What Art Educators Can Learn from the Fan-based Artmaking of Adolescents and Young Adults

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The explanations of 101 adolescents and young adults, who are fans of popular culture narratives and make art inspired by these phenomena, provide insight into why these youth were drawn to create fan-based artworks, how they learned to make these art forms, and what the creative activities mean to them. Emergent themes highlight (a) the significance of resonance with narrative content; (b) self-exploration and skill development through repetitive artmaking; (c) recognition and support within a community of like-minded others; and, (d) a sense of balance between fantasy play and everyday life experience. The findings suggest several strategies that might contribute to meaningful art education curriculum for secondary level students.

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My interests in popular stories as themes in the art of adolescents and young adults were inspired while observing my adolescent daughter and her friends create art based on their interests in Marvel Comics, Japanese *manga* (comics), and fantasy novels. I became curious about expressive behaviors of adolescents and young adults who identify themselves as *fans* of various media-conveyed literatures, such as superhero, fantasy, and science fiction stories from comics, printed or graphic novels, movies, or televised serials. I came to wonder what in these subjects attract and motivate some fans to draw copies or create reproductions of the visual stories. My curiosity about the relationship between these youth's perceptions of themselves as participants in fan cultures and as artists has compelled me to question how fans, including many who do not seem interested in taking art courses in school, learn to create highly skilled, albeit ostensibly derivative, artworks. In addition, I am interested in how answers to these questions might inform the formal art education of middle and high school students.

Over the past several years, I have been seeking answers to these and other questions about fan participatory artmaking by interviewing adolescents and young adults who are actively creating two fan-based art forms—*fanart,* and *cosplay.* Cosplay involves creating costumes, dressing, and performing or posing as characters derived from popular literatures, especially Japanese manga and *animé* or animations (Manifold, 2008). Fanart is a catchall term for any two- or three-dimensional work that copies, appropriates from, or illustrates media-produced stories and characters (Jenkins, 1992). Forms of fanart include exact copies of popular characters such as Garfield, Pokémon, or Spiderman; original illustrations based on printed or cinematic narratives such as the *Harry Potter, Star Wars*, or *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* series; and illustrations that incorporate the appearance of actors who play roles in these narratives (Jenkins, 2006).

Figure 1. Cosplayers at AnimeExpo, Anaheim, California, 2005. Photograph by the author.
Figure 2. A Hogwart's student. Fanart by 'Erithe' Erin McChesney. Courtesy of the artist.

Fanart and cosplay are exhibited or performed live at fan conventions and shared online through personal websites, fanart galleries, and cosplay sites.

The topic of when, why, and how adolescents and young adults are drawn to create art based on narratives of popular culture and what sense they make of these activities, which is the focus of this article, should be of interest to art teachers charged with developing art curricula and instruction for students in grades 7 through 12. The study, which I describe, finds that fan interests often begin during middle school years and continue into adulthood. Many art educators see middle school art courses as a last chance to capture youth's interests in art and artmaking. Afterwards, art, as one of several elective choices available to students, competes against pressures that focus on academic disciplines perceived to be more important and more likely to lead to financially secure careers (Fowler, 2001). Proponents of Visual Culture Art Education (VCAE) tell us that the way people read and interact with visual images influences the way they think and act within society, therefore, all students should be taught about visual culture, whether or not they aspire to careers as artists (Freedman, 2003b). Because media narratives, fanart, and cosplay are exemplars of visual culture, determining why youth are drawn to become fans and create art based on stories from popular culture, how they learn the skills required of fanartmaking or cosplay, and the relationship of these creative behaviors to youth's evolving perceptions of themselves as artists or art makers is justified.

Information about motivations and practices of fanart and cosplay might inform art educators regarding pedagogical strategies for attracting students to study visual arts and art curricula appropriate to the needs of youth in media-saturated societies.

Exploring Meaning Through Affective Semiotics

Passionate attraction to particular characters and intense feelings experienced when engaging with fan phenomenon define the fan experience (Jenkins, 1992). Fans frequently express pleasure in an object of affection that is "not about holding it at a distance" but about "being awash in it … about having control and mastery of the beloved subject, pulling it close and integrating it into … sense of self" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 23). According to Jung (1969), this pleasure might be understood as intuitive awareness that basic needs of the psyche are being nourished. Protagonists of stories serve as archetypes of human agency and play universally important roles in fulfilling needs to make sense of one's environment and integrate successfully into society (Jung, 1969). Socio-cultural anthropologist Bettelheim (1976) agrees that through story and fantasy play young people gain a sense of identity, experience the advantages or disadvantages of behaving in particular ways, and are persuaded that through enacting messages of the stories they might make positive changes in their lives. He contends, however, that social interaction is a necessary component of fantasy play.

In this article, I look at the reasons fans give for engaging with and learning to create artworks based on or inspired by stories in the context of *fandom* (fan communities). Considering subjects' accounts of their own feelings and understandings suggests the appropriateness of an *affective semiotic* approach to this investigation of fanart and cosplay activities. Affective semiotic approaches have been proposed by fan culture theorists (Jenkins, 2006; Hills, 2002) who view meaning as growing out of *affective sets* of experiences that integrate inner human drives with social interactions and collective sharing of knowledge about a freely selected and mutually attractive phenomena.

In seeking to understand why young people choose to engage with art based on media-conveyed stories, we might look to why some people freely choose to experience other forms of art. Falk and Dierking (2000), for example, explored why people visit art museums, and saw a constellation of factors related to why people select to engage with works of art in museum settings and the meanings they make of these experiences. Falk and Dierking determined these to cluster around motivations related to the visitor's sense-of-identity. The meanings visitors made of museum experiences were influenced by identity-related agendas, engaged within a free-choice setting, and in interaction or collaboration with "others within their own social group" (Falk, 2007, p. 420). Likewise, Jenkins (2006) saw the social interactivity of fans in their mutual engagement with fan phenomena as contributing to and fulfilling each fan's need to find a deep-seated or *core* self. Falk and Dierking's notion of identity, however, was not a core self as suggested by Jenkins (2006) but, rather, a malleable construct (Gee, 2000-

2001; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998) that might "be thought of as a confluence of internal and external forces" (Falk, 2007, p. 424).

Applied to an understanding of why some adolescents are powerfully drawn to particular media-conveyed narratives and compelled to engage in making art inspired by them, one might surmise that an adolescent, who urgently desires to know who she is at her innermost core, might recognize inchoate aspects of self in a phenomenon and be motivated to engage with the material in a search for self-understanding. Art skills developed in the act of replicating the fan phenomenon (as a process of coming to know the self) might contribute to recognition and construction of an external identity as artist, and the desire to enact this role in adult society. Interactions with others, who share interests in the phenomenon, would support the fan's emerging internal and external senses of identity.

A contribution to understanding how fanartists or cosplayers move from exploring internal self to construction of role identity was provided by Au (Prevonik, Smith-Shank, & Au, 2007) in the form of a set of factors that were found to contribute to art students' decisions to enroll in fine arts courses in secondary schools (McPherson, 2005). Au's set of factors addressed issues of identity only from the standpoint of *self-efficacy*, which she defined as an ability to envision oneself as an artist. Besides self-efficacy, Au described factors important to sustaining interests in creating art as including: *curiosity* about an interesting subject; the *challenge* of engaging in difficult art learning tasks; *involvement* in an intrinsically pleasant task; personal status or *importance* gained from being perceived as competent; public *recognition* for one's successes in art; desire to *compete* against and outperform others; *social interaction*; and *support* from family, school, and friends.[1]

These factors were suggested as functioning in five stages, beginning with a "desire to draw pictures" (Prevonik, et. al., 2007, p. 59), although Au did not speculate regarding how or why the initial desire to draw might be aroused. In the second stage, however, Au indicated that students are inspired by the aesthetic qualities of art to acquire artmaking skills and share their artistic accomplishments with peers. In stage three, students who are recognized and praised for their artmaking successes are excited about taking up the challenges of art learning and making. This motivates them to compete against peers who also make art. If students receive continued support from peers and teachers for their efforts and accomplishments during this stage, they will continue to pursue art. In the fourth stage, students consider art as a possible career choice and plan to study art at the university level. In the final stage, young artists become committed to practices of artmaking and earnestly seek careers in art-related fields.

Using a semiotic affective framework for the study as outlined by Au, I consider the possibility that an adolescent's immediate emotional response to a visual narrative of popular culture may indicate intuited resonance with that phenomenon. Powerful recognition of self in an artifact of the popular environment may trigger the youth's desire to create art that connects the phenomenon and self. The individual then might move to a second level, where

[1] Two other factors—teacher acknowledgment of success through *grades* and *compliance* with parents expectations—are specific to the formal educational setting and are not included in the framework developed for this investigation.

an internalized sense of identity forms through intense study of the attractive phenomenon (Jenkins, 2006; Hills 2002) and is supported by a sense of socio-cultural role identity (Falk, 2007) through interaction with others who also experience resonance with the phenomenon (Falk, 2007; Jenkins, 2006; Hills 2002). Afterwards, the fan moves to a third level of engagement where he or she experiences artistic self-efficacy while taking on challenging tasks of artmaking and being recognized for artistic accomplishments within the competitive social milieu (Prevonik, et al., 2007) of fandom. Having had his or her artmaking skills validated by peer fanartists and cosplayers, the young fan may desire, at the fourth level of engagement, to seek more in-depth knowledge, such as that provided by formal art education (McPherson, 2005; Prevonik, et. al., 2007). Finally, the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards of personal expression and partici-patory interactions may positively influence the fan to seek a career as artist (McPherson, 2005; Prevonik, et al., 2007).

Methodology

As data for this study, nearly 300 fanartists and cosplayers between the ages of 14 and 24 were selected from online fan sites and asked to respond to a series of questions about when and why they were drawn to engage in fan-based artmaking activities, how they learned skills required of the activity, and how they viewed these interests in terms of their daily lives and life goals. Informants included fans of diverse popular media narratives who were members of three online sites—deviantArt[2], Elfwood[3], and Cosplay.com[4]—where they posted their fanart or cosplay creations.

Each of the websites features thumbnail image indexes of works by fanartists or cosplayers who have submitted materials for public viewing. Clicking on a small image will call up the corresponding artist's profile page, which may include general information such as user-name, age, geographic location, real name, email address, and links to the artist's personal galleries of fanart or cosplay photographs. Site managers make efforts to prohibit youth under the age of 13 from posting on the sites while site members voluntarily may protect their identities by blocking publication of their real ages, names, or e-mail addresses.

The Participants

Three hundred potential informants[5]—100 from each of the three sites—were chosen from the gallery indexes by clicking on thumbnail images that illus-trated a variety of fantasy, science fiction, or animé stories and, in my opinion, evidenced a high level of artistic ability or craftsmanship. The fanartists and cosplayers were contacted via e-mail and invited to participate in the study by responding through e-mail to 12 open-ended questions. One hundred and one (101) people replied to the questionnaire.

Although national origin was not taken into consideration when selecting potential subjects, the sampling yielded individuals from 21 countries,[6] including the United States. No data were collected regarding the ethnicity or socio-economic backgrounds of the respondents. That all participants had access to computers with Internet hookups, as well as graphic software, scanners and/

[2]http://www.deviantart.com/

[3]http://elfwood.lysater.liu.se/elfwood.html

[4]http://www.cosplay.com/

[5]Due to blocked e-mails, it took 413 clicks to arrive at a list of 300 potential subjects.

[6]These were Belgium (1), Australia (5), Canada (9), Chile (1), El Salvador (1), France (3), Hong Kong (1), Indonesia (1), Italy (1), Japan (1), Korea (1), Mexico (2), the United Kingdom (7), United States (52), the Philippines (2), Portugal (1), Puerto Rico (1), Spain (2), Sweden (2), and Taiwan (1). Six participants did not identify a country of origin.

or other digital devices, and that those who were not native English speakers were able to communicate competently in written English, suggests the respondents were educated and from middle- to-upper- class backgrounds.

The Questionnaire

The 69 fanartists and 32 cosplayers (total 101 subjects), who responded to the e-mailed questionnaire, relayed answers to a series of 12 questions that were organized into four basic categories (see Appendix). In this article, I present and provide interpretations of the responses to questions in the four general categories that incorporated subsets of questions.

1. When and how did you become interested in creating fanart or cosplay?
2. What interests you about this subject and how do you experience your interest?
3. How did you learn to create fanart or cosplay?
4. How do you think of this activity in terms of your current life and future life goals?

The responses were coded using methods described by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Coding allowed themes to emerge which were arranged into sub-categories. For example, answers that described positive attitudes toward a learning strategy were differentiated from answers stating negative opinions of the strategy. Results were given as percentages out of the total number of respondents, even though not all respondents might have commented on the strategy. A content analysis of the data was conducted as recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

Questionnaire Findings

The Beginnings of Fan Interest

Nearly one third of the study subjects (32%) remembered having been interested, since early childhood, in drawing or playing dress-up as favorite characters of popular culture; they understood these activities as insertions of omnipresent media-conveyed narratives into their play worlds. They also recalled sharing their interests in popular narratives with same-age peers. Their descriptions revealed, however, during their childhood years the interactivity of play was equally or more important than the *subject* of the play.

More than 66% of the respondents indicated that they were between the ages of 12-14 when they became serious fans of particular pop-culture phenomena. In nearly every report, including those provided by subjects who as children were interested in playing with characters of popular culture, the intensity of fan interests during middle and high school was described as being fundamentally and qualitatively different than interests in popular culture during childhood. In early through late adolescence, for example, respondents were driven to pursue and engage in subjects of personal interest even when there were no others in the local social group with whom to share their interests.

While nearly a quarter of the respondents described the transition from childhood interests to adolescent fan participation as a gradual occurrence, a significant 20% described the attraction to a popular phenomenon as a

Figure 3. Sketch for an anthro cosplay by Grant Sarber. Courtesy of the artist.

dramatic emotional conversion. Coming across Anthro[7] images for the first time "took my breath!" wrote Darin[8] (personal communication, June 26, 2006). Linnéa remembered an instantaneous attraction to animé. "[I] was in the 8th grade when I saw the *Sailor Moon*[9]. I thought, 'Wow, that's exactly how I want to draw!' It was a turning point in my life!" (Linnéa, personal communication, July 25, 2006). These youth were among a handful of respondents who described an immediate attraction to striking visual qualities in the fan subject. Yet, they did not specify wanting to become *artists* in responses to the stimulating phenomenon, even though Linnéa described as intense desire to want to "draw like that;" rather, something in the visuality of anthropomorphic figures or *Sailor Moon* imagery aroused intuitive awareness of qualities with which they identified or wished to identify. Only in retrospect were these youth able to explain their reactive responses as yearnings to connect with symbolic qualities or physical characteristics of the phenomena.

The Fascination of Fan Phenomena

When asked to define what in the visual or narrative subject matter appealed to them, nearly 70% of the respondents described pleasures of engaging with fantasy. Some fans, however, were better able than others to articulate the reasons specific subjects elicited pleasure. The inexplicable attraction of fan subjects especially confounded younger (14-and 15-year-old) fans. "I like cynical characters and beautifully tragic plots in anime. I don't know why. I just do" insisted 14-year-old Rachel (personal communication, July 30, 2006). Another youth described artmaking as an involuntary reaction to fan phenomenon "I read Harry Potter and my hand just won't stop drawing the characters" (Hala, personal communication, May 25, 2006). A 15-year-old associated therapeutic affect with fanartmaking but offered no explanation of why this might be so. "Drawing [cartoons] sucks the sadness right out of me" she wrote (Mickey, personal communication, July 30, 2006).

[7]Anthro Art (i.e., anthropomorphic art) refers to imagery that integrates the concept of animal characters with human characteristics.

[8]To protect the privacy of respondents, only first names are used throughout this article.

[9]*Sailor Moon* is a manga series created by Naoko Takeuchi.

Youth who were 16 or older provided more comprehensive reasons for their attraction to favorite narratives. They were able to reflect upon and delineate connections between the inner lives of fictive characters and their own emotional needs, relationships with others, and abilities to adapt to difficult situations or adopt different socio-cultural points-of-view. One 16-year-old wrote that exploring her own experiences through fanart and cosplay provided insight about how to deal with classroom bullies, made her a more secure person, and helped her "understand some social issues." She proudly reported, "I'm nothing like I was before" (Daniela, personal communication, July 30, 2006). A 20-year-old wrote, "I like to cosplay evil characters because I feel sorry for them … I'm not an evil person myself, but I have an understanding of them and see them from their points of view." (Linda, personal communication, May 26, 2006). Ben, age 23, expressed appreciation for visual stories that provided complex models or "archetypes not normally canonized in Western art and literature, that have depths of character or character traits uncommon in some Western media" (Ben, personal communication, August 2, 2006). Overall, nearly 64% of the respondents agreed that complexity of characters or character interactions and multilayered texts were engaging characteristics of their favorite narratives.

Social Interactions Among Fans

A third of the respondents reported that group participation in fantasy play increased satisfaction by providing challenging intellectual stimulation, self-validation, enhanced feelings of well-being, or sense-of-belonging to community. Thirteen (13) adolescent respondents volunteered life-stories of changing geographies and people-crowded, yet fragmented, real-life landscapes. For example, Jade (personal correspondence, February 14, 2006) explained that because she and her family had moved a dozen times during her childhood, people she met in online fandom became constants in her social community. Likewise, Jessie (personal correspondence, March 15, 2006) indicated that size and the impersonal environment of her urban high school inhibited her ability to make and maintain close personal ties with other students. Within the social contexts of online fandom, these young women donned characters and tried out roles as ways of developing aspects of themselves that they were timid, intimidated, or had no means of exploring in the company of real-life peers whom they perceived as mere acquaintances or strangers.

Apart from meeting and making friends at fan conventions, only 26% of the youth reported knowing other fans within their local communities with whom they might interact. Seventy-three percent (73%) of all the respondents sought the friendship of like-minded peers predominantly or exclusively through online sites. Like Jade and Jessie, respondents frequently stated that they knew and were better known by others in the online fandom than by those in their real geographic communities. The respondents described three beneficial effects of sharing their artmaking activities with other fans. First, creating fanart or cosplay was seen as a way of figuring out how the world works—not by reading how the original authors of popular narratives presented character interactions—but by personally manipulating and experiencing the consequences of alternate interactions, and by discussing or debating interpretations of these experiences with

other fans. The second way of knowing was through interacting with images, stories, and people from many diverse cultures and parts of the world. Hélène, a French fanartist, described this effect as being "like a door opening to other cultures" (Hélène, personal communication, May 25, 2006).

Finally, the respondents appreciated seeing stylistic differences of others' fanart or cosplay presentations. Youth from Western cultures were eagerly curious to learn about Eastern aesthetics, for example, and young people from non-mainstream cultures, like Indonesian high school student Jia-Ling (personal communication, February 13, 2006), who posted her manga-style illustration of a local folk puppet play, *wayang kulit*, were pleased that others accepted and showed laudatory interest in their local-cultural interpretations of fan phenomena.

Learning to Create Fanart of Cosplay

More than 33% of the fanartists and 75% of the cosplayers insisted that their artmaking skills were self-taught, because they learned through self-motivated research and practice. They applied strategies such as intently studying and relentlessly copying models created by original artists of the fan materials, and also turned to one another, family, and friends as teachers. The respondents overwhelmingly agreed (79%) that practicing exact copies (i.e., *canonical* representations) of the favorite subject was critical to early learning of fanart and cosplay. The necessity of getting a character's appearance right, so that other fans will recognize the character, compelled fanartists and cosplayers to attend to the technically difficult tasks of artmaking. A 17-year-old fanartist emphasized this necessity; "It looks simple, yet it is actually quite complicated to draw. You have to get everything correct or the image looks silly" (Kelly, personal communication, May 29, 2006).

Whether they created exact copies or adaptations of an original artist's work, fanartists and cosplayers turned to peers in real or online fandom for advice about composition, shading, sewing, and special effects. They submitted their work online for critique by other fans, fanartists, and cosplayers. Constructive critiques from fellow fans, who were also artists, were mentioned as valued aids to learning by 80% of the respondents. These critiques included not only advice about technical aspects of artmaking but also comments about relationships between visual presentations and characterizations of illustrated or masqueraded characters. Thus, when a favorite story was illustrated or performed in a stylistically original way, fan critics might "say, 'It couldn't be like that' or, 'That works. That very well could happen. Good idea!'" (Madelyn, personal communication, July 30, 2006).

Besides attaining expert skills of crafting fanart or cosplay, the ultimate goal of every fan-based art maker was to develop a distinct personal style (i.e., *fanonical* representation) that might set him or her apart from the original artist and from all other fans who create images or cosplay based on the same source. Acknowledgment of competence was awarded in several ways including: through complimentary online comments left on individual artist's gallery pages by fellow fans; being listed as a favorite on other fanartists' or

cosplayers' websites; being asked to pose for photographs at conventions; being awarded prizes at fanart shows and masquerade competitions held online or at fan conventions; or by being commissioned to create specialty images or costumes for fellow fans. Skilled fanartists and cosplayers who demonstrated engaging personal styles garnered significantly increased stature and importance within the fan community; the highest recognition went to those who showed willingness to offer positive constructive critiques and advice to others or who praised, supported, and mentored novice art makers.

Thirty-five percent (35%) of the fanartists indicated that they learned useful techniques such as perspective, foreshortening, or shading in middle school and high school art classes, although not all of these respondents described the art classes as having engaged their *interests* in art. "I have been in too many art classes where I was forced to do art I didn't enjoy, so I got the technical skill but not the enjoyment out of it," explained Tammy (personal communication, July 30, 2006). The remaining 66% of the respondents did not describe formal art education as helpful, and 26% eschewed art classes altogether past the required courses in middle school.

Several respondents (18%) expressed beliefs that art teachers misunderstood the deeply meaningful, self-revelatory aspects of fan-based expressivity and dismissed fanart and cosplay as derivative, juvenile, immature, or naïve art forms. Negative attitudes expressed by some art teachers discouraged fanartists from exposing their fan interests to their teachers' potential disapproval, and inadvertently, compelled these students to become surreptitious in gaining information from formal art instruction that might be applied to their fanart or cosplay. Among the fans who perceived school art classes as providing little support for their interests in fanart learning, the primary complaint (57%) centered on the structure of art curriculum and instruction. Fanartists and cosplayers were patient in copying source material as a process of learning how to communicate with others of the fan community, but were impatient about learning knowledge and skills that focused on technique without considering meaningfulness of content. They viewed instructor-directed, sequentially presented knowledge as out-of-sync with their needs to explore some artistic processes repeatedly while acquiring other skills on a 'need to know' basis as they attempted to express ideas about their interests.

The Role of Art in the Future Lives of Fanartists and Cosplayers

Nearly 70% of the respondents in this study described their fanartmaking or cosplay activities as escapist in nature. Some explained that creating fanart or participating in cosplay provided pleasurable escape from mundane routines of life and propelled them into fantasy worlds that became 'real' when shared with others. The emotional satisfaction and pleasure of fan participatory activities gave relevance to these artistic expressions, set fan-creative endeavors apart from other everyday activities, and provided balance to lives that seemed otherwise boring or mundane.

Art as fantasy play that balances against ordinary experience may explain why, in spite of the high degree of skill and sophistication evidenced in many

of their fanart and cosplay creations, only 51% of the fanartists or cosplayers indicated that they hoped or planned to pursue careers as artists. Those who described themselves as desiring to pursue professional careers in art, and four respondents who *were* artists (i.e., two graphic designers, a photographer, and an interior decorator) also experienced creation of fanart and cosplay as qualitatively different than the creation of other types of art. As one 21-year-old graphic designer explained: unlike art created to please clients, fanart is "relaxing, pleasurable, personal … done just for me" (Charlene, personal communication, July 31, 2006).

Of those young people who anticipated pursuing careers in art, nearly all indicated that they had considered art careers before or apart from artmaking in the context of fandom. Only two fanartists indicate that their growing confidence as fanartists led them to consider themselves artistically capable. On the other hand, one young woman described how developing skills in fanart convinced her to pursue a non-art related career. "Drawing animals … rekindled my love for animals, and as a result, I will be studying animal medicine. Drawing has brought me closer to discovering who I am and what I really want to do" (Lauren, personal communication, May 26, 2006)

The fact, that 49% of the respondents reported no compelling desire to translate the pleasures of fan-based artmaking into art careers, suggested that these fans were not driven to produce fanart or cosplay because they imagined themselves to be artists, designers, or performers. Rather, each fanartist or cosplayer produced fan-based art to discover some inner sense of self that was intrinsically fulfilled and culminated in an ability to "put life in order" (Cris, personal communication, April 16, 2006), "add meaning" (Hala, personal communication, May 26, 2006), or " provide a necessary balance" to life (Hélène, personal communication, May 25, 2006). Nearly all the fanartists and cosplayers (98%) reported that they hoped or expected to continue creating art for their own pleasure and in response to their fan interests well into their adult lives.

Revisiting the Conceptual Framework

The findings of this study agree in several ways with the proposed framework, but also suggest areas where that framework might be amended. Conclusions indicate that, in stage one, motivation to create fanart or cosplay did come about due to an immediate and powerful *resonance* with something in the milieu of storied popular culture (Jenkins, 2007). Youth might not have been able to immediately understand or articulate this phenomenon, but it emboldened them (i.e., aroused *curiosity*) to put aside hesitancies or insecurities about artistic ability and enter the stage of self-seeking. In this second stage, *challenging* tasks of endless repetition, study, and practice (Prevonik, et. al., 2007) contributed to mastery of skills (Jenkins, 2006; Hills, 2002; Prevonik, et. al., 2007).

Social interactions with others of like-interests (Falk, 2007; Jenkins, 2006; Hills 2002), whether in person or online, also were important. Social interactions *supported* fans' interpretations of an adored subject and, consequently, their internalized concepts of self (Jenkins, 2006). Additionally, social interac-

tions supported development of competent skills, which led to the third stage whereby artmaking was not only intrinsically pleasurable, but also the basis for extrinsic *recognition* and elevation to *importance* within the fandom (Prevonik, et. al., 2007). An aspect not mentioned in the proposed framework, but revealed by the study as important during the third stage, iterates that youth who gave back to the socio-cultural community of fans by sharing acquired art knowledge and supporting or instructing others, experienced the highest degree of praise and *recognition.*

In the fourth level, combined internal urges and external social influences motivated fans to deeper levels of engagement with the source materials, their own artmaking capabilities (Prevonik, et. al., 2007), and others in the global fan community. This did not always translate into formal studies of art at the secondary or postsecondary level, however, as suggested in Au's framework (Prevonik, et. al., 2007).

Another obvious alteration of the original framework showed that, in contradiction to Au's findings related to youth enrolled in art classes (Prevonik, et. al., 2007), high achievement in fanart or cosplay artmaking, even if accompanied by recognition from others in the fan community, might not result in commitments to life roles as artists. Rather, the fifth stage was marked by attainment of affective states of internal/external balance and self-efficacy. Life was more satisfying when mundane experiences were balanced by excursions into fantasy. Fan youth internalized self-efficacy regarding their abilities to respond artistically to that with which they experienced resonance—whether or not that meant aspiring to become adult artists**.**

Conclusion

The young people who participated in this study tell us, in their own words, why artmaking is important to them. Artmaking, as engagement with fantasies of popular culture, assists identity development, permits expression, exploration, and enactment of ways of being in the world, and connects the fan participant to ideas beyond personal and local cultural parameters. Competent artmaking skills and knowledge are acquired. Some fan youth consider applying these skill to future art careers; a few may seek self-fulfillment in non-art careers that are awakened through engagements with fanart or cosplay; others engage in artmaking as a way of balancing their life experiences between mundane realities and expressive fantasies. The accounts of these youth lend support to Freedman's (2003a) argument that ideas should direct technique, and her proposal that three considerations be embedded in a VCAE curriculum for middle and high school students: artmaking as a component of identity formation, the development of ideas as well as skills, and cultural critique (p. 40) as a way of broadening understanding and expanding students' points of view.

I am not advocating that all art teachers of secondary level students incorporate fanart or cosplay in their curricula. After all, not all adolescents or young adults are fans of popular culture narratives, and those who are fans have widely different preferences in terms of the subjects they adore. These secondary and postsecondary level students seemed drawn to intricate visual

stories with complex characters that provided messages and models for ways of being and negotiating through challenging life situations. I am suggesting art teachers involve students with complex narrative subject matter and intricate stories about images and artists' lives. Additionally, 7-12 level art teachers might consider:

1. Permitting copying of *student-selected* images as a learning strategy accompanied by discussions about why and how the original artists make choices regarding content, media, and technique.

2. Encouraging students to develop long term, multi-layered projects based on student-selected themes that could result in individual and collaborative artmaking.

3. Guiding students to detect similarities and differences between representations of popular contemporary stories as contrast with those of historic or cultural traditions by emphasizing transposing, juxtaposing, or translating elements of one form into those of the other.

4. Providing opportunities for students to compare aesthetic ideals, share ideas, and critique artworks with students of like-interests globally through Internet exchanges.

5. Inviting students to develop personal styles through considering their individual cultural experiences, aesthetic preferences, and interests.

6. Having students consider how art might be experienced and applied in the context of many life roles, including those that traditionally may not be considered art-related.

The adolescents and young adults who participated in this study remind us that effective strategies for teaching art to adolescents and young adults should emphasize attending to more than skill acquisition. Art educators should pay attention to those qualities that render art meaningful in the lives of their students by employing strategies that (a) explore narrative ideas, (b) encourage self-exploration and skill development through research, repetitive artmaking, and sharing of knowledge, (c) support positive social interaction among students from many different cultures, and (d) provide balance between fantasy and the ordinariness of everyday life.

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Appendix

The Questionnaire

1. When and how did you become interested in fanart or cosplay?

2. What interests you about this subject and how do you experience this interest?

   a. What characters/stories do you enjoy illustrating or cosplaying most? What is it about these subjects that appeal most to you?

   b. Do you share your interest in fanart/cosplay with others in your local real-time community or only online?

   c. Who supports and encourages this interest, and how do they express that support?

3. How did you learn to create fanart or cosplay?

   a. Could you indicate how important each of these processes were to your learning?

   - Formal art classes
   - Copying the images of others
   - Tutorials online or in books
   - Critiques from friends, fans or other artists online or in person? If critiques were beneficial, what kind of critiques were most important and why? Which were least helpful?

   b. What are important aesthetic and/or crafting considerations when you are creating fanart or cosplay? What makes an artwork or costume excellent? Is there such a thing as "bad" fanart or cosplay? Explain.

4. How do you think of this activity in terms of your life and life goals?

   a. How much of your free time do you think you devote to creating fan art or participating in other fan related activities?

   b. Do you think cosplay has affected the way you experience thinking about life or your life goals? Explain?

   c. What hopes or expectations do you have for the future in terms of your artistic activity? Do you hope to become a professional artist and make a living from your work? Explain.