From resilience to autonomy. The geeks of Guadalajara and their construction of role models from geek culture[1]

De la resiliencia a la autonomía. Las frikis de Guadalajara y su construcción de modelos de conducta a partir de la cultura friki

Da resiliência à autonomia. Os geeks de Guadalajara e sua construção de modelos de comportamento baseados na cultura geek

NADIEZHDA PALESTINA CAMACHO QUIROZ[2]

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0085-0841

The purpose of this article is to explain the process that geek women from Guadalajara used to build their models of behavior stemming from the characters and fantasy narratives which belong to the geek culture of Mexico, using a gender perspective. Through the ethnographic method, the most relevant characters for the researched geek women were identified, as well as their characteristics and the models of behavior built by them from their teachings, such as: the model of resilience, the model of empowerment, the model of self-esteem, and the model of autonomy.

KEYWORDS: Geek culture, models of behavior, fantasy narratives, favorite characters, gender perspective.

El objetivo de este artículo es explicar el proceso de construcción de modelos de conducta de las frikis de Guadalajara a partir de los personajes de las narrativas fantásticas que forman parte de la cultura friki en México, desde una perspectiva de género. A través del método etnográfico se identificaron los personajes más significativos para las frikis investigadas, sus características, así como los modelos de conducta que estas construyen derivados de sus enseñanzas, tales como el modelo de resiliencia, el modelo de empoderamiento, el modelo de autoestima y el modelo de autonomía.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Cultura friki, modelos de conducta, narrativas fantásticas, personajes favoritos, perspectiva de género.

O objetivo deste artigo é explicar o processo de construção de modelos comportamentais dos geeks de Guadalajara a partir dos personagens das narrativas fantásticas que fazem parte da cultura geek no México, desde uma perspectiva de gênero. Através do método etnográfico foram identificados os personagens mais significativos para os geeks investigados, suas características, bem como os modelos comportamentais que eles constroem derivados de seus ensinamentos, como o modelo de resiliência, o modelo de empoderamento, o modelo de autoestima e o modelo de autonomia.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Cultura geek, modelos, narrativas fantásticas, personagens favoritos, perspectiva de gênero.

INTRODUCTION

Over 20 years ago, Jenkins published *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (1992), a work that would revolutionize the study of fan cultures in media. Since then, various efforts have been made to study this very complex and diverse phenomenon. Whether from a sociology, anthropology, social psychology, communication, or literary studies perspectives; all these disciplines have tried to explain the phenomenon of fan cultures focusing on one of its components: the role of the culture and creative industries which produce the multimedia and transmedia narratives consumed by fans, the transformation of these narratives which begin from fan intervention, the dynamics established by *fandoms* (fan communities), as well as the alternative cultures which stem from these products and cultural manifestations.

Since 2013, we have focused on the study of one of these alternative cultures: the geek culture in Mexico. Characterized by being an open, heterogeneous, contingent, transgenerational and glocal culture, geek culture is comprised of various fandoms among which we can highlight *anime* and *manga* fans (the *otaku* fandom), videogames fans (the gamer fandom), *cosplay* fans (the *cosplayer* fandom), comic book fans, and the fans of movies, television and/or fantastic, science fiction or horror literature, mainly (Camacho Quiroz, 2021).

In addition to tracking its origins in our country, and of reconstructing the process through which the main fan communities that comprise it were set up, we have addressed the way geeks from Mexico City construct their models of behavior from the characters that inhabit the fantastic narrative which comprise geek culture in Mexico. During this research process we were able to observe a significant difference between the characters chosen by our subjects of research, as well as the models of behavior that they constructed through them depending on their gender condition. For this reason, we set out to research this phenomenon from a gender perspective.

To this end, we decided to focus on the construction of models of behavior carried out by geek women from the metropolitan area

of Guadalajara,[3] stemming from their favorite characters, be it male or female, that are part of the fantastic narratives which comprise geek culture in Mexico (like comic books, *manga*, *anime*, videogames, etc.).

TWO THEORETICAL PILLARS TO UNDERSTAND THE OBJECT OF STUDY

The theoretical lens through which we will understand and explain this phenomenon is comprised of two pillars; firstly, the tenets of fan cultures from the media as proposed by Jenkins (2009, 2010), and Hills (2002); secondly, the gender perspective developed by Lagarde y de los Ríos (2020, 2022, 2023), and Tepichin (2019).

For Jenkins (2009, 2010) and Hills (2002), mass media fans are active readers, knowledgeable, critical, with agency, and sometimes even prosumers,[4] who use the various current communication platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Reddit, among others), to create communities of interpretation and meaning. In these fan communities or *fandoms*, they voice the full spectrum of emotions that the fantastic narratives they consume produce in them. Furthermore, they question the development of their stories, the types of characters which play the lead in them (whether they are diverse characters, members of communities with less representation in media, etc.), the conclusion of the plot, among other things. Moreover, they propose alternate developments, romantic relationships different from the canonical ones, or other types of endings when they are not satisfied with what was originally proposed by the creators or simply because they want to share with

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[3] Comprised by the municipalities of San Pedro Tlaquepaque, Tonalá, Zapopan, Tlajomulco de Zúñiga, El Salto, Juanacatlán, Ixtlahuacán de los Membrillos, Acatlán de Juárez, Zapotlanejo, and Guadalajara.

[4] According to Scolari (2013), the concept of "prosumer" was introduced by Alvin Toffler in 1980 to describe "the union between the traditional roles of the producer and consumer" (p. 337). It is currently used to name the users who go beyond the consumption of media content to create new contents stemming from the original one and introducing them in various platforms which comprise the media ecosystem.

others in the community their artistic talent in the shape of *fanfiction*,[5] *fanart*,[6] *fanvids*,[7] etc.

As stated by Jenkins (2010):

> The fan group originates… in response to the impotence of the consumer against the powerful institutions of cultural production and circulation… This group created the basis on which fans can talk about their cultural preferences and assert their desire for alternate developments to the plot (pp. 314-315).

In this regard, geeks are a particular type of fan, since they are not fans of just any media narrative, rather of *anime* (Japanese animation), *manga* (Japanese comic books), *manhwa* (South Korean comic books), *manhua* (Chinese comic books), comic books (mainly from United States of America), and videogames in particular, as well as every narrative which distinguished by their fantastic nature, such as literature, films or television series within the genres of science fiction, epic fantasy or horror (Camacho Quiroz, 2021). Besides their particular interests, geeks are distinguished from other fans by the manner in which they consume, meaning, the way in which they integrate these practices into their daily lives and identities.

Together with the premises from Jenkins (2009, 2010) and Hills (2002), the other theoretical pillar that will allow us to understand the process through which geek women from Guadalajara build their models of behavior from the fictional characters which comprise geek culture in Mexico, is gender perspective. This perspective "is inscribed in the historical-critical theoretical paradigm and in the cultural paradigm of feminism" (Lagarde y de los Ríos, 2022, p. 13), and it is distinguished

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[5] Alternate stories created by fans about a prior narrative, referred to as "canon", be it a literary work, film, a television series, comic book, etc.

[6] Illustrations, images, works of art, etc., created by fans about a character, scenario, or universe from a particular cultural product, be it a comic book, *manga*, videogame, television series, among others.

[7] Videos edited by fans about a preexisting audiovisual material, be it a film, television series, music video, an *anime*, among others.

by "the use of gender in the central analytical category for knowledge as an object of study, to understand and explain certain dimensions of social inequality" between men and women (Tepichin, 2019, p. 102).

This means that, gender perspective focused on studying the power relations that are established between men and women; in particular, how social gender relations are created, which result, as stated by Tepichin (2019), in "specific forms of subordination in terms of resources and responsibilities, attributes and capabilities, power and privilege, arising from sexual difference" (p. 102).

Apart from the deconstruction of these power relations, their origins, the social mechanisms which have been created to reproduce these inequalities, the gender perspective also contemplates de diversity of proposals, programs and actions to solve the social problems which stem from the oppression of women (Lagarde y de los Ríos, 2022).

Since gender, as argued by Lagarde y de los Ríos (2022), "is a symbolic construction, that includes the set of attributes assigned to people due to sex (which covers biological, physical, economic, social, psychological, erotic, statutory, political, and cultural characteristics)" (p. 30). One of the main goals of gender perspective is to help denaturalize this order, to take a critical stance towards attributes assigned to women with the sole purpose to restrict their capacity of agency, their autonomy, and their right to make decisions in terms of their lives, both as individuals as well as a collective; along with contributing to the construction of a new configuration stemming from the redefinition of the history, society, and culture, from and with women (Lagarde y de los Ríos, 2022).

Following Lagarde y de los Ríos (2022), in the patriarchal order,[8] women must live as *beings-for-others*, that is, they must build the meaning of their lives according to the needs and goals of others, be it their parents, partner, children or the social institutions which surround them. For this reason, when approaching a social phenomenon

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[8] Lagarde y de los Ríos (2022) defines the patriarchy as "a generic social order of power, based on a type of domination whose paradigm is men. This order ensures the supremacy of men and the masculine above the prior interiorization of women and the feminine" (p. 59).

from the gender perspective, we seek, among other things, to convey
the expectations and actions of women to regain their agency, and start
living as *beings-for-themselves*, with autonomy and freedom, as main
characters of their own lives (Lagarde y de los Ríos, 2022).

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used to approach the object of study was ethnography,
specifically, the participative observation and the semi-structured
interview since, as Montes de Oca (2016) notes, ethnography "allows us
to approach the time and space of others, the individual and collective
experience that would be unreachable otherwise" (p. 27).

Starting with the participative observation[9] carried out in two key
interaction spaces for the members of geek culture in Guadalajara:
Frikiplaza (located in the heart of the city), and *ConComics* (during the
December 2022 edition), where ten women were selected to constitute
the significant sample, and who were to be interviewed.

The selected subjects had to meet five key requirements: identify as
women, be residents of the metropolitan area of Guadalajara, declare
themselves as geeks, be members of one of the fan communities which
comprise geek culture in Mexico, and have an age range which would
allow to encompass the three generations of fans which comprise geek
culture: Founding fathers, Geek Boom Generation, and Centennial
Geeks[10] (Camacho Quiroz, 2021).

[9]   As noted by Ameigeiras (2006), participative observation "constitutes the
      cornerstone of the field work that will be used for the construction of
      the ethnographic product" (p. 124). This process can be divided into two
      main activities: "a systematic and controlled observation of everything
      happening around the researcher, and the participation in one or several
      activities of the population" (Guber, 2011, p. 52).

[10] According to Camacho Quiroz (2021), geek culture in Mexico is a
      transgenerational culture integrated by three geek generations: Founding
      Fathers (the ones who grew up during the seventies with anime such as:
      Astro Boy, *Ultraman* and/or *Princess Knight*; they were the first to turn
      an individual hobby into a collective one), the Geek Boom Generation

As can be seen in Table 1, the significant sample goes from 13 to 52 years old, that is, the subjects of research belong to the three generations mentioned before. Furthermore, they declare themselves as belonging to various geek fandoms such as: *warsies* (*Star Wars* fans), *whovians* (*Doctor Who* fans), and *fujoshis* (*yaoi*[11] or *BL* [*Boy's Love*] fans), among others.

TABLE 1

PROFILE OF THE SUBJECTS OF RESEARCH

Name/ pseudonym	Geek Fandom	Age	Occupation
Klaus	*Warsie*, comic books	52 years	Lawyer
Cristina	*Whovian*	37 years	College professor
Alin	*Otaku*	33 years	Shop owner at Frikiplaza
Mon Azzazel	*Cosplayer*	32 years	Cosplayer, creator of cultural events
Andy	*Gamer, otaku*	29 years	Computer engineer
Fer Dumort	*Cosplayer, otaku*	28 years	Photographer
Zeynatura	*Otaku, gamer*	26 years	Criminologist
Mayté	*Otaku*, comic books	25 years	Sociology student
Koi	*Otaku, fujoshi*	23 years	Industrial design student
Ángela	*Otaku*	13 years	Middle school student

Note. The use of names and pseudonyms was authorized by the subjects of research.

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(comprised by fans who grew up during the "Mexican anime boom", "the superhero comic books boom", and the birth of the gamer scene of the nineties; they were the first ones to share a common meeting place thanks to the organization of the first comic book, anime and videogames conventions) and the Centennial Geeks (those who grew up during the first decade of the new millennium with unlimited access to the full range of Japanese animation, *manga*, comic books, etc., along with the widespread use of Web 2.0).

[11] The word *yaoi* is an acronym of "no climax" (*Yama nashi*), "no resolution" (*Ochi nashi*), and "no meaning" (*Imi nashi*), and it is a genre of manga which represents romance stories between male characters, intended for a female audience (Galbraith, 2013).

During the semi-structured interviews,[12] the subjects answered the following guide questions: Which are the most significant characters from fantastic narratives within the geek culture for them? Which are the physical or personality traits, and/or extraordinary abilities of these characters? Is there a trait from these characters that they would like to have? Which are the most meaningful learnings that they have acquired from them? Do they apply these learning to their daily lives?

From the systematization of the feedback received, and the creation of categories and subcategories of analysis through the program of qualitative analysis *Nvivo12*, and from a detailed analysis of the selected characters, we were able to answer these and other questions which arose during the research, as presented below.

RESULTS

The favorite characters of geek women from Guadalajara, an analysis from a gender perspective

In a previous research, we found out that geeks find "inspirational models", and create "models of behavior" from the most meaningful characters of fantastic narratives from Mexican geek culture for them, in accordance with the "stage of life" they are in and with the "type of orientation" they require in that specific period of their lives; they might have found these characters in the printed pages of a superhero comic book from the United States, in a British epic fantasy saga at a cinema screen or in a Japanese *anime* series on television.

However, to the "stage of life" and "type of required guide" factors, "gender condition" must be added, since, as we will see further on, the models of behavior built by geek women who joined this research are strictly related to the condition of "captivity"[13] in which women from

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[12] Semi-structured interviews are characterized by a guide question, nevertheless, the interviewer has the freedom to introduce new questions to clarify concepts or to obtain additional information on the relevant topics (Hernández et al., 2006).

[13] For Lagarde y de los Ríos (2022), captivity "is the anthropologic category which summarizes the sociocultural fact that defines the state of women in

our country find themselves, as mentioned by Lagarde y de los Ríos (2022). What our subjects of research aspire to achieve through these models of behavior is precisely the condition opposite to captivity: freedom (Lagarde y de los Ríos, 2022).

Table 2 presents the favorite characters selected by our subjects of research, as well as other data that might help understand the traits of these characters, such as: the platforms of consumption through which the subjects encountered them, their country of origin, species, gender, and special abilities.

The period of time in which these fictional characters were introduced to the public goes from 1939 to 2022 (year in which this study took place). While the cultural products preferred by the researched subjects, as well as the consumption platforms through which they learned about these characters were: Japanese anime series, videogames, television series within the genres of fantasy or science fiction, films, comic books, webtoon, manga, animated series from the United States (*cartoons*), and, finally, printed books, in that order.

The predominance of Japanese anime (19 characters out of 45), above other cultural products which comprise geek culture in Mexico, when it comes to preferences of our subjects of research should not come as a surprise since, as showed by the researches of Camacho Quiroz (2013, 2021), the predominant fandom within geek culture in Mexico, since it is one of the longest standing, consolidated and active, is the otaku fandom (fans of Japanese anime or *manga*). Furthermore, anime is a product that has become more easily available, both in legal consumption platforms (Crunchyroll, Netflix, Amazon Prime) as well as in unauthorized platforms (animeflv).

However, what stands out in this significant sample, is the appearance of a cultural product, the webtoon,[14] which had not been mentioned in

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a patriarchal world… Women are captive because they have been deprived of their autonomy, independence to live their lives, their self-government, the possibility of choice, and the ability to make decisions" (p. 69).

[14]   Webtoon (contraction of the terms web and cartoon) "is a digital comic strip format created in South Korea to be published and distributed through a digital platform " (Aguiló, 2022, p. 109).

TABLE 2

FAVORITE CHARACTERS

Name	Consumption platform	Country of origin	Species	Gender	Special abilities
Bruce Wayne/ Batman	Comic book series *Batman*	United States	Human	male	Brilliant tactician and detective. He masters various martial arts.
Doctor Who	Television series *Doctor Who*	Great Britain	Alien	male	Can use telepathy to communicate, he can see the past, present, and future of people.
Matthew Murdock/ Daredevil	Comic book series *Daredevil*	United States	Human/ mutant	male	Master of various martial arts, has the ability of echolocation, lacks a sense of fear.
Barbara Gordon/ Batgirl/ Oracle	Comic book series *Batgirl*	United States	Human	female	Computer scientist and hacker, expert in hand-to-hand combat and the usage of tech weaponry.
Westley	Book *The Princess Bride*	United States	Human	male	Farmer who becomes a pirate. He dominates the art of the sword.
Obi-Wan Kenobi	Movie *Star Wars- Episode IV: A New Hope*	United States	Human/ alien	male	Jedi Master, with telepathic and telekinetic abilities.
Oscar François de Jarjayes	Anime series "The Rose of Versailles" (*Berusaiyu no Bara*)	Japan	Human	female	Combat and military command abilities.

Name	Consumption platform	Country of origin	Species	Gender	Special abilities
Henry Walton Jones Jr./ Indiana Jones	Film *Raiders of the Lost Ark*	United States	Human	male	Archeologists and explorers. He speaks, reads, and writes in 27 languages. Sleuthing abilities.
Princess Peach Toadstool	Videogame franchise *Super Mario*	Japan	Human	female	None in particular in most videogames.
Bulma	Anime series *Dragon Ball, Z* and *GT.*	Japan	Human	female	Scientist, inventor, possesses an above average intelligence.
Usagi Tsukino/ Sailor Moon	Anime series *Sailor Moon* (*Bishōjo Senshi Sērā Mūn*)	Japan	Human	female	She can launch moonlight beams using magic artifacts.
Ami Mizuno/ Sailor Mercury	Anime series *Sailor Moon* (*Bishōjo Senshi Sērā Mūn*)	Japan	Human	female	She can manipulate the phases of water and attack with it.
Inuyasha	Anime series *Inuyasha* (*Sengoku Otogizōshi InuYasha*)	Japan	Half human, half demon	male	He dominates several combat techniques and magic objects to increase his power.
Sakura Kinomoto	Anime series *CardCaptor Sakura*	Japan	Human	female	She can feel and use magic.
Angewomon	Anime series *Digimon Adventure*	Japan	*Digimon*	female	Archangel type *digimon* with a woman's appearance.

Name	Consumption platform	Country of origin	Species	Gender	Special abilities
Éowyn	Film *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*	New Zealand	Human	female	Warrior who is skilled with the sword.
Mint Aizawa/ Mew Mint	Anime series *Tokyo Mew Mew/ Mew Mew Power*	Japan	Human/ mutant	female	When she transforms into *Mew Mint,* wings sprout from her back which allow her to fly. She can communicate with birds.
Naruto Uzumaki	Anime series *Naruto*	Japan	Human	male	Ninja who possesses very powerful combat techniques.
Sakura Haruno	Anime series *Naruto*	Japan	Human	female	A ninja with superhuman strength and the ability to heal other people's wounds.
Garfield Logan/ Beast Boy	Animated series *Teen Titans*	United States	Meta-human	male	He has the ability to transform into any animal.
"L" Lawliet	Manga *Death Note*	Japan	Human	male	Private detective with an above average intelligence.
Edward Elric	Anime series *Fullmetal Alchemist*	Japan	Human	male	Skillful alchemist. He dominates hand-to-hand combat.
Veronica Mars	TV series *Veronica Mars*	United States	Human	female	Private investigator.
Dean Winchester	TV series *Supernatural*	United States	Human	male	Skilled hunter of supernatural beings.

Name	Consumption platform	Country of origin	Species	Gender	Special abilities
Soul Eater Evans	Anime series *Soul Eater*	Japan	Human weapon	male	He has the ability to transform into a scythe.
Olivier Mira Armstrong	Anime series *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood*	Japan	Human	female	She has combat and military command abilities.
Ezio Auditore da Firenze	Videogame saga *Assassin's Creed*	France	Human	male	Assassin who dominates various combat techniques.
25th Baam	Webtoon *Tower of God*	South Korea	Human	male	Skilled user of *shinsoo* (energy waves used for combat).
Khun Agüero Agnis	Webtoon *Tower of God*	South Korea	Human	male	His weapon is a briefcase that can clone anything he puts inside.
Kaneki Ken	Manga *Tokyo Ghoul*	Japan	Human/ *ghoul*	male	He has superhuman strength and speed. He can manipulate his body to create new limbs that he uses as weapons for combat.
Ryūko Matoi	Anime series *Kill la Kill*	Japan	Human	female	She has a garment of divine origin crafted with living strands designed for combat.
Yang Xiao Long	Animated series *RWBY*	United States	Human	female	A strong and agile huntress.

Name	Consumption platform	Country of origin	Species	Gender	Special abilities
Edward James Kenway	Videogame saga *Assassin's Creed*	France	Human	male	Assassin, pirate, and corsair.
Lucifer	Videogame saga *Granblue Fantasy*	Japan	Primordial beast/ angel	male	Commander of the archangels.
Sorey	Videogame saga *Tales of Zestiria*	Japan	Human	male	He has special abilities of divine origin that allow him to fight the supernatural beings who feed on the negative energy of humans.
Dolores Abernathy	TV series *Westworld*	United States	Android	female	Leadership abilities.
Yuri Katsuki	Anime series *Yuri!!! on Ice*	Japan	Human	male	Skilled figure skater.
Tamaki Amajiki	Anime series *My Hero Academia*	Japan	Human	male	He possesses the "gift" to physically manifest the traits of anything that he has recently eaten.
Velvet Crowe	Videogame saga *Tales of Berseria*	Japan	Human/ *Therion*	female	She has superhuman endurance and she has mastered various martial arts.

Name	Consumption platform	Country of origin	Species	Gender	Special abilities
Gyoon Oh	Webcomic "*Sign*" (*Suhwa*)	South Korea	Human	male	None in particular.
Daiba Nana	Anime series *Revue Starlight (Shōjo Kageki Revue Starlight)*	Japan	Human	female	Music theater actress. She dominates the art of "stage combat".
Tanjiro Kamado	Anime series *Demon Slayer* (*Kimetsu no Yaiba*)	Japan	Human	male	Skilled demon hunter. He has a very developed sense of smell.
Harleen Quinzel/ Harley Quinn	Film *Birds of Prey*	United States	Human	female	Psychiatrist with superhuman strength, flexibility, and agility.
Kamala Khan/ Ms. Marvel	TV miniseries *Ms. Marvel*	United States	Human/ mutant	female	She can create energy fields and strike her enemies with them.
Anya Forger	Anime series *Spy x Family*	Japan	Human	female	She can read the mind of other people.

previous studies, this speaks about the cultural industries from South Korea becoming not only the standard of consumption for the global music industry (with K-pop) or the television industry (with K-dramas), but that it has also started competing with the Japanese giants by taking over the comic book market in Asia, as well as the rest of the world[15] with its digital *manhwa* platforms such as Naver, Webtoon, Kakao Page, Lezhin Comics, and Daum Webtoon (Aguiló, 2022).

Going back to the selected characters, since the predominant cultural product in our sample was Japanese anime, it is reasonable that the country which has created most of these characters is Japan (25), followed by the United States (13), and South Korea (3). It is worth reminding that the United States is one of the main superhero comic book producers, as well as films, and fantasy and science fiction television series; therefore, it is understandable that it occupies the second place as the country of origin of the selected characters.

Out of the 45 selected characters, 32 are human beings, three are half-human half-supernatural beings, three are human mutants, one is a meta-human, two are aliens, one is an archangel, one is an android, one is a human weapon, and, lastly, one is a digital monster. Nonetheless, regardless of their origin or nature, every character possesses *human* physical features. This "humanity" (meaning, the fact that they appear and act as human beings), is fundamental for the subjects of research to self-identify with them, and to build, from their behavior and abilities, models of behavior to use as guidelines for their daily lives. That would be the first requirement.

In terms of the gender assigned to these characters, we find 24 males and 21 females. When the subjects of research were asked their reason for selecting male characters as their favorites, they stated that it was easier to identify themselves with them than it is with female characters since, on the one hand, the women who play the lead in these types of narratives are very few in comparison with the men, and, on the other hand, female leads lack development, diversity, and

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[15]   The comic book industry in South Korea is ranked sixth worldwide, after Japan, United States, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom (Aguiló, 2022).

complexity. Female characters, as stated by the subjects of research, are very basic and fit into two stereotypes: submissive women who try to please the male lead or women with a very strong personality that are always at odds with their male counterpart until they both fall in love. In this regard, Koi (23 years old) states:

> Something that I find very annoying in anime is the stereotype of women that it portrays: it can be a woman that tells you to fuck off while you have to pursue her, or it is a very accommodating woman… For example, Mikasa Ackerman from *Shingeki no Kyojin* starts mothering the male lead, taking care of him, dreaming of marrying him. As the story progresses, she becomes an empowered woman, with her own ambitions. But, in the end, she gets reduced to the same old, making her lose all her development.

Furthermore, the male characters possess attributes that they would like to have, like freedom, autonomy, power, among others, as we will see further on.

In terms of physical features of the selected male characters, there are two dominating prototypes of beauty and masculinity, the "western" one (where the characters of United States, Great Britain of France fit), represented by Caucasian, attractive, tall, well-built, athletic men with an average age of 40 years; and the "eastern" one (where the characters from Japan and South Korea fit), represented by younger men, in some cases teenagers, with fair skin, big eyes, extremely thin, androgynous features and shorter height. These characters, despite their similarity, are more diverse than the "western" ones, in the sense that some might have deformities in the face or body, sharp teeth, pointy ears, amputated legs or arms, among other characteristics.

On this point, it is worth noting that most of the male characters selected by the geeks that belong to the *Generation of the Founding Fathers* fit the "western" standard of beauty and prototype of masculinity (for example, Bruce Wayne [*Batman*], Matthew Murdock [*Daredevil*] or Indiana Jones), while most of the characters selected by the geeks of the *Geek Boom Generation* and the *Centennial Geeks* fit the "eastern" standard of beauty (for example, Naruto Uzumaki [*Naruto*], "L" Lawliet [*Death Note*] or Edward Elric [*Fullmetal Alchemist*]).

It is likely that this difference is related to the prototype of masculinity represented by each of them, but also to the main geek fandom to which the researched subjects belong. While geek women from the Generation of the Founding Fathers are fans of sagas like *Star Wars*, *Doctor Who* or *Supernatural*, among others (all of them are Anglo-Saxon productions), geek women from the Geek Boom Generation and the Centennial Geeks are fans, above all, of Japanese anime and *manga*, making it reasonable that the male characters selected by one or the other fit the predominant standards of beauty and masculinity of each transmedia narrative.

In terms of their special abilities, the selected male characters stand out due to their intelligence and deductive abilities (some are detectives or investigators), as well as their mastery of various combat techniques, be it hand to hand or using weapons of all kinds. Most of their occupations or jobs are related to confrontations with other beings (human or not), be it by acting as vigilantes, pirates, assassins, demon hunters, etc. This is very much in line with the role that has been assigned to men in the patriarchal order: the warrior.

The only characters with occupations which do not involve the destruction of other beings are Yuri Katsuki (*Yuri!!! on Ice*), and Gyoon Oh (*Suhwa*), figure skater and employee at a cafeteria, respectively. Both characters, along with Lucifer (*Granblue Fantasy*), belong to the LGBT community.

Regarding the physical features of the selected female characters, the most noteworthy is the prevalence of a beauty standard which has become hegemonic, regardless of the country of origin of these characters. Whether they appear in a comic book or television series from the United States, a Japanese anime or videogame, every woman has fair skin, light-colored big eyes, more than half are blonde (11 out of 21) or have red, blue, or light pink hair; moreover, their bodies are slender and shapely. All of them are young women or teenagers, with an age that goes from 15 to 30 years old; at the exact period when a woman is considered to have the best reproductive ability.

The only exception to this rule is Kamala Khan (*Ms. Marvel*), a character that, it is worth highlighting, was created by Marvel Comics in 2013 to represent an ethnic and religious minority of the United States: the Pakistani community, being the first Muslim superheroine

of the Marvel Universe to star in its own comic book series. Both in the comic book and in the television series produced by Disney+ in 2022, Kamala Khan is a black haired teenager, with golden brown skin and brown eyes. However, the special abilities that she possesses in print are different to the audiovisual ones. While she can modify the size of her body, elongate, and contract her limbs in the comic books, in the television series she can create energy fields and attack her enemies with them.

In terms of the special abilities of the selected female characters, it should be emphasized that most have an above average intelligence, and they also possess –just like the male characters– combat abilities, be it hand to hand or by using special weaponry, which provides them with more agency and the possibility to confront, as equals, any antagonist that might come their way, regardless of how powerful they might be.

Several of the selected characters have leadership skills, to the extent that, if they are in the military, they will surely be heads of their regiments. The occupations and jobs they have range from vigilantes, generals, revolutionist, demon huntress, ninja-physician, to inventor-scientist and sleuth. Lastly, it must be noted that one of the selected female characters belongs to the LGBT community: Harley Quinn. The sexual preference of the chosen characters, be it male or female, is a very relevant attribute for the subjects of research, it is even one of the reasons that these characters are important to them. As Zeynatura (26 years old) stated: "The fact that my favorite characters belong to the sexual diversity spectrum has a lot to do with me choosing them as my favorites".

To conclude, the desirable qualities that male characters must possess for the subjects of research are skill, intelligence, combat abilities, and a sense of justice. Meanwhile, the qualities that female characters must possess are beauty, intelligence, autonomy, leadership, and combat abilities. In the following section we will see which are the models of behavior that the subjects of research of this paper have built from the selected characters.

Models of behavior: From resilience to autonomy

As Lagarde y de los Ríos (2022) states, gender condition traverses everything; for this reason, the models of behavior build by the researched subjects are closely related to their gender condition, with what they aspire to but cannot have, or things that are difficult to achieve by the mere fact of them being women.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the model of resilience is the main model created by the researched subjects from the characters that they find more meaningful within the geek culture in Mexico, since being a woman in a patriarchal world and in a country such as ours implies facing inequality conditions in every sphere (family, work, social) in a systematic manner, as well as situations of gender-based violence on a regular basis. Hence, the first thing women learn as such in this country, to resist without desisting, is resilience.

Model of resilience

For the subjects of research, resilience is the ability to transform pain into strength, and to survive the physical and psychological violence exerted by the men around them to neutralize their agency or undermine their self-esteem, and in doing so, regaining their power and self-confidence, in themselves and their abilities, and even in their sanity, achieving in this manner the means to give meaning and purpose to their lives. For example, for Mon Azzazel (32 years old), Harley Quinn in the movie *Birds of Prey* (2020) is a model of resilience:

I like Harley Quinn because she has very little inhibitions, and a very strong personality (…) I have learned so much from her, since I also had my Joker. My ex was a very toxic person. But, just like Harley Quinn at the end of *Birds of Prey*, I also realized that, without the Joker, she is still Harley Quinn, that she didn't need to submit to someone who didn't love her, and that every attempt from the Joker to shut her down by driving her crazy, wouldn't work.

Model of empowerment

According to Lagarde y de los Ríos (2020), being an empowered woman implies being the main satisfier of your needs, the defender

of your interests, and the advocate of the meaning of your life. For the subjects of research, being an empowered woman is being a woman with agency, with confidence in her abilities who is willing to demand her place in the world, even when the world is designed for and by men. For Andy (29 years old), Oscar François de Jarjayes, from the anime *The Rose of Versailles* (1979-1980), is her role model of an empowered woman:

> I like Oscar François de Jarjayes because she rocks, she is the representation of an empowered woman… I learned from Oscar that it doesn't matter whether you are a woman, if you want to do something, you can succeed. I mean, Oscar faces the machismo of France from that era; a time where women got killed for any little thing, or they weren't allowed to do many things… I studied Electronic Engineering, and my college had two or three women. I used to be the only woman in my class, because I went to a Technical High School… So, Oscar has always been an inspiration for me.

Model of self-esteem

For Lagarde y de los Ríos (2020), self-esteem implies "to respect oneself, the ability to seek for oneself all that is good and to critically take care of one's own self in its corporeal-subjective entirety, as a *being-in-the-world* and as a *woman-in-the-world*" (p. 62). For the researched subjects, self-esteem is a necessary quality to preserve the desire to keep existing in the world, to envision a possible future where existing does not imply continuous suffering. As Zeynatura (26 years old) explains, the character of Kaneki Ken, from the manga *Tokyo Ghoul* (2011-2014), represents a good example of how to develop self-esteem, the love for oneself:

> Kaneki Ken helped me a lot through my depression, with my suicidal thoughts, and with my lack of self-love. Little by little, as he learned how to love himself, that he had a reason to exist, that he was important for others, that other people loved him, I learned the same alongside him. I learned that, even when my life began on poor terms, it doesn't have to end that way; that I have friends who love me and who consider me important, and that family is not limited to those we share blood with, but rather the people who are beside you, supporting you and loving you.

Model of autonomy

According to Fernández de la Reguera (2019), autonomy "is a process… which makes possible [for women]… to have control over their lives, from the access and usage of material, social and symbolic resources, freedom of movement, and changes in the power relations towards better equity" (p. 43). For the subjects of research, autonomy is synonymous with freedom, and it implies the possibility of making their choices, regardless of other's expectations, in particular those closer to them. In the words of Mayté (25 years old), Éowyn from film trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003) is a model of a woman with autonomy:

> One of my favorite characters is Éowyn from *The Lord of the Rings*… I like her because she goes against everything that her father says to her. When he orders her to "Stay with the other women", she goes ahead and sneaks in with the soldiers to fight against the Dark Lord… I wish I had her freedom… I have a family who has a very strong grip on me. She chooses to ignore what her father ordered her and leave anyway; that is what I wish I could do.

Model of authenticity

Authenticity is very important for the geek community in general, and for geek women in particular, since the challenge they must face from the moment they identify themselves as such is the constant questioning of their interests and their lifestyle. For this reason, to retain this identity despite the many obstacles becomes a symbol of authenticity, of truthfulness towards themselves. As Klaus (52 years old) asserts:

> Being a geek has contributed so much to myself. One of the things it allowed me was to be myself. In my professional field world, that of lawyers, people don't tend to be authentic, or they even hide what they like. I must dress a certain way, because I have to play a role, but when I worked at a library, I used to wear my superhero shirts everyday… So, being a geek has helped me express who I really am… One of the most important things I learned in life is that you don't have to be ashamed or feel bad for who you are.

Model of intelligence

For the subjects of research, intelligence is a fundamental ability to try and balance the odds and achieve their goals in an environment that, from the beginning, puts them at a disadvantage. It is also a tool that allows them to obtain independence and self-fulfillment. For Zeynatura (26 years old), Sakura Haruno, from the manga *Naruto* (1999-2014), is the perfect example of a brilliant woman who meets her goals (becoming a ninja-physician) thanks to her intellectual abilities:

> I really like Sakura Haruno because she is an ordinary character in the universe of *Naruto*. While others have special powers because of their blood or family, she is a student from an ordinary family, and she is the only one who passed the Chūnin examination due to her knowledge, not because she cheated… She is an amazing character because, even when she has no special powers or privileges, she has managed to fight and get ahead in life due to her intelligence.

Model of leadership

According to the subjects of research, leadership implies the ability to organize a group of people, know how to delegate responsibilities, and maximize the abilities of each member of the team to achieve the goals they have established, both as individuals and as a group. For instance, for Koi (23 years old), Mint Aizawa, from the anime *Mew Mew Power* (2002-2003), is an example of leadership:

> Mint Aizawa is an only child, her parents have a lot of money, but they never pay attention to her. She has a café where all her peers work, but it is just a cover up for an investigation center. She is the bridge between all of them and she organizes them… So, if we take it to a professional level, Mint has taught me the importance of organization, to identify the abilities of those you work with to coordinate them, to learn how to delegate, and to know how to make your moves with your available resources.

Model of kindness and justice

According to the subjects of research, kindness and justice go hand in hand. When you are good, you are also fair, and vice versa. Kindness

is a remarkable quality that should be sought after since it implies to defend what is right; meaning, what is good and fair for everyone. For Zeynatura (26 years old), Lucifer, from the videogame *Granblue Fantasy* (2014) is a model of kindness and justice:

> What I like about Lucifer is his angelic purity and kindness. He overlooks the sake of the world; he has a great sense of justice… So, what my favorite characters have in common is the great kindness of their hearts, a great sense of justice, that goes beyond ideas; they actually fight for what is right, for the rights of others, not only of those they love, but of those beyond their inner circle.

Model of cooperation

For the subjects of research, to cooperate means to be humble enough to ask for help when you cannot handle a task or objective alone, as well as recognizing that with the assistance of others you can go further than what would be possible as an individual. As Koi (23 years old) explains, Yuri Katsuki from the anime *Yuri!!! On Ice* (2016) is a good example of how working with another person and allowing them to help you, can make you a better version of yourself:

> I really like the character of Yuri Katsuki because he is very stubborn. At a certain point he feels very discouraged because he is "the worst of the best". But then Viktor, a veteran figure skater, appears and says to him, "I see a lot of potential in you, and I want to harness it"… Little by little, he realizes his abilities and, even when he doesn't take first place in the competition [at the figure skate world championship], he proves to himself that he can achieve his goals with the help of other people… That is the lesson that I learned from him, that you don't have to do everything by yourself… When I watched *Yuri!!! On Ice*, I was handling many responsibilities that were not mine to take. I understood then that it was okay to ask for help. When you let others help you, you can reach even higher, beyond what you might think is possible.

Model of horizontal romantic relationship

Although at first it was believed that romantic relationships would be more prevalent in the testimony of the subjects of research, the couples of characters which inspire them to build their relationships are very few. One of them is Barbara Gordon (Batgirl/Oracle) and Dick Grayson (Robin/Nightwing) from the DC Universe, since they portray a relationship of mutual respect and recognition, where the male character does not feel intimidated by the abilities of his female partner, nor does he ask her to abandon her agency or to restrict any of her abilities to reinforce his masculinity. In this regard, Klaus (52 years old) states that:

> I really like the relationship of Barbara and Dick because she is older than him, but they don't care about that. I also love that he is not intimidated by her intelligence. I have had problems in my romantic relationships for things like this.

Model of the caregiver

Lastly, there is the *model of the caregiver*. For the subjects of research, it is important to take care of those they hold in high regard, ensure their well-being, and help them avoid being in danger. However, as Lagarde y de los Ríos (2023) notes, in the patriarchal order, "women are the ones designated to take care of the lives of other people… We are the caregivers of everybody; we have a fundamental role to give life, then to protect it, take care of it, reproduce it, and to keep tangible people in the best condition possible" (p. 30). When we prioritize the needs of others above our own, we assume as the purpose of life taking care of others permanently, we relinquish our autonomy, our right to decide on a life project beyond the needs of others, a project for ourselves. For Andy (29 years old), Yang Xiao Long, from the animated series *RWBY*, is a model of caregiver with which she can identify herself:

> I like Yang Xiao Long because she takes care of others. They might not notice it, but she is always trying to take care of them… When she was a little girl her mother abandoned her, then she had an adoptive mother –Ruby's mother–, but she was murdered. So, since she was very little, she

became like Ruby's mother… I tend to end up in that position with my friends. I mean, I'm always trying to take care of them and making sure that they are okay.

FINAL THOUGHTS

What conclusion can be drawn from the findings of this research? Firstly, there are not enough female characters in the many fantastic narratives which integrate geek culture in Mexico (in particular, in Japanese anime). And secondly, that the female characters portrayed must be more diverse, complex, and original for the members of the community of fandoms to identify with them, and, therefore, build their models of behavior from their traits and abilities. For this reason, geek women tend to identify themselves more with male characters.

The diversity in terms of male characters is so significant that it appears in the physical features of the selected men: some have scars on their bodies or faces, deformations, amputations, etc. While, in terms of female characters, there is only one available option: to be fair skinned, preferably blonde haired, to have big eyes, and to have a slender and shapely body. As for the desirable qualities that the characters should possess, both male and female, to be one of the favorites of the researched geeks, intelligence and combat abilities stand out. Two qualities which tend to be linked to the contemporary heroism model.

Lastly, about the models of behavior built by geek women of Guadalajara from those characters, the articulation between one model and another is remarkable, as well as the fact that every model is traversed by the gender condition of the researched subjects and, therefore, are going to be a mirror of the aspirations and needs of women, whether geek or not, who live in a patriarchal order, as well as their oppressions and captivities.

The researched geeks have built a *model of resilience* to survive the everyday violence that they are exposed to, both in the social groups that they belong to, as well as within their innermost circle. However, they desire something beyond "surviving"; they want to be the lead characters of their own lives, they want to have the capacity to choose, and trust their abilities and skills to achieve their goals, for this

reason they consider the *model of empowerment* just as essential.

Still, to become empowered women, they need to love themselves first, to feel love for themselves, for the fact that they are alive; for this reason, they must develop the *model of self-esteem*. Apart from promoting self-love or regaining it, geek women desire to be free, to have the ability of movement and decision making over their own lives; for this they must learn and develop the *model of autonomy*. As women and geeks, they aspire to be themselves, to express every dimension of their identities, without being questioned or ridiculed for this; hence they consider the *model of authenticity* so important, because being oneself should not be a reason to be ashamed.

As they are aware that the attributes assigned to them by the fact that they are women puts them at a disadvantage compared to men, which has made the development of the *model of intelligence* a strategic move (a quality that, incidentally, has been historically denied to women), since it gives them the opportunity to be self-sufficient and to thrive professionally. This model goes hand in hand with the *model of leadership*, since it implies having the intelligence to coordinate a group of people, delegate responsibilities, and enhance the qualities of each individual member to achieve a common goal.

For the subjects of research, it is important to develop the *model of kindness and justice*, with the understanding that there can be no kindness without justice, and no justice without kindness since kindness implies defending the rights of every person. In this sense, the *model of cooperation* is very relevant, since it means recognizing that with the help of others, through their teachings, we can achieve goals that we did not consider a possibility.

Lastly is the *model of the caregiver*, a model that seems like a loophole of the traditional understanding of gender where it is expected of women to become the "ultimate mothers of people" (Lagarde y de los Ríos, 2023, p. 32). Nevertheless, as noted by Lagarde y de los Ríos (2023), women of today are syncretic women, meaning that we have traditional and modern concepts of what it means to be a woman living inside ourselves. One side desires to be autonomous and live for ourselves, while the other side considers that we should live for others, and that our value depends on our usefulness, meaning, or how much or how little others need us.

As a result, it is significant that most of the models of behavior built by geek women from fantastic narratives which comprise the geek culture of Mexico are models related to *being-for-oneself* (Lagarde, 2023), with the need of becoming the protagonist of their own stories and to start building the *heroine's journey*.

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PROFILE

Nadiezhda Palestina Camacho Quiroz, Universidad de Guadalajara
PhD in Political and Social Sciences, with a specialty in Communication Sciences from Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. She has focused her academic education in the Communication and Culture areas, particularly in the study of geek culture in Mexico. She is currently carrying out a postdoctoral stay at the Department of Social Communication Studies and Humanities at the Universidad de Guadalajara (Mexico).