

Between Love and Obsession: Japanese Society's Perspective on the Concept of Yandere Characters

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Abstract. The term “*yandere*” in Japanese popular culture refers to a fictional character who harbors an intense and obsessive love for someone, to the extent that they are willing to commit extreme acts, including violence or even murder. The objective of this study is to examine Japanese perceptions of *yandere* characters, explore the factors contributing to their popularity in Japan, and analyze potential reactions if individuals were to encounter a *yandere* personality in real life. This study employs a qualitative research method, utilizing a survey administered to fifteen Japanese individuals who have an interest in *anime* and *manga*. The analysis is conducted using Gerbner's Cultivation Theory (1976) to interpret Japanese perspectives on *yandere* characters based on the collected survey data. The findings indicate that while most Japanese respondents express a dislike for *yandere* characters and prefer to distance themselves from them, a minority perceives such characters as appealing, viewing them as a representation of an intense and devoted form of love that has gained cultural traction in Japan. Furthermore, 80% of respondents believe that *yandere* behavior is plausible in real life, particularly within the context of romantic relationships.

Keywords: *yandere*, Japanese popular culture, obsessive love

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Japanese popular culture has produced a diverse cast of characters with distinct personalities that have captivated a worldwide audience. One of the most striking stereotypes is the *yandere*, who is noted for their obsessive love, which may lead to extreme behaviors, such as violence against those they regard as threats to their romantic relationships. *Yandere* is derived from the words 「病み」, meaning “sick”, and 「デレデレ」, meaning “in love” or “shy”. According to dic.pixiv.net, *yandere* is a state in which a person's affections for another person grow too intense, resulting in a pathological mental condition. Characters with *yandere* qualities lack moral and ethical understanding because of their intense love for their infatuation.

According to Gentaro Kato (2018), *yandere* is a syndrome characterized by dramatic behavioral changes in a person because of excessive love, which can lead to jealousy and overprotectiveness. According to d.hatena.ne.jp, *yandere* is a variation of *tsundere*. This phrase usually refers to a female character who is ordinarily clever and successful, but when she falls in love (*dere*) with the main character, her mental state becomes unstable (*yan*) because of her obsession with him. Initially, the *yandere* character would be nice and compassionate towards the person she/he likes, but as time passes, her/his love grows and she/he will go to any length to have her/his love reciprocated, including committing crimes.

According to The Dere Types Wiki, the earliest *yandere* character in Japanese literature was Lady Rokujo from the *Genji Monogatari* fairy story, which was published in 1021. Lady Rokujo was one of Hikaru Genji's mistresses, and she was madly in love with him and envious of his previous lovers.

Her jealousy unintentionally transformed her spirit into a *yuurei* (ghost), attacking Genji's other lovers. Although the word *yandere* had not yet been invented, Lady Rokujo was seen to have the attitude and conduct of a *yandere* enamored with her boyfriend.

Since the late 20th century, *yandere* characters have grown in popularity in *anime*, *manga*, and light novels. Yuno Gasai from “*Mirai Nikki*”, Kotonoha Katsura from “*School Days*”, and Matsuzaka Satou from “*Happy Sugar Life*” are three well-known *yandere* characters in Japanese popular culture. They engage in *yandere* behaviors such as extreme attachment to the point of harming and murdering others to protect those they care about. The portrayal of *yandere* characters in Japanese culture demonstrates how overwhelming love may result in unstable and harmful conduct. This not only heightens the story's intensity but also challenges the audience or reader to consider the distinction between love and obsession, as well as the psychological consequences.

Yandere also took place in real life on May 23, 2019, in Kabukicho, Shinjuku, Tokyo. Takaoka Yuka, a 21-year-old female, stabbed her lover in her flat after learning he had lost interest in her. Yuka revealed during the inquiry into the crime, “I stabbed him because I loved him so much.” (<https://good-topic-map.com/takaokayuka-kawaii-tiktok/>) She was convicted of attempted murder and sentenced to 3½ years in jail. The announcement shook the entire globe, and Takaoka Yuka was labeled as a “*real-world yandere*”.

But how do Japanese people regard *yandere* characters? Do people regard these individuals as simply clichés in fictional narratives, or do they recognize components of reality in them? Does the prevalence of *yandere* characters influence Japanese people's attitudes about love and romantic relationships? How would Japanese people respond if they encountered a *yandere* in real life?

The objective of this study is to examine how Japanese culture perceives and interprets *yandere* characters in entertainment media and daily life. To learn more about this phenomenon, this study used a qualitative method, examining relevant literature and conducting a survey of 15 native Japanese individuals who like *anime* and *manga*.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

(Hetamoe, 2015) The article “*Yangire/Yandere: A Tour of the ‘Poisonous Girls’ in Japanese Animation and Beyond*” examines the *yandere* and *yangire* characters in *anime* and how they represent negative assumptions about femininity and mental illness. In Japanese popular culture, *yandere* characters are portrayed as symbols of terror and fantasy.

(Ariana, R.W., and Septiandi, A., 2023) The article “*Strategi Yandere dalam Menyampaikan Perasaan Pada Film Aku no Hana*” examines how *yandere* characters express their emotions in the film *Aku no Hana*, as well as how their communication strategies reflect the possessive and manipulative traits commonly associated with the *yandere* archetype.

(R. Hiyama, R. Egusa, and K. Akagi 2024). The article “ヤンデレ的思考傾向と大学生活の充実の関連 (Relationship Between *Yandere* Thinking Tendency and University Life Satisfaction)” examines the association between *yandere* thinking tendencies and university students' levels of satisfaction with their university lives. According to this study, those who have a *yandere*-like

worldview are more likely to experience social anxiety and insecure attachment patterns in interpersonal interactions.

The three literatures suggest that the *yandere* character is more than just a literary cliché, with deeper implications for the portrayal of character psychology and romantic relationships in Japanese popular culture. According to Gerbner's (1976) cultivation theory, long-term media exposure can influence an individual's view of social reality. The theory is important in this study because it explains how exposure to *yandere* characters in *anime* and *manga* influences society's perspective of obsessive love.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach, including literature analysis methodologies and online questionnaires administered via Google Form to 15 native Japanese individuals with an interest in *anime* and *manga*. This poll seeks to learn how respondents see *yandere* characters in popular culture and how this idea affects their conception of love and romantic relationships. Academic publications, online community debates, and popular media analysis are among the sources examined in the literature reviews.

The survey contains 11 questions, which are listed as follows:

Table 1 Questionnaire's Questions

Categories	Questions	Translation
Respondents' perspectives on <i>yandere</i> characters	ヤンデレについてどう思いますか？ (<i>yandere ni tsuite dou omoimasuka?</i>)	What do you think about <i>yandere</i> ?
	ヤンデレキャラが好きですか？ (<i>yanderekyara ga suki desuka?</i>)	Do you like <i>yandere</i> characters?
	ヤンデレキャラは魅力的だと思いますか、それとも怖いと思いますか？ (<i>yanderekyara wa mirikiteki dato omoimasuka, soretomo kowai to omoimasuka?</i>)	Do you find <i>yandere</i> characters attractive or scary?
	ヤンデレキャラの面白いところとか、怖いところとか何ですか？ (<i>yanderekyara no omoshiroi tokoro toka, kowai tokoro toka nan desuka?</i>)	What is so interesting or scary about <i>yandere</i> characters?

The popularity of
yandere characters in
Japan

日本ではヤンデレキャラクタ
クターは他のキャラクター
タイプ（ツンデレ、ク
ーデレなど）と比べてど
れくらい人気があります
か？ (*Nihon de wa
yandere kyarakutaa wa
hoka no kyarakutaa taipu
[tsundere, kuudere nado]
to kurabete dorekurai ninki
ga arimasuka?*)

ヤンデレキャラは女性と
男性ではどちらが人気で
すか？ (*yanderekyara wa
josei to dansei de wa
dochira ga ninki desuka?*)
ヤンデレキャラは日本の
ファンにとって特別な魅
力がありますか？もしそ
うなら、その理由は何で
すか？ (*yanderekyara wa
Nihon no fan ni totte
tokubetsu na miryoku ga
arimasuka? Moshi sou
nara, sono riyuu wa nan
desuka?*)

日本では、操作的または
過保護なヤンデレなど、
好まれるタイプのヤンデ
レはありますか？ (*Nihon
de wa, sousateki mata wa
kahogona yandere nado,
konomareru taipu no
yandere wa arimasuka?*)
ヤンデレキャラが現実世
界に存在する可能性はあ
りますか？

If *yandere* existed in
real life

(*yanderekyara ga genjitsu
sekai ni sonzai suru
kanousei wa arimasuka?*)
現実世界でヤンデレのよ
うな特徴を持つ人に出会

How popular are *yandere*
characters in Japan compared to
other character types (*tsundere*,
kuudere, etc.)?

Are *yandere* characters more
popular among women or men?

Do *yandere* characters have a
special appeal to fans in Japan? If
so, why?

In Japan, is there a preferred type of
yandere, such as a manipulative or
overprotective *yandere*?

Is it possible for *yandere* characters
to exist in the real world?

If you encountered someone with
yandere-like characteristics in real
life, how would you react?

ったら、どう反応します

か? (*genjitsu sekai de*

yandere no youna

tokuchou wo motsu hito ni

deattara, dou hannou

shimasuka?)

ヤンデレな性格の恋人が If you had a *yandere* lover, how
いたら、どう反応します would you react?

か? (*yandere na seikatsu*

no koibito ga itara, dou

hannou shimasuka?)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that most Japanese people dislike *yandere* characters, *yandere* characters are popular in Japan because of their strong characteristics, and most Japanese people believe that *yandere* characters exist in the real world.

1. Most Japanese People Dislike *Yandere* Characters, Although They Find Them Interesting.

The *yandere* character is a well-known archetype in Japanese popular culture, and it is popular among *anime* and *manga* fans all over the world. However, this contradicts the findings of a poll of 15 native Japanese respondents. The survey results revealed that 73.3% of respondents despised *yandere* characters, while 26.7% enjoyed them.

ヤンデレキャラが好きですか?

15 jawaban

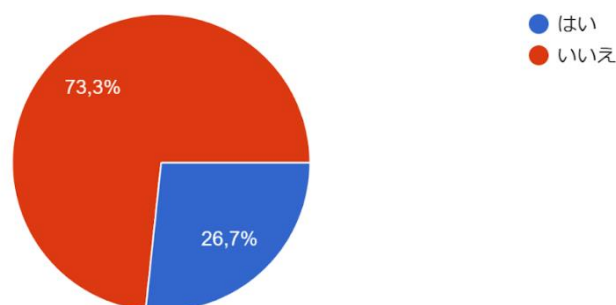


Figure 1 “Do you like *yandere* characters?” Graph [Source: Google Form]

Most respondents said they disliked *yandere* characters because of their possessive, manipulative, and violent inclinations, such as murder.

「倫理観がぶっ飛んでいるところ」

“Something where ethics no longer applies.”

「人殺しそう」

“Looks like a murderer.”

Although most respondents dislike *yandere* characters, they find them fascinating as a plot element in literature. The graph below illustrates this point.

ヤンデレキャラは魅力的だと思いますか、それとも怖いと思いますか？
15 jawaban

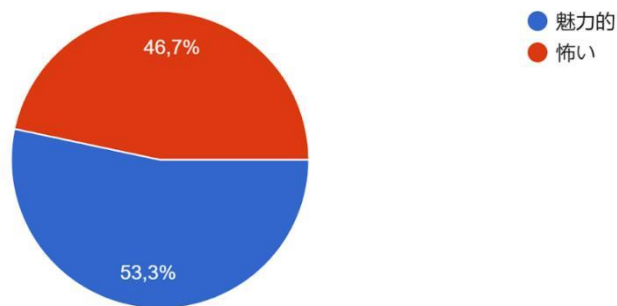


Figure 2 “Do you find *yandere* characters attractive or scary?” Graph [Source: Google Form]

In the question column 「ヤンデレキャラの面白いところとか、怖いところとか何ですか？」 most respondents answered that the reason *yandere* characters are fascinating is that they show an extreme kind of love and emotions. In fiction, characters with obsessive and committed tendencies can create fascinating dramatic tension for readers.

「ヤンデレはツンデレよりも深みがあり面白いです。なぜそのような大きな感情を持つのか、どのような行動をとるのか、ヤンデレの度合いによって危険度も変わるので面白いです。危険なところは、愛ゆえに倫理を捨て去る所です。」

“Yandere is more intriguing because it contains more depth than tsundere. It is intriguing because the level of risk varies depending on why they are experiencing such powerful emotions and how they behave. The hazardous aspect is when they abandon ethics in favor of love.”

Furthermore, several respondents noted that the conduct of the *yandere* character who repeatedly begs to be loved again appears sweet, making it a fascinating character type, but they also find it frightening.

「自分だけ愛して欲しいって迫ってくるところとか可愛くなって思いますが、それが逆に怖いなって思います。」

“I think it's adorable when she presses me for love, but I also find it scary.”

The above statement about the behavior of *yandere* characters who continue to beg their partners to only love them is consistent with the study “ヤンデレ的思考傾向と大学生活の充実の関連 (Relationship Between *Yandere* Thinking Tendency and University Life Satisfaction)” which reflects the *yandere* mindset, which is characterized by high levels of social anxiety and unhealthy attachment patterns. This results in *yandere* behavior, where individuals would resort to any means, including committing crimes, to win their loved ones' affection.

Although most Japanese people despise *yandere* characters, they are nonetheless appealing because they provide unique and dramatic psychological dynamics. Japan tends to showcase characters who symbolize profound psychological elements, whether in the romance, horror, or thriller genres; therefore, *yandere* characters are utilized as a narrative tool to investigate possessiveness and destructiveness in interpersonal relationships. This data demonstrates that, despite popular opinion, the *yandere* notion continues to play an essential role in fiction.

2. *Yandere* Characters Are Popular in Japan Because of Their Strong Personalities

Character types like *yandere*, *tsundere*, *kuudere*, and so on are well-known in Japanese popular culture. In the question column 「日本ではヤンデレキャラクターは他のキャラクタータイプ (ツンデレ、クーデレなど) と比べてどれくらい人気がありますか？」 most respondents offered a scale between 3 and 4 in terms of the popularity of the *yandere* type. This data demonstrates that *yandere* characters are still popular in Japanese culture, but not as prevalent as other character types.

日本ではヤンデレキャラクターは他のキャラクター...レなど) と比べてどれくらい人気がありますか？
15 jawaban

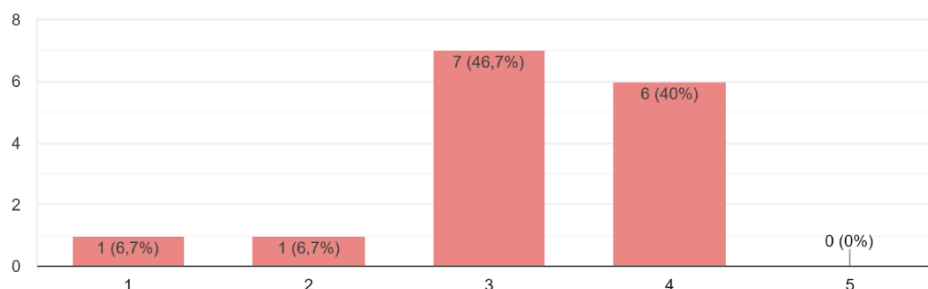


Figure 3 “Do you find *yandere* characters attractive or scary?” Graph [Source: Google Form]

Although *yandere* characters are commonly associated with male audiences owing to their frequent occurrence in the romance, horror, and thriller genres, research indicates that they are more popular with Japanese women. The graph below illustrates this point clearly.

ヤンデレキャラは女性と男性ではどちらが人気ですか？
15 jawaban

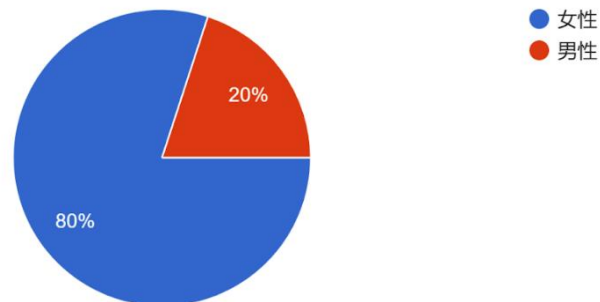


Figure 4 “Are *yandere* characters more popular among women or men?” Graph [Source: Google Form]

In the question column 「ヤンデレキャラは日本のファンにとって特別な魅力がありますか？もしそうなら、その理由は何ですか？」 some respondents answered that the main reason why *yandere* characters have such appeal in Japan is because they often have strong and dominant personalities. They show extreme loyalty to those they love, even to the point of being obsessive. In Japanese popular culture, characters with strong determination are often better remembered by audiences because they provide a more dramatic and intriguing dynamic to the story.

「ヤンデレは他のツンデレ・クーデレに比べて癖が強く、好き嫌いが分かります。ですが、好きな人はとても好きなので、根強いファンが付きやすいです。あまりにも凄いレベルのヤンデレはギャグキャラとして話題になりやすいです。ヤンデレを好きになる理由は、やはり「愛の重さ」です。ヤンデレのキャラクターは総じて愛する人に一途であり、性格が豹変してしまうほどの大きな思いにときめく人がファンになるわけです。」

“Yandere tend to have stronger quirks than the other tsundere and kuudere, and people either love them or hate them. But those who like them are very fond of them, so they tend to have loyal fans. Yandere that are too extreme tend to become the subject of conversation as comedy characters. The reason people like yandere are, of course, the ‘weight of love.’ Yandere characters are generally devoted to the person they love, and people who are excited by their strong feelings, which cause their personality to change drastically, become fans.”

One responder had an unusual response. He added that the *yandere* feature is genuinely entrenched in people; thus, anybody who observes a *yandere* character’s conduct and motivations would feel the same way the *yandere* character does.

「特に特別な魅力があるというよりかは、人間にもヤンデレタイプの人がいるというので、ヤンデレなりの気持ちなどというのが共有出来るからだと思います。」

“Rather than having a particularly special charm, I think it’s because there are yandere-type people in humans too, and we can share the same yandere feelings.”

3. Most Japanese People Believe That *Yandere* Characters Exist in Real Life

The survey revealed that most respondents believe that *yandere* characteristics can be observed in real life, even though *yandere* characters are often perceived as an exaggerated fictional trope. It is evident from the graph below that this is accurate.

ヤンデレキャラが現実世界に存在する可能性はありますか？
15 jawaban

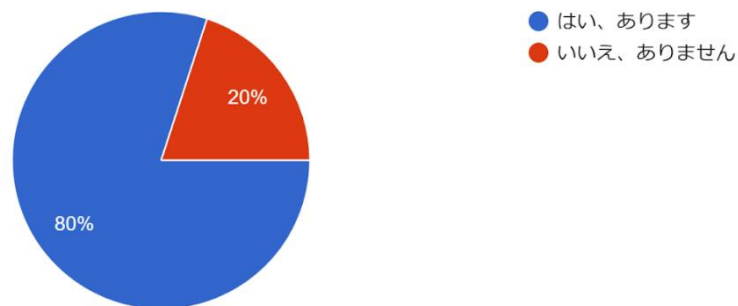


Figure 5 “Is it possible for *yandere* characters to exist in the real world?” Graph [Source: Google Form]

Many Japanese individuals believe that *yandere* features are not merely fiction; they reflect certain societal behavioral trends. For instance, individuals who exhibit *yandere* qualities are frequently characterized by strong possessiveness, obsessive behavior in relationships, or manipulative tendencies. In the study “ヤンデレ的思考傾向と大学生活の充実の関連 (Relationship Between *Yandere* Thinking Tendency and University Life Satisfaction)”, it was discovered that individuals with unstable emotional attachments are more likely to exhibit stalking, excessive jealousy, or manipulateness. Real life may witness these behaviors, albeit to a lesser degree than in *anime* or *manga*.

One example of *yandere* behavior is “*Ren'ai Sabetsu* (恋愛差別)”, in which an individual believes that they are the only one who merits affection from their companion and will take extreme measures to preserve the relationship. Japanese media frequently employs this concept as a narrative element to enhance the *yandere* character or generate dramatic conflict. However, this phenomenon has also garnered attention in real life during social discourses regarding the hazards of obsessive love and the maintenance of healthy relationships. A real-life crime that is associated with this concept is the case of Takaoka Yuka, a woman who, because of her compulsive love, stabbed her fiancé. This case captured the attention of many on social media, prompting them to draw comparisons to the *yandere* character from *anime*.

If respondents think that *yandere* characters exist in real life, how would they react if they encountered someone who acted like a *yandere* in real life? In the question column 「現実世界でヤンデレのような特徴を持つ人に出会ったら、どう反応しますか？」 most respondents responded that they would maintain their distance, be terrified, not want to become involved, or run away.

「関わっても良いことがないので逃げます。2次元のキャラクターだから良いのであって、現実世界にいたら化け物です。」

“There’s nothing good in getting involved, so I run away. It’s fine because they’re two-dimensional characters, but if they were in the real world, they’d be monsters.”

However, several responders had the opposite response. They indicated that they would welcome individuals with *yandere* traits and even befriend or fall in love with them because of their attractiveness. This finding demonstrates that some Japanese people still react positively and openly to persons who exhibit *yandere* behavior.

「おもしろくて友達になりたい。」

“I think they’re interesting, and I want to be their friend.”

「直ぐに好きになると思います。」

“I think I will fall in love with them straightaway.”

Then, what is their response if they have a *yandere* partner? Most respondents in the question column 「ヤンデレな性格の恋人がいたら、どう反応しますか？」 they expressed that they might fall in love with them due to fear or because they found their personality irritating. In Japanese society, individuals who exhibit *yandere* traits are often perceived as having mental disorders, which is why most individuals avoid romantic relationships with those who show *yandere* personalities.

「めんどくさいと感じてしまうかもしれない。」

“I might find it annoying.”

「関わっても良いことがないので逃げます。恋人に尽くすのが好きな人だったら、ヤンデレな恋人はいいパートナーかもしれません。」

“There’s nothing good in getting involved, so I run away. If you’re the kind of person who likes to devote yourself to your partner, a yandere lover might be a good partner for you.”

「ちょっと怖い。」

“It’s a little scary.”

However, just a few responders responded positively. They found a *yandere*'s personality endearing and wanted to try to fully embrace it.

「個人的にはそれは嬉しいので、相手が好きな行動をしたり、相手に好まれるようにすると思います。」

“Personally, I find that flattering, so I think it encourages you to do things that the other person likes and makes them like you.”

「可愛いと思う。」

“I think it's cute.”

This proves that, even though most Japanese individuals prefer to avoid individuals with *yandere* personalities, there are still some Japanese individuals who are willing to develop friendships or romantic relationships with them. This is due to their perception of them as loyal individuals. In *anime* and *manga*, *yandere* characters are often portrayed in a captivating and dramatic manner; however, in real life, having a *yandere* partner can be highly dangerous.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that, while *yandere* characters are very popular and interesting in the world of *anime* and *manga*, most Japanese people dislike *yandere* characters and do not want to meet or be in a relationship with someone who possesses these characteristics in real life. However, *yandere* characters are still in demand for a various reason, including their strong personalities, emotional attractiveness, and unwavering commitment in relationships. This is why *yandere* characters tend to be more popular among women than men, since many admirers see them as a representation of deep and unwavering love.

On the other side, a tiny percentage of Japanese individuals want a *yandere* partner because they see it as an intense and passionate type of love. Unfortunately, in real life, *yandere*'s obsessive and possessive conduct may cause major difficulties in relationships, such as violence, stalking, and illegal activities.

The results of the study also indicated that many Japanese people believe that individuals with *yandere* traits do exist in real life, although their numbers are very small. Several real cases, including the case of Takaoka Yuka, bolster this belief and ultimately spark controversy in society.

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