UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
DI PADOVA

University of Padua

Department of Linguistic and Literary Studies

Master's degree in

Communication Strategies

Class LM-92

Master Thesis

Gender and Body Representations in Japanese comics

Supervisor

Prof. Dr. Claudia Padovani

Second Supervisor

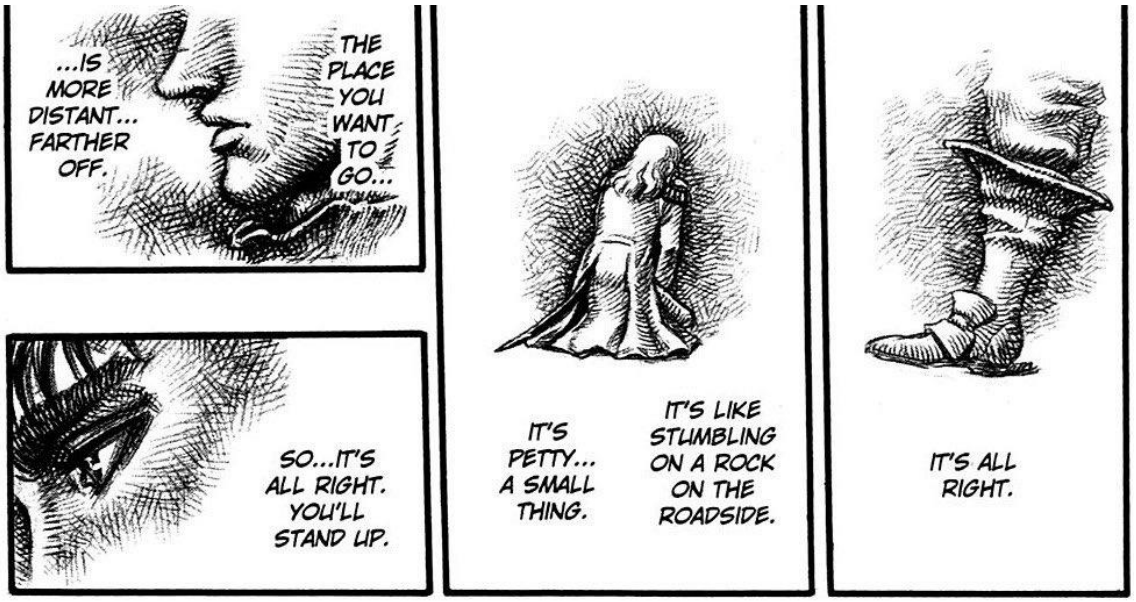
Prof. Dr. Demis Basso

Academic year 2022 / 2023

Graduate student

Nicol Ellecosta

2054447



AND YOU'LL START WALKING.

SOON...

Index

Introduction

As many other boys born in the 1990s, I grew up on bread, water, soccer, American sitcoms, and Japanese cartoons. I was fascinated by works such as *"Dragon Ball*," "*One Piece*," and "*Lupin the 3rd*." Thrilling fights lasted several weeks (those who grew up with the Italian cartoon schedule will understand), the action sequences were mind-blowing, and the characters' hair in the most extravagant shapes and garish colors bewitched me from the start.

Stunned by what I was seeing on screen, I developed a huge interest with everything concerning Japanese animation. In my teens, I had repeatedly devoured Hayao Miyazaki's films, rewatched the animated series "*Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood*" multiple times and bought my first manga. The Comic books, too, were so different and peculiar. As I bought my first volume of "*Dragon Ball*," I realized only about halfway through that I was reading it backward. Indeed, manga should be read from right to left.

As I grew up, however, it was no longer the fights that most captured my interest, but it was the characters themselves: so different from American superheroes.

First, male characters were not brutes without an identity, suitable only for bashing everything that dared to move in their presence. Young heroes like Edward Elric and Gohan are shown to be fearful and not invincible. Those characteristics collide with American superheroes, which are more boring precisely because they are infallible.

Also, another thing that caught my attention more and more as time went on was the female characters. Of course, my teenage eyes were not unmoved by the curves of figures like Fujiko Mine, but even more so, their character interested me. While American and Italian products provided mainly one-dimensional "damsels in distress," on the other hand, Japanese cartoons and comics presented strong and confident female figures.

Add to the previous two points the born interest in gender studies and different subcultures I could cultivate in my five-year undergraduate career. Here is where the idea for this dissertation came from. Gender studies are gaining more and more importance in political and social discourse. Think that in Italy, the first course in Gender Studies was opened at Sapienza University in Rome for the academic year 2022/23. But what do manga and gender studies have in common? Well, the discourse surrounding gender

issues – and the often related corruption of mores – is very often linked to media contents.

Tying together my interest in manga and gender studies, I wondered how male and female characters are perceived by other readers my age in terms of sexualization and stereotyping. Trying to understand, above all, how problematic they find the gender stereotypes found in the pages of Japanese comics. A questionnaire was created to answer the previous question and administered to online respondents.

After this extensive introduction, it is time to enunciate the structure of the following thesis. It will begin with a comprehensive review of the literature regarding gender in the West.

What are the "most appropriate" roles for the female population, and which ones for the male population? In this work's first chapter, we will try to answer how the various tasks and gender roles have been formed in society.

Gender issues have always been a part of the human discourse. Starting from primitive societies based on a "household" where men hunted, and women looked after the offspring, the question has been raised as to what role is most appropriate for people of the male gender and those of the female gender. However, as we will see throughout the following sections, this binary system with a definite division of roles did not take root in all cultures and, even more noticeably, did not remain the only gender division in society. There are more societies where there are not two genders (female and male), but there is a third or even more (Russo, 2021b). For example, we might mention the Berdache, people with "double souls," members of some North American societies. Berdache are people with masculine features but are not regarded as "real men" by their home societies; instead, they have a hybrid role between masculine and feminine (Williams, 1986).

Ample space will be given to the reasons behind the inequalities between men and women and how culture with its symbols and power relations, contributes to creating its own gender identity. Alongside gender identity, sexual orientations have saturated political and social discourse. New awareness concerning people's sexuality has resulted in homosexuality and other "deviant" forms being eradicated from mental illness. Of course, alongside the discourse of sexualization and gender identity we must talk about the body.

The importance of the body in shaping one's gender identity should not be underestimated because the biological apparatuses influence our perception of ourselves. Moreover, our body is the place where our sexual orientation and gender "comes to life."

Physique and self-perception that nowadays are more crucial than ever, given the enormous importance we place on social media and other people's opinion of us, especially related to outward appearance. We will discuss how beauty ideals have changed over the years from Twiggy-like thinness to a "curvier" slenderness in the second section. Although mass media cannot be considered the primary (if not the only) cause, they will not be left out of the body's discourse on gender identity.

In the third chapter we are going to dwell into Japanese gender issues. We will see how the younger male generation openly opposes the hegemonic masculinity constituted by corporate employees. On the other hand, we will also discuss how women live out their gender roles as "good and wise mothers"; a social imposition to which many young women do not want to be credited. It is essential to give an overview of what it means to be a man and a woman in the Japanese archipelago, to make it easier to understand the behaviors of manga characters. The next chapter will talk precisely about Japanese comics, the most exported product of the Rising Sun. The importance of gender in Japanese comics will become apparent early on, given the strict division of literary genres on a biological basis. Thus, manga are divided into comics for boys and for girls.

It turns out quite well known that Japan is a society in which patriarchal power and social discrepancies on a sexual basis are evident. However, many manga writers use the medium of comics precisely to counter the status quo and socially imposed gender roles. To demonstrate the latter claim, we will analyze several characters, both male and female, who highlight the discrepancy between the new generation of writers and readers and that of their parents.

Having completed the theoretical part of the dissertation, we will move on to the analysis and discussion of the questionnaire. The questionnaire takes on the task of answering the question of how a non-Japanese audience perceives manga characters regarding sexualization and gender stereotyping. In addition, with the help of GRBS and TPB scales, respondents' opinions about gender issues will be investigated to understand statements about comic book figures regressively.

Finally, the results will be summarized in a discussion, where conclusions will be drawn in response to hypotheses to understand readers' perceptions of the characters.

1.Are Mars and Venus that far apart?

On January 6, 2021, it is now possible in Iceland to define oneself in the gender *Kynsegin/annað*, or neutral, thus going beyond the gender dichotomy defined by the biological male and female sexes (Siviero, 2021a). Furthermore, Iceland was the first country to establish gender wage equality by law (Tara, 2018). Despite this, the rule based on biological sexes still applies in most Western countries. Nevertheless, what is gender, and what differentiates it from the concept of biological sex? In this chapter, we will try to answer this question as comprehensively as possible by explaining where the term stems from. Furthermore, we will tackle the main problems regarding feminism and the patriarchal society implementing the notion of gender identity into the discourse. We will analyze how one's gender identity is created through socialization with one's surroundings and the people in them. Finally, we will discuss sexual orientation, often mistaken for gender identity. As a first step, however, it is essential to understand how gender is assigned to people.

In most industrial countries, when a person is born, she or he is assigned a sex based on the genitalia. There are usually two alternatives: female if she has a vulva, and male if he has testicles and penis instead (Ruspini, 2017; Siviero, 2021a). However, already at this early stage, the first problems can arise. In fact, about 1.7 percent of newborns (Medina & Mahowald, 2021) are born with some anatomical features that can be considered female and some that can be attributed to the male biological sex (Siviero, 2021b). For these intersex children, surgical operations are employed to make the genitalia more clearly female or male (Ruspini, 2017). It is essential to clarify that hermaphroditism or pseudohermaphroditism has nothing to do with disabilities. However, a large proportion of intersex newborns are subjected to genital mutilation in order to "normalize" their situation and more easily categorize them into a binary gender (Kessler, 1996). These surgical operations are done on the assumption that with well-defined biological sex, children can more easily create their own gender identity (Ruspini, 2017).

However, to glimpse differences in a person's sexual and gender identity solely based on the appearance of genitalia seems somewhat reductive. The dichotomy of being female and being male as the only two ways of experiencing the world is becoming less and less credible (Sabatini, 1994; Scott, 1987). Indeed, one cannot underestimate the shades of gray on the continuum between being a "real man" and a "real woman." From a Western point of view: where should we place men who prefer to stay home and care

for their children? Or where should we place the career woman, unmarried and without offspring, on an imaginary line connecting the two biological sexes? Moreover, where do people transitioning from one gender to another fit?

Nevertheless, biological sex has always played an essential role in our society, creating well-defined power roles and many gender stereotypes that have permeated the worlds of work, society, family, and even the media for centuries now (Connell, 2011; Ruspini, 2017). For example, John Gray's best-selling book "*Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*" (1992) has become famous, which assumes that women and men have different emotional needs and that stepping outside the binary canons imposed by society can only create chaos and relationship breakdown. However, is it really that simple? Are men and women so easily categorized? Are they indeed two different planets?

Taking Barbagli's (2003) and Lorber's (1990) works as examples, it seems clear that "our" Western conception is to be considered myopic. Categorizing people into only two sexes and considering only one sexual orientation as "natural" (the heterosexual one; Richardson, 1996) is nowadays to be considered at least inaccurate. It seems evident that our being a "woman" and our being a "man" is not a fact to be reputed simply as anatomical given law but is much more a social construct to which we conform and to which we are confronted from an early age. Throughout the following sections, this concept will become more apparent.

1.1. What is “gender”?

Before delving into such complex topics as the history of feminism, the various forms of masculinity, and how the roles of women and men are divided in Western society, it is good to define the term "*gender*." In the first instance, it is crucial to say that gender is not equivalent to the word "*sex*," which refers, on the one hand, to the reproductive and erotic act; and, on the other hand, to the physiological and biological characteristics that distinguish women from men (APA, 2023f). The term "*gender*" (Indo-European root of the verb "to produce") as it is understood in this context, became in everyday use in the 1970s and denotes the cultural and social differences between women and men (APA, 2023f; Connell, 2011).

We can encounter these differences in everyday life, so much so that we take them for granted. When, for example, we make eye contact with a person on a sidewalk, we immediately identify them as either a woman or a man and organize much of our time and

lives based on this distinction. Furthermore, it is precisely because society deems these facts as "natural" and expected that those who go against this system are reputed to be abnormal or strange (Connell, 2011; Mosse, 1996). There would be plenty of examples to give in this regard but think of homosexuality, which is regarded in many parts of the globe as unnatural and to be avoided. According to the theories that proliferated in the 1960s and 1970s, this sharp division (and considered by most as "natural") on a biological basis was made with a specific goal.

> The purpose of affirming a sex/gender distinction was to argue that the actual physical or mental effects of biological difference had been exaggerated to maintain a patriarchal system of power and to create a consciousness among women that they were naturally better suited to ‘domestic’ and nurturant roles (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2017, p. 57).

Although this belief may seem far too skewed in favor of a system promoting a binary system, it is not far removed from what happens in our communities. Indeed, multiple institutions indoctrinate people to hold themselves to the standards considered most appropriate in a given society, generating quite a few forms of inequality between males and females (Connell, 2011). For example, it is interesting how in many countries, literacy rates lean significantly on the side of men. Far more males can read and write (UIS, 2023) in countries such as Nigeria, Afghanistan, and India (Central Intelligence Agency, 2015). Furthermore, as shown by research conducted by the organization Statista (2021a), literate men reach 90 percent and women 87. Even in school education, there are apparent differences in education according to the gender of students. For example, stereotypes that see girls as less proficient in scientific fields such as mathematics do not cease to exist (Kollmayer et al., 2016; Leslie et al., 2015; Ruspini, 2017). In this regard, data collected from the study by Grunspan and colleagues (2016) are interesting. The research shows that in biology, males are considered to excel, even though their female classmates have higher grades. These stereotypes obviously impact choices regarding the future as well; significantly more males enroll in engineering and computer science courses. Instead, girls prefer fine arts courses and language high schools (Arnot et al., 1999; van der Vleuten et al., 2016). What concerns the religious field most Catholic churches or mosques are administered by men only. In addition, much of the world's wealth, major technology companies, and scientific institutions are primarily run by men (Connell, 2011). Not to mention the glaring inequalities that have always plagued the world of work and the production of goods; in this regard, the wage differences that divide

the male and female genders are well known. In fact, it is common knowledge that men generally earn higher wages for the same skills and hours of work than their female counterparts (Bishu & Alkadry, 2016; Hoff & Lee, 2021). These are just some differences in Western society that have permeated patriarchal society for centuries. It is good to remember, however, that most people conform to these gendered precepts willingly (Connell, 2011), as evidenced, for example, by parents who, as soon as they learn of their children's biological sex, buy clothes in the "right" color, buy girl or boy toys, and perhaps paint the newborn's room pink or blue (Ruspini, 2017).

Nonetheless, this dichotomous split between men and women has met with strong objections over time. The most obvious of these criticisms addresses that considering only the two biological sexes does not allow us to analyze in the gender spectrum the various nuances that contributes to definition of being a man or a woman (Connell, 2011). Picking up on the statement taken from Pilcher and Whelehan's (2017) work, one might assume that all men are favored by the situation created over the ages. The hierarchical composition of many modern societies has a positive effect on the male sex, as opposed to the female sex; however, this does not detract from the fact that a segment of the male population does not benefit from it and even must pay a high price. For example, boys who do not conform to the masculinity standards expected by the society in which they live (for example, homosexuals, or non-assertive men) are frequently forced to suffer verbal or physical violence from other members of the community (Connell, 2011; Morin & Garfinkle, 1978).

It seems, therefore, evident that gender comes very close to a performance (Butler, 1990) and is therefore experienced differently by all people. It can also be said that to adapt to these socially imposed standards; there is a need to go through a "learning" phase. In the words of feminist writer Simone de Beauvoir (1949), "one is not born a woman, but becomes one." The same can also be asserted for the male gender, which implies the constant enactment of masculine attributes such as strength, seeming insensitive, and being assertive to peers and people of other genders (Connell, 2011). Starting from de Beauvoir's statements, it is, therefore, necessary to analyze how gender theory has propagated from its beginnings in the 1800s to the present.

1.2. History of gender: from ancient times to the present day

1.2.1. The first reflections on gender relations

As early as ancient Greece, there were questions about the proper roles women and men should assume in society. However, there was no talk of two sexes; being female and being male were perceived as different gradations of a single biological sex (De Leo, 2021).

In the Middle Ages, the misogynistic and patriarchal beliefs of the Catholic religion were propagated throughout Europe. The legacies of Christian intellectuals of the time were replete with statements that theorized women's apparent physical and mental inferiority (Blamires, 1992). That said, even then, it was possible to find texts that could be described as the progenitors of feminist theories. In 1405 Christine de Pizan's "*The Book of the City of Ladies*" was published, a work that strongly critiqued the blatant abuse females were subjected to in the Middle Ages. To highlight her dissent, she created in her novel a fictional city where women could live in safety and tranquility. It is essential to accentuate safety and tranquility because de Pizan's goal was not to gain social and economic equality but simply parity of respect (Connell, 2011).

The moral and social defense of women also had a large following during the Reformation period. For example, the Quakers (members of the Protestant sect founded by George Fox) preached and defended the right of women to exercise religious authority and to enunciate biblical writings in public (Connell, 2011). During the French Revolution, Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) took inspiration from some of the Quaker edicts in developing her claim for women's rights.

Nevertheless, the eighteenth century was marked by an incentive for families to grow their population. This increased emphasis on population growth was for the industrial increase and to enhance war forces. During this period, femininity and being a woman started to be associated more predominately with reproduction and motherhood (Cabrio, 2021b). Building on these premises, sexuality studies focused on a binary conception of the sexes: women and men are two distinctly separate entities with no meeting point (De Leo, 2021).

These biologically based theories also grew and spread like wildfire in the following century. With the advent of Darwinist theories in the nineteenth century, beliefs were further fortified. All social, power differences, and ethnic hierarchies were to be traced in large part to the biological characteristics of men and women (Connell, 2011). Darwin's views

were accompanied by a hardening of the beliefs that would later generate the fortunes of Fordist society, namely the male-women dichotomy. For example, the founder of Positivism, Auguste Comte (1851-54), laid the groundwork for what we now call the "traditional family," which elevates women as the pillar of society as long as they remain ensconced in their hearth to care for husband and children.

The nineteenth century was essential in discussing people's sexuality and sexual orientation. Psychiatrists and doctors of the time considered all forms of sexuality that did not conform to the reproductive act as pathology (Cabrio, 2021b). It is during this time that terms such as: "*homosexuality*," "*uranism*," and "*contrary sexual sensitivity*" come into everyday use (De Leo, 2021). It is appropriate to stop here and continue the topic of sexuality and sexual orientation in the following chapter.

In the 1900s, the issue of equality again became prominent in scholarly discussion, as evidenced by the work of John Stuart Mill (1912), who (unlike his predecessors) did not trace the superiority of males to a moral basis, but only a physical one. The popularization of socialist ideas led to various studies and works that focused on gender inequality in labor and economic affairs. Prominent examples are the works of leading figures in the German socialist world as August Bebel (1879) and Friedrich Engels (1977). In particular, the latter's work, "*The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*," put the role of women in the family and the idea of "matriarchy" under the magnifying glass. Both works, however, had women as the focus of social reform (Connell, 2011).

As Connell (2011) reminds us, before the 1900s and the establishment of socialism in Europe, women found it very difficult to popularize their essays. Women authors mainly analyzed economic issues as women's literature developed and spread. Olive Schreiner's "*Die Frau und die Arbeit*" (1914) looks at the parasitism of bourgeois women and mainly attacks the system of exploitation against women workers. Likewise, one can cite Russian author Aleksandra Kollontaj (1977), who prophesied how only women's support for the cause of socialism could open the door to true equality. With the contribution of women writers in the 1900s, the idea that progress could elevate gender relations to a more rational plane spread (Connell, 2011).

Indeed, this is further accentuated by depth psychology, which takes its first steps with psychologists Carl Gustav Jung and Alfred Adler. However, it is, above all, the theories of Sigmund Freud that play a fundamental role in gender studies, theorizing how much of his patients' mental problems were not physical but psychological. Freud developed new ways of interpreting people's emotional states by examining their sexual desires.

The works framing the clinical cases of Dora (1901) and the Wolf-Man (1914) are relevant in this regard.

Nonetheless, from the 1920s onward and with the advent of ethnography, opinions that gender roles are not natural and immutable are extended (Connell, 2011). Of relevance is the work conducted by Margaret Mead (1963) in Samoa that empirically highlighted cultural differences in gender roles. In addition, further work reiterated Mead's beliefs and recognized differences in gender roles based on social status and not just cultural status (Parsons & Bales, 1956).

1.2.2. Feminisms in the postwar period to the present

The Women's Liberation Movement, which emerged in the 1960s and expanded to most western countries, spread views that saw the social group of women as oppressed. The term *patriarchy*, meaning a system based on the idea that power is totally in the hands of male persons, who subjugate women through it, takes hold during this period (Connell, 2011). Primarily, female domestic labor is criticized, and how only husbands and capitalists benefit from it (Malos, 1980). The concept of gender roles is thus exacerbated and radicalized. Nevertheless, through patriarchy theory, some male scholars began to use the same language (Sawyer, 1970). It was recognized how women who were subjugated by the power of men and the same males who did not adhere to the stereotype of the "real man" were oppressed. For example, these suggestions became an integral part of works focused on the equality and liberation of the gay population (Hocquenghem, 1972).

As the 1970s ended, feminist theories began to make their way into institutions and universities. Funds were allocated for activities to protect women abused by their partners, and more women's health centers and equal opportunity programs in employment opened. Over the next decade, it became increasingly easy to find feminist-oriented research that discusses the role of women in society (Connell, 2011).

The 1990s saw vast improvements in what concerns the role of women in society. A striking example is that in 1991 the leaders of the three major Scandinavian political parties were all led by a woman (Connell, 2011). The improved status of women in institutions made feminists shift their gaze to other factors of analysis for the welfare of the female population. Taking the discourses of black feminists in North America as an example, it is unmistakable how the discourse of racism was largely neglected. The writer

and activist bell hooks (1984) brings the content of class struggle and ethnicity back into the spotlight. This work is complemented by Patricia Hills Collins' work entitled "*Black Feminist Thought*" (1991) which chronicles the status of women marginalized on ethnic and sexual grounds in the West.

In the same period, the focus of gender studies shifts from women's studies to a more generalizing one. Indeed, it will no longer be referred to as women's studies but rather gender studies. The spectrum of analysis is dramatically expanded by implementing studies with lesbian, gay, and trans communities as the object of research. In this regard, it is necessary to cite Judith Butler's masterwork "*Gender Trouble*" (1990), which quickly became the feminist text of reference (Connell, 2011). The primary assumption to be drawn from Butler's work is that gender is not a given fact but is like a performance enacted by our daily behavior. From Judith Butler's contribution, a whole strand of research emphasized the fragilities and various nuances found in the continuum between the female and male sex. From queer theories (lesbian and gay studies), especially the concept of heteronormativity that indoctrinates people to follow a binary system of gender is questioned (Connell, 2011).

Moreover, the early 2000s also marked a significant turning point in so-called men's studies, that is, the field of research focusing on the role of men and the various forms of masculinity (Connell, 2005). The topic of masculinities will be covered in a more comprehensive way in section 1.4. Now it is time to get to the point, trying to give a well-rounded answer to the main structures that have, over the centuries, oppressed the female gender.

1.2.3. But what exactly are feminists battling against? Connell's four gender structures

In her seminal work "*Woman's Estate*" (1966), British psychologist Juliet Mitchell traces her years of militancy in the Women's Liberation Movement and points to what she sees as the main power structures that created gender inequality between women and men. According to Mitchell, the oppression of women encompassed four distinct social structures: (a) production, which includes women's lesser physical strength and violence that caused their subordination; (b) the second sphere includes reproductive, which according to the author, caused women to be removed from the economic-productive world; (c) sexuality; and finally, (d) the socialization of children.

Multiple practical and empirical pieces of evidence prove the existence of these social structures. A typical example is the definition of male and female in most liberal states. Usually, females and males are considered similar citizens, even though the social sexual code describes them as opposites. Evidence is that men are commonly expected to work and hold power as breadwinners, while women care for children and the home. It seems logical that, especially in past decades, women who wanted to leave their homes and pursue careers encountered countless difficulties to display their authority and abilities (Connell, 2011).

From the 1970s to the present, other social structures of subjugation towards women have been theorized. In this thesis, however, those of Raewyn Connell (2011) have been chosen and will be explained more deeply in the ensuing paragraphs.

Power relations

Power constituted the central and fundamental element of the patriarchal structure introduced by the Women's Liberation Movement. In much of the world, the hegemonic power of men in families remains a well-accepted fact. The exercise of submission by husbands toward wives and fathers toward daughters is perceived as natural and obvious. Patriarchal power is expressed in families and entrenched in much of the state, government, and judicial apparatuses (Connell, 2011).

Lawyer Catherine MacKinnon (1983) investigated judicial procedures in U.S. rape cases in which the propensities of judges and public opinion to prosecute the accuser rather than the accused were highlighted. In the present day, not much has changed. Just think of the famous case of Christine Blasey Ford and Brett Kavanaugh. Blase Ford accused Kavanaugh of being sexually assaulted, and in this regard, studies have shown evident impartiality in the judgment. A propensity to believe Brett Kavanaugh was found especially among men (Bush, 2018). In Europe, a case of sexual assault in Italy by a driving instructor against an 18-year-old student caused quite a stir. On February 10, 1999, "for the Supreme Court, the fact that the girl was wearing jeans did not make her complaint credible, because 'it is a fact of common experience' that they cannot be slipped off without the 'active cooperation of the wearer'" (RCS Quotidiani, 2010, para. 2). This case went around the world and has gone down in history as one of the most striking cases of victim blaming, but it does not end here. According to the judges, the girl must have been consenting because there were no noticeable signs of collusion. It was therefore assumed that "it is illogical to say that a girl can supinely undergo rape" (ADNKronos, 2020, para. 2).

Another recent case demonstrating the transparent power disparity between men and women is the news case of Mahsa Amini (Figure 1, top left). Accused of wearing the hijab badly, the young Iranian girl died in a reasonably ambiguous manner after spending time in the custody of the morality police, who deny any implications (Al Jazeera, 2022). Following this event, the protests spread like wildfire from Saqqez to various other provinces in Kurdistan and beyond (Reuters, 2022). According to some analysts, the 2022 protests marked the most significant threat against the Iranian government since 1979 because they encompassed different social classes and are often led by female protesters opposing Ali Khamenei's regime and the mandatory wearing of the hijab (Agence France-Presse, 2022; Picard & Laurain, 2022). The response of the Iranian state was imminent, bloodily suppressing any form of revolt or manifestation of dissent. Particularly

Figure 1: top right Mahsa Amini (https://www.abilitychannel.tv/mahsa-amini-morte/), top left Hadis Najafi (https://iranwire.com/en/women/107894-hadis-najafi-20-becomes-a-new-symbol-of-defiance-in-iran/) below Nika Shakarami (https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle)

notorious have become the stories of Hadis Najafi and Nika Shakarami (Figure 1, top right and below), two of the leading faces of protests in Iran.Made famous on Tiktok, the young Hadis Najafi, liked to share moments of daily life on social networks, frequently posing without the hijab and in brightly colored clothes. In a video recorded from her cell phone and later sent to friends, Hadis dreamed of a better future: "In the end, I'll be happy...when everything is changing" (Najafi, cited in Baynes, 2022, para. 18). An hour later, during a demonstration the young Iranian girl was reached by six gunshots (Ostanwire, 2022). Nika Shakarami, on the other hand, was a 17-year-old Iranian girl who disappeared during a demonstration on Keshavarz Boulevard on September 20, 2022 (FP Staff, 2022). The young woman was renowned for her attitude during protests, in which she chanted nonstop choruses and slogans (Women's News, 2022). The footage of her standing on a bin while burning her veil in the middle of a street riot is famous (Mezzofiore et al., 2022). Another video shows how the girl was arrested and loaded into a police truck (CNN, 2022) and then taken to Evin prison, a place of systematic torture and rape (Ghobadi, 2022; Mackey, 2009). Shortly after that, Nika died from blunt force trauma and was buried in the Hayat ol Gheyb cemetery to avoid a national procession that would have triggered further protests (Mezzofiore et al., 2022). These are just a few examples that demonstrate the Iranian patriarchal society's exercise of power over women and how their voices are systematically silenced no matter what the cost.

Moving from Arab countries to sub-Saharan and East African countries, one encounters one of the most infamous and reprehensible practices of power maintenance. Female genital infibulation is an aberrant ritual involving partial or total removal of genital organs (Save the Children Onlus, 2020). The goal is for the woman undergoing mutilation not only to fail to experience the pleasure of orgasm through clitoral stimulation but also to preserve her virginity until marriage (WHO, 2023). Indeed, after undergoing infibulation – usually between infancy and 15 years of age (WHO, 2023) – a woman will be prevented from having sexual intercourse until defibulation, which is the re-opening of the vulva. The husband will carry out this cleavage by penetrating the woman and thus creating a gap to make the sexual act possible (Elise & Johansen, 2017). Sex becomes, therefore, particularly painful, but this is not the only physical complication: urinary and menstrual problems and difficulties in childbirth can occur (WHO, 2023). The origin of female genital mutilation has very ancient roots and is closely intertwined with the culture of ancient Egypt (hence the name: "pharaonic circumcision"; Yoder & Khan, 2008). In Somalia, referred to by anthropologist Annie de Villeneuve (1937) as "*le pays des femmes couseus*" (the country of sewn women), the practice is still carried out on a dreadful

number of women (about 98 percent; CARE International, 2023). For Somali men, female chasteness is paramount, as a non-infibulated woman is regarded as impure and excluded from society (Landinfo, 2008). Although some countries such as Nigeria (Di Liegro, 2015) and Sudan (Napoli, 2020) have banned the ritual of infibulation, it is still present in many northeast African- (including Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Djibouti) and West African regions (Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, and others; WHO, 2023).

The topic of power also plays a considerable part in writings dealing with homosexual liberation. For example, research conducted by Dennis Altman (1972) that investigated the criminalization, police harassment, and economic discrimination to which the gay community was subjected has become relevant. In this regard, one could also cite the work of Morin and Garfinkle (1978), who researched the motivations that lead some men to have an irrational fear of homosexual men.

Still, it is not only through violent acts that men subdue other genders. If we analyze the term "*power*" from Michel Foucault's (1975) perspective, it occurs predominantly in discourse, through how people speak and are categorized. The discourse of power impacts people's behavior and obviously impacts the body, forcing individuals to discipline themselves to maintain an acceptable physical form. Take, for example, the discourse surrounding the world of beauty and fashion. In the fashion industry, women are often relegated to a consumer role and subjected to humiliating acceptability tests. Fashion imposes arbitrary rules on the female population, which must be adhered to in order to be accepted. However, these impositions negatively affect many girls' emotional and psychological states (Connell, 2011). In recent years there has been a slight change for the better. The various movements promoting body positivity on social media try to counteract the beauty standards anchored for decades in Western society. Nowadays, it is, consequently, much easier to come across photos, advertisements, videos, and movies that contain different body shapes and sizes, as well as a greater conglomeration of ethnicities (Cohen et al., 2019; Cohen et al., 2020). Despite this, the slender and toned female body remains widely the most desired and generates a state of discomfort in many girls because they cannot fulfill themselves in the beauty standards imposed by society (Capecchi, 2006; Guizzo et al., 2021).

Production and consumption

The second gender structure indicated by Connell (2011) is the one first recognized as such by the social sciences, namely the one concerning the division on a biological basis of labor. Like all gender structures analyzed up to this point, the one concerning the world

of work is not the same for all cultures and, more importantly, has undergone various changes over the centuries. For example, secretarial work was typically considered a man's job in decades past. Today, however, secretarial jobs are typically associated with female employees. An additional case that should be mentioned is that of the agricultural field, which has undergone a marked change from a purely female job to a typically male job (Connell, 2011).

The pinnacle of the productive division lies in the split between wage and non-wage labor. According to Øystein Holter (2003), the Western gender order is based on this very axiom and is the main difference in the gender structure between our societies and non-capitalist societies. Economically, wage labor is defined as all those tasks performed for monetary compensation. Usually, these functions include the creation of products that are placed on the market. On the other hand, non-waged activities include household chores that are usually not done for profit but for love and are hence free (Connell, 2011). In addition, in the previous sections, we have already discussed the pronounced inequality of wages, which tends to favor men.

Products have overtly gendered connotations, not only in their packaging, but they provide for different uses based on gender (Connell, 2011). For example, cleaning products are associated with the housewife (Ruspini, 2017). Not to mention the cosmetics industry that maintains the canon of society that enforces "a ban on aging" (Capecchi, 2006). It should be added in this regard that the world of production is also losing its rigidity in the gender split, as evidenced precisely by the world of cosmetics. More and more men are using cosmetics (Atkinson, 2008; Thota et al., 2014) and undergoing typically feminine beauty practices such as depilation (Boroughs et al., 2005; Frank, 2014).

Emotional relationships

In Connell's (2011) words, emotional relationships can be positive and negative. Emotional relations are frequently linked to stereotypes that can result in misogynistic acts and opinions if they affect the female gender. On the other hand, if negative stereotypes are directed at the homosexual population, it is homophobia and transphobia if the hatred is directed at the trans population.

However, one, if not the most important, arena of emotional bonding is sexuality (Connell, 2011). As with the world of work, the sexual sphere is also culturally constructed, as abundant anthropological and historical studies show (Caplan, 1987; Mead, 1963). From these different perspectives, the heterocentric one that predicts attraction between people of the opposite sex as natural and preferable has become hegemonic worldwide

(Butler, 1990). It is important to remember that not all societies function, or at least have not always functioned, following the binary of heterosexuality as the only acceptable sexual orientation.

An excellent example is ancient Greece's society, which did not harbor any prejudice in sexual relations between males (Connell, 2011). Even the seemingly morose Japanese society saw sexual relations between males as something divine and necessary for growth (Hayakawa et al., 2013). In Papua New Guinea, sexual practices involving persons of the same sex were considered a normal growth stage (Herdt, 1981).

Heteronormativity and the attempt to label all sexual orientations as something to be avoided and to be kept secret have only accentuated the frequency and infinity of discourses surrounding the topic of sexuality and sex (Foucault, 1976b). Western society has thus tried to dictate to individuals what is permissible and with whom to have or not to have sex (Hurford, 2009). Foucault (1976b) finds the influence of socialization on the creation of sexual orientations so transparent that he even goes so far as to define "*the homosexual*" as a social construct.

> As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. It was consubstantial with him, less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature (Foucault, 1990, p. 43).

Therefore, only with early sexologists' contributions, these same-sex sexual relationships no longer become an independent act but create this new individual: *the homosexual* (Cabrio, 2021b; Hurford, 2009). We will return to the topic of sexual orientation later. However, it seems rather evident that even emotional, loving relationships and coitus are social constructs that have, over time, subjugated those who do not maintain themselves to a heteronormative structure.

It does not end there. Even in the heterosexual sphere, there has never been equity between the two sexes. Gender stereotypes, such as the one concerning the seemingly

irrepressible and uncontrollable male sexual appetite, have for centuries guaranteed the privileged situation of men over women (Ruspini, 2017).

> Sexual hypocrisy was particularly exacerbated in the Victorian era [...] Many husbands, who in appearance were morose citizens and faithful to their wives, regularly frequented prostitutes or had mistresses. This behavior was treated with indulgence in men, while respectable women with affairs were cause for scandal and, if discovered, were ostracized from "good society" (Giddens, 1992, p. 199).

It is common knowledge that female sexuality has been regarded as problematic for centuries, as evidenced by the fact that during the Middle Ages, pure and chaste women were marriageable. In contrast, those who showed sexual appetite were regarded as dangerous witches or prostitutes (Ruspini, 2017). Women who sought sexual pleasure were perceived by the community as deviant and virtually against nature. As Abbatecola (2002) reminds us, the ideal of womanhood was an asexual, available, and docile woman.

With the transition of society to modernity and the strengthening of the hegemony of the traditional family, the fear around female sexuality was further accentuated (Ruspini, 2017). As evidence of this, it is possible to cite two very famous novels, such as Lev Tolstoy's "*Anna Karenina*" (1877) or Gustave Flaubert's (1857) masterwork "*Madame Bovary*." On the other hand, men were encouraged to indulge their sexual appetites because they were taught that women were available and complicit (Ruspini, 2017).

It begs the question of whether things have changed nowadays and reached a point of equality between the two genders. Although obvious and apparent steps forward have been taken, there are still worrying double standards regarding the topic of sexuality. For example, the study conducted by Amnesty International in 2019 Belgium collected some data related to rape cases. The survey revealed shocking data, such as the fact that as many as 24% of young respondents had been victims of rape and sexual violence. A further shocking finding is that as many as 48% of men claimed that the victim was partly at fault because she was dressed "inappropriately" (16%), because of her provocative attitude (14%), because she was drunk, or because she was not "convincing" enough in resisting advances (16%). It is, therefore, not surprising that the number of rapes in Belgium is steadily increasing (Portuesi, 2020).

There is no shortage of cultural products where the double standard related to women's sexuality is highlighted. It has become nationally prominent in Italy, a scene from the

cartoon "*Adrian*," which has been accused by many people of victim blaming (HuffPost, 2019). Generating the backlash on social media was a line uttered by the main character in the second episode. Addressing two victims of sexual assault, the Watchmaker says, "If you had drink less, maybe you would have avoided the unfortunate encounter with those shady guys" (Celentano, 2019).

The two cases listed above (the Amnesty investigation and "*Adrian*") are just two of many cases that demonstrate the still reigning male hegemony in what concerns the sexual sphere.

Symbols, culture, and discourse

All social behavior can be traced back to an interpretation of our surroundings. This is proved by the fact that every peculiarity about humanity cannot be excluded from *discourse* (Foucault, 1969). It can be inferred from this introductory sentence that every social structure and behavior we enact is composed of meanings and symbols. It follows that gender is also chiseled from a set of meanings.

According to Connell (2011), when we talk about a woman or a man, we trace it back to a system of knowledge, meanings, and allusions stashed over hundreds of years of culture and transmitted through a socialization system.

> When the highland community in Papua New Guinea [...] says, "our clan is a clan of men," it does not mean that their clan is composed exclusively of males. When an American football coach yells at his losing team, "you're a bunch of sissies," it does not mean he believes his players can have babies. Both cases state something that, when examined in their source context, takes on meaning (Connell, 2011, p. 151).

One of the main symbolic structures for what concerns gender is writing. Starting with psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's (1998) theory of the Father's Name and Phallic Meaning, strands of thought have emerged glimpsing "phallocentric" forms in language. The *father's law* is also expressed through words that frequently denote male supremacy over the feminine. According to Connell (2011), the only way to counter this social structure is to subvert it by introducing new writing and speaking methods that go against this phallocentric and patriarchal idea. To cite one, this was done by feminist author Xavière Gauthier (1981), who used women's writing as a contestation.

It should be added that, as with other social structures, many women conform and do not try to paddle against the status quo (Connell, 2011). A glaring example of this is the

case of Giorgia Meloni. The first woman to achieve the Italian council presidency chose to be called "*il presidente*" rather than the feminine: "*la presidente*" (Cangemi, 2022; il Post, 2022). As can be easily guessed, this event set off a broad strand of discussion in the Italian political scene. On Twitter, the famous art critic and rector of the University for Foreigners of Siena, Tomaso Montanari, criticized the president's choice. According to the critic, the president's decision is purely ideological: "because power, by us, is still and only male. That's all" (Montanari, in Cigna, 2022). The writer Michela Murgia, in an interview with Adnkronos (2022, para. 3), explained how, in her opinion:

> From the symbolic point of view, she, who claims the masculine article, is saying, 'I will rule as a male' [...] I think this is the best possible answer to those who rejoice over a woman in power. It is not the gender of the person in charge that matters, it is the model of power that one holds. Giorgia Meloni's model of power is the masculinist 'male' one.

Although language is widely the most studied dimension of gendered symbolic structures, it is certainly not the only one. One can find traces of gender symbolism in many cultural settings, such as movies and comic books. It is precisely on the gender symbolic structure that much of the core of this elaborate will be based, but we will discuss this in more detail in the ensuing sections.

In the preceding sections, an attempt has been made to answer questions concerning the social structures that have given life to the Western patriarchal system. However, it is not only women and people in minority sexual orientations who are harassed and subjugated by male cultural hegemony. A good part of the male gender is subjugated to other men, and we will dedicate the following section to this topic.

1.3. What about men?

Those who have followed the flow of this thesis up to this point will have understood how being male is also mainly a social construct based on socialization (Connell, 2005; Ruspini, 2017; Russo, 2021a; Siviero, 2021a). It has been widely discussed how the male gender has subjugated the female gender for centuries. That said, it is important to note how not only do women suffer from the supremacy of a particular fringe of men but males who do not hold themselves to the standards of masculinity in a specific society are also subjugated. To make the latter concept more understandable, it is necessary to analyze the issue of hegemonic masculinity and toxic masculinity.

"The supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as domination and as intellectual and moral direction" (Gramsci, 1948a, p. 70). First, it is essential to understand what is meant by the term "*hegemonic masculinity*." The term initially appeared in a study conducted in Australia to analyze inequalities among high school students (Kessler et al., 1982). Empirical evidence emerged from this research demonstrating different power relations between male "social classes" (Cockburn, 1983; Herdt, 1981; Hunt, 1980; Willis, 1977). Taking up Gramsci's concept of *hegemony*, which was very fashionable during the 70s, this new way of defining power relations among men was proposed (Connell, 1977).

Antonio Gramsci, one of the most enlightened minds of the last century, formulated the theory of cultural hegemony in an attempt to explain why the proletarian revolutions, predicted by Karl Marx, did not ultimately come true (Cerardi, 2001; Frosini & Liguori, 2004).

The State generally uses two techniques to exert its power over the subjugated masses. The first is a dictatorship, which is the ultimate manifestation of tyrannical oppression by the State over its people. The second is what Gramsci called cultural hegemony, which could be defined as the apparatus of consent generated by the dominant strata via institutions such as parties, schools, the Church, and moral ideologies. Through this ideological and institutional/cultural apparatus, the State can maintain control over its "subjects" without shedding blood but with exhortation (Broccoli, 1975; Cerardi, 2001; Gramsci, 1948b).

It is vital for the culture that wants to impose moral and intellectual direction to ensure that these ideologies are internalized and perceived as natural and shareable so that fertile ground can be created for the system of control (Gramsci, 1948b; Gruppi, 1972). The dominant ideology permeates to such an extent into the communal identity that even the one who should oppose it, the marginalized class, embraces its individualistic and selfish thoughts and ethics. It is, therefore, essential for those who wish to maintain and consolidate political and social power that the vast majority stand on its side and share its values and thoughts (Gramsci, 1948b). It is up to "traditional" intellectuals, those who are not subjugated by the hegemonic ideology and who work at their craft as freethinkers, to help the proletariat and the classes enslaved to tyrants in the task of overthrowing domination (Gramsci, 1974). "The proletariat can become a ruling and dominant class to the extent that it succeeds in creating a system of alliances that enables it to mobilize

the majority of the working population against capitalism and the bourgeois State" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 145).

A similar thing happened with the marginalized male classes who, with the help of feminist theories on the role of the male and patriarchy, were able to attract media attention (Goode, 1982; Snodgrass, 1977). However, some examples of scholars who recognized different types of masculinity even before women's emancipation movements can be found in the literature. For example, Hacker (1957) recognized in the late 1950s that being masculine involved the enactment of a social role that was by no means static, which takes different forms in different eras, taking its cue both from new forms of masculinity arising on the land, but also being influenced by external sources (Ferguson, 2001; Morrell, 1998).

Indeed, the differing power relations between various forms of masculinity can be found in every society. Just think of the study conducted by Valdés and Olavarría (1998) on masculinity in Chile, one of the most homogeneous societies in the world. Even in the South American community, different forms of living the male role have been found based on social status. The seemingly rigid Japanese community encounters difficulties in maintaining its ideal masculinity, with the crisis of the salaryman (Dasgupta, 2000) and the increased presence of fathers in childcare (Ishii-Kuntz, 2003; Taga, 2003). Borrowing the dialectical pragmatism theorized by Demetriou (2001), it is evident that these forms of masculinity encounter each other and mutually influence one another in a globalized world. Indeed, we will take a closer look at how one of the most engaging social plagues of recent years (that afflicts men in particular; Crepaldi, 2019c; Yong & Nomura, 2019) that of the hikikomori has moved from Japan to the rest of the world.

Moreover, in Gramscian style, male hegemony generally is not a system based on force and violence. Obviously, there are exceptions, such as concerning the subjugation of the gay community (Morin & Garfinkle, 1978). Rather it is a value system that has been achieved through persuasion, cultural beliefs, and institutions (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). An example of male hegemony's cultural and institutional imprint is the glorification of male sports activities in television broadcasts (Sabo & Jensen, 1992) and the systematic censorship of other genders (Roberts, 1993).

Having reached this point, it is possible to summarize the concept of hegemonic masculinity briefly and concisely through the words of Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p. 832):

> [hegemonic masculinity] embodies the currently most honored way of being a man, it requires all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men. [...] Hegemony does not mean violence, although it can be supported by force; it means ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion.

However, one might wonder whether these changes in masculine hegemony happen abruptly or are more gradual shifts. From Connell and Messerschmidt's words, one can infer that hegemonic masculinity is society's most coveted form of being a man, but this does not mean that it must include the absolute majority. Frequently, submissive, and dominant communities coexist for long periods in situations of interchange. Messerschmidt (2004), in this regard, conducted a study of gay communities in large cities. It is clear from this study that homosexuals are often targets of homophobic and discriminatory acts, but a slice of society accepts them well. The latter segment of society not only lets them freely express their sexual orientation but also enhances their characteristics (e.g., by helping to organize celebrations such as Gay Pride) and giving them political prominence.

Toxic masculinity

Thus, it seems evident that masculinity can create problems for both males and females. In this regard, the term "*toxic masculinity*" was coined in the 1990s, indicating manifestations of masculine aggression, frequently accompanied by frustration related to gender roles (Russo, 2021a).

One of the leading scholars regarding toxic masculinity is Michael Kimmel. The American sociologist, who specializes in gender studies, delved into the anxieties and fears surrounding the construction of gender identity in the male population throughout his research career. One of the focal points of his studies indicates how the male gender is always under the relentless scrutiny of other men (Kimmel, 2013). The fear of failure and not proving oneself up to tests of virility are, according to Kimmel, the leading source and support of the Western sexist system (Kimmel, 1994). As early as their adolescent years, boys "[learn] that [their] peers are a kind of gender police constantly threatening to expose them as sissies" (Kimmel, 1994, p. 148).

In summary, toxic masculinity is "the cultural norms enacted by men that are harmful to men and society as they encourage behaviors related to dominance, aggression, and sexuality" (Russo, 2021a, p. 219). So, it can be said with due certainty that being female and being male can lead to issues in both cases. Problems can arise from where a

person is born and the resulting social conventions, power systems, and relationships. Socialization plays an essential role in creating one's gender identity, that is, how an individual moves on the imaginary continuum between female and male.

1.4. Socialization and gender identity

As a first step in introducing the complex and intricate topic of gender identity, it is necessary to digress briefly and explain what is meant by the term "*identity*." The lemma was introduced in 1950 by German psychoanalyst Erik Erikson in his work "*Childhood and Society*," in which he analyzes the importance of the infant stage in constructing one's identity. In a very rough and simplistic way, one could summarize identity as the life process by which one attempts to answer the question: *who am I?* (Crocetti et al., 2008). Erikson (1959) connects the construction of personal identity to a path paved by one's biological particularities (such as gender), personal experience, and the cultural and social *milieu* in which a person is born and grows up. This process, which reaches its full complexity during adolescence (Havighurst, 1952; Palmonari & Crocetti, 2011) and the pubertal stage, is surrounded by multiple difficulties and phases of stress. Creating one's identity is an intricate journey demonstrable because each of us faces life choices that may prove not easy and cause regrets (Pombeni et al., 1992).

Another point to be considered is that this long and torturous pilgrimage continues beyond attaining an autonomous, evolved, and stable personality. Undoubtedly, it is vital for people to find a place in society (Erikson, 1959) and to complete what Havighurst (1952) refers to as *developmental tasks*. A developmental task is one "[...] which arises at or about a certain period in the life of an individual, successful achievement of which leads to happiness and to success with later tasks, while failure leads to unhappiness in the individual" (Havighurst, 1952, p.2). Again Havighurst (1952) divides these vital developmental tasks of the individual into (a) non-recurrent, i.e., those occurring at a specific time of life (learning to talk and walk, for example); (b) recurrent, on the other hand, comprise the occurrences that accompany the person throughout life (need to maintain friendships). In these recurrent tasks, one should also include the construction of gender identity.

Gender identity represents one of the personal aspects of the individual and shapes his or her involvement in gender relations or sexual practices (Stoller, 1968). As mentioned earlier, when discussing gender, the influence of cultural, ethnic, and social status

characteristics cannot be underestimated (Bottomley, 1992). It has already been discussed how different societies expect specific behaviors from different genders and how this indoctrination begins even before coming into the world (Ruspini, 2017).

Nowadays, it is possible to introduce infants to gender even before birth. Knowing the biological sex of fetuses before they are born allows parents to make appropriate preparations. For example, knowing that a mother-to-be will give birth to a baby girl makes it possible for parents to paint the nursery pink, allows grandparents to buy pastel pink pajamas with little stars, and friends to buy toys that best match the baby's biological sex (Ruspini, 2017). Moreover, we are told by our parents that pink is a color that suits little girls more and is not for boys. By playing with dolls, little girls internalize that cosmetics, taking care of their bodies, and housework are women's things. On the other hand, little boys grow up measuring their athletic and physical abilities or playing with small industrial machines (Russo, 2021a; Siviero, 2021a).

By this, it is highlighted how from a very young age, we are directed to a specific gender role made up of the different social conventions that most fit what is expected by the community. Even more imperative for the growth of people is that we do not only dwell on appearances or toys, but frequently parents modify their behavior according to the biological sex of their children. Judith Lorber (1990) also adds to the axioms that glimpse parents as the first "teachers" of gender roles. According to the professor, primary socialization in the family teaches children how best to behave to best "represent" their gender. Girls will be encouraged by their parents to show themselves as more docile and inclined to listen and care; in the home, they will take on cleaning and cooking tasks. As for boys, family members perceive violent or "risky" behaviors more willingly (Connell, 2011).

In contrast, children are expected, from an early age, to exhibit assertive and dominant character traits toward their peers and little girls. Attitudes that do not model themselves according to these expectations (such as crying) are punished with taunting phrases such as "don't be a sissy" or "act like a man" (Russo, 2021a, p. 79). From an early age, boys and girls are confronted with this system based on rewards and punishments. Based on the responses children recognize in their parent's facial expressions and attitudes, they understand the best way to behave to avoid reprimands (Connell, 2011; Rolls, 2013).

The ideology based on biological sex also has enormous relevance in school life. The stereotype of boys as more likely to assert themselves in science subjects such as

mathematics and computer science is expected. On the other hand, girls are evaluated more positively in arts and language content (Arnot et al., 1999). These stereotypes are the basis for the evident gender disparity in school path choice, with vocational, technical, industrial, and agricultural colleges attended overwhelmingly by males. On the other hand, hotel and tourism schools, social service studies, linguistic and classical high schools, and magistral schools have higher female attendance. Unfortunately, it follows that there is a clear professional bias (Ruspini, 2017).

The world of labor, in fact, according to some scholars (Bourdieu, 1998; Holter, 2003), represents the pinnacle of gender inequality, in which the patriarchal system is most evident. Gender separation in work is based on the biological characteristics that divide women and men and has long ensured the survival of Fordist society (early decades of the 1900s; Ruspini, 2017). Following Mosse's (1996) consideration, the Fordist Model required precise and well-defined roles, particularly within the family unit. During this period, the traditional family was born, which preached the working man who was more defiladed from family duties; and the "good mother" devoted to childcare and the home (Chodorow, 1991). Through this system, a dual-dependency system has been generated: on the one hand, the woman cannot do without the income brought home by her husband, and on the other hand, the man relies on his wife's care (Hochschild, 1989). That said, this exacerbation in the man-woman dichotomy has had a more significant impact on the female gender. Indeed, for most women at the time – and today – marriage and paid work were a challenging combination to achieve (Ruspini, 2017).

Moreover, women's work had particularly adverse connotations associated with poverty, loneliness, promiscuity, and deviance. The aura of negativity that hovered around working women was so dense that women workers in France were called the same as prostitutes ("*femme isolées*"; Scott, 1991). Although these conditions are increasingly changing in much of the globe, as evidenced by the increasing cases of "alternative families" (Ruspini, 2017), it is undeniable that there are still significant problems to be solved in the world of work. For example, the evergreen problem of wages has already been mentioned (Bishu & Alkadry, 2016; Hoff & Lee, 2021). In addition, it is significantly more difficult for women to get ahead in their careers, as Moss-Racusin's (2015) and Treviño's (2015) studies show. According to data collected from the first of these two studies, identical resumes and applications are perceived differently if the candidate is named Jennifer or John (Moss-Racusin et al., 2015). The other study found that female management professors are less likely to receive a prestigious professorship, even though their

objective performance and personal conditions at work were comparable to those of their male colleagues (Treviño et al., 2015).

As noted by Bourdieu (1998), the asymmetrical relationship between the two sexes has ancient roots, but the shades of gray between the female and male genders have always been evident. So, ancient as humankind itself, are so-called “third genders”, meaning people that don’t recognize themselves as male or female, but find themselves in a “hybrid role” between the two sexes.

1.4.1. Third genders

Throughout history people in a hybrid state between women and men have fascinated scholars of all kinds. A famous example is the knight d'Eon, who lived half his life as a man and the other half as a woman (Lever & Lever, 2009). The British psychologist Havelock Ellis was so fascinated by the vicissitudes of the knight that to describe the total gender reversal, he took up his name by coining the term "*Eonism*" (Ellis, 1928). However, this is just one of the many cases studied in the past regarding the "third gender."

Mention has already been made of the *Berdache*, members of some Native American communities, who are born with male biological characteristics but take on a hybrid role in society between man and woman (Lorber, 1995; Williams, 1986). To the case of the *Berdache* can be added that of the *Hijra*, people who find their roots in parts of India and Pakistan. Similarly, to the *Berdache*, the *Hijra* are born with male anatomical peculiarities. However, they take on a female name during their lives, wear conspicuous and refined, typically feminine clothing, and are regarded as a separate gender. *Hijras* abandon their families to join these particular groups, which are marginalized by their respective communities. Despite their exclusion from society, *Hijras* are attributed "supernatural" powers. For example, it is a widespread belief that *Hijras* can promote a couple's fertility but also curse people. In addition, it is customary to invite them to new birth celebrations where they perform songs and dances (Russo, 2021b).

Another particularly unique example that can be explicated is that of the *Femminelli*. A term that first appeared in the late 1800s describes male persons being considered "effeminate." Even today, in Naples, one can encounter rare cases of *femminilielli*, who, in the words of Porpora Marcasciano:

> [feel] woman in the classical sense of the word, but not a modern, independent woman, who works and lives alone, has no children but only a few lovers, no! The *femminiello* aspires to be a wife, mother, sister, worker, good cook, good housewife, faithful, and religious (Marcasciano, 2020, pp. 79-80).

It is clear, then, that the *femminielli* identify as a woman, anchored in models that we might consider antiquated (Vesce, 2017). Further evidence of this is given by the importance of certain rituals that the *femminielli* community has embraced for centuries. Indeed, *femminielli* weddings are still practiced in Naples, complete with wedding favors (Figure 2). Added to this is the so-called "*figliata*," which consists of a childbirth simulation, reinvigorating the belief that a vital part of being a woman is procreation (Cabrio, 2021b; Stoller, 1985). Another particularly significant event for the *femminielli* is the Candlemas festival held atop the shrine of Montevergine, which is reached by a colorful procession on pilgrimage (Russo, 2021b).

These ancient examples of people with male biological sex who identify themselves in female roles enshrine the unfoundedness of biological rules (Connell, 2011). As also amply demonstrated by the fact that some people reject or at least do not identify with the sex assigned to them at birth.

The term *transgender* refers to all people who do not identify with their biological sex, unlike cisgender individuals, that is, women and men who recognize themselves in their anatomical features. Trans people exhibit male and female traits, thus rejecting a binary conception of gender (Arfini, 2007). Therefore, when talking about these individuals,

Figure 2: A femminielli marriage in Naples (retrieved from: https://www.napoli-turistica.com/femminiello-cultura-napoletana/)

there is a tendency to use the term non-binary (Siviero, 2021b). For some people, getting full awareness of their gender can be rather painful. Problems attributable to socialization arise, such as the fear of disappointing one's parents or clashing with what society expects. Regarding the psychological difficulties trans people encounter along their journey, multiple studies have been conducted (McCann, 2015; McNeil et al., 2012; Zoë et al., 2015).

In this regard, mentioning the Trevor Project association is necessary. The Trevor Project is a nonprofit organization founded by Celeste Lecesne, Peggy Rajski, and Randy Stone that focuses on suicide prevention among members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities. The organization offers guidance and counseling from highly trained advisors and workshops for students and parents to create a more inclusive society. In addition, the Trevor Project also does relevant statistical work by investigating the psychological state of trans people. For example, results collected by the organization in 2019 from a sample including 35 thousand U.S. youth aged 13 to 24 show an apparent disparity in well-being between trans and cisgender people. A particularly impressive finding is attempted suicide, which sees as many as double the number in the trans population (The Trevor Project, 2019).

However, not only the difficulties related to socialization and living in the community can create undue concern for trans people. An essential part of creating gender identity is our physical characteristics (Connell, 2011), and as mentioned earlier, some people do not identify with them. *Gender dysphoria* is the non-harmonious relationship between gender and physical characteristics that results in inadequacy and foreignness. For this reason, some transgender people decide to acquire some traits of the opposite sex in order to feel more comfortable (Arfini, 2007) – for example, the typically feminine clothes, cosmetics, and wigs worn by the *femminielli* in Naples. However, some people present a discrepancy between their gender identity and their biological sex and consequently present the need to get as close as possible to the body they feel is theirs (Ruspini, 2017).

Some transgender people are undergoing or have already endured surgery to transition from one sex to the other (Siviero, 2021b). Sex mutations are another peculiarity that have broadly challenged what is natural: biological sex, reconfirming that gender is a spectrum and not a fact to be taken as established (Ruspini, 2017). However, there are authors (Stoller, 1985) who argue that a transitioning person does not make an effective change from one sex to the other because an essential part of being a "real man" and a

"real woman" is missing: the reproductive function. According to Stoller, it would be correct to speak of a gender modification rather than a sex change. These statements reinforce Roen's (2002) beliefs that the meaning we attach to the body and biological peculiarities remain the primary indicators of gender. In Roen's opinion (2002), these discourses would only fuel fears and negative stereotypes associated with the transgender community. Indeed, beliefs are still widely held that see transgender people as sick or disturbed; they can never define themselves as real women or men; and they certainly cannot be good parents because they would negatively affect their children's upbringing (Luciani, 2011).

We will discuss the body and how it plays an integral part, not only in creating one's gender identity but especially in the media, in the following chapter. When it comes to gender identity, this term is often confused with sexual orientation, which is only one piece that makes up gender identity. The concept of sexual orientation and how it has changed meaning over the years will be explained in the next section.

1.5. Sexual orientation

Frequently, sexual orientation is confused with the concepts of gender identity and gender role (Siviero, 2021a). When sexual orientation is referred to, it means: "the enduring pattern of an individual's emotional, sexual, and/or romantic attraction. In science, sexual orientation is often divided into the three components of attraction, behavior, and self-identification." (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2023, para. 1). As is well known, the two main categories used to describe sexual orientation are heterosexuality and homosexuality. However, as has been amply demonstrated, the experiences of many people have corroborated that limiting the affective and sexual pleasure categories to only two classes is reductive (Siviero, 2021a).

For example, bisexual people may experience sexual attraction to people of two or more genders. According to Weinberg and colleagues (1994), recognizing oneself as a bisexual person includes a gradual journey of several moments and elements. The most important of these is the verification that sexual intercourse is fulfilling with people of both genders. Individuals who call themselves pansexual, on the other hand, may experience loving feelings and sexual attraction toward other people regardless of their gender and biological sex. Moreover, one can list asexuals, individuals with no sexual drive toward others; this does not mean, however, that they cannot have romantic feelings and call

themselves heteroromantic (if attracted to a person of the opposite gender) or homoromantic (if attracted to people of the same gender; Siviero, 2021b). Another sexual orientation, which has been relatively little discussed so far, is the demisexual orientation. Demisexuals experience sexual attraction only to people with whom they have created an intense emotional relationship. From this, it can be inferred that demisexual people do not experience much interest in sexual activity and place relatively greater emphasis on affective values (Burgundy et al., 2022).

Consequently, it turns out to be self-explanatory that many identities can result from mixing different genders and sexual orientations. Thus, one may encounter heterosexual women and lesbians; gay men or heterosexual men; or trans women and trans men who may be straight or homosexual (Siviero, 2021a). It must be said, however, that even these dichotomous versions may prove to be inaccurate or not entirely exhaustive:

> Some women are in a relationship with transgender women who, while dressing in the clothes and using a name of the gender they identify with while taking hormones or modifying certain features of their bodies, have not undergone genital surgery and who have sexual relations with their partners that involve penetration: the terms "*lesbian*" and "*heterosexual*" may both seem flawed to describe the sexual orientation of these people, and it may be that those directly concerned do not identify with either (Siviero, 2021a, p. 14).

1.5.1. Heterosexuality and “deviant” sexual orientations

It has already been mentioned in previous sections that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the great European countries, driven by a nationalist instinct and by expansionist aims began to place enormous importance on industrial and war production (Cabrio, 2021b). In this environment the term "homosexuality" was coined, which included all people who shared deviant sexualities not directed toward the reproductive act. Psychiatrists and scholars from other medical branches categorized all sexual appetites and gender experiences that deviated from reproduction into "a single pathologizing framework in which we now recognize as the distinct concepts of homosexuality, cross-dressing, and transgenderism" (Cabrio, 2021b, p. 61). Moreover, these forms of sexuality at the time were considered abnormal, if not "aberrant," and potentially dangerous to health (Foucault, 1976a). Some beliefs back then might be comical today: for example,

masturbation was believed to make one blind, oral sex was potentially carcinogenic (Ruspini, 2017), childhood masturbation was perceived as highly perverse (Giddens, 1992).

The fact that homosexuality was regarded as potentially dangerous is not to be considered as a "totally negative" occurrence. Through this disbelief, the abolition of the anti-sodomy laws was achieved. It was precisely some openly homosexual men who demanded their abolition, among whom one must necessarily mention the German poet and jurist Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, that is, the first person to come out publicly (Cabrio, 2021b). In 1886, the German neurologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing published the work "*Psychopathy sexualis*," with which he attempted to compile a "glossary" of abnormal sexual practices, and through which the terms "heterosexuality" and "homosexuality" became widespread.

Interestingly, in the early 1900s, words concerning the sexual sphere were remarkably malleable and fluid because clarity about what they described did not persist (Cabrio, 2021b). Dorland's Medical Dictionary, in fact, also defined *heterosexuality* in 1901 as "an abnormal and perverse appetite for the opposite sex" (in Katz, 1995, p. 90). This description was also joined by Merriam Webster's Dictionary, which two decades later described heterosexuality as the "morbid sexual passion for a person of the opposite sex" (in Katz, 1995, p. 92). It was not until 1934 that the definition of heterosexuality came closest to that in use today: "manifestation of sexual passion for a person of the opposite sex; normal sexuality" (in Katz, 1995, p. 92).

Further evidence that in the early 1900s, there were still multiple insecurities about definitions concerning the sexual domain is provided by the terms homosexuality and transgenderism, which were considered to be a manifestation of the same sexual orientation. The first to distinguish the two terms was Magnus Hirschfeld in 1923. The German physician made history because the first vaginoplasty was performed in his clinic (Cabrio, 2021b). He became particularly renowned for the story of Danish artist Lili Elbe, who underwent several surgeries in 1931 to complete the male-female transition at Hirschfeld's clinic (Chare, 2016). Unfortunately, the last surgery, which included a uterus transplant (the ability to procreate was regarded as an essential prerogative for becoming a "real woman"), resulted in her death (Cabrio, 2021b).

With feminist ideas, discourses concerning homosexuality venture outside the medical realm alone and enter the social sciences. Through the contributions of LGBTQIA+ communities and feminist writers, sex is diverted from the reproductive act alone, thanks in

part to the invention of the birth control pill (Cabrio, 2021b). Finally, in 1973, after decades of struggles for rights, homosexuality was officially removed from the American Psychiatric Association's "*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*" (APA, 2023d).

Recognizing homosexuality as non-pathologizing has not solved all the problems surrounding the lesbian and gay world. There are, in fact, many countries in which it is still illegal to be homosexual, as evidenced by the considerable research conducted by the Human Dignity Trust. The nonprofit organization founded in 2011 in London is the only one that advocates globally for LGBTQIA+ rights through an intricate web of relationships with activists worldwide (Human Dignity Trust, 2023b). According to data from the London-based organization, as many as 67 jurisdictions still criminalize male homosexuality (Figure 3). A remarkable fact is that almost half of these countries are members of the Commonwealth. It can therefore be assumed that these countries have maintained strict canons concerning the sexual sphere of their English colonizers (Reality Check Team, 2021). On the other hand, 41 countries criminalize any form of lesbianism (Figure 4; Human Dignity Trust, 2023b).

Today, the five jurisdictions of Iran, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, and Yemen provide the death penalty for homosexual persons. In addition, in six other countries (Afghanistan, Brunei, Mauritania, Pakistan, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates), the death penalty is a viable legal practice (Figure 5). Finally, 14 states criminalize transgender expressions such as cross-dressing (Figure 6; Human Dignity Trust, 2023a).

However, there has been a great deal of progress concerning the rights of same-sex people worldwide. For example, in 2022, Slovenia joined the other 31 countries where marriage between same-sex couples is legal (HRC Foundation, 2023). According to data collected by Equaldex (2023), 53 states allow same-sex couples to adopt children. Moreover, even in Central African countries that are notoriously the most homophobic ones, perceptible improvements have been made. A case in point is Botswana, which, in 2019, decided to decriminalize gay and lesbian couples (Cappellini, 2019).

It thus seems quite evident that changes (albeit slow and delayed) are taking place, securing necessary and just rights for the LGBTQIA+ community. After briefly reviewing the history of how the terms heterosexuality and homosexuality have stabilized in the collective discourse, it is time to discuss the field where sexuality most obviously "takes place": namely, the body.

Figure 3: Countries where sexual activities between men is illegal

Figure 4: Countries where sexual activities between women is illegal

Figure 5: gender expression of trans people is criminalized

Figure 6: countries where death penalty for homosexuals is executed (images 5 to 8 retrieved from: https://www.humandignitytrust.org/lgbt-the-law/map-of-criminalisation/)

2. Sexualization and the body

One cannot speak about gender issues without talking about the body. The body plays an essential role in creating one's gender identity because that is where our biological characteristics are most apparent. However, as we will see later, the ideals of beauty inevitably linked to our physical appearance also change depending on where we are and the historical period. The following chapter will deal with precisely these issues: how gender roles dictate that women and men achieve a particular body type, generating, in not a few cases, issues that should not be underestimated.

According to philosopher Susan Bordo (1993), the body, as with gender, would also be a social construct. Thus, there would be no such thing as a "natural body." Instead, it would be constructed to conform to the prevailing standards of beauty in a given culture and society (Capecchi, 2006). Moreover, it would mainly be women who would be subjected to this sort of tyranny (Bordo, 1993), who would find themselves following canons of slenderness and youthfulness that are difficult (if not at times impossible) to maintain (Markula, 2017). The woman must be slender, but not only that, the silhouette must be dry, showing a toned and flat belly, the breasts, and buttocks well taut and firm with skin free of impurities, well-polished, and smooth. All these characteristics show a propensity for discipline and self-control as "well suited" to the Western female gender (Bordo, 1993; Capecchi, 2006). It follows from this, as Saveria Capecchi (2006), among many authors, points out, that aging is to be avoided most absolutely in our Western society. The idea of youth is an imposition that the cosmetics industry imposes on girls since adolescence. However, in recent years, even the male gender has been increasingly attracted to the cosmetics and body care industry (Boroughs et al., 2005; Frank, 2014; Ruspini, 2017).

2.1. The thinness ideal: the female body as a cage

Rising to fame in swinging '60s London, supermodel Twiggy Lawson (Figure 7) featured androgynous, almost masculine features and a particularly slim body (Harper's Bazaar Staff, 2009). The British model and singer was the first model depicted in a miniskirt, reshaping the ideal female figure, and bringing 90-60-90 measurements to a much leaner silhouette. Twiggy became the woman to be compared with; the buxom breasts disappeared and became almost a source of embarrassment (Corriere della Sera, 2015; Roberts, 2005); the hourglass shape with a narrow waist that enhanced curves became

Figure 7: Twiggy Lawson (retrieved from: https://www.amica.it/2021/05/13/twiggy-modella-oggi-anni-60-minigonna/)

Figure 8: Cindy Crawford (retrieved from: https://www.harpersbazaar.com/fashion/models/g8530/cindy-crawford-in-photos/?slide=4)

exuberant and had to be set aside (Capecchi, 2006). Of course, the love for curves returned, especially in the 1980s, with models like Cindy Crawford (Figure 8; Corriere della Sera, 2015). Nevertheless, the ideal of thinness that Twiggy definitively unleashed has remained prominent to this day, causing no small number of problems for women who fail to conform to current beauty standards (APA, 2008; Becker et al., 2004; Calogero, 2004).

Clearly, the ideal body representation is also largely shaped by culture and society. In every historical period, norms are introduced to which one must adhere for gaining positive sanctions (Foucault, 1976b). Modern power is based on these axioms, manifesting in self-surveillance and self-regulation. According to Foucault (1975), each person internalizes the gaze of others to such an extent that he or she becomes the overseer of himself or herself. The individual, therefore, exercises surveillance on and against himself. Indeed, the manipulation and regulation of the female body have always been central to the social construct that keeps the power relationship between the sexes active

(Capecchi, 2006; McRobbie, 2009). Examples involving men's control of the female body do not stop at thinness alone; one needs only to think at the incessant discourse surrounding abortion and IVF laws (Capecchi, 2006).

Two more questions arise: why is it so crucial for men to maintain control over the female body? Moreover, why do so many women willingly agree to follow and aspire to these ideals of slenderness and youthfulness?

Susan Bordo (1993) recalls how women have been prevalently associated with the body. Indeed, in mythology, family life, and religion, the body has always been the most critical part of being a woman, as demonstrated by the dualism composed of mind and body. The former characteristic is equated with being a man (Bordo, 1993) who is assumed to be more assertive, dedicated to leadership, and self-sufficient (Bem, 1974). On the other hand, the feminine is identified with the body (where the supposedly negative pole resides), which symbolizes uncontrollability and desire. It has always been believed that the pleasures of the body lead men to the failure of the will, as demonstrated by the story of Adam and Eve, in which the woman conducts the man into temptation (Bordo, 1993). Since the dawn of time, it has been assumed that women's irrational will pose a threat (Capecchi, 2006).

Let us come to the point. Susan Bordo (1993) theorizes that it is precisely to create a kind of cage that the male gaze has imposed the ideal of thinness (McRobbie, 2009). By suppressing and keeping in check hunger and desire, women have been opened to new possibilities that include entry into the world of work (purely male terrain until a few decades ago). By proving themselves managed and regulated, especially in today's consumerist-driven society that makes controlling hunger impulses even more complicated, females are rewarded by society. The community promises women with slim and toned bodies success in business and love. Those who do not abide by the rigid beauty standards imposed by capitalist and patriarchal society are destined to experience frustration, guilt, and feelings of failure (Capecchi, 2006). Moroccan sociologist Fatema Mernissi (2000) made an interesting parallel between Muslim and Western cultures, comparing the *chador* (veil covering the head and shoulders, typical of Shiite tradition) worn by women and the Western ideal of beauty. Just as the veil encloses Islamic women, so too the size 42 serves as a cage for Western girls.

None of this detracts from the fact that the female body can produce an exciting site of experimentation and emancipation. The figure of Madonna has been widely analyzed

Figure 9: Madonna on the set of Material Girl (retrieved from: https://www.vanityfair.it/gallery/madonna-abito-asta-material-girl)

Figure 10: Madonna in one of her many manly suits (retrieved from: https://www.pinterest.it/pin/329888741437686025/)

and studied. The iconic singer, nicknamed the Queen of Pop, reached the pinnacle of success with records such as "*Like a Virgin*," "*Like a Prayer*," and "*True Blue*," and immediately sparked public interest because of how she chameleonically modeled her outward appearance, often bringing her sexuality and gender into play. For Fiske (1989), Madonna represents a prime example of a popular text that contains an infinity of contradictions within itself. In herself, the singer contains both meanings of female sexuality imposed by the patriarchal society, but for years she has also been a symbol of resistance (Capecchi, 2006). Explicitly transgressive sexuality, the use of cross-dressing (Figure 10), and sexual innuendos in lyrics have been perceived by many feminists as symbols of self-determination because they are not directly subject to the male gaze (Attwood, 2006; Capecchi, 2006; Schwichtenberg et al., 1993). In my opinion, a perfect example to explicate the dominant and emancipating position Madonna takes in many of her products is the intro to the video for "*Material Girl*" (Figure 9; Lambert, 1985). Before the actual song begins, it is possible to hear a dialogue between Madonna and an unspecified friend, in which she says, "Yeah, he's still after me. He just gave me a necklace [...] No, I think it's real diamonds [...] He thinks he can impress me by giving me expensive gifts [...] It's nice, though. You want it?" This brief but significant incipit shows a woman holding a man firmly in her fist, demonstrating a prominent position of dominance. The fact that the expensive necklace is offered to her friend indicates that the singer is merely playing and exploiting her beau.

Another cultural icon that became famous towards the end of the last century, around which several contradictions revolve, is the first female protagonist of an action video game, Lara Croft (Capecchi, 2006). While the protagonist of the "*Tomb Raider*" series (Core Design, 1996) represents a prototype of Western beauty standards (lean, firm, toned body with huge breasts), for most gamers, her appeal lies in her gender ambiguity. The figure devised by Core Design was blatantly created for the *voyeuristic* male gaze, giving a *femme-fatale* vibe, thus enhancing the masochistic pleasures of some players. However, Lara Croft also represents a model of female strength. Through the violence expressed in the game, female players can counter gender stereotypes by giving free rein to their fantasies (Schleiner, 2001).

Returning to the initial discussion regarding the ideals of slenderness and beauty, the media – in all their forms ranging from TV, music videos, video games, magazines, and of course, social networks (Conrad et al., 2009; Döring, 2022; Downs & Smith, 2010) – have played an essential role in propagating them (APA, 2008). When discussing the portrayal of women in the media, we often stumble upon the term "*sexualization*." Before we turn to that, we must take a brief step back and understand where feminist studies in the media come from and how they have changed over the decades.

2.2. Feminist Film Theory: from the Male Gaze to the new millennium

2.2.1. The 1960s and 1970s: criticism of women's roles and the Male Gaze

Towards the end of the 1960s, a cultural movement spread in the United States that has gone down in history as the Women's Liberation Movement. This movement consisted of two currents: a) a more radical one that intended to place greater value on women's specificities and thus build an expressly female cultural branch (Bullock & Trombley, 1999); b) and a liberal one that propagated the idea that women and men were, in fact, equal and therefore it was right to pursue a struggle for equality (Dow, 2014). During the 1970s, it was mainly the latter that was enormously successful. The main goal was to rebalance women's social status in labor and the economy (Capecchi, 2006).

Out of this trend came the *Role Image Approach*, which analyzed the representation of women in the media. At the time, the female image was highly discriminating and stereotyped. Especially in the media, certain branches of women's lives were deliberately left out, such as the working world to which many women belonged (Capecchi, 2006). This instance is easily demonstrated by analyzing the roles devoted to female actresses in

1970s American dramas. Rarely were female characters dedicated to prestigious tasks, and if they ever showed interest in a career, they were punished in love (Capecchi, 2006). Thus, the media sought to influence public opinion by willfully censoring reality and showing what was considered the ideal woman at the time (Tuchman et al., 1978). The cultural and media product was hence perceived as a brake on women's emancipation (Gerbner, 1972), concealing women's participation in social life and making life very difficult for them in media production (Butler & Paisley, 1980).

In this environment, *Feminist Film Theory* and its strong critique of the Hollywood product were born (Haskell, 1974; Rosen, 1973). Becoming of global importance is the work "*Ways of Seeing*" by John Berger (1972; Figure 14), the first to use the term "*male gaze*." From a feminist perspective, the male gaze depicts women in the media from a deliberately heteronormative perspective and for the sexual pleasure of men (Eaton, 2008; Łuczyńska-Hołdys, 2013). In the cinematic product, the male gaze takes three forms: a) that of the man behind the camera; b) that of the male characters within the film; c) and finally, that of the viewer looking at the image from the outside (Devereaux, 1995).

> Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed is female. Thus, she turns herself into an object of vision: a sight (Berger, 1972, p. 49).

Taking Berger's theory and repolishing it with the work of Freud and Lacan, filmmaker Laura Mulvey published the seminal work "*Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*" (1975). According to Mulvey, the female body is reduced to mere voyeuristic pleasure for the male spectator (Mulvey, 1975). Through female depiction, men can give free rein to their scopophilia, reducing the person immortalized in the film into an object of sexual pleasure (Freud, 1905; Mulvey, 1975). In addition, the close identification with the male characters observing the women within the films allows viewers to create a kind of direct contact with the actresses, consequently succeeding in increasing their narcissistic ego (see "*mirror phase*" in Lacan, 1949).

2.2.2. The 1980s: the enhancement model and the need to sweeten the differences between women and men

The following decade saw a change in perspective: the apparatus that propagated the model of equality was challenged mainly, and the need to enhance women's culture came to the fore (Capecchi, 2006). In the 1980s, the resentment against the patriarchal cultural system that voluntarily excluded women's products from the various artistic disciplines spread like wildfire (Capecchi, 1993).

The goal is to exalt the intrinsic differences between being female and male (Capecchi, 2006). According to author Luce Irigaray (1975, 1992), it is necessary to demolish the presumed equality and neutrality of masculine and feminine values and to recognize that there are biological differences and that one cannot be exempt from considering them (Capecchi, 2006). Women authors must take on the task of giving free rein to their subjectivities, emphasizing their worldview, without having the ambition to "*become men*" (Irigaray, 1977).

2.2.3. The 1990s: overcoming the male-female dichotomy and the post-gender model

In this dissertation, we have extensively analyzed and discussed the partial deconstruction of the dichotomy between women and men and how the spread of the term gender has partly overcome this. The 1990s saw a proliferation of new gender identities and sexual orientations. To exalt these new subjectivities, U.S. professor Donna Haraway (2007) proposes the figure of the cyborg, i.e., a hybrid of person and machine that overcomes female-male dualism but does not undo sexual differences. To Haraway (2007), women must use technology and its possibilities to achieve the goals of feminism. For example, bell hooks (1992) spurs women marginalized by society on an ethnic and sexual basis to show their dissent against racist content disseminated in the media.

In sum, it is possible to summarize the values of post-gender feminists of the 1990s in the attempt to gain and claim new media spaces for those who do not see themselves (or are excluded based on ethnicity or social status) in the gender dichotomy (Capecchi, 2006). Cinematic and non-film representations of people from the LGBTQIA+ community have increased in recent years (Capecchi, 2006; Cabrio, 2021a). Nowadays, social discourse is dominated by online communication and social media (Breidenbach et al., 2021). Especially relevant is the topic of sexualization, which is often related to the topic

of the female body and its representation in the media. It is to this issue that the following section will be devoted.

2.3. Effects of women's sexualization in media

As previously stated, most depictions of women in the media are idolized according to Western beauty standards. Women are shown, therefore, in most cases thin, white, and foremost sexualized (APA, 2008; Biefeld et al., 2021). What leads the media to show male, but predominantly female, figures in a sexualized way is the need to capture viewers' attention by extolling the beauty and activating sexual associations (Gill, 2008). Not surprisingly, I think anyone knows one of the most famous axioms used in marketing, namely "*sex sells*" (Blair et al., 2006; Streitmatter, 2004). In the report entitled "*Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls*," the American Psychologists Association (2008) explains how a sexualized person must exhibit at least one of the following characteristics:

- the value of the person depicted derives solely from her or his sexual attractiveness;
- physical appearance is equated with being sexy;
- the figure is reduced to a mere object for the sexual desires of others;
- sexuality is inappropriately imposed on a person.

It is crucial, however, to notice that no physical parameters make sexualization possible or not. It follows from this that any person can be sexualized, as indicated by some studies that prove that black women are sometimes sexualized even more than white women (Emerson, 2002; Ward et al., 2013). In fact, as Sharla Biefeld and colleagues (2021) note, the term sexualization does not refer to a specific body dimension or ethnicity. However, it concerns behaviors and clothing that emphasize certain body parts (especially the buttocks and breasts). Thus, sexualization involves the viewers' attention to the outward appearance of the person depicted and can, therefore, take on different nuances (Fasoli et al., 2018). Sexualization can be based on what is considered attractive. It can focus on physical peculiarities or sex, i.e., sexual characteristics and expected desires that undergird the person's sexual availability (Morris & Goldenberg, 2015).

The figure of the sexualized woman in the media usually brings evident benefits. For example, female characters who are sexualized in movies are generally more popular and are perceived as more attractive than women who are not sexualized (Stone et al., 2015). However, sexualization is not only accompanied by positive factors. Sexualized

girls are usually seen as less skilled, intelligent, and sporty (Daniels & Zurbriggen, 2016; Ward, 2016). That said, sexualization also has clear negative impacts on media users.

Several studies (including Jewell & Brown, 2013; Jewell et al., 2015) have highlighted how exposure to sexualized images of women conspicuously reinforces gender stereotypes. Research showed a widespread belief that women should focus on appearing sexually attractive to men and be visibly flattered by male attention. The vision of sexualized women also increases acceptance of violence against women (Ward, 2002; Ward et al., 2005), throwing fuel on the fire of the rape myth. The aberrant rape myth, which cultivates the idea that women who dress provocatively are just waiting to be molested (Burt, 1980), is still present in Western cultures (we have seen examples of this in previous chapters).

Nowadays, sex and sexualization still are associated almost exclusively with physical acts, although they can also be experienced online (Attwood, 2006). Sexualization and sex have moved *en masse* to social networks such as Instagram (Golitschek, 2021), pornographic sites (Attwood, 2017), and erotic live-chatting sites like *Chaturbate* or *LiveJasmin* (Attwood, 2006), allowing people to experience sex with the simple use of a smartphone. As Feona Attwood (2006) explains in her report "*Sexed Up: Theorizing the Sexualization of Culture*," the fact that sex is experienced at a distance does not exclude that it can be experienced intimately and fulfilling. Consequently, it can be said that sex is also an experience outside the body by uniting technology and flesh. The "*on-the-road*" use of sex has contributed to the proliferation of the "*sexualization of culture*."

2.4. Sexualization of culture: self-sexualization, objectification, and commodification in new media

First, *sexualization of culture* refers to the growing concern surrounding the value system of sexual practices and identities (Attwood, 2006; Donaghue, 2014). Today's society is decidedly more permissive toward sex: "sex [...] has become the Big Story" (Plummer, 1995, p. 4). The mass media are the leading promoters of this cultural form, having disproportionately increased the amount of sexual content and made it readily available everywhere (Hagen, 2021). In this regard, one need only think of the soft porn content on any social media or the exorbitant number of female content creators on OnlyFans (1.5 million; Wise, 2022b). In addition, erotic chat sites are also gaining increasing users. For example, the most popular camgirls on Chaturbate may have more than 500,000

followers and 20,000 people connected on their cams simultaneously (Porn Sites XXX News, 2020). This growth and increased ease of access to sexual services have caused a shift from the more intimate and domestic, almost hedonistic sphere of sex (Giddens, 1992) to "a recreational model of sexual behavior [...] facilitated by its placement in the market" (Bernstein, 2001, p. 397).

It can be argued that sex is so visible and explicit that it has become part of people's daily lives (Attwood, 2006). To Brian McNair (2002), we would increasingly be moving toward a "striptease culture," which is the latest step toward the "commercialization of sex and the expansion of sexual consumerism" (p. 87). In this environment of sexualized and striptease culture, a further shift in sexualization in the mass media could be ascertained. Indeed, there was a shift from sexualization by others ("*Fremdsexualisierung*"; Döring, 2022) to a self-sexualizing one (Hagen, 2021). In the former, "girls and women [were staged] as sexual objects for the heterosexual male spectator" (Döring, 2022, para. 1), whereas in the latter, it is the people who represent themselves in a sexualized, erotic, and sensual way (Hagen, 2021).

Self-sexualization has given rise to two currents of thought. The first sees self-sexualization as a consequence of the gender inequality that has long oppressed women (Khandis et al., 2018). On the other hand, there is no shortage of criticism of people's promiscuous and self-sexualizing attitudes (e.g., Gill, 2003; Whelehan, 2000; Williamson, 2003).

Let us briefly dwell on the first of these perspectives. Some authors argue that self-sexualization is an unmistakable expression of *sexual empowerment* (Donaghue, 2014; Thompson & Donaghue, 2014). Empowerment is ambiguous and has no unanimous definition (Glaser, 2015). We will now settle for the summary definition of the term given by Brandes and Stark (2021, para. 1): "Empowerment aims to enable people to shape their social environment and their lives themselves by using their own personal and social resources." According to Naila Kabeer (2002), empowerment is thus a source of favorable power that empowers people to self-determine. Thus, sexual empowerment is also perceived as enabling individuals to make personal decisions regarding their sexual sphere (Hagen, 2021). Self-sexualization would consequently be a structure that fits perfectly with today's neoliberal values that focus heavily on individual freedom (Donaghue, 2014). For authors adhering to sex-positive feminism, sexual freedom and its consequent display would be more important than pursuing social equality. People should experience their sexuality freely without fearing negative sanctions (Rodríguez, 2005). The sex-

positive viewpoint sees, therefore, in self-sexualization a world of positive possibilities for the female universe. By performing and experimenting with their sexuality, women show themselves as active and confident, deliberately countering the patriarchal impositions that have shackled them for a very long time (Thompson & Donaghue, 2014). This new female model, the *phallic woman* who adopts typically masculine sexual behaviors (Dreeßen, 2016), enjoys them in a lustful and carefree way (McRobbie, 2009), comes to the fore.

On the other end of the spectrum, authors who counter the sex-positive ideal do not perceive the display of femininity as a mechanism for self-determination but rather as the internalization of the heteronormative surveillance gaze (Dreeßen, 2016; McRobbie, 2009). So, while girls who self-sexualize may experience a liberating and emancipating sense, they may also be depowered (Lamb & Peterson, 2012). According to Imelda Whelehan (2000), the proliferation of sexualized images in the mass media can be interpreted as a form of "retro-sexism," i.e., a counter-response to feminist movements. By transvesting itself with ironic and pastiche content, female exhibitionism only fuels male hedonism by creating a "sexism with an alibi" (Williamson, 2003). Modern sexualization involves a purposeful commodification of one's body, reinforcing the self-supervising gaze despite showing a confident woman (Gill, 2003). "The sexual subjectification [is nothing more than] objectification in new and even more pernicious guise" (Gill, 2003, p. 105).

The discourses revolving around the terms sexualization and self-sexualization, of course, assume relevance when taking young people as the object of analysis. Primarily the social world represents an increasingly important place of interchange for adolescents (Schneider & Tokya-Seid, 2023). Online communities have rapidly become "safe spaces" where boys and girls can exchange opinions on crucial issues such as sexuality and gender identity (Hornauer, 2018). Regarding the use of social media as a point of experimentation and negotiation of one's sexuality, there are also divergent views. Playing with one's sexuality can be seen as simply and innocently experimenting and putting oneself out there (Hornauer, 2018). However, authors such as Schumacher (2015) argue that showing oneself even on social media in self-sexualizing poses only reinforces the gender stereotypes already prevalent in society. Studies such as Döring's (2020) further reinforce Jessica Schumacher's words, highlighting how women try to show themselves as pretty and sexy. Various social posts confirm what Smolak and colleagues (2014) had

already discussed, namely that girls, to look sexy, must wear makeup and provocative clothes.

2.4.1. Self-made porn and objectification

One social network, in particular, is gaining more and more space in public discussion: OnlyFans. Like all other socials OnlyFans allows its content creators to post photos and videos for musical and artistic purposes (Pryce, 2019). However, it is certainly not for its family-friendly content that the social has become world famous. Unlike all other social media platforms, OnlyFans is the only one on which it is possible to post explicit content (Hall, 2018; Nikolic, 2021), of which much is paid content that can only be viewed by followers who are willing to make a monthly subscription (Jankowicz, 2020). This feature has, over the years, mainly enticed young girls to perform in *risqué* shows to earn "easy money" (Wise, 2022b). One may refer to OnlyFans as a hybrid between social networks and pornographic sites (Hartmann, 2022). However, it is precisely the interactivity typical of socials that makes OnlyFans so beloved. The ability to message with content creators gives a sense of proximity that, for Kevin Symes (cited in Pryce, 2019, para. 5), is one of the site's greatest strengths: "[creators] are opening up a different side of themselves to people who want to invest their time and money into them." Some creators also welcome the greater intimacy promoted by OnlyFans compared to regular porn sites, an example being Australian porn actress Jenna Love. For Jenna Love: "the subscriber model offers both a level of privacy and the ability to give fans a candid glimpse into her sex life" (Pryce, 2019, para. 7). Moreover, the *onlyfanser* appreciates the fact that on the London-based site, it is possible to self-manage while avoiding the world of porn, which as is well known is far from rosy (Pryce, 2019).

The fact that so many girls are willing to show themselves in racy attitudes on social media opens the debate concerning the term *objectification*. Mistakenly, sexualization and objectification are frequently used as synonyms (Loughnan & Pacili, 2014). Sexualization can be quantified and, if particularly pronounced, can cause the sexualized person to be perceived in the minds of viewers as a mere object of pleasure (Fasoli et al., 2018; Holland & Haslam, 2013). If a person is, so to speak, *hypersexualized* (Hatton & Trautner, 2011), that is, shown naked, in a provocative pose, and with particular emphasis on areas such as the pelvis and breasts there is a risk that the person in question will be denied all mental and personal characteristics (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997;

Langton, 2009). A objectifed woman presents, according to Nussbaum (1999), distinct peculiarities:

- first, the objectified person is dispossessed of his or her personality and experience characteristics, thus denying autonomy and subjectivity.
- In the second instance, there is an instrumental characteristic: the objectified person is turned into a mere tool for one's satisfaction.
- Being perceived as mere objects causes the person to be seen as interchangeable.
- All these characteristics listed above make the person inert and violable, giving the observer the belief that he or she owns them.

As a result, girls who choose to expose themselves on social media risk being objectified by those who watch them, who may perceive them as mere shells without character or personality. Sexualization and objectification, which continue to be more widely inflicted on women than men (Ganahl et al., 2003), have been deeply analyzed in all forms of media (Fasoli et al., 2018). One of the fields in which sexualization has been studied is that of body dissatisfaction.

2.4.2. The effect of the thinness ideal and sexualization on female body dissatisfaction

According to studies conducted by the National Organization for Women (NOW; 2023) on a sample of U.S. girls, 53 percent of 13-year-old girls are dissatisfied with their bodies – an even more shocking figure concerns 17-year-old girls, whose percentage increases to 78 percent. Contributing in no small part to this is exposure to sexualizing images in the media that frequently depict women as unnaturally thin or with unattainable physical characteristics for most women (Ferguson et al., 2011; Setty, 2022). Idealized figures typical of the male gaze that can be found in any media can negatively affect women's self-esteem, causing increased body and mental state issues (Figure 12; Calogero, 2004; OMB, 2018).

Eating disorders are among the most dangerous and debilitating psychological phenomena that can result from body dissatisfaction (Stice & Shaw, 2002). Along with several other socializing factors, such as family and friends, media exposure plays a crucial role in women's bodily perceptions of themselves (Becker et al., 2004; Le Grange et al., 2009;

Figure 12: fat-shaming on social media (retrieved from: https://www.phillyvoice.com/are-fitness-transformations-form-fat-shaming/)

Ringer et al., 2006). According to the previously cited APA report (2008) and research by Harrison and Cantor (1997), contact with slimness ideals significantly contributes to body-related dissatisfaction and eating disorders in women. The American Psychological Association lists five types of eating disorders, including pica and rumination disorder, mainly affecting children or people with mental disabilities (APA, 2023e). The three manifestations that are most relevant to this research are:

- anorexia nervosa predominantly occurs in adolescent girls who voluntarily refuse to eat. The main causes that lead girls to reject food are amenorrhea (the lack of at least three menstrual cycles), fear of putting on weight, and a distorted perception of their physique (APA, 2023a).
- Bulimia nervosa, conversely, manifests itself in multiple episodes of binge eating, that is, periods in which abnormal amounts of food are eaten. These binges are usually followed by compensatory behaviors such as laxative abuse, self-inflicted vomiting, and excessive exercise (APA, 2023c).
- Finally, there is binge-eating disorder. As with bulimia nervosa, this disorder manifests itself in recurrent periods of binge eating. However, in this case, consuming vast amounts of food is not followed by inappropriate compensatory behaviors but usually results in severe distress and despair (APA, 2023b).

According to several studies (including Becker et al., 2002; Keel & Klump, 2003; MFMER, 2023), it is mainly the first two, anorexia and bulimia, that would be linked to cultural and media products. Multiple research studies have shown that the percentage of women and girls who have suffered from anorexia at any point in their lives is between 0.9 percent and 2.0 percent (Keski-Rahkonen et al., 2007; Stice & Bohon, 2012). Some studies even recognize 3 and 5 percent peaks for adolescents (Stice & Bohon, 2012; Stice et al., 2010).

The organization known as NEDA (National Eating Disorders Association) has collected some interesting data regarding bulimia. According to the data collected, the percentage of women who have had bulimia at some time would range from 1 to 1.5 percent (NEDA, 2022). Research conducted by Eric Stice and Cara Bohon in 2012 would raise these rates as high as 5.4 percent among adolescent girls.

Let us now turn to a more in-depth examination of the effect of the media on these two manifestations of eating disorders. The Nielsen Company (2023) is a globally active organization that analyzes trends affecting people's media-related habits. According to data collected by the company in the 2018 "*Nielsen Total Audience Report*," Americans spend nearly half of their time interacting with media. Thus, the population would spend as much as 10.5 hours a day using any form of media (The Nielsen Company, 2019). These data regarding the time people spend engaging with media become relevant if we relate them to other research. In 2017, Dove (the famous personal care brand) published findings regarding women's body satisfaction and media. Approximately 7 out of 10 women recognize the idealized image conveyed by the media as the primary source of

their body dissatisfaction (Dove, 2017). The studies involving adolescent girls and social media are most interesting. Almost all girls (95 percent) would spend a good portion of their time checking the comments sections of posts, constantly reading negative critiques of the beauty and physique of the person depicted (Fardouly et al., 2015). In addition, many girls feel considerable pressure from their friends regarding their physical appearance. Hence, causing them to post photos in which they appear cool, sexy, and carefree (Common Sense Media, 2015). It follows that it is mainly girls who spend more time on social media who have internalized the societally imposed ideal of slenderness and thus assume attitudes of self-surveillance (Fardouly et al., 2015; Perloff, 2014; see also "*Heavy viewers*" in Gerbner, 1972).

The numerous research studies cited above seem to leave no room for any doubt that the media play a role that should not be underestimated in what concerns women's self-image, especially about their physical appearance. However, some researchers do not see the media world as the main culprit. Proof of this would be that many people are dissatisfied with their bodies but do not develop eating disorders related to the ideal of thinness proposed by the media (Ferguson et al., 2011). According to Levine and Murnan (2009), the media should be considered more as a variable risk factor and not a causal source of risk. It is inferred that media exposure would not cause body dissatisfaction but rather a "speed-up."

In the past chapters, we have discussed the female figure in the media at length. At this point, however, we need to ask the same question we have already asked in the first chapter of this dissertation.

2.4.3. Again: What about men?

From 1999 to 2009, the number of men hospitalized for eating disorders increased by 53% (Zhao & Encinosa, 2011). For men, exposure to images, which show a hard-to-achieve ideal of beauty, also significantly impacts body perception (Harrison & Cantor, 1997). However, male body dissatisfaction and the relative influence of the media on it is a poorly studied issue (Magdala Peixoto Labre, 2002). Despite this, there is tangible evidence to show that the male body in the media is gradually becoming more muscular, inducing greater body dissatisfaction (Magdala Peixoto Labre, 2002).

From an early age, children point to the mesomorphic body (characterized by an average, well-proportioned build) as the one to achieve. Endomorphic (fatter) and ectomorphic (thinner) types are indicated as less desirable (Mishkind et al., 1986). As a result, the V-shape, typical of the muscular man "characterized by well-developed chest and arm muscles and wide shoulders tapering down to a narrow waist," has become widespread (Mishkind et al., 1986, p. 547). It must be said, however, that this male build, considered ideal, did not originate in recent centuries but has much older roots. It can be found in most of the statues of ancient Greek and Roman societies (Grogan, 1999), only to disappear until the 1980s.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the focus on the male body returned to vogue, as evidenced by the increasingly frequent depictions of half-naked or naked men in much Western media. The men who were possible to see immortalized in the advertisements of that period were usually very muscular and were frequently accompanied by thin women (Grogan, 1999). The hypermasculine appearance of many of the men featured in the media of the time was made possible by the development and use of anabolic drugs, which made men "more masculine than masculine" (Pope et al., 2000, p. 36). Another peculiar example analyzed regarding the increasing male musculature concerns the world of action figures. In a study conducted by Pope and colleagues (1999), it could be ascertained how "*G.I. Joe*" or "*Star Wars*" models featured bodybuilder physiques and showed more prominent shoulders and chests than previously released action figures. For what concerns the world of cinema, an appreciation for pumped-up actors could be ascertained, as evidenced by a study from which it was found that in the

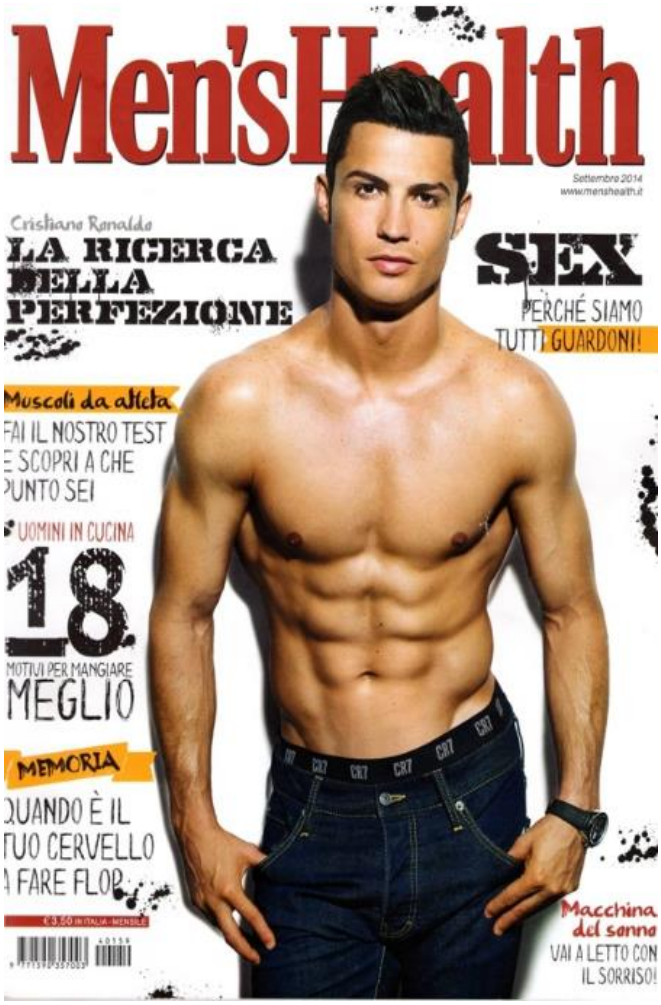


Figure 13: Italian Men's Health cover featuring Cristiano Ronaldo (retrieved from: http://www.pila-tescouture.it/2016/09/28/da-means-health-settembre-2014/)

top 10 favorite actors of male teenagers were many action heroes with sculpted physiques (e.g., Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone, and Wesley Snipes; Figure 19; Distefan et al., 1999). In addition, exposure to an increasingly muscular male ideal has caused an exorbitant increase in the popularity of dietary supplements, gyms, and weight training machines (Kalorama Information, L.L.C., 1999; Magdala Peixoto Labre, 2002).

Despite these statistics showing that the body has no small influence on the male imagination, many men still think that physical appearance is a female concern (Hervik & Fasting, 2016). It is, therefore, peculiar that magazines specializing in male appearance articles have consistently increased their earnings and distribution (Lawrence, 2016). A prime example is the renowned Men's Health magazine. Men's Health was the first monthly magazine to focus not only on men's fitness and health but also on their beauty: "each month, the cover sports a fabulous, rippling man with (a) no shirt, (b) a wet shirt, or (c) a shirt in the process of being removed" (Figure 13; Puri, 1988, p. 40). Men who appear on the covers of Men's Health usually have a well-defined outward appearance: they present (a) a body with little fat, which emphasizes a broad chest and a well-sculpted six-pack (Lawrence, 2016; Magdala Peixoto Labre, 2005; Ricciardelli et al., 2010); (b) they are predominantly of Caucasian ethnicity; (c) their heads are covered with thick hair; (d) their chests are hairless; and finally, (e) it can be seen that their cheekbones and jaws are particularly pronounced (Lawrence, 2016). Another typical feature of the magazine is the content that, as briefly announced before, does not focus on fitness or physical activity, but through commands such as "Lose your gut!", spurs its readers to shape their bodies according to the images that are presented in the pages (Lawrence, 2016; Magdala Peixoto Labre, 2005; Ricciardelli et al., 2010).

Naturally, significant differences exist in the ideal shape of men's and women's bodies. First, women need to tone their bodies and focus mainly on the lower part (thighs, hips, and legs), while men should aim for a muscular body shaped mainly in the upper part (shoulders and abs; Markula, 2017). However, there are striking similarities between female and male physical ideals, including thinness, to name one. Another prerogative the two ideals share is that accepting socially imposed conformity results in additional financial success (Alexander, 2003). In this regard, Ricciardelli and colleagues (2010) noted that the muscular, perfect men depicted in magazines such as *Men's Health* were in positions of power and control (Ricciardelli et al., 2010). However, the most critical fact that unites the two models is that both are difficult to achieve and somewhat unrealistic, causing many people to experience symptoms of shame and stigma (Markula, 2017).

That said, one should not analyze the female and male ideals of slimness solely in a negative light. Indeed, images of sculpted and toned physiques may entice people to join the gym or engage in other forms of sports (Magdala Peixoto Labre, 2002). However, it should be acknowledged that for many people, aspiring to the physical appearance promoted by the media is a most unrealistic, if not impossible, goal, which can cause psychological problems related to physical appearance. These concerns can result in unhealthy behaviors such as excessive physical activity and disproportionate use of steroids and dietary supplements (Magadala Peixoto Labre, 2005). More and more men are presenting some form of dissatisfaction related to their physical appearance (estimated 25-40%; Newport Institute, 2022). As with girls, it is mainly younger boys who suffer from exposure to idealized images, going on to increase their body dissatisfaction. Research conducted on college students showed that body dissatisfaction was exceptionally high after viewing images of idealized men (Arbour & Ginis, 2006).

These body-related concerns can result in eating disorders, which were recognized to be on the rise as early as the end of the last millennium (Braun et al., 1999) and continue to increase today (NEDA, 2022). The numbers involving eating disorders in males are lower than in females, but they prove worrisome. For example, 0.3 percent of men suffer or have suffered from anorexia, and 0.5 percent, on the other hand, for bulimia. Reaching as high as 2% are males suffering from binge-eating disorder (NEDA, 2022); this means that 10 million U.S. men suffer or have suffered from an eating disorder in their lifetime (Markula, 2017). Another fact that makes these numbers highly concerning is that eating disorders rank second in death rates for psychological disorders, surpassed only by opiate addiction (Chesney et al., 2014). This fact has an alarming impact on the male population, frequently diagnosed with eating disorders with severe delays. In part, because there is still a widely held notion that eating disorders affect only women (Mond et al., 2014).

2.4.4. Brief digression about obese people's representation in movies and media

> In the amazing book *Moby Dick* by the author Herman Melville, the author recounts his story of being at sea. In the first part of his book, the author, calling himself Ishmael, is in a small sea-side town and he is sharing a bed with a man named Queequeg […] and I felt saddest of all when I read the boring chapters

that were only descriptions of whales, because I knew that the author was just trying to save us from his own sad story, just for a little while.

– Taken from the paper written by Ellie in the movie "*The Whale*" (Aronofsky, 2022).

Darren Aronofsky's masterpiece "*The Whale*" was released in theaters in 2022. The film,

Figure 14: Oscar winning actor Brendan Fraser as Charlie (retrieved from: https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/awards/story/2023-02-15/whale-makeup-prosthetics-blaze-new-technology-trails)

based on the play of the same name written by Samuel D. Hunter (2012), tells the story of Charlie, a college professor who lives in a state of self-enclosure and is trying to end his life by bingeing on food. He is doing this because he lost the love of his life. In the plot, we will learn about other characters such as Liz, the nurse who cares for Charlie, Thomas, an adept of the New Life cult; and most importantly, Ellie, the protagonist's daughter, with whom he has had no contact for eight years. However, it is not the plot we will focus on in this paragraph. It is the character played masterfully by Brendan Fraser (winner of multiple awards for his leading role: including Best Actor at the Academy Awards and Critics' Choice Awards; Figure 14) that has prompted multiple criticisms. However, the objections that have been leveled against Fraser's performance are not related to his acting abilities but to the fat suit worn during the movie's filming. The fact that the plot focuses on a character suffering from a very severe form of obesity being

played by an actor who does not have the same characteristics has been perceived by many viewers and some insiders as a glaring case of fat shaming (see for example Stewart, 2022; Head, 2023; West, 2023). Some authors assume that director Darren Aronofsky gave the audience a cliché character with whom the audience could empathize with. Author Lindy West writes in *The Guardian*:

> People respond positively to *The Whale* because it confirms their biases about what fat people are like (gross, sad) and why fat people are fat (trauma, munchies) and allows them to feel benevolent yet superior. It's a basic dopamine hit, reifying thin people's place at the top of the social hierarchy. Look at me, Mom! I'm doing empathy on the big greasy monsters! (West, 2023, para. 7).

Although I disagree with this examination (and I am not the only one, I recommend: DuFer, 2023) because, in my opinion, it is too reductive and does not capture the true meaning of the work, of which obesity is only a pretext. However, it is undeniable that obese people are frequently stigmatized in the media (Whyte, 2010), harming public opinion, which often harbors negative biases against obese people (Lie, 2010; Puhl & Brownell, 2008). According to some studies, these biases are, in fact, attributable to the influence of the media and how overweight people are portrayed in it (Greenberg et al., 2003). In movies and TV series, obese characters are usually comic sidekicks or are lonely and sad figures (Whyte, 2010). Just think of the endless examples of comedy and adventure movies aimed at teenagers that contain the trope of the fat and goofy best friend who gorges on snacks (e.g., Chunk from "*The Goonies*," Fat Kid from "*Monster Squad*," and Albert from "*Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids*"). Rare are the cases in which the overweight character plays the role of a protagonist's love interest or in which he or she plays a prestigious role (Whyte, 2010).

Despite this, nowadays, the representations of obese and overweight people in movies, cartoons, and TV series have changed a lot (somewhat like what has happened with the LGBTQIA+ population from the turn of the millennium to the present), showing less stereotypical figures and more diverse roles (Whyle, 2010). A good example is Spinnerella (heroine of the animated universe "*She-Ra and the Princesses of Power*"; Figure 15), an overweight superheroine characterized by immense courage, strength, and beauty. Mention can also be made of Carmen Wade (Figure 16), a character from "*GLOW*," a TV series that made the representation of different body types and ethnicities its strong point. With the media's help, body-positive movements are rightly achieving great goals, reducing the stigma against people with nonconforming bodies. However, it is essential to note that the media must maintain the prerogative of educating people about healthy lifestyles (Whyte, 2010).

After this brief examination of the representation of the female and male body, it is only fair to give due space to what is considered the "third genders," or non-binary people, and how they are portrayed in film and media products.

Figure 15: Spinnerella (retrieved from: https://she-raandtheprincessesofpower.fandom.com/wiki/Spinnerella)

Figure 16: Carmen from GLOW (retrieved from: https://glow.fandom.com/wiki/Carmen_Wade)

2.4.5. Non-binary people in cinema

After finishing filming for her first appearance in the TV series "*Dirty Sexy Money*" (Wright, 2007-2009), trans actress Candis Cayne invites some family members and friends to her home to watch the episode together. In the series, Cayne plays a trans character, and when she first appears on screen, she realizes that the character's voice has been lowered to sound more masculine. According to the actress, it was the worst moment of her life (Cabrio, 2021a; Feder, 2020). Actress Jen Richards recounts in the documentary "*Disclosure*" (Feder, 2020) that she was rejected several times for different jobs in which she was supposed to play trans women (which she is) because, according to producers, "too little trans." These are just two examples demonstrating stigma among film studios and TV series toward trans and non-binary people (Cabrio, 2021a).

For many trans people, it has remained particularly traumatizing how the media has often portrayed the exposure or revelation of a trans person's past in works (Cabrio, 2021a). In his chapter on trans figures in films, Pietro Cabrio (2021a) lists some examples of film works in which a trans person's private parts are exposed to another person for the first time. For example, in "*The Crying Game*" (Neil, 1992), which tells the love story between an Irish terrorist and the widow of a British soldier (Dil, Figure 17), when the girl exposes her biological sex to the protagonist, he reacts by vomiting.

The same reaction could be seen in cartoons, such as in the episode of "*Family Guy*" titled "*Quagmire's Dad*" (MacFarlane, 2010). In the episode, Brian falls in love with a

Figure 17: Jaye Davidson as Dil (left) and in real life (right; retrieved from: https://consent.yahoo.com/v2/collectConsent?sessionId=3_cc-session_62b12669-848c-4d06-a575-306d1c6b4929)

blond, buxom trans woman (who is, unbeknownst to him, Quagmire's father). However, when Brian discovers Mrs. Quagmire's past, he begins an interminable sequence of vomiting. It does not end there. In the same episode, Brian compares Ida to a stalker because, according to his words, they should warn when one of *them* moves into the neighborhood. Moreover, in another scene, Lois throws out food prepared by Mrs. Quagmire. For many magazines, the episode is offensive and transphobic (GLAAD, 2010; Jokic, 2022), calling MacFarlane's actions "slap-in-face ignorance" (Johnson, 2010, para. 5). Over the years, Seth MacFarlane (creator of "*Family Guy*") has returned to the subject several times, calling the episode as, "probably the most sympathetic portrayal of a transsexual character that has ever been on television" (Jokic, 2022, para. 2). Furthermore, according to the series creator:

> the intent of the Family Guy episode was to show that Quagmire's father was still a war hero, and still someone that he could look up to and respect [...] It's more about individual moments and individual jokes (MacFarlane cited in Jokic, 2022, para. 7-8).

Summarizing a speech by Nick Adams featured in the docufilm "*Disclosure*" (Feder, 2020), it can be said that Hollywood has taught the public the "most appropriate" reaction to have when one sees the genitals of a trans person: vomit.

As with much of the cultural phenomena we have analyzed in this thesis, there have been apparent steps forward in portraying trans people in media and films. Depictions of nonbinary and trans people with multifaceted personalities who move away from the typical speck have significantly increased. The trend that made transpositions of trans people less transphobic and consequently realistic began with the most famous work created from a trans perspective: "*The Matrix*" (Wachowski & Wachowski, 1999). Many years after the film's release, both Wachowski sisters began their transition journey, so much so that many trans people began to see the film as an allegory of the trans experience. A shining example is the color of the pill Neo must ingest to enter the real world, which is red, exactly like the estrogen-based pills found in the 1990s (Cabrio, 2021a). These theories were later confirmed by Lilly Wachowski herself, who said in an interview, "I'm glad this interpretation came out: that was the original intention, but the world was not ready yet" (BBC Newsbeat, 2020, para. 1).

However, it still remains problematic for many people that although the characters are no longer mere stereotypical caricatures, they are primarily played by cisgender actors and actresses (Cabrio, 2021a; Reitz, 2017). In the previous chapter, we discussed Lili

Elbe, the Danish artist who underwent several surgeries in the 1930s to complete her male-to-female transition. In a famous cinematic transposition of her story, cisgender male actor Eddie Redmayne was chosen to play the artist ("*The Danish Girl*"; Hooper, 2015). The problem lies in the fact that casting actors and actresses who are not trans people in roles reinforces the idea that trans people's gender is not defined or authentic and that they cannot define themselves as "real women" or "real men." Because underneath, biological sex is always hidden (Cabrio, 2021a; Reitz, 2017). Nevertheless, as we mentioned, with the increased visibility that the LGBTQIA+ community has gained in recent years; awareness has grown of how to represent trans and non-binary people more fairly and truthfully. For example, some actresses, including Halle Berry and Scarlett Johansson, have turned down roles of trans men offered to them (Cabrio, 2021a).

The media must represent trans individuals more accurately and less stereotypically because, as multiple studies have shown (Brown, 2022; Minkin & Brown, 2021), much of the population does not personally know a trans person. Therefore, the stereotypes and information people gather around the trans world come mainly from the media. The same is also true for trans people themselves, who look to media products for role models to inspire them (Cabrio, 2021a). In addition, it should be noted that finding reference points to follow is considerably more difficult for trans men since, even for the trans population, the axiom applies that women are shown more frequently (Feder, 2020).

Above, we discussed the issue of body satisfaction in the cis population; it is only fair to examine that of the trans community. In general, members of the LGBTQIA+ community are proportionately more likely to suffer from eating disorders than heterosexual and cisgender individuals; these impacts especially non-binary and transgender persons (NEDA, 2022; Parker & Harriger, 2020). For example, research conducted on a sample of U.S. college students showed that it is primarily transgender students who suffer from eating disorders (Diemer et al., 2015). Similar to what happens with the straight and cis population, trans people also base their image on the figures they see depicted in the media. A study conducted by Gordon and colleagues (2019) highlights how adolescents in the LGBTQIA+ community measure themselves against the beauty ideals they find on social media, LGBTQIA+ webpages, and magazines.

The past chapters have explicitly examined gender and how it is malleable and changes shape over time. In addition, an attempt has been made to paint as accurate a picture as possible of how gender is transposed in the media, especially to the body, one of the "places" that most highlight gender identity. However, this thesis does not set out to study

gender as a term in its own right. This research aims to place gender in relation to Japanese comics. It is essential, therefore, to take a trip to Japan to discuss gender from a Japanese perspective so that the chapters devoted to manga can be more easily understood.

2.5. Wrapping the gender issue and beauty standards up

In the first two chapters of this dissertation, an attempt has been made to explain the gender issue as thoroughly as possible. We started with the definition of the term, which encompasses all the social and cultural differences that differentiate being a woman and being a man (Connell, 2011). Gender roles are an issue at least as old as humanity itself. From the time of cave societies, tasks between women and men have been divided, leaving men with the duty of procuring food and women with the care of children (Russo, 2021b). The division of roles on a biological basis also accompanied the discourse in antiquity and the Middle Ages and then became an integral part of the industrial social structure (Connell, 2011). Fordist society was primarily based on the rigid division of domestic roles: men were responsible for bringing bread to the table. At the same time, women had to take care of the children and household care (Ruspini, 2017).

However, with the expansion of studies concerning the topic of gender and increasing awareness, it is pretty evident that the man-woman dichotomy is nowadays at least dated (Connell, 2011). Indeed, in the first chapter, speaking for example of different sexual orientations, especially of third genders, it has become necessary to broaden the continuum dividing women and men (Sabatini, 1994). As a result, the idea that each person moves through this nebula that divides the roles of women and men, slowly constructing his or her own gender identity, came to the fore.

Gender identity is not just "what I like" regarding sexuality but is a far more complex concept. In this regard, the cultural, social, and ethnic influences that characterize the environment in which the individual socializes and grows up should not be underestimated (Bottomley, 1992). Constructing one's gender identity resembles a mosaic composed of multiple tiles. Assembling a gender identity congruent with one's personality is one of the most time-consuming developmental tasks (see Havighurst, 1952) that can sometimes create dissatisfaction and concern. As Professor Elisabetta Ruspini (2017) reminds us, it is possible to introduce people to "suitable" gender roles even before they are born. Since birth, the individual is confronted with the most appropriate expectations and behaviors to be accepted by society (Lorber, 1990). For example, boys will be

expected to behave more assertively and competitively, while girls will be taught to act more meekly and be inclined toward caring (Connell, 2011).

To summarize, the socialization and expectations that mark gender roles can be defined as social constructs (Bordo, 1993) or narratives by which communities form models for their social reality (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009). As with most social constructs, gender is also mutable, dynamic and changes over time (Oxford Reference, 2023). Just think of the history of pink, which was initially considered masculine and later became the quintessential feminine color (Impedovo, 2021).

Along with socialization and cultural factors, sexual orientation is vital in constructing one's gender identity. Sexual orientation is what an individual directs both physical and emotional desire toward (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2023). The increased awareness regarding different sexual orientations has further broadened the spectrum of gender identity by creating a myriad of possible "combinations" (Siviero, 2021a). Moreover, one cannot forget how perceptions towards homosexuality have changed. For example, in ancient Greece (De Leo, 2021) and feudal Japan, homosexuality was considered a normal social fact, if not a standard phase of growing up (McLelland, 2005a). Nowadays, in the Western universe, homosexuality is generally accepted or at least tolerated. In many countries (predominantly African and Arab), sexual orientations other than straight are outlawed (Human Dignity Trust, 2023b).

Nevertheless, the division of power between men and women remains more or less unchanged. Much of the monetary and corporate capital still resides in the hands of the male gender. Not only that, power relations can be seen prominently in numerous court cases and everyday life (Connell, 2011). A striking example of how power relations are still present and overpowering is that of Mahsa Amini and her fellow fighters in Iran. Gender differences also manifest in other ways, such as in the symbols permeating our societies (Connell, 2011). Language, with its gender differences, is a shining example.

A distinguishing feature of power relations in patriarchal societies is that it is not only women who are oppressed but men who are directly victimized. Socialization and relationships with peers allow men to "become men" (Ruspini, 2017). The rules of behavior that males adhere to to be accepted in the group can be summarized in the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Males who do not fit the standards imposed by society suffer the consequences. Just think of the constant homophobic harassment that members of the gay community are forced to endure (Messerschmidt, 2004).

Gender is, therefore, a social construct that is created through socialization and the milieu in which a person finds himself or herself. However, one cannot forget the decisive role played by the individual's biological characteristics, their "sex" (APA, 2023f). A person's biological characteristics are evidenced in the body, where gender identity becomes particularly evident. According to Susan Bordo (1993), however, beauty ideals and representation of the perfect body would also be primarily defined by society and community expectations (Capecchi, 2006). We have extensively discussed how the ideal of slenderness and youthfulness has propagated from the 1960s to the present. If maintained, standards can make life easier (Foucault, 1976b). The self-regulation that people impose on themselves is consequently the most modern and effective form of power (Foucault, 1975), which can create severe forms of malaise in people. The most apparent form of body-related malaise is pronounced in bodily dysphoria, which can lead to unhealthy eating and not inconsiderable psychological problems (Stice & Shaw, 2002).

Of course, mass media is the primary source of popularizing beauty standards. Through the media, not only is the ideal body, whether female or male, propagated, but there is also a noticeable increase in sexualizing content (Hagen, 2021). Feona Attwood (2006), one of the leading scholars in the field of sex in the media, states that sex has entered our daily lives to such an extent that we cannot escape it. A phenomenon that, in the long run, has led to a culture of self-sexualization (Hagen, 2021). We have, therefore, moved away from the male gaze introduced by Berger (1972), which proposed the person sexualized by others, to one where people show themselves promiscuously of their own free will (Hagen, 2021). Some young men and women, measuring themselves against the images they see in the media, may feel embarrassed because they do not conform to the representations they are confronted with (Stice & Shaw, 2002).

Living in a media-saturated society, with images, videos, and music directly (or more ambiguously) telling us how to behave or look, it is most typical to think that people are influenced by them (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). The question arises about the differences in media communication of gender roles and the ideal body in other countries. As this thesis focuses on gender representation in manga, the most famous and exported Japanese media product (Camera & Duran, 2007), it is only fair to turn our gaze to Japanese gender ideologies. First, it is essential to note that the over-saturated Japanese media production has as its focus content that reminds men and women of their roles in society (McLaren, 2021). Moreover, according to some scholars (see Borggren, 2021; Napier, 2005), Japanese culture is especially vision-oriented compared to other cultures.

According to Susan Napier (2005), Japan would be traditionally "pictocentric," given its writing composed of ideograms. Therefore, it is natural to think that the influence of media is even more significant in Japan, given its importance and immense spread in the country.

Accordingly, the next chapter will investigate gender issues in Japan by analyzing how media products and society direct one's behavior and gender roles in the Rising Sun archipelago.

3. Gender in Japan

In future sections, we will briefly analyze gender issues in Japan without going into too much detail since this research aims to answer how gender is represented in manga and how Western readers perceive this. However, to make some attitudes and behaviors of characters within comics made in Japan more understandable, it is only fair to explicate some notions regarding the structures that "govern" Japanese gender issues. At the core of gender issues in Japan is the perennial dichotomy between work and home life, which has, since the last century, generated a considerable discrepancy between women and men (Nemoto, 2016).

3.1. The Breadwinner and the Housewife: domestic life in Japan

The Meiji era (1868-1912) was not only marked by Japan's evident rapprochement with Western culture, a massive cultural and infrastructural modernization of the country, and the introduction of a constitution but also by a reconfiguration of what "the family" was to be and especially the role of women (Ezawa, 2021; Koyama, 2014; Nolte & Hastings, 1991; Uno, 2005). The cornerstone of this way of thinking was the ideology of "*ryōsai kenbo*" (良妻賢母; good wife, wise mother), which required women to contribute to the welfare of the nation by looking after children, husbands, and the home (Uno, 1993). The goal, then, was to generate a female social class of "educated mothers" who would contribute to the growth of Japan by developing a generation of "superior" children (Koyama, 1991). As with gender roles in the West, beginning in 1873, *ryōsai kenbo* was taught to schoolchildren. Alongside notions of math, reading, and writing, children were introduced to their appropriate gender roles (Nolte & Hastings, 1991).

After World War II, family life in Japan changed dramatically. On paper, at least. The constitution enacted in 1947, ensured equal rights for men and women, as made explicit in Article 14: "All citizens are equal under the law, and there shall be no discrimination in political, economic or social relations on account of race, creed, sex, social status or family origin." However, as we will see in the next chapter, this did not undo gender inequalities in society. The most glaring example of this is the 1986 "Equal Employment Opportunity Law" (EEOL), which made male-female segregation in the workplace legal by generating two distinct pathways: one aimed at prominent careers for men (*sōgoshoku*) and one for women of the clerical gender (*ippanshoku*). We will discuss the Equal Employment Opportunity Act in more detail later (Yamada, 2013).

Coming back to the discussion of family life, it is evident that the composition of the Japanese family has also altered extensively since the postwar period, just as perceptions toward married life have considerably changed. It can be said with due certainty that about 80 percent of single women and men in Japan perceive marriage as a restriction of their freedom. This axiom is further emphasized by the Japanese female population associating becoming a mother with self-sacrifice (Nakano, 2014). Male perceptions toward married life have also changed conspicuously in the last century. Many single men in Japan with regular jobs view married life as a constraint on their autonomy, which is already restricted by grueling work schedules (MHLW, 2014). Further is compounded by the fact that married men contribute very little to household chores and childcare (Hertog & Kan, 2019; Tstutsui, 2015). A fact that generates great stress in husbands because they believe they should participate more in domestic life but are prevented from doing so by their constant work commitments (Taga, 2017). The three mentioned examples are just two manifestations of how Japanese domestic life has changed. However, they retain some commonalities with the prewar and Meiji-era ideal family model.

While in the early 1900s, the typical Japanese family consisted of four or more children, with the legalization of abortion in 1948, the average number of children per household plummeted dramatically (Norgren, 2001). From the 1960s onward, it became usual for the family to consist of a married couple with two children (Ezawa, 2021); this had obvious repercussions on the drastic decline in births in Japan, which from the 1970s to 2015 fell from an average of 2.13 to 1.45 per woman (MHLW, various years). As the composition of households has changed, the ideology of *ryōsai kenbo* has also lost abundant appeal, although not entirely (Uno, 1993). In fact, for much of Japanese society, the family to aspire to was (and to a large extent still is) one consisting of a "salaried" husband with a stable white-collar job in a large company and a professional homemaker woman who takes full-time care of the children and spouse (Vogel, 1963). In addition, a thought shared by the Japanese community was that children's educational success depended on their mothers. So, women were not only expected to take care of the family but also to contribute actively to the schooling of their offspring (Hendry, 1993; Vogel, 1978).

The family consisting of a salaryman and his homemaker wife was frequently associated with affluence and modernity, maintaining a certain appeal even nowadays (Goldstein-Gideoni, 2012). As briefly mentioned, this model, antiquated from a Western perspective, has yet to lose appeal. The family consisting of a salaryman and his homemaker wife

was frequently associated with affluence and modernity, maintaining a certain appeal even nowadays (Goldstein-Gideoni, 2012). For evidence of this, one can cite the work of Emma Cook (2014, p. 38): "[Women] made it clear that while they might date a man in irregular employment, they would not marry or live with him unless he found stable work, regardless of their feelings." Indeed, precarious or irregular work is perceived as a sign of irresponsibility, *Moratorium Ningen*, meaning a childhood that is not fully completed (Okonogi, 1981). Moreover, many young Japanese women admit that their families would not accept marrying a man with precarious work (Genda & Hoff, 2005). Despite this, work remains an integral part of the lives of most working-class women (Kondo, 1990; Roberts, 1994). Furthermore, it is precisely women's working lives that we will discuss in the next section.

3.2. Work in Japan

3.2.1. Life between work and family: the dichotomy of women's life in Japan

A law introduced by the Japanese government in 1986 was mentioned in the previous paragraph. The Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL) provided for the equal and fair employment treatment of men and women. It was enacted because, before that year, it was challenging for women to establish themselves in the world of work because of the limited opportunities available. One of the main reasons why women were not hired was because managers of large companies assumed that sooner or later, their employees would leave their jobs after the birth of a child (Ogasawara, 1998). Although the law has brought undisputed improvements, female segregation in the Japanese workplace remains integral.

The Japanese world of work continues to be particularly unequal, even when put in relation to other East Asian countries, in which wives do almost all the domestic work (Kan & Hertog, 2017). To prove the previous statement, one can analyze the data collected by the Economist in 2017. The famous British magazine ranked Japan as the second worst economy for a working mother. The wage gap is almost double the OECD average, forcing many women to give up work paths that are already difficult due to the obligations of caring for and maintaining the family (Hertog & Kan, 2019). Therefore, many married women are forced to rely on their husband's income for childcare (Hertog, 2021). Research conducted by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare in 2015 showed that only recently has the number of women who give up their employment once they have their first child decreased.

Nevertheless, only one-third of Japanese mothers have steady employment (IPSS, 2010). Through the policies of former Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, there was an attempt to emphasize the role of working women, seeking to boost them into positions of government and corporate responsibility. It soon became apparent, however, that these policies were primarily aimed at elite, highly educated women with ample social and economic capital at their disposal (Dalton, 2017). Women from the lower classes who want to enter the workforce are forced to perform like a salaryman while handling all the household tasks because they have little help from their husbands (MHLW, 2015). As a result, combining marriage and work remains a mirage for most Japanese women (Rosenbluth, 2007).

3.2.2. From man enslaved to the company to new forms of masculinity

In Japan, hegemonic masculinity-i.e., the most coveted and socially desirable masculinity-is represented by the white-collar worker in a large corporation, to which he is highly devoted and to which he devotes most if not all, of his working life (Cook, 2021; Roberson & Suzuki, 2003). Usually, the Japanese employee's life is characterized by very long working hours that prevent him from actively participating in family life. It is precisely against this workaholic lifestyle away from the family that many young Japanese are rebelling (Roberson & Suzuki, 2003). As confirmed by Aya Ezawa (2021), it can be said that the woman-man dichotomy that permeates Japanese society affects both women and men negatively.

Japanese scholarly literature since the early 2000s has increasingly focused on alternative and subordinate forms of experiencing masculinity (Cook, 2021; Roberson & Suzuki, 2003). Assuming that the salaryman is still the most coveted form of masculinity, the authors have focused much on the relationship between productivity and masculinity (Frühstück & Walthall, 2011).

Nowadays in Japan, expectations of masculinity have changed somewhat and extended beyond the workplace to areas such as intimacy, sex, and married life, as well as family life (Ishii-Kuntz, 2003, 2015; Mizukoshi et al., 2016; Nakatani, 2006). Among these alternative forms of masculinity that oppose the hegemony of the salaryman is the "*Ikumen*," men who prefer to devote themselves to domestic tasks (Charlebois, 2017). Being *ikumen* does not necessarily go to the exclusion of productivity, but it indeed represents a shift in what was the perspective of being male until a few decades ago. Indeed, it was

largely unthinkable for Japanese men to spend much of their time at home, devoting themselves to raising their offspring (Cook, 2021).

Moreover, there have been significant changes in male behaviors (Cook, 2021). Among the many authors to have analyzed these changes is Itō Kimio (1996), who points out that being a man is no longer just about assertiveness and displaying physical and financial strength. Indeed, there are more and more "soft-hearted" men. An excellent example of this is pop icons that present a softer and less masculinity. Many Japanese popular and cultural icons (think of boybands) present themselves as sensitive, gentle, and generally give a sweet and approachable self-image (Glasspool, 2012). Moreover, as we will see in the next chapter, the sweet and gentle man has become a prerogative of many Japanese comics aimed at younger female audiences.

Another peculiarity, often associated with new forms of masculinity in Japan, is low assertiveness, especially in the sexual sphere (Martorella, 2007). In East Asia, masculinity and gender roles are under-explored areas. Usually, for East Asian communities, being male is inevitably linked to sexuality (Lin et al., 2017). Sex has always been a crucial topic in Japanese culture, considering the act as something therapeutic and necessary for both men and women. Proof of this can be seen in the countless sex-themed depictions dating back to the Edo era (early 17th century; Ala, 2019; Martorella, 2007). During the Tokugawa era, even male homosexuality was perceived "as a masculine and even masculinizing practice" (McLelland, 2000, p. 24), which was part of a young individual's growth path (McLelland, 2003, 2005a, 2011). The Meiji era, however, drastically changed the perception of sex in Japan, demonizing it: "“[T]he issue of sex, both hetero- and homosexual, was seen as a potentially damaging distraction from which a young man needed protection" (McLelland, 2000, p. 24). This view has been drastically reshaped in modern Japan, coming remarkably close to that of the Edo period. Nowadays, men who are not interested in marriage, or more generally in coitus per se, are seen as problematic (Cook, 2021).

In this brief analysis of the domestic and working life of the Japanese population, one can encounter all the contradictions that distinguish the Japanese archipelago. Indeed, (from a Western perspective) social life is marked by a clash-always between the modern and the backward (Ficocelli, 2019). Among the issues discussed in the previous lines, it could be ascertained that many women prefer to indulge in housework rather than pursue a successful working career (Hertog, 2021). Another characteristic we call old-fashioned is the workaholic life that much of the male population still intends to pursue (Cook,

2021). However, as can be seen from the multiple forms of alternative masculinity that are emerging, there is an evident willingness on the part of males to rebel against the non-stop life of salarymen (Ezawa, 2021). Of course, the struggle against cultural hegemony does not stop only at work life, but as we have seen in previous chapters, the body is also a thriving "battlefield" in which to move.

3.3. Beauty ideals in Japanese media

The following lines will explore the main differences between Western and Japanese aesthetic standards. While, as mentioned earlier, a slender, almost androgynous male is perceived as more desirable in Japan (Inagaki, 1973), the ideal female body also differs significantly (Dale, 2021). The kawaii aesthetic of a sweet, almost "helpless" female appearance is coveted in Japan and inevitably clashes with Western ideals (Kinsella, 1995).

It is difficult, therefore, to deny noticeable cultural differences between beauty ideals (cf. Pollock, 1995; Swami, 2015). However, it should not be forgotten that we live in a globalized world heavily influenced by Western media (Swami, 2021). Consequently, one might wonder if these differences are still as pronounced today as they were decades or hundreds of years ago.

3.3.1. Beauty ideals around the world

According to evolutionary psychologist David Buss (1999), physical attraction would be a timeless cross-cultural given law. Such a claim suggests that beauty standards are a biological rather than a cultural fact. However, in the past few chapters (and as we will see later), this statement would seem somewhat outdated or incorrect, although Western cultural influence in much of the world's media cannot be underestimated (Swami, 2021).

Let us proceed step by step. Beauty and its relative perception are themes analyzed in much of the world, an example being Pollock's (1995) anthropological study of South Pacific communities. In South Pacific societies, fatness is associated with high status, wealth, and authority. Even more critical, obesity is considered appreciable, especially in women, because it is a symptom of femininity and sexuality. The accumulation of body fat has such desirability that people of high status (both women and men) deliberately take vast doses of food before marriage. As Viren Swami (2015) notes, desired fattening

is not unique to Pacific communities but can be found in numerous societies around the globe. In Western society, wanting to gain weight would seem paradoxical, if not even problematic, or a symptom of some pathology. Thus, cultural differences related to the body are highlighted, but as noted several times before: are these divergences still present in today's globalized world?

Cross-cultural differences regarding the ideals of attractiveness would be less pronounced, as shown by several studies of different Western and non-Western urban communities (Swami & Tovée, 2005; Swami et al., 2007). The International Body Project (Swami et al., 2010) further highlights how in recent years, there has been a kind of homogenization of slenderness as a cardinal principle of what should be considered "beautiful." The research on a sample of nearly 7,500 participants from 26 countries showed that despite differences in women's body sizes, thinness was ideal in all urban sites surveyed. Nevertheless, when moving away from the cities and countries of higher socioeconomic status, it was noticeable that participants idealized more shapely bodies (Nicolau et al., 2008; Tovée et al., 2006).

It is fair to ask why cultural differences, which were very pronounced until a few decades ago, have narrowed considerably in recent years. According to many scholars (see Brumberg, 1998; Calogero et al., 2007; Swami, 2021), the fusion of beauty standards began during the early 20th century with the propagation of Western mass media. It would be, therefore, primarily the media from the United States and Europe that would have "homogenized" the standards of what is beautiful and what is not in the rest of the globe. Mervat Nasser, an Egyptian-born scholar, agreed with the Westernization theory as evidenced by her comparative study on a sample of students in Cairo and London. "New concepts of beauty and femininity [...] transmitted through television programs" (Nasser, 1986, p. 625) would have contributed to generating the increasing attitude toward unhealthy eating behaviors in non-Western countries. However, Western mass media do not stop at propaganda of beauty standards alone; they have also exported the idea that the body should remain young, that it is malleable, and that working on one's appearance is necessary (Becker, 2004; Levine & Smolak, 2006, 2010).

Despite this, articles can be found in the literature that imputes limitations to the Westernization argument as the ultimate goal of homogenizing beauty ideals. For example, Christopher Ferguson (2013) suggests that media exposure has a significantly more deleterious effect on individuals with prior body dissatisfaction. That said, it would still be

erroneous to underestimate the influence of Western media, especially in contexts of rapid socioeconomic development (Swami, 2021); Japan is a prime example.

The sudden socioeconomic development experienced by the Japanese community after World War II and Western influences contributed to drastically reshaping society. A strong sense of belonging marked Japanese society until then, and the community became individualistic and consumerist, also implementing new gender roles (Gordon, 2001). Canons of beauty underwent a noticeable reshaping, coming considerably closer to those in the West, especially concerning the female sphere. As in the West, in mid-20th-century Japan, the belief that a slender body should be regarded as a symptom of high social status became widespread (Swami, 2021).

In the next section, we will discuss just that: how the Japanese media, with its famously misogynistic traits, has a strong influence on the representation of the ideal female body (McLaren, 2021).

3.3.2. Misogyny in Japanese media production

As is well known, Japan is a society saturated with media content, most of which inculcates in the population how to live their role as male or female. "The commute to school or work is a good example. From the train station platform to the journey itself, commuters are bombarded with advertisements for cosmetics, diet products, education, travel, and commercial media productions" (McLaren, 2021, p. 340). Moreover, very often, the content of messages is quite explicit, with inserts devoted to lolicons (drawings of highly sexualized prepubescent girls), and on smartphones, it is easy to glimpse "soft porn" content in sports magazines and tabloids (McLaren, 2021). These depictions are commonplace and are often consumed while traveling by train or subway in a society where train harassment (*chikan*) is particularly common (Horii & Burgess, 2012). The phenomenon is so widespread that the Japanese government introduced women-only train carriages in the most populous cities (McLaren, 2021).

Japan is among the countries with the most extensive media reach (Holden & Ergul, 2006), as evidenced by the very high number of newspapers sold (among the highest in the world; Villi & Hayashi, 2015) and the vast television audience (Yoshimoto, 2010). Despite this, media production is highly concentrated, with only six organizations

Figure 18: the typical crew of a Japanese news broadcast (retrieved from: https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/programs/)

controlling all media (McLaren, 2021). Generally speaking, the governing bodies of entertainment media present a conservative worldview with little openness to the outside world. According to Sally McLaren (2021) there would be three reasons why the Japanese media are so fearful of overcoming some of the barriers to which they are bound. First, only three advertising agencies (*Dentsu*, *Hakuho*, and *ADK*) promote their mission and worldview in the media. Moreover, said advertising agencies continue cultivating relationships with TV and radio stations and major political parties. For example, *Dentsu* weaves business relationships with Toyota and Honda, but also with the Liberal Democratic Party, which - with sporadic exceptions - has ruled the Japanese country since 1955 (McLaren, 2021).

As for the press, on the other hand, one can safely speak of a closed system or *Kisha Karabu* (press club). Government, ministerial, and police information is passed on to a small elite of newspapers. Thus, causing evident conformity (Freeman, 2000), a general aversion to and lack of trust in investigative journalism, and systematic self-censorship (Kingston, 2017).

Moreover, proving that Japan is a patriarchal society, the media system is also a male-dominated world (Ishiyama, 2013). Women employed full-time in journalism account for roughly 15 percent of the total (Byerly, 2011). Concerning the world of television, sexism also manifests itself in the role that young women take on in television news, in which they are often hired in the role of side objects to anchormen (Figure 18; Takenobu, 2017), reinforcing "traditional discriminatory division of labour" (Suzuki, 1995, p. 79). Moreover, fascinating research conducted in the offices of a TV station in Osaka showed how

sexual harassment of women was routine and even subsidized, almost as if it were a rite of passage (Painter, 1996).

Women's representation in Japanese media has changed very little, remaining virtually unchanged since the 1970s. Most studies criticized the highly stereotypical representation of women (Inoue et al., 1989; Muramatsu & Gössman, 1998). For example, in advertisements, the female gender usually assumes the role of a housewife caring for children, leaving little room for alternative representations (Suzuki, 1995). Little or nothing changes in films in which female characters are often relegated to the domestic sphere, while men cover important tasks and active, leading roles (Valaskivi, 2015). In addition, television programs devoted to women – what Midori Suzuki (1995) calls "wide shows" – focus exclusively on gossip, sensationalized murders, and advice on how to live life as a housewife; consequently offering "offer nothing to a woman that would help her to manage her daily affairs independently [leaving her] estranged from information" (Suzuki, 1995, p. 77).

ndeed, it would be naïve to believe that "if women are portrayed on television as having careers, the problems will disappear" (Suzuki, 1995, p. 80). According to Kate Manne (2018), it is primarily women who rebel against patriarchy in the media who are harassed by the system: "misogyny's primary function and constitutive manifestation is the punishment of 'bad' women, and policing women's behavior" (Manne, 2018, p. 192). Through this system, only women who conform their being to society's expectations are valued (Manne, 2018). However, increased media literacy would (at least partially) counteract the misogynistic status quo that characterizes Japan (Suzuki, 2005). That said, women in the Japanese media product still assume a gregarious role to men, often serving as objects to be admired. An object frequently taking on kawaii features as a passive, pure, and submissive female (Pike & Borovoy, 2004) with a petite and skinny body (Ginsberg, 2000). In the following lines, we will discuss where kawaii aesthetics originated and how it was propagated in depth.

3.3.3. The small and skinny girl: kawaii aesthetics

As widely discussed, thinness is the paramount prerogative for the "ideal" female physique. A fact that is also frequently associated with a sense of aesthetics and beauty (Voracek & Fisher, 2002). We have also seen how in the West, thin women are portrayed in the media as happy, successful, and socially desirable (Heinberg, 1996; Tiggemann,

2002). In addition to the factors listed above, in Japan, there is also a perception of greater femininity (Inokuchi et al., 2014).

Among the main characteristics that unite the ideal of slenderness between Western and Japanese women is the compelling pressure to which they are forced (Dale, 2021). The glorification of a slim body in Japan is such (Nishizawa et al., 2003) that the desire to have a slim body emerges as early as school age, as shown in a study conducted by Nishizawa and colleagues (1999) on a sample of six-year-old girls. This compelling quest for thinness, as we analyzed in the previous chapter, can result in eating disorders. Body dysphoria and subsequent eating disorders are also considered by some scholars (see Smith & Joiner, 2008) to be an effect of Westernization. Indeed, dissatisfaction related to body appearance is a prerogative found mainly in Westernized countries, including Japan, and predominantly affects young women (Yamamiya et al., 2008). Two research studies focusing on samples of young Japanese women can be cited to demonstrate this. According to studies by Sano and colleagues (2008), as many as 80 percent of Japanese adolescent girls are dissatisfied with their physique. Wardle, Hasse, and Steptoe (2006), on the other hand, after analyzing a sample of college students from 22 countries, found that many Japanese female students suffered from body dissatisfaction. While 70 percent of the Japanese sample described themselves as dissatisfied with their bodies, in countries such as Thailand, the United States, and Ireland, the percentage fluctuates between 50 and 60 percent.

Among the leading causes of body dissatisfaction, it is necessary to mention socialization. Multiple studies (including Keery et al., 2004; Yamamiya et al., 2008) have shown that comments about one's appearance from peers and family relationships influence one's perception of one's body in no small measure. Young women most experience parental relationships' influence on their physique (Stanford & McCabe, 2002). Mothers, through their criticisms and behaviors, mainly inculcate their young daughters' desire to lose weight (Rodgers et al., 2009a; Rodgers et al., 2009b). Especially in Japan, where the daughter-mother dyad appears to be particularly close (Kashiwagi, 1998), parental influence on the body is more evident. A study by Yamazaki and Omori (2016) found equitable attitudes between mothers and daughters regarding eating behavior. In addition, many Japanese girls suffering from an eating disorder admitted that they constantly discuss diets and food with their mothers (Mukai et al., 1994).

As Japan is one of the most collectivist societies, where most people seek acceptance and inclusion (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), it is standard that peer judgment takes on

fundamental connotations (Omori et al., 2015). For young Japanese girls, a slim body is a great way to be accepted by their friends, who often converse about slimness, dieting, and attractiveness (Levine & Smolak, 2004). Not conforming to such beauty ideals results in peer teasing, which can give rise to depressive symptoms and body dysphoria (Chisuwa-Hayami & Haruki, 2017).

However, as has been repeatedly announced throughout this thesis, the undoubted influence of the media on people's behaviors cannot be underestimated. Through globalization and the unchallenged Western dominance over the cosmetics industry, they have contributed to greater homogenization of beauty standards around the world: including in Japan (Yamamiya, 2020). It must, however, be pointed out that "being thin" is not equivalent in all societies (Yamamiya & Suzuki, 2021). The thinness to which so many Japanese aspire is of a particular type, which could be summarized by the term: "*kawaii*" (Pike & Borovoy, 2004).

Big eyes, tiny bodies, and Lolita

Generally, there are two conflicting schools of thought regarding deriving the term "*kawaii*." On the one hand, some argue that the term in question comes from the word *kawaisa*, which can be translated as "sweet," "cute," or "helpless" (Pellitteri, 2008). On the other hand, the term kawaii should be related to the concept of *kawayushi*, a word that first appeared in an anthology of short stories from the Heian period. The term *kawayushi* means "dazzled face," indicating the facial expression when blushing with embarrassment. In fact, a typical feature of the Japanese visual language is the flushed cheeks of characters when they feel ashamed (Dale, 2021). Although *kawaii* aesthetics became commonplace in the 19th century, one can find works steeped in "cuteness" as early as a thousand years ago in Japanese literature. For example, "*The Pillow Book*" (around the year 1000), written by a court attendant of the Six *Shōnagon*, includes lists and depictions of typically *kawaii* objects, such as children in ceremonial costumes and baby dolls (Shirane, 2007). Nowadays, the expression *kawaii* encapsulates anything (human or not) associated with a sense of vulnerability, childishness, and cuteness (Kerr, 2016). One can, therefore, include various characters from manga and anime, mascots such as Pikachu and Hello Kitty, but also a specific type of particularly wavy writing and, indeed, people who try to appear cute and young (Marcus et al., 2017).

Having become one of the most prominent aspects of Japanese culture in recent decades, *kawaii* has also largely reshaped aesthetics, clothing, and etiquette (Marcus et al., 2017). In work "*Kawaii Syndrome*," Sōichi Masubuchi (1994) hypothesizes that

"sweetness" and "cuteness" have taken the place of the ancient "refined" aesthetic canons. Consequently, the physical appearance to which many Japanese women aspire is that of the *kawaii*. More and more girls and adult women wear "childlike" clothes, self-impose weight-loss diets, and behave innocently to exacerbate a sense of sweetness and vulnerability (Kinsella, 1995). In addition, many women not only stop at meticulous wardrobe design and careful use of makeup but also resort to cosmetic surgery. Among the most famous surgical practices is blepharoplasty (surgery "to remove excess skin from the eyelids"; ICMDCCP, 2023, para. 1) to make the eyes look "bigger" and thus more innocent (RiRi, 2012).

The kawaii phenomenon is particularly evident among young female idols, i.e., youthful performers branded for their looks, personality, and attractiveness (Galbraith & Karlin, 2012). Idol groups such as Babymetal (Figure 19) or AKB48 are expected to entertain male audiences with seductive demeanor, maintaining a "squeaky, clean" voice and wearing schoolgirl outfits or bikini (Luck, 2017, p. 25). Idols personify what Ginsberg (2000) called the "kawaii ideal," that is, young girls with "wide eyes and an extremely thin, petite physique" (Yamamiya & Suzuki, 2021, p. 112). Thus, traditional femininity based on passivity, purity, and submission is emphasized (Pike & Borovoy, 2004).

Figure 19: kawaii-metal band Babymetal (retrieved from: http://www.metalhammer.it/2019/05/10/babymetal-il-nuovo-brano-elevator-girl/)

However, the *kawaii* phenomenon is not just an excuse to create a female standard for men to turn their voyeuristic gaze. Scholars such as Hasegawa Yuko (2002) have closely followed the idol fad by interpreting it as a kind of revolt against the status quo. Moving into a state of eternal youth while avoiding the traumatic nature of the adult stage has, according to Hasegawa (2002, p. 140), "the potential to perform a political function of undermining current ideologies of gender and power." Also of the same opinion is Japanese studies expert Masafumi Monden (2015), who defines *kawaii* aesthetics as a "delicate revolt." Women who perform their gender through kawaii clothing and gestures "present themselves in ways that can prevent them from being objectified and sexualized" (Monden, 2014, p. 266, 268).

Many women, therefore, experience an emancipatory feeling by adorning themselves with *kawaii* objects and clothes. A shining example is the so-called "*Lolita*" (not to be confused with the complex derived from Vladimir Nabokov's book; Nguyen, 2016). The Lolita's attire includes a particular mix of punk, Gothic, Rococo, and Victorian elements that spring forth in a dress made of "frills, lace, ribbons and a bell-shaped skirt supported by a petticoat" (Figure 20; Nguyen, 2016, p. 16). The patterns that make up such clothing are closely related to the aesthetic principle of *kawaii* with floral motifs, candy depictions, and fantasy characters (Nguyen, 2016).

> Lolita is a way of living. I think it is a life, someone's way of living, a principle of thinking. To put loving kawaii things at the forefront, to live under a self-created rule to which one applies the things that one finds kawaii. I think that is what would be called in Japan a Lolita (Chisato, 2010, in Nguyen, 2016, p. 16).

For many women who belong to the Lolita subculture, the kawaii aesthetic is a mechanism that allows them to protect themselves from the traumatic transition process between adolescence and adulthood (Nguyen, 2016). The transition involves the setting aside of affective objects in order to switch to those that are "more appropriate" for an adult woman (Swindle, 2011). Consequently, Lolitas are part of what the Anglo-Australian scholar Sara Ahmed (2010) calls "affective aliens," people who are disappointed by something that should have given them satisfaction and happiness. Indeed, the media often emphasizes the transition to adulthood as a period full of positive changes for girls: for example, finding a mate and pursuing an uplifting career (Swindle, 2011). However, this is only sometimes the case, especially in Japan.

McVeigh (2000) had theorized that *kawaii* is nothing more than a "resistance consumption," through which "adorning or associating oneself with cuteness positions one, if only

temporarily, outside the demands of the highly ordered regimes of labour" (p. 167). Lolitas have created a subculture where they can "express their own desires and interests outside of the male-dominated public sphere" (Gagné, 2008, p. 131).

To conclude this paragraph and briefly summarize the concept of *kawaii* and the Lolita lifestyle from a more emancipatory than oppressive perspective, let us borrow the words of An Nguyen (2016, p. 27).

> Lolita fashion is a reaction to and rejection of mainstream society that stems from the assertive power of claiming personal definitions of *kawaii*. Removed from and uncaring of the opinion of those in positions of power, *kawaii* is as powerful as it is personal and individual. Even if *kawaii* culture cannot directly challenge the existing patriarchy or lead to a complete upheaval of the current system, it offers girls and women a way to create and participate in a world that men are not allowed to access. Lolita fashion offers a way for people to cope with and to reach outside the realities of their day to-day lives.

Figure 20: two examples of Lolita fashion (left: https://twitter.com/TokyoFashion/status/1233482835945803777; right: https://www.etsy.com/it/listing/1172820412/japanese-style-luxury-qi-chinese-lolita)

So, Lolita attire, and in general the choice of a *kawaii*-prone lifestyle, represent in the mindset of young Japanese girls an attempt to regain control over their bodies and minds to openly oppose the patriarchy and gender roles imposed by their society (Nguyen, 2016). Parallel to girls, many Japanese boys embrace their version of *kawaii*, namely the

"*hoso macho*" body (lean and toned, almost androgynous physique; Andreasson & Johansson, 2017). One peculiarity that differentiates Japanese masculine looks from Western ones is that adjectives such as "feminine" are complimentary (Kowner, 2004). Furthermore, like their female counterparts, young Japanese men, through a "3S (skinny, small, soft)" physique, fight their battle against the status quo and what is imposed on them (Monden, 2012).

In the following chapter, we will discuss how male beauty ideals are remarkably different in Japan than in the West and how these are used to counteract society.

3.3.4. Yin and Yang: Eroticism and sexual desire

In today's media, the increased emphasis on men's physical and aesthetic appearance is tangible (Saladin, 2015). Parallel to the increased media emphasis on the male physique, images of idealized bodies have been propagated that are impossible for many to achieve. Predominantly these are sculpted, unrealistically muscular, and bulky physiques (Pope et al., 2000), highlighted especially in recent decades (Leit et al., 2001). These images, spread mainly by the mass media, cause many young Westerners to desire a bulkier body. Some of them, failing to achieve this goal, develop body dysphoria (Calzo et al., 2015).

Summarizing the male beauty standards in the West, Kenneth R. Dutton (1995, p. 343) states that:

> there are broadly, two prototypes for the traditional depiction of the male body – as object – one of them stressing its heroic, super-masculine traits, the other presenting features associated with the passive object of desire. Heavy muscularity in the "heroic" mode is conceptually quite distinct from the muscularity associated with youthful potency and the lithe and slender physique of the 'aesthetic' mode.

Usually, the super-mesomorphic "heroic," is seen more as a dominant display to other men than an aesthetic value (Dutton, 1995; Ueno, 2015a). As a result, men with a slender physique, comparable to a teenager, are perceived by other males as childish and unassertive because they are incapable of passing a message of aggression (Dutton, 1995; Ueno, 2015a). To prove their masculinity, Western men must be hyper-masculine and physically "elevate" themselves above their peers. Thus, many boys welcome changes related to their body shape (McCabe et al., 2002). Consequently, males

welcome increased muscle mass as a positive event, unlike females, who often experience mutations negatively (Palmonari & Crocetti, 2011). However, in the literature, an increasing number of scholars recognize the presence of androgynous and less muscular males in English-speaking media (Bordo, 1999; Dutton, 1995; Monden, 2021), coming abundantly close to a more Nipponese view of the ideal man.

Japanese masculinity is based on the Chinese concept of *wen-wu*: "both excelling in literature (*wen*) and military skills (*wu*)" (Chen, 2011, p. 53). The "ideal" Japanese man presents a combination of feminine and masculine attributes, clearly recalling the yin and yang symbol (Monden, 2021). Although yin and yang are opposites, they contain the seed of their opposite. The yin inseminates the yang and vice versa, making one unable to exist without the other (Wang, 2012). The slender body with boyish, almost adolescent features allows Japanese men to "deny" their maturity while remaining "male enough" (Seki, 1996). According to scholars Sugihara and Katsurada (1999), the masculine ideal is, as a result, more about physical efficiency rather than ruggedness and muscularity. Therefore, achieving a muscular appearance is desirable but simultaneously functional and light.

A slim body with toned muscles is known as "*hoso macho*" (Figure 21) and is, in Japan, the preferred physique of most young men. Overly bulky bodies are not particularly liked

Figure 21: the hoso macho physique (retrieved from: https://japantoday.com/category/features/lifestyle/japanese-women%E2%80%99s-magazine%E2%80%99s-list-of-traits-for-an-ideal-man-is-both-understandable-and-baffling)

by the Japanese (Andreasson & Johansson, 2017). Consequently, the *hoso macho* physique is based on what Monden (2012) calls the 3Ss: skinny, small, and soft. These peculiarities are evident in most male celebrities. Generally, male idols have delicate faces, and their physiques are androgynous and frequently underweight (Kowner, 2004).

Of course, considering Japanese male aesthetics as a single immovable block would be wrong. As Ozamu Hashimoto reminds us in his work "*Binan e no ressun*" ("*Lessons for Handsome Men*"; 1994), male beauty standards change considerably depending on the milieu and gender of the observers. Some men prefer a rugged, muscular body, unlike others who aspire to a stately appearance punctuated by an adolescent, feminine face (Hashimoto, 1994). The latter has been particularly popular with the female public in recent years. The slender body with youthful (*shōnen*) and androgynous features has made its way into the Japanese imagination, especially in recent decades since the 1990s (Hashimoto, 1994). Cult TV writer and critic Mori Mari (1994) contributed significantly to the creation of the so-called *bishōnen* (handsome boy), a boy who can be easily mistaken for a girl.

Bishōnen has become an integral and extraordinarily relevant part of manga devoted to the young female audience. Moreover, it should be noted that comics for young girls are a noteworthy marker in articulating male beauty in Japan (Monden, 2021). When referring to a handsome boy in Japan, he is often compared to a manga character: "as if (he) popped out from pages in *shōjo* manga" (Monden, 2021, p. 272). Nonetheless, it is not only comic books that have many young boys with androgynous features within them. Advertisements in contemporary Japan also aim to attract the voyeuristic female gaze (McLelland, 2000a; Miller, 2006). In music, *aidoru* (idols) boy bands, such as Arashi, who embody boyish charm, have become a global phenomenon. Idols appeal to girls because they give them the impression that they do not want to dominate them, so they do not come across as threatening (Nagaike, 2012).

Moreover, unlike Western culture, Japanese culture finds a clothed body more aesthetically appealing than a naked one (Monden, 2015). Indeed, since ancient times, the body's shape has not been significant in Japanese aesthetics. However, it is undeniable that in contemporary Japan, nudity (both female and male) is becoming increasingly visible (Miller, 2006). Nevertheless, this does not detract from the fact that most heterosexual Japanese women judge a clothed body as more attractive (Monden, 2015), which inevitably contradicts the Western perspective linking physical beauty with sexuality and sexual desire (Monden, 2021). Therefore, Japanese aesthetics is very close to the

theorems of Immanuel Kant (1790), who defined *beauty* as something that can be admired in a detached way without feeling the desire to possess it. That is the reason why it is essential to split between "eroticism" and "sexual desire," which is related to the term "sexualization" that we encountered in the previous chapter.

When we speak of eroticism, we are referring to a concept that may vary according to culture and time, "however, we might broadly define it as relating to desire and the aesthetics of desire, a delayed or postponed promise of gratification, as opposed to the immediacy of sexualization" (Monden, 2021, p. 273). According to Scruton (2009), eroticism would consequently fall within the realm of aesthetics: dealing with glances, allusions, and suggestions rather than explicitness. On the other hand, sexualization, through beauty, induces the desire for carnal gratification (Monden, 2021). Sexualized people are explicitly reduced to sexual fantasies, erasing their individuality (Scruton, 2009). Japanese aesthetics, therefore, offers a different perspective regarding sexual desire. According to Masafumi Monden (2021, p. 273), "Japanese culture offers one way of appreciating (male) physical beauty that is focused on a fully clothed body which is not immediately linked to sexual desire."

Aesthetically speaking, the salaryman presents an overly mature and authoritarian appearance in the eyes of Japanese youth and young men (Bardsley, 2011). As a result, young people are rebelling against the unsustainable work rhythms typical of salarymen but also against their severe and rigid way of being. The "delicate revolt" (Ueno, 2015b) instigated by young people has given birth to a generation that places greater emphasis on leisure time than the workplace. Consequently, the importance placed on experiencing one's hobbies and especially one's physical appearance and look has increased (Cook, 2013; Dasgupta, 2013).

3.4. Summarizing gender and body issues in Japan

Japanese are constantly bombarded with images and media representations that impose the most appropriate attitudes and worldviews for men and women (McLaren, 2021). Underlying the gender differences in Japan is the dichotomy that persists between work and home life. According to Nemoto (2016), this strict division of labor has created a discrepancy that is difficult to heal between women and men.

As Japanese culture moved closer to Western culture, family roles (especially women's roles) became particularly present in the discourse (Ezawa, 2021). The ryōsai kenbo

ideology was born, which framed the woman in the new role of a housewife, attentive to caring for her children and husband (Uno, 1993). In this regard, the Japanese government tried to patch it with the introduction of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL); at least on paper, it was supposed to decrease employment discrimination drastically. However, although there have been improvements, the situation has remained more or less unchanged for women (Kan & Hertog, 2017). Thus, most Japanese women aspire to find a husband with a permanent employment contract that provides a stable income (Hertog, 2021).

The husband who devotes his heart and soul to the business is known as a salaryman. Japan's most coveted form of masculinity encapsulates rigid work schedules and an almost religious devotion to the company in which he works (Cook, 2021). Hours spent at work are so disproportionate that it prevents most men from actively participating in family life. It is precisely against this workaholic lifestyle that an increasing percentage of Japanese males are rebelling (Roberson & Suzuki, 2003). For example, ikumen, an alternative form of masculinity, prefer to engage in domestic tasks (Charlebois, 2017). Alongside the increased propensity for nurturing, recent years have seen a change in male attitudes, which have become more "affable" (Glasspool, 2012). A fact that inevitably affects the sexual sphere as well. Indeed, there has been an increase in men behaving less assertively toward women. This fact is not to be underestimated since, in East Asia, being male is inevitably related to sexual dominance (Lin et al., 2017).

Young Japanese men are not only rebelling against the grueling work schedules and total devotion to the company but also against salarymen's inflexible and rigid lifestyle (Bardsley, 2011). Tangible evidence of this is the increasing attention men in the Rising Sun place on their outward appearance (Dasgupta, 2013). Having a slim body covered by not-too-obvious muscles, which might limit physical readiness, is the figure most Japanese men strive for (Andreasson & Johansson, 2017). The hoso-macho physique is compared to characters in Japanese comic books, particularly the so-called bishōnen, seen mainly in manga for young girls (Monden, 2021). Being bishōnen, with their gentle, non-dominant savoir-faire, characterizes most male pop icons (especially idols; McLelland, 2000a). This perception of security, given by non-assertiveness, makes idols so beloved by women (Nagaike, 2012).

Like most Western societies, Japanese societies impose the ideal of a slim physique on women (Dale, 2021). However, as previously analyzed, lean does not equate to slim. The Japanese ideal of slenderness is quite different from the Western ideal, taking a

precise definition: kawaii (Pike & Borovoy, 2004). According to some scholars, kawaii would represent nothing more than the personification of male sexual desire (n.b. Japanese) punctuated by servility and availability (Pike & Borovoy, 2004; Yamamiya & Suzuki, 2021). Young female idols are thus presented in provocative costumes and innocent attitudes (Luck, 2017).

On the other hand, the opposite perspective judges the kawaii movement as a delicate uprising, to which many young Japanese women decide to queue up of their own volition (Hasegawa, 2002; Monden, 2014, 2015). Young women experience a sense of emancipation by wearing kawaii costumes and adorning themselves with objects of high affective value (Nguyen, 2016). In particular, we took a closer look at the Lolita phenomenon. The Lolita style is characterized by flashy clothes marked by many laces, lace, and bows, interpreting an idealization of the Rococo and Gothic styles (Nguyen, 2016). In summary, kawaii and Lolita's life represent a way for young Japanese girls to escape from the worries of adulthood. Age, which in Japan imposes pressing expectations on the female gender: it is crucial to find a husband with a stable job and take care of offspring (Nguyen, 2016; Swindle, 2010).

It is not only objects and clothes that make the revolt of young Japanese women possible. Japanese comic books, so-called manga, are frequently used by female illustrators and writers as fertile ground for challenging the status quo and gender roles (Fujimoto, 1998; Ito, 1994b; Ogi, 2001, 2003). Minomiya Kazuko sees manga as a cultural product that can positively affect young women, enticing them to pursue careers outside of home life (Allison, 2006a). The following chapters will explore the main issues surrounding male and female characters in manga. Furthermore we will analyze some character tropes in manga and how those kind of figures go against typical gender stereotypes in Japan.

4. Being male and female in manga

In this chapter, the main argument of this thesis will be tackled, that of gender issues and their representations in Japanese comics. This topic has already been considered several times by different authors (Darlington & Cooper, 2010; Fujimoto, 1998; Ishida, 2015; Ito, 2005, 2000; McLelland, 1999, 2000b) both in what concerns the graphic representation of characters – who are frequently sexualized regardless of their gender (Allison, 1996; Gateward, 2002; Gwynne, 2013; McLelland, 2010; Robertson, 1999) – as well as linguistically (Unser-Schutz, 2015a, 2015b). However it is necessary, before dwelling into the topic of gender representation in manga, to briefly talk about manga per se.

4.1. Manga, the Japanese comic book

Before analyzing how gender issues are represented in manga, it is appropriate to answer questions such as "what are comics?", "Where did manga, this particular form of Japanese visual art, originate?", "What are the differences with Western comics?" and most importantly, "how does it communicate?".

Manga is Japan's most famous export product, generating exorbitant revenues far exceeding American comic books. It is a highly genderizing medium, as evidenced by the fact that manga is not categorized into genres (e.g., horror, comedy, etc.) but instead according to the target audience they are aimed at. One peculiarity that unites much of Japanese comics is the drawing style and visual metaphors that distinguish it. This language is known as the Japanese Visual Language. This chapter will explain the communication of manga through its language and the main themes that are dealt with in it. As a first step, however, it is essential to tell the medium's history, where it originated, and how it spread worldwide and became a worldwide phenomenon.

Comics as a medium originated during the American Civil War and were used to depict the politicians of that time playfully. So-called "funnies" (Bindi & Raffaelli, 2021), little pieces of graphic art, were printed in the newspapers of the time, and an incredible conflict of interest was created around them because their joking and derisory nature manipulated readers' opinions (Bindi & Raffaelli, 2021). However, it should be remembered that although the comics of the American 18th century are considered to be the progenitors of this medium, various forms of illustrated art are very similar to comics that were

born several hundred years earlier. One example is the *emakimono* (絵巻), but we will discuss this later.

Taking McLuhan's (1964) theory about hot and cold media as a starting point, comics are to be considered as a form of cold media. In fact, unlike other image-based technical mediums, such as photography, comics are not explicit in their means and, therefore, only provide the reader with some of the information needed to extrapolate their whole meaning. As Brancato (1994) further explains in his work "*Fumetti: guida ai comics nel sistema dei media*" ("*Comics: a guide to comics in the media system*"): "[It is] the audience that makes cinema, radio, and television operational. It is the public that decodes […] their messages and strategies. Outside of the audience, a medium cannot exist" (p. 32).

Therefore, with its skills, the readership community decodes the message hidden in the comic panels. This happens not only by reading the contents of the little clouds that come out of the mouths of the various characters or by reproducing in one's mind the sound of onomatopoeias such as "Boom!", "Gulp!", "Smack!" but it is also possible to manage the pace of the narrative (Bindi & Raffaelli, 2021; Natsume, 2008). Indeed, if an image particularly strikes the comic book viewers, they may focus on the drawing and slow down the course of the story, or if caught up in a rush of curiosity, they may speed it up.

However, it would be reductive to analyze the reading of comics as something that only concerns the visual apparatus. As Schodt (1986) stated, comics, especially Japanese ones that focus mainly on the representation of sounds (e.g., the shape of the little clouds), assume great importance (Bindi & Raffaelli, 2021), are also deeply related to the auditory apparatus. The layout of Japanese comics, with dynamic and fluid strokes, is designed to guide the readers' eyes so they can emotionally connect with the characters from the first impact (Natsume, 2008; Schodt, 1986).

Some researchers (Bindi & Raffaelli, 2021; Kukkonen, 2013) go even further, glimpsing in the reading of comics also a kind of "embodiment," an almost bodily identification with the characters, given by facial expressions and movements, which at times make any explanation superfluous. To enjoy a comic book fully, it is not enough to read its contents. However, one must let oneself be carried along the path tiled by the panels, trying to feel and perceive with one's whole body what the artists are trying to convey.

As a result, one can claim that the enthusiast picks up the artists' suggestions, decoding and creating within herself the meaning of what is being brycetold (Kukkonen, 2013).

The reader benefits not only from the graphic and literal content of the comic strip but also gathers the cartoonist's feelings, emotions, and worldview, creating a perception of the work through her value system (Bindi & Raffaelli, 2021).

4.2. A global sensation

In the Land of the Rising Sun, the term *manga* denotes all forms of comics, not just those of Japanese origin (Pellitteri, 2020). In general, manga is categorized according to the gender and age of the target audience it is aimed at (Bindi et al., 2021; Kinsella, 2000; Posocco, 2005; Prough, 2010; Schodt, 1986), and unlike American comics, which has focused almost exclusively on the superhero theme (Pellitteri, 2008), it consists of a multitude of subgenres, including horror, science fiction, and sports (Bryce & Davis, 2010; Pellitteri, 2008; Schodt, 1986). Moreover, all different types of manga share a similar form of communication, known as the Japanese Visual Language (Cohn, 2005, 2010). This way of depicting characters makes Japanese comics recognizable worldwide and more readily marketable (Camara & Duran, 2007; Gravett, 2004; Schodt, 1996). Some hallmarks of this visual language are distinctively large eyes, extravagantly shaped hair, kinetic lines, and cartoony character design (Chen, 2011; Lent, 2000; Ng, 2003; Pellitteri, 1998, 2008).

Nowadays, manga represents the best-selling product range in all Japanese pop culture (Camara & Duran, 2007), although it hasn't always been like this. In fact, this medium has traveled a remarkably long path that we might even trace back to the dawn of the Heian period, the mid-700s (Camara & Duran, 2007). During this period, so-called *emakimonos* (Figure 22) were created, thus becoming the true progenitors of modern manga. *Emakimonos* were hand-painted scrolls, usually made of paper or silk, which featured love and war stories, folk and fantastic tales, news, and everyday events (Bindi et al., 2021; Camara & Duran, 2007). Although these scrolls were composed of a single

Figure 22 Emakimono scroll retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emakimono

image, according to Pellitteri (2008), these were sequentially scanned by the eye, starting from left to right, "metabolizing," so to speak, a small portion of the image at a time. A very similar way to how panels in modern manga are read and processed, as confirmed by Yui (2004):

> These are hand scrolls people enjoyed in the following way: they unrolled them from right to left, opened them for a certain breadth each time, read them for a certain period, and then moved on to the next scene enjoying the movement of the scenes. This is the same way people read comics nowadays. […] So, one can assume that Japan has some longstanding background in its comic industry (Yui, 2004 in Pellitteri, 2008, p. 93-94).

Although Japanese comics were influenced by such an ancient art form as the *emakimono*, it was not until 1814 that the term *manga* first appeared. "*Hokusai manga*" is how the painter Katsushika Hokusai (1814-1878) titled a collection of sketches he used to teach students the art of drawing (Bindi et al., 2021; Pellitteri, 2008). This manual contained various scene depictions, which, like the artistic scrolls of the Heian era, recounted representations of situations ranging from everyday life to the spiritual (Pellitteri, 2008). A hundred years later, manga as we know it, or *story-manga* (Bindi et al., 2021), characterized by longer stories, was born. In these years, thanks to the significant contribution of Osamu Tezuka, considered the "god of manga," several features were implemented and became distinguishing traits, not only of manga per se but of Japanese Visual Language in general. For example, the large eyes. Tezuka himself, a great admirer

of Disney animation, took up the eye shape of Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, and company (Pellitteri, 2008; Schodt, 1996). This was not, however, a trivial "copy-paste." The "god of manga" recognized in this rounded and exaggerated form of representing the eyes is an excellent way to enhance further the characters' emotions (Natsume, 2000; Pellitteri, 2008). In addition, one cannot forget the groundbreaking "directorial" changes hatched from Tezuka's mind. Already from one of his very first works, "*Astro Boy*" (1952-1968), it is possible to see a drastic change in what concerns the reader's "point of view." Indeed, there was a shift from a more theatrical and static view to a more cinematic one, punctuated by frequent "camera movements," close-ups, and wide fields, which made the stories and their staging more dynamic and compelling (Pellitteri, 2008). However, only some things about the Japanese Visual Language should be revealed right away. We shall continue our discussion later on.

Nowadays, manga and its animated transpositions (so-called *anime*) represent the core of Japan's pop-cultural export (Camara & Duran, 2007). In this claim's support, it is sufficient to look at the exorbitant catalog of anime that can be found on streaming platforms such as Netflix or the incredible number of registered users who use Crunchyroll (around 120 million; Wise, 2022a), one of the main sites dedicated to Japanese animation. Nevertheless, manga has not always been synonymous with gold mining in the West. In fact, success abroad has been very late and conditioned by several graphic, expressive, and communicative factors (Pellitteri, 2008). Some of these features, such as the concept of

Figure 23: Cover of the 1000th "One Piece" chapter (retrieved from https://www.opgt.it/cover-completa-capitolo-1000/)

"*ma*," will be further explained in the chapters devoted to the Japanese Visual Language. However, we should briefly focus on one factor that played a significant role in the low proliferation of manga before the 1980s: the *object* manga itself.

American comic book fans accustomed to reading "*Peanuts*" (Schulz, 1950-2000) or Marvel classics must have been weirded out finding a hypothetical copy of "*D. Gray-man*" (Hoshino, 2004-present) in their hands. As soon as a reader opened a newly released manga in the early 2000s, the most striking difference between comics and manga came to the surface: the last page is the first. In fact, since the early 2000s, manga have been printed in the United States with the original binding from right to left (Sevakis, 2015). Another detail that quickly catches the eye is the manga's almost absent color palette compared to Marvel and Disney comics. Unlike the famous American superhero comics, the pages of Japanese comics are exclusively composed of black and white colors (even here, there are rare exceptions such as the Full Color editions of "*Dragon Ball*" and "*Naruto*"; Bindi et al., 2021). That being said, one cannot underestimate the drastic difference in the publication formats of Japanese comics compared to their overseas counterparts. Generally speaking, manga are published in specialized magazines (such as the world-famous "*Weekly Shōnen Jump*"), which can reach more than 400 pages in length – a measure that differs greatly from Western formats – and usually contain the adventures of various authors (Bindi et al., 2021; Schodt, 1996). The most successful works are then republished in *tankōbon* (単行本; paperback book) form, probably the format most familiar to admirers of the genre. In some cases, *tankōbons* reach an impressive number of pages, like for the best-selling manga (Gintoki, 2022; WeBuyBooks, 2021) entitled "*One Piece*" (Figure, 23; Oda, 1997-present), which has reached and now exceeded 20,000 pages (Bindi et al., 2021).

These stumbling blocks have been overcome today, and manga sales vastly surpass those of their American cousins (Gravett, 2004; Schodt, 1996). Analyzing sales data from recent years could be helpful. In 2018, a collection of comics starring Superman, titled "*Action Comics #1000*" (DC Comics, 2018), sold 500,000 copies (Jackson Miller, 2018). In the same year, volume #88 of "*One Piece*" was purchased a whopping 2.5 million times (Loo, 2018). The margin becomes even wider when we compare the sales of the two genres in 2021. "*King Spawn #1*" (Lewis & McFarlane, 2021), the latest comic featuring the famous character created by Todd McFarlane, was the best-selling superhero comic with nearly half a million units (Jackson Miller, 2021). In contrast, last year's final chapter of "*Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba*" (Gotouge, 2016-2020) was added to more

than 5 million shelves worldwide (Loo, 2021), while the five volumes published in 2021 of "*Jujutsu Kaisen*" (Akutami, 2018-present), sold well over 30 million copies (Sahu, 2021). This phenomenon is made even more impressive by the fact – as also shown by a study conducted by Kate Allen and John Ingulsrud (2003) – that despite books consistently selling less and less, manga continue undaunted to reach a constant (if not higher) number of users.

Plus, drawing *à la japonaise* had also a significant influence on pop-cultural creation around the world (Pellitteri, 2006). This fact is easily demonstrated by analyzing Italian comics, including "*Monster Allergy*" (Centorno & Artibani, 2003-2015), "*W.I.T.C.H.*" (Gnone, 2001-2012) and "*Geist Maschine*" (LRNZ, 2021); French video games like "*Wakfu*" (Ankama Games, 2012); and U.S. animated series such as "*Avatar: The Last Airbender*" (DiMartino & Konietzko, 2005-2008). All these works share similar traits, such as the characters' large eyes, brightly colored hair, or the plot centered on Campbell's

Figure 24: some examples of JVL in European media.

"Hero's Journey" (1949). Of course, each artist adds elements of their culture to the Japanese Visual Language, creating what one could call visual "dialects" (Natsume, 2001). In the next chapter, we will look closely at this language.

4.3. Learning Japanese

The special language with which manga communicates to its readers is called Japanese Visual Language. Like written or spoken language, a visual language is composed of small fragments that, put in a row, make up a meaning. Therefore, one can compare the panels and drawings in comics to the morphemes and phonemes that compose a written or spoken sentence. Of course, the Japanese Visual Language is not the only visual idiom. Different cartoonists implement features of the visual language of their countries in their comics (Cohn, 2003), and as we saw earlier, these languages can mix and create different "visual dialects" (Cohn, 2010; Natsume, 2001). "Manga is merely another 'language,' and the panels and pages are but another type of 'words' adhering to a unique grammar" (Schodt, 1996, p. 26).

However, it is essential to remember that not all manga have the same graphic design. Indeed, the most affectionate audience can easily recognize the rounder lines of manga aimed at a female audience, as opposed to the more angular features of male comics (Natsume, 2001). That said, in general, manga share some characteristics that could be described as "standard" as far as the Japanese visual language is concerned and that are shared by many "speakers" (Cohn, 2010). According to Cohn (2010), the credit for the stratospheric success of Japanese comics can be mainly attributed to visual characteristics. This unified style makes manga easily recognizable and user-friendly.

In addition, this standardization of certain features of Japanese comic book drawings is an excellent way to make oneself recognizable in the eyes of people familiar with that language and a good source of learning (Cohn, 2010). Generally speaking, young Japanese women and men maintain their graphic manual dexterity, as is not the case for most of their peers in the rest of the world (Cox et al., 2001; Wilson, 2000). Indeed, by trying to reproduce the drawings of their favorite mangakas, this passion is further fostered and persists throughout adolescence (Cohn, 2010).

4.3.1. Panels, clouds, kinetic lines, and more

Every language (whether written, spoken, visual or sign based) is composed of symbols that can be defined as "arbitrary," meaning signs that are understandable only to people who know a given idiom (Peirce, 1931) and "iconic" symbols that are instead comprehended generally by anyone (Berruto & Cerruti, 2017).

Belonging to this last category of symbols are onomatopoeias. Onomatopoeias are tiny particles that phonetically reproduce a sound that can be of an object, a particular action, or an animal (Berruto & Cerruti, 2017; Treccani, 2012). Of course, in reading a comic book, this is further made explicit by adding drawings. However, even in an image the sound "Bang!" imprinted on a simple panel with only a building still makes the reader guess that there is a shooting at that moment, presumably in that same establishment.

Another typical peculiarity of the Japanese Visual Language, which we have encountered several times, is the depiction of large eyes. Having become part of the collective imagination and so many other "visual dialects" of the world, they have been taken from another culture, demonstrating how JVL has also changed over time, implementing features of other cultures (Gravett, 2004). Tezuka, impressed by Disney's drawings, decided to incorporate the characteristic large, glowing eyes that still distinguish characters such as Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck in his works. This was not only an aesthetic choice but also a practical one. As a matter of fact, by exaggerating the size of the eyes, it is possible to make the emotions portrayed on the characters' faces more evident and *readable* (Cohn, 2007a; Pellitteri, 2008).

Kinetic lines are another category of iconic symbols understandable to anyone. Here, too, however, the Japanese language differs from American comics. If Saitama (protagonist of "*One-Punch Man*"; One, 2012-present) hits a villain's nose with a right uppercut, the punch is depicted in complete stasis with kinetic lines around it indicating its trajectory up to that moment and based on the number of lines the power of said blow can be deduced (Figure 25; McCloud, 1994). In American comics (especially the older ones), the opposite happens: the kinetic lines follow the moving object, often painted blurrily, indicating its displacement (McCloud, 1994). Returning briefly

Figure 25: Saitama hitting a bad guy (One, 2012-present chapter 7)

to the discussion regarding dialects and influences of visual languages, kinetic lines were among the first "words" from Japanese comics to be implemented in American graphics. Thus, many movements of DC and Marvel's tights-clad heroes nowadays are depicted as they are in Japan (McCloud, 1996).

It is primarily the elements symbolizing emotions that are most difficult for "non-speakers" of JVL to understand. Natsume (1997) refers to these particles as "*Key Yu*," divided into two distinct categories based on their ease of reading. Simpler to interpret are symbols such as word clouds, which, based on their shape, indicate the speaker's mood. For example, a text cloud surrounded by spines suggests to the reader that the character is shouting at that precise moment. This is often accompanied by a character design with sharp teeth and pointed nails. In contrast, a whispered sentence is characterized by a rounded word cloud enclosed by a dotted "tail" (Forceville, 2005).

The second group of so-called "*Key Yu*" is distinguished by signs that are less decipherable and more complex for readers unfamiliar with the Japanese Visual Language (Natsume, 1997). Among the vast palette of metaphors used by mangakas, we could mention: the serpentine tongue that marks characters intent on teasing someone else (Figure 26), the pulsing vein on the forehead that indicates anger and rage; nervousness and fear are often represented with drops of sweat and the shrinking of the pupil (Figure 27); the streams of blood rushing from the nose in particularly lecherous situations (Figure 28); the sparkles in the eyes and sharp canines used to denote malice (McCloud, 1994; Natsume & Takekuma, 1995; Schodt, 1986).

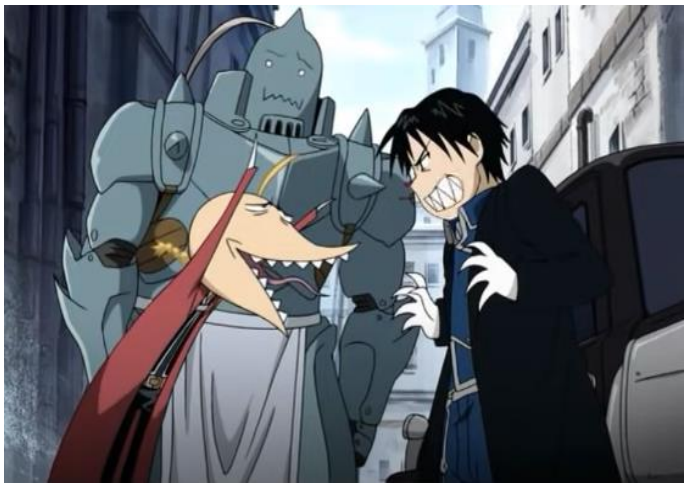


Figure 26: Edward Elric teasing Roy Mustang (taken from "Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood"; Irie, 2009, episode 21: "Advance of the Fool")

Figure 27: example of nervousness taken from "Vagabond" (Inoue, 1999, chapter 14 p. 8)

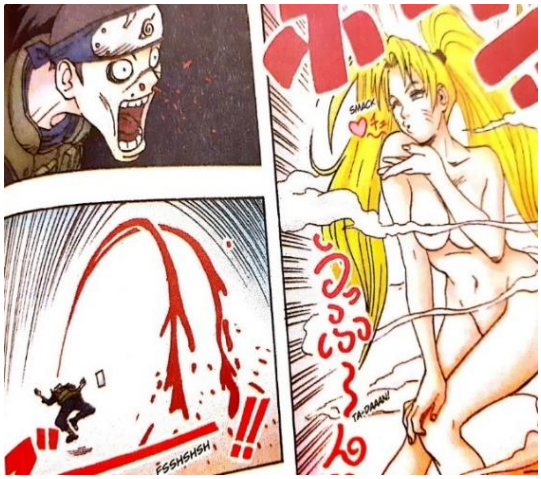


Figure 28: Nose-bleeding taken from "Naruto" (Kishimoto, 1999, chapter 1 p. 10)

A crucial part of the manga and its communication is the particular use of backgrounds, which play an important role in conveying the mood of a scene. Scenarios that serve as backdrops for fights to the death are frequently depicted with particularly dark hues and landscapes that radiate havoc throughout (Pellitteri, 2008). A pointing example in this regard is the clash between Goku and Frieza fighting strenuously on the planet Namek on the verge of collapsing (Figure 29; Ellecosta & Basso, 2023). Sentimental and

Figure 29: Goku vs. Frieza (Full-Color version of Dragon Ball; Toriyama, 1991, chapter 326)

emotionally impactful scenes for the protagonists of several *shōjo* manga are often showered with flowers and stars that enhance their romance (Cohn, 2010). Particular attention is paid to depicting sex scenes, where white clearly takes over black. In addition, mangakas frequently use particular visual metaphors, such as flowers blooming or waves crashing in the background (Schodt, 1986). A perfect work to best describe the

Figure 30: Kissing scene between Casca and Guts
(Miura, 1994, episode 45 "Confession", p. 24)

latter concept is Kentaro Miura's "*Berserk*." "*Berserk*" is one of the Japanese comics landscape's most oppressive and dark works. Consequently, many of its pages are dominated by black and markedly gory and bloody scenarios. White overpowers black in sporadic instances. One such case is the first kiss between Casca and Guts, which declare their love for each other in front of a rushing waterfall and on a lush spring meadow (Figure 30). The light filtering through the foliage of the trees and the absolute lack of dialogue convey an absolute sense of peace, especially after learning what the two have been forced to endure in previous chapters (Ellecosta & Basso, 2023).

4.3.2. JVL and its grammar rules

Every language, written, spoken, or visual, has its grammar. Drawings left to themselves convey nothing to the reader, just as happens with single words that alone cannot explain a concept. Therefore, visual language, too, needs its own grammatical rules employed by drawers to make a sequence of panels more easily understandable (Cohn, 2010).

To explain the grammar of manga, one could start with its "morphemes," the vignettes that make up its stories. Usually, in literature, there are three classes used to categorize the design of Japanese comic book panels: level of detail, the plane perspective, and the concept of "*ma*" (Cohn, 2005, 2007b, 2010; McCloud, 1996; Pellitteri, 2008).

According to Cohn (2007b), panels can be divided according to how much information the artists want to convey at a specific moment. For example, mangakas may depict a scene in its entirety, inserting multiple characters (*Macros*; Figure 31) or focusing on a single protagonist in the foreground (*Monos*; Figure 32). Some vignettes contain only one detail, such as a sword hilt, a hand, or an eye (*Micros*; Figure 33). In fighting-focused manga, there are frequent vignettes in which movements are not divided over several panels but are depicted in one drawing (*Polymorphic*; Figure 34).

In the early years of manga history, the comics were drawn as if the plot took place on a stage and readers were seated in the middle of an audience. With the opening of Japan to the West after World War II, American animated films arrived in the Land of the Rising Sun and began to influence the works of Japanese artists. Again, Tezuka dramatically

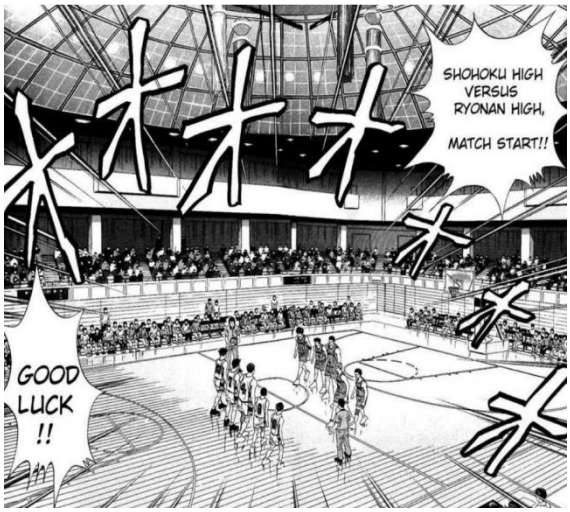


Figure 31: game starts between Shohoku High and Ryonan High (Inoue, 1991, chapter 150 p. 18)

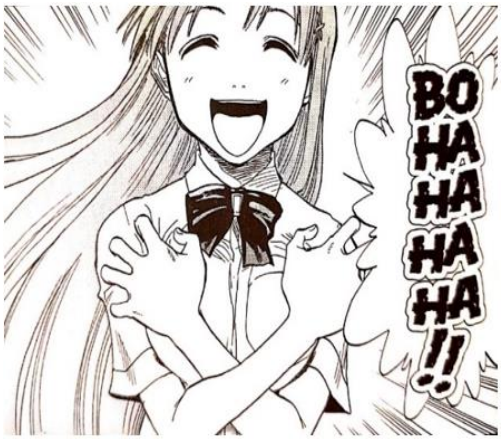


Figure 32: Mono on a laughing Inoue (Kubo, 2002, chapter 27 p. 9)

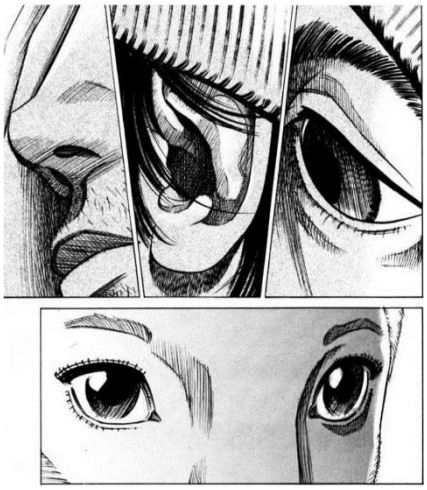


Figure 33: series of Micros taken from "Homunculus" (Yamamoto, 2003, chapter 2 p. 250)

Figure 34: Kenshiro performing the famous Hokuto Shinken technique (Buronson, 1983-1988)

transforms Japanese comics, changing the readers' viewpoint. The creator of "*Astro Boy*," influenced by U.S. cartoons, began to refine his drawings and stories with distinctly cinematic techniques, such as camera movements, sequence plans, and close-ups (Pellitteri, 2008). These changes shifted the manga perspectives and horizons. Readers no longer sit passively in the middle of an auditorium watching a theatrical play but are transmuted into cameras moved expertly by directors equipped with pencils and pens.

Unlike American comics, manga has frequent moments of "silence" that precede or follow more syncopated moments in terms of narrative pace. This writing style can be traced back to a typical Japanese form of poetry: the haiku. Haikus are lyrical compositions of very few lines characterized by their lack of clarity, which leaves expansive room

for readers' interpretation. Pellitteri (2008) glimpses this form of poetry as why manga is known for its rare dialogue and exposition. Chapter number 367 of "*Berserk*" (Mori, 2022-present), for example, contains as many as ten pages in a row without a single dialogue.

However, panels cannot be analyzed individually; instead, they must be related to each other, analyzing the narrative arc of a whole scene. Single words can rarely convey meaning; one must therefore place them in a larger, more complex context. This is also the case with comic book images, whose narrative arc is usually based on these points:

- the *Establisher* (E) is the first panel of a narrative sequence that introduces the scene and indicates its mood;
- one or more *Initials* (I), in which the action begins;
- the *Peak* (P), which represents the focal point of a sequence;
- additional information is often added to scenes for readers through the use of so-called *Refiners* (Ref);
- finally, the narrative arc ends with the *Release* (R), the scene's climax that releases the tension created in the rest of the episode (Cohn, 2007a, 2008).

I will try to make this more understandable with a scene from "*Fullmetal Alchemist*" (Figure 35; Arakawa, 2005, chapter 43, p. 23-24). What can be seen in this series of panels is Edward Elric, along with his aunt Pinako Rockbell, unearthing the Elric brothers' deceased mother. The first panel that serves as the *Establisher* for the scene features only a bare tree surrounded by a few raindrops. The lack of dialogue (which distinguishes not only this frame but the entire scene) and this first-panel point reader to the emotional gravity of the sequence. The *Initial Phase*, which recounts the opening stages of the excavation, begins with an overhead shot of Ed about to start digging up his mother's body. The sequence is "interrupted" by a *Refiner* (in this case, a close-up of Edward's

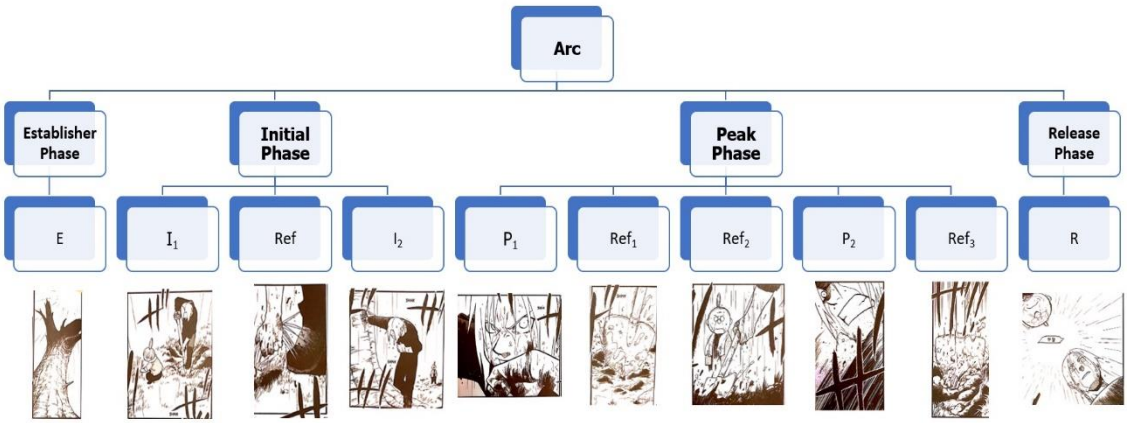


Figure 35: example of a Narrative Arc (Ellecosta, 2021)

hand busy pulling weeds) to make Ed's fatigue and feelings even more evident. The scene's highlight, or *Peak Phase*, is marked by multiple *Refiners* and a few *kanji* representing the young alchemist's heartbeat. The heartbeat's sound and the extensive use of Refiners add further tension to the scene. The last *Peak*-panel (P2) features a close-up of a grimace by Ed that lets the reader know he has reached the buried body of his deceased mother. The struggle is further made explicit by the last *Refiner* (Ref3), which lingers on the shovel and is accompanied by a resounding "Clonk!". The *Release Phase*, consisting of a single panel, dissolves the tension of the sequence by framing the distraught faces of Ed and Pinako (Ellecosta, 2021). As was evident from this example, an element can be used several times in a row (in this example: Ref1 and Ref2) using *Environmental Conjunctions*. This a strategy that is often used to give additional breathing room for the narrative (Cohn, 2010), as the JVL makes significantly less use of *Macros* than *Micros* and *Monos*, an indication that manga focus much more on individual characters and not on broad scenes (Cohn, 2005).

4.3.3. The manga characters

The world of Japanese comics is primarily populated by characters with giant eyes, extravagantly shaped hair along with tiny mouths and noses. On the other hand, physical appearance enhances the cultural gender differences between males and females (Cohn, 2010). For JVL "talkers," it is not difficult to recognize the more angular features that contour the faces of male characters, as opposed to the rounded shapes of feminine visages (Cohn, 2010). This drawing technique can, in turn, be linked back to the concept of *takete* and *maluma* (Figure 36). Wolfgang Köhler (1929) hypothesized that every word our brain perceives is connected to other features, such as an image. Hearing the word *takete*, our brain creates an angular, rough figure. The exact opposite happens with the term *maluma*, which makes us think of something round and soft. Thus, it can be hypothesized that making men's faces exceptionally rugged and angular is a way of further "masculinizing" them. In contrast, the smooth, round faces of females make them further pleasing to the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975).

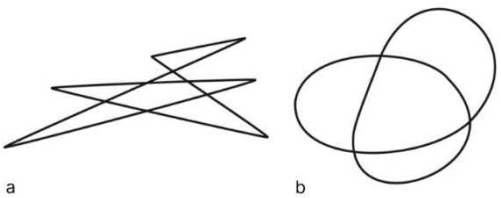


Figure 36: Takete and Maluma (retrieved from https://journal.tabloud.com/takete-e-maluma-legame-tra-forma-e-suono/)

Of course, gender differences do not stop at the depiction of faces alone; this is especially accentuated in

manga aimed at male adolescents. In so-called *shōnen*, men are frequently drawn in a hyper-masculine way (McLelland, 2010), while women are often objects of sexual gratification for those looking at them (Mulvey, 1975). Women in manga are a prime example of what John Berger (1972) called the *male gaze*, that is, the man inside the camera lewdly watching the woman inside a work such as a movie. Girls in manga are nearly always drawn in an oversexualized fashion with huge breasts, thin waists, and long legs (Chen, 2011; Ito, 1994a; Shigematsu, 1999; Thompson, 2007). Furthermore, physical attributes are a device used by cartoonists to represent the characters' personalities visually. For example, comedic sidekicks are often drawn as awkward and chubby compared to their more heroic counterparts, who are often good-looking (Pellitteri, 2008).

Regarding the character's personality, on the other hand, there is an interesting contrast between *character* and *kyarâ* in literature. After World War II, mangakas focused heavily on figures' character and psychological development, giving them increasingly complex and profound growth paths (Pellitteri, 2008). This category of personas that Gô Itô (2005) refers to as *characters* have, over time, been overtaken by *kyarâs*. The latter are protagonists who are more childish and superficial in their content. However, thanks to their aesthetics, they are excellent marketing products that are often characterized by rounded and sweet lines (Pellitteri, 2008). Simply put, *kawaii*.

The expression *kawaii* – derived from the Japanese word *kaiwasa* (諧和), which means cute, sweet, and helpless – has become, in recent years, an increasingly common feature in the portrayal of characters in Japanese comic books. These round-faced figures with childlike personalities were once designed mainly for the younger audience. In this regard, one can mention characters such as Arale, Doraemon (Figure 37), and Keroro. Nowadays, these characters are also very loved by adults, who are captivated by the

Figure 37: Doraemon (retrieved from https://www.wired.it/play/televisione/2019/11/29/curios-ita-50-anni-doraemon/)

Figure 38: super-deformed Miyagi and Hanamichi from "Slam Dunk" (Inoue 1990-1996)

adorable features of these figures and spend plenty of money on gadgets (Pellitteri, 2008). A particular form of *kawaii* is the super-deformed (Figure 38). In this case, the physical proportions of the figures are exaggeratedly altered to make them funny and exacerbate a particularly hilarious scene in the story (Pellitteri, 2008).

Opposed to the *kawaii* characters are the *cool* figures, good-looking and confident characters such as Sailor Mars, Rukawa from "*Slam Dunk*" (Inoue, 1990-1996), or the famous Kenshirō. Interestingly, a good portion of manga antagonists falls into this category (Pellitteri, 2008): Hikari of "*Neon Genesis Evangelion*" (Sadamoto, 1994-2013), Griffith the Hawk's Band captain, or "*Death Note's"* (Ōba & Obata, 2003-2006) anti-hero Light Yagami.

Itô (2005) notices how the distinction between *character* and *kyarâ* is becoming increasingly blurred. More and more mangakas are creating figures that exhibit both characteristics, mixing more exciting and profound personality traits with more childlike ones that appeal more to the general merchandising-loving public. A similar thing happens with *cool* and *kawaii* figures, which are widely the most popular among the audience (Ellecosta & Basso, 2023). Characters like Usagi ("*Sailor Moon*") and Gon ("*Hunter x Hunter*"; Togashi, 1998-present) present personalities that can be described as childish, but in difficult times they can be strong and confident (Pellitteri, 2008).

4.4. A highly “genderized” medium

According to Christine Gledhill's (1998) theory, a literary genre comprises texts with specific characteristics, such as the emotional impact generated, plot structure, and setting. However, regarding manga, genre categorization is not done following this principle, rather it is based on the gender and age of the audience (Bindi, et al., 2021; Cooper-chen, 2001; Ito, 1994b; Kinsella, 2000; Posocco, 2005; Schodt, 1986). Sex and the gender of consumers for any given product have been crucial marketing tools for categorizing audiences (Lacey, 2000), but this is even more evident in the Japanese context (Clammer, 1997).

Targets are classified by taking into consideration the age and biological sex of the audience. Usually, in literature, there are six categories considered in this scheme:

- *kodomo* are the comics aimed at children's audiences*;*

- *shōnen* and *seinen,* on the other hand, are designed respectively for a young and adult male audience*;*
- *shōjo* is the manga for adolescent girls, and josei is the manga for adult female readers*;*
- moreover, pornographic-themed manga is called *hentai.*

After this brief introduction to manga, let us move on to the most important part of this thesis: gender issues in Japanese comics.

According to some scholars (Fujita, 2011, 2012; Saito, 2007; Takai, 2005; Wakakusa, 2003), representations in Japanese media are biased by sex and gender, as we have seen with the manga target audience, reinforcing a binary system of femininity and masculinity. The thought often compounds that manga audiences are indifferent and unaffected by gender representations, accepting without questioning sexualizations and stereotypes (Tanaka, 2013). However, as has been widely discussed, there are fluid representations of both male and female genders, demonstrating that manga presents some examples that do not conform to Nipponese gender roles. Moreover, as Blumer and Katz (1974) remind us, one must recognize the audience's capacity for interpretation and engagement. However, what readers think about manga and its gender representations will be discussed more in-depth in the chapters on research methods and results.

In the following sections, different gender representations will be analyzed by considering different cultural factors and how certain stereotypes and cultural "hegemonies" have changed. As in the case of masculinity yearned for by most Japanese people, which has shifted from that of the samurai to that of the so-called *sarariiman* (サラリーマン; salaryman), that is, men dedicated to working and the financial maintenance of the family (Chen, 2012; Dales, 2009; Dasgupta, 2000). We will analyze how even the latter form of hegemonic masculinity is challenged by more fluid gender roles, such as herbivorous men and hikikomori, two forms of masculinity spreading across the globe. We will look at some examples of female characters who do not only lend themselves to being specks, used merely as voyeuristic gratification for men, but are drawn and written as strong and, at times, even dominant over their male counterparts. In addition, we will examine some examples of comics with gay, lesbian, and transgender characters at their core to try to understand how the queer community is perceived in Japan and especially by the *otaku* community.

4.5. What is "*macho*" in Japan? Changing masculinities in Japan

During the samurai era, especially during the Edo period (1603-1867), warriors practiced the so-called *seppuku* (切腹; "belly-cutting with a knife"). This way of committing suicide through self-disembowelment was practiced to avoid dying by enemy hands or as a way of cleansing the soul after a severe injustice (Bertram Freeman-Mitford, 2007; Treccani; Turnbull, 1977). The ritual involved the samurai sitting in the *seiza* (正座; "sitting properly") position, kneeling with his toes stretched backward, taking a sharp knife and, starting from the right, stabbing his stomach, provoking a cut so deep that it caused death (Nitobe, 1998; Rankin, 2011). By opening his belly, the place where the soul resided according to the beliefs of the time, the samurai would show those present the purity of his spirit, which was clean and blameless (Rankin, 2011; Turnbull, 1977).

This brief description of the ritual may sound brutally painful and unnecessarily long, but this is not entirely true. Indeed, the ritual was designed so the *seppuku* practitioner would die as peacefully and honorably as possible. In this series of panels from "*Lone Wolf and Cub*" (Figure 39; Koike & Kojima, 1970-1976), we can see that the focus of the action relies not only on the one who is about to commit suicide. Among the participants in the ritual is also the figure of the *kaishakunin* (介錯人), who, once the ripping operation was completed and observing the samurai's body leaning forward, decapitated the latter with a clean blow ending the suffering (Seward, 1977). However, the *kaishakunin's* job was by no means easy and required great sword mastery. Indeed, the head could not be detached from the body (this would have been a grave symbol of dishonor) but had to remain anchored to it via tendons and muscles (Bertram Freeman-Mitford, 2007; Nitobe, 1998).

With the advent of the Meiji era in 1889, *seppuku* (or *hara-kiri*) was eradicated as a form of punishment. However, this does not mean that other people in the following decades did not perpetrate it. There are many testimonies of people who committed suicide through self-disembowelment for various reasons: mourning the emperor's death, defeated generals in World War II, and many more (Fusé, 1980). Sadly, even at the end of the last millennium, a case of *hara-kiri* became very popular.

In the spring of 1999, a golf equipment company's salesclerk broke into the firm president's office; fifty-eight-year-old Masaharu Nonaka, equipped with two razor-sharp fish filleting knives, rails against his former employer because he had been told to resign from his position. At that point, gripped by despondency over the affront he suffered, he ripped

Figure 39: Seppuku in Lone Wolf and Cub (retrieved from https://www.pinterest.it/pin/414612709437196824/)

open his stomach in what has been described as the first "*corporate hara-kiri*" (BBC, 2000). This news caused a stir and spread worldwide because it symbolized what was perceived as the crisis of the salarymen, who rebelled against the Japanese establishment (Matanle et al., 2008).

Thus, we come to the actual reason for this whole premise. The samurai, the military, and the salaryman not only share *seppuku* as a way of honorably committing suicide, but they also share the fact that they have been, for some time, the most coveted and desired male type in Japanese society (Dasgupta, 2013).

The salaryman has been for many years (and still is, in fact) the most sought-after form of masculinity by the Japanese population (Connell, 2005), exactly as the samurai and the soldier were before it (Chen, 2012; Dasgupta, 2013). At this point, it is fair to ask two

questions: how is it that the all-proud, all-virtue masculinity of the samurai has been replaced by the decidedly less "manly" salaryman? How is it that nowadays, even white-collar masculinity is challenged by what Dasgupta (2000) calls "*salaryman escaping*"?

4.5.1. Hegemonic masculinity in manga: sports, alcohol, and otaku

We abundantly discussed about hegemonic masculinity in the first chapter. Furthermore, we analyzed the permanent misogyny that permeates Japanese society, which can safely be defined as a patriarchal community. Obviously, this cultural background comes to the fore, also in the most renowned and prolific Japanese media: manga.

For example, let us talk about what happens in boys' sports manga. First of all female characters are frequently absent, let alone figures belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community of whom there is virtually no trace. It is enough to think of two prototypical comics of the sports genre such as "*Captain Tsubasa*" and "*Slam Dunk*," in which we do not find any notable female characters, except in the former case, the mother figure and in the latter the main character's love interest. As it is usual in many countries, sports are considered to be mainly a male activity (Donaldson & Poynting, 2004). According to Connell (2009), it is, therefore, necessary to recognize in the body not only objects, but also agents of social practice. In other words, practicing sports, an athletic body, accompanied by a particular diet based on meat and alcohol consumption, is an important differentiating factor between the dominant and subordinate male classes (Donaldson & Poynting, 2004).

For example, the decrease in alcohol consumption in Japanese society has been attributed to herbivorous men who belong to a type of male subordinate to the hegemonic one (Srimulyani, 2021). The latter may seem irrelevant; however, alcohol is constantly depicted in Japanese popular media, including manga. In male comics, sake is not only used as an integral cultural product but also to enhance the social activities of the characters. There are frequent scenes where salarymen gather around a table to discuss important business matters, accompanied by a visible bottle of sake (e.g., "*Sake no Hisomochi*"; Roswell, 1996). In addition, a scene from chapter #585 of "*One Piece*" that depicts Luffy together with two of his friends in the practice of *Kyōdai Sakazuki* (兄弟盃; a ritual typically performed to create brotherly bonds) has become particularly famous (Rankin, 2012). The panel sequence (Figure 40) shows the three children pouring copious portions of sake into three cups. This alcohol-centered ritual is perceived as a symbol

of masculinity and symbolizes the hope of remaining friends, another essential characteristic typical of manhood, expressed not only in manga (Nishimura, 1997) but in general (look up "male bonding" in Tiger, 1969). The low consumption of alcohol in recent years is thus perceived by Japanese society as a direct affront to the establishment and the dominant culture, so much so that actual contests have been organized to entice young people to drink more (Abbasi & Russon, 2022).

During the discussion made in the first chapter about hegemonic masculinity, it became clear that the most coveted form of masculinity can change with time. Sometimes, the shifts can happen more peacefully, and in other occasions changes suddenly occur and with no lack of violence; as shown by the example of the gay communities

Figure 40: Kyōdai Sakazuki-scene in One Piece (Oda, 2010, Chapter 585, p. 14)

(Messerschmidt, 1997). With due respect, we could compare what happens in big-city gay communities with what happens in Japan regarding *otaku* (オタク; "*anime-obsessed nerds").*

The term "*otaku*" is familiar to most manga and anime fans worldwide (Okada, 1997; Pellitteri, 2008). It must, nonetheless, be remembered that this word has taken on rather negative connotations in its home country (Eng, 2001; Fang & Fang, 2022; Welin, 2013). In fact, *otaku*, in its hardest conception, is synonymous with a person who is detached from society and spends most of his or her days isolated in his or her room that encloses a small multimedia paradise consisting of comic books, cartoon DVDs, and video games (Azuma, 2010; Eng, 2001; Pellitteri, 2008). However, as illustrated by Grassmuck (1990), manga fanatics do not reject and are not entirely rejected by Japanese society. Moreover, it is at this moment that the parallels with the homosexual community made earlier become clear. Both forms of masculinity are respected and discriminated against by the society they live in. Picking up again on Grassmuck's (1990, para. 70) discussion: "[Japanese] society has come to realize that it needs otaku. Their fantasies and their detailed technical knowledge make them very attractive employees, for example, in software. Otaku are fit well for Japanese capitalism".

It is, therefore, clear that the technology, the gadget, the video game, and especially the comic book market can only do with otakus, who represent a highly significant part of their audience. It does not end here. As mentioned earlier in talking about the homosexual community and its relative "exaltation" through the promotion of events dedicated to the rainbow community, otakus are also extolled by a part of Japanese and international society. For example, it is well known that in Japan, an integral segment of the population perceives otaku as a form of expression to be welcomed, especially as they have also moved to the West. Cultural appreciation from the United States has always been essential for the Japanese (Okada, 1997). In addition, one cannot overlook the fact that comic book fairs are steadily increasing worldwide (Elliott, 2018; Pellitteri, 2006), demonstrating an ever-growing esteem for the comic book fan community.

As a reminder, hard otakus live in a state of semi-reclosure in their rooms, thus experiencing a lifestyle very similar to what is commonly known as hikikomori (Eng, 2001). This is another male-dominated community that has moved from Japan to the rest of the world. We will talk more specifically about masculinity in Japanese comics, starting from the hikikomori.

4.5.2. Being a man in manga: heroes, herbivores, social reclusion, and androgyny

The hikikomori phenomena

In the city of Kawasaki, which is in the Kanagawa Prefecture, lives a young 22-year-old lad named Tatsuhiro Satō (Figure 41). Tatsuhiro has been living for roughly four years in a state of self-reclosure from society. Convinced that there is some plot hatched by Japanese society to create a massive community of hikikomori, he decides to lock himself in his room and never go out again. The goal of this mysterious organization, which Tatsuhiro calls "N.H.K." (*Nihon Hikikomori Kyōkai*, meaning the "Japanese Hikikomori Association"), is allegedly to build a social class – that of the hikikomori – so that the elite strata of the community can have someone to exploit and subjugate.

Tatsuhiro represents a classic stereotype of the Japanese hikikomori: a heterosexual man who excludes himself from society for reasons that relate to the enormous social pressure placed on the male gender (Crepaldi, 2019c; Meligrana, 2013; Yong & Nomura, 2019), who supports himself mostly with money from his family members (Kopyciński, 2018; Yuen, et al., 2018); and who spends much time on the Internet (Crepaldi, 2019a; Kato et al., 2019). It is worthwhile to take a quick step back and explain what the phenomenon of hikikomori is and what it stems from.

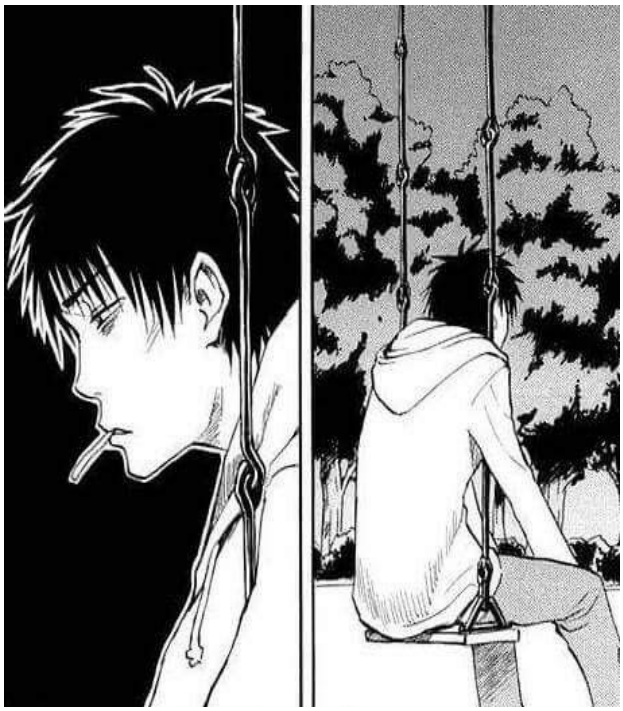


Figure 41: Tatsuhiro Satō (retrieved from https://i.pinimg.com/originals/a3/d0/ae/a3d0ae4b30f3cb0176d4daddffa3c272.jpg)

Tamaki Saitō (1998), considered by many to be the leading expert on this particular social phenomenon, describes in his famous work "*Shakaiteki hikikomori: owaranai shishunki*" ("*Hikikomori: Adolescence Without End*") the condition of hikikomori. The five points by which he clearly and concisely explicated the main characteristics of social withdrawals have become renowned: (a) the first point, of course, was devoted to the fact that hikikomori voluntarily exclude themselves from society for at least six months;

(b) a general phobia toward school that frequently evolves into dropping out; (c) apathy and poor social exchange; (d) a radical alteration of the circadian rhythm; and (e) the last element marks a violent behavior in the family, mainly directed toward their mothers (Saitō, 1998). A sixth item, theorized by Alan Teo (2010), has added to this, which links us back to the otaku discourse: self-enclosure in one's own room. Eventually, Suwa (2003) and other colleagues hypothesized the presence of two distinct forms of hiki-komori. Primary-level social withdrawals are distinguished by the fact that psychopathologies do not accompany their voluntary exclusion from society. On the other hand, those at the secondary level have pathologies including developmental and personality disorders. Justifiably, one wonders why this phenomenon finds its roots in Japanese society.

We briefly mentioned that the cause of self-reclusion is the social pressure experienced by hikikomori. It is, therefore, no coincidence that this social phenomenon originated in Japan, which is known to represent one of the most strict and harsh communities towards the male gender (Ranieri, 2016). One only must think of the exorbitant number of deaths caused by the so-called *karoshi* (過労死; "death by overwork"), which is estimated to be around 10,000 in 2020 (Hunt, 2021), which predominantly affects male workers (Kanai, 2009). Unable to keep up with the rhythms imposed by Japanese society, social recluses embark on what Dario Meligrana (2013) refers to as a "*silent protest*." This disapproval does not result in violent riots but culminates in self-reclosure and total distancing from society.

A community like Japan's, which, let us remember, still relies heavily on the male identity of the salaryman, is therefore seriously challenged by the ever-increasing amount of hikikomori. Tamaki Saitō, in a conference held on July the 29th of 2019, even speculated that the social withdrawals community counts 2 million hikikomori and could even amount to 10 million in a few years. These numbers would worry any society because being a hikikomori implies being NEET, meaning unemployed and not in education. Having so many people not studying and not working has visible economic effects, as shown by numerous studies (Kopyciński, 2018; Nonaka & Sakai, 2021).

Nevertheless, let us move on with Tatsuhiro’s story. The doorbell rings. Tatsuhiro listlessly gets up and goes to open the door. He is confronted by a lovely little girl named Misaki, who reveals to the young protagonist that she is aware of his condition and knows of a functional remedy to resolve the situation. Armed with a contract, Misaki proposes that Tatsuhiro sign it and pledge that he will leave the house at least once a day and go to a park not too far away. The young protagonist proves reluctant but eventually relents

and is persuaded. The fact that Tatsuhiro agrees with Misaki's suggestion is close to the reality of hikikomori. In fact, social recluses occasionally try to "diversify" their solitude by indulging in evening walks or shopping in sparsely trafficked supermarkets (Hattori, 2005). Generally, however, they try to avoid crowded places that might lead to social exchanges (Wong, 2009).

Family circumstances play a substantial role, as demonstrated by clinical psychologist Fiorenzo Ranieri (2016), who analyzed the situation of hikikomori in the Tuscan province of Arezzo. This study showed that Italian social withdrawals had very similar household settings as their Japanese peers. Synthetically, hikikomori family units are mainly composed of a) an absent, overworked father who is unable to maintain a relationship with his children; and b) a mother who is obsessively attached to her kids but who is personally in need of help and, therefore, unable to establish a meaningful bond with them. In "*Welcome to the N.H.K.*," we see a similar family pattern as far as Tatsuhiro's household is concerned. The protagonist of the manga lives off the money sent to him by his mother, who calls him often and thus makes her support and affection felt; however, she cannot emotionally support her son. Moreover, the father is absent, as proven by the fact that he is only once mentioned during the whole narrative. However, one must say a word for the young hikikomori's mother. She cannot know Tatsuhiro's condition since he keeps it hidden. This detail is also verisimilar to what happens to social recluses in real life. The Japanese perceive being hikikomori as a social stigma of which they feel deep shame (Iwakabe, 2021). It is certainly no mystery that in modern societies, self-realization is a crucial thing to pursue and, in some cases, even becomes the only real driver of existence (Piceci, 2019). This becomes particularly evident in masculinist and patriarchal societies such as Japan, which places enormous importance on the ability on the part of the breadwinner to bring sustenance to his household (Connell, 2005; Gwynne, 2013).

Involuntary Celibates and cases of misogyny in manga

Obviously, detaching oneself entirely from the community and consequently avoiding any social relationships implies the fact that another important characteristic of the heterosexual male is missed: being able to attract sexual partners (Crepaldi, 2019b; Justin et al., 2022; Mulhall et al., 2008). It is equally evident that the lack of relationships, as far as hikikomori are concerned, is due to their self-enclosure rather than an inability to be attractive to possible love and sexual partners. The main difference between social recluses and incels (another social phenomenon of great importance and, in my opinion, far too underestimated in the literature and media) lies specifically in this.

Similarly, to the hikikomori, so-called incels ('Involuntary Celibates') isolate themselves from society for different reasons than hikikomori. On the one hand, hikikomori exclude themselves due to heavy social pressures. On the other hand, incels shut themselves off because they cannot establish an emotional and sexual relationship with a partner of the opposite sex, the reason why they perceive a deep social stigma. Thus, they are prevented from realizing themselves as persons and heterosexual males (Crepaldi, 2020; Justin, et al., 2022). A large proportion of the members of this community, however, do not place the 'blame' on themselves but accuse women who are guilty of only pursuing looks, money, and social status in a man (Crepaldi, 2019b; Gallerano et al., 2018; Longo, 2020). According to the incel community, physical appearance plays the most significant role. Beauty would, therefore, not lie 'in the eye of the beholder' but would be a measurable and objective prerogative. Height, penis length, facial shape, and jawline would be the first qualities a woman would pay attention to. Hence, if a man lacks in one or more of these particularities, he is destined to be alone (Segalewitz, 2020).

Fortunately, having gained greater economic and social independence, women in much of the Western world are free to choose their partners, inevitably increasing competition in the heterosexual male population, consequently raising the difficulty of gaining the interest of a person of the opposite sex (Crepaldi, 2019b). Thus, the 'red pill' theory has gained more and more resonance. Simply put, it theorizes that social power is mainly in the hands of women and that men are simply puppets managed by them (Vallerga & Zurbriggen, 2022). Based on these misogynistic and conspiratorial ideologies, several manga were born, and the core of their narrative deal with revenge porn and violence against women.

'*Prison Experiment*' (Kantetsu & Minase, 2016) tells the story of Aito Eyama. Aito is a teenager constantly bullied by his classmates, who perpetually beat and taunt him. However, one day, things are destined to change. Aito receives a letter inviting him to participate in the so-called 'Captivity Game,' which assures the winner with a substantial monetary prize. The game consists of assuming the role of the captor, choosing a victim to be held prisoner for a month, and torturing her, however, without killing her, which is the only rule to be followed. The main character uses this 'lucky' opportunity to exert his sadistic and macabre revenge on Aya Kirishima (the ringleader of the bullying group that makes Aito's life hell). The plot revolves around repeated scenes in which Aya is abused in the worst ways. The girl repeatedly tries to escape, but this only increases Aito's

repressed rage as he reduces her to nothing more than a mere object at the yoke of his worst perversions (MyAnimeList).

Probably the most striking and famous case of revenge porn-centered manga is *'Redo of Healer'* (Figure, 42; Tsukiyo & Haga, 2017-present). Keyaru is a young healer whose primary purpose in the plot and in the group of allies is to cast healing and regeneration spells. Furthermore, the protagonist has often been sexually abused by members of the royal family, including Princess Flare, now a permanent member of Keyaru's party. For unspecified reasons, the young magician acquires unimaginable powers that make him strong above all else. Therefore, he decides to go back in time to take revenge on the people who have abused him. Among his victims, of course, is Flare. The princess is vilely abused by the protagonist, who, in the first instance, decides to break all the girl's fingers, promising her to stop if she ceases to scream. Of course, the crying and screaming do not stop, and this causes Keyaru to use his skills to heal the princess's hands and start over. This scene, which is complicated to stomach and easily categorized as torture porn, would be hard for many viewers to swallow. However, it doesn't end here. Once this debasing and denigrating sequence is over, the protagonist breaks the princess's legs and begins a terrifying scene of sexual abuse. Finally, Keyaru erases the girl's memory in what should appear to be a scene of compassion. However, once the unfortunate girl's memories are erased, the magician gaslights her into having 'consensual' sex. From this point on, the plot is a succession of violence perpetrated against women (slavery and more rape scenes), designed to please the scopophilic gaze of a fringe of men.

Figure 42: 1st issue of "Redo of Healer" (Tsukiyo & Haga, 2017; retrieved from https://www.drcommodore.it/2021/03/17/redo-of-healer-magic-press-annuncio/)

Of course, it must be remembered that not all incels are misogynistic and blame women for their single status (Crepaldi, 2019b). Consequently, even male characters in manga do not aim to treat their female counterparts negatively and disrespectfully. In this regard,

it is appropriate to open the discussion of *bishōnen*, a particular form of masculinity that we have already crossed in the previous chapter.

A more 'gentle' and feminine masculinity: the herbivorous man and the bishōnen

A further form of masculinity not conforming to the salaryman in comics and Japanese culture is that of the so-called *soushokukei danshi* (草食(系)男子), which translates as 'herbivorous man.' This term, introduced by Maki Fukasawa, includes men who are not driven by ambition nor by their careers and, in addition, present a more gentle and passive manner towards women (Morioka, 2013). According to some scholars (Buerk, 2012; Chen, 2012), this being less dominant and assertive towards women is the reason for the low birth rate in Japan. However, the lack of sexual relations with persons of the opposite sex does not make herbivorous men necessarily homosexual (Ushikubo, 2008). Generally speaking, herbivorous men do not see women as mere ego gratification but are much more likely to engage in an equal relationship with their partner that is mainly based on affection rather than physical intercourse (Morioka, 2013), as evidenced by the increase in men caring for their children and household (Yamada, 2008).

In addition, herbivorous men have another characteristic that inevitably collides with Japan's most coveted form of masculinity. Herbivorous men are generally unambitious at work and do not ruthlessly pursue careers. A fact that clashes with the three characteristics of Japanese masculinity theorized by Ito Koto (in Yamada, 2008): a) first and foremost, the man must be oriented towards superiority; b) he must be interested in property and possession; and finally, c) his behavior must pursue power. Generally, it is work and its success that defines a man's qualities, especially how masculine he is. The difference between salaryman and Western masculinity lies precisely in this. Although standardized masculine stereotypes related to physical appearance and behavior are similar in Japan and the West, masculinity in the Land of the Rising Sun is much more geared toward economic well-being (Srimulyani, 2021). Herbivorous men oppose this. In short, "herbivorous men do not want to be trapped in the routine of office work, they basically want to deconstruct the image of the salaryman as one of the symbols of masculinity" (Srimulyani, 2021, p. 119).

This type of character is predominantly present in comics dedicated to adolescent girls, namely *shōjo*. With the advent of the new millennium, especially from 2010 onwards, the figure of the male in works dedicated to female audiences has largely changed. If already, since the 1970s, the protagonists of *shōjo* comics fell in love with slender males with feminine features, it is in recent years that the character of the latter has changed.

Earlier, girls were portrayed as awkward and in need of 'salvation', usually from a male (Dowling, 1981), thus setting up a relationship of subservience on the part of the female.

Nowadays, on the other hand, gender fluidity has become prominent, suggesting a desire on the part of female mangaka to portray more 'feminine' men. In this respect, it is worth mentioning *'Monthly Girl's Nozaki-kun'* (Tsubaki, 2011-present), which features several male characters who take on distinctly female roles in the plot. For instance, one could briefly analyze the figure of Umetarou Nozaki, a character who fits the description of herbivorous men made earlier. First, Umetarou was captain of the basketball team, representing the stereotype of the competitive and sporty male. However, he later decided to abandon his basketball career to devote himself entirely to drawing manga for girls, much to the disappointment of his parents. Furthermore, despite being the main love interest of the protagonist, Umetarou avoids Sakura's attention. One of Umetarou's colleagues is Hirotaka Wakamatsu, whose job is to draw the floral and starry backgrounds of the panels. Hirotaka is another atypical character in terms of Japanese masculinity. He is characterized by a shy and insecure personality, causing him to be frequently bullied by the other figures in the manga. Another characteristic of Hirotaka's personality is that he constantly tries to avoid conflict, refusing to rebel against bullying in most cases. Due to this difficulty in letting off steam, he even develops insomnia (Srimulyani, 2021).

Another type of male character that we have briefly discussed is that of the *bishōnen* ('beautiful boys'). According to multiple authors (Hardacre, 1997; McLelland, 2000a; Ogi, 2001; Orbaugh, 2003), these androgynous males with gentle facial traits and long, slender limbs (Allison, 1996) have become a popular trope for female comic artists who can express their sexual desires through them. In Japan, the sexual sphere, especially related to the female gender, is very restrictive and should only be experienced within the walls of one's own home (Fujimoto, 2004). It is precisely for this reason that the narrative ploy of emotional and amorous relationships between young, good-looking boys is frequently used in girls' comics. In fact, many female mangakas believe that only love between men is free and exempt from relationships of force and submission (McLelland, 2010). It is, therefore, easier for women to empathize with and 'covet' the love relationship of two boys since, as Helen Hardacre (1997, p. 85) puts it, "women's degradation is as a result of sex, a consequence from which men are immune, and of which women can never be free". While it is true that most stories involving *bishōnen* are about feelings and do not necessarily end in sexual intercourse, it is

equally accurate to say that in recent years explicit depictions of and thrusts of coitus have become increasingly frequent (Welker, 2015).

Yet, restricting the definition of the beautiful boys in *shōjo* manga as homosexuals would be wrong. In fact, these are closer to being androgynous characters, especially regarding their personality. Indeed, they are empathetic figures who frequently take on roles in stories usually reserved for female characters. For instance, when another character abuses a bishōnen, they are portrayed as helpless and at the mercy of events. When,

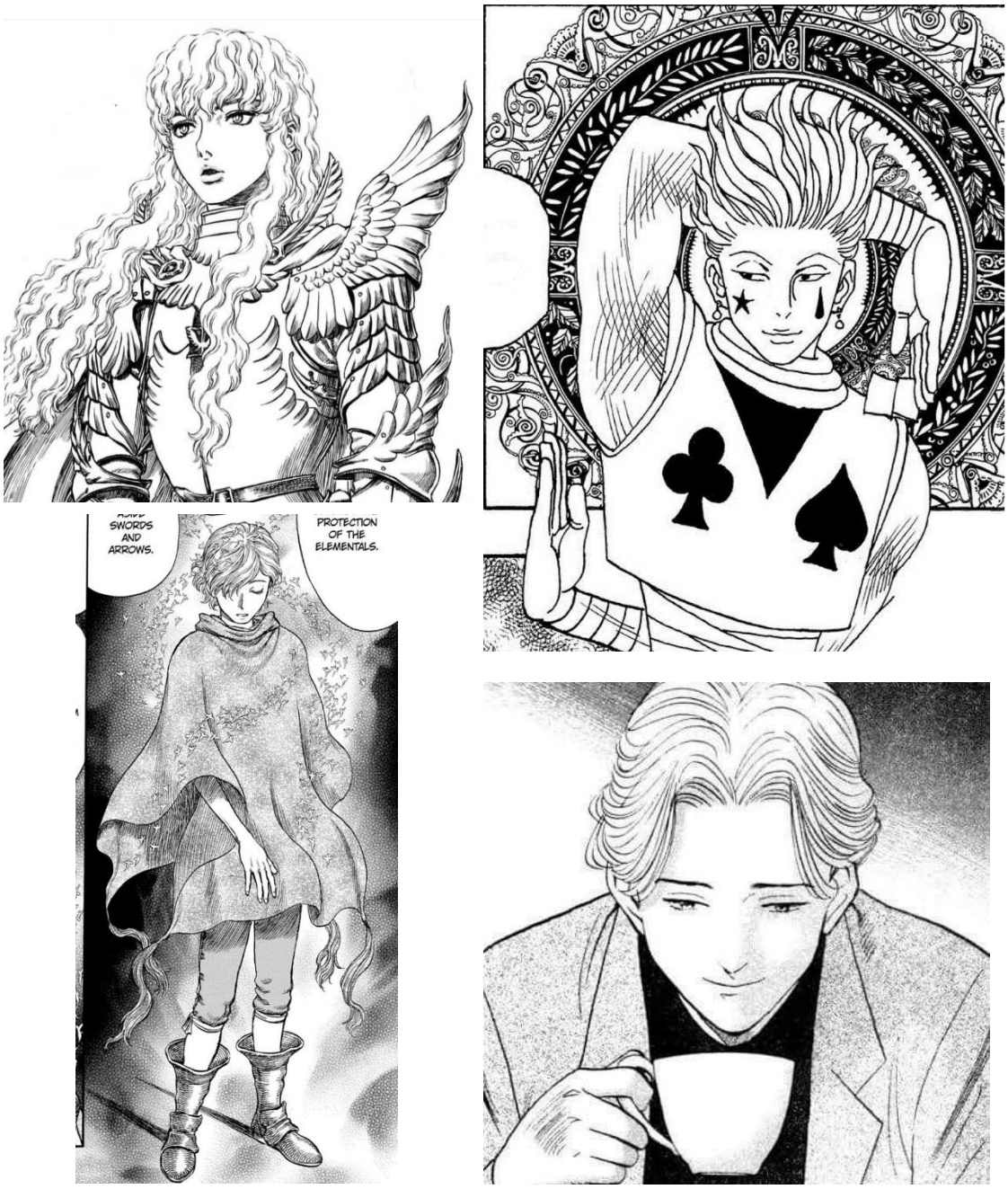


Figure 43: Some examples of bishōnen in shōnen and seinen manga (from the top left: Griffith, Hisoka, Serpico, and Johan)

on the other hand, it is he who wants to have sex, the relationship is illustrated as an equal and emotionally intense exchange (McLelland, 2010).

It should be added that *bishōnen* are not only a prerogative of manga dedicated to young girls but also represent an increasingly recurring type of figure in comics addressed to male audiences. In battle-*shōnen* and *seinen*, the androgynous characters often assume the role of antagonist or sidekick of the protagonist, who usually takes on roles more consonant with Japanese masculinity (Roden, in Darling-Wolf, 2003 p. 79). Examples include Griffith and Serpico from *'Berserk,'* Hisoka from *'Hunter x Hunter,'* and Johan Liebert from *'Monster'* (Figure 43). The most interesting peculiarity of these characters is that their androgyny, or rather, their feminine side, is constantly punished (Fetch, 2014; Saito, 2007). Masculinity is associated with stability, security, and consistency, whereas femininity is unpredictable and unconstrained and should consequently be kept at bay (Bordo, 1995; Iida, 2005). Otherwise, some sanction is going to be imposed. This concept is more easily understood with the help of an example.

Envy is one of the seven homunculi that act as counterparts to the Elric brothers in *'Fullmetal Alchemist'* and as can be easily guessed, embodies the capital sin that lends him his name. The gender of this figure is not clearly defined. What can be ascertained from reading the comic is that the other characters address Envy with masculine pronouns without ever being contradicted, thus suggesting that the homunculus recognizes himself in the male gender (Fetch, 2014). Envy is a shapeshifter, which in Japanese culture usually coincides with the representations of the animal spirits of the raccoon and the fox, creatures mythologically considered to be false (Foster, 2012). This specificity also applies to this homunculus, who, in the plot, takes on the role of a lying and elusive figure who achieves his goals through deception. Throughout the plot, Envy the jealous, takes on various forms; however, his favorite is that of an androgynous male who displays both masculine physical characteristics and feminine features such as the curve of his hips, which in some panels is drawn in a particularly tapered manner. Envy's clothing is also considered feminine, as evidenced by the light black sleeveless crop top covering his chest and revealing his navel and flat abs. The pelvic area is wrapped in a pair of shorts that sometimes resembles a very short skirt (Fetch, 2014). This peculiar outfit choice makes him the most skin-exposing figure, not only of the male characters but also of the female ones in '*Fullmetal Alchemist.'* Consequently, even from the perspective of Laura Mulvey (1975) and the male gaze, Envy assumes a role usually dedicated to

women. Indeed, his physical appearance and his skimpy clothing make him the object of the scopophilic gaze of those looking at him.

Moreover, it is common for Envy to emphasize the importance of physical appearance to his persona. Attention to personal appearance is a further characteristic typically associated with the female gender. However, it is shared by more and more young boys in Japan who oppose Japanese standards of masculinity (Iida, 2005). In summary, the homunculus of jealousy is thus not, as is usually the case with male characters, an observer. Instead, Envy becomes a passive object to whom the eye is turned (Fetch, 2014).

Furthermore, as already discussed, gender is performative and not based on given facts (Butler, 1990). For instance, even the physical movements of the homunculus of jealousy emphasize an evident duality between the feminine and masculine parts. In a fight scene between him and Edward Elric, it can be seen how the more masculine part takes control of his personality (Saito, 2007), while in some instances, he assumes a typically feminine posture with his hand on his hips and the body weight resting on the left leg (Mulvey, 1975; Figure 27).

An immense hatred towards humanity drives Envy's actions during '*Fullmetal Alchemist*' storyline. This blatant racism that the homunculus of jealousy feels stems from the fact that people (as opposed to homunculi) fail to prioritize aspects of reason over feelings. However, what causes this hatred is also the primary source of suffering for Envy and triggers within him a sense of jealousy towards humankind. Indeed, Envy's true feelings surface during the confrontation between the homunculus, Colonel Roy Mustang, Lieutenant Riza Hawkeye, Scar, and young Edward Elric. After suffering massive damage from the colonel's alchemical fire attacks, Envy loses the strength to maintain his androgynous form and is, as a result, forced to assume his authentic image: that of a worm. Seeing that the then foes, Scar and the two Amestris army members Mustang and Hawkeye, manage to put aside their animosity to defeat the common enemy bring out all the feminine sides of Envy. In a particularly moving scene, Envy's true personality is unmasked by Edward Elric, a fact that unleashes an enormous feeling of shame in the homunculus. To suppress these feminine sides of him, Envy decides to inflict the ultimate punishment on himself by committing suicide (Figure 44), proving again that feminine aspects, if not kept at bay, are in some way punished or subdued (Fetch, 2014).

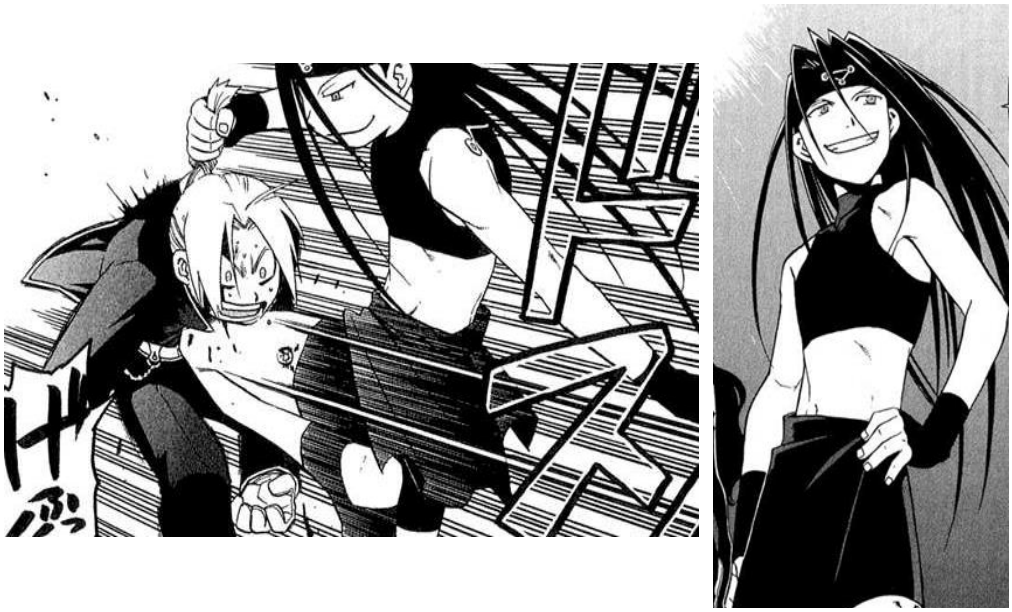


Figure 44: Envy in a more masculine pose on the left, and in a more feminine on the right

The strong (but still emotional) macho

During the fight scene analyzed earlier, the difference between the androgynous and the more masculine male comes to the fore. The latter is 'allowed' to release his anger and lose control (Bordo, 1995). It was previously mentioned that the alchemical explosions Roy Mustang created drastically weakened Envy's power, causing him to revert to his worm stage. Unlike the homunculus, Mustang is a man one may consider part of the hegemonic masculinity of the fictional kingdom of Amestris. Not only is he an active member of the army, but he is also proficient in organizing plans to expose the homunculi's wiles and is particularly courageous. These are all characteristics in Japanese culture attributable to the male gender (Saito, 2007). According to Susan Bordo (1995), only males are allowed to be violent and lose their temper in pursuit of their goals.

Nevertheless, as is the case in almost all Japanese comics, even the most masculine male has traits of femininity in his being. Thinking back to Roy Mustang: despite being calculating and, at times, a hyper-violent character, his personality is much more fluid and not at all monolithic. For there are plenty of scenes in which he shows concern for lieutenant Riza Hawkeye, and the panel in which he mourns the death of his best friend, Maes Hughes, has become particularly famous. Therein lies the difference between the males of manga and those of American comics (Friedlander, 2015), although in both countries, there are evident changes in hegemonic masculinity (Abele, 2015).

The vision of masculinity changed considerably in the United States at the beginning of the new millennium. According to Professor Elizabeth Abele (2015), this shift in the paradigm of American masculinity can be attributed to the feminist movements of the late

1990s. Feminism allowed men to live according to their patterns without holding themselves to the rigid canons of US hegemonic masculinity. This, however, did not permeate the world of comics. Generally, in American comics, males are represented in a much more one-dimensional way than their Japanese counterparts. As far as American superheroes are concerned, their main characteristic is brute force. Only a little space is given to the identity and motivations that drive them to act (DuBose, 2009; Van Lier, 2017), making the plot 'flatter' and more based on simple good versus evil struggles (with some exceptions like Spider Man and Batman). In addition, American comic superheroes display the characteristics of what Mike DuBose (2009) calls ornamental masculinity. The latter is a form of masculinity that lends itself perfectly to the representation of 'non-human' men, such as Superman. According to DuBose (2009), in the case of American superheroes, ornamental masculinity would rely on the emphasis on their physical features and looks. Human emotions are left out because they are considered no more than a 'distraction [that] can undermine the sense of masculinity behind the hero' (DuBose, 2009, p. 208). Obviously, physical power also plays an essential part in *shōnen* and *seinen* manga. Nevertheless, the fights (especially in recent years) are always motivated by a fundamental psychological basis, as also made explicit by Kaori Yoshida (2008, p. 76-77): "the tendency [is] to have stories not simply of good versus evil, but of complicated human relationships and worldviews." For example, we could recall Guts' story, the main character in '*Berserk*.'

Physically, the Black Swordsman displays all the characteristics of ornamental masculinity discussed above. Guts is characterized by significant musculature and, for much of the plot, is accompanied by an enormous sword (resembling a simple heap of iron; Figure 45) which only he can lift. Nevertheless, unlike characters like Captain America, who base everything on their physical strength, determination, and hyper-masculine appearance (square jaw, toned and muscular body; Van Lier, 2017), the protagonist of *'Berserk'* is the subject of multiple scenes in which he proves to be vulnerable. Throughout the plot, there are moments between fights in which Guts introspects or exchanges opinions on worldviews with other Hawk Band members. Personally, I remember with great fondness the dialogue between Guts and Casca in the twenty-second chapter called: '*The Bonfire of Dreams*' (Miura, 1993).

Before the all-important battle that could spell the end of the hundred-year war in the Midlands, Guts is sitting on the sidelines watching his comrades from above. He sees many small torches surrounding one massive fire: Griffith. Alone, with only his trusty sword at his side, he is joined by Casca. Guts debuts saying to Casca that he feels enormous envy towards her and Griffith because they are both there intoxicated by a significant dream. On the other hand, Guts claims he is only part of the Hawk Band purely by chance, going on to kill dozens, even hundreds of men for no real reason. We sense in this scene that Guts will soon choose to leave the group to pursue his dream. In this handful of panels, the more human sides of the Black Swordsman are perceptible as he lets all his doubts and fears shine through, something that rarely happens for male characters in Marvel or DC comics.

Figure 45: The famous sword-quote (Miura, 1989, chapter 1 p. 18-19)

The forms of masculinity seen above are certainly not the only ones found in the pages of Japanese comics. One could briefly mention characters such as Goku, Luffy, and Naruto, characterized by unrelenting strength of spirit but at the same time marked by incredible naiveté (Ellecosta, 2023). However, to avoid going on longer than expected, we will focus on one last form of masculinity in manga: the salaryman.

More than just robots

European and American media production makes us think that salarymen are just automatons who live only to meet their company's needs. In movies such as "*American Beauty*" and "*Wall Street*," Japanese salarymen are lonely and sad figures or greedy, power-hungry robots (Matanle et al., 2008). In academic books, on the other hand, salarymen are portrayed as people at the mercy of events, dedicated only to following the orders of their bosses (Mills, 1953; Whyte, 1960), thus becoming inflexible and highly efficient drones (Kanter, 1989; Peters, 1982). Of course, as the most coveted form of masculinity in Japan, it is only natural that the figure of the salaryman is frequently the protagonist of narratives in manga (Matanle et al., 2008).

It must be said that even in Japanese pop culture, the figure of the corporate employee is often depicted as a

> common, average, generic Japanese adult man, who tends to have a non-confrontational personality—non-adventurous, weak-willed and servile, a pushover—often working overtime to the death at some exploitative company, and conforming strictly to the formalities of an extremely vertical organizational hierarchy by respecting the authority of his superiors (Japanese with anime, 2021, para. 3).

However, as seen in the section on heroes such as Gatsu and Roy Mustang, salarymen are also depicted as multifaceted and more profound character-wise (Matanle et al., 2008). One example is Ichirō Inuyashiki, the protagonist of the *seinen* manga of the same name. Ichirō is a middle-aged man employed by a company living with his wife and two children. Characteristically, he is shy and rarely expresses his opinions clearly and directly, making him the target of frequent family criticism. The bullying he is the target of further encloses him in his lonely and melancholy State of mind, which, however, is in open conflict with his need to help others.

In the plot, Ichirō is stricken with stomach cancer. Upon learning of his condition, the protagonist retreats to a park, which a UFO hits. In the process, Ichirō is destroyed and rebuilt, in the form of a cyborg, by the aliens. With his new cyborg powers, the salaryman

can finally fulfill his desire to help people in extreme need. In addition, this will give him more courage in human relationships, bringing him much closer to his nearest and dearest (Fandom, 2023a).

Ichirō's example shows that manga focusing on salarymen concentrates on the opposing sides of workaholic life and highlights its strengths. "In these stories, the authors reveal the human being that inhabits the grey suit as he faces up to and—almost always—overcomes near-impossible challenges" (Matanle et al., 2008, p. 641). It is, however, undeniable that much of the narrative of manga centered on corporate employees tries to tell the story of the difficulties experienced by their protagonists.

Consequently, social criticism is nevertheless central and essential. While the "heroic" side of the salaryman lifestyle is extolled, the mangaka's commitment to extolling the desire to reform the system is evident (Matanle et al., 2008). "Salaryman manga is a reflection of the feelings of trauma and change that Japanese salaryman experience in their working lives and which they often associate with globalization, financialization and Americanization" (Matanle et al., 2008, p. 641), but without neglecting the resilience and strength of successful Japanese organizations (Dasgupta, 2000).

We have seen how manga presents multiple "tropes" regarding the writing of its male characters, yet never omitting the more human sides. Even the seemingly more macho figures bring out their moods, which does not usually happen in American comics (van Lier, 2017). Moreover, it is essential to recognize in the narrative of alternative masculinities, such as the herbivorous men, a strong critique of the status quo and what are the expectations of Japanese society (Srimulyani, 2021). The manga salaryman recognizes values in Japanese hegemonic masculinity that should not be underestimated (Matanle et al., 2008), but without leaving aside the obvious problems caused by their social status (Dasgupta, 2000). Therefore, interpreting the manga phenomenon as mere entertainment is undoubtedly short-sighted. In fact, comics' social (and economic) importance in Japan must be considered. Plus, let us remember not just for men but also for women.

Feminist Minomiya Kazuko recognizes Japanese pop production, including manga and anime, as an effective way to counter gender ideologies for women (Allison, 2006a). The following section will discuss women and their respective depictions in manga.

4.6. Women in manga: just Cinderellas and Sex objects?

In Japanese consumer production, women assume a vital role since they are the subject of most advertising and media portrayals per se (Moeran, 1995). That is different in manga, in which women often assume a supporting role and appear in significantly smaller numbers than males (Unser-Schutz, 2015b). As a result, it is more difficult to find a satisfactory number of "trope" figures in the female landscape of manga. As Srimulyani (2021) reminds us, love is the predominant theme of many *shōjo* and *josei* comics. With the advent of "*Candy Candy*" (Mizuki, 1975), many female mangakas have taken up its story incipit, which includes an awkward girl who, after multiple misunderstandings and adventures, manages to win the heart of a young boy. The Cinderella complex can summarize much of the protagonists in girls' comics from the 1980s onward. The syndrome describes a sweet, beautiful, and kind girl who cannot care for herself (Dowling, 1981).

The stereotype of the Cinderella girl is also evident in comic books starring a superheroine. Just think of the aforementioned "*Sailor Moon*." Although much of the plot recounts the battles between young superheroines dressed as schoolgirls and evil forces, the focus remains on Unagi's love and college life (Prough, 2010). Unagi, as is easily guessed, is a good-looking, good-natured, and kind girl; however, she cannot take care of herself due to her immaturity and clumsiness. Here, the male figure comes into play, which turns out to be dominant and saving for the protagonist, enhancing the typical Japanese dichotomy between the dominant man and the submissive woman (Srimulyani, 2021).

Fans of *shōnen* and *seinen* manga will undoubtedly be no strangers to the term "*oppai*," a word used to refer to the enormous breasts of girls featured in multiple comics for male audiences. For decades, big-breasted female characters have been an almost immovable feature in male manga. One thinks of Fujiko Mine (Figure 46) the famous rival and love interest of Lupin the 3rd. The buxom thief made her first appearance back in 1967 in "*Blues to Die*" (Monkey Punch, 1967), preceding even the advents of Jigen and Goemon, Lupin's famous sidekicks (Shoji, 2014). Fujiko was conceived to recreate a sort of Bond girl to stand alongside the protagonist (Monkey Punch, 2005). A femme fatale who wears the latest fashionable designer clothes or latex jumpsuits to accentuate her vertiginous form, for whom Lupin inevitably loses his head. Lupin's feelings are only partly reciprocated by Fujiko, who uses the protagonist's affection to her advantage (Monkey Punch, 2003). However, considering the comely Fujiko as mere eye candy is short-sighted, considering her enormous intelligence, cunning, and fighting ability. Instead, Fujiko uses her charm, ambiguous sexuality, and *oppai* to achieve her ends, making her a character

capable of taking care of herself and not at all at the mercy of events (cf. Iwasa & Nakatani, 2012; Mikuriya, 1979). In multiple cases, however, the figure and especially the breasts of women in men's manga are used as fan service, reducing the characters to mere sexualized shells (Allison, 1996).

In this regard, consider the *harem* subgenre, in which a protagonist, usually male, is surrounded by a handful of adoring girls (AnimeNation, 2009). However, romance cannot be said to be the narrative's focus, which often falls on the curvy and lustful young women surrounding the protagonist (Martin, 2014). The major criticism of the *harem* subgenre is its excessive use of sexual references to satisfy a specific fragment of the male audience (Drummond-Mathews, 2010).

Figure 46: Fujiko Mine (retrieved from: https://www.telenauta.it/2021/06/15/lupin-iii-la-donna-chiamata-fujiko-mine-una-storia-piu-adulta-per-i-fan-del-ladro-su-prime-video/)

For example, the beloved "*Highschool of the Dead*" (Satō & Satō, 2006-2013), which has now become a staple of the genre, recounts the vicissitudes of a group of high school students, led by Takashi, trying to survive a zombie apocalypse. The sometimes rewarding "mindless fun that brings all of the gory entertainment of a zombie apocalypse" (Hanley, 2011, para. 8) is all too often interrupted by sexual fanservice. For example, we would take the character of Shizuka Marikawa (Figure 47), a buxom school nurse and the only adult in the group. In one of the first sequences of apparent tranquility, the party finds itself safely in the home of Rei, one of the students. Taking advantage of having escaped the zombie onslaught, the schoolgirls and Shizuka decide to take a hot bath. Then begins a succession of sexually charged fanservice scenes centered on Shizuka, Rei, and Takashi:

During the bath, Shizuka gets complimented by Rei who says that Shizuka's breasts are enormous, leading Shizuka to say 'Yup, I get that a lot!'. Jealous and angry at Shizuka's reply, Rei proceeds to grab and squeeze Shizuka's breasts. After a while, Shizuka uses her breasts to squirt water at Rei to get back at her. Once Shizuka finishes her bath, the next time she is seen is when she comes up to Takashi. Obviously drunk, she tries to kiss Takashi and then tries to grab his penis, but is pushed away by Takashi who accidentally gropes her breasts in the process (Fandom, 2023b, para. 17).

After loading Shizuka onto his shoulders (with an unfailing shot of the nurse's butt) and carrying her to her room, Takashi decides to get a snack from the refrigerator. In the kitchen, he is surprised by Saeko (another student; Figure 48) intent on cooking dinner. In the manga panels, one can see the young boy's embarrassment and arousal as his fellow student wears only an apron and a black thong in plain sight. Such scenes occur throughout the manga. Although the female characters in "*Highschool of the Dead*" prove to be skilled fighters, it is inevitable to think that they represent merely wrappers put there for the sexual gratification of readers.

Figure 47 and Figure 48: Shizuka and Seiko (retrieved from "Highschool of the Dead - Chapter 6: In the Dead of the Night", Sato & Sato, 2007)

Moreover, as with Lara Croft, seeing buxom and uninhibited young girls slinging massive guns can enhance the masochistic fantasies of a part of the male audience (Schleiner, 2001). It is inferred that in works such as "*Higschool of the Dead*," women are illustrated following male sexual appetites. Female characters are shown to be both submissive and uninhibited, ready to be subdued by their male counterparts (Allison, 1996).

So, in many comics for boys, women are hypersexualized and serve principally as "eye candy." In comics aimed at the female audience, they are often dorky little girls intent only on following a love interest. In that case, one must ask: Is that all? What is left of manga as a place where a "positive shift in gender reality" can arise? What remains of manga that allows girls to feel "comfortable [...] and inspired to seek out careers or missions as adults unrestricted by gender?" (Allison, 2006a, p. 135-136). Miller and Bardsley (2005), in their study "*Bad Girls of Japan*," recount the open contrast between young women and their demure and obedient representation in visual culture. Especially the works created by female authors highlight this rupture between the population and cultural hegemony. "In the closed space reserved for girls in *Shōjo* culture, girls deny and complexify the dominant gender stereotypes that exist in contemporary Japanese society through gendered creations that transgress hegemony" (Wakeling, 2011, p. 130).

4.6.1. New representations of the feminine: the Shōjo culture

Being *shōjo* means the "juvenile existence […] prior to the adoption of adult femininity" (Kotani, 2007b, p. 55). In the Japanese imagination, the girl who "adheres" to the *shōjo* subculture is usually "free and arrogant, unlike meek and dutiful *musume* (daughter) or pure and innocent *otome* (maiden)" (Aoyama, 2005, p. 53). As pointed out by Emily Wakeling (2011, p. 131), the epithemes daughter and virgin indicate the presence of "male authority in determining the girl's identity, whereas the concept of *shōjo* has none of these connections." Japanese society is intimidated by *shōjo*, describing them as "childish," "superficial," "selfish," and "unproductive" (Orbaugh, 2002), perceiving them as coming from "an exotic and longed-for world of individual fulfillment, decadence, consumption and play" (Eiji in Kinsella, 1995, p. 96). One of the fields where this subculture finds particular resonance is that of contemporary art.

Contemporary art nowadays finds itself in more fertile ground than ever before. Globalization has meant that non-Eurocentric works of art, such as those from Asia, could enter the global art scene. "Local cultures have always been supremely good at picking up just

enough of a colonising or influencing culture to enhance their own practices and worldviews" (Webb, 2005, p. 36). It is from this mixture of Western and Asian culture that, during the Meiji era, *Shōjo* culture was born. In 1899, the Women's High School Order enabled the spread of girls' schools, contributing principally to the literacy of Japanese women (Wakeling, 2011). Equal to the proliferation of schools, illustrative and informative magazines for young female readers also became widespread. It is a common thought in Japan that schools and magazines aimed at young female students have enabled the spread of the *shōjo* identity (Kawasaki, 2008).

The figure of the *shōjo* girl finds much prominence in manga devoted to young women, where she catalyzes gender transgressions (Wakeling, 2011). In the previous chapter, we discussed "*The Rose of Versailles*". Oscar, the protagonist conceived by Riyoko Ikeda, constantly oscillates between being a man and being a woman, resisting identification with one gender (Shamoon, 2007). Taking Ikeda's work as a cue, many female manga authors for girls have experimented boldly with gender roles, battling against patriarchy (Wakeling, 2011). Although mangakas have primarily been raised according to the ideology of "good wife and wise mother," through their works, they have constructed a place where adulthood and gender roles are partially reshaped and denied (Kotani, 2007a). As a result, the pencils of multiple female authors have given birth to female figures with strong and multifaceted characters; we will discuss one of them in the following section: Lust.

4.6.2. The lascivious Lust's piercing nail

It is not necessarily the case that manga for male audiences are written by male mangaka, Hiromu Arakawa's wonderful "*Fullmetal Alchemist*" being a prime example. However, despite being portrayed by a female artist, even the female characters drawn in the Steel Alchemist comic are highly stereotypical. The women Arakawa drew have huge eyes, gigantic breasts, unrealistically thin waists, and long legs (Fetch, 2014).

As can be easily guessed, Lust, the only female homunculus, is also hypersexualized: large breasts, a skinny waist, and long tapered legs that end in abundant hips. As her name indicates, she represents the sin of lust, although her behavior is not particularly lecherous. Suffice it to say that the only action remotely associated with sex is the romantic rendezvous with one of the comic's secondary characters, Jean Havoc. Lust is sexualized "by the surroundings." The cartoonist's camera movements and the comments of the manga characters emphasize her physical appearance and how she dresses (Fetch, 2014). For example, her shapely cleavage is enhanced by a tight, low-cut dress and shots that foreground her cleavage and the tattoo in the middle of her breasts. In addition, character comments related to Lust's physique are frequent. During a confrontation between (Lust's now ex-lover) Jean Havoc, Roy Mustang, and the female homunculus, Colonel Mustang teases the colleague who has fallen into the homunculus' trap: "I can see why you fell for her. After all you're a sucker for big boobs!" (Figure 49).

Figure 49: Roy Mustang's quote about Lust's chest (retrieved from: "Fullmetal Alchemist", chapter 38: "Signal to Strike", Arakawa, 2004, p. 31)

Interestingly, the other women in the manga do not receive the same treatment, even "directionally" speaking. According to Amber Fetch (2014, p. 12), this could be motivated by the fact that "in order to embody the sin of lust without explicitly being lustful, Lust's appearance must be objectified and sexualized." Lust is, therefore, a prime example of what Laura Mulvey (1975) identifies as a "woman to watch." In works of fiction, women are often illustrated and depicted according to the sexual tastes of the straight man, trying to pander to his voyeuristic gaze. The only sexualizing factor in Lust lies precisely in her appearance, which is often framed in specific parts. Many panels frame only her breasts, lips, or the Ouroboros tattoo between her breasts. Moreover, the fact that Lust is not

human further facilitates her sexualization. According to Thomas Lamarre (2006), non-human women, as in the case of Lust, a homunculus, are inevitably connected to something immaterial, increasing objectification and fetishization.

Lust's superhuman characteristics that allow her, among other things, to stretch her fingernails at will to make them razor-sharp, to not age, and to regenerate from any wound, make her able to hold her own against most male characters within the manga. However, as with Envy's example, only men can fight and lose control (Bordo, 1995). Thus, the reason for Lust's "tight, contained, 'bolted down,' firm'" (Bordo, 1995, p. 190) appearance. A slim body signifies "the proper management of desire" since "women's desires are by their very nature excessive, irrational, threatening to explode and challenge the patriarchal order" (Bordo, 1995, pp. 205-206). Nevertheless, Lust does just that: she openly challenges male power by incorporating what are usually considered characteristics of men.

Intellectual abilities, the ability to devise intricate action plans, and showing courage to act are characteristics juxtaposed with the male gender in Japan (Saito, 2007). Even from his first appearance in the manga, Lust appears to be the mastermind behind an intricate conspiracy. She is seen as sporting above-average intelligence, even giving orders to her two brothers, Envy and Gluttony.

> To highlight her ability to control, as of her sixth appearance in the show, she is clearly in charge of the other Homunculi seen up to that point (Envy and Gluttony). The other villains defer to her, ask her for permission to take certain actions, and follow her orders (Fetch, 2014, p. 13).

A further "rather masculine" peculiarity of Lust is her active behavior. Throughout the narrative, we see her traveling, devising evil plans, and, more importantly, proving violent, injuring, and killing. We have often said that loss of control, especially violence, is typically a male prerogative (Bordo, 1995). In manga, women are often depicted as violent, going against Japanese gender stereotypes.

As in the case of Lust, violent women in manga exhibit nonhuman or cybernetic characteristics (Fetch, 2014). Cyborgs are entities created by the mixture of human characteristics (the mind and body) and robotic parts. Usually, cyborgs are more intelligent and physically strong than ordinary people and have special abilities. "Machines are disturbingly lively, and [humans] are frighteningly inert," explains Donna Haraway (2007, p. 317). Lust, for example, can withstand a barrage of bullets in the chest or stretch his

fingernails, making them robust piercing weapons. We have already discussed how these characteristics make Lust's sexualization easier and more immediate as she is compared to an object, but this allows her to be more active and to embark on hazardous attitudes and missions. Lust's intimate encounters are not aimed at carnal pleasure but are witty and carefully calculated attempts at murder (Fetch, 2014).

So, although Lust is an object to watch, the homunculus noticeably clashes with what is expected of a woman, which is to be "supportive of, obedient, and subordinate to the men in their lives – husband, boyfriend, lover, boss, brother, father, etc." (Ito, 1994, p. 86). Lust rarely is shown to be submissive (it happens only with Father, the absolute leader of the homunculus). Indeed, there are far more situations in which she is the one who subjugates the male characters. For example, in a fight between Lust and Roy Mustang, the latter is speared by the homunculus' nail spear (Figure 50). According to Tina Chanter (2004, p. 50), the razor-sharp quill would be a "replacement for her missing penis." Consequently, when Lust symbolically penetrates his opponent, she emphasizes her power and dominance over her opponent, thus, greater masculinity (Fetch, 2014).

Figure 50: Lust and her piercing nail (retrieved from: https://danbooru.donmai.us/posts/42574)

Even though Lust is decidedly sexualized, is drawn promiscuously, presents a provocative physique, and the shots devoted to her focus assiduously on her breasts, lips, and legs, it cannot be said that she is not an exciting and multifaceted character. Like many other female figures in manga, Lust shows she can fend for herself, escaping Japanese gender stereotypes that would like obedient, kind, and subordinate women (Ito, 1994). Thus, the medium of comics can help young Japanese women escape the compelling duties imposed on them by society (Allison, 2006a). Figures such as Lust and Oscar, but also female inventors such as Bulma from "*Dragon Ball*", the devilish pirates Nami and Nico Robin, or the formidable swordswoman Casca from "*Berserk*," can serve as good reference points for young girls who need examples to follow in order to counter the status quo.

Nonetheless, in previous chapters, we have seen how self-sexualization can be considered an emancipatory trait for women (Hagen, 2021). We briefly discussed Fujiko Mine and how she is focal to the male gaze but masterfully uses her physique to reverse the forces at play. Other manga, such as "*Sundome*" (Okada, 2006-2009), make fun of male characters (and the male reader), giving them the false idea that they are in the dominant position when in fact it is the girls who have the upper hand (Gwynne, 2013). The ensuing section will discuss Sahana, one of Okada's main characters (2006-2009).

4.6.3. The female body as a “weapon”

In the mid-1990s, in *shōjo* manga appeared "a new kind of female hero for a new kind of […] Japanese girl" (Allison, 2000, p. 260). The female figures in these new manga conspicuously collided with the stereotype of Japanese femininity, proving to be "aggressive, violent, and often quite dominant" (Napier, 1998, p. 104). According to Frances Gateward (2002), the emancipation of female characters in manga lies precisely in the displays of sexualized violence, just as in the case of Western postfeminist icons such as Lara Croft and Kill Bill. Japanese heroines have multiple traits in common with American icons, including: "readily apparent strength and skill with a more traditionally feminine, and often emphatically sexualized, physique" (Purse, 2011, p. 187).

Of course, it should not be forgotten that *shōjo* heroines move in a fantasy context. Real-world girls cannot emancipate themselves by acquiring weapons or some miraculous power. The body is apparently the only tangible and viable source of emancipation for young Japanese women. However, this is not to be seen as an absolute evil since girls'

active sexuality puts Japanese masculinity in great difficulty. One cannot underestimate the fact that in many modern manga, female sexual activity is not punished (Gwynne, 2013), blatantly going against the ideal of morality that is attached to being female (Srimulyani, 2021). To make this more understandable, we will take Kazuto Okada's (2006-2009) work, "*Sundome*," as an example.

Sahana, one of the central figures in the manga, is introduced to the audience and other characters, as is often the case in manga aimed at men. The young student wears a school uniform, modified ad hoc to attract the gaze of males, as evidenced by the short black skirt and the low-cut shirt. The girl is represented according to the canons of the male gaze: "a passive object whose primary purpose is to satiate the reader's sexual desire" (Gwynne, 2013, p. 334). Even the posture Sahana assumes on the second page of the manga indicates an apparent sense of submissiveness and timidity. These characteristics are soon to be subverted.

Figure 51: Sahana dangling "Hideo" in front of her breasts (retrieved from: "Sundome 1st chapter: Collar Rules", Okada, 2006)

The work's title already hints at what the mangaka aims for: "*Sundome*" means "stopping before the moment." The vicissitudes recounted in the manga focus on the boys' inability to win over their female classmates, who enjoy playing with their feelings. Inability and awe are further exacerbated by the author's drawings, which constantly highlight that the girls have the upper hand. For example, yet objectified Sahanas' first appearance enhances her dominance over her male peers "not merely in sexual terms but also in terms of social relations" (Gwynne, 2013, p. 334). The female student is depicted in her entirety. At the same time, Hideo (the manga's male protagonist) is immortalized in an expression of total devotion and disbelief in front of his female companion (Gwynne, 2013).

The apparent power relations between Sahana and Hideo become further evident in the panel that frames the title of the first chapter of the work, "*Collar Rules*" (Figure 51). The page immortalizes Sahana wearing only a bra and putting her cleavage on full display. In front of her breasts, she dangles a doll representing Hideo, and the student's gaze is directed at the reader. So, it is not only Hideo who is maneuvered like a puppet by Sahana; the reader is also conspicuously so. The eyes centered on the comic user place the reader and the marionette on the same level. As is the case in almost all *seinen* manga, the reader identifies with the protagonist, and that is why Hideo's helplessness is also conveyed to the reader himself, placing him in a state of subordination (Gwynne, 2013).

> Identification with a subordinate male character within the text serves to problematise the ostensible authority of the reader. The opening page effectively embodies the sexual and feminist politics of this particular manga series, which frequently unsettles the commonly held perception that females within manga exist to be passively viewed (Gwynne, 2013, pp. 335-336).

In addition to the previously mentioned scene, there are multiple instances in which female students in "*Sundome*" play with their sexuality to subjugate their male classmates. There are scenes in which the young girls purposely drop their pens to catch the eager glances of the students, deriving amusement and enjoyment from it. "The schoolgirls, however, do not appear to be passive victims of the male gaze, but rather active instigators" (Gwynne, 2013, p. 336).

This self-sexualizing view is objectionable and has weaknesses, such as the need for and "dependence upon the approving gaze of others" (Budgeon, 1994, p. 66) that characterizes today's younger generation. However, taking Fujiko and Lust's character as an example, I would disagree with the scrutiny that would see in works like "*Sundome*," a

mere gratification of the male gaze. In Okada's work, much emphasis is placed on the vulnerability of the male physique and the relative sexual power of men. Whenever Hideo partially glimpses Sahana's underwear, he is paralyzed by erections that leave him powerless and embarrassed (Gwynne, 2013).

According to Joel Gwynne (2013), "*Sundome*" is nothing more than an allegory of the moral panic surrounding young women's sexuality in Japan. "The sexuality of the girls symbolizes a crisis in Japanese masculinity […] the text does not seek to punish female sexuality activity" (Gwynne, 2013, p. 338).

In sum, self-objectification, which certainly presents problems, can be seen by young Japanese girls as an emancipatory force to counter patriarchy and the sexual dominance of men openly.

4.7. Portraying (and opposing) gender in Japanese comics: a summary

The importance of comics in Japan is undoubted. Not only is it the most exported and famous product from the Rising Sun archipelago (Camara & Duran, 2007), but it also serves as a place to critique Japan's difficult social situations. Moreover, manga is used by multiple female authors as a place in which to oppose monolithic Japanese gender laws openly. Characters, whether female or male, are rarely one-dimensional.

Therefore, it would be too easy to sidle up to the various opinions (cf. Kong, 2022; Leardi, 2021) that demonize manga by glimpsing it as an insidious mechanism for transmitting misogynistic ideologies. Indeed, many *harem* and *isekai* comics, with their sexual content that often includes underage characters, are problematic and feature highly stereotypical female characters, valid only to catch boys' gaze. However, this censorious view of manga does not see me agreeing.

First, unlike American and European comic production, manga has always cared to please the female audience (Gwynne, 2013), as evidenced by the exorbitant number of female readers. Suffice it to say that three-quarters of teenage girls and more than half of women under 40 read comics regularly (Norris, 2009; Statista Research Department, 2021b). The factors that have caused so many women to become passionate about the medium are many (Gwynne, 2013), but I will only list the two most important ones as far as my research is concerned. First, the many heroines in Japanese comics must be

considered (Allison, 2000). Secondly, we need to highlight (for the umpteenth time) the crucial nature of the subversion of gender roles in manga (Darlington & Cooper, 2010).

For example, we have seen how even the most muscular and gruff male figures hide a sensitive side that often surfaces. Alternatively, in the previous chapters, when we analyzed the figures of Fujiko Mine and Lust, we could see how although the two girls exhibit sexualizing characteristics, they are multifaceted characters who do not allow themselves to be subdued by men. So, to conclude this chapter, I would again like to make use of Amber Fetch's work "*More Than Alchemical Reactions*" (2014) and discuss two more characters from "*Fullmetal Alchemist*": the Armstrong brothers.

On the one hand, we find the "Ice Queen," General Olivier Mira Armstrong. The physical appearance of the female soldier from Amestris certainly conforms to her gender: long blond hair, full lips, and round hips. However, the general's character is calculating, ambitious, brave, and loyal, features usually associated with the male sex (Bordo, 1995). Olivier is shown to be active, intelligent, and above all, trying to suppress her feelings. Moreover, similar to what characterizes Lust, Olivier Armstrong is constantly accompanied by a phallic object to emphasize her masculine side further. Although sheathed, the Ice Queen's sword is always present in the panels depicting her (Fetch, 2014). In addition, Olivier has no problem refusing orders, even going so far as to mutiny and murder one of his superiors (Figure 52).

Figure 52: Olivier Armstrong's mutiny in Chapter 90 "Army of Immortals" (Arakawa, 2008, p. 8)

On the other side is Major Alex Armstrong, Olivier's younger brother. At first glance, the major is emphatically masculinized, evidenced by his mighty physique (Bordo, 1995), barely contained by his military uniform. Yet, character-wise, Alex is marked by a rather feminine personality (Fetch, 2014). First and foremost, it is essential to highlight how Alex is fixated on physical and artistic aesthetics. Aesthetics that is preserved even in the moves used by the major to defeat opponents.

Moreover, Alex Armstrong is often associated with the symbol of the rose (this is even more evident in the animated transposition; Figure 53). A fascinating trait given that in Japan, the rose is usually related to effeminate characters (Welker, 2006). However, the marker that most differentiate him from his sister is the ease with which he expresses his feelings. For example, in a highly poignant scene recounting the Ishval war of extermination,

> Alex is depicted holding the body of an Ishval child as tears stream down his face. He refuses to continue fighting [...] all the other veterans of that particular war whose reactions we see do exactly the opposite; they all hide their emotions (Fetch, 2014, p. 48).

Speaking of the Armstrong brothers, it is not only gender roles that are reversed, but also the cinematic eye is completely subverted (Fetch, 2014). Dusting off Laura Mulvey's (1975) axioms we encountered in previous chapters, only women can be the object of

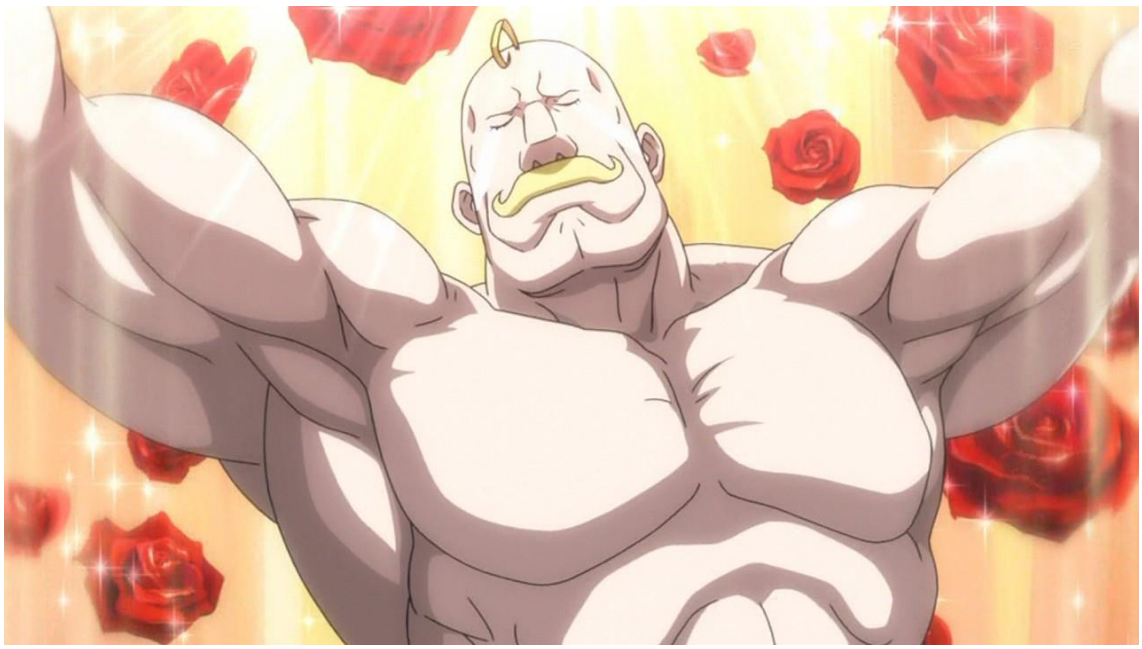


Figure 53: General Armstrong in an anime frame taken from "Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood" (https://www.reddit.com/r/blackdesertonline/comments/6g07zq/request_alex_louis_armstrong_full_metal_alchemist/)

the scopophilic gaze. It would be impossible for males to "bear the burden of objectification" because they carry the "principles of the ruling ideology and the physical structures that back it up" (Mulvey, 1975, p. 347). Between Olivier and Alex, however, the latter is frequently illustrated shirtless, with his muscles in full view. Instead, Olivier always wears a uniform and is constantly accompanied by her sword (Fetch, 2014).

In conclusion – and reiterating that female (and male) objectification in many manga should not be underestimated – it can be said with due certainty that both women and men can find good examples to follow within the pages of manga. Male characters' greater *multifacetedness* and emotionality can help young readers take note of their own emotions and not be ashamed of exposing them. On the other hand, the strong presence of independent female characters who can take care of themselves can give a strong sense of empowerment to young female readers.

Having reached this point, however, it is time to focus on the Western audience, the research sample, to understand what they think of Japanese comic book figures. In the next chapter, we will discuss the methodology used for the study and then analyze the results, which will be discussed next.

5. Research's methodology

This chapter will outline the methodology used for the study. As indicated several times throughout the thesis, the research focuses on character images in relation to participants' views on gender roles. A questionnaire was constructed and posted online on various forums for this research. We will discuss how respondents were recruited and what items make up the survey in the following sections.

5.1. Participants

315 participants opened the questionnaire link: 118 completed the questionnaire in Italian. At the same time, the remaining part of the sample was divided into 36 interviewees who answered the questions in German and 160 in English. However, three respondents did not consent to the privacy statement. The results prepared for the data analysis will be based on these 312 total participants.

The first skimming of the sample was done following the question, "Have you ever read a manga?" to which 206 participants answered affirmatively. In contrast, the other 77 who replied to this question responded negatively.

5.2. Materials and procedure

Respondents were recruited voluntarily by sharing a link on various social platforms and relying on word of mouth from diverse personal and non-personal contacts on WhatsApp. The main platform on which the link to the questionnaire was posted was Facebook. Some groups dedicated to the Japanese comics fanbase were chosen, such as: "*Wholesome Manga V4*" and "*GMW 3.1*"; groups devoted to the cosplayer community "*Cosplay UK*" and "*Cosplayers Italiani (Cosplay Italia)*." Finally, questions were also made public on several questionnaire exchange groups in different languages, including *'Studien suchen Teilnehmer*,' *'Research Survey Exchange Group*,' and *'Compilazioni questionari tesi e ricerche sperimentali*.' Attempts were also made to convince some influencers from the manga sphere to share the questionnaire link; however, this led to little success.

Once the link to the questionnaire had been opened, participants were presented with a greeting page with an explanation of the research and a choice of three languages for

completion: English, Italian, and German. In the middle of this 'introductory' page was also the link to the site containing the privacy document. Once consent for data processing had been given, the actual question pool began.

The questionnaire consisted of six parts, two divided by filter questions (Q00 and Q000) which asked the participants whether they wanted to continue with the next section. The questionnaire (Appendix B) was constructed as follows.

5.2.1. Demographic part and section about manga

The demographic section asked about age, gender, education level, employment status, nationality, sexual orientation, and whether or not they had read Japanese comics before (Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5. Q6, and Q7). Those who answered negatively were taken directly to the battery of questions on the GRBS scale (Q19; Brown & Gladstone, 2012).

If the participant answered affirmatively to the last question, a small sample of questions concerning their passion for manga was opened. Firstly, the participants were asked to give an affective evaluation of manga (Q8) employing three statements ("I like them," "I know them too little to give a firm opinion," and "I do not like them"). Respondents who claimed to like manga were asked to rate three statements (Q9) concerning their passion for the medium, i.e., how important Japanese comics have been in their lives, how this medium has influenced their character, and, finally, how many of their friends are manga fans. Once the questions had been answered, they went directly to question Q11. On the other hand, the sample members who had responded to Q8 with "I don't like them" were asked to indicate why they did not like manga (Q10) and were then confronted with Q11. Finally, participants who did not know enough about manga to be able to give an evaluation were redirected to the question of whether or not they perceived gender stereotypes in manga (Q11). Question Q12 asked respondents which women, men, and the LGBTQIA+ community were the most stereotyped characters in Japanese comics.

The last part of this section asked whether or not the respondents were members of the cosplay community (Q13). Respondents who answered in the affirmative were asked if they had ever taken the guise of characters from a different gender from their own (Q14); if yes, they were asked why (Q15) and if there had ever been any problems related to their passion (Q16, Q17, and Q18).

Once the demographic and manga-related part was completed, the participants had to answer the ten items of the GRBS scale in its shortened form (Q19; Brown & Gladstone, 2012).

5.2.2. Gender Role Beliefs Scale

As we were able to analyze in chapter one, when we talk about gender roles, we mean behaviors usually attributed to the different biological sexes (Alters & Schiff, 2009; Lindsey, 2015). In fact, generally, when we talk about gender roles, or what Levesque (2011) refers to as 'sex roles,' we mainly focus on society's expectations of the 'two' biological sexes (Alters & Schiff, 2009). Furthermore, as discussed extensively, it has been found that many of these expectations of female and male sexes change according to the society in which one finds oneself and differ between different social classes and ethnicities (Scott Carter, Corra, & Carter, 2009).

These different perceptions influence many other cultures' social and economic life. However, even more so, they change the behavior of people who (in most cases) hold to social norms to avoid sanctions (Ruspini, 2017). Throughout this dissertation, we have encountered several instances in which gender roles are modified and revised by society. An excellent way to recognize and assess how the community perceives gender roles is the so-called Gender Role Beliefs Scale, theorized in 1996 by scholars Paula Kerr and Ronald Holden.

Considered one of the earliest valuable scales for measuring ideological differences between gender and stereotypes (Brown & Gladstone, 2012), the Gender Role Beliefs Scale (or GRBS; Kerr & Holden, 1996), in its original form, comprised 20 items. Responses were given on a Likert scale from 1 to 7, where 1 indicated the propensity to agree with the statement totally, and 7 told complete disagreement. In addition, six of the 20 items were reverse scored. High scores showed a tendency on the part of the respondent to support views to be considered feminist. Low scores, on the other hand, indicated a more conservative worldview.

However, for this study, items from the GRBS scale in its shortened form were taken (Brown & Gladstone, 2012). As shown by Brown and Gladstone (2012), their shortened scale containing only ten items exhibits high internal consistency (α=8.1), as well as between the two scale factors (α=.78 and .74, respectively). In addition, the mean

correlation is .48, a score in the range of optimal levels of homogeneity (Brown & Gladstone, 2012).

In summary, the GRBS in its shortened form has the same reliability and validity values as the one proposed in 1996 by Kerr and Holden. However, it should be added that the Likert scales have been reversed in the present research: the people with low scores have the most progressive opinions.

Item	***M***	***SD***	***Sk***
1. It is disrespectful to swear in the presence of a lady.	3.89	1.88	0.10
2. The initiative in courtship should usually come from the man.	4.02	1.94	0.11
3. Women should have as much sexual freedom as men.	2.23	1.82	1.34
4. Women with children should not work outside the home if they don't have to financially	5.40	1.85	-1.02
5. The husband should be regarded as the legal representative of the family group in all matters of law.	5.54	1.86	-1.04
6. Except perhaps in a very special circumstances, a man should never allow a woman to pay the taxi, buy the tickets, or pay the check.	4.70	2.12	-0.40
7. Men should continue to show courtesies to women such as holding open the door or helping them on with their coats.	2.69	1.66	0.90
8. It is ridiculous for a woman to run a train and a man to sew clothes.	5.72	1.79	-1.32
9. Women should be concerned with their duties of childbearing and housetending, rather than with the desire for professional and business careers.	5.86	1.65	-1.50
10. Swearing and obscenity is more repulsive in the speech of a woman than a man.	4.54	2.07	-0.22
Factor 1	28.30	6.58	-1.03

Factor 2	19.83	6.82	0.06
Factor 3	48.13	11.32	-0.31

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Skewness Values for Individual Items and Scale Factors (Brown & Gladstone, 2012, p. 155).

5.2.3. Theory of Planned Behavior Questionnaire in relation to gender

As is widely known, it is challenging to explain all human behavior straightforwardly. In an attempt to shed light on the motivations that lead people to engage in their behavior, several areas of study have been considered in psychology, among which one can list personality traits and social attitudes (Ajzen, 1988; Sherman & Fazio, 1983).

However, as Ajzen (1991), among others, points out, the personal and social characteristics of the person are not very good predictors of conduct in different situations. Taken individually, the elements of religion, ethnicity, social status, religious derivation, and work situation cannot give a sufficiently accurate picture of the motivations that lead the individual to perform a specific action (Epstein, 1983; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1974). It is, for this reason, that the principle of 'aggregation' was introduced.

> The idea behind the principle of aggregation is the assumption that any single sample of behavior reflects not only the influence of a relevant general disposition, but also the influence of various other factors unique to the particular occasion, situation, and action being observed (Ajzen, 1991, p. 180).

In summary, by summing up different types of behavior observed in different situations and contexts, the external sources cancel each other out, giving a more plausible picture of the motivations that lead to specific behaviors. Indeed, the aggregation principle has been empirically proven to predict people's attitudes more plausibly than specific behaviors (Ajzen, 1988). This is not to say that in the theory of planned behavior, general attitudes and traits that distinguish the individual's personality are entirely set aside, far from it. An attempt is made to assess how much these peculiarities influence people's behaviors across a broader spectrum since it is assumed that personality and general attitudes only indirectly modify behaviors (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977).

The focal point in the theory of planned behavior is the person's intention to perpetrate certain behaviors. Individuals' intentions are hypothesized to motivate behaviors (Ajzen, 1991). Intentions are, according to Icek Ajzen (1991, p. 181), "indications of how hard people are willing to try, of how much of an effort they are planning to exert, to perform

the behavior." Consequently, the greater the intentions to engage in and pursue a given behavior, the greater the likelihood that the actual execution of that behavior will occur. It is essential, however, to make explicit that in pursuing a behavior, it is not enough to "want it." However, there are additional prerogatives to consider, such as nonmotivational factors. Among the nonmotivational elements, we could list the time one can devote to a given behavior, economic availability, and the ability to perform said behavior (Ajzen, 1985).

The theory of planned behavior is also closely related to the notion of self-efficacy theorized by Albert Bandura (1982). According to the Canadian psychologist, self-efficacy includes "judgments of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations" (Bandura, 1982, p. 122). In other words, behavior is primarily directed by self-confidence and an assessment of one's own capabilities. Self-evaluation thus plays no small role in the choice of activity to be performed, the emotional and physical effort that must be injected into execution (Bandura, 1991).

How to predict behavior and intentions

First, the items in the TPB scale must be compatible with the behavior or phenomenon to be investigated (Ajzen, 1988; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). For example, in this research, which aims to study how gender issues and related stereotypes are perceived in Japanese comics, the items are modulated to investigate attitudes of control and intentions toward gender roles ("I feel threatened by homosexual couples," "in the future I intend to participate in organizing events dedicated to the LGBTQIA+ community").

1. In all, the theory of planned behavior proposes three different determinants that go into shaping behavioral intention:
2. Attitude toward behavior investigates how positively or negatively an individual values a particular behavior.
3. Subjective norms refer to the social pressures on the individual to perform a behavior.

Finally, the last section provided by the TPB is the degree of perceived behavioral control. With the questions in this determinant, the respondent is assumed to indicate how likely they feel to perpetrate a given behavior based on opinions, past experiences, and anticipated obstacles (Ajzen, 1991).

Implementing these determinants in an ad-hoc created questionnaire makes it possible to "predict behavioral intentions with a high degree of confidence" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 206).

In addition, as in this case, the TPB can be used in a variety of ways, such as to investigate contraceptive use among adolescents (Caron, Godin, Otis, & Lambert, 2004), alcohol consumption (Schlegel, d'Averna, Zanna, DeCourville, & Manske, 1990), or how people occupy their leisure time.

5.2.4. Questions related to manga characters and panels

Heat-maps and evaluation of stereotypes

After consenting to continue completing the questionnaire at the first filter question (Q00), participants were faced with the first figure (of 12) from a Japanese comic book. The 12 pictures in this section were randomly administered.

The images were divided into three micro-sections based on gender (female, male, and non-binary), attempting to divide them equally between:

a) more explicit gender representations.
b) More “ambiguous” character representations.
c) Between depictions that included both figures framed from the chest up and figures "immortalized" in their entirety.

For example, for what concerns the female gender, two figures with particularly androgynous features, such as Casca and Sailor Uranus, were chosen; the former was drawn in her entirety, and the latter was depicted as half-length (Figures 54). A similar thing was later done for two female characters more easily recognizable as women: Mei and Rei. In addition, the same reasoning was done for male and non-binary figures.

Once an image was loaded into the questionnaire, body regions were added to make data coding easier. Indeed, it was the participants' task to indicate with two clicks the parts of the body or face that they felt most stated the gender of the characters (Figure 55). A 7-point Likert scale was added under each image, asking participants to rate how masculine (1) or feminine (7) they thought the figure in question was. In addition, a further question was included that required respondents to rate eight statements about the image they had just seen through scalers from 1 (definitely no) to 6 (definitely yes). As a first step, participants had to indicate their familiarity with the character drawn above and then rate how stereotypical, sexualized, offensive, and emancipating the figure was. Next, they had to assess whether the body depicted could be a truthful representation of

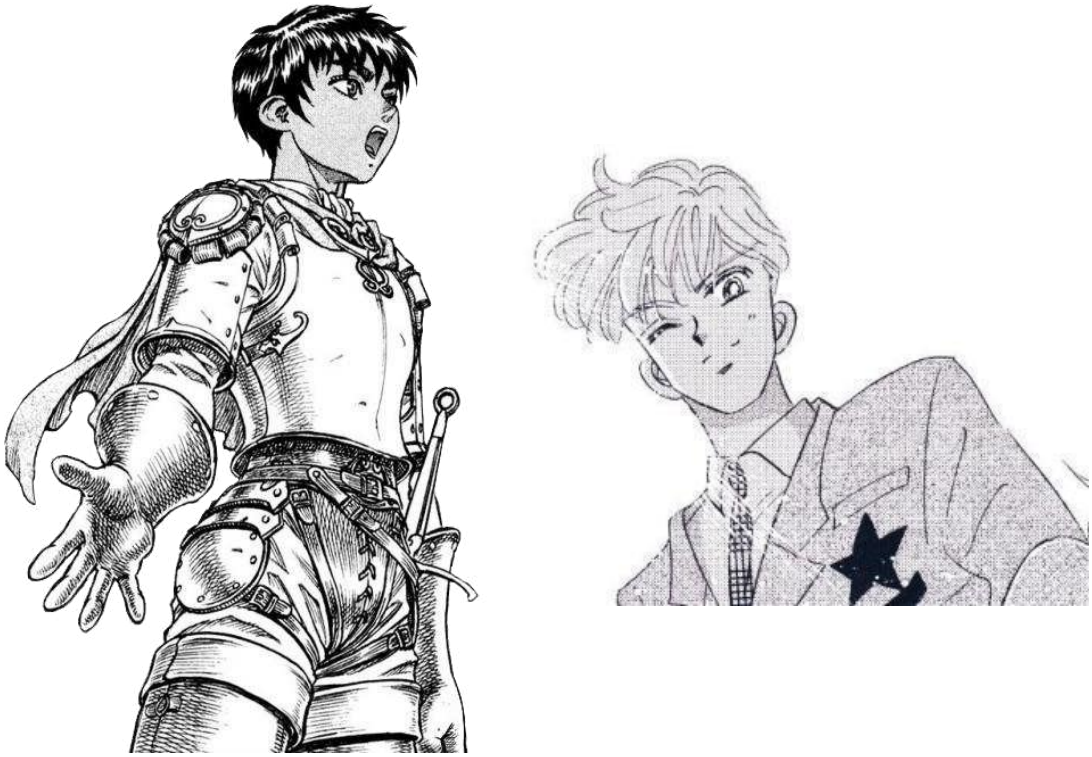


Figure 54: Casca and Sailor Uranus as shown to the participants

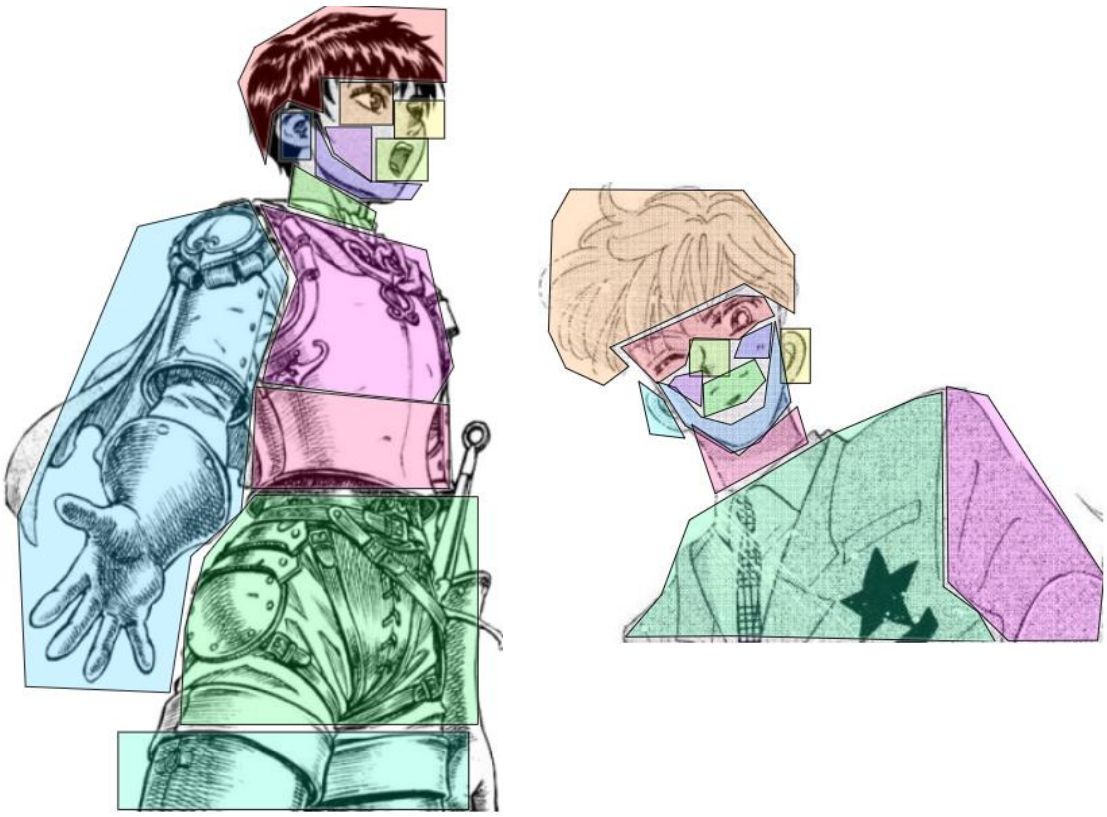


Figure 55: Casca and Sailor Uranus regions

reality (always keeping in mind that these are fictitious figures) and whether the figures'

facial expressions and clothing had influenced the participants' judgment.

5.3. Data Analysis

The data collected through questionnaire responses were processed in three separate stages.

Once a sufficient number of participants was reached, the dataset containing the results was downloaded from Qualtrics and subsequently imported to an Excel folder. Once the file was uploaded to Excel, necessary changes were made to the dataset, removing variables that were not useful for research purposes and renaming those deemed valid. Next, the numerical values that indicated respondents' gender, educational level, nationality, occupation, and sexual orientation were recoded into nominal values to make them easier to read.

GRBS results were calculated as indicated by Brown and Gladstone (2012), reversing the Likert scales, and then coded into a single column named GRBS. Regarding the theory of planned behavior scale, it was coded by taking as an example the work of Tirado González and colleagues (2012) for what calculations to be done and that of Francis and colleagues (2004) for the creation of the items. Regarding the determinants of Ajzen's (1991) TPB scale, the following were chosen: 7 items for attitude, 5 for subjective norms, 3 for the control scale, and 7 for intention. Once the averages of the results were calculated, the data were put into a single column renamed TPB.

Finally, data regarding images were coded. First, 12 columns were created to include the regions seen previously in Section 4.2.4. After carefully analyzing the coordinates of the points, additional regions not previously considered, such as the forehead, were added, increasing the number of columns to 16.

These, then, are the variables used to calculate the results.

- Demographic variables: Age, Gender, Education, Nationality, Work, Sexorient, and Read.
- The data encapsulating the responses to the questions for those who read manga have been renamed Manga_value, Manga_import, Manga_char, and Manga_friends. In contrast, the results for those who do not like Japanese comics were coded as Notlike. Data that included responses to questions about gender stereotyping in comics were named Genderstereo_perc, Genderstereo_prob,

Genderstereo_fem, Genderstereo_male, Genderstereo_lgbtqia, and Genderstereo_other. This study's data on cosplayers, which were not particularly prominent, were recoded into Cosplay, Crossplay, Crossplay_why, Crossplay_fun, Crossplay_mocked, and Crossplay_funwho.

- The two sets of questions used in this research were coded in GRBS and TPB.
- Regarding the questions concerning images, the regions were divided into 16 columns: IMG_hair, IMG_eyes, IMG_mouth, IMG_nose, IMG_arms, IMG_chest, IMG_jawchin, IMG_legs, IMG_pelivc, IMG_ears, IMG_other, IMG_cheek, IMG_forehead, IMG_neck, IMG_abs, IMG_wrong. The variable IMG_gender provides information about the gender of the figures. Statements regarding figure knowledge, stereotyping, sexualization, offensiveness, and emancipation were coded as IMG_know, IMG_stereo, IMG_sexual, IMG_offens, and IMG_empow. Finally, the three variables regarding verisimilitude of bodies, facial expression, and clothing were named IMG_real, IMG_face, and IMG_cloth.

The second stage of the analysis went like this. As the first step, basic descriptive features such as means and frequencies were analyzed, calculating chi-square (χ) and Fisher's F (analysis of variance) and regression models. The median and mean are proposed in conjunction with the standard error, which estimates the standard deviation.

The third and final step involves looking for relationships between the different variables. For doing this, Pearson's r^2 was used to calculate correlations and for the different regression models.

It should be made explicit that the data were processed using the statistical software R-Studio.

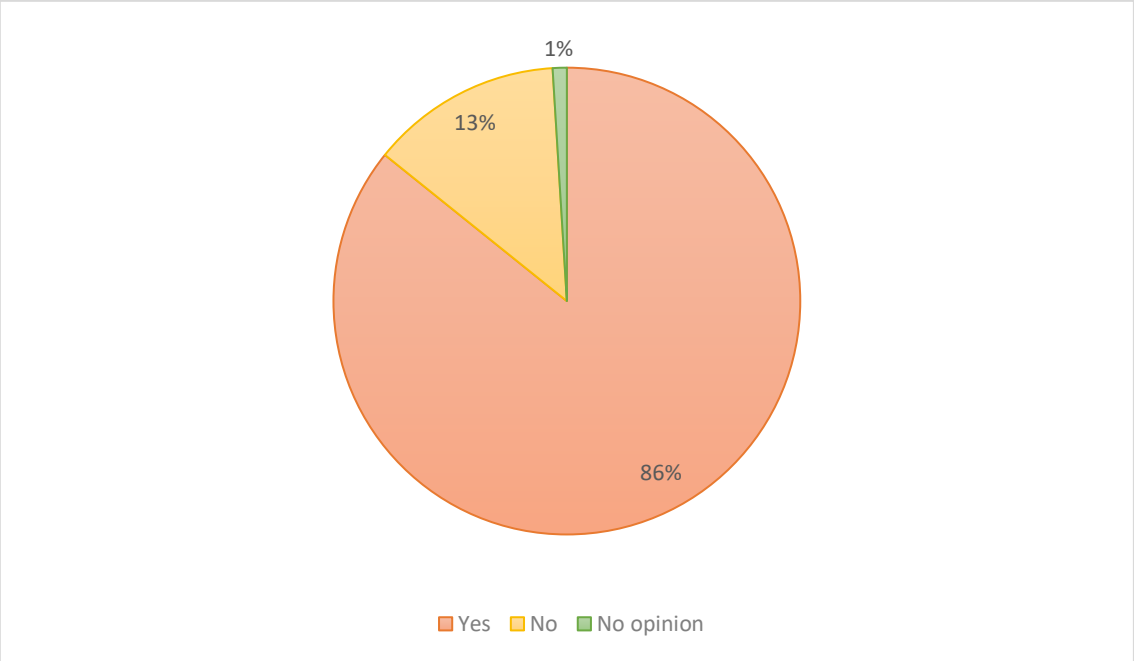
6. Results

Initial analyses concern the sample and the relative opinions regarding the possible perception of gender stereotyping in manga. It was assumed that there is little difference between the origin and perception of gender-related stereotyping, given the compelling cultural Westernization (Nasser, 1986). With the Genderstereo_perc variable, the respondents' perception of stereotyping was investigated (Table 2).

According to the data collected, the hypothesis was confirmed, as evidenced by the large percentage (86 percent) of participants who, regardless of their place of origin, stated that they encountered stereotypical characters when reading manga (Graph 1).

	NA	Yes	No	No Opinion
China	0	2	0	0
Colombia	0	2	1	0
Germany	8	7	4	1
Italy	30	58	4	4
Netherlands	2	2	0	0
Oceania	1	13	6	6
Other	14	26	3	2
U.K.	9	4	1	3
U.S.A.	0	9	0	0
Total	64	123	19	16

Table 2: Perception of gender stereotypes in manga



Graph 1: Percentage perception of stereotyping

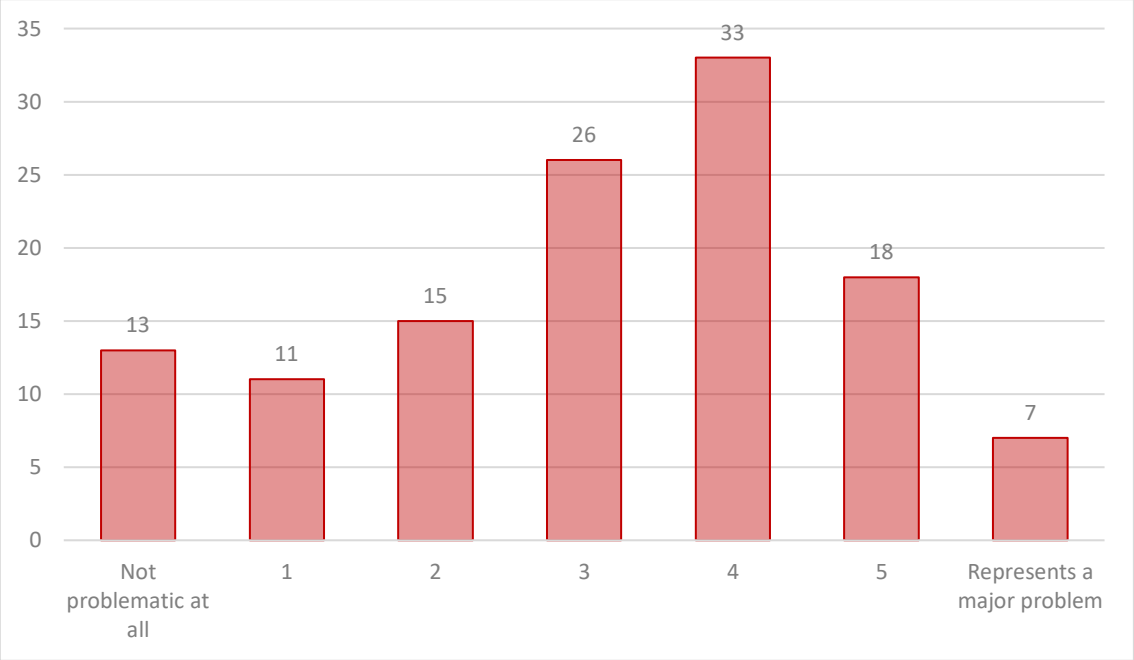
Through the Genderstereo_prob variable, on the other hand, an attempt was made to quantify through a Likert scale from 0 (not at all problematic) to 6 (represents a stringent issue) the severity of stereotyping as perceived by participants.

Even though only 7 (8.61% of participants who gave a rating) saw figure depiction as a grave issue, character stereotyping remains a factor that readers should be aware of. Indeed, 62.73% (rating of 4 and 5 on the scale) of the sample who gave an opinion about stereotyping are not indifferent to it (Table 3 and Graph 2).

	NA	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
China	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Colombia	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Germany	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Colombia	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Italy	38	10	6	6	9	14	10	3
Netherlands	2	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Oceania	13	2	1	0	5	2	3	0

Other	19	0	1	4	8	9	3	1
U.K.	13	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
U.S.A.	0	1	1	3	2	1	1	0
Total	99	13	11	15	26	33	18	7

Table 3: Perception of the severity of character stereotyping



Graph 2: Participants' assessment of the severity of figure stereotyping

Following this brief smattering regarding the respondents' opinions, further data will be presented and broken down according to the hypotheses' themes.

6.1. Sexualization and emancipation in character images

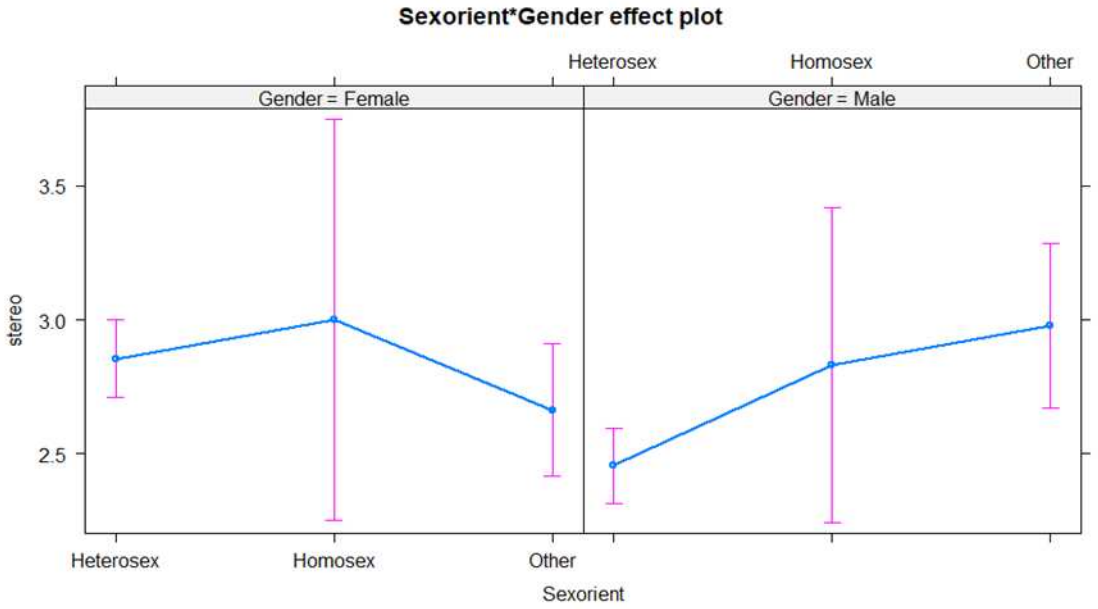
The following statistical analyses were conducted to investigate differences regarding sexualization between female and male respondents. Taking up Laura Mulvey's (1975) male gaze theory, it is hypothesized that heterosexual men perceive the images proposed in the questionnaire as less stereotyping, sexualizing, and offensive. To do this, the variables Gender, Sexorient, IMGN_stereo, IMGN_sexual, and IMGN_offens were related. As can be seen in Table 4, there is a statistically significant relationship between the Sexorient and GenderMale variables ($p.<0.002$). Thus, it can be inferred that the supposition is correct: demonstrating a clear difference in perception toward sexualized images between heterosexual males and the other participants in the sample.

Heterosexual men are thus shown to be less "sensitive" to the graphic representation of figures in manga, finding them less offensive and sexualizing.

	Estimate	Std. Error	df	t value	Pr(>|t|)
(Intercept)	2,533522	0,450219	12,16564	5,627	0,000106
SexorientHomosex	-0,25278	0,523181	197,669	-0,483	0,629519
SexorientOther	-0,00322	0,209565	175,5309	-0,015	0,987763
GenderMale	-0,45477	0,144645	183,1805	-3,144	0,001945
SexorientHomosex:GenderMale	0,898626	0,6829	188,0938	1,316	0,18981
SexorientOther:GenderMale	-0,0148	0,320543	180,5176	-0,046	0,963217

Table 4: Sexorient * Gender + (1 | Image) + (1 | ID))

The fact that heterosexual men are less bothered by the graphic representations of figures in the manga is further evidenced by Graph 3. As can be seen, the score given to the variables IMGN_stereo, IMGN_sexual, and IMGN_offens is lower on average than that given by the other respondents. In addition, as demonstrated by the box plot encompassing the responses of heterosexual men, there is a slight variance in the responses, indicating uniformity of opinion.



Graph 3: Sexorient * Gender effect plot

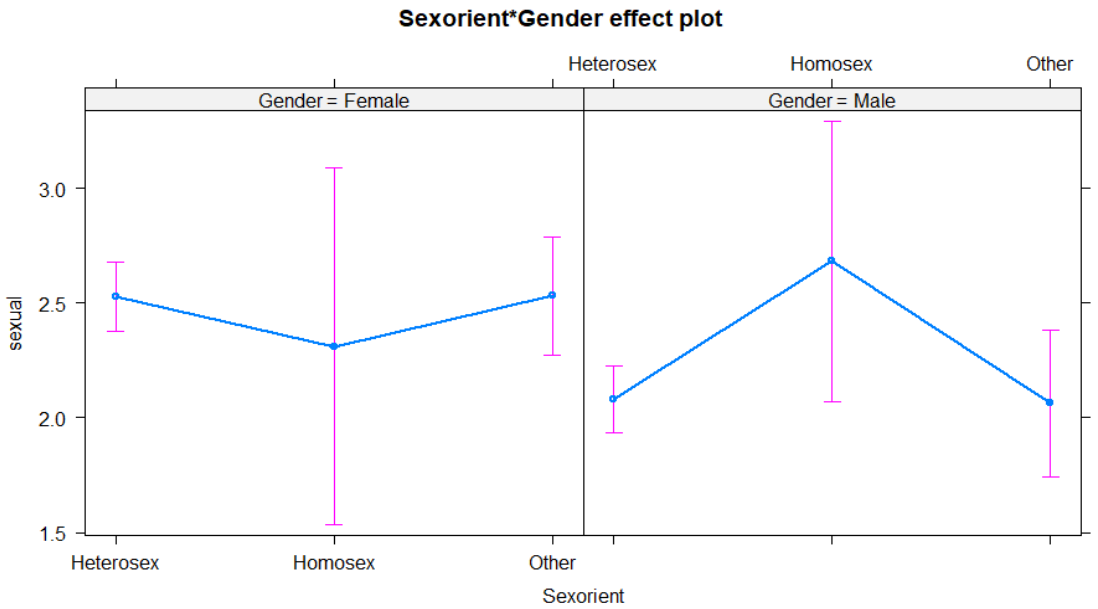
In addition, a further hypothesis was made regarding participants' opinions of the figures proposed in the questionnaire. It was hypothesized that women would be more critical of

the graphic representations of the characters of clothing and physical appearance. The following variables were used: gender, IMGN_real, and IMGN_cloth.

It can be seen in Table 5 that there is indeed a statistically significant relationship between the variables (p.<0.002). This result indicates a greater focus by the female audience on the physical representations of the characters and how the authors decide to dress them. In addition, as can be inferred by analyzing Graph 4, there is a general homogenization of opinions among heterosexual women. Shifting our attention to the right side of the graph, we can see a significant divergence of opinions regarding physical appearance and dress among the male audience. Homosexual men were significantly more influenced by the characters' physical appearance than their heterosexual counterparts. It must, however, be made explicit that the box plot is quite broad, proving that the opinions of the sample of homosexual males are quite divergent from each other.

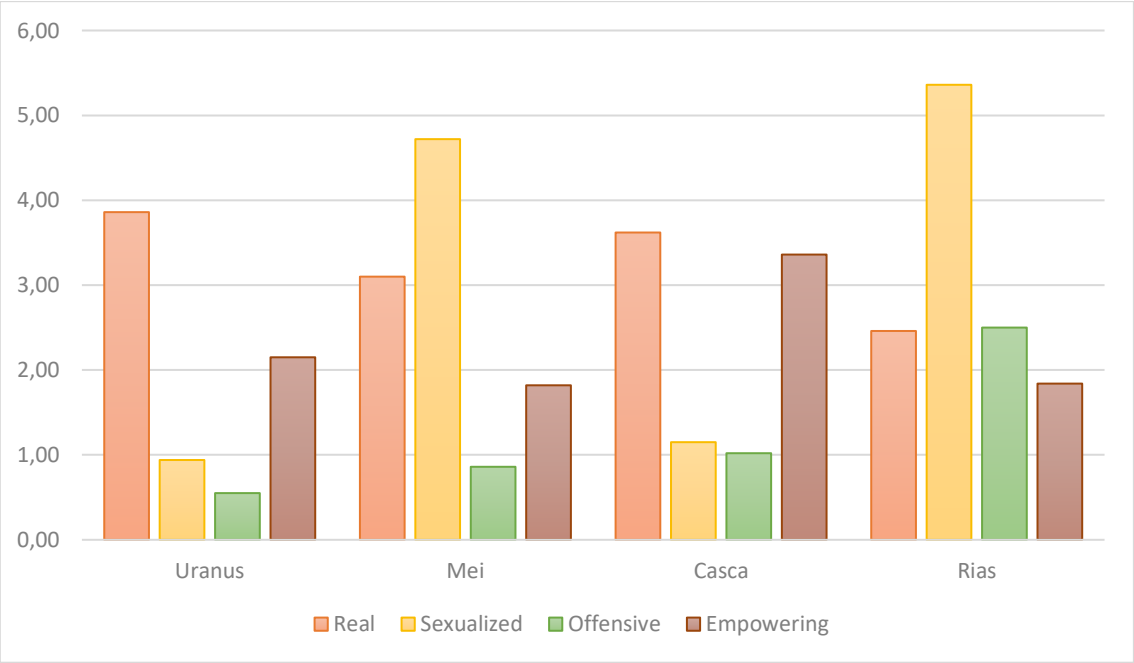
	Estimate	Std. Error	df	t value	Pr(>|t|)
(Intercept)	2,533522	0,450219	12,16564	5,627	0,000106
SexorientHomosex	-0,25278	0,523181	197,669	-0,483	0,629519
SexorientOther	-0,00322	0,209565	175,5309	-0,015	0,987763
GenderMale	-0,45477	0,144645	183,1805	-3,144	0,001945
SexorientHomosex:GenderMale	0,898626	0,6829	188,0938	1,316	0,18981
SexorientOther:GenderMale	-0,0148	0,320543	180,5176	-0,046	0,963217

Table 5: (sexual ~ Sexorient * Gender + (1 | Image) + (1 | ID))

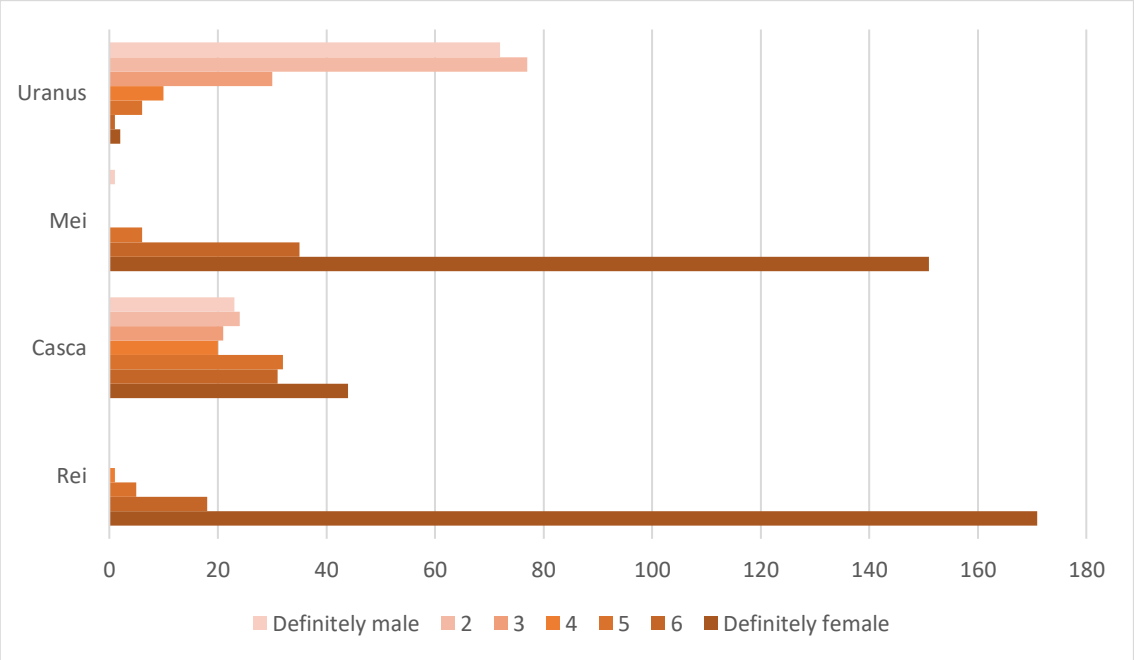


Graph 4: Sexorient * Gender effect plot

The hypothesis regarding the "realness" of the figures' bodies was also true. Female figures with bodies closer to reality are perceived as less offensive and sexualized (Graph 5). It can also be seen that the most sexualized characters are not only seen as less emancipating but are, as expected, the ones with the most obviously feminine features (Graph 6).

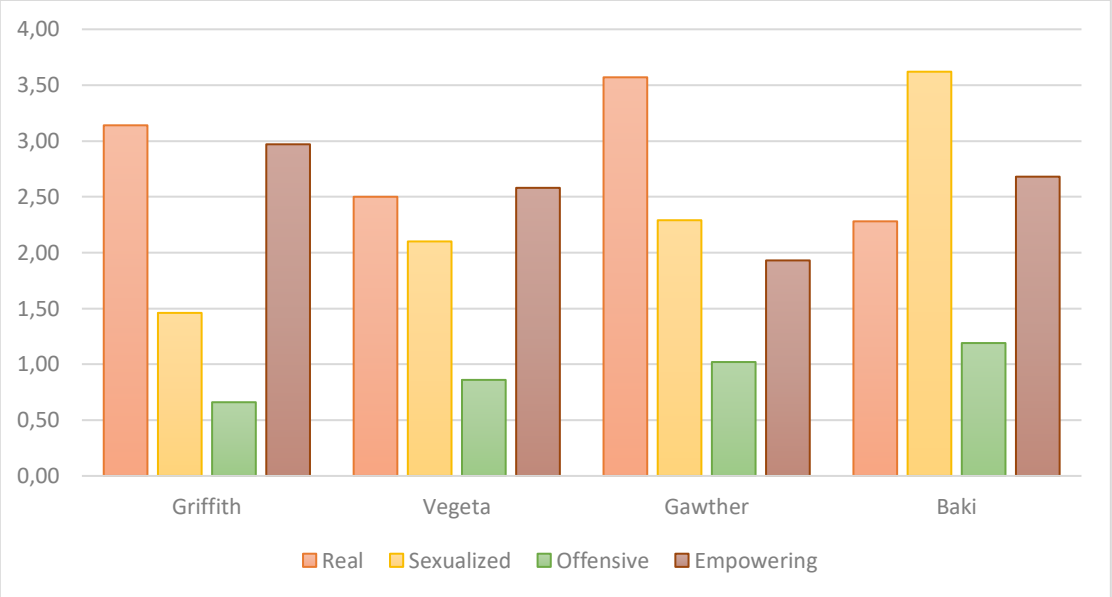


Graph 5: Female characters

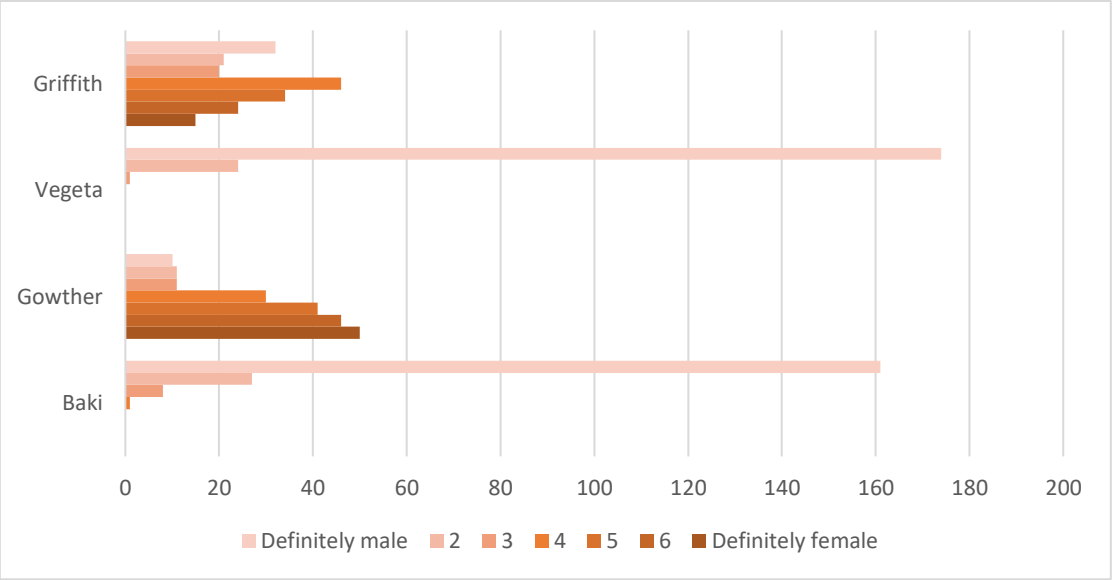


Graph 6: Gender perception of female characters

Similar hypotheses were also investigated about male figures. It was confirmed that presenting explicitly masculine characteristics turn out to be emancipating (Graph 7). Just think of the strong muscularity presented by characters such as Vegeta and Baki, who are much more emancipating than a figure such as Gowther, who is perceived as highly feminine (Graph 8). However, seeing how an "ambiguous" figure like Griffith is considered the most emancipating is peculiar. Like Casca (Graph 5), Griffith also wears armor in the image proposed in the questionnaire. Thus, the attire could be why the two soldiers are considered the most emancipating out of all characters (Johnson, 2001).



Graph 7: Male characters



Graph 8: Gender perception of male characters

The IMGN_know, IMGN_stereo, IMGN_sexual, and IMGN_offensiveness variables were used to analyze any discrepancies in ratings concerning full-body depictions of female and male characters. According to the data collected, there are statistically significant differences for all three features of stereotyping, sexualization, and offensiveness.

Going step by step, Table 6 shows the statistical analysis results between the variables IMGN_know and IMGN_stereo. The results show a statistically significant correlation between the two variables (p<0.002). The left part of graph 9 indicates how male characters are considered more stereotypical by those who do not know them. Let us look at the right side of the graph, showing the stereotyping of female characters. We can see that the situation is similar, indicating greater stereotyping among those who know the figures. Also, as hypothesized, the female characters are generally more stereotyped.

	Estimate	**Std. Error**	**df**	**t value**	**Pr(>|t|)**
(Intercept)	2,1299	0,1969	606,9335	10,816	< 2e-16
knowRecLow	0,9355	0,24	655,1999	3,898	1,07E-04
Imageg2	1,4484	0,2862	596,2256	5,06	5,59E-07
knowRecLow:Imageg2	-0,7283	0,3424	610,3914	-2,127	3,38E-02

Table 6: stereo ~ knowRec * Image + (1 | ID)

Graph 9: knowRec * Image effect plot

The hypothesis that the half-length female characters were more sexualized than their male counterparts was correct (p.<0.002; Table 7). As can be deduced from Graph No.

10, characters with more feminine features are more sexualized and are particularly so by participants who do not know them. Male characters are also perceived as more sexualized by participants unfamiliar with the proposed figures. However, they are significantly less so.

	Estimate	Std. Error	df	t value	Pr(>|t|)
(Intercept)	2,2028	0,1947	608,1808	11,315	< 2e-16
knowRecLow	0,6996	0,2375	653,3894	2,946	0,00333
Imageg2	1,1861	0,2842	599,8441	4,173	3,44E-05
knowRecLow:Imageg2	0,1404	0,3399	614,1697	0,413	0,67964

Table 7: sexual ~ knowRec * Image + (1 | ID)

Graph 10: knowRec * Image effect plot

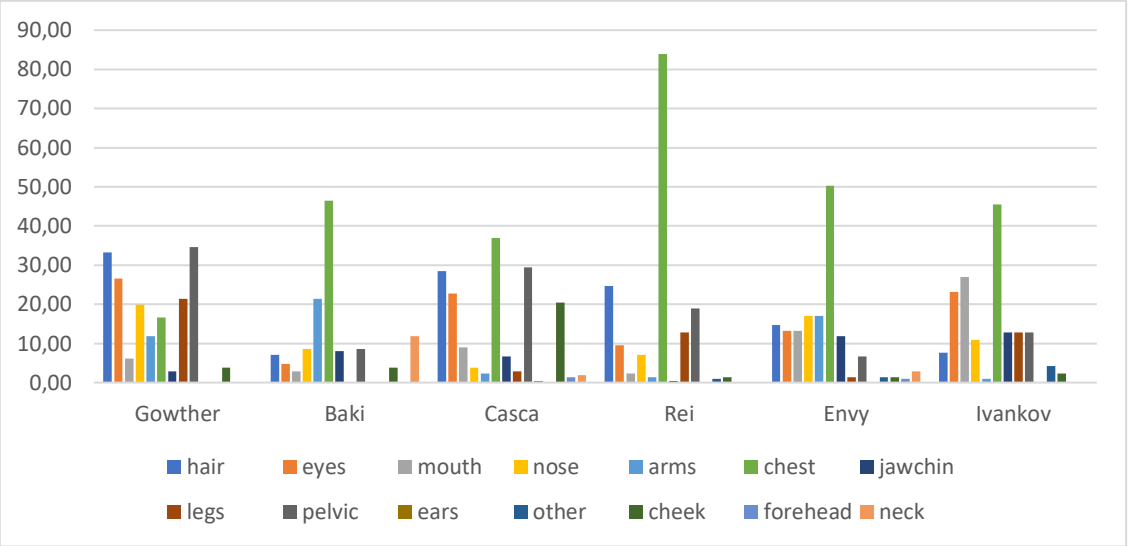
The most exciting results, however, concern the IMGN_offensive variable (Table 8). As suspected, male figures are seen as less offensive, with shallow scores (Graph 11), and as knowledge of the characters decreases, the perception of offensiveness increases. The most pronounced difference, however, can be recognized among female characters where the straight-line slope is quite steep, denoting a vast difference between respondents who know the figures and those who do not.

	Estimate	Std. Error	df	t value	Pr(>|t|)
(Intercept)	0,7354	0,1571	602,7556	4,68	3,54E-06
knowRecLow	0,3947	0,1836	679,5488	2,15	3,19E-02
Imageg2	0,5984	0,2025	556,7893	2,955	0,00326
knowRecLow:Imageg2	0,6497	0,2431	562,5454	2,672	0,00775

Table 8: offens ~ knowRec * Image + (1 | ID)

Graph 11: knowRec * Image effect plot

The click hypothesis about figure regions was not ultimately confirmed. Indeed, a significant difference between the sexualized images (Baki, Rei, and Ivankov) and the remaining ones was suspected. As can be seen from Graph 12 and Figure 57, there are no particular differences between the characters. However, as hypothesized, the torso area is the most clicked on overall. The only exception is Gowther, for whom the pelvic area has captured the most attention, probably because of the particularly short shorts. In addition, the hypothesis that the regions of the pelvic area and hair were the most clicked parts proved correct.



Graph 12: regions clicked

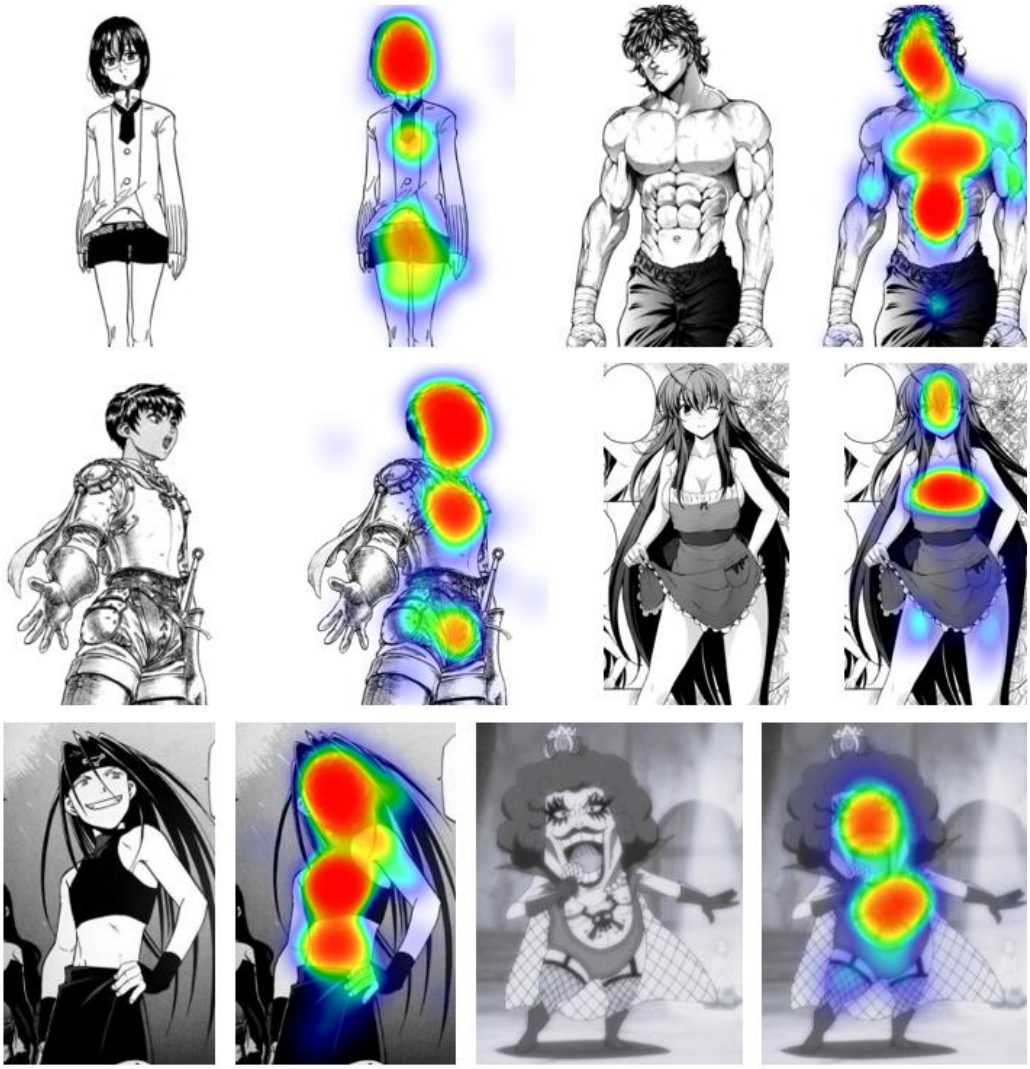


Figure 57: comparison between figures and heat maps (from the top left: Gowther, Baki, Casca, Rei, Envy e Ivankov)

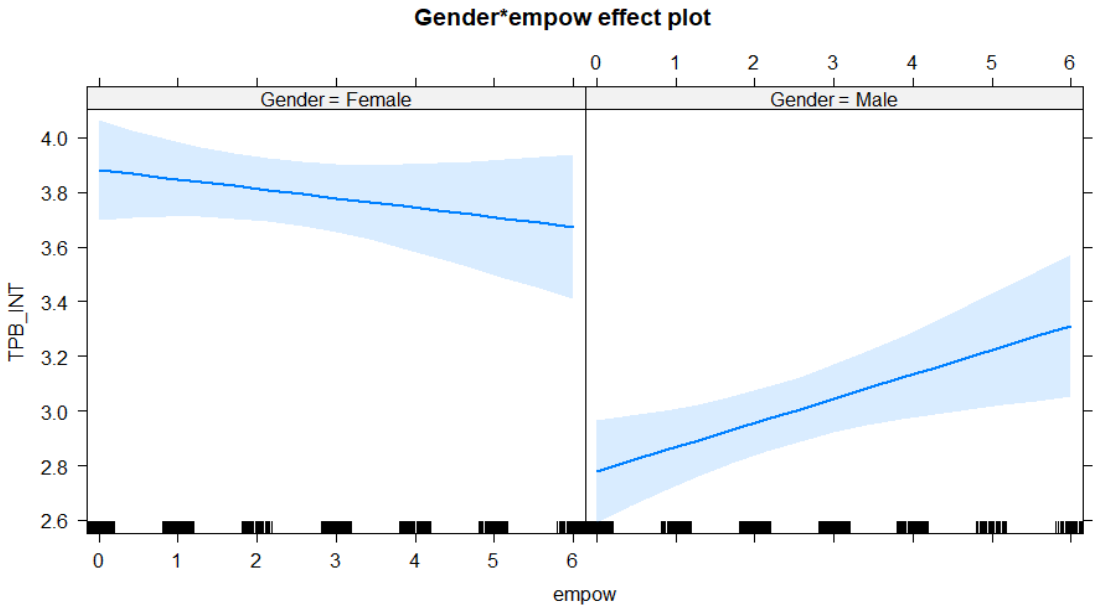
6.2. Results concerning the GRBS and TPB scales in relation to images

Building on the axioms predicting self-sexualization as an emancipating factor (Lamb & Peterson, 2012), we hypothesize that people to be considered more progressive (i.e., those with the lowest scores on the GRBS and TPB scales) find images of female figures as emancipating. Highly sexualized figures, in particular, are assumed to contribute to this result. Relating the variables Gender and Genderempow to each other shows that the hypothesis turns out to be true (Table 9), as evidenced by the statistically significant relationship between them (p.<0.002). Consequently, for the female participants in the sample, images of women in manga may have emancipatory effects.

Furthermore, if we pause to analyze Graph 13, there is a noticeable discrepancy between the opinions of female and male audiences regarding the emancipation factor. In the first box enclosing the responses of the female audience, the line representing the intertwining of the two scales and the Empow variable is descending. The mean score in the two scales increases at a lower level of perceived empowerment. For the male audience, this is entirely different. The lower the score in the GRBS, the higher the degree of perceived emancipation. Thus, it could be hypothesized that "progressive" males perceive sexualization and self-sexualization as an essential source of emancipation for the female body.

	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	Pr(>F)
Gender	1	123,5	123,52	95,962	< 2e-16
empow	1	1,7	1,74	1,352	0,24538
Gender:empow	1	9,5	9,46	7,352	0,00686
Residuals	736	947,3	1,29		

Table 9: Relation between Gender and GenderEmpow



Graph 13: Gender * empow effect plot

7. Discussion

This thesis aimed to delineate as precisely as possible how readers and nonreaders of manga perceive Japanese comic book characters concerning their gender roles. Through a questionnaire, an attempt was made to specify the participants' views on the figures' bodies regarding sexualization and emancipation primarily.

Generally, the hypotheses proved correct, although one would have expected a more significant correlation between self-sexualization and emancipation, as theorized by Lamb and Peterson (2012). However, the axioms introduced by Berger (1972) and subsequently revised by Laura Mulvey (1975) concerning the male gaze and the fact that many female figures are created to capture men's attention have been largely confirmed. In addition, the assumption that proposed a regression-type correlation between the scales (GRBS and TPB) and character emancipation has been demonstrated. However, it should be added that one would have predicted higher emancipation scores for sexualized characters, especially from the most progressive participants, i.e., with the lowest scores on the scales. However, it is appropriate to continue in steps.

7.1. Stereotyping in Japanese comics

As explicated in the literature (Kinsella, 2000; Prough, 2010), it cannot be denied that Japanese comics have intensely sexist connotations. Just think that manga is not divided into genres but is directly divided according to the biological sex of the target audience to which it is addressed. Thus, there is manga for boys and adult men (shōnen and seinen) and, conversely, comics aimed at adult girls and women (shōjo and josei). With this in mind, it seems evident that there must be stereotypical elements in manga. As expected, a large proportion of the sample who have read manga in their lifetime (86%) have perceived elements of stereotyping in their lives about manga characters. In addition, nearly 70% of respondents, regardless of their background, perceive character simplification as problematic.

Respondents' high rate of perceived stereotyping could be related to the roles to which characters are often relegated. Throughout the thesis, we have seen how in boys' manga, representing the most significant slice of Japanese comics on the market (Loo, 2021), women are underrepresented and often cover secondary roles or unimportant

tasks (Unser-Schutz, 2015b). On the other hand, there is a widely held notion that male characters are merely heartless brutes, interested only in violence and fighting (Unser-Schutz, 2015b).

An exciting peculiarity that emerged from the collected data concerns the two characters from Berserk: Casca and Griffith. The two figures Miura designed are widely considered to be the most emancipating. The peculiarity of this result lies in the fact that they are the only two characters proposed to the sample who wear armor. More clothing-related data would be needed, but it is hard not to think that the respondents were attracted to these two figures because they were influenced by the "uniform's charm." As indicated in the study by Richard Johnson (2001), the uniform conveys authority and manipulates our behavior subconsciously. For example, in the presence of a policeman, one is ordinarily inclined to behave cooperatively and particularly attentively.

Rewinding the tape and going back to the discussion of symbols introduced by Raewyn Connell (2002), it becomes natural to think that one of the most prominent symbols of patriarchal power, namely the uniform, establishes a sense of strength in people's minds. That is even more interesting when we consider Casca, a female soldier, presented in gaudy armor, steadily on her legs, intent on giving a speech, is considered by the pool of interviewees as the most emancipating character.

Casca's emancipation is inevitably linked to her wearing armor, proudly demonstrating her status as a soldier and a strong woman. The smooth and toned body covered by the iron plates that only hint at the physique of the captain of the Hawk Squad is thus a model to follow. Especially the results related to the body representation give rise to the most interesting discussions.

7.2. The body in manga

One of the main questions this thesis sought to answer was: How is the graphic representation of characters' bodies perceived by readers and non-fans?

The visual depiction of characters in manga has always generated discussion and buzz (Daugherty, 2020; Gwynne, 2013). Most will be familiar with multiple female characters' exaggerated and disproportionate curves with their huge breasts and thin waistlines beyond belief. Undoubtedly, figures such as the previously mentioned Fujiko Mine, Lust, and Nico Robin are designed to capture the lustful gaze of young readers. It would be

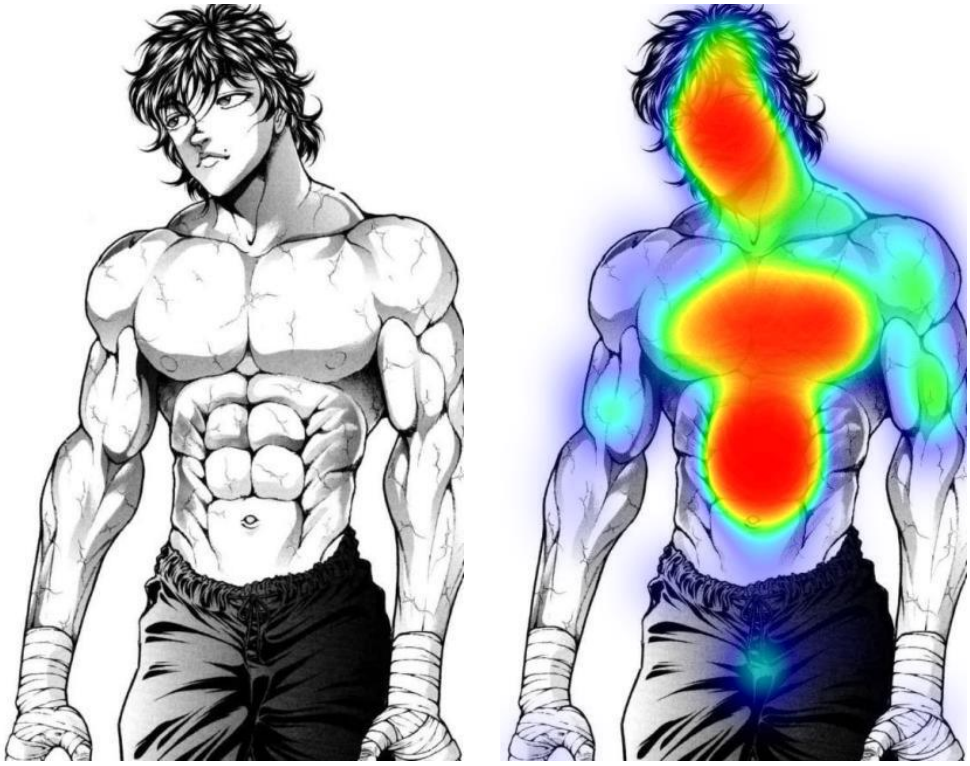


Figure 58: Baki (retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/CoolMangaPanels/photos/a.118210079584573/229608735111373/?type=3); Figure 59: Baki's heat map

short-sighted, however, not to broaden the gaze to other genres that themselves undergo blatant sexualizations.

Many *shōnen* heroes willingly display their prosperous muscles. Just think of one of the most common recurrences in Dragon Ball comics that involves Z warriors taking off - in the middle of a battle - their clothes putting their voluminous abs and biceps on display. Furthermore, one could mention non-binary characters that have accounted for a significant portion of the Japanese hentai and pornographic market in recent years. The so-called "*futanari*" (hermaphroditism in Japanese) subgenre includes characters with female features equipped with huge penises with or without testicles who perform sexual acts with women and men (Fort, 2017; Zohar, 2009). Thus, in the Japanese pop world, all genders are blatantly sexualized, although, as expected, a not inconsiderable double standard persists.

The data show that having a muscular, hypermasculine physique is a source of emancipation. On the other hand, the notion remains unchanged that exposing one's feminine characteristics through skimpy clothes or daring poses is hardly empowering, if not outright offensive. That is particularly evident when comparing the two most sexualized characters in the questionnaire: Baki and Rias.

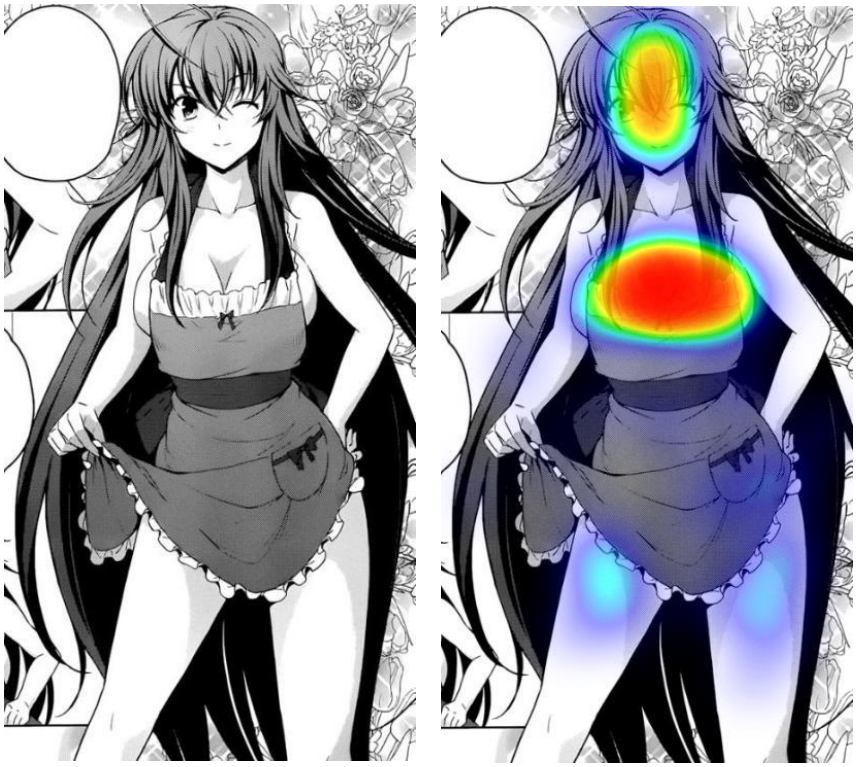


Figure 60: Rias retrieved from (https://www.zerochan.net/1165378); Figure 61: Rias' heat map

On the one hand, the respondents perceive Baki (Figure 58), the bulky boxer protagonist of the homonymous manga, as an emancipating role model. As shown in Figure 59, the interviewees' eyes – and fingers – fell in large numbers on the athlete's abs and bulging biceps. Rias's voluptuous breasts (Figure 60), on the other hand, along with her outfit and winking attitude, generated the highest level of displeasure in the respondents, as evidenced by the large number of people in the sample who were offended by looking at the image of the young woman. It is superfluous to specify that the area that captured the most clicks was the girl's prosperous chest (Figure 61). It seems, then, that there is an apparent double standard between male and female body displays. On the one hand, being hypermasculine is judged as a positive factor to be pursued. On the other hand, exalting one's femininity by emphasizing one's body continues to be something scarcely empowering and, at times, offensive for both males and females.

Therefore, it is no coincidence that the two girls who stray furthest from the concept of the male gaze are perceived as least sexualized. Sailor Uranus and Casca not only present characteristics that participants see as intensely masculine (considering that most participants mistook Sailor Uranus for a male), but they are also the two who cover their bodies the most. Furthermore, as seen above, Casca wears armor, but Sailor Uranus

also sports masculine clothing, being drawn in a suit and tie. Consequently, the concept is repeated that exposing the female body is seen as sexualizing and, at times, offensive.

At this point, it begs the question of why so many people become attached to the figures featured in manga despite perceiving noticeable problems in the graphic depiction of characters. As demonstrated by multiple studies (cf. Chen, 2011; Ellecosta & Basso, 2023), the characters' personalities create a strong connection between readers and the medium of Japanese comics. According to many fans of manga, values such as friendship, group strength, and resilience have gone from today's societies that increasingly focus on individualism and the individual (Molle, 2001). It is, therefore, no coincidence that many readers, taking refuge in the pages of comics, feel a strong affinity with the Lone Wolves figures, who usually must rely on their own strengths without giving up on strong friendships (Ellecosta, 2021; Ellecosta & Basso, 2023). A further example of the attachment felt by readers toward the characters, could be given by the responses collected in this research's questionnaire. Thus, opening the room for two extra hypotheses: (a) the manga reader is a passive one and overlooks the issue; (b) even though sexualized the figures' personalities exceed their graphic depiction. Although it is mostly non-readers that feel offended by the depiction of the characters, the manga fanbase is not unaware of the issue, as largely shown by the data collected in this research. So, it could be assumed that often the personality and identity of a figure overpowers the physical appearance.

Throughout this thesis, we have analyzed multiple figures, which sexualized or stereotyped as they were, present undoubted character prerogatives that can create emotional contact with readers. To the examples of female characters seen above, we add Casca, who survived Berserk's dark and violent world, even becoming the captain of a hundred men. On the other hand, it is not hard to see why young boys' manga have such great appeal to both male and female readers. Through the narrative contrivance of the "hero's journey" (Campbell, 1942), the protagonists of many *shōnen* manga are forced to overcome multiple difficulties and make up for various defeats to achieve their goal eventually. The resilience and will retaliate demonstrated by these characters can only create an emotional connection with readers, who, in the difficulties of the comic book protagonists, see their own by identifying with them accordingly (Ellecosta, 2021; Ellecosta & Basso, 2023).

7.3. Limitations and insights for possible future research

Although the questionnaire and the data collected through it yielded some exciting results in understanding readers' perceptions of manga characters, it is still helpful to dwell on what could be improvements and opportunities for development. First, the sample would need to be expanded to make the data more meaningful. It might be an idea not only to post the questionnaire on the various online forums devoted to the Japanese comics medium but to take advantage of the many trade shows to administer a paper version of the survey.

The methodology also has flaws that should be polished for future research. Foremost, it would be appropriate to shorten the set of questions. Thus, the number of participants who complete the questionnaire would drastically increase. For example, one of the two scales could be cut from the trial because the data did not turn out to be of particular difference, and therefore it is optional to keep both scales. In addition, a pilot study to gather opinions regarding the choice of images might have proved useful.

Previously, the emotional and affective value that binds readers to characters has emerged. Consequently, a subsequent line of research could include an evaluation of figures not only physically but also on a personality basis. Building on Bandura's (1982) social learning theories, one could investigate possible changes in perceptions about sexualization when linked to characters to whom participants are particularly attached.

A further research proposal could investigate the cosplayer phenomenon and self-sexualization. Many online content creators wear costumes inspired by manga and anime characters intentionally modified to appear sexy. In this regard, a comparative study could be conducted to analyze the rate of perceived empowerment between real people and fictional characters.

Final remarks

With this thesis, we have accurately outlined the perceptions towards figures within manga, especially about gender roles and the depiction of bodies. Based on the data collected and the methodology used, this work can find its usefulness in the field of communication, but also for the publishing industry and the fields of developmental psychology.

The gender issue is nowadays an essential part of political and social discourse. Think of all the examples we have crossed in the course of this thesis: speaking of power relations and symbols, we have stumbled upon the sad vicissitudes of protests in Iran and female circumcision; we have discussed how language can represent a vital source of power (Connell, 2002); and finally, we have talked about hegemonic masculinity (Kessler et al., 1982) and how issues related to third genders have evolved over time.

Much of this thesis was devoted to gender issues in Japan and the main cultural differences between the Japanese archipelago and the West. Through a careful analysis of the relevant literature, it was shown how gender roles are indeed largely cultural mutations (Butler, 1990). As de Beauvoir (1949) said, one is not born female but not born male either. The growing awareness that being a woman and being a man are largely given by cultural and social factors, intermingled with increased cognition regarding different sexual orientations, have made it compelling and necessary to discuss these issues. Proof of this is the exorbitant increase in requests for students to enroll in college courses dealing with gender issues (Data USA, 2023; Department of Gender & Women's Studies, 2017).

Especially in the field of culture and communication, gender studies find fertile ground and can serve as an exciting focus for discussion. Throughout this dissertation, we have discussed how the world of mass media influences our perception of how to experience our gender. Movies, books, comics, music videos, and the like constantly inundate us with notions about the most appropriate behaviors in different communities. Especially regarding outward appearance, pop culture plays an essential role in propagating the prevailing beauty standards at a given time and place globally. Just like gender, the ideal body is a social construct constantly being reshaped.

A shining example in this regard is the ideal Japanese male body. Unlike most Western countries, Japanese men do not wish to attain a hypermuscular body; instead, they

prefer a slender body outlined by a vein of not-too-showy muscles (Inagaki, 1973). The *hoso-macho* physique is also particularly appreciated by the female gender, which sees in these less muscular men a less assertive charm that gives them a feeling of confidence (Monden, 2021). Much more similar are the canons of female beauty, which in both Japan and Europe and America favor women who are thin and eternally young. However, young Japanese girls deliberately use looking young and adolescent to counter the status quo that would have them "good wives and wise mothers" (Nguyen, 2016).

In addition, the body has become increasingly visible due to the growing popularity of social networks. Young men and young girls decide of their own free will to put their physiques on display, radically changing the object of the gaze from passive to active and the instigator of said gazes (Hagen, 2021). Self-sexualization is for some people an emancipating factor, especially for women, because it counteracts the idea of a patriarchy that would like its daughters to be morose and chaste (Donaghue, 2014). From another perspective, however, deciding to make one's body available for millions of people to see only reinforces the idea that women are merely objects of male desire (Whelehan, 2000).

One of the mediums that are most criticized for representing its figures in a hypersexualized and often overly simplistic way is manga (Daugherty, 2020). As made explicit earlier, this thesis aimed to understand how the body representations of certain characters are perceived. We have mainly focused on factors such as emancipation and sexualization. As can be easily guessed, images depicting young girls with prosperous breasts have established the most negative reactions. However, it should be added that no figure was perceived as highly offensive, but at the same time, only characters in armor were seen by the sample as strongly emancipating. It could, therefore, be assumed that manga users are people who pay little attention to issues such as the sexualization and objectification of women, but this would be reductive and not totally accurate. The two scales used to investigate opinions related to stereotypes and gender roles showed that manga readers are people to be considered progressive and care about issues such as equity and gender equality.

In conclusion, it can be argued with due confidence that the methodology used allowed for a relatively accurate and unambiguous account of what people's opinions are regarding the depiction of characters in manga. However, as seen above, the study has ample room for modification and improvement. Japanese comics are thus fertile ground for

conducting a wide variety of cultural, image-learning, and visual language studies, but precisely can also serve as a starting point for psychological studies.

Therefore, Japanese comics are a cultural cross-section, a window into a world, sometimes completely different from our own. It is not, therefore, sufficient to consider the little black-and-white books, written backward, filled with fights, love stories, and characters with unrealistic hair, as mere children's entertainment. Resilience, friendship, the will not to give up, and exciting insights into social criticism are distinguishing characteristics that define manga from its genesis to the present day, consequently managing to capture the interest of millions of people.

Figure 62: Attack on Titan's closing panel (Isayama, 2021)

Sources

Abbasi, H., & Russon, M.-A. (2022, August 18). *Japan launches contest to encourage young people to drink more alcohol.* Retrieved October 17, 2022, from NBC News: https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/japan-drinking-contest-alcohol-consumption-health-rcna43675

Abbatecola, E. (2002). L'identità in questione. L'omosessualità da Foucault alla queer theory (Identity in question. Homosexuality from Foucault to queer theory.). In *Tra i generi. Rileggendo le differenze di genere, di generazione, di orientamento sessuale (Between genders. Rereading differences in gender, generation, and sexual orientation.)* (pp. 225-248). Milano: Guerini e Associati.

Abele, E. (2015). Introduction, Liberating American Masculinity. In E. Abele, & J. A. Gronbeck-Tedesco (Eds.), *Screening Images of American Masculinity in the Age of Postfeminism* (pp. xiii-xxiv). Lexington Books.

ADNKronos. (2020, December 15). *Stupro, quando la sentenza fa discutere (Rape, when sentencing causes discussion).* Retrieved from ADNKronos: https://www.adnkronos.com/crimea-esplosione-distrugge-missili-russia-destinati-a-flotta-mar-nero_1fgjXtUF3nkcIRrh6s1Qpv

adnkronos. (2022, October 24). *Governo, Michela Murgia: "Meloni è 'il presidente'? Modello di potere maschilista"* . Retrieved from adnkronos: https://www.adnkronos.com/governo-michela-murgia-meloni-pretende-articolo-maschile-e-modello-di-potere-maschilista_6Tf4tMQTgsIS1JZXvxbVQ2

Agence France-Presse. (2022, November 6). *Fresh protests erupt in Iran's universities and Kurdish region.* Retrieved from The Guardian: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/06/iran-fresh-protests-universities-kurdish-region

Ahmed, S. (2010). Happy objects. In M. Gregg, & G. Seigworth (Eds.), *The Affect Theory Reader* (pp. 29-51). Durham: Duke University Press.

Ajzen, I. (1985). From intentions to actions: A theory of planned behavior. In J. Kuhl, & J. Beckmann (Eds.), *Action-control: From cognition to behavior* (pp. 11-39). Heidelber: Springer.

Ajzen, I. (1988). *Attitudes, personality, and behavior.* Chicago: Dorsey Press.

Ajzen, I. (1991). The Theory of Planned Behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Process, 50*, 179-211.

Ajzen, I., & Fishbein, M. (1977). Attitude-behavior relations: A theoretical analysis and review of empirical research. *Psychological Bulletin, 84*, 888-918.

Akutami, G. (2018-present). *呪術廻戦 (Jujutsu Kaisen).* Shueisha.

Al Jazeera. (2022, October 7). *Iranian coroner denies Mahsa Amini died from blows to body.* Retrieved from Al Jazeera: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/10/7/iranian-coroner-denies-mahsa-amini-died-from-blows-to-body

Ala, E. (2019). Ukiyoe shunga: Stampe erotiche giapponesi di epoca Edo (Ukiyoe shunga: Japanese erotic prints from the Edo era). *Kervan - International Journal of Afro-Asiatic Studies*, 215-234.

Alexander, S. M. (2003). Stylish Hard Bodies: Branded Masculinity in Men's Health Magazine. *Sociological Perspectives*. doi:https://doi.org/10.1525/sop.2003.46.4.535

Allen, K., & Ingulsrud, J. E. (2003). Manga Literacy: Popular Culture and the Reading Habits of Japanese College Students. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 674-683.

Allison, A. (1996). *Permitted and Prohibited Desires: Mothers, Comics, and Censorship in Japan.* Boulder: Westview Press.

Allison, A. (2000). Sailor Moon: Japanese Superheroes for Global Girls. In T. Craig (Ed.), *Japan Pop! Inside the World of Japanese Pop Culture* (pp. 259-278). New York: M.E. Sharpe.

Allison, A. (2006a). Fierce Flesh: Sexy Schoolgirls in the Action Fantasy of Sailor Moon. In A. Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination* (pp. 128-162). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Altman, D. (1972). *Homosexual: Oppression and liberation.* Sydney: Angus and Robertson.

Amendola, A., & Tirino, M. (2018). Il cosplay e le culture giovanili: interazione sociale, emozioni mediali e performance identitarie (Cosplay and youth cultures: social interaction, medial emotions, and identity performance). In *Culture e Studi del Sociale (Culture and Social Studies)* (pp. 57-71). Salerno.

Amnesty International. (2020). *Belgium: Must Step Up Efforts on Human Rights Protection.* London: Amnesty International Ltd.

Andreasson, J., & Johansson, T. (2017). The New Fitness Geography: The Globalization of Japanese Gym and Fitness Culture. *Leisure Studies, 36*(3), 383-394.

AnimeNation. (2009, April 17). *Ask John: What Distinguishes Harem Anime?* Retrieved from AnimeNation: News Blog + More!: https://web.archive.org/web/20091116035437/http://www.animenation.net/blog/2009/04/17/ask-john-what-distinguishes-harem-anime/

Ankama Games. (2012, February 29). Wakfu. Square Enix.

Aoyama, T. (2005). Transgendering Shôjo Shôsetsu: Girls' Inter-text/sexuality. In M. McLelland, & R. Dasgupta (Eds.), *Genders, Transgenders and Sexuality in Japan* (pp. 49-64). Londra: Routledge.

APA. (2008, February 1). *Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls.* Retrieved from American Psychological Association: https://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/girls/report

APA. (2023a). *anorexia nervosa.* Retrieved from American Psychological Association: https://dictionary.apa.org/anorexia-nervosa

APA. (2023b). *binge-eating disorder.* Retrieved from American Psychological Association: https://dictionary.apa.org/binge-eating-disorder

APA. (2023c). *bulimia nervosa.* Retrieved from American Psychological Association: https://dictionary.apa.org/bulimia-nervosa

APA. (2023d). *Discrimination Against Homosexuals.* Retrieved from American Psychological Association: https://www.apa.org/about/policy/discrimination

APA. (2023e). *eating disorder.* Retrieved from American Psychological Association: https://dictionary.apa.org/eating-disorder

APA. (2023f). *sex.* Retrieved May 5, 2023, from American Psychological Association: https://dictionary.apa.org/sex

Arbour, K. P., & Martin Ginis, K. A. (2006). Effects of exposure to muscular and hypermuscular media images on young men's muscularity dissatisfaction and body dissatisfaction. *Body Image, 3*, 153-161.

Arfini, E. (2007). *Scrivere il sesso, retoriche e narrative della transessualità (Writing sex, rhetorics and narratives of transsexuality).* Roma: Meltemi.

Arnot, M., David, M., & Weiner, G. (1999). *Closing the Gender Gap: Postwar Education and Social Change.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Atkinson, M. (2008). Exploring Male Femininity in the `Crisis': Men and Cosmetic Surgery. *Body & Society, 14*(1). doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X07087531

Attwood, F. (2006). Sexed Up: Theorizing the Sexualization of Culture. *Sexualities, 9*(1), 77-94.

Attwood, F. (2017). *Sex Media.* Polity Press.

Azuma, H. (2010). *Generazione Otaku: uno studio della postmodernità (Generation Otaku: a study of postmodernity).* (M. Pellitteri, Ed.) Jaca Book.

Bandura, A. (1982). Self-efficacy mechanism in human agency. *American Psychologist, 37*, 122-147.

Bandura, A. (1991). Social-cognitive theory of self-regulation. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*.

Barbagli, M. (2003). Orientamento sessuale, genere e rapporti di coppia (Sexual orientation, gender, and relationships). *Innesti. Storia delle donne, storia del genere, storia sociale (Grafts. Women's history, gender history, social history).* Certosa di Pontignano.

Bardsley, J. (2011). The Oyaji Gets a Makeover. In J. Bardsley, & L. Miller (Eds.), *Manners and Mischief Gender, Power, and Etiquette in Japan* (pp. 114-135). Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.

Baricordi, A., De Giovanni, M., Pietroni, A., Rossi, B., & Tunesi, S. (1991). *Anime. Guida al cinema d'animazione giapponese (Anime. A guide to Japanese animated cinema).* Bologna: Granata Press.

Baynes, M. (2022, September 30). *'We want everyone to know her name': TikToker Hadis Najafi, 23, shot dead in Iran protests.* Retrieved from Sky News: https://news.sky.com/story/we-want-everyone-to-know-her-name-hadis-najafi-the-23-year-old-tiktoker-shot-dead-in-iran-protests-12706404

BBC (Director). (2000). *Changing the Japanese Way* [Motion Picture].

BBC Newsbeat. (2020, August 7). *The Matrix is a 'trans metaphor', Lilly Wachowski says.* Retrieved from BBC News: https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-53692435

Bebel, A. (1879). *Die Frau und der Sozialismus (Women and Socialism).* Zürich-Hottingen: Verlag der Volksbuchhandlung.

Becker, A., Burwell, R. A., Gilman, S. E., Herzog, D. B., & Hamburg, P. (2002). Eating behaviours and attitudes following prolonged exposure to television among ethnic Fijian adolescent girls. *British Journal of Psychiatry, 180*, 509-514.

Becker, A., Keel, P., Anderson-Fye, E., & Thomas, J. (2004). Genes and/or jeans? Genetic and socio-cultural contributions to risk for eating disorders. *Journal of Addictive Diseases, 23*, 81-103.

bell hooks. (1984). *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center.* Boston: South End Press.

bell hooks. (1992). *Black Looks: Race and Representation.* South End Press.

Bem, S. L. (1974). The measurement of psychological androgyny. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 42*(2), 155-162.

Benedetti, S. (2015). *La subcultura dello yaoi/Boys' Love in Italia: Omoerotismo, creatività e interazioni sociali nel fandom femminile (The subculture of yaoi/Boys' Love in Italy: Homoeroticism, creativity, and social interactions in female fandom (Dissertation)).* Venezia: Università Ca'Foscari Venezia.

Berger, J. (Director). (1972). *Ways of Seeing* [Motion Picture]. Penguin Books.

Bernstein, E. (2001). The Meaning of the Purchase: Desire, Demand and the Commerce of Sex. *Ethnography, 2*(3), 389-420.

Berruto, G., & Cerruti, M. (2017). *La linguistica. Un corso introduttivo (Linguistics. An introduction).* UTET Università.

Bertram Freeman-Mitford, A. (2007). *Tales of Old Japan.* Aegypan.

Biefeld, S. D., Stone, E. A., & Spears Brown, C. (2021). Sexy, Thin, and White: The Intersection of Sexualization, Body Tipe, and Race on Stereotypes about Women. *Sex Roles, 85*, 287-300.

Bindi, V., & Raffaelli, L. (2021). *Che cos'è un fumetto (What is a comic book?).* Roma: Carocci editore.

Bindi, V., Raffaelli, L., & Posocco, C. (2021). Il fumetto giapponese fra catastrofi e trasgressioni (Japanese comic book between catastrophes and transgressions). In V. Bindi, & L. Raffaelli, *Che cos'è un fumetto* (pp. 67-79). Roma: Carocci editore.

Bishu, S. G., & Alkadry, M. G. (2016). A Systemic Review of the Gender Pay Gap and Factors That Predict It. *Administration & Society*. doi:10.1177/0095399716636928

Blair, J. D., Stephenson, J. D., Hill, K. L., & Green, J. S. (2006). Ethics in advertising: sex sells, but should it? *Journal of Legal, Ethical and Regulatory Issues, 9*(1-2), 109-118.

Blamires, A. (Ed.). (1992). *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Blumer, J. G., & Katz, E. (1974). *The uses of mass communication.* Londra: Sage.

Bordo, S. (1995). *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Borggreen, G. (2021). Gender and Visual Culture. In J. Coates, L. Fraser, & M. Pendleton (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture* (pp. 331-339). London and New York: Routledge.

Borgogna, N. C., McDermott, R. C., Aita, S. L., & Kridel, M. M. (2019). Anxiety and depression across gender and sexual minorities: Implications for transgender, gender nonconforming, pansexual, demisexual, asexual, queer, and questioning individuals. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity, 6*(1), 54-63.

Boroughs, M., Cafri, G., & Thompson, J. K. (2005). Male Body Depilation: Prevalence and Associated Features of Body Hair Removal. *Sex Roles*, 637-644.

Bottomley, G. (1992). *From Another Place: Migration and the Politics of Culture.* Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1998). *La Domination masculine (Male domination).*

Brandes, S., & Stark, W. (2021, März 8). *Empowerment/Befähigung.* Retrieved from Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung: https://leitbegriffe.bzga.de/alphabetisches-verzeichnis/empowermentbefaehigung/

Braun, D. L., Sunday, S. R., Huang, A., & Halmi, K. A. (1999). More males seek treatment for eating disorders. *International Journal of Eating Disorders,* 415-424.

Breidenbach, S., Klimczak, P., & Petersen, C. (2021). *Soziale Medien: Interdisziplinäre Zugänge zur Onlinekommunikation (ars digitalis) (Social Media: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Online Communication (ars digitalis)).* Springer.

Broccoli, A. (1975). *Antonio Gramsci e l'educazione come egemonia (Antonio Gramsci and education as hegemony).* La Nuova Italia.

Brown, A. (2022, Giugno 7). *About 5% of young adults in the U.S. say their gender is different from their sex assigned at birth.* Retrieved from Pew Research Center: https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/06/07/about-5-of-young-adults-in-the-u-s-say-their-gender-is-different-from-their-sex-assigned-at-birth/

Brown, M. J., & Gladstone, N. (2012). Development of a Short Version of the Gender Role Beliefs Scale. *International Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences, 2*(5), 154-158.

Brumberg, J. J. (1998). *The body project: An intimate history of American girls.* New York: Vintage Books.

Bryce, M., & Davis, J. (2010). An Overview of Manga Genres. In T. Johnson-Woods (Ed.), *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives* (pp. 34-61). Bloomsbury Publishing.

Budgeon, S. (1994). Fashion Magazine Advertising: Constructing Femininity in the "Postfeminist" Era. In L. Manca, & A. Manca (Eds.), *Gender and Utopia in Advertising: A Critical Reader* (pp. 55-70). Lisle: Procopian Press.

Buerk, R. (2012, Gennaio 11). *Young Japanese 'decline to fall in love'.* Retrieved from BBC News: https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-16500768

Bullock, A., & Trombley, S. (Eds.). (1999). *The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* (III ed.). Harper Collins Publishers.

Burt, M. R. (1980). Cultural myths and supports for rape. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 38*, 217-230.

Bush, D. (2018, October 3). *More Americans believe Ford than Kavanaugh, according to new poll.* Retrieved from PBS News Hour: https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/more-americans-believe-ford-than-kavanaugh-according-to-new-poll

Buss, D. (1999). *Evolutionary psychology: The new science of the mind.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* New York: Routledge.

Butler, M., & Paisley, W. (1980). *Women and the Mass-Media.* New York: Human Sciences Press.

Byerly, C. (2011). *Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media.* Washington DC: International Women's Media Foundation.

Cabrio, P. (2021a). Persone e personaggi trans nel cinema e in tv (Trans people and characters in film and TV). In A. Cavallo, L. Lugli, & M. Prearo (Eds.), *Cose Spiegate Bene - Questioni di un certo genere (Things Explained Well - Matters of a Certain Kind)* (pp. 70-81). Milano: Iperborea.

Cabrio, P. (2021b). Quando abbiamo cominciato a dirci eterosessuali e omosessuali (When we started calling ourselves heterosexuals and homosexuals). In A. Cavallo, L. Lugli, & M. Prearo (Eds.), *Cose spiegate bene - Questioni di un certo genere (Things Explained Well - Matters of a Certain Kind)* (pp. 60-69). Milano: Iperborea.

Calogero, R. M. (2004). A Test of Objectification Theory: The Effect of the Male Gaze on Appearance Concerns in College Women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 28*(1). doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2004.00118x

Calogero, R. M., Boroughs, M., & Thompson, J. K. (2007). The impact of Western beauty ideals on the lives of women: A sociocultural perspective. In V. Swami, & A. Furnham (Eds.), *Body beautiful: Evolutionary and sociocultural perspective* (pp. 259-298). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Calzo, J. P., Masyn, K. E., Corliss, H. L., Scherer, E. A., Field, A. E., & Austin, S. B. (2015). Patterns of Body Image Concerns and Disordered Weight- and Shape-Related Behaviors in Heterosexual and Sexual Minority Adolescent Males. *Developmental Psychology, 51*(9), 1216-1225.

Camara, S., & Duran, V. (2007). *Art of Drawing Manga.* Sterling Publishing.

Campbell, J. (1949). *The Hero with a Thousand Faces.* Pantheon Books.

Cangemi, A. (2022, October 28). *Meloni vuole essere chiamata 'il Presidente del Consiglio': la nota ufficiale ai ministeri (Meloni wants to be called 'the President of the Council': the official note to ministries).* Retrieved from fanpage.it: https://www.fanpage.it/politica/meloni-vuole-essere-chiamata-il-signore-presidente-del-consiglio-la-nota-ufficiale-ai-ministeri/

Capecchi, S. (1993). Le immagini femminili nei programmi televisivi. Una panoramica sulle ricerche anglo-americane dagli anni '70 ad oggi (Female images in television programs. An overview of Anglo-American research from the 1970s to the present). *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia (Italian Sociology Review)*, 425-440.

Capecchi, S. (2006). *Identità di genere e media (Gender Identity and Media).* Roma: Carocci Editore.

Caplan, P. (Ed.). (1987). *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality.* London: Tavistock.

Cappellini, M. (2019, July 31). *Ecco i 70 Paesi dove essere gay è ancora illegale (Here are the 70 countries where being gay is still illegal).* Retrieved from Il Sole 24 Ore.

CARE International. (2023, February 6). *Female Genital Mutilation: A daily grim reality for girls in Somalia.* Retrieved April 26, 2023, from Care: https://www.care-international.org/news/female-genital-mutilation-daily-grim-reality-girls-somalia

Caron, F., Godin, G., Otis, J., & Lambert, L. D. (2004). Evaluation of a theoretically based AIDS/STD peer education program on postponing sexual intercourse and on condom use among adolescents attending high school. *Health Educ Res*, 185-197.

Castelletti, R. (2015, Dicembre 1). Otaku? Una forma di ribellione dei ragazzi schiacchiati dalla crisi (Otaku? A form of rebellion of kids crushed by the crisis). *La Repubblica*.

Celentano, A. (Director). (2019). *Adrian* [Motion Picture].

Centorno, K., & Artibani, F. (2003-2015). *Monster Allergy.* The Walt Disney Company Italia.

Central Intelligence Agency. (2015). *CIA World Factbook.* Central Intelligence Agency & United States Government Publishing Office.

Cerardi, C. (2001). *Gramsci e la costruzione dell'egemonia (Gramsci and the construction of hegemony).* Milano: La Mongolfiera.

Chanter, T. (2004). Abjection, or Why Freud Introduces the Phallus: Identification, Castration Theory, and the Logic of Fetishism. *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 48-66.

Chare, N. (2016). Landscape into Portrait: Reflections on Lili Elbe and Trans* Aesthetics. *Parallax, 22*(3), 347-365.

Charlebois, J. (2017). The Shifting Gender Landscape of Japanese Society. In S. Toyosaki (Ed.), *Intercultural Communication in Japan: Theorizing Homogenizing Discourse* (pp. 55-70). London and New York: Routledge.

Chen, H.-p. (2011). *The Significance of Manga in the Identity-Construction fo Young American Adults: A Lacanian Approach (Electronic Thesis of Dissertation).* Ohio State University.

Chen, J. S. (2007). A Study of Fan Culture: Adolescent Experiences with Anime/manga Doujinshi and Cosplay in Taiwan. *Visual Arts Research, 33*, 14-24.

Chen, S. (2012). The Rise of 草食系男子 (Soushokukei Danshi) Masculinity and Consumption in Contemporary Japan: A Historic and Discursive Analysis. In C. Otnes, & L. Zayer (Eds.), *Gender, Culture and Consumption.* Routledge.

Chen, Y. (2011). *Warriors as the Feminised Other: The Study of Male Heroes in Chinese Action Cinema from 2000 to 2009.* PhD Thesis, University of Canterbury.

Chesney, E., Goodwin, G. M., & Fazel, S. (2014). Risks of all-cause and suicide mortality in mental disorders: a meta-review. *World Psychiatry, 13*(2), 153-160.

Chisato. (2010, May 1). in person interview. (A. Nguyen, Interviewer)

Chisuwa-Hayami, N., & Haruki, T. (2017). Associations of Body-Related Teasing with Weight Status, Body Image, and Dieting Behavior among Japanese Adolescents. *Health Promotion Perspectives, 7*(2), 80-87.

Chodorow, N. (1991). *La funzione materna. Psicoanalisi e sociologia del ruolo materno (The maternal function. Psychoanalysis and sociology of the maternal role).* Milano: La Tartaruga.

Cigna, Y. (2022, October 25). *Infuria il dibattito a sinistra contro Meloni «IL» presidente. Le voci di Murgia e Montanari. Calenda: «Così fate il suo gioco» (Raging debate on the left against Meloni "THE" president. The voices of Murgia and Montanari. Calenda: "So you play her game).* Retrieved from OPEN: https://www.open.online/2022/10/25/giorgia-meloni-presidente-consiglio-maschile-polemica/

Clammer, J. (1997). *Contemporary Urban Japan: A Sociology of Consumption.* Malden: Blackwell Publishers.

Cleveland Clinic. (2022, November 4). *Demisexuality.* Retrieved from Cleveland Clinic: https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/22678-demisexuality#:~:text=Demisexuality%20is%20a%20sexual%20orientation.,no%20interest%20in%20sexual%20activity.

CNN. (2022, October 27). *Videos show Iranian teen protester's final hours.* Retrieved from CNN: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=udmMlKN4LWY

Cockburn, C. (1983). *Brothers: Male dominance and technological change.* London: Pluto.

Cohen, B., Jinks, D. (Producers), & Mendes, S. (Director). (1999). *American Beauty* [Motion Picture]. United States: United International Pictures.

Cohen, R., Irwin, L., Newton-John, T., & Slater, A. (2019). #bodypositivity: A content analysis of body positive accounts on Instagram. *Body Image*, 47-57.

Cohen, R., Newton-John, T., & Slater, A. (2020). The case for body positivity on social media: Perspectives on current advances and future directions. *Journal of Health Psychology, 26*(13). doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105320912450

Cohn, N. (2003). *Early Writings on Visual Language.* Carlsbad: Emaki Productions.

Cohn, N. (2005). *Cross-Cultural Space: Spatial Representation in American and Japanese Visual Language.* Emaki Production.

Cohn, N. (2007a). A Visual Lexicon. *Public Journal of Semiotics, 1*(1), 53-84.

Cohn, N. (2007b). Foundations for a Natural Visual Language Grammar. *Visual and Iconic Languages Conference*, University of New Mexico.

Cohn, N. (2008). *Towards a Visual Language Grammar: The Narrative Structure of Comics, and Maybe More.* Unpublished Manuscript.

Cohn, N. (2010). Japanese Visual Language: The Structure of Manga. In T. Johnson-Woods (Ed.), *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives* (pp. 253-271). Bloomsbury Publishing.

Common Sense Media. (2015). *Children, Teens, Media, and Body Image.* Common Sense Media.

Comte, A. (1851-54). *Système de politique positive ou Traité de sociologie, instituant la religion de l'humanité.* Paris: L. Mathias.

Connell, R. W. (1977). *Ruling class, ruling culture.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Connell, R. W. (2005). *Masculinities.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Connell, R. W. (2009). *Gender* (II ed.). Cambridge: Polity Press.

Connell, R. W. (2011). *Questioni di genere (Gender Issues)* (II ed.). (R. Ghighi, Trans.) Milano: Il Mulino.

Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. *Gender and Society, 19*(6), 829-859.

Cook, E. E. (2014). Intimate Expectations and Practices: Freeter Relationships and Marriage in Contemporary Japan. *Social Science Japan Journal, 16*(1), 36-51.

Cooper-chen, A. (2001). 'The Dominant Trope': Sex, Violence, and Hierarchy in Japanese Comics for Men. In A. Cooper-chen, *Comics & Ideology: Popular Culture and Everyday Life.* Peter Lang.

Core Design. (1996). Tomb Raider.

Corriere della Sera. (2015, February 3). *Dalla «donna grissino» al seno più grande (ma solo per una sera) (From "breadstick woman" to bigger breasts (but only for one night)*. Retrieved from Corriere della Sera: https://www.corriere.it/moda/news/cards/dalla-donna-grissino-seno-piu-grande-ma-solo-una-sera/twiggy-elogio-donna-grissino.shtml

Cox, M. V., Koyasu, M., Hiranuma, H., & Perara, J. (2001). Children's Human Figure Drawings in the UK and Japan: The Effects of Age, Sex, and Culture. *British Journal of Development Psychology*(19), 275-92.

Crepaldi, M. (2019a). *Hikikomori. I giovani che non escono di casa (Hikikomori. Young people who do not leave home).* Alpes Italia.

Crepaldi, M. (2019b, August 18). *Il fenomeno degli INCEL: i "celibi involontari" che odiano le donne (The INCEL phenomenon: the "involuntary celibates" who hate women).* Retrieved Settembre 4, 2022, from Hikikomori Italia: https://www.hikikomoriitalia.it/2019/08/incel-e-hikikomori.html

Crepaldi, M. (2019c, December 28). *Perché l'hikikomori riguarda soprattutto i maschi (Why hikikomori mainly affects males).* Retrieved Aprile 04, 2021, from Hikikomori Italia: https://www.hikikomoriitalia.it/2019/12/gli-hikikomori-sono-soprattutto-maschi.html

Crepaldi, M. (2020). Body shaming maschile: "l'altezza conta" (Male body shaming: "height matters"). Retrieved from https://open.spotify.com/episode/2K1QoiA2i8dil8Z4k2hQPY?go=1&sp_cid=af8d6ec0bb4a9c1ffe8b45d170d33677&utm_source=embed_player_p&utm_medium=desktop&nd=1

Crocetti, E., Rubini, M., Luyckx, K., & Meeus, W. (2008). Identity formation in early and middle adolescents from various ethinc groups: From three dimensions to five statuses. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 37*, 983-996.

Dale, J. P. (2021). Cuteness Studies and Japan. In J. Coates, L. Fraser, & M. Pendleton (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture* (pp. 320-330). London and New York: Routledge.

Dales, L. (2009). *Women, feminism and the family in contemporary Japan.* New York: Routledge.

Dalton, E. (2017). Womenomics, 'Equality' and Abe's Neo-Liberal Strategy to Make Japanese Women Shine. *Social Science Japan Journal, 20*(1), 95-105.

Daniels, E. A., & Zurbriggen, E. L. (2016). The price of sexy: Viewers' perceptions of a sexualized versus nonsexualized Facebook profile photograph. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture, 5*(1), 2-14.

Darlington, T., & Cooper, S. (2010). The Power of Truth: Gender and Sexuality in Manga. In T. Johnson-Woods (Ed.), *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives* (pp. 157-172). Bloomsbury Publishing.

Darling-Wolf, F. (2003). Male Bonding and Female Pleasure: Refining Masculinity in Japanese Popular Culture Texts. *Popular Communication, 1*(2), 73-88.

Dasgupta, R. (2000). Performing masculinities? The 'salarymen' at work and play. *Journal of Japanese studies, 20*(2), 189-200.

Dasgupta, R. (2013). *Re-reading the Salaryman in Japan: Crafting Masculinities.* Londra: Routledge.

Daugherty, S. G. (2020). In the Name of the Moon: Female Mangaka and the Manga Industry. *TRACE: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange*. Retrieved from https://trace.tennessee.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3414&context=utk_chanhonoproj

Dawson, J., Handel, A., Aronofsky, D. (Producers), & Aronofsky, D. (Director). (2022). *The Whale* [Motion Picture]. United States: A24.

DC Comics. (2018). *Action Comics #1000.* DC Comics.

de Beauvoir, S. (1949). *Le Deuxième Sexe (The Second Sex).* Éditions Gallimard.

De Leo, M. (2021). *Queer: Storia culturale della comunità LGBT+ (Queer: History of the LGBT+ Community).* Einaudi.

de Pizan, C. (1405). *Le Livre de la Cité des dames (The Book of the City of Ladies).*

de Villeneuve, A. (1937). Etude sur une coutome Somalie, les femmes cousues (Study on a Somali custom, the sewn women). *Journal de la Société des Africanistes (Journal of the Society of Africanists), 7*, 15-32.

Demetriou, D. Z. (2001). Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity: A critique. *Theory and Society*, 337-361.

Devereaux, M. (1995). Oppressive Texts, Resisting Readers, and the Gendered Spectator: The "New" Aesthetics. In P. Zeglin Brand, & C. Korsmeyer (Eds.), *Feminism and tradition in aesthetics.* Penn State University Press.

Di Liegro, A. (2015, June 1). *Stop all'infibulazione in Nigeria. E' il primo Stato africano a dichiararla illegale (Stop infibulation in Nigeria. It is the first African state to declare it illegal).* Retrieved April 26, 2023, from Il Messaggero: https://www.ilmessaggero.it/primopiano/esteri/infibulazione_nigeria-1067762.html

Diemer, E. W., Grant, J. D., Munn-Chernoff, M. A., Patterson, D. A., & Duncan, A. E. (2015). Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation, and Eating-Related Pathology in a National Sample of College Students. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 57*(2), 144-149. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2015.03.003

DiMartino, M. D., & Konietzko, B. (Directors). (2005-2008). *Avatar: The Last Airbender* [Motion Picture].

Distefan, J. M., Gilpin, E. A., Sargent, J. D., & Pierce, J. P. (1999). Do movie stars encourage adolescents to start smoking? Evidence from California. *Preventive Medicine, 28*(1), 1-11.

Donaghue, N. (2014). Sexualization. In *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology* (pp. 1746-1750). New York: Springer. doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-5583-7_418

Donaldson, M., & Poynting, S. (2004). The time of their lives: Time, work and leisure in the daily lives of ruling-class men. In N. Hollier (Ed.), *Ruling Australia: The power, privilege & politics of the new ruling class.* Melbourne: Australian Scholarly.

Donner, R., Bernhard, H. (Producers), Spielberg, S. (Writer), & Donner, R. (Director). (1985). *The Goonies* [Motion Picture]. United States: Warner Bros.

Döring, N. (2022, August 12). *Sexualisierung (Sexualization).* Retrieved from Dörsch - Lexikon der Psychologie (Dörsch - Dictionary of Psychology): https://dorsch.hogrefe.com/stichwort/sexualisierung

Dove. (2017). *The 2017 Dove Global Girls Beauty and Confidence Report.* Dove self-esteem project.

Dow, B. J. (2014). *Watching Women's Liberation 1970: Feminism's Pivotal Year on the Network News.* Champaign: University of Illinois Press.

Dowling, C. (1981). *The Cinderella Complex: Women's Hidden Fear of Independence.* Simon & Schuster.

Dreeßen, Y. (2016). Me, Myelf and I? Postfeminismus und Sexismus im Mainstreampop der Post-Millennium Jahre. *PopScriptum*, 1-24.

Drummond-Mathews, A. (2010). What Boys Will Be: A Study of Shonen Manga. In T. Johnson-Wood (Ed.), *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives* (pp. 62-76). Bloomsbury Publishing.

DuFer, R. (2023, March 8). *"The Whale" e il peso (culturale) di Darren Aronofsky ("The Whale" and the (cultural) weight of Darren Aronofsky.).* Retrieved from YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gF9K1QfNw3A

Dutton, K. R. (1995). *The Perfectible Body: The Western Ideal of Male Physical Development.* New York: Continuum.

Eaton, E. W. (2008). Feminist Philosophy of Art. *Philosophy Compass*, 873-893.

Elise, R., & Johansen, B. (2017). Virility, pleasure and female genital mutilation/cutting. A qualitative study of perceptions and experiences of medicalized defibulation among Somali and Sudanese migrants in Norway. *Reproductive Health*. doi:https://doi.org/10.1186%2Fs12978-017-0287-4

Ellecosta, N. (2021). *Esiste una relazione tra la lettura di manga e la creazione della propria identità? (Elaborato di tesi triennale).* Libera Università di Bolzano.

Ellecosta, N., & Basso, D. (2023). Knowledge and Appreciation of Manga Comics in an Italian Sample. In D. Villa, & F. Zuccoli (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 3rd International and Interdisciplinary Conference on Image and Imagination* (pp. 486-495). Milan: Springer.

Elliott, M. A. (2018). The Globalization of Comic-Con and the Sacralization of Popular Culture. In A. Beniwal, R. Jain, & K. Spracklen (Eds.), *Global Leisure and the Struggle for a Better World* (pp. 221-242). Palgrave Macmillan.

Ellis, H. (1928). *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (Vol. VII: Eonism and Other Supplementary Studies). Philadelphia: F.A. Davis.

Emerson, R. A. (2002). "Where my girls at?": Negotiating black womanhood in music videos. *Gender & Society, 16*, 115-135.

Encyclopedia Britannica. (2023). *sexual orientation.* Retrieved March 16, 2023, from Encyclopedia Britannica: https://www.britannica.com/topic/sexuality

Eng, L. (2001). The Origins of 'Otaku'. *Cornell Japanese Animation Society*.

Engels, F. (1977). *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats (The origin of the family, private property and the state).* Berlin: Dietz.

Epstein, S. (1983). Aggregation and beyond: Some basic issues on the prediction of behavior. *Journal of Personality, 51*, 360-392.

Equaldex. (2023). *Same-sex adoption.* Retrieved from Equaldex: https://www.equaldex.com/issue/adoption

Erikson, E. H. (1950). *Childhood and Society.* London: Imago.

Erikson, E. H. (1959). Identity and the life cycle: Selected papers. *Psychological Issues, 1*, 1-171.

Ezawa, A. (2021). Family, Inequality, and the Work-Family Balance in Contemporary Japan. In J. Coates, L. Fraser, & M. Pendleton (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture* (pp. 106-114). London and New York: Routledge.

Fandom. (2023). *Ichirō Inuyashiki.* Retrieved from Fandom: https://inu-yashiki.fandom.com/wiki/Ichir%C5%8D_Inuyashiki

Fandom. (2023b). *Shizuka Marikawa.* Retrieved from Fandom: https://highschool-of-the-dead.fandom.com/wiki/Shizuka_Marikawa

Fang, T., & Fang, L. (2022). The translation of otaku and transnational construction of East Asian masculinity. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*. doi:10.1080/23311983.2022.2114222

Fardouly, J., Diedrichs, P. C., Vartanian, L. R., & Halliwell, E. (2015). Social comparisons on social media: The impact of Facebook on young women's body image concerns and mood. *Body Image, 13*, 38-45.

Fasoli, F., Durante, F., Mari, S., Zogmeister, C., & Volpato, C. (2018). Shades of Sexualization: When Sexualization Becomes Sexual Objectification. *Sex Roles, 78*, 338-351.

Feder, S., Scholder, A. (Producers), & Feder, S. (Director). (2020). *Disclosure: Trans Lives on Screen* [Motion Picture]. United States: Netflix.

Ferguson, C. J., Winegard, B., & Winegard, B. M. (2011). Who Is the Fairest One of All? How Evolution Guides Peer and Media Influences on Female Body Dissatisfaction. *Review of General Psychology, 15*(1), 11-28.

Ferguson, H. (2001). Men and masculinities in late-modern Ireland. In B. Pease, & K. Pringle (Eds.), *A man's world? Changin men's practices in a globalized world.* London: Zed Books.

Fetch, A. (2014). *More than Alchemic Reactions: Playing with Gender Norms in Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood (Master's thesis).* Bowling Green State University.

Ficocelli, S. (2019, February 4). *Tokyo e dintorni, fra tradizione e modernità (Tokyo and its surroundings, between tradition and modernity).* Retrieved from la Repubblica: https://www.repubblica.it/viaggi/2019/02/02/news/giappone_fra_tradizione_e_modernita_-217938110/

Fishbein, M., & Ajzen, I. (1974). Attitudes toward objects as predictors of single and multiple behavioral criteria. *Psychological Review, 81*, 59-74.

Fiske, J. (1989). *Reading the popular.* London: Unwin Hyman.

Flahive, L., Mensch, C., Kohan, J., Herrmann, T. (Producers), Flahive, L., & Mensch, C. (Writers). (2017-2019). *GLOW* [Motion Picture]. United States.

Flaubert, G. (1857). *Madame Bovary.* Paris: Libraires-Editeurs.

Forceville, C. (2005, Gennaio 31). Visual representations of the idealized cognitive model of anger in the Asterix album La Zizanie. *Journal of Pragmatics, 37*.

Fort, A. V. (2017). *Sex and the impossible: stigma and sexualities of online fantasy fetish content creators (dissertation).* Universiteit van Amsterdam.

Foster, M. D. (2012). Haunting Modernity: Tanuki, Trains, and Transformation in Japan. *Asian Ethnology, 71*(1), 3-29.

Foucault, M. (1969). *L'archéologie du savoir (The archaeology of knowledge).* Paris: Gallimard.

Foucault, M. (1975). *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison (Surveillance and punishment. The birth of prison).* Paris: Gallimard.

Foucault, M. (1976a). *Histoire de la sexualité (The History of Sexuality).* Paris: Éditions Gallimard.

Foucault, M. (1976b). *La Volonté de savoir (The Will to Know).*

Foucault, M. (1990). *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction.* (R. Hurley, Trans.) New York: Vintage Books.

FP Staff. (2022, October 2). *Iran: Nose smashed, skull pounded; security forces return body of another young woman with suspicious injuries .* Retrieved from Firstpost: https://web.archive.org/web/20221006092601/https://www.firstpost.com/world/iran-nose-smashed-skull-pounded-security-forces-return-body-of-another-young-woman-with-suspicious-injuries-11373081.html

Frank, E. (2014). Groomers and Consumers: The Meaning of Male Body Depilation to a Modern Masculinity Body Project. *Men and Masculinities, 17*(3). doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X14539509

Fredrickson, B. L., & Roberts, T. A. (1997). Objectification theory. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 21*, 173-206.

Freeman, L. A. (2000). *Closing the Shop: Information Cartels and Japan's Mass Media.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Freud, S. (1901). *Bruchstück einer Histerie-Analyse (Fragment of Histeria Analysis).*

Freud, S. (1905). *Tre saggi sulla teoria sessuale (Three essays on sexual theory).*

Freud, S. (1914). *Aus der Geschichte einer infantilen Neurose (From the history of an infantile neurosis).*

Friedlander, K. (2015). When Eleven-Year-Olds Kick-Ass: The Gender Politics of Hit-Girl. In E. Abele, & J. A. Gronbeck-Tedesco (Eds.), *Screening Images of American Masculinity in the Age of Postfeminism* (pp. 83-102). Lexington Books.

Frosini, F., & Liguori, G. (2004). *Le parole di Gramsci: Per un lessico dei Quaderni del carcere (Gramsci's words: For a lexicon of the Prison Notebooks).* Milano: Carocci Editore.

Frühstück, S., & Walthall, A. (2011). Introduction: Interrogating Men and Masculinities. In S. Frühstück, & A. Walthall (Eds.), *Recreating Japanese men* (pp. 1-21). Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Fujimoto, Y. (1991). A life-size mirror. Women's self-representation in girls' comics. *Review of Japanese Culture and Society*, 53-57.

Fujimoto, Y. (1998). *Watashi no ibasho wa doko ni aru no? Shojo manga ga utsutsu kokoro no katachi (Where is the Place Where I Belong? The Shape of the*

Heart as Reflected in Shojo Manga). Tokyo: Gakuyo Shobo.

Fujimoto, Y. (2004). Transujendaa: Onna no ryōsei guyū otoko no han'inyō. *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal. English Supplement: A Journal for the International Exchange of Gender Studies, 27*, 76-117.

Fujio, F. F. (1969-1996). *ドラえもん (Doraemon).* Shogakukan.

Fusé, T. (1980). Suicide and culture in Japan: A study of seppuku as an institutionalized form of suicide. *Social psychiatry*(15), 57-63.

Gagné, I. (2008). Urban princesses: Performance and "Woman's Language" in Japan's Gothic/Lolita subculture. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology, 18*(1), 130-150.

Gail, M., Harrison, A., Bevan, T., Fellner, E., Hooper, T. (Producers), & Hooper, T. (Director). (2015). *The Danish Girl* [Motion Picture]. United States, United Kingdom, Denmark, Belgium, Germany, Japan: Universal.

Galbraith, P. W., & Karlin, J. G. (2012). *The Mirror of Idols and Celebrity.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gallerano, D., Romeo, G., Medosi, F., Castelli, M., & Manes, L. (2018, Maggio 21). *I brutti che odiano - Nemo - Nessuno Escluso (The Ugly Haters - Nemo - None Excluded).* Retrieved from Canale Youtube Rai: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8JLvckJcb8

Ganahl, D., Kim, K., & Netzley, S. B. (2003). Longitudinal analysis of network commercials: How advertisers portray gender. *Media Report to Women, 31*, 11-15.

Gateward, F. (2002). Bubblegum and Heavy Metal. In F. Gateward, & M. Pomerance (Eds.), *Sugar, Spice and Everything Nice: Cinemas of Girlhood* (pp. 269-284). Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Gauthier, X. (1981). *L'étrange métamorphose d'Anaïs (Anaïs' strange metamorphosis).* Garance.

Genda, Y., & Hoff, J. (2005). *A Naggings Sense of Job Insecurity: The New Reality Facing Japanese Youth.* Tokyo: International House of Japan.

Gerbner, G. (1972). Violence in Television Drama: Trends and Symbolic Functions. In G. A. Comstock, & E. A. Rubinstein (Eds.), *Television and Social Behavior* (Vol. I). Washington DC: US Government Printing Office.

Ghobadi, P. (2022, May 30). *Iran: Teen protester Nika Shakarami's body stolen, sources say.* Retrieved from BBC News: https://web.archive.org/web/20221005180616/https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-63128510

Giddens, A. (1992). *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gill, R. (2003). From Sexual Objectification to Sexual Subjectification: The Resexualisation of Women's Bodies in the Media. *Feminist Media Studies, 3*(1), 100-106.

Gill, R. (2008). Empowerment/sexism: Figuring female sexual agency in contemporary advertising. *Feminism & Psychology, 51*, 35-60.

Ginsberg, L. (2000). The Hard Work of Working Out: Defining Leisure, Health and Beauty in a Japanese Fitness Club. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues, 24*(3), 260-281.

Gintoki. (2022, March 27). *Top 10 Best-Selling Manga Of All Time In Terms Of Number Of Sales.* Retrieved September 7, 2022, from Anime Galaxy Official: https://animegalaxyofficial.com/top-10-best-selling-manga-of-all-time-in-terms-of-number-of-sales/

GLAAD. (2010, May 10). *GLAAD Shares Community Concerns About Last Night's Family Guy.* Retrieved from GLAAD: https://www.glaad.org/2010/05/10/glaad-shares-community-concerns-about-last-nights-family-guy

Glaser, S. (2015). Plädoyer gegen Empowerment? Zwischen Ansprüchen, gelebter Praxis, Kritik und neuen Ideen (Plea against empowerment? Between claims, lived practice, criticism and new ideas). *soziales_kapital, 14*, 30-41.

Glasspool, L. (2012). From Boys Next Door to Boys' Love: Gender Performance in Japanese Male Idol Media. In P. W. Galbraith, & J. G. Karlin (Eds.), *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture* (pp. 113-130). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gledhill, C. (1998). Genre and Gender: The Case of the Soap Opera. In S. Hall (Ed.), *Representations: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (pp. 337-386). Londra: Sage.

Gnone, E. (2001-2012). *W.I.T.C.H.* The Walt Disney Company Italia.

Goldstein-Gideoni, O. (2012). *Housewives of Japan.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Golitschek, N. (2021, March 22). *Was sind Influencer und wie beeinflussen sie uns? (What are Influencers, and how do they influence us?).* Retrieved from Medienkompass: https://medienkompass.de/was-ist-influencer-marketing/#:%7E:text=vermittelt,%E2%80%9C,Instagram%2C%20Youtube%20und%20Twitter%20verfolgen

Goode, W. (1982). Why men resist. In B. Thorne (Ed.), *Rethinking the family: Some feminist questions.* New York: Longman.

Gordon, A. R. (2001). Eating disorders East and West: A culture-bound syndrome unbound. In M. Nasser, M. A. Katzman, & A. R. Gordon (Eds.), *Eating disorders and cultures in transition* (pp. 1-16). New York: Taylor & Francis.

Gordon, A. R., Austin, S., Pantalone, B., Baker, D. W., Eiduson, R. A., & Rodgers, R. (2019). Appearance ideals and eating disorders risk among LGBTQ college students: the being ourselves living in diverse bodies (BOLD) study. *Journal of Adolescence Health, 64*(2), 43-44. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2018.10.096

Gotouge, K. (2016-2020). *鬼滅の刃 (Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba).* Shueisha.

Gramsci, A. (1948a). Il Risorgimento. In *Quaderni del carcere.*

Gramsci, A. (1948b). *Quaderni del carcere (The Prison Notebooks).*

Gramsci, A. (1971). Alcuni temi della quistione meridionale (Some themes of the southern question). In *La*

costruzione del partito comunista (The making of the communist party). Torino: Einaudi.

Gramsci, A. (1974). *Gli intellettuali e l'organizzazione della cultura (Intellectuals and the organization of culture).* Aeonia edizioni.

Grassmuck, V. (1990, Dicembre). I'm Alone, but not Lonely: Japanese Otaku-Kids Colonize the Realm of Information and Media. A Tale of Sex and Crime from a Faraway Place. *Mediamatic, 5*(4).

Gravett, P. (2004). *Manga: Sixty Years of Japanese Comics.* Laurence King Publishing.

Gray, J. (1992). *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus.* New York: HarperCollins.

Greenberg, B. S., Eastin, M., Hofschire, L., Lachlan, K., & Brownwell, K. D. (2003). Portrayals of Overweight and Obese Individuals on Commercial Television. *The American Journal of Public Health, 93*(8), 1342-1348.

Grogan, S. (1999). *Body Image: Understanding Body Dissatisfaction in Men, Women, and Children.* New York: Routledge.

Grunspan, D. Z., Eddy, S. L., Brownell, S. E., Wiggins, B. L., Crowe, A. J., & Goodreau, S. M. (2016, February 10). *Males Under-Estimate Academic Performance of Their Female Peers in Undergraduate Biology Classrooms.* doi:https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0148405

Gruppi, L. (1972). *Il concetto di egemonia in Gramsci (Gramsci's hegemony concept).* Roma: Istituto Gramsci.

Guizzo, F., Canale, N., & Fasoli, F. (2021). Instagram Sexualization: When posts make you feel dissatisfied and wanting to change your body. *Body Image, 39*, 62-67.

Gwynne, J. (2013). Japan, postfeminism and the consumption of sexual(ised) schoolgirls in male-authored contemporary manga. *Feminst Theory*, 325-343.

Hacker, H. M. (1957). The new burdens of masculinity. *Marriage and Family Living*, 227-233.

Hagen, S. (2021). *Boss Bitch oder Lustobjekt? Konstruktionen von Empowerment und Objektifizierung in Diskussionen über die Selbst-Sexualisierung deutscher Rapperinnen (Boss Bitch or Lust Object? Discussions about the Self-Sexualization of German Female Rappers).* GRIN Verlag.

Hall, J. (2018, January 19). *OnlyFans is the site where porn is more intimate than ever.* Retrieved from Dazed: https://www.dazeddigital.com/science-tech/article/38717/1/onlyfans-is-the-site-where-porn-is-more-intimate-than-ever

Hanley, A. (2011, February 16). *Manga Review: Highschool of the Dead Vol. 1.* Retrieved from UK Anime Network: https://www.uk-anime.net/manga/Highschool_of_the_Dead_Vol._1.html

Haraway, D. (2007). A Cyborg Manifesto. In S. During (Ed.), *The Cultural Studies Reader* (III ed., pp. 314-334). Abingdon: Routledge.

Hardacre, H. (1997). *Marketing the Menacing Fetus in Japan.* Berkeley e Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Harper's Bazaar Staff. (2009, March 23). *Best Models of All Time.* Retrieved from Harper's Bazaar: https://www.harpersbazaar.com/fashion/trends/g805/famous-models-0409/

Harrison, K., & Cantor, J. (1997). The relationship between media consumption and eating disorders. *Journal of Communication, 47*, 40-67.

Hartmann, T. (2022, February 10). *OnlyFans: Neues Geschäftsmodell, altes Stigma (OnlyFans: New business model, old stigma).* Retrieved from Das Blättchen: https://www.nd-aktuell.de/artikel/1161158.sexarbeit-onlyfans-neues-geschaeftsmodell-altes-stigma.html

Harusono, S. (2016-present). *佐々木と宮野 (Sasaki and Miyano).* Media Factory.

Hasegawa, Y. (2002). Post-Identity Kawaii: Commerce, Gender and Contemporary Japanese Art. In F. Lloyd (Ed.), *Consuming Bodies: Sex and Contemporary Japanese Art* (pp. 127-141). London: Reaktion Books.

Hashimoto, O. (1994). *Binan e no ressun (Lessons for Beautiful Men).* Tokyo: Chuo koron-sha.

Haskell, M. (1974). *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies.* New English Library.

Hatton, E., & Trautner, M. N. (2011). Equal opportunity objectification? The sexualization of men and women on the cover of Rolling Stone. *Sexuality & Culture, 15*, 256-278.

Hattori, Y. (2005). Social withdrawal in Japanese youth: A case study of thirty-five hikikomori clients. *Journal of Trauma Practice, 4*(3/4), 181-201.

Havighurst, R. J. (1952). Social and Psychological Needs of the Aging. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 11-17.

Hayakawa, M., Kuwamura, Y., Sano, M., Tatara, M., Kashioka, T., & Yoda, H. (2013). Jinrui no hajimari to nihonjin no seibunka: ukiyoeshunga wa omoshiroi (The origin of humankind and the culture of sex in Japan - Interest in ukiyoe shunga). *Human Studies: Bulletin of Institute for Cultural and Human Research*, 73-104.

Heinberg, L. J. (1996). Theories of Body Image Disturbance: Perceptual, Developmental, and Sociocultural Factors. In J. K. Thompson (Ed.), *Body Image, Eating Disorders, and Obesity: An Integrative Guide for Assessment and Treatment* (pp. 27-47). Washington: American Psychological Association.

Hendry, J. (1993). The Role of the Professional Housewife. In J. Hunter (Ed.), *Japanese Women Working* (pp. 224-241). London: Routledge.

Herdt, G. H. (1981). *Guardians of the flutes: Idioms of masculinity.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Hertog, E. (2021). Attitudes to Marriage and Childbearing. In J. Coates, L. Fraser, & M. Pendleton (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture* (pp. 92-105). London and New York: Routledge.

Hertog, E., & Kan, M.-Y. (2019). *Education and Gendered Division of Domestic Labor over Time in Contemporary Japan.* Austin: Paper Presented at the Population Association of America.

Hill Collins, P. (1991). *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment.* New York: Routledge.

Hochschild, A. (1989). *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home.* New York: Avon.

Hocquenghem, G. (1972). *Le désir homosexuel (The homosexual desire).* Paris: Éditions universitaires.

Hoff, T., & Lee, D. R. (2021). The gender pay gap in medicine: A systemic review. *Health Care Management Review, 46*(3), 37-49. doi:10.1097/HMR.0000000000000290

Hokusai, K. (1814-1878). *北斎漫画 (Hokusai Manga).*

Holden, T. J., & Ergul, H. (2006). Japan's Televisual Discourses: Infotainment, Intimacy and the Construction of a Global Uchi. In T. J. Holden, & T. J. Scares (Eds.), *Medi@sia: Global Media/tion in and Out of Context* (pp. 105-127). London: Routledge.

Holland, E., & Haslam, N. (2013). Worth the weight the objectification of overweight versus thin targets. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 37*, 462-468.

Holter, Ø. G. (2003). *Can Men Do It? Men and Gender Equality - The Nordic Experience.* Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers.

Horii, M., & Burgess, A. (2012). Constructing Sexual Risk: 'Chikan', Collapsing Male Authority and the Emergence of Women-Only Train Carriages in Japan. *Health, Risk and Society, 14*(1), 41-55.

Hornauer, C. (2018). *Soziale Medien und Geschlecht. Selbstdarstellung und Sexualisierungsdiskurse Jugendlicher in sozialen Netzwerken (Social Media and Gender).* Evangelische Fachhochschule Darmstadt.

Hoshino, K. (2004-present). *D.Gray-man.* Shueisha.

HRC Foundation. (2023). *Marriage Equality Around the World.* Retrieved from Human Rights Campaign: https://www.hrc.org/resources/marriage-equality-around-the-world

HuffPost. (2019, January 23). *Lo show è stato accusato di victim blaming, di attribuire alle donne la colpa delle molestie (The show has been accused of victim blaming, of blaming women for harassment).* Retrieved from HuffPost: https://www.huffingtonpost.it/2019/01/23/bufera-social-contro-la-frase-pronunciata-ad-adrian-se-aveste-bevuto-meno-non-vi-avrebbero-importunato_a_23650460/#:~:text=%22Se%20aveste%20bevuto%20qualche%20bicchierino,donne%20la%20colpa%20delle%20molestie.

Human Dignity Trust. (2023a). *Map of Countries that Criminalise LGBT People.* Retrieved from Human Dignity Trust: https://www.humandignitytrust.org/lgbt-the-law/map-of-criminalisation/

Human Dignity Trust. (2023b). *Who We Are.* Retrieved from Human Dignity Trust: https://www.humandignitytrust.org/who-we-are/

Hunt, E. (2021, June 2). *Japan's karoshi culture was a warning. We didn't listen.* Retrieved from Wired: https://www.wired.co.uk/article/karoshi-japan-overwork-culture#:~:text=The%20government%20accepts%20around%20200,toll%20at%20around%2010%2C000%20deaths.

Hunt, P. (1980). *Gender and class consciousness.* London: Macmillan.

Hunter, S. D. (2012). *The Whale.* Denver Center for the Performing Arts.

Hurford, E. M. (2009). *Gender and Sexuality in Shoujo Manga: Undoing Heteronormative Expectations in Utena, Pet Shop of Horrors, and Angel Sanctuary (Master Thesis).* College of Bowling Green State University.

ICMDCCP. (2023). *Blefaroplastica (Blepharoplasty).* Retrieved from Humanitas: https://www.materdomini.it/cure/blefaroplastica/

Iida, Y. (2005). Beyond the 'Feminization of Masculinity': Transforming Patriarchy with the 'Feminine' in Contemporary Japanese Youth Culture. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies, 6*(1), 56-74.

Ikeda, R. (1972-1973). *ベルサイユのばら (The Rose of Versailles).* Shueisha.

il Post. (2022, October 28). *C'è confusione su come chiamare Giorgia Meloni (There is confusion over what to call Giorgia Meloni).* Retrieved from il Post: https://www.ilpost.it/2022/10/28/giorgia-meloni-signor-presidente-del-consiglio/

Impedovo, M. (2021). Breve storia del colore rosa (Short history of the color pink). In A. Cavallo, L. Lugli, & M. Prearo (Eds.), *Cose Spiegate Bene - Questioni di un certo genere (Things Explained Well - Matters of a Certain Kind)* (pp. 138-144). Milano: Iperborea.

Inagaki, T. (1973). Nisemono to shite no bijo (A Beautiful Woman as an Imitation). In T. Inagaki (Ed.), *Bishojo ron (Studies of the Beautiful Girl)* (pp. 28-41). Tokyo: Ushio shuppan.

Inokuchi, M., Matsuo, N., Takayama, J. I., & Hasegawa, T. (2014). Trends in Thin Body Stature among Japanese Male Adolescents. *Annals of Human Biology, 41*(3), 277-281.

Inoue, T. (1990-1996). *Slam Dunk.* Shueisha.

Inoue, T. (1998-present). *バガボンド (Vagabond).* Kodansha.

Inoue, T., & Kenkyukai, J. Z. (1989). *Josei zasshi o kaidoku suru: Comparepolitan - nichi-bei-mekishiko hikaku kenkyu (Reading into Women's Magazines: Comparepolitan - Comparative study of Japanese, American and Mexican Magazines).* Tokyo: Kakiuchi-shuppan.

IPSS. (2010). *Report on the Fourteenth Japanese National Fertility Survey, vol. 1: Marriage Process and Fertility of Japanese Married Couples.* Tokyo: National Institute of Population and Social Security Research.

Irie, Y. (Director). (2009-2010). *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood* [Motion Picture].

Irigaray, L. (1975). *Speculum. De l'autre femme (Speculum. From the other woman).* Paris: Les Editions de Minuit.

Irigaray, L. (1977). *Etica della differenza sessuale (Ethics of sexual difference).* Milano: Feltrinelli.

Irigaray, L. (1992). *Io, tu, noi. Per una cultura della differenza (Me, you, us. For a culture of difference).* Torino: Bollati Boringhieri.

Ishida, H. (2015). Representational appropriation and the autonomy of desire in yaoi/BL. In M. McLelland, K. Nagaike, K. Suganama, & J. Welker (Eds.), *Boys Love Manga and Beyond: History, Culture, and Community in Japan* (pp. 210-232). Jackson: Mississippi University Press.

Ishii-Kuntz, M. (2003). Balancing fatherhood and work: Emergence of diverse masculinities in contemporary Japan. In J. E. Roberson, & N. Suzuki (Eds.), *Men and masculinities in contemporary Japan.* London: Routledge Curzon.

Ishii-Kuntz, M. (2015). Fatherhood in Asian Contexts. In S. R. Quah (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Families in Asia* (pp. 161-174). London and New York: Routledge.

Ishiyama, R. (2013). Japan: Why So Few Women Journalists? In C. Byerly (Ed.), *The Palgrave International Handbook of Women and Journalismus.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Itô, G. (2005). *Tezuka is Dead: Postmodernist and Modernist Approaches to Manga.* Tokyo: NTT Shuppan.

Ito, K. (1994a). Images of Women in Weekly Male Comic Magazines in Japan. *Journal of Popular Culture, 27*(4), 81-95.

Ito, K. (1994b). The world of Japanese Ladies' comics: from romantic fantasy to lustful perversion. *Journal of Japanese Studies*.

Itō, K. (1996). *Dansei-gaku Nyumon (Introduction to Men's Studies).* Tokyo: Sakuhinsha.

Ito, K. (2000). The manga culture in Japan. *Japan Studies Review*, 1-16.

Ito, K. (2005). A history of manga in the context of Japanese culture and society. *The Journal of Popular Culture, 38*(3), 456-474.

Iwakabe, S. (2021). Working with social withdrawal, or hikikomori, in Japan: From shame to pride. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 77*(5), 1205-1218.

Iwasa, N., Nakatani, T. K. (Producers), & Yamamoto, S. (Director). (2012). *〜峰不二子という女〜(Lupin the Third: The Woman Called Fujiko Mine)* [Motion Picture]. Japan: Nippon TV.

Jackson Miller, J. (2018). *2018 Comic Book Sales to Comics Shops.* Retrieved Marzo 20, 2021, from Comichron: Comics History... By The Numbers!: https://www.comichron.com/monthlycomicssales/2018.html

Jackson Miller, J. (2021). *2021 Comic Book Sales to Comics Shops.* Retrieved September 7, 2022, from Comichron: Comics History...By the Numbers!: https://www.comichron.com/monthlycomicssales/2021.html

Jankowicz, M. (2020, March 14). *We spoke to a woman earning more than $100,000 a year selling explicit content on OnlyFans — this is exactly how she makes her money.* Retrieved from Insider: https://www.businessinsider.com/onlyfans-monica-huldt-describes-how-makes-money-2020-3

Japanese with Anime. (2021, February 19). *salaryman.* Retrieved July 22, 2023, from Japanese with Anime: https://www.japanesewithanime.com/2021/02/salaryman.html

Jewell, J. A., & Brown, C. S. (2013). Sexting, catcalls, and butt slaps: How gender stereotypes and perceived group norms predict sexualized behavior. *Sex Roles, 69*, 594-604.

Jewell, J. A., Spears Brown, C., & Perry, B. (2015). All my friends are doing it: Potentially offensive sexual behavior perpetration within adolescent social networks. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 25*(3), 592-604.

Johnson, K. (2010, May 11). *Family Guy: Reaching new transmisogynistic lows.* Retrieved from bitchmedia: https://www.bitchmedia.org/post/family-guy-reaching-new-transmysogynic-lows

Johnson, R. R. (2001, March). Psychological Influence of the Police Uniform. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, 70*(3), 27-33.

Jokic, N. (2022, July 10). *12 Years After Airing, Seth MacFarlane Had A Confusing Justification For A "Family Guy" Episode That Was Accused Of Being Transphobic.* Retrieved from BuzzFeed: https://www.buzzfeed.com/natashajokic1/seth-macfarlane-family-guy-transphobic

Justin, K. J., Shepler, D. K., & Kinel, J. R. (2022). She's Just Not That Into Me: Sexual Self-Concept Among Heterosexual Men Who Identify as Involuntary Celibates. *Journal of Social, Behavioral, & Health Sciences*, 117-133.

Kabeer, N. (2002, December 16). Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment. *Development and Change, 30*(3), 435-464. doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.00125

Kalorama Information, L.L.C. (1999). *The market of physical fitness equipment.*

Kan, M.-Y., & Hertog, E. (2017). Domestic Division of Labour and Fertility Preference in China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. *Demographic Research, 36*, 557-587.

Kanai, A. (2009). "Karoshi (Work to Death)" in Japan. *Journal of Business Ethics, 84*(2), 209-216.

Kant, I. (1790). *Kritik der Urteilskraft.* Berlin and Libau: Verlag Lagarde und Friedrich.

Kanter, R. (1989). *When Giants Learn to Dance.* London: Simon and Shuster.

Kantetsu, & Minase, C. (2016). *ブリズンラボ (Prison Experiment).* Futabasha.

Kashiwagi, K. (1998). *Psychology of marriage and family.* Kyoto: Minerva Shoto.

Kato, T., Kanba, S., & Teo, A. (2019, Agosto). Hikikomori: Multidimensional understanding, assessment and future international perspectives. *Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences, 73*. doi:10.1111/pcn.12895

Katz, J. N. (1995). *The Invention of Heterosexuality.* New York: Dutton Books.

Kawasaki, K. (2008). Osaki Midori and the Role of the Girl in Shôwa Modernism. *Asian Studies Review, 32*, 293-306.

Keel, P. K., & Klump, L. K. (2003). Are eating disorders culture-bound syndromes? Implications for conceptualizing their etiology. *Psychological Bulletin, 129*, 747-769.

Keery, H., van den Berg, P., & Thompson, J. K. (2004). An Evaluation of the Tripartite Influence Model of Body Dissatisfaction and Eating Disturbance with Adolescent Girls. *Body Image, 1*(3), 237-251.

Kerr, H.-Y. (2016, November 23). *What is kawaii – and why did the world fall for the 'cult of cute'? .* Retrieved from The Conversation: https://theconversation.com/what-is-kawaii-and-why-did-the-world-fall-for-the-cult-of-cute-67187

Kerr, P., & Holden, R. (1996). Development of the gender role beliefs scale (GRBS). *Select Press, Journal of Social Behavior & Personality, 11*(5), 3-16.

Keski-Rahkonen, A., Hoek, H. W., Susser, E. S., Linna, M. S., Sihvola, E., Raevuori, A., . . . Rissanen, A. (2007). Epidemiology and course of anorexia nervosa in the community. *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 1259-1265.

Kessler, J. S. (1996). La costruzione medica del genere: il caso dei bambini intersessuati (The medical construction of gender: the case of intersex children). In S. Piccone-Stella (Ed.), *Genere. La costruzione sociale del femminile e del maschile (Gender. The social construction of the feminine and masculine)* (pp. 95-117). Bologna: Il Mulino.

Kessler, J. S., Ashendon, D. J., Connell, R. W., & Dowsett, G. W. (1982). *Ockers and disco-maniacs.* Sydney: Inner City Education Center.

Khandis, B. R., Brock, B., Denson, T. F., Grosjean, P., & Brooks, R. C. (2018). Income inequality not gender inequality positively covaries with female sexualization on social media. *Proceedings of the Natioanl Academy of Sciences, 115*(35). doi:https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1717959115

Kimmel, M. (1994). *Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity.* SAGE.

Kimmel, M. (2013). *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era.* Nation Books.

Kingston, J. (2017). *Press Freedom in Contemporary Japan.* London: Routledge.

Kinsella, S. (1995). Cuties in Japan. In L. Skov, & B. Moeran (Eds.), *Women, Media and Consumption in Japan* (pp. 220-254). Londra: Curzon Press.

Kinsella, S. (2000). *Adult manga: Culture and power in contemporary Japanese society.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Kio, S. (2002-2006). *げんしけん (Genshinken).* Kodansha Comics.

Kishimoto, M. (1999-2014). *ナルト (Naruto).* Shueisha.

Köhler, W. (1929). *Gestalt Psychology.* Horace Liveright.

Koike, K., & Kojima, G. (1970-1976). *子連れ狼 (Lone Wolf and Cub).* Futabasha.

Kollmayer, M., Schober, B., & Spiel, C. (2016). Gener stereotypes in education: Development, consequences, and interventions. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*. doi:10.1080/17405629.2016.1193483

Kollontaj, A. (1977). The Social Basis of the Woman Question. In A. Kollontaj, *Selected Writings.* London: Allison & Busby.

Kondo, D. K. (1990). *Crafting Selves.* Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Kong, S. (2022, September 1). *Read, Debate: Engage - On Manga, Anime and Sexism.* Retrieved from Fair Planet: https://www.fairplanet.org/story/on-manga-anime-and-sexism/

Kopyciński, B. (2018). *Hikikomori: Significant Impacts on Modern Japanese Society Introduction and Cultural Context of Hikikomori.* Kent State University.

Kotani, M. (2007a). Alien Spaces and Alien Bodies in Japanese Women's Science Fiction. In C. Bolton, I. Csicsery-Ronay, & T. Tatsumi (Eds.), *Robot ghosts and wired dreams: Japanese science fiction from origins to anime* (pp. 47-74). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Kotani, M. (2007b). Doll Beauties and Cosplay. *Mechademia 2: Network of Desire*, 49-62.

Kowner, R. (2004). When Ideals are too 'Far-Off': Body Dissatisfaction and Physical Self-Ideal Discrepancy in Japan. *Genetic, Social, and General Psychology Monographs, 130*(4), 333-361.

Koyama, S. (1991). *Ryosai kenbo no kihan (The Norm of the Good Wife and Wise Mother).* Tokyo: Keiso Shobo.

Koyama, S. (2014). Domestic Roles and the Incorporation of Women into the Nation-State: The Emergence and Development of the 'Good-Wife, Wise Mother' Ideology. In A. Germer, V. Mackie, & U. Wöhr (Eds.), *Gender, Nation and State in Modern Japan* (pp. 85-100). New York: Routledge.

Lacan, J. (1949). *Le Stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je.* Presses universitaires de France.

Lacan, J. (1998). *Les formations de l'inconscient.* Paris: Le Seuil.

Lacey, N. (2000). *Narrative and Genre: Key Concepts in Media Studies.* Houndmills: Macmillan.

Lamarre, T. (2006). Platonic Sex: Perversion and Shojo Anime (Part One). *Animation 1.1*, 45-59.

Lamb, S., & Peterson, Z. D. (2010). Adolescent Girls' Sexual Empowerment: Two Feminists Explore the Concept. *Sex Roles, 66*(11-12), 703-712.

Lambert, M. (Director). (1985). *Material Girl* [Motion Picture].

Landinfo. (2008). *Female genital mutilation in Sudan and Somalia.* Landinfo Country of Origin Information Centre.

Le Grange, D., Lock, J., Loeb, K., & Nicholls, D. (2009). Academy for Eating Disorders Position Paper: The Role of the Family in Eating Disorders. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 1-5.

Leardi, M. (2021, September 1). *"Abuso sessuale": Dragon Ball censurato in Argentina ("Sexual abuse": Dragon Ball censored in Argentina).* Retrieved from il Giornale.it: https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/spettacoli/abuso-sessuale-dragon-ball-censurato-argentina-1972439.html

Leeds-Hurwitz, W. (2009). Social construction of reality. In S. Littlejohn, & K. Foss (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory* (pp. 892-895). Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Leit, R. A., Pope, H. G., & Gray, J. J. (2001). Cultural Expectations of Muscularity in Men: The Evolution of Playgirl Centerfolds. *International Journal of Eating Disorders, 29*(1), 90-93.

Lent, J. A. (2000, Novembre). Animation in Asia: Appropriation, Reinterpretation, and Adoption or Adaption. *Screening the Past*(11).

Leslie, S.-J., Cimpian, A., Meyer, M., & Freeland, E. (2015). Expectations of brilliance underlie gender distributions across academic disciplines. *Science, 347*, 96-129.

Leupp, G. P. (1995). *Male Colors: The Construction of Homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan.* University of California Press.

Lever, E., & Lever, M. (2009). *Le Chevalier d'Éon, une vie sans queue ni tête.* Librairie Arthème Fayard.

Levine, M., & Smolak, L. (2006). *The prevention of eating problems and eating disorders: Theory, research, and practice.* Mahwah: Erlbaum.

Levine, M., & Smolak, L. (2010). Cultural influences on body image and eating disorders. In W. S. Agras (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of eating disorders* (pp. 223-246). New York: Oxford University Press.

Lewis, S., & McFarlane, T. (2021). *KING SPAWN #1.* Todd McFarlane Productions.

Lie, D. (2010). Cases in Health Disparities: bias against the obese patient and approaches for managing it. *Medscape Today*. Retrieved from http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/716744_2

Lin, X., Haywood, C., & Mac an Ghaill, M. (2017). Introduction. In X. Lin, C. Haywood, & M. Mac an Ghaill (Eds.), *East Asian Men: Masculinity, Sexuality and Desire* (pp. 1-10). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Longo, T. (2020). Misoginia online: le nuove forme di radicalizzazione all'interno del terrorismo Incel (Online misogyny: the new forms of radicalization within Incel terrorism). *Sicurezza, terrorismo e società (Security, terrorism and society)*, 85-99.

Loo, E. (2018, Novembre 29). *Top-Selling Manga in Japan by Volume: 2018.* Retrieved Marzo 20, 2021, from Anime News Network: The Internet's Most Trusted Anime News Source: https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2018-11-29/top-selling-manga-in-japan-by-volume-2018/.140164

Loo, E. (2021, November 28). *Top-Selling Manga in Japan by Volume: 2021 — Demon Slayer Finale Sells Record 5.17 Million.* Retrieved September 7, 2022, from Anime News Network: https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2021-11-28/top-selling-manga-in-japan-by-volume-2021-demon-slayer-finale-sells-record-5.17-million/.180076

Lorber, J., & Farrell, S. A. (Eds.). (1990). *The Social Construction of Gender.* SAGE.

Loughnan, S., & Pacili, M. G. (2014). Seeing (and treating) others as sexual objects: Towards a more complete mapping of sexual objectification. *TPM: Testing, Psychometrics, Methodology in Applied Psychology, 21*, 309-325.

Loughnan, S., Haslam, N., Murnane, T., Vaes, J., Reynolds, C., & Suitner, C. (2010). Objectification leads to depersonalization: The denial of mind and moral concern to objectified others. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 40*, 709-717.

LRNZ. (2021). *Geist Maschine.* BAO Publishing.

Luciani, S. (2011, August 2). *Transizioni familiari. Transessualismo, genitorialità e tutela del minore (Family transitions. Transsexualism, parenting, and child protection).* Retrieved from InterattivaMente: https://www.interattivamente.org/transizioni-familiari-transessualismo-genitorialit-e-tutela-del-minore/

Luck, A. (2017). Japan's Madonna Complex. *Index on Censorship, 46*(1), 22-25.

Łuczyńska-Hołdys, M. (2013). *Soft-Shed Kisses: Re-visioning the Femme Fatale in English Poetry of the 19th Century.* Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

MacFarlane, S. (Writer), & Michels, P. (Director). (2010). *Quagmire's Dad ("Family Guy" episode)* [Motion Picture].

Mackey, R. (2009, August 28). *Iranians Say Prison Rape Is Not New.* Retrieved from The New York Times: https://archive.nytimes.com/thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/08/28/iranians-say-prison-rape-not-new/

MacKinnon, C. A. (1983). Feminism, marxism, method and the state: Toward feminist jurisprudence. *Signs*, 635-658.

Magdala Peixoto Labre, A. M. (2005). Burn Fat, Build Muscle: A Content Analysis of Men's Health and Men's Fitness. *International Journal of Men's Health, 4*(2), 187-200.

Magdala Peixoto Labre, M. A. (2002). Adolescent Boys and the Muscular Male Body Ideal. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 30*, 233-242.

Malos, E. (Ed.). (1980). *The Politics of Housework.* London, Allison & Busby.

Manne, K. (2018). *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Marcasciano, P. (2020). *Tra le rose e le viole. La storia e le storie di transessuali e travestiti (Between the roses and the violets. The history and stories of transsexuals and transvestites).* Edizioni Alegre.

Marcus, A., Kurosu, M., Ma, X., & Hashizume, A. (2017). *Cuteness engineering : designing adorable products and services.* Springer.

Markula, P. (2017, January 9). *The Ideal Fit Masculine Body.* Retrieved from Psychology Today: https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/fit-femininity/201701/the-ideal-fit-masculine-body

Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the Self: Implication for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation. *Psychological Review, 98*(2), 224-253.

Martin, T. (2014, June 11). *Review: Aesthetica of a Rogue Hero.* Retrieved from Anime News Network: https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/review/aesthetica-of-a-rogue-hero-limited-edition/bd-dvd/.75436

Martorella, C. (2007, June 24). Cultura hentai, relativismo e politica sessuale (Hentai culture, relativism, and sexual politics). *GX Magazine*, 25-33.

Masubuchi, S. (1994). *Kawaii shōkōgun (Kawaii Syndrome).* Nihon Hōsō Shuppan Kyōkai.

Matanle, P., McCann, L., & Ashmore, D. (2008). Men Under Pressure: Representations of the 'Salaryman' and his Organization in Japanese Manga. *Organization, 15*(5), 639-664.

Matsumoto, L. (1977-1979). *宇宙海賊キャプテンハーロック (Space Pirate Captain Harlock).* Akita Shoten.

McCabe, M. P., Ricciardelli, L. A., & Finemore, J. (2002). The Role of Puberty, Media and Popularity with Peers on Strategies to Increase Weight, Decrease Weight and Increase Muscle Tone among Adolescent Boys and Girls. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research, 52*(3), 145-153.

McCann, E. (2015). Transgender mental health. *Psychiatric Mental Health Nurs*, 76-81. doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/jpm.12190

McCloud, S. (1994). *Understanding Comics.* Mark Martin.

McCloud, S. (1996). Understanding manga. *Wizard Magazine, 56*, 44-48.

McLaren, S. (2021). Gender, Media, and Misogyny in Japan. In J. Coates, L. Fraser, & M. Pendleton (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture* (pp. 340-350). London and New York: Routledge.

McLelland, M. (2000a). No Climax, No Point, No Meaning? Japanese Women's Boy-Love Sites on the Internet. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 274-291.

McLelland, M. (2000b). The Love between 'Beautiful Boys' in Japanese Women's Comics. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 13-25.

McLelland, M. (2005a). A Short History of 'Hentai'. *Sexualities, Genders and Rights in Asia: 1st International Conference of Asian Queer Studies.* Bangkok: AsiaPacifiQueer Network, Mahidal University.

McLelland, M. (2005c). *Queer Japan from the Pacific Age to the Internet Age.* Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.

McLelland, M. (2010). The "Beautiful Boy" in Japanese Girls' Manga. In T. Johnson-Woods (Ed.), *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives* (pp. 77-92). Bloomsbury Publishing.

McLelland, M. (2011). Japan's Queer Cultures. In T. C. Bestor, & V. L. Bestor (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Japanese Culture and Society* (pp. 140-149). New York: Routledge.

McNair, B. (2002). *Striptease Culture: Sex, Media and the Democratization of Desire.* London and New York: Routledge.

McNeil, J., Bailey, L., Ellis, S., Morton, J., & Regan, M. (2012). *Trans Mental Health Study 2012.* Sheffield Hallam University.

McRobbie, A. (2009). *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change.* Londra: SAGE.

McVeigh, B. (2000). *Wearing Ideology: State, Schooling and Self-Presentation in Japan.* Oxford: Berg.

Mead, M. (1963). *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies.* New York: William Morrow.

Medina, C., & Mahowald, L. (2021, October 26). *Key Issues Facing People With Intersex Traits.* Retrieved from CAP: https://www.americanprogress.org/article/key-issues-facing-people-intersex-traits/#:~:text=It%20is%20estimated%20that%20up,identifiable%20sexual%20or%20reproductive%20variations.

Meligrana, D. (2013). La silenziosa protesta degli Hikikomori (The silent protest of the Hikikomori). *Online Journal of Anthropology, 9*(1), 71-73.

Mernissi, F. (2000). *L'harem e l'Occidente (The Harem and the West).* Firenze: Giunti.

Messerschmidt, J. W. (2004). *Flesh & blood: Adolescent gender diversity and violence.* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Mezzofiore, G., Polglase, K., & Pourahmadi, A. (2022, October 27). *What really happened to Nika Shahkarami? Witnesses to her final hours cast doubt on Iran's story .* Retrieved from CNN World: https://edition.cnn.com/2022/10/27/middleeast/iran-nika-shahkarami-investigation-intl-cmd/index.html

MFMER. (2023). *Anorexia Nervosa.* Retrieved from Mayo Clinic: https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/anorexia-nervosa/symptoms-causes/syc-20353591

MHLW. (2014). *Heisei 26-nendo kekkon kazoku keisei ni kansuru ishiki chosa hokoku-sho.* Tokyo: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare.

MHLW. (2015). *Heisei 24 nen ban hataraku josei no hokoku (The Circumstances of Working Women in 2015).* Tokyo: Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare.

MHLW. (various years). *Jinko dotai tokei (Demographic Statistics).* Tokyo: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare.

Mikuriya, K. (Director). (1979). *ルパンはシャネルがお好き (Lupin, Do You Like Chanel?)* [Motion Picture].

Mill, J. S. (1912). The subjection of women. In J. S. Mill, *Three Essays.* London: Oxford University Press.

Miller, L. (2006). *Beauty Up: Exploring Contemporary Japanese Body Aesthetics.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Miller, L., & Bardsley, J. (Eds.). (2005). *Bad Girls of Japan.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mills, C. W. (1953). *White Collar: The American Middle Classes.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Minkin, R., & Brown, A. (2021, Luglio 27). *Rising shares of U.S. adults know someone who is transgender or goes by gender-neutral pronouns.* Retrieved from Pew Research Center: https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/07/27/rising-shares-of-u-s-adults-know-someone-who-is-transgender-or-goes-by-gender-neutral-pronouns/

Mishkind, M. E., Rodin, J., Silberstein, L. R., & Striegel-Moore, R. H. (1986). The Embodiment of Masculinity: Cultural, Psychological, and Behavioral Dimensions. *American Behavioral Scientist, 29*(5). doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/000276486029005004

Mitchell, J. (1966a). *Woman's Estate.*

Miura, K. (1989-2021). *ベルセルク (Berserk).* Hakusensha.

Mizuki, K. (1975). *キャンディ・キャンディ (Candy Candy).* Kodansha.

Mizukoshi, K., Kohlbacher, F., & Schimkowsky, C. (2016). Japan's Ikumen Discourse: Macro and Micro Perspectives on Modern Fatherhood. *Japan Forum, 28*(2), 212-232.

Moeran, B. (1995). Reading Japanese in Katei Gaho: The Art of Being an Upperclass Woman. In L. Svok, & B. Moeran (Eds.), *Women, Media, and Consumption in Japan* (pp. 111-142). Honolulu: Hawaii Press.

Molle, A. (2001). *Processi culturali globali e subculture: Il caso degli Otaku (Tesi di laurea in sociologia dei processi culturali).* Genova: Università degli studi di Genova.

Mond, J. M., Mitchison, D., & Hay, P. (2014). Prevalence and implications of eating disordered behavior in men. In L. Cohn, & R. Lemberg (Eds.), *Current Findings on Males with Eating Disorders.* Philadelphia: Routledge.

Monden, M. (2012). The Importance of Looking Pleasant: Reading Japanese Men's Fashion Magazines. *Fashion Theory, 16*(3), 297-316.

Monden, M. (2014). Being Alice in Japan: Performing a cute, "girlish" revolt. *Japan Forum, 26*(2), 265-285.

Monden, M. (2015). *Japanese Fashion Cultures: Dress and Gender in Contemporary Japan.* New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Monden, M. (2021). The Continuum of Male Beauty in Contemporary Japan. In J. Coates, L. Fraser, & M. Pendleton (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture* (pp. 270-278). London and New York: Routledge.

Monkey Punch. (1967). *死んでゆくブルース (Blues to Die).*

Mori, K. (2022-present). *ベルセルク (Berserk).* Hakusensha.

Mori, M. (1994). *Besuto obu Dokkiri Channeru (The Best of Dokkiri Channel).* Tokyo: Chikuma shobo.

Morin, S. F., & Garfinkle, E. M. (1978). Male homophobia. *Journal of Social Issues, 34*(1), 29-47.

Morioka, M. (2013). A Phenomenological Study of “Herbivore Men”. *The Review of Life Studies, 4*, 1-20.

Morrell, R. (1998). Of boys and men: Masculinity and gender in southern African studies. *Journal of Southern African Studies, 24*(4), 605-630.

Morris, K. L., & Goldenberg, J. L. (2015). Women, objects, and animals: Differentiating between sex-and beauty-based objectification. *International Review of Social Psychology, 28*, 15-38.

Mosse, G. L. (1996). *Sessualità e nazionalismo. Mentalità borghese e rispettabilità (Sexuality and nationalism. Bourgeois mentality and respectability).* Roma-Bari: Laterza.

Moss-Racusin, C. A., Molenda, A. K., & Cramer, C. R. (2015). Can evidence impact attitudes? Public reactions to evidence of gender bias in STEM fields. *Psychol. Women Q., 39*, 194-209.

Mukai, T., Crago, M., & Shisslak, C. M. (1994). Eating Attitudes and Weight Preoccupation among Female High School Students in Japan. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 35*(4), 677-688.

Mulhall, J., King, R., Glina, S., & Hvidsten, K. (2008). Importance of and Satisfaction with Sex Among Men and Women Worldwide: Results of the Global Better Sex Survey. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 788-795.

Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. (M. G. Durham, & D. M. Kellner, Eds.) *Screen, 16*(3).

Muramatsu, Y., & Gössman, H. (1998). *Media ga tsukuru jendaa: Nichidoku no danjo, kazokuzo o yomitoku (Gender Created by Media: Reading representations of men, women and the family in Japan and Germany.* Tokyo: Shinyosha.

MyAnimeList. (n.d.). *Prison Lab.* Retrieved Dicembre 19, 2022, from https://myanimelist.net/anime/38902/Prison_Lab

Nabokov, V. (1955). *Lolita.* The Olympia Press.

Nagai, G. (1972-1973). *マジンガーZ (Mazinger Z).* Kodansha.

Nagai, G. (1975-1976). *ＵＦＯロボ グレンダイザー (UFO Robot Grendizer).* Kodansha.

Nagaike, K. (2012). Johnny's Idols as Icons: Female Desires to Fantasize and Consume Male Idol Images. In P. W. Galbraith, & J. G. Karlin (Eds.), *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture* (pp. 97-112). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Nakano, M. (2014). *"Ikukyu sedai" no jirenma: josei katsuyo wa naze shippai suru no ka.* Tokyo: Kabushiki Kaisha Kobunsha.

Nakatani, A. (2006). The Emergence of 'Nurturing Fathers': Discourses and Practices of Fatherhood in Contemporary Japan. In M. Rebick, & A. Takenaka (Eds.), *The Changing Japanese Family* (pp. 94-108). New York: Routledge.

Napier, S. J. (1998). Vampires, Psychic Girls, Flying Women and Sailor Scouts: Four Faces of the Young Female in Japanese Popular Culture. In D. P. Martinez (Ed.), *The World of Japanese Popular Culture: Gender, Shifting Boundaries and Global Cultures* (pp. 91-109). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Napier, S. J. (2005). *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle, Updated Edition: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Napoli, A. (2020, May 2). *Sudan, governo approva legge che vieta mutilazioni genitali femminili. L'infibulazione sarà un crimine (Sudan, government passes law banning female genital mutilation. Infibulation will be a crime).* Retrieved April 26, 2023, from Focus on Africa: https://www.focusonafrica.info/sudan-governo-approva-la-legge-che-vieta-le-mutilazioni-genitali-femminili-linfibulazione-sara-un-crimine/#:~:text=L'infibulazione%20sar%C3%A0%20un%20crimine,-2%20Maggio%2C%202020&text=In%20Sudan%20la%20mutilazione%20genital

Nasser, M. (1986). Comparative study of the prevalence of abnormal eating attitudes among Arab female students of both London and Cairo universities. *Psychological Medicine*, 621-625.

National Organization for Women. (2023). *Get The Facts.* Retrieved from National Organization for Women: https://now.org/now-foundation/love-your-body/love-your-body-whats-it-all-about/get-the-facts/#:~:text=One%20study%20reports%20that%20at,the%20time%20girls%20reach%20seventeen.&text=When%20asked%20%E2%80%9CAre%20you%20happy,their%2060s%20answered%20%E2%80

Natsume, F. (1997). *Manga wa naze omoshiroi no ka [Why are Manga fascinating? Their visual idioms and grammar].* Tokyo: NHK Library.

Natsume, F. (2000). Japan's manga culture. *The Japan foundation newsletter*, 1-6.

Natsume, F. (2001). Introduction of Manga: Short Comics from Modern Japan. *Manga: Short Comics from Modern Japan: A Japan Foundation Touring Exhibition*. Londra: Japan Foundation.

Natsume, F., & Takekuma, K. (1995). *Manga no Yomikata (Come leggere manga).* Tokyo: Nagaoka Shoten.

NEDA. (2022). *STATISTICS & RESEARCH ON EATING DISORDERS.* Retrieved from National Eating Disorders Association: https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/statistics-research-eating-disorders

Nemoto, K. (2016). *Too Few Women at the Top: The Persistence of Inequality in Japan.* Ithaca: ILR Press.

Newport Institute. (2022). *The Truth About Male Body Image Issues.* Retrieved from Newport Institute: https://www.newportinstitute.com/resources/co-occurring-disorders/male-body-issues/

Ng, W.-M. (2003). Japanese Elements in Hong Kong Comics: History, Art, and Industry. *International Journal of Comic Art, 5*(2).

Ngai, S. (2012). *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Nguyen, A. (2016). Eternal maidens: Kawaii aesthetics and otome sensibility in Lolita fashion. *East Asian Journal of Popular Culture*, 15-31.

Nicolau, M., Doak, C., van Dam, R., Hosper, K., Seidell, J., & Stronks, K. (2008). Body size preference and body weight perception among two migrant groups of non-Western origin. *Public Health Nutrition*, 1332-1341.

Nikolic, M. (2021, January 14). *OnlyFans: Milliardenumsätze nach fünf Jahren – moderner Feminismus oder billige Pornographie? (OnlyFans: Billions in sales after five years - modern feminism or cheap pornography?).* Retrieved from Brutkasten: https://brutkasten.com/onlyfans/

Nishimura, S. (1997). *Saraba waga seishun no Shonen Janpu (Goodbye Shonen Jump of my Youth).* Tokyo: Gentosha.

Nishizawa, Y., Kida, K., Nishizawa, K., Hashiba, S., Saito, K., & Mita, R. (2003). Perception of Self-Physique and Eating Behavior of High School Students in Japan. *Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences, 57*(2), 189-196.

Nishizawa, Y., Kudo, M., Kida, K., Kimura, Y., Saito, K., & Mita, R. (1999). The Perception of Self-Physique in School Children: An Analysis from Gender, Grade and Physical Anxiety. *Japanese Journal of School Health, 41*(4), 300-308.

Nitobe, I. (1998). *Bushidô.* Tokyo: Kôdansha.

Nolte, S. H., & Hastings, S. A. (1991). The Meiji State's Policy Toward Women, 1890-1910. In G. L. Bernstein (Ed.), *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945* (pp. 151-174). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Nonaka, S., & Sakai, M. (2021). A correlational study of socioeconomic factors and the prevalence of hikikomori in Japan from 2010 to 2019. *Compr Psychiatry*.

Norgren, T. (2001). *Abortion Before Birth Control: The Politics of Reproduction in Postwar Japan.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Norris, C. (2009). Manga, Anime and Visual Art Culture. In Y. Sugimoto (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Japanese Culture* (pp. 236-260). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nussbaum, M. C. (1999). *Sex & Social Justice.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ōba, T., & Obata, T. (2003-2006). *デスノート (Death Note).* Shueisha.

Oda, E. (1997-present). *One Piece.* Shueisha.

Ogasawara, Y. (1998). *Office Ladies and Salaried Men: Power, Gender, and Work in Japanese Companies.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ogi, F. (2001). *Reading, Writing, and Female Subjectivity: Gender in Japanese Comics (Manga) for Girls (Shoujo) (Phd diss.).* State University of New York at Sony Brook.

Ogi, F. (2003). Female subjectivity and shoujo (girls) manga (Japanese comics): shoujo in ladies' comics and young ladies' comics. *Journal of popular culture, 36*(4), 780-803.

Okada, K. (2006-2009). *すんどめ (Sundome).* Akita Shoten.

Okada, T. (1997). *Todai otakugaku koza.* Tokyo: Kôdansha.

Okonogi, K. (1981). *Moratorium ningen no jidai (The era of the moratorium generation).* Tokyo: Chūō Kōron-sha.

OMB. (2018, October 26). *Welchen Einfluss haben Influencer auf ihre Follower und was bedeutet das für das Marketing in sozialen Medien? (What influence do influencers have on their followers and what does that mean for social media marketing?).* Retrieved from Online-Marketing-Blog der OMB.

Omori, M., Yamawaki, N., & McKyer, E. L. (2015). A Comparative Study of Smoking in American and Japanese Adolescents: Self, Social Influences, and Health Beliefs. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction, 13*, 345-360.

One. (2012-present). *ワンパンマン (One-Punch Man).* Jump Comics.

Orbaugh, S. (2002). Shôjo. In S. Buckley (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Japanese Culture* (pp. 458-459). Londra: Routledge.

Orbaugh, S. (2003). Busty Battlin' Babes: The Evolution of Shojo in 1990s Visual Culture. In J. S. Mostow, N. Bryson, & M. Graybill (Eds.), *Gender and Power in*

the Japanese Visual Field. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Ostanwire. (2022, September 25). *Hadis Najafi, 20, Killed in a Spray of Bullets in Karaj, Becomes a New Symbol of Defiance in Iran*. Retrieved from IranWire: https://iranwire.com/en/women/107894-hadis-najafi-20-becomes-a-new-symbol-of-defiance-in-iran/

Oxford Reference. (2023). *social constructionist psychology*. Retrieved from Oxford Reference: https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100515201;jsessionid=9AD9AFEFB64651CD75BDF28F2EA8C866

Painter, A. (1996). The Telerepresentation of Gender in Japan. In A. Imamura (Ed.), *Re-Imaging Japanese Women.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Palmonari, A., & Crocetti, E. (2011). Sviluppi degli studi sull'adolescenza (Developments in adolescent studies). In A. Palmonari (Ed.), *Psicologia dell'adolescenza (Adolescent psychology)* (pp. 35-51). Bologna: Il Mulino.

Parker, L. L., & Harriger, J. A. (2020). Eating disorders and disordered eating behaviors in the LGBT population: a review of the literature. *Journal of Eating Disorders*(51). doi:https://doi.org/10.1186/s40337-020-00327-y

Parsons, T., & Bales, R. F. (1956). *Family Socialization and Interaction Process.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Peirce, C. S. (1931). *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, vol. 2, Elements of Logic.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Pellitteri, M. (2006). Japanese Comics Abroad: The Case of Italy. A short History of Manga's Absorption in the "Bel Paese" Comics Tradition. *Asia Culture Forum.* Gwangju.

Pellitteri, M. (2008). *Il drago e la saetta (The dragon and the thunderbolt).* Tunuè.

Perloff, R. M. (2014). Social Media Effects on Young Women's Body Image Concerns: Theoretical Perspectives and an Agenda for Research. *Sex Roles*. doi:DOI 10.1007/s11199-014-0384-6

Peters, T. (1992). *Liberation Management.* New York: Macmillan.

Picard, F., & Laurain, J. (2022, November 23). *Call it a Revolution? Iran protest movement defies growing brutality.* Retrieved from France 24: https://www.france24.com/en/tv-shows/the-debate/20221123-call-it-a-revolution-iran-protest-movement-defies-growing-brutality

Piceci, L. (2019). Hikikomori in relazione alla crescita tecnologica: la responsabilità sociale delle famiglie e della scuola (Hikikomori in relation to technological growth: the social responsibility of families and schools). *Giornale Italiano di Educazione alla Salute e Didattica Inclusiva (Italian Journal of Health Education and Inclusive Teaching)*, 81-87.

Pike, K. M., & Borovoy, A. (2004). The Rise of Eating Disorders in Japan: Issues of Culture and Limitations of the Model of 'Westernization'. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry, 28*, 493-531.

Pilcher, J., & Whelehan, I. (2017). Gender. In J. Pilcher, I. Whelehan, & N. Aguilera (Ed.), *Key Concepts in Gender Studies* (pp. 57-59). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Plummer, K. (1995). *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds.* London and New York: Routledge.

Pollock, N. J. (Asia Pacific Journal of Clinical Nutrition). Cultural elaboration of obesity: Fattening procesess in Pacific societies. *1995, 5*, 357-360.

Pombeni, M. L., Palmonari, A., & Kirchler, E. (1992). Evolution of the Self Concept in Adolescence and Social Categorization Processes. *European Review of Social Psychology, 3*, 258-308.

Pons, P. (1988). *D'Edo à Tokyo: Mémoires et Modernités (From Edo to Tokyo: Memories and Modernities).* Paris: Gallimard.

Pope, H. G., Olivardia, R., Gruber, A., & Borowiecki, J. (1999). Evolving ideals of male body image as seen through action toys. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 65-72.

Pope, H. G., Phillips, K. A., & Olivardia, R. (2000). *The Adonis Complex: The Secret Crisis of Male Body Obsession.* New York: Routledge.

Porn Sites XXX News. (2020). *Some Chaturbate Stats.* Retrieved from Pornsites XXX Blog: https://pornsites.xxx/blog/some-chaturbate-stats/

Portuesi, T. (2020, March 5). *Stupro, per un giovane su due è colpa anche della vittima (Rape, for one in two young people it is also the victim's fault).* Retrieved from Europa Today: https://europa.today.it/attualita/stupro-donne-amnesty.html

Posocco, C. (2005). *MangArt. Forme estetiche e linguaggio del fumetto giapponese (MangArt. Aesthetic forms and language of Japanese comics).* Milano: Costa & Nolan.

Pressman, E. R. (Producer), & Stone, O. (Director). (1987). *Wall Street* [Motion Picture]. United States: 20th Century Fox.

Prough, J. (2010). Shōjo Manga in Japan and Abroad. In T. Johnson-Woods (Ed.), *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives* (pp. 93-106). Bloomsbury Publishing.

Pryce, J. (2019, May 5). *Porn app OnlyFans and platform JustFor.Fans stars share personal stories, paid sexual content creation, and the online adult entertainment marketplace.* Retrieved from Esquire: https://www.esquiresg.com/features/porn-app-onlyfans-and-platform-justfor-fans-stars-share-personal-stories-paid-sexual-content-creation-and-the-online-adult-entertainment-marketplace/

Puhl, R. M., & Brownell, K. D. (2008). Bias, discrimination, and obesity. In G. Bray, & C. Bouchard (Eds.), *Handbook of Obesity: Clinical Applications* (pp. 81-89). New York: Informa Healthcare USA.

Punch, M. (2003, November 13). Interview: Monkey Punch. (A. Divers, Interviewer)

Punch, M. (2005). Interview with Monkey Punch - Lupin the Third: Dead or Alive DVD. (Funimation, Interviewer)

Purse, L. (2011). Return of the "Angry Woman": Authenticating Female Physical Action in Contemporary Cinema. In M. Waters (Ed.), *Women on Screen: Feminism and Femininity in Visual Culture* (pp. 185-198). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ranieri, F. (2016). Adolescenti tra abbandono scolastico e ritiro sociale: il fenomeno degli "hikikomori" (Adolescents between school dropout and social withdrawal: the phenomenon of "hikikomori"). *Psicologia Clinica dello Sviluppo (Clinical Developmental Psychology)*, 319-326.

Rankin, A. (2011). *Seppuku: A History of Samurai Suicide.* New York: Kodansha USA.

Rankin, A. (2012, February 11). *21st-Century Yakuza: Recent Trends in Organized Crime in Japan ~Part 1 2 1 世紀のやくざ —— 日本における組織犯罪の最近動向.* Retrieved October 17, 2022, from The Asia-Pacific Journal: https://apjjf.org/2012/10/7/Andrew-Rankin/3688/article.html

RCS Quotidiani. (2010). *Stupro e jeans: le precedenti sentenze (Rape and jeans: previous rulings).* Retrieved March 21, 2023, from Corriere della Sera: https://www.corriere.it/Pop-up/precedenti.shtml

Reality Check Team. (2021, May 12). *Homosexuality: The countries where it is illegal to be gay.* Retrieved from BBC News: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-43822234

Reitz, N. (2017). The Representation of Trans Women in Film and Television. *Cinesthesia, 7*(1). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1125&context=cine

Reuters. (2022, September 20). *Protests flare across Iran in violent unrest over woman's death.* Retrieved May 31, 2023, from Reuters: https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/tehran-governor-accuses-protesters-attacks-least-22-arrested-2022-09-20/

Richardson, D. (Ed.). (1996). *Theorising Heterosexuality: Telling it Straight.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Ringer, F., & McKinsey Crittenden, P. (2006). Eating disorders and attachment: the effects of hidden family processes on eating disorders. *European Eating Disorders Review, 15*(2), 119-130.

RiRi, M. (2012, February 25). *Some Japanese customs that may confuse foreigners.* Retrieved from Japan Today: https://japantoday.com/category/features/lifestyle/some-japanese-customs-that-may-confuse-foreigners

Roberson, J. E., & Suzuki, N. (2003). Introduction. In J. E. Roberson, & N. Suzuki (Eds.), *Men and Masculinities in Contemporary Japan* (pp. 1-19). London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon.

Roberts, G. S. (1994). *Staying on the Line: Blue Collar Women in Contemporary Japan.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Roberts, P. (1993). Social control and the censure(s) of sex. *Crime, Law and Social Change, 19*(2), 171-186.

Roberts, Y. (2005, November 2). *Twiggy's wrinkles.* Retrieved from The Guardian: https://www.theguardian.com/news/2005/nov/02/mainsection.commentanddebate2

Robertson, J. (1999). Dying to Tell: Sexuality and Suicide in Imperial Japan. *Signs, 25*(1), 1-35.

Rodgers, R. F., Faure, K., & Chabrol, H. (2009a). Gender Differences in Parental Influences on Adolescent Body Dissatisfaction and Disordered Eating. *Sex Roles, 61*(11), 837-849.

Rodgers, R. F., Paxton, S. J., & Chabrol, H. (2009b). Effects of Parental Comments on Body Dissatisfaction and Eating Disturbance in Young Adults: A Sociocultural Model. *Body Image, 48*(2), 171-177.

Rodríguez, M. J. (2005). El feminismo "Pro-sexo" o anti-censura ("Pro-sex" or anti-censorship feminism). *Anuario de sexología (Sexology Yearbook)*, 7-37.

Roen, K. (2002). Tecnologie trans-sexing. Considerazioni cliniche e discorsive (Trans-sexing technologies. Clinical and discursive considerations). In C. Leccardi (Ed.), *Tra i generi. Rileggendo le differenze di genere, di generazione, di orientamento sessuale (Between genders. Rereading differences in gender, generation, and sexual orientation)* (pp. 133-146). Milano: Guerini e Associati.

Rolls, E. T. (2013). What are emotional states, and why do we have them? *Emotion Review, 5*(3), 241-247.

Rosen, M. (1973). *Popcorn Venus.* McCann & Geoghegan.

Rosenbluth, F. M. (2007). *The Political Economy of Japan's Low Fertility.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Roswell, H. (1996). *酒のほそ道 (Sake no Hisomochi).* Nihon Bungeisha.

Ruspini, E. (2017). *Le identità di genere (Gender identities).* Roma: Carocci Editore.

Russo, A. (2021a). Chi studia le maschilità (Who studies masculinities?). In A. Cavallo, L. Lugli, & M. Prearo (Eds.), *Cose Spiegate Bene - Questioni di un certo genere (Things Explained Well - Matters of a Certain Kind)* (pp. 212-219). Milano: Iperborea.

Russo, A. (2021b). Un mondo di generi (A world of genders). In A. Cavallo, L. Lugli, & M. Prearo (Eds.), *Cose Spiegate Bene - Questioni di un certo genere (Things Explained Well - Matters of a Certain Kind)* (pp. 178-188). Milano: Iperborea.

Sabatini, R. (1994). *L'astuzia del desiderio (The cunning of desire).* Roma: Editorama.

Sabo, D., & Jensen, S. C. (1992). Images of men in sport media: The social reproduction of gender order. In S. Craig (Ed.), *Men, masculinity, and the media.* Newbury Park: Sage.

Sadamoto, Y. (1994-2013). *新世紀エヴァンゲリオン (Neon Genesis Evangelion).* Kadokawa Shoten.

Sahu, D. (2021, December 24). *Top 25 Best-Selling Manga of 2021; Jujutsu Kaisen, Tokyo Revengers & More.* Retrieved September 7, 2022, from TV Fandom Lounge: https://www.tvfandomlounge.com/2021/12/24/top-25-best-selling-manga-2021-jujutsu-kaisen-tokyo-revengers-more/

Saito, S. (2007). Television and the Cultivation of Gender-Role Atittudes in Japan: Does Television Contribute to the Maintenance of the Status Quo? *Journal of Communication, 57*(3), 511-531.

Saitō, T. (1998). *社会的ひきこもり : 終らない思春期 (Hikikomori: Adolescence Without End).* Tokyo: PHP Kenkyūjo.

Saitō, T. (2019). Foreign Press Center Japan. Tokyo.

Saladin, R. (2015). Between Gyaru-o and Soshokukei Danshi: Body Discourses in Lifestyle Magazines for Young Japanese Men. *Contemporary Japan, 27*(1), 53-70.

Sano, A., Le, D.-S. N., Tran, M.-H. T., Pham, H. T., Kaneda, M., Murai, E., & Yamamoto, S. (2008). Study on Factors of Body Image in Japanese and Vietnamese Adolescents. *Journal of Nutritional Science and Vitaminology, 54*(2), 169-175.

Satō, D., & Satō, S. (2006-2013). *学園黙示録 HIGHSCHOOL OF THE DEAD (Highschool of the Dead).* Monthly Dragon Age.

Save the Children Onlus. (2020, August 2). *La storia di una donna che ha detto no all'infibulazione (The story of a woman who said no to infibulation).* Retrieved April 26, 2023, from Save the Children: https://www.savethechildren.it/blog-notizie/la-storia-di-una-donna-che-ha-detto-no-all%E2%80%99infibulazione#:~:text=Che%20cos'%C3%A8%20l'infibulazione,tradizionalmente%20in%20almeno%2030%20Paesi.

Sawyer, J. (1970). *On Male Liberation.* Pittsburgh: Know.

Schlegel, R. P., d'Averna, J. R., Zanna, M. P., DeCourville, N. H., & Manske, S. R. (1990). Problem drinking: A problem for the theory of reasoned action? *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 358–385. doi:/10.1111/j.1559-1816.1992.tb01545.x

Schleiner, A.-M. (2001). Does Lara Croft Wear Fake Polygons? Gender and Gender-Role Subversion in Computer Adventure Games. *Leonardo*, 221-226.

Schneider, G., & Tokya-Seid, C. (2023). *Soziale Medien/ Soziale Netzwerke/ Social Media.* Retrieved from Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung: https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/lexika/das-junge-politik-lexikon/321140/soziale-medien-soziale-netzwerke-social-media/

Schodt, F. L. (1986). *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics.* Kodansha International.

Schodt, F. L. (1996). *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga.* Stone Bridge.

Schreiner, O. (1914). *Die Frau und die Arbeit (Women and Work).* Jena: Diederichs.

Schulz, C. M. (1950-2000). *Peanuts.* United Feature Syndicate, Universal Uclick/Andrews McMeel Syndication.

Schumacher, J. (2008). *Sexualisierung der Gesellschaft. Neue Anforderungen an die Pädagogik (Sexualization of society. New demands on pedagogy).* GRIN Verlag.

Schwichtenberg, R. L., Pribram, D., Tetzlaff, D., & Scott, R. (1993). *The Madonna Connection: Representational Politics, Subcultural Identities, and Cultural Theory.* New York: Routledge.

Scott, W. J. (1987). Il "genere": un'utile categoria di analisi storica ("Gender": a useful category of historical analysis). *Rivista di Storia Contemporanea (Journal of Contemporary History)*(4), 560-586.

Scruton, R. (2009). *Beauty.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Segalewitz, J. (2020). *"If You're Ugly, the Blackpill is Born with You": Sexual Hierarchies, Identity Construction, and Masculinity on an Incel Forum Board.* Dayton: University of Dayton.

Setty, E. (2022). Young People's Perspectives on Online Hate, Unwanted Sexual Content, and 'Unrealistic' Body- and Appearance-Related Content: Implications for Resilience and Digital Citizenship. *Youth, 2*(2), 195-216.

Sevakis, J. (2015, October 21). *ANSWERMAN: How Did American Manga Releases Become Right-To-Left?* Retrieved September 15, 2022, from Anime News Network: https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/answerman/2015-10-21/.94170

Seward, J. (1977). *Hara-Kiri (Ritual Suicide in Japan).* Edizioni Mediterranee.

Shamoon, D. (2007). Revolutionary Romance: The Rose of Versailles and the Transformation of Shôjo Manga. In F. Lunning (Ed.), *Mechademia* (pp. 173-182). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Sherman, S. J., & Fazio, R. H. (1983). Parallels between attitudes and traits as predictors of behavior. *Journal of Personality, 51*, 308-345.

Shigematsu, S. (1999). Dimensions of Desire: Sex, Fantasy, and Fetish in Japanese Comics. In J. A. Lent (Ed.), *Themes and Issues in Asian Cartooning: Cute, Cheap, Mad, and Sexy* (pp. 127-164). Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press.

Shirane, H. (Ed.). (2007). *Traditional Japanese Literature: An Anthology, Beginnings to 1600.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Shoji, K. (2014, August 28). *She came, she stole and she conquered.* Retrieved from The Japan Times: https://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2014/08/28/films/came-stole-conquered/

Silver, J. (Producer), Wachowski, L., & Wachowski, L. (Directors). (1999). *The Matrix* [Motion Picture]. United States, Australia: Warner Bros.

Siviero, G. (2021a). Cos'è l'identità di genere (What is gender identity). In A. Cavallo, L. Lugli, & M. Prearo (Eds.), *Cose Spiegate Bene - Questioni di un certo genere (Things Explained Well - Matters of a Certain Kind)* (pp. 8-15). Milano: Iperborea.

Siviero, G. (2021b). Un glossario per parlare di identità di genere (A glossary for discussing gender identity). In A. Cavallo, L. Lugli, & M. Prearo (Eds.), *Cose Spiegate Bene - Questioni di un certo genere (Things Explained Well - Matters of a Certain Kind)* (pp. 16-23). Milano: Iperborea.

Smith, A. R., & Joiner, T. E. (2008). Examining Body Image Discrepancies and Perceived Weight Status in Adult Japanese Women. *Eating Behaviors, 9*(4), 513-515.

Smolak, L., Murnen, S. K., & Myers, T. A. (2014). Sexualizing the self what college women and men think about and do to be "sexy". *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 38*, 379-397.

Snodgrass, J. (Ed.). (1977). *For men against sexism: A book of readings.* Albion: Times Change Press.

Srimulyani, N. E. (2021). Herbivore Man in Shoujo-Manga: Deconstruction of Japanese Traditional Masculinity. *Mozak Humaniora, 21*(1), 109-121.

Stanford, J. N., & McCabe, M. P. (2002). Body Image Ideal amond Males and Females: Sociocultural Influences and Focus on Different Body Parts. *Journal of Health Psychology, 7*(6), 675-684.

Statista Research Department. (2021a, September). *Global adult literacy rate 2009-2020, by gender.* Retrieved from Statista: https://www.statista.com/statistics/1220131/global-adult-literacy-rate-by-gender/

Statista Research Department. (2021b, Agosto 10). *Share of high school students who read shojo or josei manga Japan 2020, by gender.* Retrieved Agosto 15, 2022, from Statista: https://www.statista.com/statistics/1214343/japan-reader-share-female-targeted-manga-high-school-students-by-gender/

Stevenson, N. D., Austen, C. (Producers), & Stevenson, N. D. (Writer). (2018-2020). *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* [Motion Picture]. United States.

Stewart, S. (2022, December 21). *Opinion: The backlash against 'The Whale' is telling us all something important.* Retrieved from CNN: https://edition.cnn.com/2022/12/21/opinions/the-whale-fatphobia-brendan-fraser-ctrp-stewart/index.html

Stice, E., & Bohon, C. (2012). In T. Beauchaine, & S. Linshaw (Eds.), *Eating Disorders. In Child and Adolescent Psychopathology* (2nd ed.). New York: Wiley.

Stice, E., & Shaw, H. E. (2002). Role of body dissatisfaction in the onset and maintenance of eating pathology: A synthesis of research findings. *Journal of Psychometric Research, 53*, 961-962.

Stice, E., Marti, C. N., Shaw, H., & Jaconis, M. (2010). An 8-year longitudinal study of the natural history of threshold, subthreshold, and partial eating disorders from a community sample of adolescents. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 118*(3), 587-597.

Stoller, R. J. (1968). *Sex and Gender, vol. I: On the Development of Masculinity and Femininity.* London: Hogarth Press.

Stoller, R. J. (1985). *Presentations of Gender.* New Haven: Yale University.

Stone, E. A., Brown, C. S., & Jewell, J. A. (2015). The sexualized girl: A within-gender stereotype among elementary school children. *Child Development, 86*, 1605-1622.

Streitmatter, R. (2004). *Sex sells!: The media's journey from repression to obsession.* Basic Books.

Sturken, M., & Cartwright, L. (2001). *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sugihara, Y., & Katsurada, E. (1999). Masculinity and Femininity in Japanese Culture: A Pilot Study. *Sex Roles, 40*, 635-646.

Sutherland, H. (Director). (1972-1984). *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids* [Motion Picture].

Suwa, M., Suzuki, K., Hara, K., Watanabe, H., & Takahashi, T. (2003). Family features in primary social withdrawal. *Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences*, 586-594.

Suzuki, M. (1995). Women and Television: Portrayal of Women in the Mass Media. In K. Fujimura-Fanselow, & A. Kameda (Eds.), *Japanese Women: New Feminist Perspectives on the Past, Present, and Future.* New York: The Feminist Press.

Suzuki, M. (2005). Media Literashi to Jenda (Media Literacy and Gender). In K. K. Senta (Ed.), *Jenda Hakusho Vol 3: Josei to Media (Gender White Paper Vol. 3: Women and Media)*. Tokyo: Akashi Shoten.

Swami, V. (2015). Cultural influences on body size ideals: Unpacking the impact of Westernisation and modernisation. *European Psychologist, 20*, 44-51.

Swami, V. (2021). Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Body Size. In M. Leeds Craig (Ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Beauty Politics* (pp. 103-111). London and New York: Routledge.

Swami, V., & Tovée, M. J. (2005). Female physical attractiveness in Britain and Malaysia: A cross-cultural study. *Body Image, 2*, 115-128.

Swami, V., Frederick, D. A., Aavik, T., Alcalay, L., Allik, J., Anderson, D., . . . Zivcic-Becirevic, I. (2010). The attractive female body weight and female body dissatisfaction in 26 countries across 10 world regions: results of the international body project I. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 36*(3), 309-325.

Swami, V., Gray, M., & Furnham, A. (2007). The female nude in Rubens: Disconfirmatory evidence of the waist-to-hip ratio hypothesis of female physical attractiveness. *Imagination, Cognition, and Personality, 26*, 139-147.

Swindle, M. (2011). Feeling girl, girling feeling: An examination of "Girl" as affect. *Rhizomes*. Retrieved from http://www.rhizomes.net/issue22/swindle.html

Taga, F. (2003). Rethinking male socialization: Life histories of Japanese male youth. In K. Louie, & M. Low (Eds.), *Asian masculinities.* London: Routledge Curzon.

Taga, F. (2017). Dilemma of Fatherhood: The Meaning of Work, Family, Happiness for Salaried Male Japanese Workers. In B. G. Holthus, & W. Manzenreiter (Eds.), *Life Course, Happiness and Well-being in Japan*. London: Routledge.

Takahashi, Y. (1981-1988). *キャプテン翼 (Captain Tsubasa).* Shueisha.

Takenobu, M. (2017). Josei ga kagayaku: Seisaku no Futsugona Shinjitsu (The Inconvenient Truth of the Women Can Shine Policy). *Onnatachi no 21 Seiki, 91*, 4-7.

Takeuchi, N. (1995-1999). *美少女戦士セーラームーン (Pretti Guardian Sailor Moon).* Star Comics.

Takimoto, T. (2003-2007). *N・H・Kにようこそ! (Welcome to the N.H.K.).* Kadokawa Shoten.

Tanaka, H. (2013). Wakamono niyoru manga aidoku to jenda imeji no juyo: Shonen spotsu manga SLAM DUNK dokusha wo rei ni (Youths' manga reading and their reception of gender images). *Journal of Information and Communication, 13*, 1-15.

Tara, J. (2018, January 4). Iceland Makes Equal Pay the Law. *Time*. Retrieved from

https://time.com/5087354/iceland-makes-equal-pay-the-law/

Teo, A. R. (2010). A new form of social withdrawal in Japan: a review of hikikomori. *Int J Soc Psychiatry*(56), 178-185.

Testa, F. (2023). *"The Whale" e la grassofobia: le accuse hanno un senso? ("The Whale" and fatphobia: do the allegations make sense?).* Retrieved March 31, 2023, from Life and People Magazine: https://www.lifeandpeople.it/2023/03/04/grassofobia-cosa-e-perche-un-problema-film-the-whale-arofonofsky/#:~:text=Il%20film%20ha%20ricevuto%20un,aumentare%20le%20forme%20degli%20attori.

Tezuka, O. (1952-1968). *鉄腕アトム (Astro Boy).* Kodansha.

The Nielsen Company. (2019, March). *U.S. Consumers are Shifting the Time They Spend with Media.* Retrieved from Nielsen: https://www.nielsen.com/insights/2019/us-consumers-are-shifting-the-time-they-spend-with-media/

The Nielsen Company. (2023). *About Nielsen.* Retrieved from Nielsen: https://www.nielsen.com/about-us/#overview

The Trevor Project. (2019). *National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health.* Retrieved from The Trevor Project: https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2019/?section=Introduction

Thompson, J. (2007). *Manga: The Complete Guide.* New York: Ballantine Books.

Thompson, L., & Donaghue, N. (2014). The confidence trick: Competing constructions of confidence and self-esteem in young Australian women's discussions of the sexualisation of culture. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 23-35.

Thota, S. C., Hermosillo, S. N., Keyhani, N. K., & Walker, J. A. (2014). Male Grooming: An Ethnographic Research on Perception and Choice of Male Cosmetics. *Academy of Business Research Journal*, 24-33.

Tiger, L. (1969). *Men in Groups.* Random House.

Tiggemann, M. (2002). Media Influences on Body Image Development. In T. F. Cash, & T. Pruzinsky (Eds.), *Body Image: A Handbook of Theory, Research, and Clinical Practice* (pp. 91-98). New York: Guilford Press.

Togashi, Y. (1998-present). *ハンター×ハンタ (Hunter × Hunter).* Shueisha.

Tolstoj, L. (1877). *Anna Karenina.*

Toriyama, A. (1979-1984). *Dr. スランプ (Dr. Slump).* Shueisha.

Toriyama, A. (1984-1995). *ドラゴンボール (Dragon Ball).* Shueisha.

Toriyama, A., & Toyotarou. (2015-present). *ドラゴンボール超スーパー (Dragon Ball Super).* Shueisha.

Tovée, M. J., Swami, V., Furnham, A., & Mangalparsad, R. (2006). Changing perceptions of attractiveness as observers are exposed to a different culture. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 443-456.

Treccani. (2012). *Onomatopee (Onomatopoeia).* Retrieved September 16, 2022, from Treccani: https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/onomatopee_%28La-grammatica-italiana%29/

Treccani. (n.d.). *Seppuku.* Retrieved October 10, 2022, from Treccani: https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/seppuku

Treviño, L. J., Gomez-Mejia, L. R., Mixon, F. G., & Balkin, D. B. (2015). Meritocracies or Masculinities? The Differential Allocation of Named Professorships by Gender in the Academy. *Journal of Management*. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206315599216

Tsubaki, I. (2011-present). *刊少女野崎くん (Monthly Girl's Nozaki-kun).* Square Enix.

Tsukiyo, R., & Haga, S. (2017-present). *回復術士のやり直し ～即死魔法とスキルコピーの超越ヒール～ (Redo of Healer).* Kadokawa Shoten.

Tsutsui, J. (2015). *Shigoto to kazoku: Nihon wa naze hatarakizuraku uminiki no ka.* Tokyo: Chuo Koron Shinsha.

Tuchman, G., Daniels, A. K., & Benet, J. (1978). *Heart and Home. Images of Women in the Mass Media.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Turnbull, S. R. (1977). *The samurai: A military history.* New York: Macmillan.

Ueno, C. (2015a). Shisen no seijigaku (Politcal Studies of the Gaze). In C. Ueno (Ed.), *Hatsujo sochi (The Erotic Apparatus)* (pp. 123-136). Tokyo: Iwanami shoten.

Ueno, C. (2015b). Ratai no kigo-gaku (Semiotics of Nudity). In C. Ueno (Ed.), *Hatsujo Sochi (The Erotic Apparatus)* (pp. 92-122). Tokyo: Iwanami shoten.

UIS. (2023, May 31). *Percentage of illiterates who are female.* Retrieved from Unesco Institute for Statistics: http://data.uis.unesco.org/

Unno, K. (2006). Manga ni okeru jendā ni tsuite no. *Ōsaka meijō daigaku kiyō, 6*, 77-85.

Uno, K. S. (1993). The Death of the 'Good Wife, Wise Mother'? In A. Gordon (Ed.), *Postwar Japan as History* (pp. 293-322). Berkeley: California Press.

Uno, K. S. (2005). Womanhood, War and Empire: Transmutations of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother' Before 1931. In B. Molony, & K. S. Uno (Eds.), *Gendering Modern Japanese History* (pp. 493-519). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Unser-Schutz, G. (2015a). Influential or influenced? The relationship between genre, gender and language in manga. *Gender and Language, 9*(2), 223-254.

Unser-Schutz, G. (2015b). What text can tell us about male and female characters in shojo- and shonen-manga. *East Asian Journal of Popular Culture*, 133-153.

Urasawa, N. (1994-2001). *Monster.* Shogakukan.

Ushikubo, M. (2008). *Soushokukei Danshi "Ojouman" ga Nihon wo Kaeru.* Tokyo: Kodansha.

Valaskivi, K. (2015). Mass Media in Japan. In J. Babb (Ed.), *The Sage Handbook of Modern Japanese Studies.* London: Sage.

Valdés, T., & Olavarría, J. (1998). Ser hombre en Santiago de Chile: A pesar de todo, un mismo modelo. In T.

Valdés, & J. Olavarría (Eds.), *Masculinidades y equidad de género en América Latina.* Santiago: FLACSO/UNFPA.

Vallerga, M., & Zurbriggen, E. L. (2022). Hegemonic masculinities in the 'Manosphere': A thematic analysis of beliefs about men and women on The Red Pill and Incel. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 602-625.

van der Vleuten, M., Jaspers, E., Maas, I., & van der Lippe, T. (2016). Boys' and girls' educational choices in secondary education. The role of gender ideology. *Educational Studies, 42*(2), 181-200.

Vesce, C. (2017, October 3). *Altri transiti. La figura sociale del femminiello (Other transitions. The social figure of the femminiello).* Retrieved from il lavoro culturale: https://www.lavoroculturale.org/altri-transiti-la-figura-sociale-del-femminiello/carolina-vesce/2017/#_ftn2

Villi, M., & Hayashi, K. (2015). The Mission is to Keep the Industry Intact. *Journalism Studies*. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2015.1110499

Vogel, E. F. (1963). *Japan's New Middle Class.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Vogel, S. H. (1978). Professional Housewife: The Career of Urban Middle Class Japanese Women. *Japan Interpreter, 12*, 16-43.

von Krafft-Ebing, R. (1886). *Psychopathia Sexualis.* Stuttgart: Verlag von Ferdinand Enke.

Voracek, M., & Fisher, M. L. (2002). Shapely Centerfolds? Temporal Change in Body Measures: Trend Analysis. *BMJ*, 1447-1448.

Wakeling, E. (2011). "Girls are dancin'": shojo culture and feminism in contemporary Japanese art. *New Voices, 5*.

Wang, R. (2012). *Yinyang: The Way of Heaven and Earth in Chinese Thought and Culture.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ward, L. M. (2002). Does television exposure affect emerging adults' attitudes and assumptions about sexual relationships? Correlational and experimental confirmation. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 48*(9-10), 461-465.

Ward, L. M. (2016). Media and sexualization: State of empirical research, 1995-2015. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 560-577.

Ward, L. M., Hansbrough, E., & Walker, E. (2005). Contributions of music video exposure to black adolescents' gender and sexual schemas. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 20*, 143-166.

Ward, L. M., Rivadeneyra, R., Thomas, K., Day, K., & Epstein, M. (2013). A woman's worth: Analyzing the sexual objectification of black women in music videos. In E. L. Zurbriggen, & T. Roberts (Eds.), *The sexualization of girls and girlhood: Causes, correlates, and resistance* (pp. 39-62). New York: Oxford University Press.

Wardle, J., Hasse, A. M., & Steptoe, A. (2006). Body Image and Weight Control in Young Adults: International Comparisons in University Students from 22 Countries. *International Journal of Obesity, 30*, 644-651.

Webb, J. (2005). Art in a globalised state. In C. Turner (Ed.), *Art and Social Change: contemporary art in Asia and the Pacific* (pp. 30-43). Pandanus Books.

WeBuyBooks. (2021, October 20). *Top 10 Best-Selling Manga of All Time.* Retrieved September 7, 2022, from We Buy Books: https://www.webuybooks.co.uk/latest-news-helpful-guides/top-10-best-selling-manga-books-of-all-time/

Weinberg, M. S., Williams, C. J., & Pryor, D. W. (1994). *Understanding Bisexualities.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Welin, A. (2013). *The meaning and image of Otaku in Japanese Society, and its change over time (dissertation).* Göteborgs Universitet Inst För Spräk Och Litteraturer.

Welker, J. (2006). Beautiful, Borrowed, and Bent: 'Boys' Love' as Girls' Love in Shojo Manga. *Signs*.

Welker, J. (2015). A brief history of shônen'ai, yaoi, and Boys Love. In M. McLelland, K. Nagaike, K. Suganuma, & J. Welker (Eds.), *Boys Love Manga and Beyond: History, Culture, and Community in Japan* (pp. 42-75). Jackson: University of Mississippi Press.

West, L. (2023, March 10). *The Whale is not a masterpiece – it's a joyless, harmful fantasy of fat squalor.* Retrieved from The Guardian: https://www.theguardian.com/film/2023/mar/10/lindy-west-on-the-whale

Whelehan, I. (2000). *Overloaded. Popular Culture and the Future of Feminism.* London: The Women's Press.

WHO. (2023, January 31). *Female genital mutilation.* Retrieved April 26, 2023, from World Health Organization: https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/female-genital-mutilation

Whyte, J. (2010, April). *Media Portrayal of People Who are Obese.* doi:10.1001/virtualmentor.2010.12.4.msoc1-1004

Whyte, W. H. (1960). *The Organization Man.* London: Penguin.

Williams, W. L. (1986). *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Williamson, J. (2003, May 31). Sexism with an Alibi. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/media/2003/may/31/advertising.comment

Willis, P. (1977). *Learning to labor: How working class kids get working class jobs.* Farnborough: Saxon House.

Wilson, B. (2000). Becoming Japanese: Manga, Children's Drawings, and the Construction of National Character. *Visual Arts Research, 25*(2), 48-60.

Wise, J. (2022a, Settembre 5). *How many people use Crunchyroll in 2022?* Retrieved Settembre 7, 2022, from Earthweb: https://earthweb.com/crunchyroll-users/#:~:text=Crunchyroll%20in%202022%3F-,Crunchyroll%20has%20120%20million%20registered%20global%20users%20and%205%20million,its%20February%202021%20users%20count.

Wise, J. (2022b, August 9). *ONLYFANS STATISTICS 2022: USERS, REVENUE & CREATOR EARNINGS.* Retrieved from Earthweb: https://earthweb.com/onlyfans-statistics/

Wollstonecraft, M. (1792). *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.*

Women's News. (2022, September 30). *Iran protests continue on the 15th day; 300 killed, 15,000 arrested*. Retrieved from Women's News: https://web.archive.org/web/20221006024830/https://women.ncr-iran.org/2022/09/30/iran-protests-300-killed-15000/

Wong, V. (2009). Youth locked in time and space? Defining features of social withdrawal and practice implications. *Journal of Social Work Practice: Psychoterapeutic Approaches in Health, Welfare and the Community*, 337-352.

Woolley, S. (Producer), & Jordan, N. (Director). (1992). *The Crying Game* [Motion Picture]. Great Britain.

Wright, C. (Director). (2007-2009). *Dirty Sexy Money* [Motion Picture].

Yamada, M. (2008). Otoko to wa Nanika 'Otoko Rashisa' no Daisho. *Jenda Shakaigaku*.

Yamada, S. (2013). Equal Employment Opportunity Act, Having Passed the Quarter-Century Milestone. *Japan Labor Review, 10*(2), 6-19.

Yamamiya, Y. (2020). Cultural Differences of Physical Adornment (Yosooi Nobunka-Sa). In T. Suzuki (Ed.), *Psychology of Physical Adornment: Organizing and Decorating Mind and Behavior (Yosooi No Shinrigaku: Totonoe Kazaru Kokoro To Kodo)* (pp. 222-236). Kyoto: Kitaoji Shobo.

Yamamiya, Y., & Suzuki, T. (2021). Beauty Standards and Body-Image Issues in the West and Japan From a Cultural Perspective. In M. Leeds Craig (Ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Beauty Politics* (pp. 112-122). London and New York: Routledge.

Yamamiya, Y., Shroff, H., & Thompson, J. K. (2008). The Tripartite Influence Model of Body Image and Eating Disturbance: A Replication with a Japanese sample. *International Journal of Eating Disorders, 41*(1), 88-91.

Yamazaki, Y., & Omori, M. (2016). The Relationship between Mothers' Thin-Ideal and Children's Drive for Thinness: A Survey of Japanese Early Adolescents and their Mothers. *Journal of Health Psychology, 21*(1), 100-111.

Yoder, P. S., & Khan, S. (2008). Numbers of women circumcised in Africa: The Production of a Total. *Demographic and Health Research*(39).

Yong, R., & Nomura, K. (2019, April 16). Hikikomori Is Most Associated With Interpersonal Relationships, Followed by Suicide Risks: A Secondary Analysis of a National Cross-Sectional Study. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*. doi:10.3389/fpsyt.2019.00247

Yoshimoto, M. (2010). Why Japanese Television Now? In E. Tsai, & J. Choi (Eds.), *Television, Japan, and Globalization.* Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan.

Yoshizaki, M. (1999-present). *ケロロ軍曹 (Keroro)*. Shonen Ace, Kerokero Ace.

Yuen, J. W., Yan, Y. K., Wong, V. C., Tam, W. W., So, K.-W., & Chien, W. T. (2018). A Physical Health Profile of Youths Living with a “Hikikomori” Lifestyle. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 15*(2). doi:10.3390/ijerph15020315

Yukimura, M. (2005-present). *ヴィンランド・サガ (Vinland Saga)*. Kodansha.

Zhao, Y., & Encinosa, W. (2011). Update on Hospitalizations for Eating Disorders, 1999 to 2009. HCUP Statistical Brief #120. *Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality*.

Zimbert, J. A. (Producer), & Dekker, F. (Director). (1987). *The Monster Squad* [Motion Picture]. United States: TriStar Pictures.

Zoë, H., Doherty, M., Tilley, P. J., & Mccaul, K. (2015). *The First Australian National Trans Mental Health Study: Summary of Results.*

Zohar, A. (2009). *Postgender: Gender, Sexuality and Performativity in Japanese Culture*. Cambridge Scholars.