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Whenever we discuss concepts so wide as Culture or Identity, at first we tend to fall into the stereotypes or the symbols that inevitably tie us together. In Colombia, talking about culture usually means talking about coffee, sombreros vueltiaos or the National Soccer team. Names like Shakira, Fernando Botero or el Pibe Valderrama tend to show up. These are fairly recognizable items for most Colombians but are they really at the core of what we understand as our individual identities?

Later, when we take a closer look at how our true identity forms, we discover that that's not always the case, especially for the younger generations. Our modern identities are composed of so many factors and referents that it makes it hard to even try to grasp a clear idea of Identity. By only looking at our Colombian cultural symbols, we fall short of who we are nowadays. Today, in our globalized, ever-connected world, our sense of self-recognition is amplified. The later generations have grown up in a society that makes it easy for them to find referents from all over the world, making their sense of self even more plural. Moreover, when we speak about

Colombia, we speak about diversity, so in our case particularly, Cultural diversity is a better suited name to encompass the million possibilities we have to define our identity.

That's the purpose of this edition of Speaks: to discuss the ways in which culture makes us who we are. This edition reflects about the ways our local cultures shape our identity; for better and for worse. The first article recognizes some of the most valuable cultural manifestations of our country, while speaking about cultural appropriation. The second article argues for the appreciation of our native communities' ancestral knowledge and the defense of their territory. We can take our identity from our hometowns; or we can completely detach from it, as it is reflected in the third article, which discusses the ways identity can form opposite of our home cultures. Culture can be local, but it can also be global, as expressed in the final two articles of this issue, which analyse the ways globalization has merged into our everyday, constructing our sense of selves in the process. We hope you enjoy this edition of Speaks and think about yourself: How is your identity built?



Jessica Galvez Granada.

Lead editor

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Roots in change: Cultural identity in the modern era

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Abstract

Cultural identity is the emotional and social connection we have with the heritage, values, and traditions of our ancestors. It is a deep understanding of who we are in terms of origin, language, customs, and beliefs. Cultural identity not only provides a sense of belonging, but also encourages diversity and respect for differences. It is fundamental for intercultural understanding and the construction of harmonious and respectful societies while preserving our customs.

***KEYWORDS**

culture

Appropriation

Identity

Tradition

Cultural appropriation is a phenomenon that involves the reception, reinterpretation and use of cultural elements of one culture by another. In the case of Colombia, rich in diversity, the appropriation of diverse cultures has been a constant process throughout its history. Since its beginning, Colombia has been appropriating words, expressions, and traditions from other countries. This accumulation of influences has contributed to the construction of national identity, influencing music, gastronomy, fashion, art and other aspects of daily life. However, the current and more modern influences are overshadowing Colombia's cultural expressions, filling it with expressions and customs that leave ours aside. It is important to highlight that cultural appropriation is not a unilateral phenomenon, but rather involves a complex exchange of ideas, traditions, and expressions between diverse cultures. We will mention the ways in which Colombia has assimilated, adapted, and incorporated different cultures from different parts of the world. We will examine how these cultural manifestations work and how they have influenced Colombian society, enriching its cultural landscape and generating a unique amalgam that reflects the diversity and richness of the country.

Colombia is a country of contrasts and diversity, full of a multiplicity of cultural variants that spring from the territory and its rich and complex history. This country, with the imposing Andes Mountain range and the vast Amazon rainforest, is home to a wide range of mestizo cultures and foreign influences that combine to create the colorful identity of its people. "There are around 115 indigenous peoples and more than 65 native languages." (Foreign Ministry, 2022). From the ancestral traditions of indigenous peoples to the mark left by Spanish colonization, passing by the Afro-descendant heritage and the various migrations that have marked its demographics, such as the Wayuu, the Nasa, and the Arawaks, Colombians take their referents.

Each region of the country has a social organization, traditions, beliefs, and artistic manifestations that compose the complex picture of Colombian identity.

Colombia, as a cultural mosaic, has different regions which contain its own traditions, gastronomy, music, dances, and unique artistic expressions, forging a nation with cultural plurality as its most precious wealth. One of the most important celebrations that give life to our country is the Barranquilla carnival, one of the most important and recognized internationally, where cultures merge with a series of dances, colorful costumes, music, and traditional activities. Another very important manifestation is the Silleteros Parade in the Feria de las Flores in Medellín, a very Antioquean tradition where people parade the streets with huge floral arrangements on their backs, in commemoration of the traditional flower culture of the Antioquia mountains. Over the years, these celebrations have developed, influenced by various ethnicities, stories, and geographical environments, enriched by its indigenous, African, European and mestizo heritage.





In recent years, Colombia has experienced increasing cultural diversification due to globalization, migration, international exchanges, and commercial relations. Some of the cultures that have most influenced Colombia are American culture with pop and the bands that are responsible for popularizing rebellious behavior, or fast food that gave rise to a gastronomic culture of our own. Asian culture with its k-pop, metrosexual boy bands, k-dramas and animes, which is a source of culture identification for many. These interactions have expanded the presence of different cultures in the country. Although historically established cultures remain fundamental, in Colombia there is an influence of various contemporary cultures that comes from past decades as well:

Most of the dates that Colombians celebrate are foreign. We are a country that has received cultural influences in its more than 500 years of history and 200 years of republic. For this reason, Mother's Day, Easter, and Christmas are celebrations, that, although we believe them as ours, are not Colombian (Parra, 2019).

Latin America has been one of the most influenced regions when it comes to including traditions, linguistic expressions, and music from different countries, which facilitates the building of bridges with people from all over the world, but which also means a debilitation of their own cultural referents.

The lack of cultural identity that this diversification promotes can have a significant impact on future generations in a variety of ways. Cultural vulnerability is what causes our culture to lose predominance and can also lead us to lose diversity, a fundamental part of who we are as individuals and as a society. This debilitation of our own culture can have social, psychological and political consequences, such as the loss of historical and traditional connections, losing our connection with our roots, and disconnecting from the past. As someone with love for who they are and where they come from, someone who says that "Whoever does not know their history is condemned to repeat it", losing our cultural referents poses important challenges for the construction of young people's identity. Cultural identity is not static and evolves over time; cultures can adapt and change, but preserving significant elements of identity is essential to maintaining a connection with the past and building a future enriched by diversity.

Why appropriate other cultures if we have our own?

I started this article with the goal of solving this question, and it turns out that the more I reflect, the clearer it became, there are two sides to the coin: appropriating

cultures or evolving as a culture. I was very wrong and blinded to the fact that other cultures affected our traditions and our young people, but Colombia itself is a great mix of different cultures and traditions, from Europe to Asia and America. In general, the different cultures are not invading us, but enriching us much more and filling our different cultures with new traditions, beliefs and vocabulary that makes Colombia a richer country at the end of the day. The important thing is not to lose the essence of what identifies our culture.

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Indigenous People in Colombia: Preserving Cultural Identity in the Present Day

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Abstract

In the deafening echo of social media, indigenous voices in Colombia often get lost despite their rich cultural heritage and traditions and intrinsically connected with nature, these communities face a silent battle for the preservation of their identity. As their sacred territories fade due to conflict and industrial expansion, so do their cultural legacy, and the invaluable wisdom they possess to tackle contemporary challenges. It is urgent to respect their territorial rights, involve them in decisions affecting their lands, and learn from their profound understanding of the interconnection between humanity and nature. In this respect and support, we not only protect their heritage but also pave the way for a more equitable and sustainable future for all.

*KEYWORDS

Indigenous communities

Cultural heritage

Sacred territories

Cultural identity

Traditional practices

In a world where social media amplifies diverse voices, indigenous communities often go unheard, surrounded by a digital void akin to being "online." Bound by shared culture and history, these communities span the globe, boasting unique traditions and languages. Colombia is home to 115 distinct indigenous communities, each with its beliefs, lifestyles, and artistic expressions. Despite their rich heritage, society and public institutions seem to have historically disregarded their value, as highlighted in the National Development Plan (Colombia, 2022). This oversight is especially noticeable in their continuous fight for the land, which has been constantly threatened by different agents. Considering the invaluable contributions of indigenous cultures to modern society, including profound knowledge of ancestral medicine, it is our responsibility as Colombian society to honor these vital roots.

When it comes to the Cultural Heritage and Traditional Knowledge of indigenous communities, we find that their ancient wisdom is an integral part of their cultural identity. While cultures and local knowledge systems are diverse, certain characteristics are common among them. The Know-how that the communities gather from their experience is transmitted as a whole, containing religious beliefs, information about sacred plants and their territories. Information is passed down through the generations, creating a culture in the process. Guided by each community's worldview, they firmly recognize that tangible and intangible components cannot be divided or separated. Specifically, indigenous communities understand that knowledge, cultural values, customary laws, biological resources, and landscapes -whether they be forests or mountains- are intricately linked, and sustain the integrity of their culture.

One of the most central ways in which Indigenous culture manifests is in their extensive understanding of various traditional crops. They are farmers who, over the years, have preserved and refined techniques for planting, harvesting, and caring for land products, not only for their physical properties, but also for the spiritual connections they allow. In the Amazonian indigenous cosmogony, sacred plants are fundamental for interconnecting and negotiating with spiritual beings. Their elements are a source of special energy for shamanistic practices, and without them, communication among worlds would not flow. Coca is undoubtedly one of the most important plants, as it represents conscience itself and is an essential part of the shaman's and indigenous people's lives. Coca transformed into mambe is one of the products from the chagra (cultivated field) that should never be missing, because it is a fundamental part of their ancestral knowledge and their everyday life. (Gaia Amazonas, 2019) Tobacco is another plant given to Amazonian indigenous people

from the very beginning. It is used for healing, gaining wisdom, and increasing attention in everyday life. This plant provides strength and powers to traditional practitioners for navigating the world, depending on the healings and preventions needed during each period. Their spiritual use of plants represents an intangible cultural heritage that must be preserved and safeguarded against any misuse by third parties, as it is directly linked to the very right to existence.

Additionally, it is essential to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of indigenous people in the field of natural medicine. These communities' connection with nature has facilitated the accumulation of profound knowledge about the healing properties of plants, herbs, and other natural substances over generations. This wisdom, passed down orally, has been used to treat various diseases and health conditions. Indigenous traditional medicine practices encompass a rich tapestry of rituals, medicinal herbs, and healing techniques, often intertwined with specific spiritual beliefs and worldviews within each community.



Imágenes tomada de: <https://www.kienyke.com/historias/indigenas-tucano-san-jose-del-guavire-tradiciones>

The profound wisdom derived from these practices benefits not only the indigenous communities but also the entire world, offering valuable insights into the intricate relationship between humans and nature, providing alternative approaches to healthcare that are deeply rooted in millennia-old wisdom.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, indigenous medicine faced the virus using traditional plants. Betty Sousa, a Public Health assistant from the Tikuna Yoi ethnic group in the Amazonas department, shared insights into the benefits of traditional remedies, such as Jungle Tobacco with its antiseptic properties, and Yerbaluísa known for its anti-inflammatory and relaxing attributes. She also described how they managed virus symptoms with natural elements like bicarbonate with lemon or lemon with crushed garlic in water, along with vaporizations utilizing plants like Cordoncillo,

Matico, Yerbamala, Chamomile, Yerbaluísa, and Eucalyptus, as well as medications like aspirin and naproxen that yielded positive effects. Similarly, Yahaira, a member of the Mokaaná community in Atlántico, recommended using Watercress, which she noted "oxygenates the blood and brain, reducing lung inflammation" (Constante, 2020).

More than the mere fact of curing diseases, this life-saving knowledge is delicate and should be preserved because it is primarily transmitted orally and practically. Elders and shamans share their wisdom through stories, myths, chants, and rituals with younger generations. This practical learning extends to apprentices who accompany traditional healers in their daily activities, actively participating in plant collection, remedy preparation, and healing rituals. This hands-on approach also includes community members, even children, who are encouraged to engage in traditional practices and directly interact with nature, thus immersing themselves in the natural world. Indigenous traditional medicine is deeply intertwined with nature, and knowledge is gained and transmitted through direct interaction with the surroundings and the community, fostering a profound understanding of the healing properties of the environment. These practices have been recognized for their holistic and natural approaches to treating diseases and maintaining both physical and mental health (Constante, 2020).





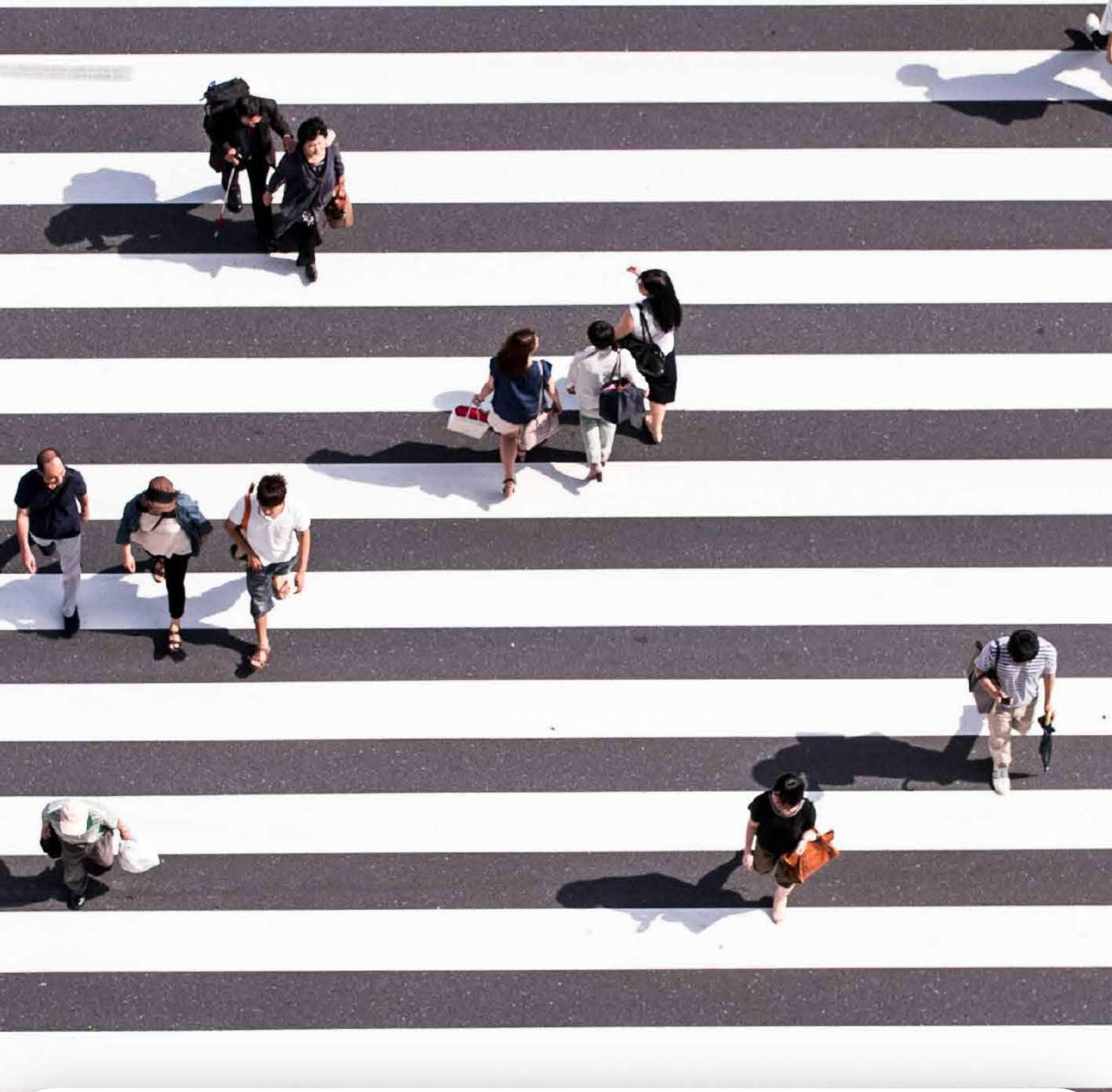
These spiritual and medicinal practices are not possible without the deep connection of these communities with their territories. Landscapes and natural elements play a crucial role in their way of life and knowledge systems. Knowledge often originates from specific sacred sites like forests, mountains, and lakes. For instance, the Nukak Makú, like many indigenous groups, live in the Amazon rainforest and rely heavily on it for survival. They acquire vital knowledge about the forest's resources and survival skills directly from these natural sites, which hold cultural and spiritual significance. Often, indigenous communities believe that spirits or deities reside in the natural elements, influencing their worldview. The loss of indigenous sacred territories in Colombia, especially, is occurring due to a series of interconnected factors. The internal armed conflict in Colombia has led to the forced displacement of indigenous communities, forcing them to abandon their ancestral and sacred lands. Additionally, the expansion of industry, mining, commercial agriculture, and other development projects has encroached upon these territories, destroying natural ecosystems, and displacing communities that rely on them for sustenance and spiritual support. The result of these activities, coupled with the imposition of Western fashion and lifestyles, has led to the loss of the sacred connection these communities have with the land.

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Identity, an expression of the self and not of the culture

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Abstract

This essay delves into the complexities of personal identity and its relationship to cultural background. The author questions the mandate to be proud of one's cultural roots and highlights their detachment from their own families' cultures. Their identity, shaped by the influence of globalization and the internet, is characterized by a commitment to reason, science, and spirituality, making it unorthodox and self-defined. Ultimately, the author stresses the importance of individuality in the formation of one's identity and encourages readers to question whether their own identity is truly their own or if it's imposed by external factors.

*KEYWORDS

Identity

Culture

Globalization

Internet

Critical Thinking

Spirituality

Are we fully from where we grow up? Must we be proud of what represents us culturally? Throughout our lives, at some point, we have heard phrases like "we have to be proud of our roots" or "we have to give everything for our homeland", but do they represent the mindset of a nation, department, or municipality? Growing up, I was constantly changing accommodation; I had to move to different cities and towns, so never felt identified with my parents' different home cultures. My father is from the Plains and my mother is from the Cundiboyacense region. Despite I grew up with them, I never fully empathized with their customs. I was never excluded from any of my parents' families, but the strong roots in religion and livestock and agricultural activities made me take some distance from their shared values. While it is true that some characteristics in my personality are related to these cultures, this does not imply that everything that makes up my identity belongs to them. I think I am not the only one who does not identify with the cultural identity of the place where one grew up. Although culture influences a person's identity, different experiences, and points of view, like those provided by globalization and the internet, also influence this process.

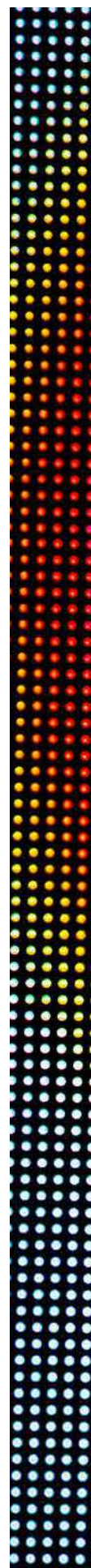
My sense of identity is detached from multiple cultural references of what my father's the Llanera identity means. Usually when I share with my dad's side of the family, I am involved in activities that by nature are carried out in a dirty environment, such pasture, corrals, ranches, etc. It is common for my family to constantly practice this type of activities, since its normal for them. However, for me, this is not pleasurable due to the dirt and heat. It is difficult for me to feel a strong connection in these types of activities, so I have not developed a sense of identity around traditions of the plains. In addition to this, the Llanera culture and much of Colombia still retains traditions related to bullfighting since the second half of the nineteenth century. This practice has been shown to cause damage to the integrity of the animals involved (Cabrera, 2009). Since I do not agree with animal abuse, all of this has the consequence that my identity is distanced from this culture and that I spend less time with my paternal family every time we go on vacation. I usually

prefer to look for other things to do, such as being on the cell phone, playing games or watching series. This has created the perception that I do not like to share with them, so I seek to integrate myself into the activities that I dislike the least.

On the other hand, when talking about my mother's Cundiboyacense identity, my conflict comes from their extremely religious way of seeing things. The problem really is not that they have a religion, but that they believe is the only valid position, so they judge others quite extremely. It is well known that Catholicism is the dominant religion in Colombia; this reflected both in customs and social representations, having many festivities, carnivals, myths and saints (Sánchez, 2017). This has become so normal for my mother's side of the family, they are seen actively participating in activities such as going to mass, praying the rosary every night, doing the Stations of the Cross, celebrating Holy Week, among others. Despite the fact that Colombia its constitution stipulates the Catholic religion as the official religion of the country (Alvarez, 2011), there is no law or rule that forces people to strictly belong to one. In my case, I consider myself a spiritual deist, which as Benítez (2007) explains, is a person that believes in a God or supreme being, but does not follow any organized religion or share the values of the deist perspective. When I tried to explain my way of looking at life to them, I understood that, to them, anything that does not meet the characteristics of their religion is sacrilege. They have never respected my beliefs and forced me to participate in their customs without making an effort to understand me. In addition to this, another aspect that I don't like is their derogatory remarks when talking about feminine men, tattoos or animated series, which according to their religious perspective, are wrong. They are simply extremely indoctrinated, and there are many factors that explain these behaviors; among them, their family customs, the place where they come from, and perhaps the fear of being punished in a divine way. Apart from the inconsistencies in this religion, the attitudes of my relatives are very questionable, that is why my identity is totally distanced from them.

After clarifying all of the above, my identity, far from the Llanera and Cundiboyacense culture of my relatives, has undergone a profound transformation driven by globalization and the unlimited access to information I've been offered by the Internet. By immersing myself in this vast network of knowledge, I have been fortunate to reduce my ignorance and broaden my cultural and cognitive horizons, a

fundamental aspect in helping me form my identity. This evolution has also been possible thanks to significant people in my life, such as high school teachers, my father and stepfather; they have played a fundamental role in instilling in me the ability to critically reason and foster a love of science. Their teachings have empowered me to question dogmas and traditional conceptions, encouraging me to adopt an evidence-based approach





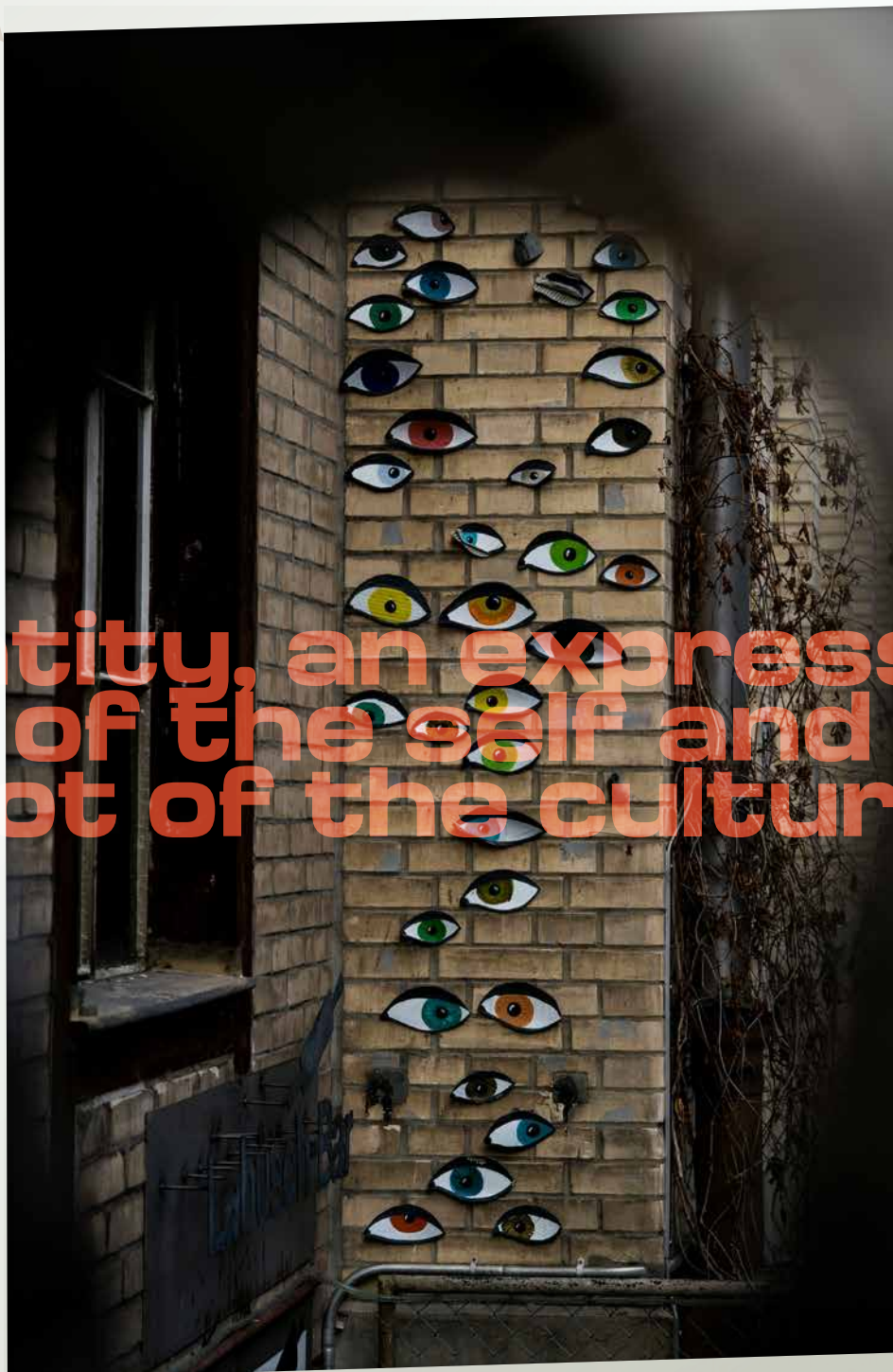
and logical thinking, while still cultivating my spirituality. On the other hand, I have found inspiration from public figures such as Jordan Peterson, who is a Canadian intellectual, cultural critic, clinical psychologist, and professor. His profound explorations of religion and his perspective on deism have been instrumental in shaping my intellectual identity. Peterson, like many other contemporary thinkers, has helped me to unravel the mysteries of religion from a critical point of view and has provided me with a platform to reflect on how religion and spirituality can coexist with rationality and scientific thought. This has adhered more strongly to my identity as I consider myself a person who seeks objectivity and reason above all. These people have had a stronger impact on the construction of my identity than what was supposed to be instilled in me by my roots or my blood; they have opened my mind and bestowed upon me values such as respect and perseverance.

As you can see, my identity is quite distant from the families I was born into, both in the activities my Llanera family usually does, as well as the religious beliefs of my Cundiboyacense family. My identity, if I had to define it, would be unorthodox, pursuing reason and loving science; my identity is self-taught, characterized by Buddhist philosophy, reflections around the concept of deism, and influenced by artistic media such as music, anime, movies, sports, literature and video games. I could say for sure that I can't pigeonhole myself into a specific subculture, doctrine or any kind of group. With the passing of time, I simply added things to my identity because they caught my attention and I liked them, not because they were imposed on me or because of the weight of the cultural identities my parents carried. Identity does not depend on what others say, it should not be imposed through symbols passed down by generations. In fact, it is the opposite, identity is the essence of the person, no matter if that person is the so-called black sheep of the family. Now I turn to you as a reader and ask you, is your identity really yours? Or is it something imposed by others? Think about it.

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Identity, an expression
of the self and
not of the culture





Literary Arcana: The Cultural Soul of Wattpad

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Abstract

This narrative focuses on the adolescence of a young girl with internal conflicts going through a self-discovery journey, as it typically happens at that stage of life. It specifically focuses on her experience with Wattpad, a reading and writing platform that some love, others despise, and some others do not know. The author describes her own experience, exploring through memories the way her personality and identity were structured. It also reflects about the inevitable influence of the internet in the identity development of Generation Z.

*KEYWORDS

Wattpad

Platform

Storytelling

Writing

Literary Genres

The construction of a person consists of many components, whether they be biological or social. These inevitable and necessary components have been influencing the way in which identity develops in everyone, changing through the generations until finally reaching the age of technology. Nowadays, thousands of forms of interaction happen on the internet, usually through platforms focused on all the interests under the sun: music, movies and even virtual diaries, all dedicated to reinforcing the identity of those who use them. There is a platform that has contributed to the creation of my stance towards the world, to the construction of what is my own essence. According to Thayid, et al, Wattpad is a platform that has been around since 2006, launched by a couple of friends who saw the potential of online literature. It is a platform where, as its logo indicates, "stories live". Its reach is such that it currently has more than sixty-five million users. Here, users post and read more than just fanfics; there is a wide range of genres to choose from, from the most youthful romance to the most dystopia-oriented science fiction.

According to Falguera & Selfa in their research in 2020, emerging writers are able to express their ideas, voicing all the creativity that floods their heads, showing the world what they like to do, and making the people who follow their worlds feel the same joy they feel when they publish each fragment of their stories. But why would anyone be interested in touching on a subject that may be viewed as irrelevant by some? The answer may not be simple, but my cultural identity was slowly formed by the connections that this platform made for me. Wattpad is very important to me because it inevitably became one of the biggest turning points in my life; not only did it develop my identity through its countless stories, but it also came to form everything I am today. It provided a good escape from the world, I met people with the same taste for books and it helped me to have a better critical sense of what I write and what I read.

My first encounter with the platform was the first way I had to escape the mess of teenage girl's mind. It was in 2015, to be more precise, at the beginning of the school year in March. At the time, I was eleven years old, with a great amount of insecurities, invasive thoughts, and fantasies. It was there, right in the middle of all the clutter in my head, when a friend, by chance, approached me with the news that would

change my life to this day. She talked about Wattpad as if it were one of the best discoveries ever and although at first I doubted such greatness, I decided to delve into it, thus finding an escape from all the changes, and desires I was going through. Not only through reading, but also through writing, I found a way to break free while showing the world the realities I was constantly imagining. That recommendation reinforced the bond we already had between the two of us, talking, telling each other, and thinking about the "What ifs..." of each of the stories we read, but it also allowed us to connect with people from all over the world.

Wattpad has also been a major factor in the development of my identity as it has given me the opportunity to interact with new people. I got to know the work of different story creators, such as "Married to the Devil" which was the first story I found on Wattpad. This was the first narrative that kept me at the edge of my seat, crying, expectant and curious about what would happen next. The lives of the characters, their decisions, the way in which the writer carried out each of the paths of her personalities, contributed to a greater extent to the formation of my cultural identity, of my own essence. It is from this that I began to reflect about the quality of my own writing, being critical of my work, while admiring the way these people delivered a fragment of their soul in each of the words they put on a page. It was like talking to them, knowing how they felt, how they created, made me feel closer to myself, more understood. The friendships on the platform are peculiar, but not at all static, they never stagnate in a single pole, nor are they appreciated from the superficial. These people say what they want, and they constantly motivate you to keep writing; they advise and guide you to stand out at the top of the charts. That interaction is the most exciting, and the most nurturing for a writer's process.

In Wattpad, quality is not a requirement: There is no writing that isn't worthwhile, much less the effort of those who publish there. Writers have the opportunity to develop or publish their story by receiving feedback as the chapters are published, thus receiving the emotions, feelings and sensations that are awakened in their audience. Readers can become part of the story, from inspiring characters to helping in the creation of plots; variety has no limits, in fact it never will. In that order of ideas, Shoji and company share the position that, in some aspects of a person's life, and much more of their creations, nothing is perfect, (Sáez, 2021). We can't make the mistake of criticizing something incorrectly if we haven't first taken on the task of learning about it. In my life, I try to go by the saying "Don't talk about what you don't know", much less criticize things that I haven't studied or experienced before. That is another of the most important things Wattpad has contributed to the person I am today.

Resilience is another part of my identity I developed while being a part of this community. At the time I got into it, my classmates ridiculed me for it. Fortunately, I didn't consider it bullying, as it was an internal tease between us, something I didn't dislike; however, that doesn't mean it was the same with everyone. On the contrary, some people could be very cruel to anyone who expressed their taste for that kind of "weird stuff". I became disgusted

One of the things for which Wattpad receives criticism is for the infinity of stories that do not have a minimum of revision or effort in their grammar, orthography or even coherence

by unfounded comments, discrimination or insults that do not seek to expose arguments but attack the essence of an individual. It is in situations like these that the community on the platform becomes critical. Whether it is the more global audience or the fans clinging to the writers who have stood up with their stories, as in the case of Ariana Godoy, who with her trilogy "Hidalgos", formed a mass of followers dense enough to the point of obtaining films from her writings. It's through the support of the community that I became more aware of details about writing, such as what book may or may not grab my attention, as well as the whole process behind a story, no matter how mediocre it may seem to some. I was constantly trying to find the errors in those books and contrast them with the stories I was reading. In this way I increased my critical sense, sharpened by the stories before my eyes. Writing is a long road, traveled in short steps, and although my stories had many mistakes in the beginning, I now feel closer and prouder of what I have achieved. So, despite people thinking about the platform as second-class content, I learned to stand by my work and rely on my friends.

Now it only remains for me to express how much I enjoyed the trip of describing Wattpad, the lessons I learned that I keep today. I do not want this relation to end, because it became the foundation of the love I profess to writing. In short, through Wattpad, I experienced all kinds of realities, understanding the way the world is now mobilized. Each aspect of being part of the community came to form my identity and influence the direction of my life. The friends I made here, and the books I have read – stories of love or action – have influenced

the way everything works in my head. Wattpad became the best possible place for a young woman who only wanted to be herself, achieve every dream, and experience some of what was written in those pages, without being judged or isolated. After all, don't you have a guilty pleasure that has made you form all that you are? Live and let live, that's my motto.

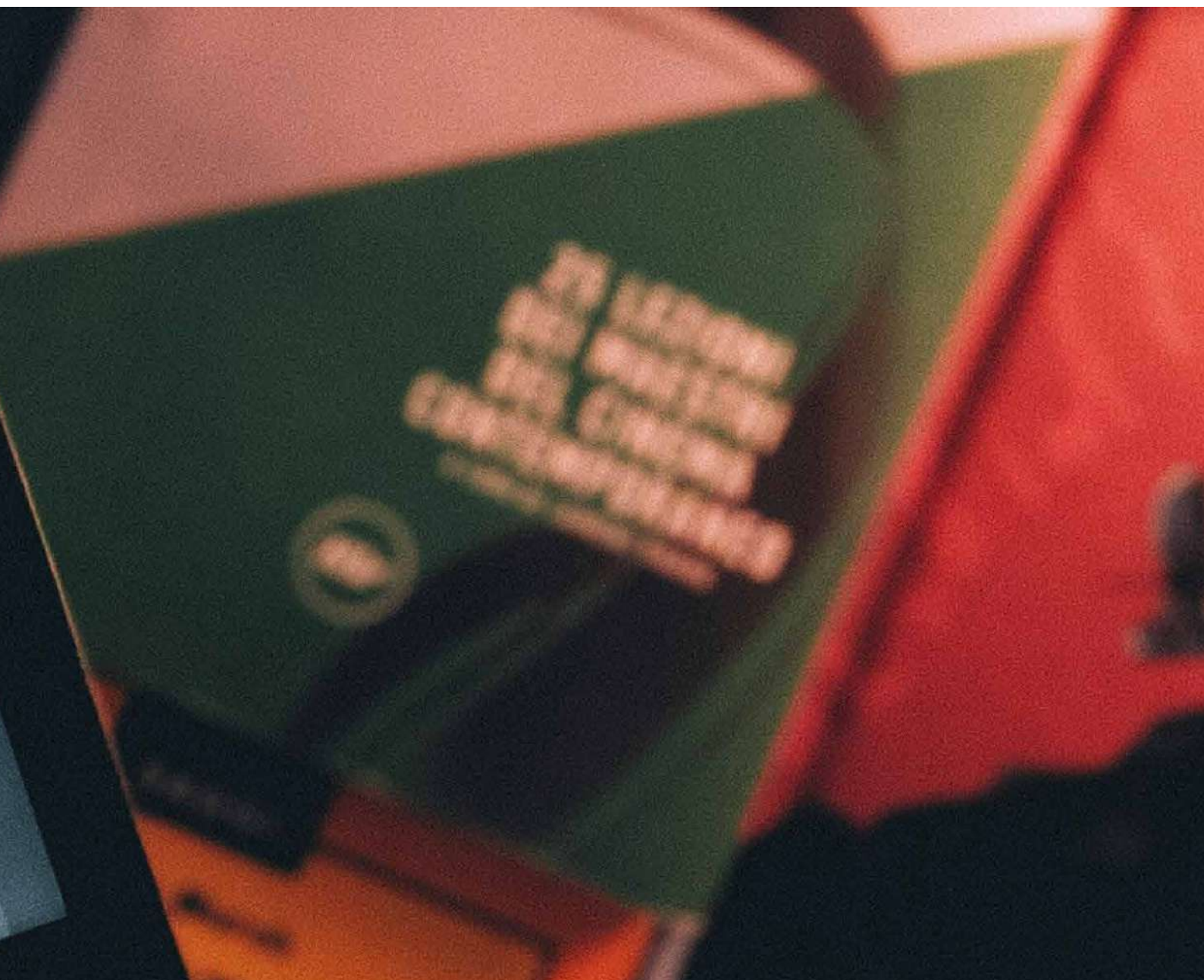


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Otaku culture and its impact on society

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Abstract

“Otaku” is a concept that emerged in Japan and now it’s present in all over the world; it expanded and became a culture: “Otaku Culture”. This article analyzes the impact of this culture, especially since the pandemic. Watching anime influenced the lives of many people, transmitting values of perseverance in the face of tough times.

*KEYWORDS

Japan

Pandemic Impact

Anime

Naruto

Culture

Have you ever heard the term "Otaku" and wondered what it refers to? Otaku is a word that is mostly related to people that watch anime, read manga, or is related to Japanese culture. The word “Otaku” (おたく/オタク) was created by the humorist and essayist Akio Nakamori in the 80’s in Japan and it was initially used to refer to a person with an obsessive interest in any particular subject (Tsuitsui, 2008, p. 14), hobby or any form of entertainment. In the rest of the world, this term is commonly used especially for fans of a certain type of Japanese popular culture, especially anime, manga, and other popular culture; people who feel related to the stories or characters. Even though “Otaku” is a word used to refer to a person, the term has evolved and now refers to much more; there is a whole community behind this, people who identify with a sense of belonging and share the same values, so the word has transcended to just a term into an established culture. Nowadays we talk about **“Otaku Culture”** because it’s present in all over the world. The impact of this culture has become more remarkable since the pandemic and watching anime has influenced the lives of many people, transmitting values of perseverance in the face of tough times.

History has shown that many subcultures appeared in Japan after World War II and Otaku Culture is one of them. Around 1983, the term was used by humorist Akio Nakamori as a pejorative word for anime fans, but they adopted it to talk about themselves in a positive way. Tsuitsui has written that in a certain time, in 1989, otaku had a negative connotation because it was related to a serial killer of girls who had this word as his name: Otaku Tsutomu Miyazaki (2008). At first, it was only used in Japan and the Akihabara neighborhood located in the center of Tokyo was the place where the community gathered, and they opened manga, costume, and video game stores. However, since the 90's, this word was expanding its positive scope and began the roots of the "Otaku Culture" as a form of identification of a community with common tastes (2008). At first, it was only used in Japan and the Akihabara neighborhood located in the center of Tokyo was the place where the community gathered, and they opened manga, costume and video game stores and these activities expanded and transcended with time. “The word otaku, at least from the way it is currently used, appears to be too narrow and confining to accurately describe the diverse identities and interests of people who are passionate about anime” (Morrissy, 2016) and now “children's and young people's manga are very much committed to promoting positive values such as friendship, loyalty, effort and self-improvement” (López, 2021). It's important to mention that Globalization is a trigger of this culture, thanks to the expansion of the internet around the world, Television, broadcasting and social media, aspects of Japanese and Otaku Culture have expanded across countries’ borders in recent

years. Even if it started as a word with a negative meaning, people have turned this into a whole culture identification that has gone beyond Japan and now “around the world, admirers of Japanese pop culture (above all, anime and manga) proudly embrace the label otaku” (Tsuitsui, 2008, p. 14).

Otaku culture has expanded around the world, globalization has been a key factor in this process but in the past two years, the pandemic was the most influential trigger for the distribution and consumption of audiovisual content like anime, manga, or video games from Japan. Anime has always been one of the most important exponents of otaku culture and now with the pandemic its popularity has increased even more, as “global demand for anime content grew 118% over the past two years, making it one of the fastest-growing content genres by that metric during the pandemic” (Fischer & Flinn, 2022). When many people were looking for some distraction, they found anime and otaku culture, so these figures are evidence of anime’s reach during the pandemic and the demand for this kind of content, which grew in an exponential way. Everyone was locked in their homes during the pandemic, due to the situation every day social media and streaming platforms were visited by people; these aspects were determinant in the growing worldwide expansion of Japanese entertainment content.

One platform where the otaku culture expanded through the world was Crunchyroll, which served to reach people because this streaming platform gives the opportunity to watch anime; “as of August 2021, the anime-focused subscription video-on-demand platform Crunchyroll had five million paying subscribers. Subscription numbers have grown rapidly in recent years, with the company managing to triple its number of paying subscribers between February 2017 and the beginning of 2021” (Stoll, 2023). Animes from most genres can be found and everybody can find something that they like. Some genres are:

- Kodomomuke (コドモムケ): Anime deliberately made for children below 12 years of age.
- Shonen (少年): The literal meaning of Shōnen is a boy. This type of anime is generally targeted toward teen boys (12-18 years old), it inspires young boys to achieve greater things in life. (Kumar, 2023).
- Shoujo/Shoujo (少女): The word Shōjo translates to young girls. It is

- targeted at young girls (12-18 years old). This genre explores the feminine side which basically includes genres such as romance and drama. (Kumar, 2023).
- Seinen (青年): This genre is targeted toward adult men. It covers a wide variety of mature genres, such as psychological, gore, violence, action, etc. (Kumar, 2023).
- Josei (女性): This genre is targeted for adult women. It shows the realistic lives of women, including their relationships, challenges, and more. (Kumar, 2023).

A particularly good example could be Naruto anime which has been present in this culture for many years and has reached new audience thanks to pandemic and is one of the most popular anime in the streaming platform Crunchyroll; Naruto was a source of some help to people that didn't know what to do, people who were bored and even those who were going through difficult times because of quarantine. This anime has helped the community of otaku culture since its first episode and returned to give some happiness to people even 20 years after its premiere.

The anime called: Naruto / Naruto Shippuden has been present in members of the otaku culture's lives since 1999 and is still relevant because it has messages of perseverance and unity that have been handed down from generation to generation. It's protagonist, Naruto Uzumaki is a boy who belongs to a Village of Ninjas and because of a "monster" that he has inside, he faced scorn and hurtful remarks from the people around him, but he always believed in himself and that is one of the main reasons of his success after many years of effort and resilience. One of his remarkable phrases is: "Failure does not give you a reason to quit as long as you have faith", he always says this to remind himself and everyone around him that giving up is never an option. This specific anime has marked the lives of many people who belong to the otaku culture over the years; values such as effort

Crunchyroll gives a space where the Otaku people can meet and interact. Even with the existence of different genres, the community can share the same values, because there are animes that have been present in the lives of almost everyone that belongs to Otaku Culture.

responsibility, gratitude, simplicity, and faith in oneself have been the main lessons that Naruto has shared with the world. I include myself in the group of people that recognize this anime as a help in difficult situations, thanks to the pandemic many others like me found this culture and started by watching Naruto for the first time and it gave us hope and support by simple episodes that reminded us that we could not stop dreaming and having faith that everything would turn out well in spite of the circumstances. Every story present in the anime showed us that we all have our own path to follow and that we cannot give up until we reach the goal that will make us happy or as Naruto always says: “Follow your ninja way.” This feeling of perseverance is an important characteristic of the otaku culture, everyone who has seen or heard about Naruto would be identified with this sentence.

After all that has been said, if someone ever asks you about the Otaku, now you can now answer that it refers to a group of people that feel identity with common interests. Over time, this word has transcended and evolved; at the beginning it started like something negative but now people embrace this label with love and pride. Otaku is now associated with a whole stablished culture around the world, its presence has gained strength in the past years thanks to the pandemic and one of the most known animes became even more popular because of its help with people in quarantine that were going through hard times, people from many countries around the world are members of a culture and that’s the whole point of this word: “Otaku”. If you consider yourself an otaku, you’re part of this culture. Naruto is one of the most loved anime characters among the members of Otaku Culture and that’s why it has transcended generations and shares different values with everyone that has seen this anime. I can agree with everyone because in my personal experience, Naruto has been present in my life and he has taught me to persevere and to have faith in myself despite difficulties. There’s no doubt that nowadays Otaku Culture is especially important in society, so, if you're not part of this culture yet; what are you waiting for?

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