

DEPICTIONS OF SEXUALITY AND GENDER CONSTRUCTION IN JAPANESE MANGA AND ANIME



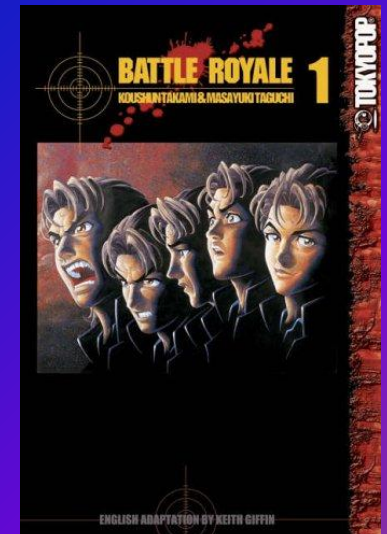
Research Questions

- ▣ Who is reading/watching Japanese manga/anime in the United States?
- ▣ Why should researchers care about Japanese comics in reference to sexuality and gender?
- ▣ What are similarities and differences in gender and sexuality as displayed in Japanese anime/manga and popular US media such as magazines?
- ▣ What are the social implications for the nonwestern gender and sexuality themes portrayed in anime/manga?



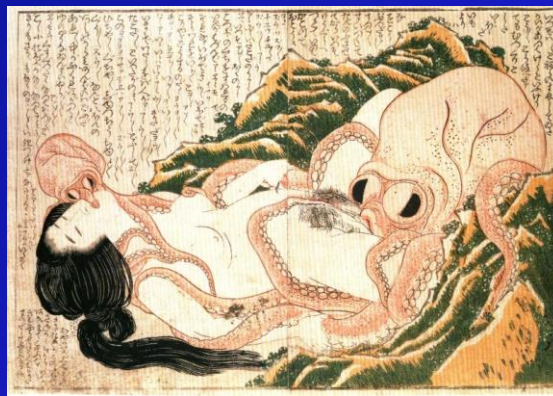
Introduction to Anime and Manga

- ❑ *Manga* are essentially Japanese “comics” which are enjoyed by all age demographics in Japan equally
- ❑ *Anime* is the animated version of manga that airs on major Japanese networks such as Tokyo TV
- ❑ Manga sales account for nearly half of all publishing sales in Japan
- ❑ Since being imported into the US, manga sales have increased 350% (2002-2007); a majority of readers are adolescent females



History

- ❑ Manga was not solely an art form but also a political and social tool
- ❑ Manga became commercialized and widespread in Japan during the Edo period due to the advent of wood blocking
- ❑ Manga was not only a medium for politics and art, but also for sexual purposes, i.e. wife sexual instruction
- ❑ The Tokugawa period (1600-1868) demonstrated especially conspicuous literary and artistic portrayals of normative male homosexuality



Gender and Sex in Japanese Anime and Manga (Femininities/Female Sexuality)

- ▣ *Shoujo* femininity idealism is a common theme in Japanese media, which places Japanese women and girls within a rigid, binary position - a helpless, selfless, needy and domestic girl
- ▣ *Shoujo* is further defined by the linguistic positions of *kawaii* and *kawaiisou*
- ▣ Sexuality and gender among *redikomi* (adult women's) manga still struggle within the ideal of the young girls' *shoujo* concept –now they are an *absence* of *shoujo*
- ▣ In men's comics women are limited, domestic, secondary and/or in support roles



Gender and Sex in Japanese Anime and Manga (Masculinities/Male Sexuality)

- ❑ Masculinities in manga include muscular, powerful men who have limited emotional ability and solve problems through fighting and competition
- ❑ Well-intentioned, hard-working simple “everymen” who long for “good girls” – these are future or current salarymen
- ❑ Bishounen, shounen-ai and yaoi represent the male ambiguous gender identity made popular, eroticized and highly desired during the Tokugawa period



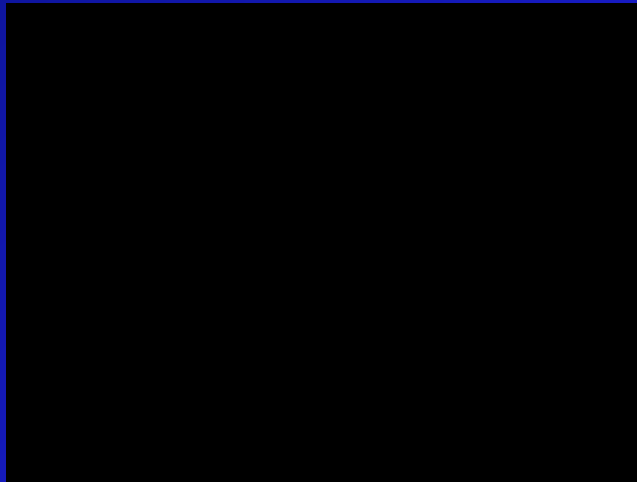
Sex and Gender in American Popular Media

- ❑ Mainstream media female gender identity: submissive, non-threatening or constantly sexually aroused and heteronormative
- ❑ Women and girls in U.S. media center on attractiveness to males with no attention to female sexuality, pleasure or desire
- ❑ Music videos tend to portray traditional gender and sexuality behaviors/roles
- ❑ Masculinity in U.S. – hypermasculinity and positive promiscuity
- ❑ Mens mags- body-consciousness and muscularity, action and sexual performance



Similarities and Differences in Japanese/ American Media (Masculinities/Male Sexuality)

- ▣ Males portrayed ideally as “salary/company men”
 - Men are heterosexual, married or with a girlfriend
 - Providing via wage work is essential to this construction
 - In their leisure time, men are typically depicted as away from home and family, engaged in sports/outdoor activities
- ▣ In American media, the metrosexual is assumed to be or labeled as gay
- ▣ In Japanese media, there remains a legitimate masculinity that involves “traditionally feminine” traits - *bishounen*
 - With this construction of masculinity, there is no general assumption of sexuality; gender behaviors and sexual orientation are separate



Similarities and Differences in Japanese/ American Media (Femininities/Female Sexuality)

- ▣ Japanese *shoujo* concept is similar to American adolescent and young women constructions in that women are portrayed as dependent, heteronormative and preoccupied with fashion, beauty and body size
 - American females depicted as defiant and challenging to the viewer
 - However, *shoujo* girls exemplify “girlishness” and *kawaii* concept
- ▣ Contrasted to Japanese sex positivity, American female sexuality tends to be secret, stigmatized and heavily associated with disease contraction and unwanted pregnancy – abstinence is considered virtuous
 - In Japan, condoms are offered out of vending machines – sexuality is not divorced from everyday life



Conclusion

- ▣ Gender and sexuality in anime and manga is similar in many ways to American popular media gender/sex displays – however, with important culturally contextual differences
- ▣ Reasons for these differences tend to be rooted in social, political and religious historical foundations and have survived the westernization of the *Meiji* restoration
- ▣ Anime and manga are such examples of Japanese media gender and sexuality differences and are now widely enjoyed by (largely adolescent) U.S. audiences on a wide scale
- ▣ Though manga/anime have become infused into American culture, this media provides a unique way of engaging adolescents and young people in the US about gender and sexual constructions which are uncommon in their cultural milieu