

ADOLESCENTS' VALUE FORMATION IN THE SUPERHERO FANDOM

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JOSEPH RUSSELL R. SANTOS

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Acknowledgments

The concept of superheroes has always been a familiar one to all of us, regardless of how much we are interested in them. It goes without saying that the ideologies and principles superheroes embody have given us the notion of what it takes to be heroic and how this heroism is something that society will always need. Hence, I would first like to extend my gratitude to all the people behind the creation of such characters, who have become significant figures in the lives of children, teenagers, and even adults. Without these creative individuals, not only would we have fewer sources of entertainment, but we would also have fewer sources of inspiration.

Of course, these superheroes wouldn't be relevant without the fans who show their undying support and passion for their favorite heroes and heroines. Regardless if they are inclined to *Marvel*, *DC*, or any other brand, fans will always be united by their love for the stories and characters they either grew up with or have just been recently introduced to. At some point in our lives, we may have even wanted to become just like these heroes we admire. Thus, to the community of superhero fans, I thank you as well for maintaining what the characters stand for. From a fan to another, I hope that you continue to journey with me in the fight against *Hydra* and in the protection of Earth from *Darkseid*.

Aside from the superhero community, I also wish to express my gratefulness for the "super individuals" who guided me in the completion of this work. To Ms. Maricel Santos, who has given me an amazing and truly useful laptop, to Ms. Rissa Mae Sanoria, who has helped me with the transcriptions, to Ms. Michelle Santos, who has shared suggestions for my presentation, to Mr. Armstrong Villamayor, who has assisted me with the coding, to Mr. Allen Legaspi, who has accommodated my workplace needs, to Dr. Ron Resurreccion, who has provided me with

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Lastly, the motive for initiating this study certainly exists because of all the people who need a superhero in life and those who aspire to be a hero in their own little way. Regardless of what you have gone through or continue to deal with, I am confident that we shall push back. Though it is easier said than done, we, too, can turn the blackest nights into the brightest days. Always remember, I'm with you 'till the end of the line.

*Just because someone stumbles and loses their way, it doesn't mean they're lost forever.
Sometimes we all need a little help.*

– Charles Xavier of the X-Men

Abstract

The Superhero Fandom is a fan group that continues to grow across the globe because of the notable characters and stories found in comic books, television series, and films. To determine what fans specifically attain from this community, the present study aimed to explore the value formation of adolescents in the superhero fandom. Fifteen adolescents from the Philippines were individually interviewed to gather the data needed. In addition, two local online superhero fan communities were observed for a week. Thematic analysis of the interviews show that adolescent fans adopt values such as helpfulness, doing what is right, concern for the well-being of others, optimism, and perseverance. Furthermore, the findings also reveal that adolescent fans get these values from viewing superhero-related fan material, witnessing a character's ability and experiences, participating in fan discussions and social media, and playing superhero video games. Relatedly, these values and the fandom itself are helpful in their personal lives in that they have something to relate to, a source of happiness and satisfaction, the chance to address the challenges of life, and a feeling of a sense of belongingness. On the other hand, the results from the observed online fan communities do not show any relevant data that answer the research questions because probing the members was not part of the objective for the present study. Nevertheless, the same online groups have been found to be a venue for the free sharing of information about the fandom. Overall, the findings suggest that the superhero fandom is a context for the formation of values that are essential in positive youth development.

Keywords: Values, Fan Communities, Positive Youth Development, Adolescents

Chapter I: Introduction

Superman, Captain America, Batman, Iron Man, Supergirl, Black Widow, Wonder Woman, and Captain Marvel – these are just some of the names associated with the word “superheroes.” As common as these superheroes are, there are countless more characters that may or may not be known to some, but are certainly popular among those who are fans of the superhero genre. With the growing superhero culture captured by the ever-popular *Marvel* and *DC* movies, superheroes have become part of the mainstream consumption of both old-time and new fans. In turn, their interests in this area may extend to other platforms, may it be in television series, comic books, and even video games that they integrate as part of their lifestyle and status as a fan.

These notable characters that many are familiar with can sometimes be even referred to as role models to the youth, especially that majority of those who are fans of these superheroes belong to younger side of life. Teenagers have been regarded to look up to their favorite characters because of the sense of wonder and aspiration people get from the likes of such fictional figures. Not to mention, the period of adolescence is also the time for exploration and heightened peer-engagement (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2010), which is why adolescent fans may more likely to subscribe to other forms of networks and communities outside their primary connections. Developmentally-speaking, these adolescents are inclined to seek out peer interactions (Smetana, Campiogne-Barr, & Metzger, 2006) more often and it is highly possible for them to shift to individuals and groups that share their own interests. With this line of thought, adolescents who are fans of the superhero genre may be more inclined to venture into fan activities with other fans.

While it may be easy to determine who the fans are, what does it mean to be a fan? Many answers can be given to describe what a fan is and what the different types of fans are, but being a fan entails more than just being passionately interested in something. Fan studies have been prevalent in recent times especially that the rise of fan groups is evident across all contexts. However, in contrast to sports and music, the science fiction and fantasy genre consistently do not get that much attention as far as social science research is concerned. It is also unfortunate that fans coming from science fiction and fantasy genre are also given unnecessary stereotypes that lead to the formation of degrading remarks towards their hobbies, the community they are part of, and even to the members themselves (Cohen, Atwell, Anderson, & Tindage, 2015).

Despite the seemingly negative and stereotypical connotation, the outstanding culture and benefits that the fantasy fandom provide cannot be denied because of the emerging studies that prove all the noteworthy advantages that fans attain from engaging in the respective fandom. To give a few, some of these psychological benefits include a source of a psychological sense of community (Obst, Zinkiewicz, & Smith, 2002; Plante, Reysen, Roberts & Smith, 2014; Chadborn & Reysen, 2016), an opportunity for identity-formation (Chen, 2003; Groene & Hettinger, 2016; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005; Mock et al., 2013; Plante, Roberts, Reysen, Gerbasi, 2016; Reysen, Plante, Roberts, & Gerbasi, 2015), and a means to raise political awareness (Brough & Shreshtova, 2011; Lopez, 2011; Siuda, 2014).

With these notable findings showing the positive outcomes that fantasy fan groups offer, it is therefore necessary to shed more light on the impact of the growing community. In view of this, newer results will certainly establish that fantasy fan groups can provide more than just mere leisure. For this research, other unexamined concepts will be tackled. More specifically,

this present study will explore the values that adolescents get from one of the notable fan groups of the fantasy genre today – the Superhero Fandom.

Chapter II: Review of Related Literature

The context of fandoms

Fan groups, otherwise known as fandoms, is considered as a multicultural territory where each fan community subscribes to its own unique media substances, values, and contexts (Chen, 2007). Often, it is composed of individuals who perceive themselves as part of a larger community joined by similar interests (Reysen et al., 2015). Fandoms come in different forms such as music, sports, and science fiction, and these areas provide numerous opportunities for studies. However, it would be more crucial to examine the less-explored fantasy fandom which comprises notable fictional materials including *Star Wars*, *Marvel and DC Superheroes*, *Harry Potter*, and other related media. Morey (as cited in Tsay-Vogel & Sanders, 2015) reveals that fantasy fandoms are more intense among teenagers and young adults, indicating that the population of these groups are mainly composed of those who belong in the said age range. Relatedly, these fans are not merely passive members or consumers, because they actively seek out to their fandom.

Tsay-Vogel & Sanders (2015) did a study on a group of *Harry Potter* fans who were tasked to answer a series of tests. The results indicate that those who had higher levels of perceived membership also had higher levels of enjoyment, appreciation, knowledge acquisition, and intentions to seek fan-related materials. Tsay Vogel & Sanders (2015) further explained that some of the big factors that lead fans to be proactive are fan activities such as the existence of annual conventions, the available media products that allows fans to re-watch their chosen series or movies, and even fan-made fictional materials that entices fans to know more about the deeper stories behind their respective fandom.

Another possible reason for adolescents' participation is that the dynamics behind their fan group is more appealing to them. In their study, Chadborn & Reysen (2016) asked a large number of fans to take tests that measure levels of their sense of community, and their results revealed that adolescents feel a stronger sense of community with their respective fandom as opposed to their local community. These same results do indeed prove and further validate the other findings related to the link between sense of community and fandom engagement. Obst et al. (2002) showed that fans of the fantasy fandom have high levels of sense of community, while Plante et al. (2015) claimed that fans coming from the same community share a common ground in terms of belongingness and family, and they consider these as big motivations to engage in their corresponding fandoms. Since the community is held together as a loose basis of shared interests in circulating texts, comics, or animation, the community brings adolescents closer to each other (Chen, 2003).

In reference to these conceptualizations, it can then be said that fan membership in the fantasy fandom is similar with that of the peer group. Gorene & Hettinger (2015) did an experiment on two different fandoms. They assigned participants to receive either an affirming or threatening feedback about their fan identity. Participants were also asked to participate in a fandom-related task. Their results showed that in comparison with fans that received threatening feedback and were weakly identified to their fandoms, participants who highly identified with the fandom and had their fan identities affirmed had greater engagement in the fan-related task. These results prove that fan membership in the fantasy fandom also share similar social dynamics with other common social groups, such as being part of a peer network. Evidently, various studies even show evidence that adolescents gain a number of other psychological benefits from being part of a fandom, which is just like when they are with their peers. Notably,

membership in these fandoms helps promote political activism (Brough & Shreshtova, 2011; Lopez, 2011; Siuda, 2014), builds social and personal identity (Chen, 2003; Groene & Hettinger, 2016; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005; Mock et al., 2013; Plante et al., 2016; Reysen et al., 2015), and accumulation of life skills (Chen, 2007; Vinney & Dill-Shackleford, 2016).

In short, fan membership offers more than just leisure; it also provides an opportunity to establish good peer network and a stronger sense of community. These fantasy fandoms may differ in terms of the fictional material and subgenre, but it goes without saying that they function as another type of social group that adolescents have. Thus, encouraging adolescents to at least be participative or to maximize their membership in fan communities would be beneficial for them. However, it is first important to determine if there is indeed something that fans can get from the fantasy fandom, apart from the entertainment value these fandoms provide. These include prosocial values that are beneficial to one's development, which will be tackled in the next section.

Fandom as a venue for values

Schwartz (1992, as cited in Barni & Danioni, 2016) defines values as desirable and trans-situational goals that serve as guiding principles in people's life to select modes and means of actions. In line with this definition, values may come from different sources, including social groups. The dynamics in fan membership may seem similar to peer networks, but there are other unique mechanisms that are found within them especially in fantasy fandoms. Given that this particular fan group involves fiction, adolescent members experience "getting lost" in a story and the narrative. These experiences then contribute to the formation of one's attitude, beliefs, and even behavioral intentions that may be in line with the story world (Dill-Shackleford et al., 2016). In their same review, Dill-Shackleford et al. (2016) state that exposure to fiction/fantasy

fandom helps increase the value of empathy and reduces prejudice. According to these authors, an explanation for this occurrence was that fiction provides a safe place to process emotions, ideas, values, and beliefs. Relatedly, Sanders & Tsay-Vogel (as cited in Tsay-Vogel & Sanders, 2015) pointed out that frequent exposure to fan-related narratives can impact fans' values such that, heavier engagement is related to agreement with values embedded in the said narratives. In a different study, Dill-Shackleford et al. (as cited in Vinney & Dill-Shackleford, 2016) did an analysis of fan-related comments pertaining to the characters of a fictional television show. Their results showed that the fans discussed them as if they were actual individuals and they used complex ideas, values, and beliefs that tackle real-life issues.

While the mentioned findings give emphasis to the impact of the fictional aspect of fandom, there are still other ways adolescents form values through their fan membership. Plante et al. (2014) explored in two studies the relationship between engagement in fantasy fandoms and global citizenship, which is otherwise known as the identity based on prosocial values that aim to better the world. After conducting a series of tests to a group composed of fans and a control group, they found that those who engaged in fantasy fandoms significantly had higher sense of global awareness, identified themselves more as global citizens, and had higher levels of prosocial values. The authors concluded that fan activities and the global citizenship they promote help instill prosocial values among fans. It is possible that this prevalence is due to the wider opportunities to interact with other fans. Obst et al. (2002) claimed that fans get together through local gatherings and conventions (e.g. Comic Con), where thousands of individuals attend events, panels, and discussions. However, interaction is not limited to these types of engagements; they also mingle through non face-to-face means, such as communicating in online

forums and blogs. Thus, this becomes an avenue to not just build a stronger community, but it is also a way to learn from one another.

With all the studies pertaining to value formation in the fantasy fandoms, it would then be important to pinpoint how exactly do adolescents adopt the said values. Most of the existing studies used a quantitative approach that revealed the impact and contributions of such values to adolescents' development. Conversely, only a small amount of qualitative researches were conducted. One study that discusses value formation in a particular fantasy fandom is that conducted by Serrano (2017).

In his research, Serrano (2017) interviewed a number of avid comic book fans who were asked to recall their experiences in reading comic books during their adolescence. After doing a qualitative analysis, the author found out that these fans were able to identify themselves with certain characters who helped them form values, including, selflessness, service to others, a level of conscience, and an awareness of consequences in order to attain a moral life. In addition, being a comic book reader and fan also allowed the same participants to be cautious about immoral values such as self-centeredness, hunger for power, sense of entitlement, lack of care, and sinisterness.

With the evidence showing how fantasy fandoms may be a source of values, it is noteworthy that the line of research in this area continues to grow. However, the specific values and how they are adopted have not yet been thoroughly examined. Most of the studies involve how fan membership contributes to different psychological outcomes. Therefore, there is a need to understand the dynamics behind adolescent value formation in general.

Value Formation in Adolescence

While values may seem simple in terms of how they are understood, the way they are formed requires more examination. Konopka (1973) defines value formation as a developing phenomenon that involves adopting values through an interacting process between an individual and the systems surrounding a person throughout different age periods. In her review, Konopka examined different psychosocial concepts and eventually proposed that the formation of values is a developmental, intellectual, and emotional process which peaks in adolescence. During this stage, Konopka explains that these young people are inclined to use both “thinking” and “feeling” to re-evaluate their own values. Thus, exposing them to a variety of contradicting values can help them to question alternatives until they adopt a certain value-system.

Warren & Wray-Lake (2017) points out that adolescence is the period of identity-formation, therefore it is also the time when they often explore behaviors that align with the values of their parents and peers. Warren & Lake further expounded that because of this phenomenon, adolescents then express commitment to the said values that they internalize. Perhaps, adolescents’ inclinations to be overly evaluative of their own thoughts and feelings, and to be more self-aware (Weil et al., 2013; Frankenberger, 2000), are the main contributors that lead them to more likely be adoptive of values during the said developmental stage. As a matter of fact, one related way of how these adolescents form their values is through mindfulness (Warren & Wray-Lake, 2017), which may be associated with their egocentric predispositions (Frankenberger, 2000; Weil et al., 2013). Warren & Wray-Lake (2017) studied values by conducting a survey to a group of teenagers, and their findings reveal that adolescents who practiced mindfulness had higher levels of intrinsic value behavior (e.g. self-acceptance,

affiliation, community feeling) and lower levels of extrinsic value behavior (e.g. financial success, attractive appearance, social recognition).

In line with these results, it is safe to point out that apart from the methods that lead adolescents to form values, the specific values that they adopt also vary. As an example, adolescents who engage in prosocial activities are found to have higher self-transcendence values and lower hedonism values, while those who participate more in age-inappropriate activities have higher hedonism and self-enhancement values, and lower self-transcendence and conservation values (Rechter & Sverdlik, 2016). Collectively, these studies have raised that there is still a need to examine the unexplored values, because the specific values have not yet been determined.

Adolescence has been established as the period of identity-formation and of stronger connection with peers. In this regard, promoting the right values that enhance teenagers' positive outlook, well-being, and their relationship with others should be given importance so that they may adopt these beneficial principles as they progress through the said stage. In view of this, it is important to tackle the relevant sources where adolescents adopt the values they have.

Sources of Values

When discussing social influence and adolescent development, the role of parents and peers come into play. However, it has been established that peer groups start to become more influential in this stage, where the adolescents slowly deviate from conformity to parents (Padilla-Walker & Carlo, 2007). Similarly, the same mechanism is evident in adolescent value formation. Through a quantitative examination of teenagers' values, friendship, and community, Barni et al. (2013) argued that having the peer group influence one's value formation can remain

beneficial in certain situations. They found out that adolescents learn positive values, such as social responsibility, more often when they have higher levels of trusted friendships and community connectedness. In addition, even the positive peer group activities, including volunteerism, also lead teenagers to uphold the value of social responsibility (Wray-Lake et al., 2016). When it comes to larger issues that call for relevant values, adolescents who are part of peer groups with universalistic values are more likely to have lower levels of approval of political violence (Dahl, 2017).

Amidst the relationship between peer group and the values adopted, it is also necessary to examine the way these values are imbibed. Though it is pointed out that adolescents, to a certain extent, seem to befriend peers with similar levels of values (Dahl, 2017), teenagers' perceived peer expectations are part of what contributes to value formation. To provide a better understanding, Padilla-Walker & Carlo did a mediation study on value-related behavior, personal values, and peer expectation. The results of Padilla-Walker & Carlo (2007) reveal that adolescents' prosocial behavior is accounted by peer expectation, and the relationship is mediated by adolescents' personal values.

In summary, as adolescents engage with their own peer group, they learn certain values depending on the group characteristic. Given that there are a wide variety of values and principles, it would be essential to learn more about the specific principles other unexplored values that teenagers adopt when they are with their peer group. In addition, peer groups also come in different forms, which is why it is also possible that the values of one peer group may be different from the values of another. With that being said, it would be more essential to conduct a qualitative study on the actual experiences of adolescents who are part of one of the communities

of the fantasy fandoms. Specifically, questions such as what are the fan-related activities adolescents do in order to learn these values, what specific values do they get from their membership, and in what ways these values and the fandom itself become useful in their lives, are some of what need to be tackled through a study. In doing so, the dynamics behind value formation in the fantasy fandom will be better understood and its benefits for real-life implications can be maximized.

Conceptual Framework

The present study argues that adolescents who engage in the fantasy fandom are able to adopt certain values that are relevant to their actual lives. Through the examination of the different activities and other related processes that teenagers experience in their respective fandoms, the researcher will be able to determine the impact of these learning outcomes to the fans, which in turn would be imbibed as part of their values system. Bardi & Goodwin (2011) presented a framework that contains five facilitators as the ones responsible for value formation: priming processes, adaptation, identification, consistency maintenance, and direct persuasion attempts. First of all, priming processes involve the use of repeated priming, where people may attain values from being constantly reminded about a certain value they need to adhere to. Second, adaptation refers to using values to adjust to a new environmental demand. For instance, a teenager who is newly given a task at home may find the need to use values that involve the efficient completion of the newly assigned roles. The present situation makes the individual more aware about what values are needed, which in turn would lead that person to change values or adopt new ones. Third, identification occurs when a person finds the need change values that are in line with the new group that he or she is affiliated. To illustrate, a student who is assigned to a high-achieving class will tend to learn the new group's values because that particular person now

feels associated with the said group. Fourth, consistency maintenance is an occurrence when adolescents make attempts to consistently use values that are in line with their behavior.

According to Bardi & Goodwin (2011), the reason for this is that individuals wish to avoid cognitive dissonance that is accounted for by the any inconsistency between one's expression and one's held values. A good example is when a teenager, who starts to acknowledge that she upholds the value of altruism, decides to always practice altruistic acts. Lastly, direct persuasion attempts tackle the use of encouragement to think about a new value. A teenager who has a discussion with a friend who tries to promote a certain ideology about a particular issue may gradually choose to adopt the said principle after elaborate consideration.

Using the framework of Bardi & Goodwin (2011), the five concepts that act as facilitators of value formation may explain the process behind how adolescents adopt values from a fantasy fandom. As adolescents become part of the said fandom, they are exposed to different social dynamics and mechanisms that lead them to get certain values. Initially, the constant reinforcement of heroic themes and principles that are found in the films and comics they consume become part of the priming process. As a result, the constant "reminders" that adolescents witness slowly become more salient in their values system. In this case, the constant priming done by the social surrounding becomes a path towards value formation.

Besides being primed, adolescents who become members of their fan group will feel the need to adjust accordingly to the new lifestyle that the fandom offers. Slowly, adolescents will first blend in by knowing more about the fandom itself by reading more novels and watching more series. Eventually, they begin to engage in more intense fan-related practices, such as

regularly attending conventions and having discussions with fellow fans. In turn, they also adopt certain values along their participation in the activities and the adaptation practice itself.

Similar to adaptation, identification with the fantasy fandom also occurs in continuous engagement with the group. Adolescents gradually “become one” with their fandom because of the identification process that happens throughout their membership. Since these adolescents feel that they belong to the group, they interpret whatever values and ideas they see as beneficial to the members and part of what it takes to be a member. Therefore, they become strongly associated with the fandom and they then imbibe whatever values the group upholds.

In line with the fourth facilitator, adolescents who already had prolonged exposure with a fandom have the inclination to be consistent with their membership. One of the basic actions that they might take is to regularly keep track of the latest trends in their fandom. A perfect example is when avid fans make monthly subscriptions for their chosen comic books or when they stay tuned for the weekly *YouTube* videos of the latest fan theories about the next film. Relatedly, the same process also applies to value formation in the sense that adolescents try to embody the core values and themes that are promoted in fan materials. As fans get enticed with the values they adopt from the characters they relate with, they often uphold the same principles to remain consistent with what their fandom and the characters possess.

Finally, it is evident that fandom provide a space for discussions that are not just about the characters and stories, but also topics that are beyond yet related to the themes of the fandom. Online forums and social media posts about plot speculations, character analysis, and even philosophical motives of the heroes spark debates and rich discussions among fans. In a lot of cases, moral issues are even tackled to the point that fans would give thorough assessment about

the actions of the characters and cite situations that support their claims. Through this process, adolescents have the possibility to be persuaded and have their values and beliefs challenged.

This then leads adolescents to adopt values that are either enhanced or new to them.

The framework on the five facilitators of value formation (Bardi & Goodwin, 2011) explains the dynamic process behind adolescent value formation in fandoms. While each concept provide specific analysis on how adolescents adopt whatever values they get, all five of them do not need to be necessarily present at the same time before someone forms a new value. It is then important to take note that an adolescent fan can adopt values through one facilitator alone or through all five facilitators. Nevertheless, this particular model will serve as a good basis for pointing out the ways on how adolescents adopt their values from the fantasy fandom.

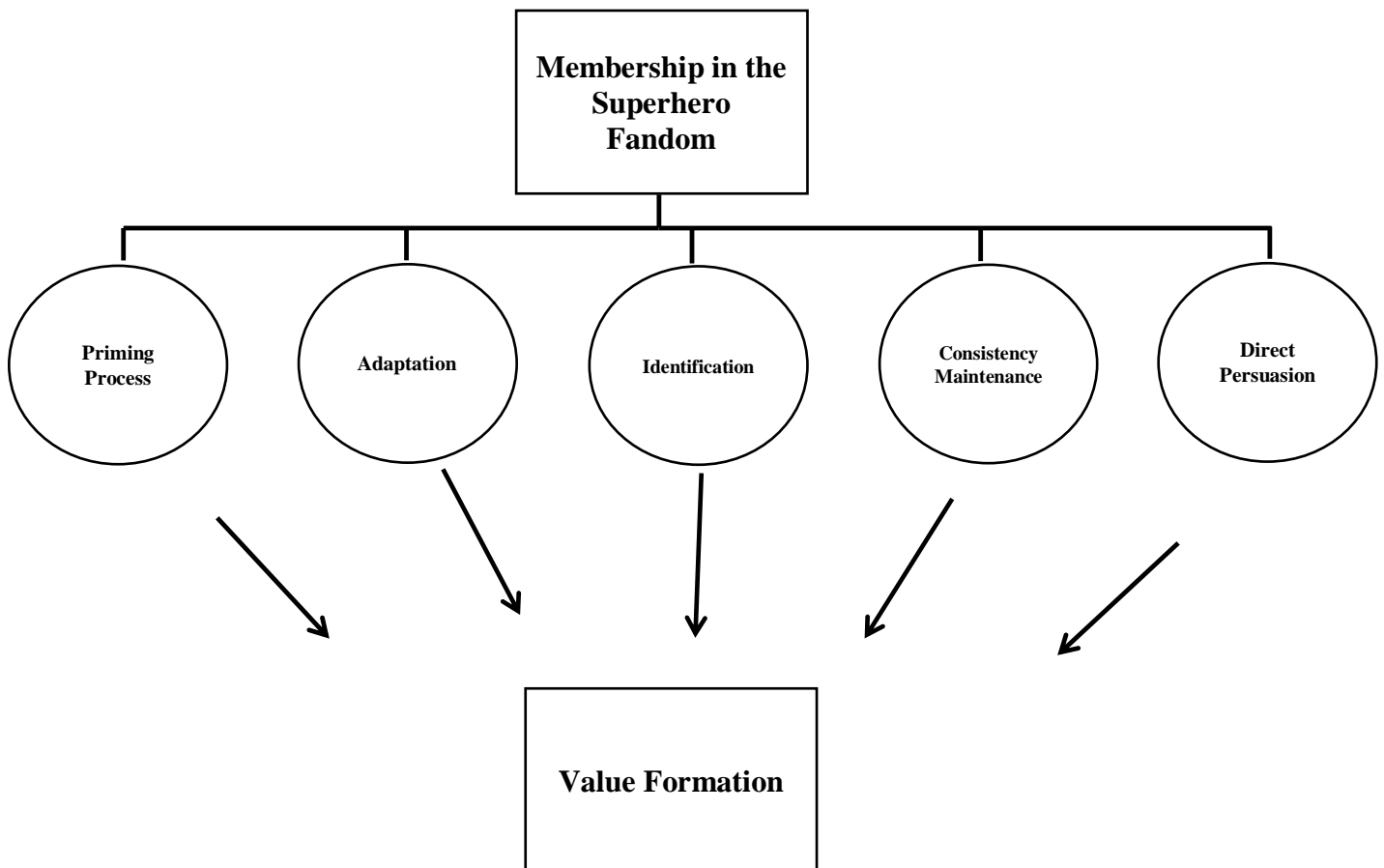


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

Statement of the Problem

The present research aimed to explore the values adopted by adolescents in the superhero fandom, the process pertaining to how they are formed, and the degree to which these values and the fandom itself become important these adolescents. More specifically, the following questions were sought to be answered:

- a. What are the specific values adopted by adolescents as they engage in the superhero fandom?
- b. How are the values adopted from the superhero fandom?
- c. How do the adopted values and the fandom itself, in the perspective of the adolescents, become helpful in their personal life?

Definition of Terms

1. **Superhero Fandom** - In this study, the superhero fandom was classified as the group that is composed of fans who participate in activities, watch and read related media, purchase merchandise, and engage in discussions pertaining to the superhero genre.
2. **Values** – In his theory, Schwartz (1992) define values as desirable and abstract goals that become guiding principles in the lives of people. In this study, values are principles or life lessons that fans learn during their engagement in the superhero fandom. Consequently, these values were determined as any life lesson or principle that adolescents learn from their fandom.
3. **Value Formation** – Value formation is defined by Konopka (1973) as a developing phenomenon that involves adopting values through an interacting process between an

individual and the systems surrounding a person. In this research, value formation was determined through questions that explored what values were adopted by adolescents, the means by which values are adopted, and the life implications of the values adopted.

Significance of the Study

Since fandoms belonging to the superhero genre are still not completely explored as opposed to other forms of mainstream fandoms, determining the different values that fans get from their respective group may establish a set of key variables that may serve as a precursor to future researches. Very few studies have tackled the link between value formation and fan membership, which is why the completion of this study will help generate stronger conceptualizations regarding adolescent value formation in this modern fandom. Additionally, the impact and benefits of participating in this type of community will also raise awareness that fantasy fandoms yield important advantages to teenagers. Hence, possible interventions and programs that make use of such fandoms may be drawn out as a means to help in positive youth development.

According to Lerner & Steinberg (2004), positive youth development is a belief that emphasizes on the use of fundamental resources for healthy development. They further describe that these resources include the utilization of communities and programs that would lead the youth to a positive direction. Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger (2006) point out that research on positive youth development, which encompasses constructs such as, adolescent well-being, compassion, and altruism, have been emerging. In this light, teenagers who are still in the process of developing their identity may be encouraged to take part in the superhero fandom as a means to find a good peer network and to learn values that may be part of their own identity.

Scope and Delimitations

The present study primarily focused on the values of adolescents whose age ranges from 14-19 years old. As qualified participants, they all have been part of the superhero for at least one year. Moreover, their participation mostly involved fan-related activities, including but not limited to, regular consumption of the source of media (i.e. watching its series, reading novels or comic books), purchasing of merchandise, joining fan discussions with others, and attending fan conventions. With that being said, implications may only involve teenagers who have experienced such circumstances. On the other hand, the online community observed did not use age as a variable because both fan groups are composed of thousands of people belonging to a diverse age range. Furthermore, the online fan communities in this study were made for the Philippines and both groups come from a single social media platform.

Chapter III: Methodology

Research Design

The researcher used a qualitative approach to explore the values learned by teenagers as they take part in their respective fandoms. One-on-one interview sessions were done with each participant. Through this method, the researcher obtained in-depth explanations that could be used to thoroughly describe the life principles gained by the participants and how they become meaningful and helpful in their lives. Furthermore, the said participants also had the opportunity to fully express their thoughts about the subject matter at hand. At the end of each interview, each participant was debriefed and given a limited edition *Star Wars* tumbler as an incentive for their participation. When it comes to the participants, all of them were adolescent fans. As for the method of data analysis, thematic analysis was utilized.

In addition to the interview, observation of an online community was also conducted. This has served as the second source of data that would supplement the interviews. Nørskov & Rask (2011) claim that combining this method with offline approaches, such as the face-to-face interview, will serve as a complement due to the additional data that may be garnered. More specifically, Nørskov & Rask (2011) referred to such communities that could produce the relevant data, as the Open Source Software (OSS) community, wherein information about informal aspects of interactions within a population can be retrieved through mere observation. When it comes to the data analysis used, thematic analysis was also the primary tool in interpreting the data.

Sample and Sampling Design

Purposive sampling was utilized in the research. Fifteen Filipino adolescents (8 males, 7 females) who meet the participant inclusion and were willing to share their experiences in their continuous engagement in the superhero fandom were invited to participate. The ages of the participants fall within the range of 14-19 years old ($M = 16.733$). All of them were also students who belong to a private educational institutions in the Philippines. At the time of their interviews, 6 were in Junior High School, 5 were in Senior High School, and 4 were in the College level. In line with religious affiliations, the participants were composed of a Born Again Christian ($N=1$), Catholics ($N=10$), Christians ($N=3$), and a Protestant ($N=1$). Qualified participants of the study were all Filipinos and residents of the Philippines. Each one of them has been a fan of the superhero genre for at least a year and an active consumer of related fan materials, including but not limited to television series, comic books, movies, and collectibles. In addition, all of them confirmed to be updated with the latest news about the superhero fandom. 7 participants have reported to subscribe to comic books, all 15 of them indicated they watch superhero films, 7 noted they view superhero television series, 13 have said that they browse online videos about the superhero fandom, 4 have reported to play superhero-themed video games, 3 claimed to attend fan conventions, and 8 browse through social media platforms and/or blogs.

With regard to the online community that will be observed, two Philippine online groups from a social media platform were observed. During the duration of the study, the first group was composed of 5,344 members and had been existing since 2015. The second group had 3,331 members and had been established since 2013. In both groups, members continuously posted images and videos, shared the latest news about the fandom, commented on relevant posts, and

engaged in discussions about the trends in superheroes. Group 1 had an average of 13 posts per day during the week, while Group 2 had an average of 36 posts on each day on that week. Moreover, Group 1 had 9 group moderators, while Group 2 had 11 moderators in total. On this social media platform, moderators are in charge of reviewing all the posts by the members and to ensure that they do not group violations, which include but are not limited to, using foul and offensive language directed at another member, any form of discrimination, and humiliating others.

Instruments

A semi-structured interview guide, which contains questions revolving around the personal experience of the participants, was used as the main tool for the study. Pilot-testing was done with a qualified participant and it was found out that some revisions regarding the interview scheduled had to be made. While rich and promising data were elicited, new main interview questions were used for the succeeding interviews: 1. What are the life lessons you have learned from superheroes and/or the fandom, 2. What fan activities did you do to learn these life lessons, and 3. In what instances have you used these life lessons and the fandom in your personal life. During the data-gathering itself, an audio-recording device was used so as to accurately take note of the important key points of what was discussed during the interviews. For the observation of the online community, a computer device was used to monitor the flow of the discussions within the said community.

The posts, which contained the content shared by the members, were also used as the items for the data-gathering itself. On average, group 1 was found to have an average of 13 posts per day, while group 2 had an average of 33. Each post also varied in terms of text, wherein

some contained a paragraph at most, two to three lines most frequently, and in some instances, no caption at all. The posts also revolve around short video clips, images, and links to an external source.

Data Gathering Procedures

The researcher visited a small private school in the Philippines where possible participants were given a consent form and a survey that asks them about basic demographics and questions related to the time they have spent participating in their respective fandom. For the adolescents who were under 18 years old, their parents were first given the parental consent form before they were allowed to participate. When the qualified participants have identified, they were each contacted to participate in an interview that lasted for about 25 to 35 minutes. After each interview, a verbal summary was provided in order to validate the information gathered from the participants. Lastly, a debriefing session was done so that the researcher may give emphasis on the purpose of the study and to once again ensure the participants' confidentiality.

In line with the observation of the online community, the researcher first coordinated with the group moderators, who were informed about the nature of the study. After consent has been given, the researcher conducted a daily observation of the interactions found in the mentioned community for a week in total. However, no direct interaction or participation was done by the researcher. Nørskov & Rask (2011) pointed out that the role of the observer is to act as an investigator who follows the community's activities, but he or she must not take part in them so as to prevent any possible influence over flow of the community's engagements. The data observed in the said communities were the daily postings of the members. These included, but were not limited to, questions about any fan-related activity or material, shared images about

the characters, videos about upcoming movies or film series, and the latest news about the fandom. On each day, the researcher took note of all posts by the members who shared something on that particular day. No post was disregarded, regardless if they did not elicit any response and reactions from fellow members. The postings and the comments were recorded word for word to ensure the authenticity of the data. The names of the original poster and the commenters were also included in the raw file, but were not used in the presentation of the results for confidentiality purposes.

Method of Data Analysis

To capture more data, each interview was transcribed verbatim and analysis was individually done through thematic analysis, where coding and categorization were conducted. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis provides the advantage of flexibility to qualitative researchers. Braun and Clarke provided a step-by-step procedure to ensure that the results generated would be more valid and accurate. Basically, the process includes the familiarization of the data, generating the initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming the themes, and producing the report. To ensure the validity of the results gathered, the written output was shown to the participants so that they may further check how true the data is in accordance to their perspective and to determine whether it captures the ideas and experiences they truly have. Moreover, an independent coder was also recruited to assist in forming more accurate themes and in reducing researcher bias.

Specifically, the researcher had to transcribe each interview verbatim. All of the transcribed interviews were then coded accordingly by reviewing the sections that answer the research questions. Once coding was done, the external independent coder was tasked to do the

same before the work of the coder and the researcher were compared. Upon finalizing the codes of both the researcher and the coder, the codes that share the same essence were grouped into themes that accurately answer the research problems.

At the end of the week, the researcher highlighted any relevant discussions that may capture the research problem. The segments coming from any discussions or content shared by the members were attempted to be coded accordingly. To accomplish this, all gathered posts on each day for the entire week were once again reviewed to determine the segments to be used for coding. Any segment that may answer the same research questions used for the interviews were used. Segments that came in the form of comments, statements, and other forms of text were attempted to be matched with the research questions. Once a particular segment matched the research questions, they were translated into the necessary codes.

Ethical Considerations

Apart from the possibility of participants reflecting on any unpleasant experiences they may have had, there are no known risks in the study. A written consent form was provided to each participant who was assured that they are allowed to withdraw from the study anytime. For those who are still minors, the consent was first asked from their respective parent or guardian before the researcher proceeded with the actual interview. Should there have be an instance when any form of discomfort or unpleasant feeling due to rumination during the interview, debriefing was done with the participants.

Methodological Limitations

Though the research procedures and the concept of the study itself seem promising, it is still necessary to point out a few methodological limitations to further improve future researches.

The issues and limitation associated with the use of self-report need to be considered.

Participants may somehow have had the tendency to succumb to social desirability due to the notion that they must make sure their hobby is something commendable. Furthermore, some of them may have also exaggerated their answers, while some may have been embarrassed to reveal details about themselves or their experiences. Nevertheless, this concern was certainly addressed by constantly reassuring the participants about their confidentiality and by establishing the needed rapport with them. In reference with the online community, the researcher could not limit the observation and the data analysis to the given age range of 14 to 19-year old participants because the members of the group were composed of different individuals coming from different age brackets.

Chapter IV: Results

After each participant underwent the necessary qualitative interview and both online groups were observed, thematic analysis was conducted. Any themes that were drawn from the data are described below.

Interview with the Participants

This section shows the responses of the participants who underwent the one-on-one interviews. The themes are presented according to the research question and have been generated according to the self-report of all the participants. Most of the responses provided by adolescent fans were based on their personal experiences and how they see the questions fit to their own perspective.

What are the values that adolescents adopt from the Superhero Fandom?

As previously mentioned, values are the guiding principles and life lessons that adolescents learn from their participation in the superhero fandom. The values that fans adopt mostly revolve around ideologies that are beneficial to themselves and other people. Below are the values that fans have acquired. All of the values were reported in the interviews, and none was found in the observation of the online communities.

1. Helpfulness

Based from the responses, this value refers to one's inclination to extend assistance for another individual's sake. Participants who have learned this value from the fandom have referred to characters who often reach out to people or use their abilities to become helpful in any way. One participant said:

“Lagi siyang (Spider-Man) tumutulong ng mga tao. Kahit busy na busy na siya, tutulungan niya pa rin. Yung mga loved ones niya tutulungan niya.”

Another respondent also mentioned how she is amazed with a character’s decision to help. The participant claimed:

“He’s (Rocket) just like a really tiny fluffy raccoon and he decides to help universe because he has friends who pushed him to do the better thing.”

2. Doing what is right

The responses of the participants define this value as the choice to do what is good and in spite of whatever circumstance a person is in. In a lot of cases, this refers to how the characters use their abilities to promote good over bad. A participant noted how a character embodies the said value. He said:

“Here’s Batman: he’s something you should look up to and aspire to be because despite all the tragedies he faces and all the reasons that’s he’s given to do bad, he still chooses to do good.”

In addition to this, another participant pointed out how the fandom and its characters promote doing what is right. She said:

“What I’m really thankful for Marvel and their superheroes is that no one’s life is really perfect and you really should try to do your best to do what’s right.”

3. Concern for the well-being of others

According to the responses of the participants, this particular value is defined as the drive to look after other people and to show one's care for them. Commonly, concern for other's well-being is embodied by characters by being selfless and by showing the desire to be protective. A participant described how a superhero resonates the said value. He said:

"He (Captain America) was so righteous to the fact where this character really not only loves his country but he loves the people he surrounds himself with, because he feels the need to protect them as well."

One participant also raised how a known character, despite having powers, still make it a point to be concerned for other people. He said:

"With all of that, he (Spider-Man) still finds a way to protect those who need to be protected."

Another respondent notably reasoned out how the characters from the fandom are able to show care for the community because of the extraordinary abilities they have. She said:

"Because of these enhancers, they get to do more things and to contribute more to the community they're in, which makes them more of a hero."

4. Optimism

This value, as defined by the responses, is one's capability to display a positive outlook in all situations. Furthermore, optimism is also a reference to being able to look at situation in a

more positive note. A participant noted how a character is able to remain positive in spite of the tragedies he faced. He said:

“Even though there’s so many things that went wrong with his (Spider-Man) life before, he still finds a way to be optimistic. He just chooses to be optimistic about life and he just sticks with what he has to do.”

Another participant shared as well how she saw a character looked at the positive aspect of life. She said:

“Kahit alam niya (Wanda Maximoff) na mahirap yung life and there are circumstances na life throws bad stuff at you, she managed to look at the good side to change.”

5. Perseverance

The responses indicate that perseverance is one’s capacity to not only withstand a difficult situation, but to also get through it. This value gives emphasis on not giving up and being able to stand up for oneself. A participant described the experience of one character and how the same character chose to continue despite the difficulty. She said:

“He (Captain America) goes through bullying, where people beat him down, but the power of love for his country makes him push and never give up to just continue to do so.”

On a similar note, another participant gave details on how the same value is seen in a famous character in spite of this character not having any special abilities. He said:

“He (Batman) wasn’t really blessed with a superpower but with what’s he’s given, the kind of work and training he got, he really preserved and it elevated his form as a human.”

Additionally, a participant’s response stated how a female character taught her the need to defend oneself. She said:

“It (Peggy Carter) shows na kung na babastos ka ng ganyan, siyempre you have to defend yourself.”

How do adolescents adopt the values from the superhero fandom?

How adolescents adopt the values from the superhero fandom refer to what particular aspect in the fandom do they learn the values. Since the superhero fandom encompasses various areas for fan-related engagement, such as reading comic books, watching superhero films and television series, playing video games, discussing with fellow fans, and even learning from the character themselves, fans are able to witness across different domains. Once again, all of the responses came from the interviews and no related data was found in the observation of online communities. Indicated below are specific ways on how adolescents adopt the values:

1. Viewing Superhero-related fan material

Based from the responses, adolescents are able to learn the values from their consumption of media-related references and comic books. Specifically, media-related references involve scenes that are viewed through both live action and animated movies and series, while comic books come in the form of reading materials that contain various stories, plots, and events

pertaining to the universe where the superheroes and villains are. One participant shared how she has seen how superhero films and the characters involved depict certain values. She said:

“Watching the movies, you get to see how the characters love their job, how they enjoy their job, and even through suffering, through trials, loss of loved ones, they still continue to love.”

Relatedly, the same participant also added how the movies helped her see how the characters and the values they embody evolve throughout the movies. She said:

“I also really enjoy the solo character movies, especially the first ones because you get to see the hero before the epic transformation. You’ll see them before they were given all these things.”

Aside from this, one participant described how a typical story in a superhero television series connects with the characters and the values they show. He said:

“The main subject of The Flash is Barry and The Flash, but when there are scenes without Barry or The Flash, they make stories of their own. They have a sub story to the story. When they were looking for Caitlyn’s father, that was a different story from The Flash, but they just connected to the Flash itself.”

In reference to comic books, one participant pointed out how reading the comics multiple times helped him to understand the values a lot more. He said:

“But when you reread it and you really look at the wording which I do a lot, I really look at the word especially when the bolded characters. You really get into the deeper meaning of behind everything.”

Adding to this, the same participant even explained how the comic books are more advantageous in learning the values. He added:

“There’s so much context, there’s so much symbolism in comic books which I feel is very special in such a way that unlike movies where everything is just ‘Bang, bang, bang! Actions straight there! Next scene!’ But books will really take you back and as far into the future with foreshadowing and flashbacks. There’s so much symbolism.”

2. Witnessing a Character’s Ability and Experiences

Responses from the participants define this as what a character does in order to show a certain value, the character’s traits and how the characters themselves have evolved, and the character’s positive encounters, tragedies, realizations, relationships with others. More specifically, this may be any deed, gesture, or belief that a character from the superhero fandom shows. A participant narrated how one character’s action showed an important value. She said:

“He (Iron Man) was really in pain to see what he did and you can really see that he was really hurting to know that what he created for good was used the other way. He was really trying to reverse the effects of what happened.”

A different participant noted how one of the villains showed a value. He said:

“Thanos is not even scared to stand up for himself. He’s not afraid to stand up for himself. If he has to deal with confrontation, he will. Let’s just say, he’s very frank. When he says it, he’ll do it!”

Moreover, another participant described one superhero’s good deeds. He said:

“He (The Flash) taught his daughter to phase (refers to the ability to pass through objects) a whole ship with Kid Flash, I think. Then, they saved everyone in that airplane just like Supergirl and Superman. They just literally phased a whole airplane to a bridge or two buildings, I think.

One participant even explained how a fight between two characters helped her learn something. She said:

“They were fighting ni Steve, kasi mission daw niya (Bucky Barnes). Then yung helipad crashed and they both fell on the river. What really inspired me kahit sinabi niya na mission siya, pinili pa din niya yung friendship niya to save Steve sa river.”

In relation to the character’s characteristic, one participant described one villain’s transition of personality. She said:

“Gusto ko talaga yung character development niya (Loki) all throughout the entire MCU (Marvel Cinematic Universe). I mean na finding out na siya yung adopted son ni Odin tapos siyempre naging rebellious siya hangang sa naging villain, and then na proclaim niya yung sarili niya pagdating sa Infinity War kasi sinave niya si Thor eh.”

Another participant was able to point out how the dichotomous traits of a hero and a villain helped him learn. He said:

“What I really admired from that (Batman and Joker) is that even if they’re considered adversaries and opposites, we can’t deny the fact that we learn from these people.”

The same participant added *“What I really like about Batman and going back to his relationship with Joker, is even though if he’s viewed as this other guy, he could still understand where he’s coming from.”*

Interestingly, another participant claimed that one of the values she learned became stronger because of a superhero. She said:

“I think it got deeper after seeing his (Iron Man) vulnerable side with the other films.”

As for the experiences of a character, a participant described how a character went through challenges. He said:

“In the storyline where Green Lantern actually experience fear for the first time, he ended up killing most of the Green Lanterns and Parallax ended up embodying him, turning him into a super villain and it took how many years. It was in the Silver age comic before he was actually able to redeem himself. That really was one of the most evident scenes where fear overtakes a superhero.”

Another participant narrated how one iconic superhero’s difficult experience with the villains. He said:

“I’m really a fan of video games of superheroes, and I’ve been playing the recent Spider-Man game. There’s this part where all of the Sinister Six are fighting him and he still finds a way to crack jokes, still finds a way to make the most of that moment, and to really uplift himself. With all of that, he still finds a way to protect those who need to be protected. Something about that that really sticks with me is despite all of the adversity and all of the things he had to face, which sometimes feel overwhelming, he still finds a way to look beyond that and give his best in whatever he has to face. It really interests me kasi with all that’s happened, he doesn’t forget to protect the citizens.”

3. Participating in Fan Discussions and Social Media

The responses of the participants suggest that fans also learn values through actual discussions that are either done in person or online. This source of value refers to the engagement of fans in conversations with fellow fans, in forums, in blogs, in online videos, and in various social media platforms. A participant narrated how he was convinced to be more considerate about the values of one superhero. He said

“So I was really taking it to the Superman fans, I am really ‘Oh, you don’t like more down to earth superhero?’ and they were just defending ‘why won’t you read the comic instead of judging its face value? Look how much struggles he has prioritizing lowest lane, prioritizing the world, which is better?’ And then I read the Superman comic book and I thought ‘Okay, I understand now.’ It really made me feel like I’ve been putting so much questions in Superman fan in my life. When I read that, I’d say ‘Okay, that makes sense. I get why they’d say that.’ So I’d say that’s the point of deep reflection.”

In addition to what was said, the same participant also explained how the exchange of ideas with other fans helped him learn something new. He said:

“You take perspectives from each fan. It’s like a melting pot of ideas for these characters. Let say, I’ll look at the character from this perspective and I never look at him from this perspective. I’ll look at that perspective and think ‘Oh, that’s right! That’s something new. I haven’t think of that before. Maybe I’ll reread the comic and see where that was pointed out.’ So it’s really taking bits and pieces from everybody and coming up with a definition or explanation behind a character, a power or a flaw. There’s a learning experience.”

4. Playing Superhero Video Games

It is worth noting that some of the responses show that fans also get to learn values in the superhero video games. Notably, these video games revolve around a role-playing setting that allows players to use a specific character for an extended period of time. A participant explained how he, as he played a video game, has understood the values of a character a lot more. He said:

“I actually played a lot of the Batman video games, and it made me have a closer relationship with him. It made me understand where he’s coming from, from his perspective, because that game really made me play into that part of him. It made me realize that there’s more to these superheroes than the surface level.”

How do the values and the fandom itself become helpful in the personal lives of adolescents?

After adolescents have learned the values from a respective source in the superhero fandom, the same values go beyond mere acknowledgement. Adolescent fans also perceive these

values as relevant and meaningful to their actual lives. In particular, adolescent fans have reported that these values have helped them to feel better and to do more in life. Provided below are the different ways on how the values become helpful to them:

1. Having something to relate to

The results reveal that adolescent fans are able to relate themselves with the characters of the superhero fandom. Having something to relate to refers to being able to see oneself in a character, feeling that one is associated with a character, or sharing certain experiences, characteristics, and beliefs with a character. One participant share a character that he identifies with the most. He said:

“As a kid growing up, I felt he’s (Batman) something I could look up to and identify with.”

Another participant expressed why he related with a character. He said:

“There’s a certain character that you’ll be able to relate to more than another character which is why I relate more to Green Lantern because I need bravery in my life.”

2. A Source of Happiness and Satisfaction

Responses from the participants indicate that the values and the superhero fandom give them a feeling of happiness and satisfaction. This particular relevance in their lives involves the positive emotions they have because of the impact to them. A participant narrated how her fan-related activities would make her feel. She said:

“Kahit hindi kay Tony Stark, I would watch this favorite scene of mine na I’m gonna get goose bumps. Sa Winter Soldier, yung highway scene, I love that scene so much. I would watch that and I would feel good.”

In addition to this, one participant also claimed the he felt happy about an iconic superhero that he looked up to. He said:

“It makes me feel happy because he’s (Spider-Man) been a character I’ve been looking up to for a long time.”

3. The Chance to Address the Challenges of Life

According to the respondents, the values and the fandom itself help them to accumulate learnings about their actual lives, to have source of inspiration, and to have feeling of relief during times of difficulty. Furthermore, this may also refer to any realizations that fans had, change in their perspectives, or newfound knowledge and teachings they have acquired.

Additionally, they also these are also important to them because the fans become motivated, inspired, and feel pushed to do something good, to improve themselves, or to be just like the characters they admire. Respondents believe that through the values they have adopted and because of their participation in the superhero fandom, they are able to feel better in times of difficulty. To a certain extent, this may also refer to how fans use the fandom as part of their coping strategies For instance, one participant expressed that he reads comic books to learn something about life. He said:

“I really look at comic books as a means of learning not about the comic itself, but learn about things that matter in my life.”

It is also noteworthy to point out that one participant claimed that one female character has taught her something that was not taught in real life. She said:

“She (Peggy Carter) taught me things na hindi natuturo sa household sa amin. Kasi sa society, they tend to look down on women.”

Additionally, a participant stated that a character’s experience helped him to realize something valuable. He said:

“The foundation that he got with the past experiences really allowed me to see that there’s more to life than this and there’s something I could do with what’s given to me.”

Besides the other common realizations, one of the participants shared how the values and the fandom helped her to be less shallow. She said:

“The values that come with every issues or yung mismong characters themselves like how they portray themselves and how they act on situation, they help me grow kasi parang ayoko na ngayon na maging shallow lang sa pag-iisip.”

As far as inspiration is concerned, a participant said that the fandom, along with its values, helped him to overcome his fears. He said:

“It is something that really motivates me to move past my fears because if I can’t move past my fears, I’ll end up like Super Boy Prime.”

Another participant was able to share how she was inspired to improve herself. She said:

“I could be like her (Scarlet Witch) if I could be strong enough to overcome those circumstances... Feeling ko she’s gonna do this, she’s gonna do that. It would push me to do something to do na natatakot akong gawin sa buhay... Yung mga nakikita ko sa TV, it inspires me to build a better version of myself kahit parang naiisip ko na hindi ako ganito.”

In connection with the same participant, she also briefly narrated how the same character has helped her in an actual fearful situation. She said:

“We had to this rock climbing and I was really scared. I was on the verge of crying. If I didn’t do it, wala kaming grade. Sayang naman, so I had to ask ‘What would she (Scarlet Witch) do? I wish I could fly like her and boost myself up!’ Naisip ko na if I did it, I could become her. It would help me develop din to conquer my fears kahit mahirap.”

One of the participants also raised that one well-known character made him feel that he, too, can do good with what he has. He said:

“Knowing na mas malakas sila (Spider-Man) and they have that specific power, and they use it for the good, it makes me feel that I can do something also.”

In terms of feeling a moment of relief, a participant shared how thinking about what a character does helps her when she is feeling down. She said:

“When I’m feeling down, I think of him (Iron Man) and what’s he’s done, and I think that I can still do it.”

Similarly, another participant also expressed how she uses the fandom to cheer herself up. She said:

“If you’re just sad and you want something to cheer you up, you know there’s something there that’s waiting for you and is wide open.”

As indicated by a participant, one of the characters he admires has helped him cope. He said:

“As a kid growing up, it’s so much easier to cope with things ‘cause with the media and the kind of portrayal that Batman has been having, it becomes easier.”

4. Feeling a Sense of Belongingness

Lastly, responses show that the participants get a sense of belongingness from the superhero fandom and the values involved. Moreover, adolescents also get to share something and learn something about anything superhero-related. Responses indicate that sense of belongingness mostly refers to the feeling of being welcomed, being understood, and having good friendships with others.

“It feels so nice na parang this is my place. I feel like I belong here and yung experience mo na you would get to meet cosplayers, you meet mismong characters from the movies, at tiyaka yung actors na din.”

On a similar note, another participant cited how communicating with other fans online made her feel that she isn’t weird.

“Having the access on social media (about superheroes) and being able to communicate to people like that, make me feel nice na I’m not weird pala.”

In addition, a participant noted how she feels that she is not different. She said:

“It is easier to relate to these people na into the same genre. It makes me feel that I am not that different from others.”

Another participant even shared how he doesn’t feel judged when he is with his fellow fans. He said:

“Whenever I go to school (with fellow fans), it’s just really nice sa feeling that I could talk to someone about it and they won’t judge me kasi they have the same experiences I do. They feel same things and it’s really nice.”

Observation from the Online Fan Communities

This second section of the results shows the flow of discussion found within the two online fan communities. After the given duration for the observation of two online fan communities, the results reveal that the discussions in the groups do not show conversations that contain the values that may be adopted from the superhero fandom. After the segments were drawn out for data analysis, no relevant codes were found because they did not capture the essence of any of the research questions. Conversely, the texts observed show that fans are more involved in sharing about their interest in a specific aspect of the fandom and nothing about value formation is salient. Fellow fans would simply share information and write comments for the one who has shared something. Sample of these conversations are included in this portion.

For instance, one member posted a question about collecting fan-related merchandise. He, along with those who replied, said:

“How do you catalogue or keep track of your Bat collection? Or do you even try? Sinubukan ko with pen and notebook. Didn’t work. Kailangan talaga may photos. So I tried out a few apps, and this one is the best so far, for me. It can scan barcodes, for one thing. Pero dahil perfectionist, pinilit ko pa mag shoot with a plain background. At kinalkal ko utak ko (and my online purchase records) to remember how much I paid for the items. Three days in, I found out you would need large doses of discipline, determination, and a detail-oriented mindset. Patay na. So... 20 items catalogued 20 gazillion more to go. Hahaha. Huhuhu.”

1st Commenter: “I’ve been searching din for an app for various collections, ie comics, stats poster etc. Ano gamit mong app bro? Mas maganda kasi if 1 app for all items.”

Original Poster: “Sortly, bro. Free to try for 14 days. After that, you can opt to subscribe for P250 a month yata.”

2nd Commenter: Awww shit. Okay I gotta think about getting one of these. I just started thinking about best toy pickups of the year and I’m running into the perennial problem of “WHAT YEAR DID I BUY THIS.”

Aside from fan-related merchandise, fans also talk about storylines and would even try to conceptualize their own. One fan posted:

“In a possibly untold story in Gotham’s history, a gang war between Batman’s villains erupted with Gotham again as the stage and everyone including its defenders are caught in the middle. The war is between the classic villains and the modern villains. Which 7 classic and 7 modern villains would you like to see as the primary leaders of both factions?”

1st Commenter: “Sounds a bit like a war of jokes and riddles to me.”

Original Poster: “Nope. Joker and Riddler are both classic villains.”

1st Commenter: “I mean the concept. A war between villains.”

It was also found out that fans would share their sentiments and even rants about certain characters. One fan posted:

“What’s your TOP 3 BATMAN rants (Comics, Statues, toys, TV or film)?”

1st Commenter: “1 - Batman is overused as a franchise; the DC Roster is GIGANTIC. 2 - Batman Beyond isn’t appreciated enough. 3 - Batfleck is a good Batman.”

2nd Commenter: “Batman Ninja. A waste of good material.”

3rd Commenter (in response to the 2nd): “Production Issues is definitely at fault for the film. Japanese Animation is Draw first Dub later. US style is Dub now draw later.”

Original Poster (in response to the 3rd): “It’s not the animation bro.. It’s the story.. The first half or quarter was compelling pero after that especially sa Monkey Army scene that turned into a giant old school batman.. I was like “Dafaq?! Seryoso??!!”... Hahaha”

The posts of the fans show that they, too, would often share images, video clips, and articles of fan-related matters. A fan posted a set of photos of an upcoming superhero film. The commenters replied:

1st Commenter: “JL line-up with Shazam, please!”

2nd Commenter: “My best guess is Superman appeared in the final shot...”

3rd Commenter: “When will they release it?”

4th Commenter (in response to the 3rd): “Jan 19”

In line with fan-merchandise again, some fans also shared pictures of their own figurines as well as those that will be released. One fan posted a series of images of superhero figurines and his caption indicated:

“With Mattel losing the DC license come 2020, I wonder if these figures will still see light of day. Image courtesy of Toyark and their respective sources.”

1st Commenter: “I hope they do get approval. 2019 is a whole year. Maybe they can get approval and for lotsa stuff, then release them en masse? I want the Starfire. Strangely, the company that wrestled the rights from Mattel was SpinMaster. Their toys portfolio seems to be for preschoolers. By strange, I mean Mattel retrained the pre-school stuff (like Superhero girls). Stuffs that would fit into Spin Master’s field of product category. Perhaps Warner B is asking for a bigger royalty and sales share that Mattel wasn’t willing to give?”

2nd Commenter: "I'm confident these figures will get the Marvel Legends treatment akin to when Toy Biz lost the Marvel license. TB released a whole bunch of toys in the final months."

3rd Commenter: "I'm confident these figures will get the Marvel Legends treatment akin to when Toy Biz lost the Marvel license. TB released a whole bunch of toys in the final months."

4th Commenter: "Kung kailan patapos na, saka gumanda sculp."

With some posts, members of the online communities would also engage in informal debates about characters. One fan posted a photo of two superhero teams and his caption indicated:

"Who wins and why? #JLAvsAvengers"

1st Commenter: JLA. The DC heroes were designed to be Gods and Monsters. Pinnacle powerhouses. If one goes rouge it spells doom to humankind...

2nd Commenter: "Fans. All of them."

3rd Commenter: "Well JLA would definitely win, but after that DC got nothing more where marvel got a lot it's like Dc got power and marvel got number. It depends on the fans who will win and before I forget it depends on the writers because no one really dies in comics."

4th Commenter: "DC heroes won the last time they had a "misunderstanding" with Marvel heroes."

5th Commenter: "Avengers vs. JLA is mismatch. Maybe the X-Men would put up a better fight. They have to be Omega level mutants to put up a fight."

As all the posts and the comments are reviewed, the data presented show what transpires in a typical online fan community in this particular social media platform. Again, no relevant themes can be generated to fit the research questions, but the text themselves do indeed suggest that opportunities for the free flow of information about the fandom exists within these communities. Specifically, these information mostly revolved around showcasing one's fan collection and merchandise, talking about the trends in the fandom, and discussing the characters and stories.

Chapter V: Discussion

As a recap, this study aimed to explore that value formation of adolescent in the superhero fandom. Data was gathered through interviews and the observation of online fan communities in order to know what values do adolescents get from the superhero fandom, how they adopt these values, and in what ways do they become helpful in their personal lives. Results then reveal that there are indeed certain values that fans adopt through different forms of fan-related activities, and these values become helpful for them in a number of ways. In general, the results provided show supplemental evidence that further reinforce the idea that the superhero fandom is used beyond mere leisure. As mentioned by Berger & Luck (1966, as cited in Larson, 2000), joining a group allows the assimilation of the group's norms and the internalization of the identity associated with group membership. In this context, the superhero fandom is a group that has enabled the adolescents to have the same set of values.

Primarily, the values that adolescents adopt turn out to be beneficial in the sense that these principles promote positive ideologies. As a matter of fact, the values that were reported mostly revolve on what is deemed good for oneself or for the well-being of other individuals. It is important to take note that concern for others' well-being is a value that fans adopt, therefore indicating that they acknowledge that the welfare of others is something important. Similarly, this particular value may be one of the reasons as to why exposure to a fantasy fandom is linked to one's tendency to be empathetic and to the decrease of one's prejudice, as shown by in the study of Dill-Shackleford et al. (2016). Furthermore, the positive context of the same set of values, such as helpfulness, may be identified as specific prosocial values. In the study of Plante et al. (2014), the actual values were not specified in the link between engagement in the fantasy fandom and global citizenship, which is an identity based on prosocial values. However, the

current study has now successfully pinpointed what these values are. Helpfulness, doing what is right, concern for the well-being of others, optimism, and perseverance all classify as the main values that adolescent fans adopt from being part of the superhero fandom.

With regard to value formation itself, the different ways on how fans adopt the values capture the framework of Bardi & Goodwin (2011). While the themes are mostly composed of actual activities that fans do, it is necessary to raise that these are the actual experiences of the adolescent fans. The self-report of the participants clearly show that what they do in their fandom are the ones that help them adopt the values they learned. Relating these findings to the conceptual framework used, the ways on how adolescent fans adopt the values are examples of the facilitators of value formation. Viewing superhero-related fan material, witnessing a character's ability and experiences, participating in fan discussions and social media, and playing superhero video games may be considered as the precursors to the five value formation facilitators explained by Bardi & Goodwin (2011). To put it simply, these so-called activities of fans become the ways that lead adolescents to undergo priming processes, adaptation, identification, consistency maintenance, and direct persuasion. The process themselves may not have been elaborated by the responses of the participants, but their sentiments do indeed show that what they do as fans are the ones that lead them to such processes. How each fan-related activity directs adolescent fans to experience the processes of value formation is then presented below.

First of all, adolescents claim to adopt the values from television series, films, and comic books which all contain different themes. In turn, their constant exposure to these type of media and materials, along with the ideologies, prime them. This evidence may be seen in one of the

participant's claim, that said, *"There's so much context, there's so much symbolism in comic books which I feel is very special in such a way that unlike movies where everything is just 'Bang, bang, bang! Actions straight there! Next scene!' But books will really take you back and as far into the future with foreshadowing and flashbacks. There's so much symbolism."* As far as priming processes are concerned, being exposed to such symbolisms is a form of priming. The different fan materials, regardless if they are in the form of text or media, contain the values that the characters and the fandom are trying to promote. Thus, continuing to consume these materials help adolescents to be more aware about the values.

Second, adolescent fans reported to have become more engaged in their fan-related practices a lot more and they do more researches on their own. The respondents even indicated that they seek out more information beyond the stories so they can know more as a fan and in this regard, adaptation happens. A good example is a respondent's statement on the impact of re-reading fan-related material, wherein he said that *"When you reread it and you really look at the wording which I do a lot, I really look at the word especially when the bolded characters. You really get into the deeper meaning of behind everything."* The attempts of adolescent fans to try out fan activities and to find out more about the fandom, its characters, and all things related imply that these people try to obtain new knowledge. It was stated in the study of Tsay-Vogel & Sanders (2015) that fans who have higher perceived membership seek out more information about their fandom. In the same way, the participants claimed that they actively try to learn more about the characters they love and this type of action is a way of adapting with the fan community and its values. Since they are fans, they are inclined to do what a fan is supposed to do.

Third, it is necessary to point out that the adolescent respondents have all identified certain characters that embody the values they adopt. In doing so, they admire these more in the sense that they even want to be like them. In this regard, the process of identification occurs and the values become more imbibed within the fans. Participants have even pointed this out. One of them said that *“As a kid growing up, I felt he’s (Batman) something I could look up to and identify with,”* while another stated that *“There’s a certain character that you’ll be able to relate to more than another character which is why I relate more to Green Lantern because I need bravery in my life.”* These sample segments prove that relating with characters and the values they embody is a form of identification. Adolescent fans who associate themselves with characters they admire also acknowledge their similarities. Fans would not be able to relate with the characters if they do not share the same experiences and principles. In this context, the fans feel that they themselves and their beliefs are validated. As a result, new values that the characters portray are formed and the existing ones are solidified.

Fourth, fans have expressed how they look forward to watching the upcoming episode of a series, the films that will be released, and even the video games that have been made. With this anticipation and regular participation in the activities, fans become consistent with their attempts to engage with what they look forward to. One of the respondents even shared that *“The (fandom) is something cool because I like to find something in one week and something that I’m excited for. This month, I’ve started my Marvel marathon for End Game (an upcoming film). So, for me, there’s long test this week but on Saturday, I can watch Iron Man! It’s something that really keeps going. It’s a little extra push that you never thought you needed but you do.”* As the participants stated how they constantly show their excitement and anticipation for upcoming movies and other forms of fan-related consumption to be released, they become more consistent

with their fan activities. This consistency lets them to be more engaged with the fandom and at the same time, with the values the fandom has. Through this process, consistency maintenance is then evident.

Lastly, adolescent fans claim that they also take part in discussions with fellow fans. While conversations often revolve around certain events and characters in the stories, concepts on different values and various forms of learning are tackled. Participants also stated that debates occur and this type of interactions then becomes direct persuasion attempts. One good example for this is the statement of the fan who said that *“So I was really taking it to the Superman fans, I am really “Oh, you don’t like more down to earth superhero?” and they were just defending ‘why won’t you read the comic instead of judging its face value? Look how much struggles he has prioritizing lowest lane, prioritizing the world, which is better?’ And then I read the Superman comic book and I thought ‘Okay, I understand now.’ It really made me feel like I’ve been putting so much questions in Superman fan in my life. When I read that, I’d say ‘Okay, that makes sense. I get why they’d say that.” So I’d say that’s the point of deep reflection.’ ”* The realization and the new perspective considered by the participants imply that they can be persuaded and new values may be formed through conversations and even healthy discourse with fellow fans. Given that persuasion attempts involve reflecting on ideas and presenting concepts and ideologies that are similar or contradicting in nature, adolescent fans are exposed to these types of dynamics as they mingle or argue with other fans of the superhero genre. Consequently, this then results to adopting and strengthening values.

The Superhero Fandom as an Avenue for Positive Youth Development

With the respondents' statements, the results generated indeed show that teenage fans are able to benefit from them. The mere acknowledgement of how fans are able to relate to the characters and the values, to have something that brings happiness to them, to have a source of inspiration, to have a sense of relief, to have a sense of belongingness, and to gain knowledge about the fandom, already imply that the superhero fandom helps in positive youth development. Since this concept aims to engage young individuals in productive activities (Damon, 2004), the values that adolescents adopt and find helpful, as well as their membership in the fandom itself go in line with this notion. The new set of values that adolescents adopt and strengthen throughout their stay in the fandom help them to achieve the objectives of positive youth development, which revolve around the promotion of values as they progress through their current developmental stage.

Along the line of discussion in positive youth development, its link to the context of the superhero fandom clearly shows beneficial aspects that the fandom provides. Developmental assets, which is a basis for positive youth development, (Benson, 1997, as cited in Damon, 2004) is a concept that emphasizes on positive personal characteristics of the youth, such as commitment to learning, positive values, social skills, and positive identity. Hence, the impact of the values and the fandom on the personal lives of adolescents implies that their engagement with the fandom and what they adopt along the way may serve as developmental assets. In particular, the assets pertaining to the positive values are the ones developed in the context of the fandom.

With the beneficial aspect drawn from the values and the superhero fandom, it is then possible to identify what set of positive qualities adolescents can make use of as they go through

the process of positive youth development. The values themselves, such as helpfulness, doing what is right, concern for the well-being of others, optimism, and perseverance, are the actual assets that adolescents can adopt as part of their positive qualities. In turn, adolescents will now have a source to work on to their advantage. Since the data shows that values are consistently adopted through different means in the superhero fandom, the community has the potential to be a context for positive youth development. Since positive values are components of the developmental assets that are found in positive youth development (Benson, 1997, as cited in Damon, 2004), using the fandom as an avenue to instill the said values to the youth is possible. In some instances, the superhero fandom can even be used as an alternative to be introduced to members of the youth who are still working on themselves.

The Online Fan Community as a Space for Sharing

In reference to the local online fan communities, fan discussions occur through various means, including, face-to-face interactions and across social media platforms. Among these settings, online fan communities are the most common areas because they enable fans to freely share and acquire information about their fandoms. As far as the communities observed, no relevant data was found because the segments of each post and comment did not answer any of the research question. However, the flow of the conversations and content shared by the members show that the online fan communities are venues for the dissemination of fan-related news. Members are found to frequently discuss topics that range from fan merchandise to films and television series. Content shared within these groups are not limited to messages and questions alone, for many of these members would post videos, online articles, and even humorous images. The sharing of these fans occurs on a daily basis and it seems that fellow

members who are interested or who are able to relate in a given topic are the ones who frequently respond.

Interestingly, there are also instances when the members would share similar content but it would not receive any comments. Nevertheless, most of these posts would receive virtual reactions in the form of small images that depict a certain emotion. It appears that these reactions are used to show their acknowledgement and appreciation of the image, video clip, or article being shared. In turn, this is something helpful to the members because it possibly reinforces their admiration for the characters and even their membership in the community. In a way, the online community that has been included in the study may be used as a platform for fans to accumulate acquire new knowledge as far as the superhero genre is concerned, and to stay updated with the fandom itself.

Despite the findings not being that much in line with the research questions, the online fan community itself still has the potential for good implications that are helpful for adolescents and fans in general. It was noted that these groups allow the exchange of information about the fandom, which is the primary shared interest of the members. With the available open space the group provides, members may obtain a number of psychological benefits. Valkenburg & Peter (2011) have proven in their research that online communication is correlated with enhanced self-esteem, relationship formation, and friendship quality. Following this evidence, online fan communities have the same mechanisms that involve the same type of online communication that is potentially healthy for adolescent fans. The existence of several moderators, along with the rules of the group, even help maximize such advantages and minimize any possible risk.

With that being said, the online fan community may therefore be a contributing factor that makes the sense of belongingness of fans more attainable.

Limitations

Specific limitations of the study need to be addressed in order to find out how to further improve this research. Initially, the framework of the present study may not seem to capture the process of value formation at first because the themes generated on how adolescent fans adopt values do not involve the processes themselves. The interview schedule elicited the necessary data, but the participants gave more emphasis on what they, as fans, have done to reach what they have established and learn, as far as values are concerned. As adolescents, the participants may have also been pre-occupied with narrating their experiences, rather than the underlying processes, because they may be more inclined to focus on themselves.

The results of the observation may not seem to go in line with the responses of the interviewed participants who stated that they obtain values from fan-related discussions through online means. Although, it should be pointed out that the two online groups included in the study only come from one of the many social media platforms. Furthermore, there are many other online sources where fan communities are more engaged. Thus, it would be important to take into account that other internet platforms may have other group dynamics that would make discussions and the process of value formation more salient. Additionally, fans who go into these social media platforms are more likely to share and acquire information about the fandom. The opportunities for value formation may not be as evident on this specific website, as opposed to other platforms and fan-related activities.

The presented context of online fan communities does not necessarily mean that there is no potential way for fans to learn something or to adopt the values themselves because it is still possible for these to be extracted through ongoing discussions. However, as it was previously stated, the researcher's objective for this study did not involve the active participation in such conversations. The recommendation to address this limitation is briefly discussed in the following section.

Recommendations

While the present research may be considered as one of the few studies that explore the area of the superhero fandom as an avenue for adolescent value formation, areas for further improvement are still evident. Since the interviews were only conducted with teenagers, the results may not necessarily capture the sentiments of those belonging to other developmental stages of childhood and adulthood. Superheroes already appeal to different fans across multiple age groups, and the relevance of the values for them may differ. Therefore, future qualitative researches may also take into account the perspective of children below thirteen years old and young adults above twenty years old. In this way, the value formation of children, adolescents, and adults in the superhero fandom may be well-represented.

In spite of the rich data that the present research provides, there is still a need to quantify the levels of these values. More specifically, the values adopted by adolescents in the superhero fandom may be used as the specific variables in correlational studies. It is recommended to examine relationship between one's participation in the superhero fandom and one's set of values, including helpfulness, doing what is right, concern for the well-being of others, optimism, and perseverance. Furthermore, the length of one's status as a fan and the extent they

participate in activities, such as reading comic books, watching superhero films and series, attending fan conventions, and playing superhero-themed video games could be used as variables as well. Relatedly, both cross-sectional and longitudinal methods will strengthen the validity of the data pertaining to the values.

As far as theoretical and conceptualization matters are concerned, a revised interview schedule that focuses on the process of value formation may be used in the succeeding studies. Given that most of the self-reports of the participants focused on the activities they do as fans, it would also be crucial for future researches to give attention to the actual dynamics behind these activities. The interview questions may be reformed to fit the framework of Bardi & Goodwin (2011), and in turn, the underlying dynamics behind these fan activities may be highlighted and integrated to create a new model in the context of fan communities.

Lastly, the findings of the current study provide a good foundation for the conceptualization of adolescent value-formation in the context of superhero fandoms but this does not necessarily extend to other fandoms that belong to the fantasy genre. Superhero themes cater to the fantasy world but the stories and narratives differ from other big fantasy fandoms, such as *Harry Potter* and Japanese *Anime*. The same qualitative approach conducted in this research may also be utilized to determine if the next studies will yield similar or different results. On a similar note, other social media platforms, such as forums and blogs that focus on open-ended discussions about a certain topic in the fandom should be considered for observations. Alternatively, an active-participation approach, as opposed to the observational method used in this study, can be considered. This may specifically be done by looking for online fan groups who are willing to take part in online discourse set by future researchers. To fulfill

this, future research may then include a methodology that will give room for the researcher and the online members to casually interact so there would be a richer flow of information. As the members converse with one another, the researcher may try to join in the conversation, suggest topics related to what is being discussed, and even attempt to open something for discussion, where the rest of the group may add on. In this way, future studies may be able to gather conversations and segments that are relevant to value formation itself.

In conclusion, the context of adolescents participating in the superhero fandom raises the notion that this phenomenon goes beyond simple leisure. Not only are superheroes part of the growing pop culture, but they have also become meaningful aspects in the lives of adolescents. The values that the characters embody and the ideologies they represent are factors that guide the youth in different aspects of their lives. In other circumstances, the same characters, the stories, and the fan activities also become what teenagers can turn to in times when they need something to look up to. Should the youth encounter difficulties in life or feel isolated, the community of superhero fans can always serve as a home and a source of inspiration to them. It has already been established in the literature that adolescence is a period of exploration that needs to be done to foster positive youth development. With all the challenges that adolescents face, they need something that would serve as role models in life and a venue to feel welcomed. Hence, the superhero fandom, along with the values it promotes and the impact these have to the fans, can be the one that fulfills what the youth needs. No matter what obstacles that adolescents encounter, they will surely have something that is ready to help them.

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Appendix I: Parental Consent Form

Greetings in St. La Salle!

I am a graduate student conducting my Master's thesis under the guidance of Dr. Sta. Maria and the Psychology Department of De La Salle University. I wish to inform you that your child is qualified to be a participant of my study, which aims to explore the experiences of adolescents who are fans of superheroes.

In line with this, I humbly ask for your consent to allow your child to take part in this research, where he/she will participate in an interview that will last for about thirty minutes to one hour. Additionally, please be informed that an audio-recording device will be used during the interview. All of the information that your child may provide will be treated with utmost confidentiality and his/her responses will only be used for academic purposes. Furthermore, rest assured that there are no known risks involved in this study. Should he/she feel any form discomfort during the interview, he/she is free to withdraw from the study anytime. As a form of compensation for your child's participation, he/she will be given a limited edition *Star Wars* tumbler at the end of the interview.

After you have decided to either give your consent or to restrict your child from participating, please do give this form to him/her. Should you have any concerns or inquiry, you may simply contact me at **0915-836-67-96** or send an email to **joseph_russell_r_santos@dlsu.edu.ph**. By signing below, you agree to give your consent and to participate in the study:

Parent/Guardian's Name and Signature: _____

Contact number: _____ Email: _____

PARTICIPANT'S INFORMATION

Name of the child: _____ Age: _____ Sex: _____

Religion: _____ Signature: _____

Contact number: _____ Email: _____

Do you want to receive a copy of the results of the study once it is finished? Yes No

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,

Noted by:

Joseph Russell R. Santos, MS*, Rpm
Master of Science in Psychology, major in Human Development

Madelene Sta. Maria, PhD
Thesis Adviser

Appendix II: Consent Form

Greetings in St. La Salle!

I am a graduate student conducting my Master's thesis under the guidance of Dr. Sta. Maria and the Psychology Department of De La Salle University. I wish to inform you that you are qualified to be a participant of my study, which aims to examine the experiences of adolescents who are fans of the superheroes.

In line with this, I humbly ask for your consent to take part in this research, where you will participate in an interview that will last for about thirty minutes to one hour. Additionally, please be informed that an audio-recording device will be used during the interview. All of the information you provide will be treated with utmost confidentiality and your responses will only be used for academic purposes. Furthermore, rest assured that there are no known risks involved in this study. Should you feel any form discomfort during the interview, you are free to withdraw from the study anytime. As a form of compensation for your participation, you will be given a limited edition *Star Wars* tumbler at the end of the interview.

After you have decided to either give your consent or to restrict your child from participating, please do give this form to him/her. Should you have any concerns or inquiry, you may simply contact me at **0915-836-67-96** or send an email to **joseph_russell_r_santos@dlsu.edu.ph**. By signing below, you agree to give your consent and to participate in the study:

Name: _____ Age: _____ Sex: _____

Religion: _____ Signature: _____

Contact number: _____ Email: _____

Do you want to receive a copy of the results of the study once it is finished? Yes No

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,

Noted by:

Joseph Russell R. Santos, MS*, Rpm
Master of Science in Psychology, major in Human Development

Madelene Sta. Maria, PhD
Thesis Adviser

Appendix III: Letter of Request to Schools

Greetings in St. La Salle!

I am Russell Santos, a graduate student conducting a thesis under the guidance of Dr. Madelene Sta. Maria and the Psychology Department of De La Salle University. With regard to my research, I am currently exploring the Value Formation of Adolescents in the Superhero Fandom. This particular study follows a qualitative approach and I aim to have individual interviews with fifteen adolescents whose age falls on the range of 14 to 19 years old.

In line with this, I would like to ask permission from you to allow me to recruit some of your school's students to participate in the said research. Once you have allowed me to do so, I will first administer a pre-screening questionnaire that will help me determine the students who are qualified to become participants. Afterwards, I will provide a parental consent form to the selected participants in order to inform their parents or guardians about the students' participation. Should their parents or guardians have given their consent, the private interviews will be done at the most convenient time of each participant. At the end of each session, the participant will be debriefed and will also be compensated with a limited edition Star Wars tumbler. Please rest assured that all of the information pertaining to your students and to their responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality. All of the answers they provide will solely be used for this study alone. There are no known risks when participating in the research, but the participants are free to withdraw from the study anytime.

Through your assistance, I will surely be able to accomplish this study, which I believe is one of the first researches that tackles the mentioned topic. In turn, this thesis can help strengthen the conceptualization of the importance of adolescent value formation and shed light on the benefits of the superhero fandom.

For your reference, I have also attached on this letter a copy of the parental consent form, the pre-screening questionnaire, and the interview schedule. Should you have any concerns or inquiries, you may simply contact me at **0915-836-67-96** or send an email to **joseph_russell_r_santos@dlsu.edu.ph**.

Thank you in advance for your usual kind support.

Sincerely,

Joseph Russell R. Santos, MS*, RPm
Master of Science in Psychology, major in Human Development

Appendix IV: Pre-screening questionnaire for participant selection

Instructions: Kindly read each question below and provide your answer on the space provided. You are required to answer as honestly as possible. Rest assured that there are no right or wrong answers. Once you complete the questionnaire, please check if you have answered all the questions applicable to you.

Name: _____ Sex: _____ Age: _____

Contact Number: _____ Email: _____

1. **Are you a fan of superhero genre, including, but not limited to, DC and/or Marvel?**

YES NO * If you answered **NO** to #1, you may directly proceed to Question #6.

2. **How long have you been a fan of the superhero genre?**

Less than a year One year Two years Three years and/or above

3. **Do you keep yourself updated with the latest trends/news about the superhero genre?**

YES NO

4. **If you answered yes, where do you subscribe to or how do you keep yourself updated? Check all that applies to you.**

Comic Books Movies TV Series
 YouTube videos Video Games Conventions (e.g. Comic-Con)
 Online Blogs Others: _____

5. **How often do you subscribe or participate in your answers in #4?**

<i>Comic Books</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Daily	<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly	<input type="checkbox"/> Monthly	<input type="checkbox"/> Yearly
<i>Movies</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Daily	<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly	<input type="checkbox"/> Monthly	<input type="checkbox"/> Yearly
<i>TV Series</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Daily	<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly	<input type="checkbox"/> Monthly	<input type="checkbox"/> Yearly
<i>YouTube videos</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Daily	<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly	<input type="checkbox"/> Monthly	<input type="checkbox"/> Yearly
<i>Video Games</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Daily	<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly	<input type="checkbox"/> Monthly	<input type="checkbox"/> Yearly
<i>Conventions</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Daily	<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly	<input type="checkbox"/> Monthly	<input type="checkbox"/> Yearly
<i>Online Blogs</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Daily	<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly	<input type="checkbox"/> Monthly	<input type="checkbox"/> Yearly
<i>Others</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Daily	<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly	<input type="checkbox"/> Monthly	<input type="checkbox"/> Yearly

6. **If you can refer someone who is a fan of the superhero genre, kindly put their name and their contact details.**

Name of person you want to refer: _____ Their Age: _____

Their contact number: _____ Their email: _____