer*, leaving aside the evident links between one and the other, or between these fandoms and the cosplayer or comic book communities, to give an example.

Furthermore, these investigations are notably scattered, as there is no line of research that groups together all these papers at Communication

² The term *geek culture* is built from the theoretical proposal of symbolic anthropology from the approach of culture by Giménez (2005), where it “represents the set of shared traits within a group which are, ostensibly, not shared (or not fully shared) outside of it” (p. 5); and one of its main features is to provide with identities those individuals who integrate it; in this case, geeks.

³ Two of the few examples available on the web are the thesis by Hernández Núñez (2015), and Valadez Tapia’s (2019) paper presentation.

or Social Sciences schools in Mexico, as it does happen in other countries. The reasons vary and are related to the fact that many prejudices remain in academia when studying these types of phenomena, perceiving them as superfluous or as having lesser social relevance, even when the empirical reality and the number of young people that integrate this culture and/or wish to study it proves otherwise. In addition to this, the geek culture phenomenon is very complex, since it is very recent, with unclear frontiers and constantly transforming, in such a way that seizing it and trying to outline it for its research presents a constant challenge.

There is a variety of phenomena that could be studied about geek culture in Mexico, however, this article will focus on one in particular: the construction process of behavioral models that geeks carry out based on the fantastic narratives which integrate them, whether these are Japanese anime or manga, comic books from United States, videogames or fantasy literary sagas, on the understanding that these narratives can be considered contemporary or new mythologies, since they allow their members to understand certain aspects of reality, and to find, in the diverse characters that dwell on these fantastic worlds, a variety of role models (Campbell, 2004) to serve as guidelines for their daily lives, and which allow them to face the trials and tribulations that are presented to them day to day.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The theoretical perspective from which this research is addressed consists of three pillars: a) the reception studies with a culturalist approach (López, 2017), since it is based on the assumption that geeks are reader-consumers with agency and critical thinking, who analyze the media content they consume, and that they form communities of interpretation where, apart from sharing common meanings, they debate around those contents, proposing reinterpretations of them, and even create new works based on these transmedia narratives (Jenkins, 2009, 2010); b) the symbolic conception of culture and identity, since, based on the theoretical proposal by Giménez (2005, 2016), it is possible to understand the process through which identities are constructed within a particular culture: geek culture. And lastly, c) the contemporary

studies on myth, on the understanding that the main purpose of all mythology is to provide behavioral models to human beings, and that the narratives which integrate geek culture can be considered new or contemporary mythologies, therefore, can provide behavioral models to their members (Campbell, 2004; Eliade, 1991).

In terms of the methodology used to approach the object of research, the ethnographic method was selected, in particular: participative observation and semi-structured interviews, since the exercise was to understand the process of symbolic construction from the personal experience of social actors (Ameigeiras, 2006; Guber, 2011). Based on participative observation, the subjects of research who would integrate the significant sample were selected for interview. Once the corpus was built, the corpus of work was classified to construct and interpret analysis categories, with the main ones being: a) geek culture, b) geek identity, and c) construction of behavioral models.

In this regard, it is important to highlight that participative observation was carried out in four venues relevant to the geek community of Mexico: the anime, comic book and videogame conventions, TNT, La Mole and Conque, as well as the Frikiplaza of Mexico City. Based on participative observation, the subjects of research were selected who would constitute the significant sample,⁴ and who would be interviewed. These individuals had to meet various requirements. First, they had to self-identify as geeks; second, they had to belong to at least one fandom which comprise the geek culture of Mexico (be it the otaku, gamer, cosplayer or other fandom); third, the age range had to be wide, in such a way that the significant sample included various generations. And, lastly, to achieve certain gender equilibrium, the number of men and women interviewed had to be as even as possible (six women and four men).

⁴ The significant sample was comprised of ten subjects of research, since the information gathered during the semi-structured interviews was extensive and was able to answer the pivotal question of this research. Furthermore, the participative observation allowed to identify the most adequate sample for this work.

TABLE 1
PROFILES OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

Name/ pseudonym	Identity/ fandom	Age	Gender	Occupation
Martín Arceo	Geek/comic books fan	65	M	Columnist at <i>La Jornada</i> and host of <i>¡Santos cómics!</i> (Rompeviento TV)
Gabriela Maya	Geek	49	F	Educator and historian. Pioneer in the promotion of anime and manga in Mexico
Maik	Geek/comic books fan	34	M	High School professor
Alfredo	Geek/otaku	33	M	Administrative worker at Centro Universitario de Teatro (UNAM)
Neko	Geek/otaku	31	F	Middle school professor
Hitomi	Geek/cosplayer	28	F	Dietitian and professional cosplayer
Carito	Geek/otaku	22	F	Private nurse
Jorge	Geek/otaku	20	M	Nursing student
Bolis	Geek	16	F	High school student
Nisuka	Geek/gamer	14	F	Middle school student

Note: The use of full names or pseudonyms was authorized by the research subjects.

Source: The author.

GEEK CULTURE AND IDENTITY IN MEXICO

The geek culture of Mexico is a living, open, contingent culture, meaning, it transforms constantly. Furthermore, it is a community with an heterogenous, transgenerational and *glocal* nature, comprising a variety of fandoms, among which we can highlight otakus, gamers,

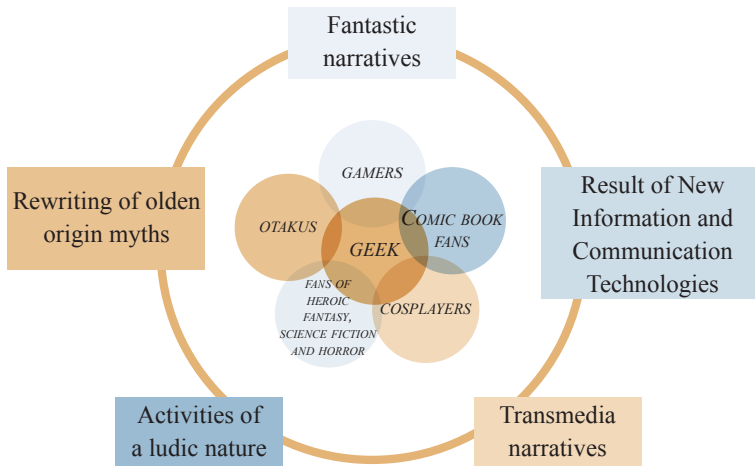
cosplayers, comic books fans and fans of literature, films, and television series of the fantasy, science fiction or horror genres. All of these cultural products and manifestations have in common that they stem from fantastic narratives; they are, for the most part, the result of information and communication technologies; and all of them have transcended their original platforms, expanding their stories to other mass media, for which they can be considered transmedia narratives (Jenkins, 2009, 2010). Taking part in these hobbies always carries a ludic nature and, lastly, most of the stories behind anime, manga, comic books, etc. can be considered upgrades of olden original myths, like the classical Greek, Chinese or Japanese mythologies, amongst others.

For example, Superman (DC Comics) could be considered a rewriting of the Greek myth of Apollo, while Flash could be read as the god Hermes and Aquaman as Poseidon (Espino Martín, 2020). Thor, from Marvel Comics, could be an update of the Norse god with the same name. Meanwhile, in terms of Japanese animation, the main character of *Dragon Ball* (Toei Animation, 1986), Son Goku, is inspired by the mythical character of Sun Wukong, one of the main protagonists of the classical Chinese tale *Journey to the West*. Not to mention the characters from the fantasy universe of *Saint Seiya* (Toei Animation, 1986), many of which are direct embodiments of gods, heroes, and creatures of Greek classic mythology (Athena, Poseidon, Hades), Norse mythology (Thor, Siegfried, Fenrir), and Japanese mythology (Ryūjin, Marishi-Ten), to name a few.

In this community of fandoms, it is possible to identify, at least, three generations of geeks:

- a) The *Founding Fathers*: those fans who grew up in the seventies and enjoyed in national broadcast TV anime like *Astro Boy* (Tetsuwan Atomu, Mushi Production, 1963-1966), *Ultraman* (TBS, 1966-1967) and/or *Ribon no Kishi* (Tezuka Production/Mushi Production, 1967-1968). They were the first ones in achieving the evolution from individual pastime to collective hobby.
- b) The *Geek boom generation*: integrated by fans who grew up in the nineties with the “Mexican anime boom” (hence the name), thanks to animations like *Saint Seiya* (Toei Animation, 1986), *Sailor*

FIGURE 1
CONCEPT MAP OF GEEK CULTURE



Source: The author.

Moon (Toei Animation, 1992) and/or *Dragon Ball* (Toei Animation, 1986). They were the first ones to self-identify as “otaku”, when the first fanzines published by the Founding Fathers (like *Animanga*, *Domo* or *Plan B*) popularized the term. They also experienced the “superhero comic book boom”, with the inauguration of the first comic bookstores in the country, and the arrival of major titles from Marvel and DC Comics, edited by Grupo Editorial Vid. They also experienced the birth of the gamer scene with the broadcasting of the television show *Nintendomanía* (TV Azteca, 1995-2000) and the publishing of the magazine *Club Nintendo* (Editorial Televisa, 1991-2019). Lastly, they were the first fans who had a meeting place for shared consumption and exchange of products, knowledge, and meanings in the shape of the first conventions dedicated to comic books, anime, and videogames.

- c) The *Centennial geeks* or *new geeks*: those who grew up in the first decade of the new millennium, with almost unlimited access to the entire range of Japanese animation, manga, comic books, and more, that was being produced around the world thanks to the widespread use of the Internet. This generation has lived, like no other, the popularization of some of the products and expressions unique to geek culture, like movies and series from superhero comic books, literary fantasy and science fiction sagas, combat or sports videogames, and/or Japanese animations with an epic sense.

That being said, even when there is no consensus on the meaning of the term *geek* in Mexico, it can be concluded that there are three main definitions based on the empirical work resulting from this research: 1) it is used to describe people who are “very passionate”, in the sense that they feel a profound emotion for some object or cultural activity; 2) it can be used as a synonym to the terms *clavado* or *clavel*, used to define those individuals with an in-depth knowledge, almost experts, about the objects or activities which interest them; and 3) it is used to name those fans to narratives and expressions in the Fantastic genre, that belong to the popular media culture, such as: comic books, anime, and videogames and/or literature, films or television series from the science fiction, horror or heroic fantasy genres. It is in this sense that our subjects of research will identify themselves as geeks.

The geek is an active reader-consumer, with agency, who has appropriated the various existing platforms of consumption and communication (like the Web 2.0, and the socio-digital networks), both to obtain those contents they want when there are no legal means to gain access to them, as well as to create communities of meaning and interpretation. In these, they share, analyze and debate those fantastic narratives they are passionate about, proposing rewritings of the stories, characters, creating new contents from them (memes, *fanart*,⁵ *fanfics*,⁶

⁵ Illustrations, images, paintings, etc., created by fans of a character, setting, universe, that belongs to a specific cultural product, be it a comic book, manga, videogame, TV series, etc.

⁶ Alternative retellings created by fans of a previous narrative, labeled “canon”, be it a literary work, film, television series, a comic book, etc.

fanvids,⁷ etc.), and organizing with other geeks to “pressure” content creators or to boycott television networks when they feel that their demands are not being met.

Geeks build communities of meaning and interpretation to interact socially and to share their interests, be it in face-to-face or virtual settings. Among the most important face-to-face settings there are conventions focused on anime, comic books, videogames; Frikiplazas, fan clubs, and/or any other venue where the members of the geek culture can meet to express their identity freely. In terms of virtual settings, it is impossible to list each of them due to the nature of the medium in which they were created (cyberspace), however, we can mention *fansites*,⁸ *fanpages*⁹ and fan groups in Facebook, as they are the most used.

Lastly, aside from providing their participants with a series of cultural attributes which enables them to construct an identity, geek culture also presents a mythological framework from which they can create behavioral models that will guide them in their daily lives, and that will allow them to face the diverse obstacles they will find in life, as will be explained in the following section.

⁷ Videos edited by fans about a preexisting audiovisual material, be it a film, television series, a music video, an anime, etc.

⁸ Unofficial webpages created by fans of a particular celebrity or cultural product or phenomenon. Generally, these spaces offer relevant information on the object of their interest, be it news, images taken from various sources, multimedia downloads, links to other fansites, or a forum used by communities to interact.

⁹ A *fanpage* is a Facebook page created by mainstream media for cultural products to establish a direct way of communication with fans or supporters of said products, since they are also users of this socio-digital network; in these pages, fans can not only interact with the official media, but also among themselves, as they share information, images, memes, etc.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF BEHAVIORAL MODELS BASED ON GEEK CULTURE IN MEXICO

According to the experts in comparative mythology, Eliade (1991) and Campbell (2004), the main role of myths is to provide behavioral models to human beings. These models will propose a guide or compass for the path to follow and how they can face the trials and tribulations of life. For both researchers, the mass culture, in particular media products like comic books and epic novels, can be considered as the mythology of our times or as new mythologies. In this regard, Eliade (1991) states:

Characters in *comic strips* (comic books) present a modern version of mythological or folkloric heroes. They embody to such an extent the ideal of a large portion of society, that eventual adjustments to their conduct or, worse still, their death, trigger real crises in the readers (p. 86).

Nevertheless, inside these fantastic narratives, geeks find guides and, at the same time, alternatives to role models in the characters which have left a mark throughout their life, those they consider their favorite characters, whether they belong to an epic fantasy literary saga, a superhero comic book, or a Japanese animation series.

To assist the understanding of the process through which geeks shape their behavioral models, a table was first designed which includes the names of the favorite characters of our research subjects, the platform in which they consume their stories, the year of release, and the country of origin from these characters, as well as their main characteristics. After that, the main behavioral models that the subjects have constructed based on them were classified.

As shown in the table above, the period in which these characters were created spans over a century, from 1905 (the oldest) to 2017 (the most recent). However, there is a segment in this timeline where most of the “births” of these characters are concentrated: the end of the 20th century and early 21st century. This concentration is not incidental, since it is placed at a key moment for the consolidation of geek culture in Mexico: The Japanese animation boom, the birth of the comic book

TABLE 2
FAVORITE CHARACTERS

Name	Consumption platform	Year of release	Country of origin	Nationality	Species	Gender	Special abilities
Sara Crewe	Novel, <i>A Little Princess</i>	1905	United States	British	Human	Female	None in particular
Kal-El (original), Clark Joseph Kent (terrestrial)/ Superman	Comic book	1938	United States	American	Kryptonian	Male	Superhuman strength, super speed, super stamina, among others
Richard John “Dick” Grayson	Comic book	1940	United States	American	Human	Male	Detective, acrobat, martial artist, among others
Frodo Baggins	Literary saga, <i>The Lord of the Rings</i>	1954	United Kingdom	Citizen of the fictional community “The Shire”	Hobbit	Male	Sword wielder
Peter Benjamin Parker/ Spiderman	Comic book	1962	United States	American	Human (with mutant powers)	Male	Genius, superhuman strength, super agility, among others

Name	Consumption platform	Year of release	Country of origin	Nationality	Species	Gender	Special abilities
Sapphire	Animated series, <i>Ribon no Kishi</i>	1967	Japan	Citizen of the fictional kingdom “Silverland”	Human	Female	Sword wielder
Lynn Minmay	Animated feature film, <i>The Super Dimension Fortress Macross: Do You Remember Love?</i>	1984	Japan	Chinese Japanese	Human	Female	Vocal talent
Gemini Kanon	Animated series, <i>Saint Seiya</i>	1986	Japan	Greek	Semi-divine	Male	Can create portals to other dimensions, can mind control his opponents, among others
Link	Videogame series	1986	Japan	Citizen of the fictional kingdom “Hyrule”	Hylian	Male	Holder of the Triforce of Courage
Asuka Langley Sohryu	Animated series, <i>Neon Genesis Evangelion</i>	1995	Japan	American (Of German and Japanese descent)	Human	Female	Child Prodigy

Name	Consumption platform	Year of release	Country of origin	Nationality	Species	Gender	Special abilities
Kenshin Himura	Animated series, <i>Rurōni Kenshin: Meiji Kenkaku Romantan</i>	1996	Japan	Japanese	Human	Male	Master of <i>kenjutsu</i> (Japanese fencing)
Sakura Kinomoto	Animated series, <i>Cardcaptor Sakura</i>	1998	Japan	Japanese	Human	Female	Can feel and use magic
Tomoyo Daidouji	Animated series, <i>Cardcaptor Sakura</i>	1998	Japan	Japanese	Human	Female	None in particular
Inuyasha	Animated series, <i>Sengoku Otogizōshi InuYasha</i>	2000	Japan	Japanese	<i>Hanyō</i> (half demon, half human)	Male	Masters various combat techniques
Nana Osaki	Animated series, <i>Nana</i>	2006	Japan	Japanese	Human	Female	Vocal talent
Gintoki Sakata	Animated series, <i>Gintama</i>	2006	Japan	Japanese	Human	Male	Master of <i>kenjutsu</i> , superhuman strength
Hiroki Kamijou	Animated series, <i>Junjo Romantica</i>	2008	Japan	Japanese	Human	Male	None in particular

Name	Consumption platform	Year of release	Country of origin	Nationality	Species	Gender	Special abilities
Hyoudou Issei	Animated series, <i>High School DxD</i>	2012	Japan	Japanese	Human-demon	Male	Multiple special powers since the legendary “Red Dragon Emperor” is trapped inside his left arm
Meliodas	Animated series, <i>Nanatsu no Taizai</i>	2014	Japan	Citizen of the fictional continent “Britannia”	Demon	Male	Immortal, has magic powers
Jim Hopper	Television series, <i>Stranger Things</i>	2016	United States	American	Human	Male	None in particular
Forsythe Pendleton “Jughead” Jones III	Television series, <i>Riverdale</i> , based on the characters of <i>Archie Comics</i>	2017	United States	American	Human	Male	High deductive ability

Source: The author.

scene, and the popularization of Web 2.0, which would allow a more widespread access to various platforms of media consumption.

This diversity, both in multimedia and transmedia terms, manifests itself in the variety of platforms chosen as receptacles of the adventures of their favorite characters. Starting with printed books, followed by comic books, and even animated feature films, television series (both analog and digital), and videogames. However, beyond the variety of platforms, the prevalence of certain cultural industries above others is evident in the diet of the geek culture in Mexico.

As shown in Table 2, from the 21 chosen characters, 14 were created in Japan, six in the United States, and one in the United Kingdom. Among the characters with a terrestrial nationality: nine are Japanese, six are American, one is British, one is Greek, and the others are native to fictional kingdoms, countries or cities. This data allows a deeper understanding of the cultural, identity-based, and even philosophical elements which shape their behaviors. While carrying out a detailed analysis of the ethical codes that guide each of the characters and their relation to the culture they come from goes beyond the objective of this research, knowing this origin helps us grasp more easily the cultural influences behind the behavioral models that our research subjects created from them. For example, in the case of Superman, the influence of Anglo-Saxon Protestantism is evident in his code of conduct; in the same manner, it is possible to identify elements from Japanese Shintoism and Buddhism in the moral compass of Kenshin Himura.

Another important fact is that, with fantastic universes as wide as these, inhabited by an almost infinite variety of species, most of the characters chosen are humans. Just a small number of them are fantastic beings (demigods, demons, and more) or aliens. In addition to this, just over one half of them have superhuman powers (super strength, super speed, super vision, etc.) or extraordinary abilities (child prodigies, brilliant military strategists, masters of different martial arts), while others don't possess any extraordinary ability (for example, they are just high school students, aspiring singers, or college professors).

From this data we can draw the following conclusions: First, beyond the generation that our informants belong to (Founding Fathers, Geek Boom Generation, or Centennial Geeks), the characters that

inspire them the most have something in common with them, which is fundamental: they are human. They belong to the same species: homo sapiens. However, despite having extraordinary abilities or superpowers, when it is the case, they are not perfect human beings; on the contrary, they are filled with insecurities, capitulations, “demons”, for which they could be considered “antiheroes”, on the understanding that an antihero is a fictional character “whose characteristics and behavior do not correspond with those of a traditional hero” (Real Academia de la Lengua Española, 2021), since, far from having admirable qualities, they are, in the words of Leibbrandt (2019):

...antisocial... estranged, cruel, unpleasant, passive, pitiful, dull, or simply ordinary, but, above all, a protagonist who lives using their own moral compass as guide, striving to define and build their own values, opposite to those recognized by the society they live in (p. 103).

Are we living in antiheroic times? It is difficult to answer this question, but the fact is that heroes are a product of their times, they represent values and virtues that prevail in a specific society. By the same token, antiheroes reflect a failed, disenchanting society, with a dubious system of values, which does not correspond with reality. In this sense, antiheroes can also be a critique to the Manichaeism and one-dimensionality of heroes, to their lack of “gradation” (they are either black or white). For this reason, they stand out for having multiple defects, they possess an ambiguous moral compass, and ethical code that can be individualistic, but at the same time, they are the most human and realistic characters to be found in any narrative.

Another interesting fact that can be taken from this selection and that says a lot about the hegemonic roles still imposed by the transmedia narratives that are consumed (whether American or Japanese) is that most of the chosen characters are men, of Caucasian appearance, and explicitly heterosexual, even when half of the significant sample is composed by women. One possible reason for this lies in the protagonism and agency that is often attributed to male characters (as opposed to female characters) in the narratives described throughout the 20th century and in the 21st century so far, despite all efforts and

progress towards including and developing female lead characters that are more active and dynamic.

In this regard, it is worthwhile to emphasize that two of the characters belong to the LGBT community: Tomoyo Daidouji (from *Cardcaptor Sakura*) and Hiroki Kamijou (from *Junjo Romantica*), a fact that could seem small (since it is the minority), but that proves to be very relevant if we take into consideration that it speaks about the gradual adjustment of traditional role models (both heroes and heroines used to be heterosexual by default), as well as the normalization of diverse sexual preferences in younger generations, since those who selected these characters as their favorites belong to the Geek Boom Generation, and the Centennial Geeks, respectively.

After outlining the selected characters and their general characteristics, a classification of the behavioral models identified through the answers given by our subjects of research will be presented. What is it that they find inspiring in these characters?

BEHAVIORAL MODELS

The first behavioral model that stands out from the rest, for having the broadest group consensus, is the *model of heroism*. According to the interviewed subjects, a hero is the one who uses their talents, qualities, and privileges to serve others, to serve their community.

What I constantly find in the geek culture sagas that I like is the idea of heroism, as Uncle Ben Parker (from *Spiderman*) said: “With great power comes great responsibility”. The idea that your talents and strengths, everything you can do, should be placed at the service of others (Maik, 34 years old).

Secondly, the *model of resilience* stands out. Meaning the ability of human beings of resisting the brunt of life without giving up, of finding the necessary strength to get up again, despite the pain and wounds, and keep going.

My favorite characters have taught me that, despite anything, I should get up again, that I can do it... That idea, that you must keep standing up, even when life keeps beating you, once and again, is what I find wonderful... In the end, that is the reason you get up from bed the next morning, even when life isn't always what you would want (Alfredo, 33 years old).

Thirdly is the *model of compassion*. A quality which allows us to find ourselves in the eyes of others, feel their pain as our own, walk in their shoes, and try to help them stand up again.

I remember that, when I was a teenager, I read *The Lord of the Rings* saga for the first time, and then I saw the movies and thought, "Frodo is so boring!". I wanted to see Legolas and Aragorn fighting against the orcs! But as I went on living life, I learned so much more, and I now realize that one of the most beautiful moments of the saga is when Galadriel says: "Even the smallest person can change the course of the future". For this reason, Frodo is the hero because his race is not quasi-magical, he isn't the legitimate heir of a throne, he is only a kid, from a very small race, who has a very simple life... And suddenly, the whole fate of the world lies in his hands! None of Aragorn's battles has any meaning if Frodo doesn't destroy the ring. And then, at the end, when Frodo can't kill Gollum, I remember thinking, "Frodo is so stupid!". But later I realized that what made Frodo a hero was his immense compassion... When he refuses to kill Gollum, it is because he sees in Gollum what he could become... That is why he tells Sam, "I can't kill him, because I have to believe there is a way back". In the end, that is what saves not only him, but the world (Maik, 34 years old).

Fourthly, we find the *model of caution*, that inner voice which warns us of danger, which prevents us from acting in a reckless manner, the voice of conscience, as it is often referred to.

I have learned many things from my favorite characters. For example, Kenshin (from *Rurouni Kenshin*) has taught me that I should think before acting, especially in social media, because you never know who might be watching... As a cosplayer, you must be incredibly careful because,

unfortunately, even if it is your first mistake, people will reproach you... If I didn't think things over, I would have had many problems (Hitomi, 28 years old).

Fifthly, there is the *model of ideal love*, that encapsulates how we want to love and be loved. This also includes the importance of detachment, of letting go of those who can't love us how we want them to.

I like Tomoyo for the way in which she loves. When asked if she is in love with Sakura, she answers "Yes, but she is happy with another person, and nothing could give me more joy". If I fall in love with someone at some point, I would want it to be like that (Alfredo, 33 years old).

When I saw *Junjo Romantica*, my romantic relationship was coming to its end... At that time, the character of Hiroki taught me to let go, because his love was unrequited. He made me ask myself, "Should I hold onto this?". Absolutely not! And now Hiroki is happy with Nowaki, so I would like for my next relationship to be like the one they have (Carito, 22 years old).

In sixth place we find the *model of maturity*, that state that we must achieve when leaving childhood behind, to become adults, with every hardship and challenge this might represent.

I have admired Link since I was a little kid because he is a child who must face thousands of things to learn to grow up (Jorge, 20 years old).

In seventh place is the *model of autonomy*; the capacity to make our own decisions, on the sidelines of what others think we must do. This also includes the ability to choose who we are and who we want to be, beyond the expectations of others.

In my daily life, I apply many of the lessons that I learned from Jughead (from *Riverdale*), like not allowing others to shape you. If my friends are one thing, I won't be the same as them... If my family wants me to be a certain way, I will simply be whatever I want, I won't be something just to please them (Bolis, 16 years old).

Lastly, there is the *model of vocation*. That calling which indicates the road that will lead us to personal fulfillment, or to the potentiation of our virtues and abilities, along with the spaces where we can be more useful for others.

I think that my favorite characters inspired me to study what I did, that is to train to become a nurse..., a career path that aims to help other people whenever possible, to step in when they need something, if there is an emergency, to always pursue the well-being of the person... Those characters inspired me to help others without distinctions (Jorge, 20 years old).

CONCLUSIONS

As can be seen, the favorite characters of the researched subjects represent a particular role model that inspires them to become a better version of themselves. Nevertheless, this model isn't coincidental, it is deeply related to the period of life that they are experiencing. For example, for Maik (34 years old), Frodo became a role model when he was already an adult and was able to understand the importance of compassion to win any battle, especially the one that all of us must fight, sooner or later, with ourselves. In the same way, for Alfredo (33 years old) and for all of those who chose the *model of resilience* as a fundamental principle in their life, this quality would not be as relevant if they didn't have enough experience to understand what it means to "endure life's hardships" or "to fall and learn to get up again".

Furthermore, for Jorge (20 years old), his favorite characters can be models of vocation since he is in the process of choosing a career path. And, lastly, for Bolis (16 years old), the character that inspires her the most (Jughead) is a *model of autonomy*, since that is the quality that she needs to learn at this point of her life. Therefore, it can be concluded that the behavioral models constructed by the researched subjects from their favorite characters are deeply linked to the stage of life that they are going through and that they can be adapted to the specific needs of guidance required at that moment.

Another relevant element which can be observed in the behavioral models identified is that it seems that none contradicts the basic tenets

of moral codes proposed by the most traditional institutions of Mexico, like family, religion, or school; on the contrary, they seem to complement each other. However, this does not mean that some elements which shape the moral compass of the subjects of research and which stem from geek culture in general, not only from their favorite characters, are at odds with the codes withheld by religion and some families in Mexico. For example, for Hitomi (28 years old), geek culture has helped her be more open-minded, more tolerant, and to overcome the prejudices found both in her family nucleus and in the religious institution that she belongs to: Catholicism.

My moral compass tells me that, if you are not hurting others, then what you are doing isn't wrong... And I believe that the main source for that mindset is geek culture. Since both my parents and my religion, Catholicism, are very close-minded, very rigid... For example, I have friends who cosplay in lingerie and some people criticize them saying "Why are they doing that?", "How can they show their bodies like that?". I don't think there's anything wrong with that, it is a form of art... that more open way of thinking comes from geek culture (Hitomi, 28 years old).

This particular example can help to understand in more detail the role of geek culture in terms of shaping the behavioral models of the researched subjects in comparison with the role played by other more traditional institutions. Due to the contingent, heterogenous, glocal and transmediatic nature of geek culture, its narratives tend to be more open, progressist, and more up-to-date, and, as we have seen so far, the involvement of geeks in the process of rewriting media texts is much more active than the one possible in an updated version of hegemonic discourses based on the institutions mentioned above, since they have a top-down structure, while the ones which integrate geek culture are more horizontal and, consequently, it is easier to actively participate in them.

Geek culture fills, in a way, the "holes" left open by these other institutions due to its openness and flexibility, for its ability to adapt to the times, and, because it allows its members to have a more active participation in transforming its narratives. Geeks, as prosumers

(Scolari, 2013), are more likely to rewrite the characteristics of their heroes (or in some cases, their antiheroes), to rework their own myths with tools such as fanfiction, fanart, fanvids, and socio-digital network campaigns to “cancel” certain characters, modify the direction of a story, and include more diverse characters.

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PROFILE

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