

# Investigating the Status of Anime Collections in Public Libraries

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## Abstract

As anime grows in popularity across the United States, so grows demand for varied access. Anime conventions, such as Seattle's SakuraCon, bring together fans to celebrate, discuss, and watch anime; there are hundreds of such conventions worldwide. Furthermore, websites, such as Crunchyroll, provide legal access to anime to millions of registered users. Public libraries can serve as another access point to anime. This access is especially important to people who cannot afford to attend conventions or pay for streaming services. But what are the challenges and needs of developing, cataloging, organizing, and providing access to anime collections in public libraries? A survey was sent to 248 public libraries in Oregon, Washington, and Alaska, aiming to identify means by which access to anime can be improved. This project lays the foundation for future work on creating better metadata systems for anime by highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of current systems.

**Keywords:** Anime; Collection Development; Collection Practices; Public Libraries

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## 1 Introduction and Background

With approximately 450 anime conventions like SakuraCon taking place worldwide each year ("Convention Schedule," 2016), drawing tens of thousands of attendees, anime is a relevant topic for collection development in public libraries. Also websites such as Crunchyroll provide online streaming access to anime to an estimated 750,000 paid subscribers and 20 million registered users (Gao, 2015). With this demand, anime as a component of library collections needs to be better understood.

While there has been some work on the role that anime can play in library collections, there is as yet no definitive work that provides a picture of the state of anime collections in libraries. In prior literature, Robbins (2014), Exner (2012), Ruble & Lysne (2010), Halsall (2004), and Brehm-Heeger, Conway, & Vale (2007) all mention the importance of anime. However, few sets of data are used to support these claims. Ruble & Lysne (2010) focus on anime as a teaching tool in classrooms and build off personal experiences. While some articles indicate how manga collections appear to draw in more teens to school or public libraries (Simmons & O'Briant, 2009; Welch & Brown, 2005), only Brehm-Heeger, Conway, & Vale (2007) mention in passing the draw anime has for teens as the rationale for holding anime events at a public library. Some articles and books discuss the circulation statistics of manga and graphic novels (Bergin, 2005; Ching, 2005; Fletcher-Spear & Jenson-Benjamin, 2011; Weiner, 2008), but not the circulation of anime.

The central purpose of this research is to establish a set of foundational data regarding the status of anime collections in U.S. libraries. Among the factors it is intended to determine is how knowledgeable U.S. librarians are about anime as a media form, what roles (if any) anime plays in targeted public programming (e.g., programming for teens, etc.) in U.S. libraries, and what kinds of challenges U.S. librarians developing anime collections face. This initial dataset will provide a foundation for building a benchmark with which future research efforts will compare the status of anime collections in other countries

(e.g., Japan, South Korea, etc.). It will also be mined for information that identifies where existing metadata practices fail to meet institutional and library user needs to accurately portray anime as a distinct medium from other media formats.

## 1.1 Anime Defined

Anime is a medium similar in characteristics to film and television (Poitras, 2003; Poitras, 2010). To some extent anime may be seen as a subsection, sub-class, or specialization of film and television media, with which it shares a broad range of genres. For instance, there are sports anime (e.g., *Kuroko's Basketball*), fantasy anime (e.g., *Princess Mononoke*), and historical anime (e.g., *Barefoot Gen*), to name only a few of the genres that are represented in the medium. What unifies anime is not narrative content, but methods of animation and artistic styles.

Much like manga (Japanese comic books), anime is not intended for any single demographic. Like manga, it “is categorized by age and sex groupings... [such as] *kodomo*, *shonen*, *shojo*, *seinen*, and *josei*,” which are intended for children, boys, girls, adult men, and adult women, respectively, though these “Japanese age groupings are more of a marketing strategy than a ratings guide” (Fletcher-Spear & Jenson-Benjamin, 2011, p. 36). Furthermore, it is likely that anime also appeals outside of the targeted demographics.

Anime also encompasses more than one distribution style, including TV series, feature films, and the direct-to-video releases called Original Video Animations, a.k.a. OVAs (Poitras 2003; Poitras 2010; Bunche, 2004; Halsall, 2004). Some franchises, such as *Naruto*, have works in all three styles—TV episodes, film, and OVA. This multi-distribution nature of anime means that a library could build a small collection of anime feature films without having to stretch budgets much more than for other film collections. However, libraries seeking to own a complete series for a particular anime will also have to consider whether to include any related films or OVAs.

## 1.2 Previous Work

Several of the articles on anime collections explore how to build an anime collection. Robbins (2014) discusses how and why to build an anime collection in an academic library, but the bulk of the article describes 25 recommended anime films. Halsall (2004) discusses how the McHenry Public Library in Illinois built an anime collection. Much of the discussion centers around what anime is and why teens love it, though a couple difficulties are discussed, such as the lack of MPAA ratings on most anime at the time of cataloging and English subtitles versus dubbed audio (Halsall, 2004). Brenner (2007) also provides advice on building an anime collection at a public library.

Exner (2012) analyzes a survey conducted at a North Carolina anime convention concerning congoers' perceptions of anime at public libraries. This is one of the few extant studies concerning anime and libraries. One interesting finding was that many respondents mentioned that their public libraries lacked manga and anime, but had marked they were from counties Exner knew to have anime collections (Exner, 2012). However, the study only looks at a portion of the data that is needed to determine whether a new system of organizing the information about anime is needed, as it examines the information needs of patrons, but not of librarians.

Because manga is closely related to anime, it is also instructive to examine the existing literature describing manga collections in U.S. libraries. Masuchika (2015) looks at manga in public libraries to explore the question of whether librarians might have civil liability immunity in regards to manga that seem to depict child pornography. Halsall points out that “in *Totoro*, there is a scene where the father and his two young daughters share the family communal bathtub. Could American parents be offended by this? Yes, certainly” (2004, p. 13). Modern Americans might easily misinterpret historical Japanese communal bathing practices (Masuchika, 2015, p. 57). Masuchika determines that without any legal precedent it is difficult to establish what sort of protections librarians have for including materials that Americans might consider

child pornography. While both of these articles raise the question of possible objections to anime regarding cultural differences, such as content seen as pornographic, neither indicate how common or uncommon such objections are. Also, because the handling of potentially objectionable content in anime has varied widely (e.g., scenes being cut or edited in some versions of *Dragon Ball*), at the least librarians may want access to data about culturally sensitive content.

## 2 Study Design

### 2.1 Method

We conducted an online survey to collect the data related to the status of anime collections in public libraries in the Pacific Northwest Region. The survey consisted of 26 questions<sup>1</sup>, divided into three sections: “Collection Size, Use, and Development,” “Patron Interactions and Programming,” and “Organizational and Cataloging Practice.” It was hosted electronically using the Catalyst survey tool provided by the University of Washington. No identifiers were collected as part of the survey. It was estimated that the survey would take 25 to 35 minutes. The survey was active for approximately nine weeks from March 30th to June 3rd in 2016.

### 2.2 Participants

The subject population consisted of persons who are employed at public libraries, are at least 18 years of age, and have some knowledge of the library collections. These requirements were made known to potential participants through the survey invitation emailed to libraries. Libraries were identified using the *American Library Directory* (Information Today, 2015), and for each an email address for the library itself, the library director, or a librarian was used.

Initially the survey was sent to 62 public libraries in Washington state. As the initial response rate was low, surveys were also sent to 136 public libraries in Oregon and 59 public libraries in Alaska. One reminder email was sent a few weeks after the initial survey invitation.

### 2.3 Data Analysis

Once the responses were received, quantitative tabulation and analysis of responses were done for questions with response options. For the collection size and circulation data the values were tallied and then plotted to determine whether there were any patterns or connections between data sets. The data from the short answer questions were open-coded with an inductive approach. The first author wrote memos as he reviewed the data from which the higher-level themes were identified. The final code book contained forty three codes representing various aspects such as series size, cross-cultural understanding, and patron interest.

## 3 Discussion

### 3.1 Results

Even though the response rate was low, 6.85%, producing a statistical accuracy of  $\pm 23.7\%$  at a 95% confidence level, we were able to gather some valuable initial insights into anime collections. Of the seventeen responses, two marked none on the first question, indicating those libraries did not have an anime collection. Of these, one left the rest of the questions blank while the other filled out other questions. The following discussion proceeds in order according to the sections in the survey.

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<sup>1</sup> The full survey questionnaire is accessible here: [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1di1srwic7L3z91291Gi\\_1yG0MUDP93VsCpMmXdVsJ2E/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1di1srwic7L3z91291Gi_1yG0MUDP93VsCpMmXdVsJ2E/edit?usp=sharing)

### 3.1.1 Collection size, use, and development

Half of the respondents had anime collections with fewer than 100 titles, and neither the age of a library's anime collection nor the total size of the library holdings was an indicator of the size of the anime collection. The library with the largest provided total size of library holdings and the library with the second smallest provided total size of library holdings both had anime collections with fewer than 100 titles. Of the two libraries with anime collections of 501-1,000 titles, one did not provide the total size of the library holdings and the other was the respondent who seemed to view anime as the same as manga.

The size of the anime collection and the average monthly circulation of anime titles is somewhat connected for the smaller collection sizes, but less so for the larger collection sizes. All of the libraries that indicated they had fewer than 100 titles also indicated they circulated fewer than 50 titles in an average month. However, libraries with collections between 100-500 titles indicated average monthly circulations of fewer than 50 titles, 50-100 titles, and 101-200 titles. The library with a collection size of 501-1000 titles indicated an average monthly circulation of 50-100, though it was the same library that seemed to confuse manga with anime. Figure 1 shows anime collection size compared to monthly circulation of anime.

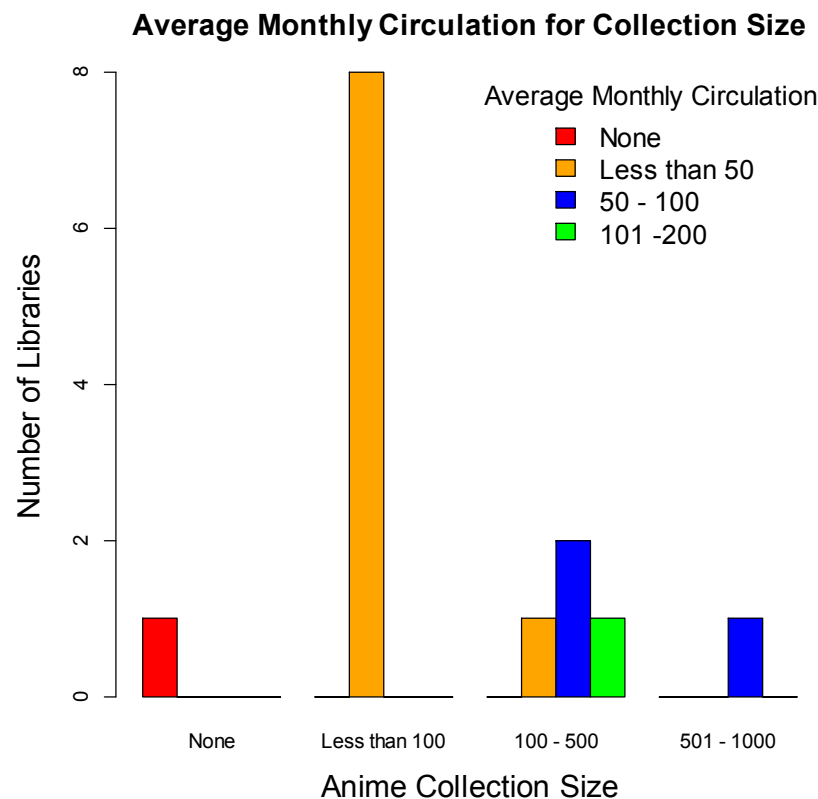


Figure 1. Average Monthly Circulation for Collection Size

Libraries primarily used patron requests and suggestions to aid in the collection selection process, though reviews and completing a series were other factors. One library mentioned that they “often choose titles that [sic] based off of mangas [sic] that circulate well from our collection.” This suggests that franchise metadata would help librarians find anime connected to works in other mediums. Patrons were also the most common source of information about anime for libraries. Periodicals, distributors, and publishers were other common sources. A similar pattern occurred in how libraries learned of new titles. The use of the patron as an information source highlights how important it is to have metadata with a robust set of access points.

The primacy of patrons as an information source was reflected in the collection development priorities with fulfilling patron requests being cited the most. Ensuring series are complete, providing a wide range of titles, collection currency, and assembling a “greatest hits” collection were other priorities. These priorities illustrate what categories of information libraries might look for to aid in developing an anime collection.

Cited development challenges tended to the common monetary concerns and older title availability; a few libraries mentioned circulation concerns and being unfamiliar with anime.

### 3.1.2 Patron interactions and programming

While patrons can access anime from the libraries primarily through DVDs, the libraries thought that patrons wanted to access anime through both DVDs and streaming. One librarian said, “I think they want it any way they can get it. they [sic] would take it in vhs if we still had it.” Staff serve as the most common means for patrons to access information about an anime collection, followed by the library’s website and displays.

Libraries brought up monetary concerns, patron interest, and collection size as challenges in providing access to anime titles. Only one library mentioned age appropriateness—further research may determine whether most libraries do not view it as an issue, do not realize the cultural differences in views of age appropriateness, or place it in a different category of challenges.

Libraries saw anime as providing entertainment, cross-cultural understanding, language learning, and drawing in reluctant readers, though only a few of the libraries hold events related to the anime collection, such as screenings of anime. The libraries mentioned low attendance and lack of staffing as reasons why events were not held.

### 3.1.3 Organizational and cataloging practice

The majority of libraries indicated that the anime collection was located within the film collection, teen collection, children’s collection, or some combination of those collections. Not all libraries subdivided the anime collection, but those that did primarily subdivided by age. Making sure the intended age demographic information is included in metadata would aid in these organizational practices. Most libraries organized anime on the shelves by title.

MARC was the preferred record format and generally the libraries’ records complied to the AACR2 standard. Several of the libraries remarked that their current cataloging system was good for locating items, such as on the shelf. However, a few libraries mentioned that browsing and searching for anime that share a genre, by subgenre, or for titles similar to a given title was a challenging process. Additional access points would strengthen current catalogs by better helping patrons find related items. Further research is needed to determine whether there are underused existing MARC fields to employ or if new fields are indicated.

## 3.2 Analysis

One of the libraries repeatedly mentioned the length of anime series as creating challenges for collection development and providing access; the series *One Piece*, for instance, consists of more than 750 episodes divided across dozens of DVDs. Collecting popular but long-running series like *One Piece* requires a large monetary and space commitment if libraries want to ensure series are complete.

The alternative to buying physical copies of multiple long-running anime series is to provide digital copies, such as streaming access. Some services provide libraries with digital titles to loan out. The service Hoopla, for example, includes TV shows and films in its offerings, though the selection of anime is rather small.<sup>2</sup> With approximately twenty-five thousand episodes,<sup>3</sup> the streaming service Crunchyroll is one of the largest collections of anime online, but because it only offers conditional free premium subscriptions to

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hoopladigital.com/home>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.crunchyroll.com/en/about>

libraries, Crunchyroll cannot completely replace a library's anime collection. While these services may free up library space and provide patrons with digital access to titles, librarians run the risk of losing control over what titles are available for patrons.

### 3.3 Limitations

The major limitation of this survey is its low response rate. Several factors likely contributed to this low response rate, including the survey design (e.g., inability to save the response), time pressures on the librarians, and potential survey fatigue. It may also be the case that most of the libraries that survey invitations were sent to either did not have an anime collection or did not consider the few anime titles they held as enough to constitute a collection.

The survey results highlight the areas where more research is needed. However, because of the low response rate, the survey does not provide much statistical power and the results cannot be used to make more than anecdotal generalizations about the state of anime collections in public libraries.

One potential issue that the survey also highlighted is the possibility of confusing anime with manga. For instance, on question 11 one respondent said, "Not know [sic] what my community wants because they don't really read anime." Another respondent seemed to treat anime and manga together, saying, "Anime has also been shown to be a good way to draw in reluctant readers. We can sell them as books that are more visual. When we find a good fit for the reader we can branch that to show them other books that are more traditional but no less exciting." These responses indicate it is necessary to better clarify the differences between anime and manga at the beginning of the survey.

## 4 Conclusion

This project represents the only preliminary look at anime in public libraries that addresses not only the collection development, but also the cataloging, organization, and user access, thus highlighting both the dearth of existing information and the wealth of possible useful avenues for further research. While the survey cannot be used to generalize about the status of anime collections in public libraries, it has shown that there are potential challenges that warrant further investigation.

Based on the preliminary findings, additional metadata such as genre and subgenre information could be useful for improving access to anime titles. Librarians might need ready access to data on an anime's demographic target, unique cultural content, franchise connections, filler status, regional versions, or animation styles to better develop collections and guide patrons to desired material. Furthermore, while this survey was limited to public libraries in the United States of America, future research will not be. Some of the potential challenges uncovered in this survey may already be addressed in the systems present in the public libraries of other countries.

In the future, we plan to send a revised survey to a larger number of public libraries in order to increase the number of responses. In addition, we will be following up our survey by interviewing librarians who manage anime collections in libraries to get a deeper understanding of the issues and challenges they face. Another area of ongoing work is the analysis of natural language questions for anime recommendations on anime-related forums to identify the important and relevant types of anime metadata. We expect to combine the results from these efforts in order to achieve the best possible understanding of the role anime plays in public library settings.

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