

Beyond the genres of Shojo and Shonen

Tracing representations of gender in popular Japanese anime, Attack on Titan (2013) and Fruits Basket (2019)

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ABSTRACT

The exponential growth and accessibility of the anime industry to people outside of Japan in the last couple of decades has opened up avenues of discussion in media research. One of the main focuses of anime scholarship has been on the genres of anime and manga, Shojo and Shonen. The gendered categorization of these genres – Shojo targeting girls and Shonen targeting boys – has been argued to home problematic depictions of gender. For instance, male Shonen characters are seen to be aggressive and female Shojo characters are said to be passive. The study questions and investigates this viewpoint. To make generalizations about these categories is to see anime through a narrow and simplistic lens. In this regard, the paper revolves around the central research question: *How is gender represented in the two genres of Shojo and Shonen in popular anime series *Attack on Titan* (2013) and *Fruits Basket* (2019)?* Using limited scholarship that hint at the potential of anime to create alternate realities, the focus of the paper is to use these popular shows to inspect anime's treatment of gender. Interrogation of these transnational cultural products is valuable because media has the power to influence the socio-political landscape and shape the ways in which we build our unique perspective of the world. Furthermore, media is also a space of contention; meaning that media representations can not only reflect societal norms and values but can also reject them. In our case, anime can be argued to portray traditional gender roles by reflecting societal structures. However, they can also distance themselves from them by countering hegemonic gender ideals. In order to inspect the manner in which the chosen anime shows build their gender narratives, Multimodal Analysis, comprising of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Visual Discourse Analysis (VDA), has been chosen. Taking account of both the visuals and the language used in the shows, this methodological approach allowed the paper to thoroughly study anime's treatment of gender. Furthermore, referring to the theoretical framework, additional guiding questions were built before conducting the analysis. In total, 30 episodes were analyzed; 15 from each anime. In utilizing this methodological approach, the study recognizes that, indeed, the genres of Shojo and Shonen cannot be ascribed to a predetermined set of characteristics and gender roles. There were nuances, overlaps, and alternate representations across the genres – hinting at the potential of anime to go beyond simple categorization.

KEYWORDS: *Anime, Japan, Representation, Gender studies, Shojo, Shonen*

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Introduction

1.1. Media: Not limited by reality

In a popular culture essay, writer Matthew LaMar says:

Animation is powerful because it is not limited by reality. It is the vision and product of skilled artisans who create something that is somehow more than reality (LaMar, 2020, para 6).

While this essay particularly focuses on the western animation industry, in contrast to live-action movies, this quote can be extended to all media products. This is because media products come with a large scope – one that affords them the power to create alternative realities. It is through these diverse portrayals and depictions of everyday life that we can then, as a society, question accepted ideologies and structures of thinking.

Orgad (2012) interrogates these accepted thinking patterns by looking at how media scripts and images shape - and challenge - our “global imagination”. The addition of the word ‘global’ means that, as a society, there is a collective idea of the world. This collective idea also manifests into how we see our position in the society. It is a sense “of who we are, and what we might expect from each other in carrying out our collective practices that are constitutive of our way of life” (Gaonkar, 2002, as cited in Orgad, 2012, p. 22). Orgad (2012) follows this definition by saying that this does not mean that this collective imagination is fixed or simple. Rather, it is layered, complex and constantly changing; and media, for one, is an enabling space for this evolution. The process of constructing and deconstructing imagined realities, then, means that we are surrounded by structures that can be contested against.

In other words, the notion of ‘reality’ is arbitrary and limitless; and media products can vouch for that. Given the capacities of media technologies, today we are able to go beyond accepted thinking patterns. Extending this conversation allows us to essentially interrogate not only our position in the society and the roles we perform but to also look for new avenues for creating other realities. The focus of this paper is on the latter. By using the case study of Japanese cultural products, the paper inspects the potential of the rising anime¹ industry in

¹ ‘Anime’ is short for animation. It is a broad term that goes beyond quintessential cartoons and stands as an indication for Japan’s animation style (Ahmed, 2020).

creating alternative narratives.

1.2. Cool Japan

“Streaming giant Netflix says that Japanese style animation, better known as ‘anime’, is becoming a common global currency” (Frater, 2020, para 1). The popularity of the Japanese entertainment industry has been ever growing in the last few decades. While the ‘old’ Japan symbolized hard-working salarymen², futuristic machinery, and a painful memory of the past, the new Japan is able to use its cultural products to their advantage as a means of integrating into the globalized landscape (Otmazgin, 2008). One can no longer imagine Japan without thinking about *Pokemon*, *Hello Kitty*, and *Spirited Away*. Japan realized early on that their unique cultural products, whether it is their popular music or manga (comic books), could shape an image that is ‘cool’ (Feigenblatt, 2012). This reinvention is particularly noteworthy because this cool image stands separated from Japan’s imperialist past (Otmazgin, 2012). Research reveals that Japan is the largest contributor of cultural products globally, accounting to 60% of the exports (Norris, 2009). This reinvention came with the growth in the manga and anime world with countless hits and productions, garnering a lot of attention among global audiences. Although the production of manga established these Japanese cultural products, it was the visual cartoon adaptations of anime that led to the boom of the industry (Ahmed, 2020).

The anime industry is widely known for the two main genres of Shojo and Shonen. They are distinguished on the basis of gender, with Shojo catering to a female audience and Shonen targeting a male viewership (Unser-Schutz, 2015). Arguably, Shojo anime focuses on traditional stories where the success of the female character is measured by her finding a love partner. Contrarily, Shonen anime is said to revolve around the perseverance and character development of the male protagonists (Fujimoto, 2008, as cited in Unser-Schutz, 2015). Despite this well-accepted categorization of the genres, this viewpoint is largely generalized. Furthermore, there is a lack of a systematic study on gender in anime in recent times.

As the anime industry continues to be consumed by large international audiences, these products no longer belong to just Japan (Jozuka, 2019). The growth of this industry, then,

² The word ‘salarymen’, here, is used to indicate the exclusive labor market that was largely a male dominated space. Owing to Japan’s patriarchal society, the social roles for men and women were demarcated (Sugihara & Katsurada, 2000).

stands as a testament to the potential reach and impact of these products on the viewership.

1.3. Aim of the thesis and Research Question

The socio-scientific relevance behind inspecting anime representations is that it allows us to contribute to the gender studies discourse and helps us imagine other realities in which gender can operate in. With media serving as an outlet of social transformation, impacting ideas of gender, identity, and sexuality (Rajeev & Mangla, 2019), studying media representations, here, is valuable because whilst anime can (and has) reproduce traditional gender ideals, these popular products also have the potential to create and embody changing gender roles (Napier, 2005, as cited in Fennell et al., 2012). Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to attempt to look beyond the simplistic categories of Shojo and Shonen and investigate the ways in which gender is represented in popular anime shows in recent times.

In order to conduct the research, the shows *Attack on Titan (2013)* and *Fruits Basket (2019)*, a Shonen and Shojo anime respectively, have been chosen. Both these shows are currently ongoing and have been successful in garnering a huge fan base. *Attack On Titan's (2013)* popularity transcended Japan with its memorabilia sold in stores across the globe (Griffis, 2017). Similarly, the anime series *Fruits Basket (2019)* is adapted from the manga, of the same name, that was able to sell over two million copies in the United States back in 2006. This manga had an early 2000s anime adaptation, which -although gaining wide scale recognition-- was not renewed, much to the disappointment of the international fans who folded 1000 origami cranes in anime conventions expressing their wish for a new season (Rios, 2019)³. Thus, the 2019 full-scale anime series has been positively received by the viewership. The paper uses these two shows to inspect the broader topic of the thesis. To this effect, the central research question that the paper revolves around is:

How is gender represented in the two genres of Shojo and Shonen in popular anime series Attack on Titan and Fruits Basket?

The aim of the thesis is to uncover nuances in gender representations by questioning

³ The folding of the 1000 origami cranes was a way for the fans of *Fruits Basket (2001)* to indicate their love for the show. There was an expectation among the fans that Funimation Entertainment, the producer of the show, will continue making the anime show after having seen the dedication among the international fan base.

the supposedly simplistic nature of anime genres. Denison (2015) claims how the discipline of anime studies is simultaneously growing with anime in itself. The study taps into the potential of anime, as a transcultural product, and aims to start a conversation and contribute to continuing discourses about gender representations in a fairly young field of study.

1.4. Outline of the thesis

The following chapters aims to answer the central research question systematically. Chapter 2 presents theories and scholarly arguments that are valuable to this thesis. This chapter starts by deliberating on representation studies and how they play a significant role in the social construction of gender. This is, then, followed up by looking at diverse scholarly standpoints of anime academics about gender representation in anime. Using this theoretical framework, the third chapter ensures systematicity and transparency of the research process by highlighting the steps performed to collect, analyze and present the data. Here, the overall qualitative methodological approach is discussed in detail. Afterward, chapter 4 explicitly discusses the results of the analysis process. Given the multiple findings of the study, this chapter is broken down into sections of *“Representation of gender in Attack on Titan (2013)”*, *“Representation of gender in Fruits Basket (2019)”*, and *“Across the two shows: Alternative representations, nuances, and overlaps”*. Lastly, the final chapter ties these arguments together by presenting the major findings of the study – and, thereby, answers the research question. This chapter is also forward-looking into the future uses of this study by hinting the limitations encountered during the research conduction process.

Theoretical Framework

This chapter forms the backbone of the study. By exploring, inspecting, and deliberating on established literature related to this topic, the paper builds the theoretical framework which guides the research question. In order to present the literature in a feasible manner, four main sections have been created. The first section attempts to underscore the importance of looking into media representations. Given that the study, at its core, looks at the world of two different anime shows, *Attack on Titan (2013)* & *Fruits Basket (2019)*, there is a great focus on the narrative these shows create in relation to gender. Therefore, in this chapter, a historical background to representation and narrative studies will be provided to show how media images, and thereby stories, have serious social implications. Here, the ways in which representations in media can play a role in creating hegemonic structures will be discussed. This will, then, lead to the second section with a specific focus on gender studies. This section is led by the “social construction of gender” theory which highlights how ‘gender’, as a concept, is fluid and ever-changing. As the literature rightly points out, this goes to show that gender norms and ideals change in accordance to the cultural and historical background of a certain place. Furthermore, media also acts as a catalyst to this change by serving as a space to create counter-narratives and portrayals. Thus, in the final two sections, the history of Japanese cultural products and established studies that have explored gender representations in anime will be examined. This will play a valuable role in the following chapters as it will serve as a reference point with which the research findings will be discussed.

2.1 Representation Studies: Narrative, Stories and Power Relations

Sartre (1969) in his book, *Nausea*, says that we, as humans, are constantly surrounded by stories and images. It is these stories that act as a tool with which we build our unique perspective of the world. The role of media in aiding this process is paramount. The social circulation of these stories, through media images and cultural products (like anime in our case), has increased the convenience with which we consume media (Spitulnik, 1996). Media scholarship investigates the effects of this increased accessibility and identifies that with the role of media in creating a shared sense of belonging, there is a constant dispersion of certain ideologies, making these media images anything but neutral (Gamson et al., 1992).

The lens through which we, as an audience, see, consume and understand media images is biased as it comes with an underlying power structure that tend to be controlled by political and economic elites (Gamson et al., 1992). Contemporary critical theory positions itself

in academia in trying to delve deeper into these power structures by identifying and dissecting the underlying narratives media images and stories deal with (Ebert, 1986). By closely reading and questioning these stories we can not only understand and value the way in which they relate to our own lives but also identify the problems they essentially address. Identifying these problems, in turn, help us look into the kind of implications these stories can have on the way by which we evaluate human action and perceive knowledge (Kreiswirth, 2000). In lieu of studying stories and the kind of representations they offer on society, social sciences look into factors like race, culture, history, gender, etc.

Over the years, several tools have been used to investigate media images. Looking at the tools used to study representations, here, serves as valuable knowledge as we can then trace the growth of representation studies in academia. For instance, one of the first tools used to study representation was language that served as a central condition for creating knowledge (Kreiswirth, 2000). This linguistic turn highlighted the interconnectedness of different disciplines. However, through continued investigation, it was quickly realized that isolating language served little to no purpose as it fails to provide a holistic view of what these stories are actually trying to tell us. Thus, the linguistic tool got expanded. In what Kreiswirth (2000) calls the “narrativist turn”, the discipline of social sciences started being looked at from a new perspective; one in which media images and stories are a part of a larger system of facts and knowledge that is constantly influenced by rhetoric, historical background, and other factors (Gamson et al., 1992; Kreiswirth, 2000).

This system is seen to present images in a way that establishes an accepted standard for norms and values but it does so in a seemingly ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ manner. For instance, Gamson et al. (1992) provides an example whereby an advertisement may attempt to sell cigarettes to women. However, just in making that ad, the producers of the advertisement may encompass a message about gender roles and what it means to be a woman. What happens, then, when we have a large number of similar images circulating in society? This circulation of images that tend to push one dominant underlying ideology leads to maintaining hegemony over what is considered ‘normal’ or, more so, ‘ideal’.

In order to dissect the notion of hegemony and power, Antonio Gramsci’s contribution is of the utmost importance. Gramsci’s “cultural hegemonic theory” highlights how the ruling class maintains, and normalizes, certain values and norms by using cultural institutions as a tool (Bates, 1975). The basic theory of hegemony is that humans are not ruled by force alone but

also by ideas (Bates, 1975). This goes to show how the media, here, is specifically a tool with which a set of ideas and values are pushed so that the general public develops a 'commonsense' understanding of things. Thus even those topics and images that claim to be neutral are bound to have structures that promote what is *normal* and what *isn't*.

However, it is worth noting that the notion of hegemony is not static but is a constantly changing and contested phenomenon. As societies are ultimately made of a diverse group of people with their own thought process and lived realities, it is impossible for hegemonic ideas to be set in stone. This means that what is considered as 'hegemony' is bound to change and is a perpetually in a shifting state. In tracing this impermanent nature of hegemony, notions of power structures, then, have to be interspersed with discourse on *agency*. Agency accounts for "the sociocultural mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn, 2011, p. 275). This consists of, but is not limited to, actions that oppose accepted structures of power. Using language as a medium of expression, people are then able to question, and most importantly resist, power structures.

Inquiring about this continuous relationship between language, agency and power is important because oftentimes, conversations about hegemony tend to isolate the role of human action. Power structures, and the hegemonic ideals they propose, are in reality a physical manifestation of individual action of people from diverse socio-cultural set ups. This means that these power structures are not fixed. They are transient and constantly changing. In fact, Gramsci, himself, uses his book to showcase the taken-for-granted structures of everyday thinking and, thereby, urges us to focus our attention beyond accepted ideologies (Bates, 1971).

This, also, applies to our understanding of gender roles. The existence of power structures and predominant ideologies in our socio-political landscape can tend to influence gender norms and stereotypes. However, these hegemonic ideals are also confronted with counter-narratives and realities of gender. The following section advances this conversation by presenting ideal gender norms and stereotypes. Understanding hegemonic gender ideals, and the ways in which they are constantly challenged, will help guide us in the analysis of the anime shows to not only find out whether traditional gender ideals are being upheld (or not), but also acknowledge the nuanced ways in which gender representations operate.

2.2 The Social Construction of Gender: Gender stereotypes and media representations

Despite the fact that 'gender' and 'sex' are used interchangeably oftentimes, there is a significant difference between the two (Lorber & Moore, 2002). The American Psychological

Association (2015, p. 2) says that while sex refers to the physiological aspects of maleness and femaleness that are assigned at birth; gender is constructed by psychological, societal, and cultural factors. With the introduction of the concept of 'gender', as a society, we were challenged to inspect the ways in which we understood gender and, thereby, saw social inequalities (Budgeon, 2014). Scholars diversified the conversation further by building different schools of thought. For instance, Bem (1993) analyzed the biological and social ways in which sex differences originate in the first place. Overtime, the conversation diverted into specifically understanding the ways in the society influences these differences. The notion of "doing gender", as defined by West and Zimmerman (1987) started being inspected. With this simultaneous change and development in gender studies, the vocabulary used to refer to gender also started diversifying.

Gender as a concept has been historically related to multiple terminologies such as 'institution', 'structure', etc. The term social institution has been used to define a wide array of things and essentially it is used to point out a "certain type of establishment of relative permanence of a distinctly social sort" (Martin, 2004, p. 1250). More often than not, gender as a structure or an institution has relations with the concept of 'constraint' - where an individual may be reduced to the tasks that they have to perform. However, to only look at the ways in which their social roles are constrained or reduced means that we are looking at structure through a narrow lens. Giddens (1984) rejects this notion of looking at structures as a form of constraint because he sees societal structures also as an enabling. This is because social structures also help us understand how we perform our own gender, the social roles we choose and more importantly, *why* we choose them (Burt, 1982). At the same time, this ability to choose is determined by the society (Risman, 2004). The social conditions in which an individual grows up can play a significant role in building one's perception of the world. However, this is not necessarily a one-way street. There is an existence of a dualism between an 'individual' and a 'society' which essentially translates to agency and structure, as proposed by Giddens (1984) in the 'structuration theory'. This theory places a lot of importance on human action and the power they possess to transform the ways in which we come to see, perform and converse about gender.

Thus, even though gender has been historically linked to a structure or an institution that merely reflects a set of ideas or beliefs, gender scholars established the ways in which this definition is, in fact, narrow and should also include practices of real people who have their

own thought processes. The narrative, then, allows us to understand that individual human actions account to something and have the ability to transform systems in place. As societal systems change, our social roles will also undergo a transformation. We will, then, be challenged to re-evaluate our position in the society by either conforming or rejecting them.

This is not to dismiss the impact of societal factors and the role they play in establishing ideal masculine and feminine norms. Lorber & Moore (2002) have studied that it is the pressures given by society that dictate what it means to be a 'man' or a 'woman'. Born out of these hegemonic ideals of masculinity and femininity, gender stereotypes have emerged. "Gender stereotypes are generalizations about what men and women are like, and there typically is a great deal of consensus about them" (Hentschel et al., 2019, p. 2). For instance, ideal feminine characteristics are associated with compassion and affection. On the other hand, masculine characteristics tend to deal with leadership, aggression, logic, capability and assertion (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Similarly, in a study conducted by Thompson & Zerbinos (1995) on the gender roles assumed by male and female cartoon characters in US television in the early 1990s, it was found that while the male characters were perceived to be strong, independent, resilient, and assertive; female characters were made to be emotional, warm and romantic. Likewise, it also becomes important to highlight the fact that gender is deeply embedded in not just the way we have internalized social expectations of gender but also in cultural rules and institutions (Risman, 2004). For instance, representations of 'ideal' men in Japanese cultural products are said to be rather feminine in comparison to western male characters (Sugihara & Katsurada, 2000). Thus, these presumably ideal roles and stereotypes differ from culture to culture.

In the case of Japan, their traditional value system was embedded in Confucianism which dictated rules for men and women. In the olden days, confucianist values underscored a lot of East-Asian cultures which influenced the lived realities and perspectives of Asian women (Grosjean, 1988). Confucianist principles reached Japan in the 17th century through the Korean peninsula and ultimately went through a lot of changes (Sugano, 2005). These principles were largely circulated through books that instructed women about their ranking in the patriarchal society and were embedded in morals of family and interpersonal relationships between the husband and the wife. Here, the role of the woman was strictly restricted to being a homemaker. The man, on the other hand, was ranked on a higher level and served as the breadwinner. However, these old traditional gender roles were replaced over time paving way

for a new treatment of gender. Modern Japan has witnessed a shift in these gender roles with more women contesting traditional ideals and undertaking their own meaning and performance of gender (Grosjean, 1988). Post the second world war, Japanese women began to question societal norms and values (Bullock, 2018). There was an uproar of intellectual discourse about gender as a whole, forcing Japan to reconsider their hegemonic norms. This rejection of confucianist laws hints at how systems are never set in stone.

Thus, while it is important to acknowledge that there is an existence of a system in place that attempts to maintain hegemonic norms and ideals, notions of gender are bound to change and develop. Consequently, media representations of gender, that are a product of the society, are neither static nor absolute. In understanding the fluidity of gender ideals, the paper acknowledges media as a space for contention; meaning that media representations can not only reflect societal norms and values but can also reject them. In fact, as Thompson & Zerbinos (1995) themselves point out that these notions of ideal masculine and feminine characteristics are constantly questioned and are changing. In this regard, our paper uses the case study of Japanese animation industry to showcase how their media representations are also reflective of changing gender ideals. Izawa (2000) says that anime has been slowly, but surely, creating counter-narratives of gender portrayals. However, up until now, these changes have been genre specific and limited to certain characters (Shojo female and Shonen male). This paper accounts for this gap in literature and attempts to dig deeper into the potential of anime being an outlet of change – building alternative narratives of gender.

2.3 Historical background of anime genres: Shojo and Shonen

In order to look into existing literature about anime representations of gender, there is a need to firstly understand the anime industry in itself. This section will attempt to provide the historical background of the genres and how the term ‘anime’ is used in today’s globalized landscape. It is important to recognize that despite the international success of both anime and manga, there has not been a comprehensive account presenting the growth of the industry in the last few decades.

As scholars (Denison, 2015) point out, defining anime as a cultural product has been difficult, and rightly so. This stems from the fact that over the years, the anime industry has been trying to constantly challenge being put into a specific category. Overtime, anime has evolved to be not just a Japanese cultural product but also a style of animation. Thus, the understanding of anime needs to be different than ‘film’ or ‘cinema’ (Berndt, 2010).

Its styles and content are found in everything from advertisements, to webisodes and short, five-minute episode television series, through to the more standard production of 'half hour' serialized episodes made for television, through to a wide range of theatrical and straight-to-video (and now DVD other digital formats) film productions (Denison, 2015, p. 19).

Thus, even though, anime is loosely translated to Japanese animation, the term in itself is very broad and encompasses a wide variety of media products (Ahmed, 2020; Denison, 2015)⁴. In order to trace how anime exists as this broad terminology today, Japan's history with the manga industry has to be inspected.

Both *manga* and *anime* are recognized as an art form, linked to Japanese history and culture (Brenner, 2007, p. 1). The word '*manga*' was coined by *Hokusai Katsukiha* and represented a collection of illustrations. Prior to the 17th century, Japan had a little to no western influence. Their cultural products were largely determined by local artists' representations of what Japan meant to them. However, manga, as an art form, changed in due course as American and western forces began to arrive in Japan. Manga started being presented as comic strips in magazines and newspapers. Furthermore, the influx of cartoons and cinematic inspirations led to the emergence of anime, which served as the visual counterpart of manga (Brenner, 2007).

Thus, anime can be recognized as a hybrid cultural product that serves as an amalgamation of Japan's complicated history. The anime we consume today reflects this very change over the years in both content and form. For instance, Japan in the 1930s and 1940s was arguably not very welcome to modernity and cultural hybridity (Berndt, 2010). This in turn, led them to build narratives that used ideological oppositions to present Japan, like "Japanese animals vs. the uncivilized domestic animals" (Berndt, 2010, p. 96). There was a need to present western, or rather American ideals, as a dichotomy, in order to establish the Japaneseness of the products. Thus, Japanese ideals could be seen in the stories, characters and narratives the industry created. Overtime, these stories were grouped under different categories and genres.

⁴ Having said that, this study in particular focuses on the commonly standardized version of anime which is presented as a half-an-hour television series.

Genres are used to create divisions and categories and are vastly used in media and linguistic studies. However, this classification is not objective and oftentimes it is very difficult to fully define what each category entails. Chandler (1997) highlights problems in defining genres as they may be overlaps between them in terms of both themes and forms. This applies to anime genres as well. Anime genres serve as an umbrella term. It is similar to that of Hollywood genres but is not a replication of them (Denison, 2015).

Most importantly, the genres that are used to divide up anime did not surface within the anime industry (Denison, 2015). Shonen, which translates to “young boy” and Shojo, meaning “young girl,” are gendered categories that emerged out of the manga industry and are used to refer to its market niches (Berndt, 2010; MacWilliams, 2008, as cited in Denison, 2015). Interestingly, as Denison (2015) points out, the terms “Shojo” and “Shonen” are extensively used outside Japan, and often without their Japanese translation, hinting at the popularity of these products and the ways in which they have been adopted in western cultures.

The history of the emergence of these two gender specific anime categories lies in the history of how manga were consumed. Earlier, manga was majorly designed for children and featured boys. These comics were what we now know as *Shonen*. However, overtime, the male audience grew and began demanding stories that had more mature depictions. Thus, Shonen, as a genre, was rebranded and starting featuring heroes, instead of boys, and telling more complicated stories which could then be consumed by a grown up audience (Brenner, 2007).

In all of this, recognizing the female audience came at a later point. *Shojo* manga existed as a genre but was initially created by men who were failing to recognize the needs and wants of the female audience (Brenner, 2007). The only way for them to establish Shojo manga and profit from the same was by including female authorship. Brenner (2007) recognizes how the advent of female authorship in a previously male-dominated manga world meant that the traditional fairy-tale stories, which were highly influenced by a Western-European narrative, were now being broken down by female Shojo authors (Brenner, 2007).

However, oftentimes, these categorizations become arbitrary as there is a lot of overlap, both in the viewership and the depictions. “One of the ways in which anime franchises stay alive is by mixing their genres” (Denison, 2015, p. 135). For instance, when the female viewership disagreed with the representation of male heroes, who were built in accordance to the traditional masculine ideals, the trope of *‘bishonen’* or the “*beautiful young men*” was created as a sub-genre in Shojo manga with increasing participation of the fans themselves

(Brenner, 2007). Similarly, as Denison (2015) illustrates, the show *Fullmetal Alchemist Brotherhood*, which is a Shonen manga targeting a male audience, yielded a lot of female fans. The anime producer, Masahiko Minami, said that “It wasn’t made specifically for female fans, of course, but I am glad that they like it in their own way.” (Kemps and Lamb, 2013, as said in Denison, 2015, p. 121). This goes to show that anime comes with complicated portrayals and consumption patterns that are anything but simplistic. This is precisely why anime deserves critical consideration.

Napier (2005) says that anime serves as both a reflection of the Japanese society and a tool of resistance that wishes to outgrow any form of categorization. “Anime has the potential to challenge traditional notions of society, identity, art and critical thinking” (Berndt, 2010, p. 97). It is this potential that the thesis wishes to delve into. Over the years, there have been scholars who have looked at anime representations with a critical eye. Some have highlighted the problematic elements of anime whilst others have highlighted the ways in which anime, as a media form, is striving towards breaking these standards. To this regard, scholars (Denison, 2015; Napier, 2005; Berndt, 2010) recognize the potential anime, and their fan base, has in challenging traditional categories and ideals by mixing and experimenting with genres.

Thus, using the following section, which specifically presents existing literature in anime studies that have investigated genre specific gender portrayals, the paper uses these diverse scholarly standpoints to highlight the gaps in anime scholarship.

2.4 Gender representations in Anime

The world of anime has had varied representations of gender over the years. Much of the focus of gender scholars about representation has been on the prevalence of sexual stereotypes. For instance, Reysen et al. (2017) conducted a study on popular Japanese anime to inspect the existence of sexual stereotypes in male and female characters; and how those were re-enforced by the viewership at large. The study pointed out that anime representations tend to showcase Shonen male and female characters maintaining certain characteristics. Typically, women are stereotyped as warm, expressive and nurturing whilst men are competitive, agentic, and dominant (Reysen et al., 2017, p. 285).

In this regard, there has been valuable research captured by anime studies scholarship that has focused on female characters, particularly in the Shojo genre (Napier, 2005; Tamaki et al., 2013; Rifa-Valls, 2011). When looking at these depictions, what remains as a recurring narrative is that the female characters shown in popular Japanese animation oscillate between

cute teenage girls who either have to be hypersexualized or evil monstrous demons whose only purpose in life is to defeat the weaker men. Often it is also the cute girls who transform into these monsters when denied something they value (Bolton, 2018). These characters are designed in accordance to the erotic male gaze (Fujieda et al., 1997).

Whilst there are arguments in media scholarship that point towards how these evil characters essentially display a new kind of strength that liberates them in a lot of ways, they usually have an ill-fated ending designed for them. “The ‘evil’ ones are killed, while the ‘good’ ones eventually transform back to nurturing mothers, harmless little girls, or helpless victims” (Bolton, 2018, p. 139). Subsequently, the prepubescent teenage characters may be shown in positions of power with them fighting monsters and magical creatures but are almost always sexualized and designed to be *kawaii*⁵ (Tamaki et al., 2013).

Additionally, Shoyo girls are seen to be depicted as selfless and warm. Oftentimes, for the story to gain some sort of emotional backing among the viewership, Shoyo protagonists are made to disappear, both in the literal and figurative sense of the word (Napier, 2005). This is what Napier (2005) calls the “Disappearing Shoyo”. In this process of making the female Shoyo disappear, there is a certain reduction of the female characters.

Conversely, representations of masculinity in anime have arguably mimicked Japan’s treatment of gender over the years. Over time, scholars have observed, with a specific focus on Shonen characters, male heroes, who were known to be aggressive and self-controlled were increasingly shown in a more vulnerable position (Harrell, 2007, as cited in Unser-Schutz, 2015). Thus, there was a tendency in anime depictions of male heroes to fall into two subsequent categories – the bold and macho hero, whose actions are almost always thoughtless, which, in turn, affects the female characters negatively; or he is the vulnerable and clueless man, dominated by vicious women (Bresnahan et al., 2006). In order to understand these two archetypes, there is a need to place this in a historical timeline.

Chen (2012) says that the fall in hegemonic masculine ideals of the hardworking salaryman in the 1990s influenced changed representations of masculinity on-screen through media products of manga, television shows and novellas. This change in portrayal of male

⁵ “Kawaii” stands for cute in Japanese. It is used in different settings but when referring to people, or girls here, it serves as a way of saying that the person is rid of any negative traits. “Kawaii, an adjective meaning ‘cute’, ‘adorable’, and ‘lovable’, is an important aspect of Japanese material culture and a key “affect word” (Clancy, 1999, as cited in Burdelski & Mitsuhashi, 2010, p. 66).

heroes is directly related to the economic and political conditions of the country. Post-war Japan upheld a lot of traditional gender roles because it benefitted their capitalist agendas (Garon, 1997, as cited in Chen, 2012). There was a lot of pressure on the male 'head' of the family to be the breadwinner which was increasingly represented in its cultural products. There was a system in place that ensured that this ideal was adhered to. This system was, largely propelled by various instruments of the state like family socialization, education system and popular cultural products (Dasgupta, 2000). Thus, the creation of the salaryman masculinity led to Japanese anime painting the ideal male hero as an educated, ambitious boy wanting to accomplish a position of stature in the society.

However, 1990s Japan, which witnessed an economic and political stagnation and slow-down, diversified the conversation around masculinity and these hegemonic ideals (Dasgupta, 2009). There was a lot of criticism about the toxic culture the salaryman masculinity embodied forcing the Japanese society to rethink their presumed gender roles. Thus, as Dahlberg-Dodd (2018) points out, the fall in this masculinity reflected in the change in the depiction of male characters in anime. This transition could also be traced in the change in anime characters who went from being an educated, mobile student to the hot-blooded aggressive male hero, wanting to challenge societal institutions; Shonen heroes started embodying a different kind of masculinity. However, this conversation about gender representations are not limited to just these categories.

While traditional portrayals exist in one way or another, it is also important to acknowledge that scholars have noted the possibilities of alternative representations in the anime universe with characters who break away from these hegemonic gender roles of the aggressive male characters and the non-resistant female characters. Hinton (2014) attempts to highlight the ways in which even the passive female Shojo characters, who are designed to be victims of the male need, are not so passive. Whether it be through luring swear words like '*baka*⁶' or by strategizing against them and gaining a revenge of sorts, the female characters are challenging traditional Shojo ideals (Hinton, 2014). Extending this argument, Hinton (2014) also goes to say how this simplistic view of anime characters being represented as oppressed is a western act of othering Japanese cultural products. He ends this argument by saying, "as such, she is not constrained by traditional gender relations but is active and resourceful in her

⁶ Baka translates to 'fool' or 'idiot'

behavior” (Hinton, 2014, p. 65). Although it would be a generalization to say that all Shojo characters are attempting to break out of the traditional gender roles subscribed to them, there definitely is a rise in stories that portray their characters differently.

Highlighting this change brings us to the work of *Hayao Miyazaki*, a pioneer⁷ in creating this alternative narrative. Miyazaki’s work almost always has female protagonists, which is indicative of the Shojo genre. At the same time, his stories do not have romance as the dominant theme and instead, places these heroines in situations where they have to be the ones to save the day (Rifa-Valls, 2011). The creation of these counter-narratives is inclusive of, but not limited to just Miyazaki.

The rise of female authorship in manga led to diverse character designs that steered away from traditional depictions. The trope of the *bishonen* or the ‘beautiful boy’ stands as a testament to this. “They are androgynous, tall, slim, elfin figures with big eyes, long hair, high cheekbones and pointed chin” (Wood, 2006, p. 398). Welker (2006) says that physically the beautiful boy is neither male nor female. These characters are born out of the cross-dressing tradition and serves as a queer character. A lot of these characters also showcase same-sex love stories, rooted in female fantasies and desires (Wood, 2006). However, at the core, the female engagement in these Shojo pieces, both as creators and as consumers, suggest an uprooting of traditional heterosexual male ideals, diversifying the conversation.

The thesis acknowledges the presence of these diverse depictions and attempts to look at popular anime series with a critical lens. The existing scholarship, although valuable, has not been updated to provide a holistic view of gender in the two genres. For instance, much of the existing scholarship focuses solely on the portrayal of Shojo female characters or Shonen male characters. With the exception of the Bishonen characters within Shojo manga, there exists a lack of research that looks at gender across the different genres. Accounting for this research gap, this paper will present a systematic research on the treatment of gender, as a whole, in recent Shojo and Shonen anime shows. Given that notions of masculinity and femininity are constantly changing, this paper will develop its argument on the fact that media content can not only capture traditional values and traits but also challenge them; bringing about crucial social change (Rajeev & Mangla, 2019). The paper uses these scholarly viewpoints as the basis to question whether the seemingly gendered categories of Shojo and Shonen are as simplistic

⁷ He is an anime director, producer, screenwriter, animator and a manga author.

in nature as they are made out to be. Are anime characters designed to be black and white? The study attempts to inspect this further by assuming the existence of overlaps and nuanced gender representations that go beyond the aggressive Shonen hero, the submissive Shojo female and the beautiful Shojo male archetypes.

Methodology

The process of research is often riddled with the question of how important and valuable the findings may be. There is a need to know that the study and its findings may be trusted for future research purposes (Fossey et al., 2002). One way to ensure transparency of the research process is to specify the methodological steps that informs the study. Methodology comprises of protocols that specify how social investigation should be approached (Ramazanoglu, 2002, as mentioned in Landman, 2006, p. 429). Thus, this chapter will expand on the methodological approach of the research by presenting and clarifying all the steps taken towards conducting the study.

The chapter starts off discussing the overall qualitative approach of the study followed by the data sample chosen for analysis. The chapter, then, delves into the steps taken to perform the analysis consisting of the tools used to look at text and images, the pilot analysis conducted before studying the entire data set followed by a detailed account of the analysis process. Finally, the last section will cover the steps taken to ensure that the findings are valid and credible.

3.1. Qualitative approach

As specified before, the study is interested in looking at the ways in which these highly circulated anime products, *Attack on Titan (2013)* and *Fruits Basket (2019)*, treat gender. Thus, the intention, here, is to look at these representations by inspecting existing social norms and investigate if and how the shows challenge them.

Social norms have been extensively studied in the field of media research. What is intriguing about this area of research is that while social norms are not written down or set in stone; in observing them, one can find patterns of behavior that are enforced and reproduced (Lune & Berg, 2016). Thus studying gender, which has been identified as a socially constructed concept, is difficult and complicated. Qualitative methods provide researchers with a set of tools that can be used to examine meaning-making processes. By definition, “Qualitative research refers to meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and description of things.” (Lune & Berg, 2016, p. 12). Essentially, qualitative research is a broad term used to expand on experiences, behaviors and interactions in a social setting (Fossey et al., 2002.)

At its core, a qualitative study uses paradigms to conduct research. “In a research context, the term ‘paradigm’ describes a system of ideas, or world view, used by a community

of researchers to generate knowledge” (Fossey et al., 2002, p. 718). Given that the paper wishes to uncover gender representations, which in itself has a system in place, this method helps in providing a lens through which the topic could be looked at.

Within the qualitative research methodology, a wide variety of tools and approaches are used to perform analysis. In our case, the critical research method has been adopted. Fossey et al. (2002) mention how critical research advocates becoming aware of investigating the socio-political context of meaning and, in that sense, counter hegemonic ideals of gender.

With the help of this approach, things that may be set up as the norm are questioned through discussion and debate. This approach fits the aim of the thesis as it is in understanding Japan’s treatment of gender, the paper considers navigating through the socio-political set-up in which the anime industry operates. By using qualitative methods, the underlying gender roles that may not be obvious at a first glance, have been brought to light.

3.2. Sample

In order to carry out the analysis, the shows: *Attack on Titan (2013)* and *Fruits Basket (2019)* have been chosen. Apart from the fact that these two shows are currently ongoing and are recent, they stand as a success story of the Japanese animation industry. In order to inspect this popularity, anime websites like *myanimelist*, *listchallenges*, and *myotakuworld* were referred to. Upon exploration, it was found that the impact of these two shows have gone past Japan and other East-Asian countries and have entered the western market (Griffis, 2017). With anime memorabilia selling in different parts of the world, the popularity of these anime shows hint at the growing viewership. Furthermore, as these two shows are distributed through international platforms like *Netflix*, *Hulu*, and *Crunchyroll*, they are widely accessible. Thus, the selection of these two shows indicate the popularity of these anime and how it resonates with international audiences, helping the study delve deeper into the central research question at hand.

Given that gender roles and attributes are present in multiple elements like plot, narrative, setting, etc., the analysis looked beyond just the characters in these shows. *Attack on Titan (2013)* has a total of 4 seasons with 72 episodes. Conversely, *Fruits Basket (2019)* has two seasons with 50 episodes. Among those, a total of 30 episodes have been randomly selected and analyzed. Thus, as the paper inspected two shows, 15 episodes from each of the shows have been chosen. As the average length of an episode is twenty-five minutes, this selection fits the methodological guidelines, as provided by Janssen & Verboord (2019). The episodes were

numbered, shuffled, and randomly selected. The randomized sampling was opted in order to negate the bias of the researcher in the selection of the episodes as well as account for the limited time and scope of the thesis. For *Attack on Titan (2013)*, episodes 1, 4, 7, 17, 28, 29, 35, 42, 43, 49, 51, 52, 57, 65, and 70 were analyzed. Similarly, for *Fruits Basket (2019)*, episodes 1, 2, 4, 7, 9, 10, 19, 21, 26, 33, 35, 36, 39, 40, and 42 were studied. The name of the episodes along with the airing date have been attached in the Appendix B.

Furthermore, additional steps were taken to prepare the episodes for research. The two anime shows were accessed through streaming platforms *Netflix* and *Crunchyroll*. These anime shows have two different versions: dubbed and original (with subtitles). For the thesis, the original version with English subtitles was used. Furthermore, to avail the transcript of the show, a simple google search of [Anime name] + [English script] helped procure the transcript of *Attack on Titan (2013)* and *Fruits Basket (2019)*. However, for newer episodes, availing the transcripts was difficult which is why for some of the episodes the transcripts were manually written down by referring to the subtitles. All the transcripts were matched with the show to ensure accuracy. After preparing the sample, data analysis of the sample was conducted.

3.3. Analysis

As this particular study bases its central interest in the ways in which popular Japanese anime treat gender, multimodal analysis is seen to be the appropriate method of choice. Consisting of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Visual Discourse Analysis (VDA), this method gives importance to not just the visual elements displayed in anime but also other factors such as: the kind of speech these fictional characters' use, the larger plot at hand, and other narrative elements. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) insist on relying on these two methods largely because media representations, given that they have social meanings, are bound to have contrasting viewpoints. While a text may not necessarily come off as sexist, its visual counterpart may be including overly sexist attributes (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006). Machin & Mayr (2012) supports this argument by illustrating how even in the lack of images, the text that we read comes with visual elements. For instance, they say that "even this very text you are now reading, which contains no image as such, communicates partly through choice of font type, color of font, line spacing and alignment of text" (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 49). Extending this to the current study at hand, which examines anime shows that come with both visuals and dialogues, this method is seen to be the most appropriate.

In order to thoroughly understand this process, the following sub-sections have been

created.

3.3.1. Text and dialogues

Fairclough (2013) specifies how social interactions presuppose what he calls 'structures' that create knowledge. Much of this knowledge creation process uses language codes. Here, language is a means of social construction whereby it not only shapes but is also shaped by the society. Strategies that appear normal or neutral on surface may, in fact, be ideologically biased. Everyday language, then, becomes a tool with which structures of knowledge are created, reproduced and maintained. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an approach that delves into looking at this process of knowledge creation by investigating the underlying relationship between language, power and ideology. Studying texts and language, here, becomes a tool to identify the political and ideological inclination (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Thus, there are a wide range of aspects that are inspected. By identifying the kind of language these anime shows use, the ultimate aim of using this method is to highlight what their individual narrative means in the larger societal context of gender (Van Dijk, 1995). In this regard, tools proposed by Machin & Mayr (2012) has been employed.

Firstly, *word connotations* were studied. This tool helped the study in inspecting the choices made by the author to use certain kinds of words. The decision to use some words, instead of others, hint at the kind of connotations, and thereby narrative, the author wishes to push. Extending this, the tool of *overlexicalization* identified the use of recurring words and/or their synonyms. The over-persuasion of certain words evidences the attempt to propel a certain ideology. These two tools served as valuable in inspecting gender norms upheld by the anime characters mainly when they were conversing with each other. As the following chapter will hint, both the shows used a certain selection of words in referring to their protagonist. The selection of words tends to also come in binaries of good/ bad, poor/ rich, pure/ evil. Here, the tool of *structural opposition* came to be of good help in understanding what characteristics were designed to be ideal in the male and female characters; and what stage (central, secondary, or peripheral) did they occupy. This tool helps in identifying whether the creators of the show employed what Van Dijk (1998) calls "ideological squaring" whereby opposing ideas are built around real people and represent a set of dichotomies. Additionally, Machin & Mayr (2012), also advice on looking at aspects that tend to be missing through the tool of *suppression*. The absence of certain words, in terms of things that were not said, also helped in understanding the narrative the shows wanted to push forth. Lastly, *lexical choices and genre*

of communication allowed to investigate whether there was a conscious decision by the author to use authoritative language in a manner that directs the audience towards thinking about the character or the story in a particular light. Ultimately, the goal of the method is to look beyond just the dialogues but also study the intentions with which they come with and what meanings they hold.

Having said that, for us to properly look at these anime representations of gender, employing tools to study language alone would be to only look at these media products through a narrow lens. With this regard, the following subsection will delve into the other half of multimodal analysis, Visual Discourse Analysis (VDA).

3.3.2. Images

The use of images in visual communications adds to the meaning creation process that inspires the overarching structure. Thus, similar to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Visual Discourse Analysis (VDA) will use tools as proposed by Machin & Mayr (2012). For instance, the analysis process largely utilizes the concept of *denotation* and *connotation*. *Denotation* looks for what is depicted in the image. Here, the analysis process quite literally lays out what the image entails in terms of the different elements. Conversely, *connotation* attempts to understand what those images mean. In addition to these two tools, visual discourse analysis also looks at the *objects* used in the image and the *setting* in which these objects are placed in. In analyzing these, the overall ideology, as attempted to be established by the author, will be brought to light (Machin & Mayr, 2012). For instance, if the female characters are shown in household settings wearing 'feminine' attires like dresses and skirts, there is a signaling of how these characters adhere to traditional feminine ideals. Conversely, if they are shown in outdoor settings with access to laptops and electronic devices, there is an underlying connotation of independence and mobility attached to the narrative. Looking into these additional tools have come to particularly helpful as both the anime shows have fantastical plots and characters.

Additionally, *salience* was also used as a tool to understand whether there were certain images in the anime shows, in the form of characters and settings, that were made to stand out. In inspecting salience, we can identify features have that are shown to have central symbolic composition. In this regard, potential cultural symbols, size, color, tone, focus, foregrounding and overlapping are explored. The manner in which the images are presented to us as the viewer will help us in understanding what is seen to be significant and what is not (Machin & Mayr, 2012). For instance, the placement of the characters (whether they are put in

the middle or in the side) essentially allows to investigate the significance put on them. Thus, the tools proposed by Machin & Mayr (2012) help us in understanding these abstract ideas better.

Although these tools will allow the study to examine both visual and linguistic elements of the data set, in order to thoroughly cover all aspects of gender representation, additional guiding questions have been developed. These questions account for things that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Visual Discourse Analysis (VDA) may overlook.

Furthermore, these questions were built before conducting the analysis and was done so by referring to the existing theoretical framework of the study. In particular, scholarship that has looked at representations of gender and sexual stereotypes in cartoons, animation, and other visual media (Reysen et al., 2017; Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995; Napier, 2005) have been chosen. These studies have been used as an example for building the guiding questions. For instance, Thompson & Zerbinos (1995) developed a scheme in their study that looked at demographic traits (number of lead/major male and female characters', number of minor characters, and gender-neutral characters), character traits (warm-cold, dependent-independent, etc.), the amount of time male, female, and gender neutral characters appear on screen for, and the type of communication these characters were seen to have.

Similarly, Reysen et al. (2017) built their coding scheme by forming guiding questions that listed out the sex of the characters, the type of character (in terms of whether they were central, secondary, or peripheral). Additionally, they identified sexual stereotypes for male or female characters. For the female characters, they investigated whether they were curvaceously thin with large breasts and small waist; and if they acted in a provocative manner. Conversely, the male characters were studied to see if they projected hyper masculine ideals in the form of possessing large muscles, masculine facial features and had aggressive facial expressions.

Keeping these examples in mind, the following questions were developed:

1. How many male and female characters did the anime have? (Largely male or largely female)⁸

⁸ Given that the two anime shows are ongoing and have several characters, this question has been inspected by looking at the whether there was a bias in representation of one gender (largely male or largely female representation)

2. What position did they occupy in the narrative? (central, secondary, and peripheral)
3. Did the characters exhibit sexual stereotypes? (women with large breasts and thin waists; men with muscles and aggressive facial features)

After developing these questions, the study performed a pilot analysis.

3.3.3. Pilot Analysis

The purpose of conducting a pilot study is to test whether the methodological tools selected is feasible for the research question.

A pilot study is referred to as a feasibility study that comprises ‘small-scale versions of the planned study, trial runs of planned methods, or miniature versions of the anticipated research ‘in order to ‘answer a methodological question(s) and to guide the development of the research plan’ (Prescott and Soeken, 1989, as mentioned in Kim, 2010, p. 191).

Conducting a pilot study was deemed to be valuable given the complexity of the anime shows at hand. The central purpose of the pilot study was to find out whether the methods selected namely, *Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)*, *Visual Discourse Analysis (VDA)*, can be properly applied to the data set. Thus, a total of eight anime episodes (the first four selected episodes from each anime⁹), along with their scripts were used for the pilot study. Upon performing the pilot analysis, it was found that the methodological approach was well suited. However, the pilot analysis identified another factor for understanding gender representations in anime. It was found that much of the gender performance of these characters was reflected in the manner in which they treated characters of i) the opposite gender and ii) same gender. Here, the dynamic shared between the men in the anime, the women in the anime, and the interaction between the opposite genders reflected important findings. Hence, another guiding question was added: “How was the relationship between anime characters depicted? (Relationship between male-female characters, male-male characters, & female-female characters)”. As the anime shows harbor a diverse range of characters, it was not possible to look at the relationship between all the characters. Instead, specific cases and examples have

⁹ For Attack on Titan (2013), episodes: 1, 4, 7, and 17 were selected. In a similar manner, the pilot analysis for Fruits Basket (2019) included episodes: 1, 2, 4, and 7.

been used to answer this question. Thus, the revised guiding questions included the following:

1. How many male and female characters did the anime have? (largely male or largely female?)
2. What position did they occupy in the narrative? (Central, Secondary, and Peripheral)
3. Did the characters exhibit sexual stereotypes? (women with large breasts and thin waists; men with muscles and aggressive facial features)
4. How was the relationship between anime characters? (Relationship between male-female characters, male-male characters, & female-female characters).

These guiding questions allow the study to look beyond the tools of Multimodal analysis and question other elements of gender portrayals. In using these revised guiding questions, the study attempts to cover all aspects of gender and progressed in conducting the research.

3.3.4. Analysis of the entire data set

After conducting the pilot analysis, the entire set of episodes from both anime shows were studied. The process of analysis was broken down to three main phases. In the first phase, the script was studied and relevant dialogues were jotted down for further analysis (see Appendix A). In the second phase, the episodes were watched and visual elements of the show were studied in accordance to the tools proposed by Machin & Mayr (2012). In the final phase, the findings from the first two stages were studied in addition to the guiding questions chosen by the study.

After using the tools of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Visual Discourse Analysis (VDA), the interpretations were critically studied and specific sections dedicated to the two anime shows were created. Three main sections were identified; the first section will look into the representations of gender in *Attack on Titan (2013)* with the subsections “*The ideal soldier*” and “*The disappearing Shonen woman: Filling the gap in the male characters’ lives*” were created. Following which, representations in of gender in *Fruits Basket (2013)* with the subsections, “*Women of Fruits Basket: The nurturer, the violent lover and the controlling leader*” and “*The Knight in Shining Armor: The ideal Shojo man*” were delved into. Lastly, the third section will use case studies to present the ways in which even in these two anime shows, there were nuanced and overlapping gender portrayals. Additionally, to support the findings of

the study, images of the characters have been presented in Appendix E¹⁰.

3.3. Credibility and ethics

Although the methodology ensured consistency in carrying out research, given that the study examined a rather complex topic, additional steps were taken to ensure credibility of the methodology. One of the ways in which this was done was by studying the limitations of performing qualitative research methods. Oftentimes, qualitative study is criticized for lacking scientific rigor (Noble and Smith, 2015). There is a tendency to view qualitative research as, merely, a collection of personal opinions. Wall et al. (2015) point out the fact that with qualitative research, there is an unconscious or conscious building of an ideological hegemony that can present biased findings. To solve this issue, researchers are always expected to be systematic and employ critical reflexivity that showcase the worldview of the researcher and study the text critically to present different viewpoints (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Wall et al., 2015). In order to tackle this, I found it necessary to position myself, as a researcher, whilst conducting the study.

Firstly, it would be valuable to say that I am a woman who also happens to be an avid consumer of anime. Both of these factors can, and did, have an impact on the research conducted. However, as a viewer, these anime shows were watched prior to making the decision of conducting research. My interest in this area stemmed from my academic pursuits in social sciences, generally, and gender studies, specifically. This field allowed me to rethink the content I consumed on a daily basis, and ultimately engineered my interest in this topic. Additionally, these personal biases were constantly checked throughout the conduction of the analysis. The presentation of the results chapter come with evidence, both in the form of relevant screenshots taken from the anime and dialogues, that acted as a justification for my observations. Furthermore, as the anime shows chosen were publicly accessible, there was no other ethical issues encountered while studying the show. Thus, referring to the steps presented by Noble & Smith (2015), there was a meticulous record keeping and presentation of the findings to ensure validity and credibility of the research.

¹⁰ Given that both the show combined had more than 50 characters, the Appendix will include pictures of all the characters mentioned in the paper.

Results and Discussion

This chapter will present the results from the analysis conducted. However, a few clarifications need to be made before mentioning the observations. The two anime shows were adopted and based on the manga of the same name. The production team of both the shows upheld the original storylines and matched the dialogues and images with their manga counterpart. Thus, in the study conducted the word, 'author', has also been used to refer to the creator of the shows. Furthermore, in order to answer the broader question at hand that looks at gender representations, the overall plot of the show is specified below.

At its core, the story of *Attack on Titan (2013)* is a socio-political commentary on human nature, powerful elites and bad governance. The anime show begins with in the land of *Eldia*, enclosed within the three walls of *Wall Maria*, *Wall Rose*, and *Wall Sina*. These three walls were built a thousand years ago by the Eldian government to protect the citizens from the *Titans* – man eating monsters. It is in the outmost wall, Wall Maria, that the protagonist, *Eren Yeager (m)*¹¹, and his friends, *Mikasa Ackerman (f)* and *Armin Arlert (m)*, reside in; and it is here where we, as an audience, get introduced to *Eren's* passion to defeat the *Titans* and venture out to a world they have been forced to retreat from for so many years. In a shocking turn of events, the first episode reveals that the walls that managed to protect the Eldian citizens has been broken down under the attack of Titans, and suddenly, Eren is forced to grow up quickly¹². He, and his friends, join the Survey Corps, the military force in Eldia comprising of team leaders who train Eren and other soldiers to fight the Titans. Further along the storyline, the Titans are revealed to, in fact, be Eldians under the control of the nation of Marley. The Marleyan government ran experiments on Eldians and, as a form of punishment, turned them into monsters. Essentially, the anime plot underscores a fight for power between the nations, Marley and Eldia. In a lot of ways, this power struggle is presented in a way that mimics real-life political struggles.

In contrast to the world of *Attack on Titan (2013)*, *Fruits Basket (2019)*¹³ deals with less

¹¹ The letters 'm' and 'f' stand for male and female respectively. While the study acknowledges that gender is a spectrum and not a binary, using these abbreviations will help in understanding anime's treatment of gender.

¹² The anime starts when *Eren (m)* is 16 years old.

¹³ The abbreviations 'AOT' and 'FB' are used to refer to *Attack on Titan (2013)* and *Fruits Basket (2019)*, respectively.

grotesque themes of family, love, and meaningful relationships. *Tohru Honda* (f), a 16-year-old high school orphan, ends up befriending the *Soma* family. Upon discovering that *Tohru* lives in a tent in the middle of the forest, the *Soma* cousins, *Yuki* (m) and *Shigure* (m) and *Kyo* (m), take her into the family in return for her doing household chores like cooking and cleaning. Eventually *Tohru* discovers the *Soma* family's secret that they are possessed by the zodiac spirits¹⁴. This possession, for the most part, is kept a secret from the rest of the world. Only when they are hugged by the opposite sex, they transform into their zodiac animals (*Kyo* into a cat, *Yuki* into a rat and *Shigure* into a dog). While the story begins with *Tohru*'s ambition to fulfill her late mother's dreams and aspirations of her achieving independence and success, this dream is pushed away when she starts living with the family. In an attempt to rid the *Soma* family from the curse of the Zodiac, *Tohru*'s mission becomes saving them from their own ill-fated endings.

The creators of the two shows, *Hajime Isayama* for *Attack on Titan* (2013) and *Natsuki Takaya* for *Fruits Basket* (2019), have distinct animation styles. Retaining popular Shonen anime themes of action and adventure, *Attack on Titan* (2013) is representative of the genre. Similarly, *Fruits Basket* (2019) falls in the Shojo category dealing with themes of romance and family. However, the aim of the research conducted is to find nuances and overlaps beyond these simplistic categories.

Additionally, when studying representations of gender, the gender of the authors responsible for the manga and anime, was also reflected on. Although it would be presumptuous to attest that the gender representations in the anime shows are directly related and are a result of the gender of the authors themselves (*Isayama* as a man and *Takaya* a woman), the paper acknowledges this fact throughout the process of analysis.

Thus, in order to discuss the findings in detail, three main sections have been created: "*Representation of gender in Attack on Titan*", "*Representation of gender in Fruits Basket*", "*Across the shows: Alternative representations of gender*". Each of these sections, then, come with subsections that explore the topic further.

¹⁴ There are 13 zodiac spirits and each of them relate to an animal counterpart. Thus, there are thirteen members in the *Soma* family - each representing a particular zodiac. This possession of the members by the zodiac spirit is later on revealed to be a curse.

4.1. Representation of Gender in Attack on Titan

The three main protagonists of the show namely, *Eren Yeager*, *Mikasa Ackerman*, and *Armin Arlert*, carry the show forward. Although these three characters are made to be the protagonists, much of the narrative rests on and around *Eren*. Eren is, oftentimes, seen to be the posterchild of the typical Shonen male protagonist. It is his desire to fight for humanity and join Survey Corps that brings together multiple storylines. Visually, he is always positioned in the center. He is determined, proactive, aggressive and almost always, reckless. It is his recklessness and its consequences that is a constant pattern over the course of the show. In fact, the other two protagonists, Mikasa and Armin, are often left to deal with those consequences. Although these characters are well-crafted in the sense that as an audience, we are introduced to their own storyline and purpose in the show, much of their personal narrative gets hidden in the shadows of Eren's aspirations. In the following sections, these character traits and dynamic between the different characters will be further discussed.

4.1.1. The ideal soldier

Upon observation, it was found out that as a show, *Attack on Titan (2013)*, made certain character traits 'ideal'. Understanding these ideal traits is important in tandem with if and how they differ between the male and female characters. The general findings of the analysis demonstrate that the ideal AOT soldier, male or female, is physically strong and capable with a 'go-getter' mentality. This largely stems from the fact that the premise of the show requires characters who are willing to sacrifice themselves to pave way for humanity. Thus, by employing the tools of the methodological approach, the study finds that there were certain ideals that are considered attractive. These characteristics change over the course of the show, for some characters, while others tend to retain most of their original traits.

In season 1, episode 4, the team leader, *Hange* (f), mentally makes a note of the different strengths and weaknesses of the members. Upon analysis, it was observed that the male characters were designed to be reckless, aggressive, determined and passionate. As the protagonist and the flagbearer of this trope, Eren propels and reproduces the narrative of the male hero ready to sacrifice his life to protect others. Other than Eren, *Reiner* (m), seems to be uphold a lot of traditional masculine ideals. He is strong, focused, and passionate. Through the show, his was complimented and considered as a standard with which the other characters were seen to make attempts to meet. The narrative was built such that any secondary or periphery character who was not on the same frequency or level of wanting to sacrifice

themselves were considered 'weak' and reprimanded over the same. In season 1, Episode 4, Eren's conflict with *Jean* (m) serves as a good example of this narrative. Jean expresses his want to escape the harsh life of Survey Corps in exchange for a comfortable life and gets shunned by Eren.

Eren: You've got soft enough in your head. Don't you think it's strange that we're training to fight Titans, just to end up farther from them?

Jean: Who cares? For my sake, I hope they keep this stupid system.

(Eren and Jean get into a fight)

Eren (thinks to himself): He is who I used to be. A ranting idiot who doesn't have control. But I'm different now. I'll use what I have learned.

(Eren defeats Jean by using a special technique)

Jean: What was that?!

Eren: The martial arts I went through a world of hurt to learn while you were screwing around. You think taking the easy way out, doing as you please, is reality? And you call yourself a soldier? (AOT, Ep. 4)

This interaction between Jean and Eren is very much representative of the ideal characteristics *Attack on Titan* (2013) reproduces. In Jean wanting to be part of a system that affords him a relatively comfortable lifestyle, we see that the characters themselves are aware of the sacrifice they are having to make. Here, Jean assumes a certain masculine ideal that is very much in *opposition* to Eren. In fact, here, Jean, fits the hardworking salaryman narrative (Chen, 2012; Dasgupta, 2000). In the first season, he is seen to consciously avoid the Survey Corps lifestyle that demands fighting the Titans. Instead, he strives for a life of stability and comfort. In this fictional world of AOT, he is rooting for the upper-class status. In contrast to this, Eren plays the role of the aggressive hero challenging status-quo.

In this specific scene, with Eren defeating him in the fight, emerging as the victorious, sacrificial soldier, we come to see how there is an active negation of the salaryman archetype (Chen, 2012; Dasgupta, 2000). The want of imagining a comfortable life by Jean and the tone used by Eren to connote his disregard for the same hints at Eren's superiority than the rest of the characters. This happens throughout the show for other characters like Armin, *Connie* (m), *Berthold* (m), and is largely observed when referring to the guiding question that looks at the

relationship between the male characters. Using *structural oppositions* of the determined and persistent soldier and the timid, weak companion, AOT sets the standard of being the desirable soldier.

For instance, Berthold, whose character is seen to be Reiner's closest friend and is positioned almost as a "side-kick" is seen dealing with his own insecurity of not being good enough. Reiner constantly mocks him for being less driven than him. There is definite comradery between them, but at the same time, Reiner takes on the lead in their relationship and this is also reflected in the visual positioning of the two characters with Reiner almost always placed in the foreground, with Berthold closely following him in the background (See Appendix C).

Reiner: Berthold, I've told you this before. You and I will be in different positions. So try thinking on your own for once.

Berthold: R-Right.

Reiner: You don't always have to wait for my signal.

Berthold: Yeah, I know.

Reiner: You're supposed to be the one with the greatest ability of all, yet you leave it to others when it matters. To be honest, I never thought you were reliable.

Berthold: I know.

Reiner: Up until now. We're ending this here, right? Keep up that attitude till you're with your beloved Annie. I bet even Annie would appreciate the one who rushes in to save her and mistake him for a prince, Even if it's you. And...

Christa, we'll save her no matter what" (AOT, Ep. 52)

This interaction between Berthold and Reiner, and Reiner's stress on "Even if it's you" suggests that Reiner has a certain dominance over Berthold. Furthermore, the line, "mistake him for a prince" is suggestive of how Berthold, ultimately, fails to live up to the expectation of a 'prince'. Here, we also see Berthold listening to Reiner without any hint of resistance. He does not confront or challenge him. His *silence* reflects his guilt of not being as physically strong as Reiner.

These set of idealistic characteristics were not just limited to the male characters. In

fact, for female characters, who also came to occupy a position of leadership and power, they had to uphold a certain level of being distant. The physically strong female characters were cold, impersonal, and distant. This narrative largely rested on the female protagonist, *Mikasa Ackerman* (f), and was furthered by other secondary characters like *Annie* (f) and *Ymir* (f).

What was refreshing to see was the fact that all these characters were very much aware of their strength and capabilities. In several instances, Mikasa announces to the rest of the members that she is strong, capable. She is seen to be the strongest of them all and is also compared to other male characters.

Armin (referring to Reiner): Mikasa is so strong I forgot that he is an exceptionally capable guy” (AOT, Ep. 17)

The female characters of Attack on Titan (2013) are not bystanders. In fact, the male-female ratio in the Survey Corps is almost equal. These characters are perky, aggressive and have more adult-like features, as pointed out by the scholarship (Shiokawa, 2009, as mentioned in Unser-Schultz, 2015). In another instance, whereby, a Reiner and Eren challenge Annie, we see the female characters fight back.

Reiner: (Reiner points to Annie) Hey, Eren. I think that slacker needs a lesson. Let us show her what a soldier should strive to be. (AOT, Ep. 4)

By using the words, “Let us show her what a soldier should strive to be”, Reiner essentially imposes a sense of authority over Annie whilst establishing what an ideal soldier ought to be like. If we were to look at this comment, in isolation, it would appear that there is a certain narrative of Reiner imposing his hyper-masculine self and taking on a dominant position. But, what unfolds, is Annie defeating Eren and Reiner in a matter of few seconds, establishing her capability as a fighter.

Using these instances, it was observed that the female characters of AOT are both physically strong and assertive, thereby overcoming the typical naïve, humble, female character archetype as identified by the scholarship. At the same time, for those female characters who go on to hold a position of power and leadership, they are seen to be reduced to just their strength.

Here, Mikasa's character upholds this narrative. She is seldom seen to express her emotions. She is distant, quiet, and reserved. In moments where a young kid expresses their admiration over Mikasa and wishes to get closer to her, Mikasa brushes it off. Her dynamic with those who look up to her is one in which she is constrained and showcases her emotionless persona. There are a lot of attempts on her part to keep her emotional side hidden.

The ideal female characters of AOT are physically strong, assertive, aggressive, and capable; but they are also emotionally stunted and reserved. This narrative resurfaces when *Christa (f)*, who was initially an amiable, friendly, and a heartwarming person, foregoes her emotions when she becomes the queen of Eldia. With her taking on a leadership position, there is an overnight shift in her character. She is suddenly emotionless and distant.

In this depiction, there is a certain masculine idea of strength that is pushed forth. For these characters to be strong, they are to fit into the masculine notion of strength - which is to be physically strong, smart, and intellectual. But at the same time, they also need to be cold, impersonal and repulsive of emotions. This is also largely reflected in the designing of the characters. By the final season, it becomes difficult to distinguish between the male and the female characters. In this sense, the sexual stereotypes of female characters having large breasts and thin waists don't apply in the character designs. Almost all the characters are clothed in one uniform. Both the male and female characters are shown with muscles. The male characters, barring Armin, sported short haircuts and sharp jawlines. Although the female characters had long hair and softer facial features in the early episodes, by the end of the fourth season, the female characters were drawn with short hair and harsher, stronger lines (See Appendix G). In this sense, the anime employs a process of de-feminizing their female characters.

While the show paints Mikasa (and other female characters) stronger in comparison to the rest, and in that, depicts assertive female characters who are no longer a witness to the Shonen hero's endeavors, much of this portrayal rests on an overall masculine narrative that for a female character to be desirable, she needs to lose her femininity. This repulsiveness to emotions is also openly discussed by the characters. In episode 7, the characters are seen to mourn over the loss of their friends in a battle between the Titans and the Survey Corps. Here, Mikasa is seen to say:

Mikasa: This isn't the time to be emotional (AOT, Ep. 7)

In Mikasa taking control of the situation, and assuming a position of leadership, she is seen to instruct people to 'toughen up'. Here, she also admits that she is strong and powerful. Thus, by employing the tools of *overlexicalization* and *word connotation*, we find that the language used by the characters stressed on the importance of being physically strong. This is not to say that female characters of *Attack on Titan (2013)* were never shown expressing concern or empathy. But their moments of empathy tended to be reserved for the male characters. With the next section, that deals with this dynamic between the male and female characters of AOT, this trope will be further explored.

4.1.2. The disappearing Shonen woman: Filling the gap in the male characters' lives

Napier (2005) introduces the concept of a "disappearing Shojo" - an instance where female characters are made to disappear in order to give effect to the story. Upon inspecting *Attack on Titan (2013)*, it was found that some of the pivotal moments and arcs in AOT's storyline stem from the death of female characters. The mere fact that the pattern of disappearance of female characters is not restricted to just the Shojo genre, stands as an example of the existing overlap between the two genres. Thus, even though the female characters of AOT break traditional stereotypes, embodying strength and assertion, the anime also reduces their role in the show.

One of the most important instances of this is in the first episode of season 1 where we witness the death of Eren's mother, *Carla (f)* in the hands of a female Titan. This loss fuels Eren's passion and is seen to be a recurring emotional drive for him. Interestingly, this trope is not limited to Eren but is also repeated over the course of the show for different characters. For example, in Season 2, Episode 28, when *Connie (m)* goes back to his hometown, he is met with a female Titan, who is his late mother. That incident, alone, including Connie's relationship with his mother, may not have been brought to light particularly in the show, but it did manage to be the start of a new story arc for the rest of the characters and the show, as a whole¹⁵.

Thus, it is important to recognize that although the disappearing Shonen women are usually secondary or peripheral characters, their disappearance is still relevant as they carry the

¹⁵ Connie finding his late mother as a Titan was an important story arc as we, as an audience, find out about the history of Titans and that they are Eldians. This was a moment of realization for the AOT characters that they were essentially not fighting the Titans but their own kind.

show forward. This recurring disappearance of these female characters give momentum to the narrative as it had a lot of emotions attached to it. The relatability quotient of AOT lies in stories of loss and injustice. However, this loss is largely rooted in the loss of the female characters. The pattern of making female characters disappear, through death or otherwise, and the loss experienced by the male characters' act as catalyst to the overarching narrative of the show.

Interestingly, the larger story of Eren and his passion to defeat the Titans also stems from the loss of a female character. Here, his late father Grisha's backstory is important because it is through him that Eren learns about the true history of Eldians. Grisha is revealed to be an Eldian who was enslaved in Marley. When the Marleyan government kills his younger sister, Grisha escapes Marley, fleeing to Eldia. Thus, his fight against the Marleyans, and thereby Eren's fight against the Titans, starts with the loss of two important female characters – Eren's mother, *Carla*, and *Eren's aunt*.

This loss of the female Shonen characters is seen to leave a gaping hole in the lives of the male characters. Although it leads them to be driven in the goals they wish to accomplish, the remaining female characters are seen to cater to that hole by taking on the role of a mother. For instance, Episode 1 establishes Carla's reliance on Mikasa to take care of Eren.

Carla: Eren!

(Eren runs away and Carla turns to Mikasa)

Carla: Mikasa, he's really reckless. When trouble comes, be sure to help each other out.

Mikasa: Yeah. (AOT, Ep. 1)

Here, we see that there was a transfer of responsibility from Eren's mother, Carla, to Mikasa. It is this responsibility that Mikasa is seen to carry forward throughout the show. Mikasa's character, despite being written as the strongest fighter, centers around Eren. This goes as far as her making decisions around Eren.

Mikasa: I'll go to the Military Police if you do. If you go to the Garrisons, so will I. You'll die an early death if I am not there for you.

Eren: I never asked for that. (AOT, Ep. 4)

This dialogue connotes two main things: Mikasa's decision to follow Eren and her using her strength as a tool to protect him. This trend takes place from the very first episode.

Bully 3: We will teach you a lesson.

(Mikasa runs into the fight)

Bully 2: M-Mikasa is with him!

Bully 1: It's no use! Run!

Eren: Hey, they ran after seeing me!

Armin: No, they ran after seeing Mikasa...Ouch... (AOT, Ep. 1)

In situations where Armin or Eren were bullied, Mikasa was seen to use her strength to scare away the bullies. However, as the show progressed, Mikasa's concerns began to be reserved for Eren alone. Although, Eren, Mikasa and Armin were seen as a trio in the early seasons of the show, Armin is seen to diverge from Eren's narrative. Mikasa, on the other hand, retains her original instinct to follow, protect and serve Eren. In this sense, she takes up the role of a mother.

The dichotomy in this portrayal --whereby her abilities fit a masculine notion of strength but her actions and decisions happen to mimic the role of a nurturer-- is both interesting and disappointing. There is a certain reduction in the representation of female characters of AOT whereby they are seen to be fit into other people's narratives. In that sense, being physically strong and assertive may suggest a change with which female representation in anime comes to function today, in comparison to the previous suggestions given by the existing scholarship, but at the same time, they do not completely forego traditional gender ideals.

4.2. Representation of Gender in Fruits Basket

Fruits Basket (2019) deals with centering the storyline around a female protagonist, Tohru, and majorly showcases a lot of female representation. Having said that, her personal story takes the backseat in the FB universe. She is propelling Soma Family's story by serving them. As an audience, we see very little of her aspirations and desires. The conversation she has with herself and the rest of the characters, particularly *Yuki* and *Kyo*, are very much inclined towards catering to the need of the Soma Family. The Soma family is a family of 14 members, the cousins including *Akito* (f), who is seen to take the position of God and she is the manager

of all the zodiacs. Each of the members come with their own past, storyline and struggles. The dynamic shared between these characters and Tohru have also been explored. In fact, in observing these secondary characters, like *Ayame (m)*, *Akito (f)*, and *Ritsu (m)*, the study finds out that several characters in the show are seen to break conventional gender roles. Additionally, as the male to female ratio is proportionate, in that the show does not harbor largely male or female characters but has equal representation, the dynamic between the male and female characters has yielded important observations.

In order to present these findings coherently, the following subsections have been created. Given that it was found that the female and male characters, barring a few, undertook opposing gender roles¹⁶, the subsections have been created in accordance to that difference. The first section, "*Women of Fruits Basket*" delves into Tohru's trajectory throughout the show, the way she saw herself, the language she used to describe herself and others. Furthermore, this section also inspects whether the rest of the female characters embody similar gender roles. In this regard, secondary characters like *Kagura (f)* and *Akito* was referred to.

The second subsection, "*Knight in the shining armor: The ideal Shojo man*" deals with the ways in which the male characters were designed and how they functioned in the storyline. It was observed that the two male leads, Yuki and Kyo, had opposing characteristics; and there was a recurring tendency of the show to showcase which characteristics were ideal and which were not; this was largely done through conversations between the characters and the way in which other secondary and peripheral characters treated Yuki and Kyo. Dissecting these conversations and mannerism, using the methodological tools selected, this section will probe into *Fruits Basket's* (2019) treatment of gender.

4.2.1. Women of Fruits Basket: The nurturer, the violent lover and the controlling leader.

The analysis of the gender representations of the female characters of FB yielded interesting results. For the most part, there was a tendency among the female characters to undertake and uphold traditional gender roles. They were the nurturers responsible for

¹⁶ By "opposing gender roles" the study means that the traits the male characters embodied were, for the most part, largely contrasted to the female characters. Thus, it was convenient to group the representation of male characters (and female characters) into subsections. Having said that, the paper acknowledges the existence of secondary and peripheral characters who have overlapping traits/characteristics. They have been discussed further down the chapter.

catering to the emotional and physiological needs of the male characters. In this regard, Tohru, the protagonist of the show, is the flagbearer of this narrative. Having said that, several secondary and peripheral characters in the show were also seen to be assertive and physically strong. However, their exercise of strength was almost always violent and irrational. Largely depicted in moments of conflict, these characters' strength was used to gain love from their male counterparts. Barring Tohru, this trope stays true for a lot of the peripheral characters as well.

Tohru is perpetually the 'caregiver'. She is the one responsible for cooking, cleaning and serving other characters, mainly the Soma cousins. Through the seasons, we witness close to no change in this narrative.

For instance, when the Soma family takes her in, *Shigure* (m) says:

Shigure: Tohru-kun, do you like chores? Like cooking and cleaning, for example?

Tohru: Er, yes, I do...

Shigure: Welcome to the Soma household!

Tohru: But, if I'm going to impose on you, please tell me the Soma rules and customs!

Yuki: Just be you, Honda-san, and live at your own pace (FB, Ep. 1)

In this dialogue, there is an underlying implication of the role Tohru is to take up for living in the Soma household. She is given the responsibility of serving them, taking care of their daily needs and keeping the house well-maintained. We also see Tohru asking them for 'rules' and 'instructions' that she should abide by. Her asking permission and, in return, gaining responsibility to take care of the house is manifested in her emergence as the caregiver. This comes off as surprising as the show begins by establishing Tohru as the determined, independent young girl who strives to live up to her own aspirations. What starts off as her journey to find her own footing transitions into her saving the three cousins from their own fate.

Tohru: The pain and anxiety that they hold in their heart, I hope I can wipe it all away someday (FB, Ep. 10)

She is also seen to further the “disappearing Shojo” narrative by filling the loss of the maternal figure in the Soma family. For instance, through flashbacks, we find Yuki’s scarred relationship with his mother. The absence of having someone who is there to take care of his needs manifests in him having a certain kind of co-dependent relationship with Tohru. Although one-sided, Tohru emerges as the nurturer who is responsible for healing the other members’ emotional turmoil. In this regard, food is used as a means of taking care of the members. Staying true to the idea that “A way to a man’s heart is through food”, Tohru was oftentimes found saying:

Tohru (to Kyo): Seeing you eat a proper meal makes me even happier, Kyo-kun.
(FB, Ep. 2)

This conversation gets reproduced multiple times throughout the show. Tohru’s maternalistic need to ensure that they are well-fed and healthy becomes her only source of happiness. So much so that the other characters also refer to her as “Belle”, as a reference to beauty and the beast fairytale.

Another pattern observed throughout the show is the constant monologue she seems to be having with herself. Much of that conversation revolves around what she presumes the other members think of her. Additionally, she is constantly striving towards winning their recognition. She is also obsessively fixated over her “shortcomings”.

Tohru: Could he have called me here to s-scold me for one of my many shortcomings?! (FB, Ep. 7)

In no instance does she see this situation problematic. In fact, she is constantly grateful for having the life she has in lieu of the three cousins.

Tohru (crying): It’s just that Hatori-san is so kind! I’m glad I met all of you. Even if I have the life I do now because I’m being used for something, I want to say thank you for it. The only thing I know I’ll never do is regret meeting Soma-kun and the others (FB, Ep. 7)

The sentence “being used for something” connotes that she is aware of the ways in which she is performing to serve the family. However, her stressing on the “Even if I have” supplemented with “I want to say thank you” indicates that she is at peace with that, and even happy. In conjunction with this, her demeanor is always apologetic and grateful. Every step of the way, she is seen to apologize for taking up space.

These scenes are also attached with a comedic element - mostly resting on the female characters (central, secondary, and peripheral). For instance, a recurring comedic scene used in FB showcases the relationship between Kagura and Kyo. Kagura is seen to possess an extreme personality whereby in moments when she is denied Kyo’s love, she ends up beating him violently (See Appendix C). She is made to be irrational when denied Kyo’s attention and love. Her character is built around her yearning for the male lead. In those instances, where she is not striving to accomplish Kyo’s love, she is portrayed similar to Tohru, serving the Soma family by catering to household chores.

Similar to the trope of the irrational female character who turns monstrous when denied love, Akito’s character was interesting to study. Akito takes the position of the ‘God’ in the anime. The zodiac curse stems from her imprisoning the Soma family for life. The bond between her and the Soma members’ rests with her having control over their lives. Thus, when Tohru enters the Soma family, she is seen to be threatened by her. In several instances, we also see her personally seeking Tohru out to make her leave the house. In many ways, Akito’s character proves a very valuable dualism. In her being a God, one could argue that the character assumes a position of power. At the same time, she is also painted to be the villain in the story. It is her control over the characters with the zodiac curse that Tohru is seen to fight. Thus, throughout the course of the anime, we see a certain structural opposition. The story develops using this tension between the two female characters - with Tohru representing the ‘good’ and Akito standing for the ‘evil’.

This tension also stays true for the peripheral characters. One of the main settings used in the show is the school which the characters attend. The classes were primarily occupied by girls and, interestingly, their conversation mostly revolved around Yuki. Groups were formed among the girls wherein they would establish rules that the rest of the girls had to maintain. These rules were designed so as to ensure that “prince Yuki” had a peaceful life. In this sense, the relationship between the female characters of the show was affected by how they treated

Yuki.

Ultimately, even though the show features a lot of female characters, the discourse and dialogue between them are always around the men in the anime. The following section, thus, inspects this and looks at the representation of gender of the male characters of *Fruits Basket (2019)*.

4.2.2. The knight in shining armor: The ideal Shojo man

As already established, even though *Fruits Basket (2019)* happens to be a Shojo anime known for female representation, much of the anime also revolves around the male leads, *Yuki* and *Kyo*, who take on the central stage as Tohru. The two characters have quite opposing traits; Yuki, who is referred to as the 'prince', is reserved, gentle and non-violent. On the other hand, Kyo is aggressive, arrogant and violent and is oftentimes painted as the misunderstood boy who has pure intentions but does not necessarily act on them. What was interesting is the kind of language the author used to showcase the dynamic between the two characters, Yuki and Kyo. In multiple instances, we see hints of what is made to appear ideal. This was, largely, propelled by the way in which the female characters (both primary and secondary) reacted around the male characters. Yuki was put up on a pedestal by the other female characters whilst Kyo was criticized.

In this sense, FB, similar to AOT, pushed certain character traits as ideal. To this extent, the simple fact that Yuki was retained as the male lead, and the romantic love interest to Tohru, showed that he rose to a certain notion of masculinity – one that broke away from the traditional ideals of the loud, hyper-masculine, aggressive protagonist who needs to be reckless in order to emerge victorious (which happens in the case of Shonen anime). In contrast, Kyo's character fits the aggressive narrative. He upheld the traditional masculine archetype, and in a lot of ways, the Shonen, idea of what a strong man is supposed to be. However, when we view the sampled chapters, we can see that he is never praised for his behaviors. The rest of the characters, especially Yuki, reprimands him and calls him childish for being unnecessarily aggressive. For instance, when Kyo realizes that Tohru was going to be staying in the Soma household, he gets furious.

Kyo: Don't make me sound creepy! And don't blame me. What the hell is she –a girl—doing here in the first place?!

Yuki: Be quiet. It's none of your business whether there's a girl in this house.

You're an outsider.

Kyo (breaks the table): Shut up!

(The table hits Tohru making her head bleed)

(Yuki slaps Kyo)

Yuki: I knew you were an idiot, but I didn't think you were this bad. Out of respect for the sheer depth of your idiocy, I'll do you a favor: I'll fight you seriously. Kyo...don't bore me.

In Yuki calling out Kyo's aggressive behavior, he uses the word 'idiot' repeatedly. Employing the tools of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study finds that there is a lot of stress, on part of Yuki, to establish that the violent actions of Kyo are not accepted. The only ones who are willing to accept his behavior are the female characters. In situations of conflict when *Kyo* causes damage, sometimes even to Tohru, Tohru is seen to never demand an apology. Instead, her inner monologue and conversation with Kyo is one in which she justifies and accepts his behavior.

Tohru: I wonder if Kyo-kun wants to beat Yuki-kun because he resents being tricked like he was in the old story. But I get the feeling that it would be invasive to ask him that. I think Kyo-san already hates me, anyway. It makes me a little sad. I finally got to meet the zodiac cat, and yet... (FB, Ep. 2)

However, Kyo's aggressive personality diminishes throughout the course of the show. It is with Tohru's company that he is seen to curb a lot of his anger.

Kyo (screams at Tohru): Don't say my name if you don't need anything!

Tohru: Okay!

Kyo (shocked and suddenly goes quiet): No, scratch that. It's fine. You can call my name without needing anything, and I don't mind if you hang around where I can see you, and if something pisses you off, you can hit me, like you did just now. (FB, Ep. 2)

Tohru: I think I'm beginning to understand Kyo-kun. He's a little awkward, but I'm sure he has a gentle heart.

In both these instances we see Tohru justifying his behavior. Furthermore, with increased input from Tohru to change Kyo's hot-tempered persona, the dynamic between Yuki and Kyo also changes with time. In season 1, their relationship was established as one where Kyo felt the need to constantly compete with Yuki. His intention was to be the last man standing, defeat Yuki and gain validation for his strength. They seldom interacted cordially. When this was observed by Tohru, she made it her goal to fix their broken relationship; and to a large extent, that worked.

As Tohru continues performing the role of the mediator, solving their personal issues and struggles, the male characters are seen to feel the need to protect her; even at the cost of Akito's disapproval. There are multiple moments when Tohru's safety is under question as Akito keeps the entire family under her possession. In these moments, the rest of the family members are always ready to protect her. Although the act of defying Akito is seen to be something that has definite consequences, the male members are ready to take that chance. This show of masculinity between them also stems in the ways in which they describe their own personal relationship with Tohru. For instance, we witness *Momiji (m)* and Kyo develop romantic feelings for Tohru which causes a lot of tension between the two characters. Both of them strive to gain Tohru's attention. This dynamic between the male characters and Tohru is retained throughout the whole show and is also seen to manifest in ways by which they compete amongst each other *for* Tohru. In return for Tohru's role as a caregiver, they develop a sense of possession over her.

Thus, we see that the role that the central characters take on in both the shows have elements of traditional gender characteristics. However, to end the conversation about the treatment of gender with them would be to oversimplify these portrayals and present half-complete pictures. Thus, the following section will use different case studies in the two shows to hint at alternative representation and overlaps between the two shows.

4.3. Across the two shows: Alternative representations, nuances and overlaps

As mentioned before, the study attempted to look at representations of gender in not just the central characters but also secondary and peripheral characters. In doing so, it was observed that both the anime shows had a diverse range of characters who steered away from traditional gender roles.

For instance, in the case of *Fruits Basket (2019)*, although the storyline demanded a lot

of interaction between *Tohru* and the three Sohma cousins, *Yuki*, *Kyo* and *Shigure*, some of the episodes also had other members of the family. Over the course of the show, we get to see that these characters perform and express their gender in their own way; and in that, challenge hegemonic narratives of gender representations. For one, *Ayame Soma* (m), who is possessed by the year of snake, is seen to have counter-hegemonic masculine traits. He has his own clothing store where he sells “romantic dresses”. In several instances, he is seen to try on the dresses. In doing so, he is also challenged by *Yuki*. For example, in Episode 28, *Yuki* questions him for wearing a dress that was ordered by a male client.

Yuki: You can use a man’s measurements?

Ayame: Of course! A man requested this.

Yuki: A man will wear it?

Ayame: Everyone has a secret garden hiding one, two, or even three things they cannot tell others. (FB, Ep. 28)

Ayame’s calm response to a mockery of his personality by *Yuki*, serves as his attempt to normalize his own gender performance. We see him trying to establish the fact that his gender performance is personal and unique. In fact, *Ayame*’s character is also seen to serve as a source of inspiration for other characters, particularly *Ritsu Soma* (m). *Ritsu* is introduced as an anxious and apologetic person who cross-dresses to feel comfortable. His tendency to constantly apologize is also rebuked by other characters in the anime.

Shigure: I see you still take after your mother; the way you panic so easily.

You’ll be a working adult soon, you know.

Ritsu: Yes, I’m sorry...

Shigure: Don’t you also feel like you should toughen up?

Ritsu: Y-Yes, of course! I want to have more confidence in myself. And one day, I hope to be overflowing with confidence, like *Aya-niisan*. (FB, Ep. 19)

This dialogue between *Ritsu* and *Shigure* suggests how *Ritsu* views himself and who he aspires to be. Although he chooses to wear women’s clothing to feel comfortable, he is seen to still struggle with his confidence. For instance, when *Tohru* learns about him, he apologizes and

says that he is embarrassed.

Shigure: Okay, Tohru-kun, here's the thing: Ritschan is male. But he's worn girls' clothes since he was young.

Tohru: Oh, I see. But why wear girls' clothes?

Ritsu: Wearing girls' clothes makes me feel calmer. At the beginning, I just wanted to try it. But once I realized I felt more at peace that way...I couldn't stop.

(Flashback to when they were younger)

Ritsu: Kagura-chan, can I have this? (referring to her dress)

Kagura: Huh? You're going to wear it?

Ritsu: I'm sorry. I'm embarrassed of myself.

Tohru: Please don't be! It suits you, really! You are beautiful! (FB, Ep. 19)

Here, we can see that there is an understanding amongst the members of the Soma household with regards to Ritsu's gender performance. Despite him struggling to find confidence, the rest of the character's attempt to support him. Over the course of the show, we find Tohru helping Ritsu in becoming more confident. In this sense, these men of the Soma family have been written to detach themselves from the traditional notion of the aggressive masculine archetype and do so whilst normalizing their own gender performance.

This is not exclusive for only the male characters. One of the pivotal secondary characters of show, Akito, is also seen to embody ambiguous gender roles. Through the first season, Akito's gender is not revealed. She is mostly seen to wear men's clothing. However, at the end of season 2, we find out Akito's history. She is a biologically female character with an abusive childhood. Her mother brought her up as a boy which eventually played a strong influence in her personal gender performance. In tracing this ambiguity through visual analysis, it was observed that the characters of FB do not uphold sexual stereotypes, as mentioned by the authorship (Reysen et al., 2017). The female characters do not come with large breasts and thin waists. Similarly, the male characters do not have muscles or facial hair. The anime accounts for them being prepubescent and draws them accordingly, steering away from these sexual stereotypes.

Having said that, we see Fruits Basket (2019) largely employing gender binaries. These

characters are referred as either male or female. This happens because of the binary gender logic of the zodiac spell. For instance, when Tohru hugs Ritsu, he turns into his zodiac animal as he is still recognized as a man. However, the existence of secondary characters like Ayame, Ritsu, and Akito is indicative of the anime potential to steer away from traditional portrayals.

Similarly, in the case of *Attack on Titan (2013)*, *Armin Arlert*, who is one of the protagonists of the show, is seen to essentially steer away from the aggressive, hyper masculine male lead. The way in which he is designed also plays into the “beautiful boy” trope. With long blonde hair, slim body, and androgynous features, his character was very much in opposition to *Eren’s*. To place Armin on a central stage and make him an important character, we see the anime’s attempt at depicting diverse masculine portrayals. Here, Armin’s performance of his masculinity is different from Eren’s but both of them are shown in the same capacity. Both are valid.

Thus, the two shows analyzed harbors a diverse range of characters with complex gender roles. While some of the central characters are seen to uphold traditional gender traits, there are others who steer away from them. But most importantly, the findings highlight the existing overlap across the two shows. The attempt to diversify the simplistic categories of anime, beyond Shojo and Shonen, is met with the fact that the existing archetypes of gender representations are not limited to a specific genre. They go beyond them. Whilst the study presents instances of both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic gender representations, the results bring to light how these gender representations are, indeed, layered and complicated.

Conclusion

5.1. Major Findings

Media scholarship (Denison, 2015; Berndt, 2010) highlights the vast scope of anime as a cultural product in that they constantly attempt to surpass simplistic categorizations. However, this view on anime has been limited to a few authors whilst others (Reysen et al., 2017; Bolton, 2018) hint at genre specific themes and characteristics. These scholars argue that as a genre, Shonen anime revolves around stories of adventure and war - and is largely propelled by an aggressive male hero. Contrarily, Shojo anime is led by a cheerful, optimistic, and a submissive female protagonist with stories centering around romance and family. The underlying issue that the paper confronts is this simplistic view of anime. To permanently attach some predetermined characteristics to the genres of Shojo and Shonen is to generalize anime as a whole. The aim of this paper has been to contest this viewpoint and bring out nuances in representations of gender in anime.

This is not to say that the chosen anime shows broke away from all hegemonic ideals. In fact, much of the analysis revealed the ways in which they existed. However, the study realizes that anime's treatment of gender is complex.

In the case of *Attack on Titan (2013)*, we see the show propel a set of ideal characteristics. These characteristics are, however, not limited to their gender. The female characters of the show are equally strong, independent and assertive as their male counterparts. Despite Eren being the protagonist of the show, as an audience, we are familiarized with the back stories of all the central and secondary characters. On the other hand, *Fruits Basket (2013)*, starts with the story of our protagonist, Tohru, but goes on to show how she serves as the mediator for the Soma household – giving light to the other characters. Having said that, this anime had more apparent distinctions between the gender roles assumed by the male and female central characters. With Tohru employing the role of a 'nurturer' for the rest of the male characters, her personal story gets overshadowed in the process. This stays true for almost all secondary and peripheral female characters who are shown in relation to a man. For instance, Kagura is introduced as Kyo's violent childhood friend who is striving for his love and attention. However, through dialogues between the male and female characters of the show, we come to find instances in which *Fruits Basket (2013)* steer away from traditional gender roles. This is largely in the case of male characters. Leading with Yuki, he is seen to be friendly, non-violent, and helpful all whilst being physically strong. He is not the quintessential

male hero who needs to display his physical strength to be strong. Other characters, like Ayame and Ritsu, challenge hegemonic masculine traits by embodying ambiguous gender roles. On the other hand, Kyo is portrayed as the reckless, aggressive and violent hero, ready to fight head-on. However, throughout the show, his recklessness gets shunned and, with help from Tohru, he is seen to become more responsible and kind. Ultimately, these findings highlight that the categories of Shojo and Shonen are, indeed, complicated.

For instance, the beautiful boy trope is no longer limited to just the Shojo genre. The narrative can be extended to Shonen; and characters like Armin stands as proof of that. Similarly, the aggressive Shonen hero may be propelled by Eren and Reiner. However, by having Kyo as a male lead in a popular Shojo anime means that this trope is not restricted to just Shonen. This extends to the female characters across the two shows. For one, Kagura stands as a character who is seen to challenge Kyo. Notwithstanding her intention to use violence to gain Kyo's love, her physical strength is acknowledged and feared. Contrarily, Mikasa, who is reiterated as one of the strongest members of the AOT, is also a nurturer. She adopts a role of the mother to Eren - similar to Tohru.

While the anime shows appear to be experimental in their representation of gender, which also goes to show the potential of anime to break out of simplistic categories, there are elements in the narrative that point out to the retention of traditional gender traits. For example, to make Mikasa a role model but then to propose a discourse whereby her existence revolves solely around Eren is reducing her character. Similarly, the female characters of *Fruits Basket (2013)*, oscillate between yearning for male attention or serving their needs and wants.

What is interesting is that these anime shows depict multiple instances whereby the characters break away from a lot of preconceived notions of gender but, in doing so, there is a lot of missed potential. This missed potential, although unfortunate, ultimately stands as a proof of the capabilities of anime to be a space for contesting gender roles. Anime, then, becomes a platform for investigating gender representations, making this an important topic for future research and deliberation.

5.2. Limitations and future use of this research

In concluding this study, it is also valuable to mention some of the limitations of the research conducted. The main limitation faced was the mere fact that the two anime shows were ongoing at the time of the analysis. While that in itself helped the thesis look at current representations of gender in the Japanese entertainment industry, it also left a space for new

research findings. This means that as the two shows develop through the seasons, there are existing possibilities for the characters to grow and assume alternate gender roles. Although tracing this growth would have helped in making additional claims about representations of gender, given the limited scope of the thesis, it was not possible to do so.

However, this limitation also points towards future research possibilities in anime scholarship. Going beyond these shows, it would be insightful to get the author's perspective on this topic. In exploring their background, we can then attempt to understand the intentions with which they created the characters. If we were to continue this discussion, there is a possibility of extending anime scholarship beyond looking at just the kind of gender roles assumed by anime character but rather investigate the ways by which the gender roles assumed by the authors themselves – and their position in the society – influences the kind of content they create and produce. The attempt of this study was to *go beyond* predetermined assumptions about gender representations, and in some ways the findings hinted at how they broke away from hegemonic roles of gender. However, this is a continuing conversation, which is important and necessary. Going beyond assumed positions of gender, and imagining alternative realities, is one of the ways by which we, as a society, can question accepted norms and roles.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A: Information about the movies.

	Title	Attack on Titan (AOT)	Fruits Basket (FB)
	Release date	April 7, 2013	April 6, 2019
	Director	Tetsurō Araki (#1–59)[a] Masashi Koizuka (#26–59) Yūichirō Hayashi (#60–) Jun Shishido (#60–)	Yoshihide Ibata
	Producer	Tetsuya Kinoshita Kensuke Tateishi Toshihiro Maeda Shin Furukawa (#1–25) Tomohito Nagase (#1–25) George Wada (#1–59) Tetsuya Endō (#26–49, 60–) Yasuyuki Nishiya (#26–) Sōya Kiyota (#50–59) Hitoshi Itō (#60–) Makoto Kimura (#60–)	TMS Entertainment
	Distributor	Funimation Entertainment, Manga Entertainment, Anime Limited, Wakanim.	Crunchyroll & Funimation Entertainment
	Synopsis	Under the attack of man-eating monsters, the remains of humanity are forced to retreat within three walls. Until one day, the walls get broken down by a titan. The show follows Eren Yeager, and his friends, Mikasa Ackerman and Armin Arlert, as they strive to defeat the titans and gain back their freedom.	Orphan, Tohrū Honda, is taken in by the Soma brothers, Yuki Soma, Kyo Soma, and Shigure Soma, when she finds out that they are cursed by the zodiac spirit. The zodiac curse turns them into their animal counterparts when hugged from the opposite sex. The story follows Tohrū as she strives to free the Somas from the curse.

Note: Information was collected from the *IMBd* and *Wikipedia* pages of the movie

APPENDIX B: List of the episodes chosen for the analysis along with the name of the episodes and the airing date

Anime Show	Episode number	Date	Name of the Episode
Attack on Titan (2013)	1	April 7, 2013	"To You, in 2000 Years: The Fall of Shiganshina, Part 1"
	4	April 28, 2013	"The Night of the Closing Ceremony: Humanity's Comeback, Part 2"
	7	May 19, 2013	"Small Blade: The Struggle for Trost, Part 3"
	17	August 4, 2013	"Female Titan: The 57 th Exterior Scouting Mission, Part 1"
	28	April 15, 2017	"Southwestward"
	29	April 22, 2017	"Soldier"
	35	June 3, 2017	"Children"
	42	August 20, 2018	"Reply"
	43	August 27, 2018	"Sin"
	49	October 15, 2018	"Night of the Battle to Retake the Wall"
	51	May 6, 2019	"Thunder Spears"
	52	May 13, 2019	"Descent"
	57	June 17, 2019	"That Day"
	65	January 18, 2021	"The War Hammer Titan"
70	February 22, 2021	"Deceiver"	
Fruits Basket (2019)	1	April 6, 2019	"I'm Going"
	2	April 13, 2019	"They're All Animals!"
	4	April 27, 2019	"Where Year Is She?"
	7	May 18, 2019	"Spring Comes"
	9	June 1, 2019	"Yuki was my first love"
	10	June 8, 2019	"It's Valentine's, After All"
	19	August 10, 2019	"I'm So Sorry!"
	21	August 24, 2019	"I Never Back Down from a Wave Fight"
	26	April 7, 2020	"Hello Again"
	33	May 26, 2020	"It's True, Isn't It?"
	35	June 9, 2020	"Who Are You?"
	36	June 16, 2020	"All Mine"
	39	July 7, 2020	"I Might as Well Die, Then..."
	40	July 14, 2020	"See You Later"
42	July 28, 2020	"You Will, I'm Sure"	

Note: Information was collected from the *IMDb* and *Wikipedia* pages of the movie

APPENDIX C: Examples of Visual Discourse Analysis



Figure 1: Screenshot taken by the author from the anime *Attack on Titan (2013)* - Episode 52

Detonations & Connotations	Objects	Settings	Salience
<p>Denotation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reiner and Berthold seem to be running ahead. • Reiner has a serious expression on his face. His eyes are sharp. • Berthold, on the other hand, is closely following Reiner with a neutral expression on his face. • Both of them are wearing their Survey Corps uniform. <p>Connotation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reiner's expression is fierce hinting at the seriousness of his words. • Berthold, on the other hand, takes the position of the listener. 	<p>Their uniform and fighting equipment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggesting that they are on duty. 	<p>The setting of this scene seems to be at an elevated level. We can see mountains behind them which suggests that they are not in the city – and hence away from population.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This also seems to be a late night/early morning scene as the sky is dark. 	<p>The focus of the scene is on Reiner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is reflective of Reiner and Berthold's relationship. Reiner is the leader and Berthold is his partner, closely behind him. • With Reiner placed in the foreground, facing the viewers directly, his dialogues are not just representative of his relationship with Berthold but also who he as a person – a resilient, strong leader.

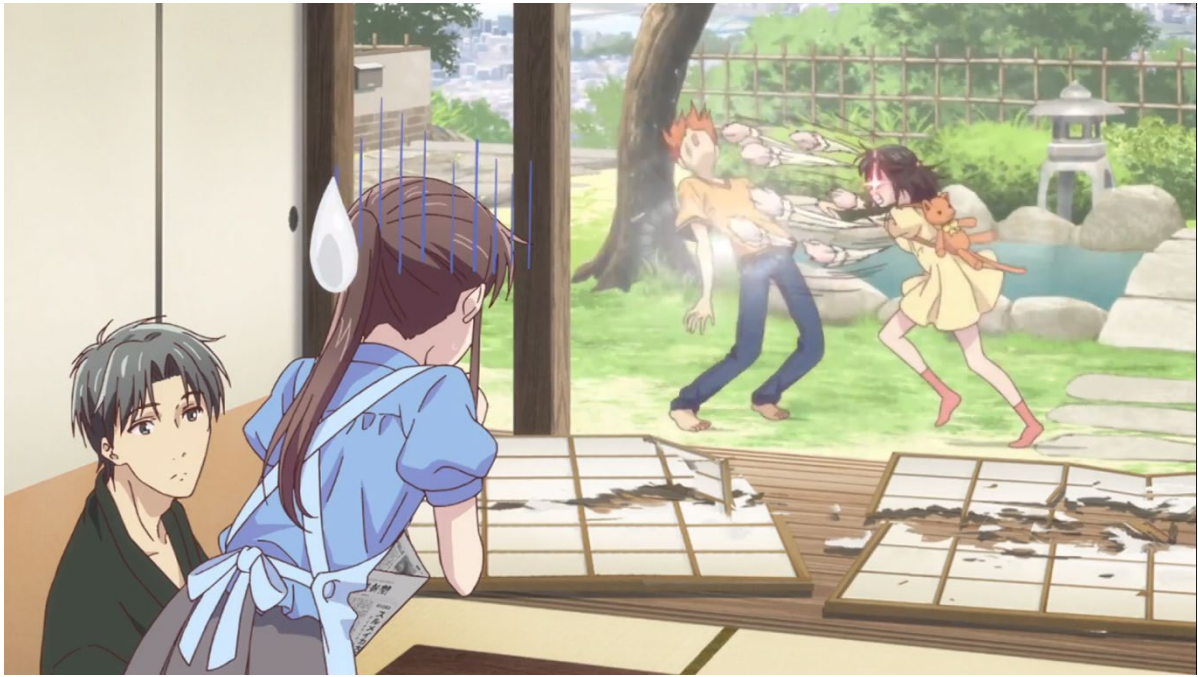


Figure 2. Screenshot taken by the author from the anime Fruits Basket (2019) from Episode 5, Season 1






Detonations & Connotations	Objects	Settings	Salience
<p>Denotation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tohru and Shigure in the living room of the Soma household. Shigure looks at Tohru surprised while Tohru stares at Kagura and Kyo. The fight between Kagura and Kyo is one-sided in that Kagura seems to be the only one fighting. There is also an animated bubble and vertical blue lines at the top of her head. Kagura's eyes are glowing red. We also see her gritting her teeth. <p>Connotation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> With Tohru's facing towards Kagura and Kyo, her facial expressions are not visible. However, she is bent forwards. The blue lines and the bubble also indicate her express and concern over Kyo and Kagura. Shigure's facial expression suggests that he is surprised at Tohru's reaction and not particularly at Kyo and Kagura. 	<p>The broken doors lying on the floor stands as the result of an aftermath of Kagura and Kyo's fight.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This also hints at Kagura's physical strength. <p>We see Tohru wearing an apron</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is indicative of her responsibility of the household chores. 	<p>This scene takes place in the Soma household.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> However, the broken doors separate Tohru and Shigure from Kagura and Kyo. 	<p>With Tohru and Shigure placed in the foreground, the focus of this particular scene seems to be on Tohru's surprise and worry about Kyo, who is in the background being beaten up by Kagura. However, with Tohru's attention directed at Kagura and Kyo, there is an equal amount of focus on Kyo's state.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kyo and Kagura are in the background but are placed in the centre of the image. Shigure and Tohru, on the other hand, are in the foreground but are placed towards the left of the image. With only Tohru's back being visible, she almost resembles the position of a viewer. Through her, our attention is also brought to Kagura and Kyo. Furthermore, the we see Kagura and Kyo clothed in similar colours – of orange and yellow. This indicates how both of them are seen as a pair.

-
- With Tohru meeting Kagura for the first time, she seems to be surprised. Shigure, on the other hand, has a relaxed expression which is suggestive of how Kagura's behaviour is known and accepted – in that it is not the first time Shigure is witnessing this.
 - Kagura is seen to be furious with her red eyes and gritted teeth indicating her anger at Kyo. Here, her facial expressions are distorted to the extent that appears almost as a monster.

- Tohru on the other hand is seen to be wearing a blue dress – a neutral colour; separating her from Kagura and Kyo.
-

APPENDIX D: Examples of Critical Discourse Analysis

Directory

Word connotation	
Overlexicalization	
Suppression	
Structural Opposition	
Lexical Choices	

Anime 1: Attack on Titan (2013)

Text	Analysis
<p>(Episode 1)</p> <p>Eren: Don't tell anyone I was crazy Eren: What?! Why would I be crying</p>	<p>Implying that he doesn't want anyone else to see him in a vulnerable position</p>
<p>Garrison 1: If it isn't Dr. Yeager's son... You've got spirit kid. Eren: S-so...you don't even have the will to fight them? Hannes: Nope. Eren: Why not?! Why don't you stop calling yourselves the Garrison and start calling yourselves the Wall Menders?!</p>	<p>Eren is established as the spirited hero who wants to save humanity. He is also seen to reprimand the Wall Menders by questioning their intentions. Here, we are also presented with the structural opposition of the willful spirit protagonist who is driven by his desire to protect humanity as against lazy Wall menders who are negligent about their duties.</p>
<p>Eren: What was that for? Carla: Your ears were red. You were lying. Mikasa helped you, didn't she?</p>	<p>Eren's attempt to hide the truth about who collected the logs implies his desire to be seen as the strong and responsible hero. However, with Carla interrogating him to find the truth, the anime establishes Eren and Mikasa's relationship with the latter helping him out at all times. This is made known to the viewer with the other characters (Carla, Armin) acknowledging Mikasa's actions.</p>
<p>Eren: Huh?! Stupid?! People who are content living like livestock are more stupid!</p>	<p>In Eren challenging the people of Eldia who are seen to be content with their lives, we see him question their lifestyle. Furthermore, the repetition of the word 'stupid' implies Eren establishing himself as superior than the others.</p>
<p>Carla: Eren...! Mikasa, he's really reckless. When trouble comes, be sure to help each other out. Mikasa: Yeah.</p>	<p>Carla is seen to constantly reiterate Eren's recklessness. In these moments, she also reuses the word 'help' which is directed at Mikasa. Mikasa replaces Carla and takes the role of a motherly figure in her relationship with Eren.</p>

Bully 3: M-Mikasa is with him!

Bully 1: It's no use! Run!

Eren: Hey, they ran after seeing me!

Armin: No, they ran after seeing Mikasa...

Ouch...

With the bullies running away after seeing Mikasa, and Armin acknowledging that, we are made to realize of her physical strength.

Eren, on the other hand, tries to claim how the bullies ran away from them when they saw him – hinting at his own strength.

However, in Armin refuting that, Mikasa's strength is, again, acknowledged.

Eren: I'll carry you and run!

Carla: Why can't you just listen to what I say for once?! Please just listen to me one last time! Mikasa!

Eren's sacrificial nature and recklessness is brought to light. Carla turns to Mikasa in an attempt to control Eren.

Armin (as the narrator): On that day, humanity remembered. We lived in fear of the Titans...And were disgraced to live in these cages we called walls.

As the narrator, Armin speaks to us, directly. By him calling the walls 'cages' we are familiarized with the plight of the Eldian citizens. This fear also validates Eren, and his friends', drive to protect humanity at all costs.

Anime 2: Fruits Basket (2019)

Text	Analysis
(Episode 1)	
Yuki: Lay off the inappropriate flirting. Are you alright Honda-san? Did my cousin pull any funny business?	In Yuki calling Shigure out by asking him to stop with the "inappropriate flirting", Shigure is introduced as a character who is known to be flirtatious to a fault.
Tohru: S-Soma Kun! Good morning!	
Motoko: Honda-san, what is the meaning of this?!	Motoko and the girls interrogate Tohru for coming to school with Yuki. There is an underlying implication of Yuki being at a higher inaccessible level than the other students at school. The repetition of 'never' and "prince Yuki" suggests that Tohru, or any other girl for that, matter do not deserve Yuki.
Tohru: U-um!	
Motoko: Allow me to introduce myself, I am Prince Yuki's second-year representative, Motoko Minagawa!	Furthermore, the existence of a club dedicated to protecting and loving Yuki indicates that he is put up on a pedestal by
Tohru: P-Prince Yuki...?	
Girl 1: Prince Yuki principles! Never steal prince's personal effects!	
Girl 2: Never invade the Prince's home!	
Girl 3: Never speak to the Prince without	

someone else present!

Motoko: “Prince Yuki” is the club dedicated to praising, loving, and protecting the prince who has graced our school with his presence. Honda-san! You have publicly signaled your revolt against our well-disciplined club! Now let’s have a clear explanation of why. You arrived at the school with Yuki today!

Passerby: Scary.

Motoko: Speak!

Girls: That’s right! What she said! I bet you’re getting a big head just because Yuki-kun was nice to you.

Tohru: I was so nervous. Soma-kun is too beautiful.

Uo: Right, you promised to pay your own tuition, didn’t you? That’s rough.

Hana: But you work almost daily. That shouldn’t be necessary just for tuition surely? (gives rice to Uo) Here, extra-large.

Uo: Thanks.

Tohru: I’d like to start living alone after I graduate, though, so I have to start saving now!

Tohru: I understand! That’s right, I’m going to live alone eventually anyway. This is a good chance for me to learn to endure that harsh life! Even if the housing I can afford is a tent that I bought on sale! Even if typhoons like the one a few days ago threatened to blow me away...Never give up! Anywhere can be home once you get used to it! Anywhere!

Yuki: Anyone would complain about pickled radishes in their curry.

Shigure: And you may be smart, but household stuff is the one thing you suck at.

the girls.

This hints at Tohru’s appreciation for Yuki. She is seen to get nervous around him which, again, reiterates him as someone who is superior and unapproachable than the rest.

Hana and Uo highlight Tohru’s hard-working personality. Tohru is also seen to be determined and eager to work hard. Additionally, she repeats how she wants to start living alone suggesting her desire to be independent.

Shigure’s justification for Yuki being bad at household stuff is that there is a lack of a woman in the Soma house. This is reflective of them upholding traditional gender roles in

Two slovenly men living alone really need a woman's help.

that they believe that women are supposed to be responsible for household chores.

Shigure: Tohru-kun, do you like chores? Like cooking and cleaning for example?

Tohru: Er...yes, I do....

Shigure: Welcome to the Soma household! Your room isn't aired out so open the window, yeah? Oh and I'd better get you a copy of the house key.

Tohru: No wait! I can't do this to you! It would be causing you too much trouble!

Yuki: We don't consider it trouble so just accept the offer. You don't have anywhere else to go anyway, right?

Tohru: But, if I'm going to impose on you, please tell me the Soma rules and customs!

There is a give-and-take policy between Tohru and the Soma family. She takes up the position of the caregiver in return for the shelter. We also witness her apologetic behavior where she profusely refuses this offer as she feels she would be burdensome to the family.

Kyo: Yo. You ready for your beating, rat-boy?

Yuki: How about you give it up already? Since you're weak.

Kyo: Why you. You're gonna get hurt if you think I am the same fighter I was last time! Here I come!

Kyo is presented as the ready-to-fight, violent character in opposition to Yuki who prefers to stay non-violent.

This exchange of dialogue between Yuki and Kyo is reflected in their relationship – one in which Kyo constantly strives to defeat Yuki in a fight.

Tohru: I...I'm sorry! Are you all right?! Um... (sees that Kyo turned into a cat)

Shigure: Oh!

Tohru: He turned.... into a cat

Yuki: That idiot

Tohru: I-I-Is this my fault?!

Tohru's tendency to apologize is again brought to light here.

Furthermore, Yuki's response to Kyo hints at how Kyo is reckless and in that an 'idiot'.

(Episode 2)

Tohru: As you can see, we patched things up. I have a feeling the days ahead will be fun!

At the end of each episode, we see Tohru taking up the role of the narrator. With the words "as you can see", she refers to us, the viewers. We also identify Tohru's attempt, and desire, to keep the Soma household together.

APPENDIX E: List of all the characters mentioned and their gender

Name of the anime	Character	Gender (male/female)
Attack on Titan (2013)	Eren	Male
	Mikasa	Female
	Armin	Male
	Reiner	Male
	Berthold	Male
	Jean	Male
	Hange	Female
	Christa	Female
	Annie	Female
	Ymir	Female
	Carla	Female
	Grisha	Male
	Connie	Male
	Fruits Basket (2019)	Tohru
Shigure		Male
Yuki		Male
Kyo		Male
Ayame		Male
Ritsu		Male
Momiji		Male
Kagura		Female
Akito		Female

APPENDIX F: Images of the characters mentioned in the study



Figure 1. Screenshot taken by the author of Eren in Attack on Titan (2013)



Figure 2. Screenshot taken by the author of Mikasa in Attack on Titan (2013)

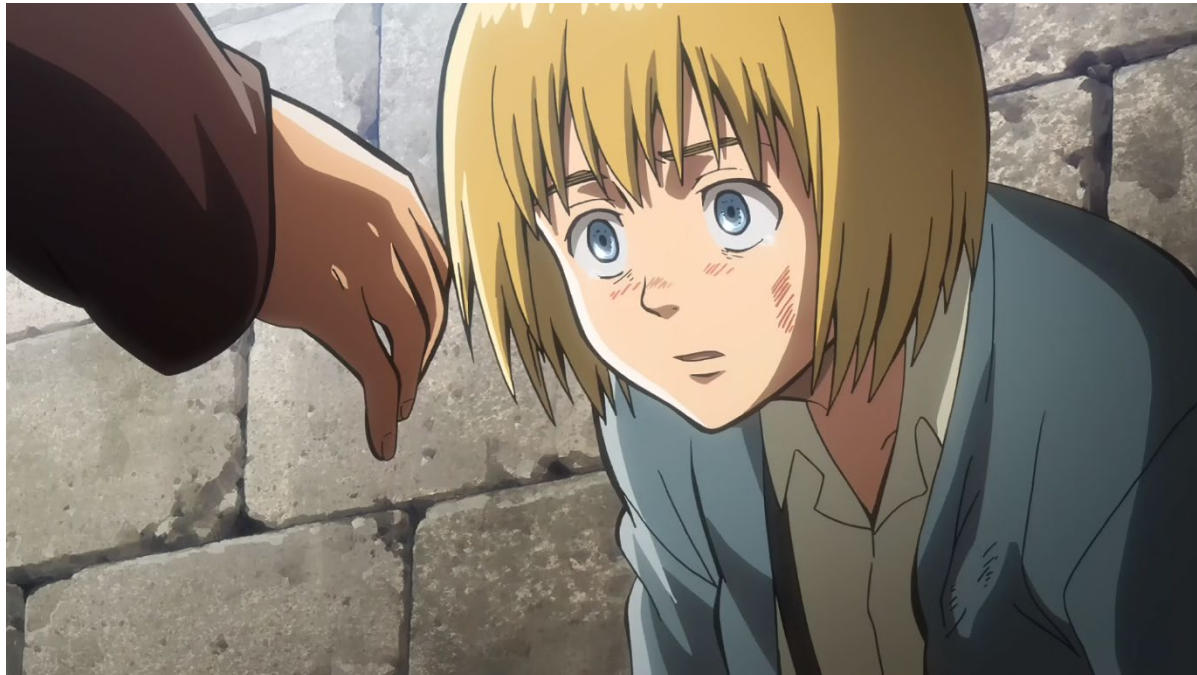


Figure 3. Screenshot taken by the author of Armin in Attack on Titan (2013)



Figure 4. Screenshot taken by the author of Reiner in Attack on Titan (2013)



Figure 5. Screenshot taken by the author of Berthold in Attack on Titan (2013)



Figure 6: Screenshot taken by the author of Annie in Attack on Titan (2013)



Figure 7. Screenshot taken by the author of Ymir in Attack on Titan (2013)



Figure 8. Screenshot taken by the author of Christa in Attack on Titan (2013)



Figure 9. Screenshot taken by the author of Jean in Attack on Titan (2013)



Figure 10. Screenshot taken by the author of Titans in Attack on Titan (2013)

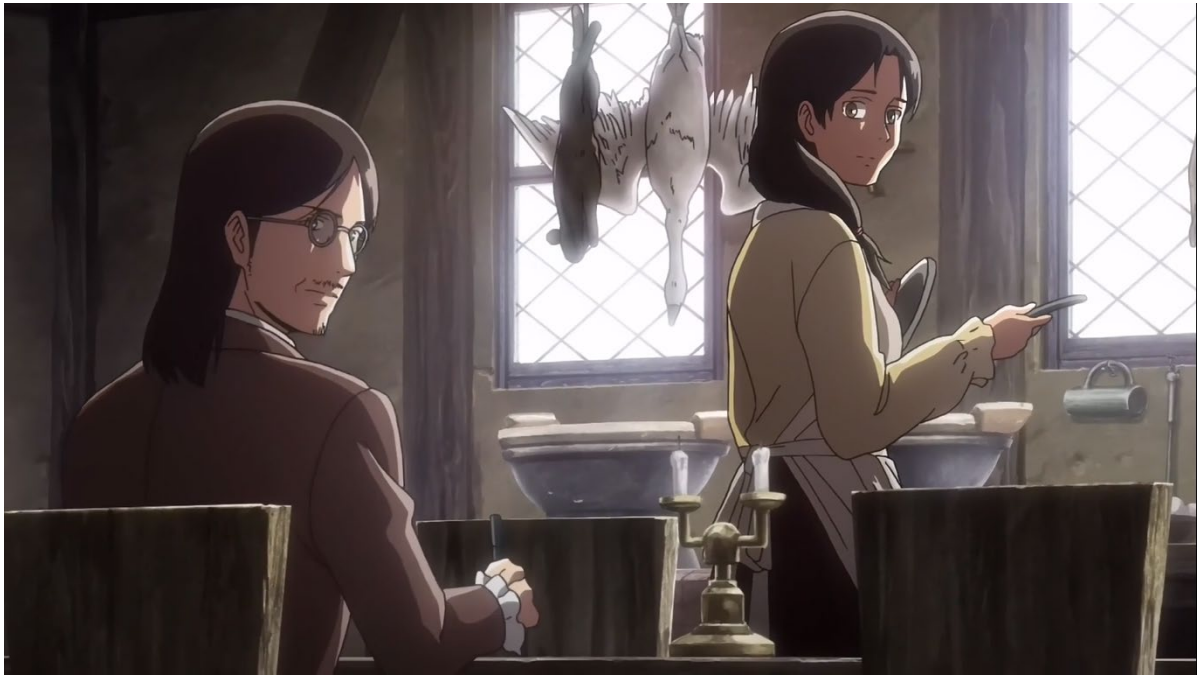


Figure 11. Screenshot taken by the author of Grisha (left) and Carla (right) in Attack on Titan (2013)



Figure 12. Screenshot taken by the author of Tohru Honda in *Fruits Basket* (2019)



Figure 13. Screenshot taken by the author of Yuki in *Fruits Basket* (2019)



Figure 14. Screenshot taken by the author of Kyo in *Fruits Basket* (2019)



Figure 15. Screenshot taken by the author of Shigure in *Fruits Basket* (2019)



Figure 16. Screenshot taken by the author of Kagura in *Fruits Basket* (2019)



Figure 17. Picture of Ayame in *Fruits Basket* (2019)



Figure 18. Screenshot taken by the author of Akito in *Fruits Basket* (2019)

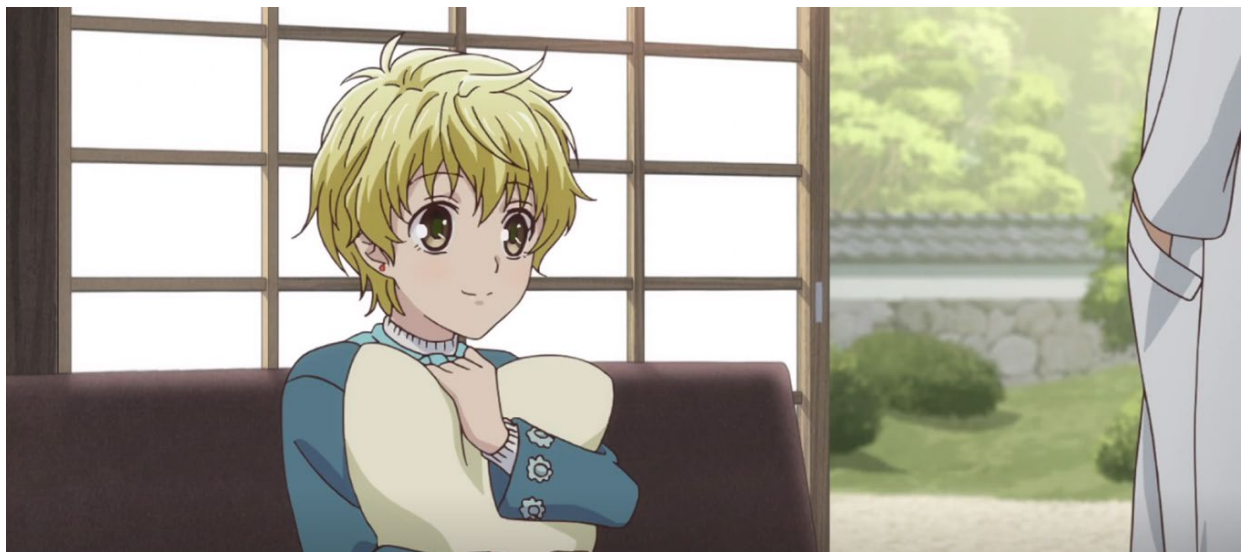


Figure 19. Screenshot taken by the author of Momiji in *Fruits Basket* (2019)

APPENDIX G: Change in Mikasa's appearance through the seasons



Figure 1. Screenshot taken by the author of Mikasa in Season 1 in Attack on Titan (2013)



Figure 2. Screenshot taken by the author of Mikasa in Season 4 in Attack on Titan (2013)