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# Walk Feminine, Talk Feminine: A Critical Textual Analysis of Femininities, Performances, and Representations

Reslie Cortes

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**WALK FEMININE, TALK FEMININE:  
A CRITICAL TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF  
FEMININITIES, PERFORMANCES,  
AND REPRESENTATIONS IN ANIME**

**by**

**RESLIE CORTES**

**B.A. COMMUNICATION STUDIES**

**THESIS**

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**Walk Feminine, Talk Feminine: A Critical Textual Analysis of Femininities,  
Performance, and Representation in Anime**

**By**

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**ABSTRACT**

In this study I examine the multiple ways in which femininity is performed and how those performances intersect with race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality in the anime *Bleach* and *Samurai Champloo*. I also interrogate the implications of these performances in relation to hegemonic discourses of Japanese femininity in the U.S. as submissive, deferent, incompetent, and domestic. As I explain in this document many performances of femininity reinforce this Orientalist ideology, however there are also performances that can alter viewers' perception of femininity and offer performances of gender identity that do not conform to hegemonic norms. By doing so, anime can shape U.S. perceptions of Japanese/Asian Americans, which impacts intercultural relationships.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In Japan the word *anime* (アニメ) refers to any animated media and cartoons. In the United States, anime specifically refers to Japanese cartoons (Price, 2001). Japan began exploring its production of anime in 1914 (Benesh-Liu, 2007). Producers completed and aired what is widely considered the first Japanese commercial animation, *Imokawa Mukuzo genkanban no maki* (芋川椋三玄関番の巻), in 1917 (Poitras, 2001).

At that time, this animated short was shown in theaters prior to the main feature film. The first feature-length anime film, *Momotarou: umi no shinpei* (桃太郎 海の神兵), did not debut until 1945. It was commissioned by the Japanese Navy in an effort to “lift the spirits of Japanese children” (Poitras, 2001, p. 49). The film tells the story of a bear, a pheasant, a monkey, and a dog who join the military and eventually liberate the island of Celebes from British rule. While this may reflect anti-Western sentiment, it is important to acknowledge how this medium was inspired and made possible through Western influence and animation technology. Japan has also been influenced by other Western cultural elements including the widespread use of English loan words (Kowner & Dalriot-Bul, 2008), the taking up of Blues (Inaba, 2012) and Hip Hop culture (Darling-Wolf, 2006), and even educational systems (Yamasaki, 2010).

With this historical background, I argue that anime is a text of intercultural communication. As Halualani and Nakayama (2010) contended, “...to say that culture is a site of struggle is to point to the process whereby competing interest (dominant structures and cultural communities) shape different representations of culture from different positionalities of power” (p. 6). Japanese produced anime is consumed in the

West; simultaneously, it is influenced by Western technology and animation style. Specifically, I approach anime as a way to symbolize how social and performative constructions of Japanese cultural and gender identities are repeatedly rearticulated and reimagined in the intersected webs of political, economic, and historical contexts. Additionally, Japanese anime has a significant influence in Asia today, being viewed in Malaysia, Korea, China, and other Asian countries (Wahab, Anuar, & Farhani, 2012). Beyond the influence of anime, Japan is considered the West of the Eastern world, holding enormous financial, technological, and political power (Lu, 2008). Thus, while Japan is influenced by the West, it also has a strong influence within Asia. As Treat (1996) argued, “It is now impossible to write or even conceive of ‘Japanese’ popular culture without involving . . . much of the rest of the world” (p. 13). This hybridity constitutes the intercultural text.

Despite the implications of anime as an intercultural media text, it has not frequently been examined in the field of intercultural communication. In this context, I argue for the critical examination of anime from the intercultural communication perspective. Bardhan (2011) has stated that “hybrid subjectivities are caught up in multiple transborder tensions that often split their senses of cultural identity...” (p. 43). In the context of Japan these tensions exist due to the materiality of colonial and colonized histories. As Shome and Hegde (2002) pointed out “the historical relation between Japan and Korea, and Japan’s economic stronghold in several parts of Asia, constitute important examples of colonial dominance produced by modernities outside of Euro/Anglo modernity.” (p. 256). This creates tensions between Japan and other Asian countries in addition to tensions between Japan and the West. Anime becomes a product of these

tensions which is then consumed abroad (Darling-Wolf, 2006). In order to examine the implications of these tensions of hybridity and consumption of anime in the U.S. an intercultural approach is critical.

I argue that a critical intercultural approach must consider the myriad ways in which cultural and gender identities are represented in media. Due to the hybrid tensions within Japanese cultures, anime often includes different races and ethnicities. Examining how these interracial and intercultural relationships are represented and negotiated addresses this gap in communication research. Bardhan (2011) maintained that media representations can offer “the discursive and representational practices that contest ... hegemonies.”(p. 45). Thus I consider the ways in which anime can offer representations of Japanese that disrupt current U.S. stereotypes of Japanese/Asian identity, particularly as it performed through gender.

While anime has a visually distinct style, globally acclaimed anime artists and directors such as Miyazaki Hayao and Takahata Isao were inspired by Walt Disney’s animation in their careers (Hu, 2010). Many of the anime features that are available in the United States were mostly produced by these two icons including *Spirited Away* (Miyazaki, 2003), *Ponyo* (Miyazaki, 2008), *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind* (Miyazaki, 1984), *My Neighbors the Yamadas* (Takahata, 1999), and *Grave of the Fireflies* (Takahata, 1988)(these are the English titles). These films are originally produced by Studio Ghibli but were licensed in English through Walt Disney, largely due to the support of John Lasseter (Chai, 2012). These affiliations have allowed anime to infiltrate mainstream U.S. entertainment. In turn, U.S. animators have been inspired by this genre. They have integrated and adopted visual aspects of anime. Series like *Avatar*:

*The Last Airbender* (Henrickson, 2007), *Teen Titans* (Murakami, 2012), and even *The Matrix* trilogy (Solomon, 2003) were all heavily influenced by anime style and themes. These anime-inspired American cartoons have been dubbed *Amerime* by the anime fan community (Akai-sama, 2008), and many fans often contest the authenticity of these inspired series. This contested space is indicative and reflective of the nature of anime as an intercultural communicative text in which fans view anime not only as a visual and artistic style but also as necessarily originating in Japan.

I argue that complex nuances of values or cultural artifacts are strategically erased or overlooked in U.S. licensed versions of anime. For example, the first anime imported into the United States was Osamu Tezuka's *Tetsuwan Atomu*. It debuted domestically and in Japan in 1963 (Schodt, 2007). NBC bought the rights to the series soon after its release in Japan and introduced a *localized* (O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013) English-dubbed version re-titled *Astro Boy* (Gibson, 2012). The series follows an atomic powered humanoid robot originally named *Atomu* (Atom), who is adopted by professor *Ochanomizu* and saves the world from various evils. However, the localized version changed the robot's name from Atomu, which had negative associations with atomic power and weapons, to Astro. This version obfuscated vestiges of the atomic powered technology celebrated in the original, sometimes excluding entire episodes in order to erase the theme of atomic power. Rather than a simple translation of the series, it has been modified extensively to silence the reminder of the atomic attack on Hiroshima during World War II (Gibson, 2012). This is an example of a localization process through which a product is modified to be marketable and profitable in a different culture. This produces a hybrid and intercultural text that combines culture of the original text and

negotiates meaning so that it is understood in the target culture (Darling-Wolf, 2006). Although the term localization was not coined until the 1980s (O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013, p. 26), some process of modification was in place at the time of *Astro Boy's* debut. In this case, U.S. producers considered citizen's sentiment towards atomic power in the post WWII moment. As a result, themes involving atomic power were erased. However, anime are transformed in more subtle ways, including linguistic and visual aspects. For instance, in several episodes of *Pokemon* an onigiri (お握り) or rice ball were exchanged for a hoagie, cracker, or sandwich (LaymanIX, 2011). While a U.S. audience may not be familiar with onigiri it is not inexplicable and could easily be introduced to U.S. viewers. For marketing purposes, the Japanese staple was replaced with American foods even when it did not fit the context of the story. These productions frequently replace complex Japanese language structures with overly simplified English language. This changes relational position between the characters and by extension may construct different understandings of Japanese culture and relationships.

Despite the implications of these changes, the U.S. anime fan population continues to grow. New technologies and production studios have introduced larger volumes and varieties of anime into the U.S., especially for those with internet access who can stream from specialty for-profit sites like *Crunchyroll*. They can also purchase corresponding figures, posters, key chains, and other collectables on these websites (Marketwired, 2013). Mainstream sites like Hulu and Netflix also offer anime streaming (Chozick, 2011). Free streaming sites like *AnimeGet.com* and *Anime-Sub.com* have emerged to meet audience demand at faster rates than licensed versions. Specialty stores

like *Best Buy* now have entire sections dedicated to anime (De La Cruz, 2004), while big box stores such as *Target* and *Walmart* have a small selection of current popular titles. Anime has been made available through U.S. television networks like *Adult Swim*. A number of anime television networks and producers emerged in the U.S. as well, with promises of high quality voice-overs (also known as dubs). *FUNimation* network, for instance, attained rights to *Dragon Ball Z* in 1994 and has been acquiring and producing dubbed anime on its own network ever since, currently boasting over 300 active titles (FUNimation).

Fans of anime in the United States have multiple reasons for their attraction to anime such as well-developed characters, interesting plots, and the quality of the art itself (Manes, 2005; Won, 2007). These motivations result in doing more than watching anime. Fans purchase related-merchandise and also participate in anime conventions held in the United States and abroad (Benesh-Liu, 2007), where they dress up as characters from their favorite series, meet other fans, and attend panels with well-known directors and voice actors. According to 2009 sales data, U.S. fans spent a total of \$2.420 billion on anime related character goods, but only \$306 million on actual DVDs (Anime News Network, 2011). The extent of available online anime content is evident in the vast gap between DVD and character good sales. As Ramasubramanian and Kornfield (2012) suggested, the high investment in character good sales indicates that anime fans are sufficiently engrossed in the world of the characters to engage in *parasocial maintenance behaviors*. This includes purchasing figures or clothing accessories in order to engage with their favorite character. These one-sided relationships the audience cultivates with the characters require maintenance behaviors in order to thrive. These performances

include sympathizing with the character, interaction with the character outside of viewing the anime, and imitation of (Japanese) mannerisms, gestures, and phrases. Therefore, while cultural understanding is not a primary motivation to view anime it may be an outcome of being engrossed in anime culture.

These mannerisms, phrases, gestures, and ways of being are products of Japanese culture. As a result, fans also broaden their interest of Japanese language, food, and clothing, and other cultural artifacts through anime (Fukunaga, 2006). Whereas some of these cultural artifacts are obfuscated or erased during the localization process depending on the, fan produced subtitled versions attempt to preserve these cultural elements. Many fan produced subtitled anime include cultural translations that explain the use of certain phrases, objects, pronouns, practices, superstitions, and relationships. Therefore, a fan's exposure to and understanding of Japanese culture will vary depending whether she or he watch licensed vs. fan-produced subtitles or dubs.

Performances of some characters in anime may not specifically illuminate the communicative practices of Japanese cultural tradition, authenticity, and identity. That is, they may not look Japanese appearance, engage in Japanese rituals, or demonstrate Japanese values (Lu, 2008). As Lu points out "A fascinating characteristic of anime is that it usually does not seem Japanese...Many anime feature Caucasian-looking characters either from the West, or Orientals with Western names" (p. 170-171). This lack of national identity has been coined *mukokuseki* (無国籍, statelessness) (Fennell D. , Liberato, Hayden, & Fujino, 2012; Iwabuchi, 2001). Lu argued that this is a deliberate choice on behalf of the creators in order to make Anime more attractive in the global

market. At the same time, there are clear indications of Japanese cultural elements being performed within various venues of anime. Making anime a potential vehicle for reproducing the construction of Japanese identities (Wahab & Anuar, 2012).

Artifacts such as language, clothing, food, games, job roles, technology, superstitions, and cultural norms are used to perform Japanese identity ways that connect anime to Japan. Manes (2005) noted, “This genre normally portrays a Japan that is not religiously oppressive in terms of human interactions, sex and violence, and therefore appears to be a refreshing paradigm for American youth” (p. 1). Cultural narratives such as myths, deities, and monsters are also prominent in many anime series (Papp, 2010). *Yokai* monsters from the Edo and Meiji period frequently make appearances in the series *Inuyasha* (Ikeda, 2004), *Natsume Yuujinchou* (Omori, 2008), *Mushishi* (Nagahama, 2007), *Kekkaishi* (Kodoma, 2011), among many others. Rituals such as funerals, rites of passage, and temple visits are also enacted in these series. These valuable sites of analysis should not be discounted as they have implications on U.S. fan’s perceptions of Japanese culture and performing of Japanese intersectional identity, which acknowledges the ways in which race, class, sex, gender, and ethnicity overlap and influence each other (Darling-Wolf, 2006).

A broad spectrum of Japanese gender, racial, and class identities are also performed within anime. However, fans also felt that racialized characters relied heavily on stereotypes such as *the coon*, *primitive*, and the *sexualized Latina* (Fennel, Liberato, Hayden & Fujino, 2012). Conversely, Lu (2009) suggested that Caucasian fans are more likely to misrecognize characters as Caucasian due to their non-Japanese appearance. While scholars (Bresnahan, Inoue, & Kagawa, 2006; Choo, 2008) argued that

performances of femininity render female bodies open to censure and abuse, some performances can disrupt these norms and stereotypes of femininity. Barber (2009) maintained that “manga and anime challenge the boundaries of gender, humanness, sexuality and class” through characters with multiple identities. Although anime may indeed present a challenge to these identity performances, research has mostly focused on same-sex romance (see for example: Miyake, 2013; Wood, 2013; Zanghellini, 2009). Meanwhile, little attention has been given to queer performances outside of sexual orientation even though many series include queer characters that engage in non-normative gender identities as a normal part of daily interactions (Bailey, 2012; Hiramoto, 2013).

Anime can provide alternative representations of (non-heteronormative) sexual and gender identities that counter U.S. narratives of queer identity performance, which often frames the body as a sexualized commodity (as is reflected in the research conducted) or a site of crises. This production of queer characters within anime is a valuable site of analysis as it provides a context for constructions of intersectional identities such as gender, sexuality, class, and race. Thus I investigate performances of queer identities in anime and how they manifest within intersections of race, class, and sex.

For this critical/cultural/qualitative inquiry, I use representations of feminine performance as a site of analysis to uncover and unpack the ways in which performative modes of femininity are discursively and materially articulated, defined, and imagined through both female and male characters in Japanese anime. As Eguchi (2011) argued, “the primary assumption of performativity emphasizes that gender is produced and

reproduced through the human body's ritual repetition of performing gender norms" (p. 24). Within this context of performativity, I interrogate how multiple forms of Japanese femininity are gendered, racialized, and classed in Japanese anime. To do so, I specifically chose to examine two discursive texts; *Bleach*, which includes a wide variety of male and female characters and *Samurai Champloo*, one of the only anime to have an indigenous Japanese main character. I raise two specific research questions to analyze the texts. They are: 1) how are cultural performances of Japanese femininity represented in anime? And: 2) how do anime's representations of Japanese femininities alter, shape, and /or reinforce hegemonic constructions of Asian/Japanese (American) stereotypes in the United States? By answering these questions, I intend to rearticulate if anime can offer a queer potentiality of counter-hegemonic gender performances.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

In this section I offer several theoretical concepts and frameworks that guide my study. These include: 1) current U.S. constructions of Japanese/Asian gender performance, 2) globalization and hybridity in Japan, and 3) queer of color critique. I use current U.S. constructions of Japanese/Asian gender performance as a basis for understanding how anime can reinforce, alter, and disrupt social and performative constructions of hegemonic femininity. I also utilize the queer of color critique to examine how performances of femininity in the anime are represented in the context of intersectionalities. Intersectionality is more than just the intersections of subject positions, rather:

[t]hick intersectionalities call for an exploration of the complex particularities of individuals' lives and identities associated with their race, class, gender, sexuality, and national locations by understanding their history and personhood in concrete time and space, and the interplay between individual subjectivity, personal agency, systemic arrangements, and structural forces. (Yep, 2010, p. 173).

Thus I examine femininity at the intersections of race, class, and ethnicity within historical and structural contexts.

### **U.S. Illusions of Japanese/Asian Stereotypes**

As I am conducting this study from the U.S. point of view, it is necessary to acknowledge how social and performative constructions of Japan cultural national identity are articulated in the United States. Primarily, the cultural diversity of East Asian countries is not fully recognized or acknowledged in the United States. This is due in part

to long standing Orientalist ideologies that conceptualize Eastern countries as homogenously mysterious, romantically extravagant, exotic, and primitive (Said, 1978). This results in understandings of Asia as a whole without distinguishing the differences between countries like Japan, China, Vietnam, Indonesia, or Thailand. These unique national and cultural identities are flattened to produce representations of Japanese/Asian Americans that are homogenous and essentialized. These representations shape U.S. ideas about Asian cultural identities without distinction. Thus, racialized and generalized Asian/American stereotypes have been applied to Japanese cultures (Toyosaki, 2011). I use the term *Japanese/Asians* in order to acknowledge this flattening while still recognizing my primary interest in Japan as a unique cultural identity. The constructions of gender performed in these anime have implications not only for U.S. understandings of Japan, but understanding of East Asia as well (Kang, 1993).

Perceptions and stereotypes of Japanese/Asian-Americans have shifted over the last few decades (Eguchi, 2013). This began with constructions of Chinese and Japanese immigrants as cheap labor for mines, railroads, and sugar plantations in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Lee, 1976). However, once the labor was no longer in demand, perceptions of the *yellow peril* dominated the U.S. imaginary (Kawai, 2005). This new construction of Asian immigrants was based on fears that their large numbers would dominate the United States and change their way of life. It also produced legislation that limited immigration based on ethnicity in the form of the Chinese Exclusion act in 1882 and later the Immigration and Nationality act in 1965 (Tung, 2010). Additionally, Japanese Americans were subject to legislative, physical, and social violences in the United States as a result of ostracization and internment camps during World War II (Martin & Nakayama, 2004).

They were also dispossessed of land property and banned from certain kinds of labor, limiting them financially (Hong, 2006). Therefore, Japanese Americans have been constructed in many different ways within the United States based on political and historical contexts.

Current mainstream U.S. perceptions of Japanese/Asians include a variety of classed, gendered, and sexed constructs that place Japanese/Asian bodies as inferior to and subordinated by White bodies (e.g., Eguchi, 2009; Eguchi & Starosta, 2012; Kang, 1993; Tajima, 1989; Toyosaki, 2011). In this way, stereotypes that appear to have positive qualities actually perpetuate racial inferiority. For example, the *model minority* stereotype places Japanese/Asian Americans as superior to other racial minorities through their diligence and company loyalty. This also causes Japanese/Asians to be perceived as hard working, smart, and nerdy but without the prestige or authority of White males in the professional setting (Eguchi & Starosta, 2012). While the same qualities could be used to describe the performance of *salariman* masculinity that reflects the hard-working white-collar employee in Japan (Hidaka, 2010), perceptions of this archetype are skewed when placed in the context of a predominantly White heteronormative masculine workspace (Eguchi & Starosta, 2012). Within this context the Japanese/Asian male is feminized through domestication (Nakayama, 2002).

While the Japanese/Asian male is domesticated and rendered asexual and submissive through model minority stereotypes (Eguchi & Starosta, 2012), perceptions of the Japanese/Asian female body are sexualized and commodified for the White heteromale gaze. This includes the *Lotus Blossom* and *Dragon Lady* archetypes, which are both sexualized in different ways (Washington, 2012). The *Dragon Lady*

stereotype constructs a witty female with unquenchable sexual appetite, but no need for emotional attachments (Kang, 1993). In contrast the lotus blossom, also known as the *geisha* when referring to Japanese women, presents the loyal and loving submissive yet sexualized female stereotype (Tajima, 1989). I reflect on these stereotypes as I reconsider the potential for anime to disrupt notions of Japanese/Asian femininity.

The (re)production of discourses surrounding Japanese/Asian stereotypes is made possible through globalization and immigration, but is brought into mainstream discourse through the use of media representations. Media representations of Japanese/Asians in the U.S remain few, resulting in these stereotypes to become even more prominent. Kawai (2005) argued that these representations make use of both the yellow peril and model minority stereotypes to construct these identities in media. These constructions continue to place Asian immigrants as a group that cannot properly assimilate into U.S. culture, “forever foreigners” (Suzuki, 2002, p. 117).

While Japanese-Americans are conceptualized in particular ways in the United States, these stereotypes do not reflect how Japanese construct their own identities. In order to disrupt U.S. stereotypes, it is important to consider these conceptualizations of Japanese identity from the context of Japan’s history and political endeavors. Perceptions of Japanese/Asians in the U.S. have changed over the last two centuries, but Japan has also negotiated and renegotiated its own cultural identity for many centuries (Darling-Wolf, 2006). These constructions of Japanese identity and performance must be considered within the global context as intercultural and international relations heavily influence them. Several waves of nationalism and globalism have impacted constructions of Japanese cultural identity.

Beginning in the 1960s the concept of *Nihonjinron*, otherwise referred to as Japaneseness, came into prominence (Wahab, Anuar, & Farhani, 2012). At the time Japan's uniqueness was emphasized in circulating literature by Nihonjinron theorists such as Takeo Doi and Chie Nakane, who emphasized hierarchical structures particular to Japan and concepts of interdependence (Payne, 2003). However, the concept itself has been of debate much earlier than that. After a samurai movement managed to overthrow the Tokugawa shogunate, the Meiji Restoration period in 1868 brought about a strong sense of nationalism because "the growing cultural import from the West represented a threat to the cultural identity of Japan" (Kowner & Dalot-Bul, 2008, p. 252). In addition to strong national sentiment, Japan strove to increase their lexicon in order to replace English loan words –or words frequently borrowed from another language-- that had been in use. However, this ban on English loan words was short lived and by 1947 English was being taught in most schools. Today, using English loan words are viewed as an acceptance of modernization, while retaining Japanese words is symbolic of upholding tradition. However, in today's historical and political context the traditional and the modern are not easily separated. Thus a dialectical approach to identity construction that disrupts binaries between traditional/modern and global/local is necessary within this globalized context (Eguchi, 2013).

More recently, Japanese cultural identity has been influenced by the United States through globalization. Through this intercultural contact and globalization, the U.S. has reinterpreted Japanese identity and constructed stereotypes. In turn, U.S. media create media representations that reify Japanese/Asian stereotypes as submissive and domestic through the model minority while simultaneously positioning them as the yellow peril.

However, Japanese also rearticulate and renegotiate their cultural identity within their media, such as anime. This cultural identity cannot be considered in isolation within a global context, as these constructions have been influenced in many ways through intercultural relationships with the West and other Asian countries (Darling-Wolf, 2006; Lu, 2008). Thus, I examine anime as a global text which combines attributes of both Japanese and U.S./Western culture. Lu also posited that “through its suggestion of racial mixing and cultural blurring, anime neutralizes itself, which reflects a broader national desire to enter an extra-territorial stage of development” (2008, p. 172).

From this intellectual space, I examine that the characters in anime represent hybrid identities that blur the lines between Japanese and Western culture. Characters that represent this hybridity shape our perceptions of intersectional Japanese identities, even if the objective of this ambiguity is to cultivate marketability on a global market. As anime viewership has risen in the U.S., so has the attention this genre has attracted from scholars over the last decade (e.g., Bresnahan, Inoue, & Kagawa, 2006; Cavallaro, 2012; Choo, 2008; Fennell, Liberato, Hayden, & Fujino, 2012; Fukunaga, 2006; Lu, 2008; Napier, 2001; Price, 2001; Ramasubramanian & Kornfield, 2012). Whether or not anime accurately depicts Japanese identity construction, it is an influential source of cultural information for U.S. viewers. With viewership of anime on the rise, how Japanese characters are depicted can have an impact on U.S. perceptions of Japanese identities that can potentially alter current stereotypes of yellow peril and the model minority.

As anime is increasingly globalized and internationalized, it becomes a vehicle for the performance of Japanese, gender, sexual, and racial identities. While some scholars claim that hyper-masculinity and hyper-femininity reign supreme within anime

(Bresnahan, Inoue, & Kagawa, 2006; Choo, 2008; Russell, 2008), I complicate this notion by examining alternative feminine performances that are made possible through intersectional identity performances.

### **Queer of Color Critique**

In this study I utilize queer of color critique in order to unpack the ways in which gender performance is constructed and performed. By examining these anime through a queer of color lens the performances of race and class can become more visible in the context of feminine performance. This is also important because of the many ambiguities present in anime. Anime has a tendency to imply certain relationships, gender, and sexual identities, rather than expressing them explicitly. I argue that the ambiguity of gender identities of such characters in Japanese anime explicate, elucidate, and elaborate queer potentiality of gender, sex, and sexuality. Queer of color critique allows me to fully examine the intersections of identity present in performances of femininity and establishes the ways in which identities do or do not conform to hegemonic expectations of liberal citizenship.

Queer critique alone would be insufficient to analyze this text because while it encompasses the fluidity of sexual and gender identities it fails to acknowledge the material realities of people of color as well as the importance of intersectionality (e.g, Alexander, 2004; Chávez, 2013; Eguchi, 2014; Eng, 2010; Ferguson, 2004; Johnson, 2005; Johnson 2013; Muñoz, 1999). As Johnson explained “[b]ecause much of queer theory critically interrogates notions of selfhood, agency and experience, it is often unable to accommodate the issues faced by gay and lesbians of color who come from ‘raced’ communities” (2005, p. 126-127). Meaning the material realities of queer of color

are very different from those perpetuated by mainstream discourses, which is dominated by white middle-class queers. Additionally, “queer critique favors universalizing views of sexuality over minoritizing ones” (Chávez, 2013). Therefore queer of color critique is necessary in order to examine diverse sexual identities that fall outside the margins.

Moreover, queer critique attempts to discursively discard the body, however not all bodies can be discursively castoff in this way as they are racially marked or even criminalized (Eng, 2010; Johnson , 2013). This is partly because of the performative aspects of race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, and gender. Alexander (2004) noted “[c]ultural performance refers to the systematized practices of people within a specified social context” (p. 503). Combining queer critique with historical materialism and women of color feminism addresses this gap. Women of color feminism addresses intersections of race, class, sex, and gender as well as how these identity positions are negotiated within the context of globalism and capitalism (Hong, 2006).

Historical materialism extends the critique of capitalism by addressing both material realities and the power relationships negotiated within the means of production (Ferguson, 2012). However, within queer of color critique we are aware that some of the Marxist formations do not address intersections of race, sex, gender, and ethnicity in the context of class (Muñoz, 1999). Together, these three constructs complement each other through material realities, queerness, and intersectional identity construction and performance. As I am looking at gender performances within an intercultural text queer of color critique is critically important as it allows me to examine anime intersectionally.

I use queer of color critique in order to address gender performance not only within the intersections of race, class, and ethnicity, but also within a historical and

political context that addresses capitalist-consumer relationships. “Queer of color critique approaches culture as a site that compels identifications with and antagonisms to the normative ideals promoted by the state and capital” (Ferguson, 2013, p.121) For these reasons, materialism and the body has been reclaimed within queer of color critique as it addresses the context of race, class, and ethnicity (e.g., Ahmed, 2012; Calafell & Moreman, 2010; Elbert, 1992; Ferguson, 2013; Yep, 2013).

Other mainstream discourses also allow some queers to be folded into society as laborers and consumers in ways that people of color cannot access (Eng, 2010). Instead, Eng argued that discourses created around non-heteronormative performances of gender and sexuality criminalizes people of color because their performance does not fit into the queer neo-liberal discourse. Using a queer of color critique is particularly important considering Lu’s (2008) argument that racial and ethnic identities are made less visible in anime. This closely parallels the critiques made of queer theory, making queer of color critique the ideal framework for this analysis.

### Chapter 3: Research Design and Procedures

In this study, I utilize critical textual analysis to identify how hegemony, ideology, and oppressive forces are reproduced in two Japanese anime texts: *Bleach* and *Samurai Champloo*. More specifically, critical textual analysis is used to “reveal a range of more-or-less ‘hidden’ and more-or-less politically motivated ideologies in texts or bodies of texts.” (Jeffries, 2007, p. 5). Critical textual analysis examines multiple elements in the text in order to uncover the reproduction of power relationships. These elements can be verbal or visual; therefore dialogue, scene composition, and the depictions of the body can all be analyzed as textual (Rose, 2012). Verbal text can be analyzed in a variety of ways, but here I focus on the ways in which race, class, and gender are performed through language use. Likewise, I look for visual elements that shed light on how race, class, and gender are performed. Thus, I examine whether femininity as performed through the words and visual elements of the text reinforce or disrupt hegemonic femininity within the context of race and class. Wodak and Meyers (2009) suggest that examining the (re)production of power, oppression, and privilege are foundational to understanding the text. I use critical textual analysis to uncover the ways in which these structures of power and gender hierarchies are performed in anime.

In order to analyze relationships of power and oppression in these two series, I consider verbal and visual texts as part of gender performance. I pay particular attention to the visual representation of the body and take up Jeffries’ (2007) conceptualization of the body as text to examine gender performance. She argued, “[w]omen have to deal with their material bodies on a daily basis” (p.18). Since femininity is performed partly through the body, her conceptualization of the body as text is useful, particularly because

anime is known for *fanservice*, which is a form of overtly sexual visual display. Furthermore, this allows me to make full use of queer of color material based critique. However, the assumption that only women deal with their material bodies fails to acknowledge the ascribed associations of femininity and the female body that allow for these material realities to exist. The feminine performing male body also receives this kind of scrutiny. Thus, it is not only the female body that experiences this materiality, but the feminine performing body, be it male or female. It would be impossible to address the gender performance in anime without taking into account the performance of the body itself. I also look to other visual and verbal performances of race, class, and gender to uncover the power structures being (re)produced or disrupted.

The analysis of data for this research followed several stages. The first viewing required the researcher to act as audience, without any note taking and focusing on the development of characters and story. The second viewing sought to identify themes. Subsequent viewings examined visual details and dialogue in depth. This method relied heavily on the theoretical frameworks I have chosen to code examine the text. In this case, I gave close attention to how queer of color performance and hybrid identities were represented to identify hegemonic relations of power. Specifically, I watched each episode of the series at least thrice. I examined anime in Japanese audio with fan-produced subtitles. The first time I viewed the series I positioned myself as a fan-girl, the second as an interested researcher, and during the third viewing I made notations regarding sites of interest in representation of Japanese identity. Fourth and fifth viewing of some episodes were sometimes necessary in order to observe the full scope of representations.

For this study I have chosen the two series *Bleach* and *Samurai Champloo* for a few reasons. Although *Bleach* does not have the same proliferation of submissive homogenous female characters, it has remained popular in the U.S. Despite the array of female characters performing masculine and a variety of feminine roles, *Bleach* still holds a spot in the top 10 most popular anime in the U.S. after 8 years on the air (Anime News Network). This provides contrast to Benesh-Liu's (2007) findings of female characters occupying very limited (gender) roles. It also has a near equal number of female and male characters, providing a counterexample of what Bresnahan, Inoue, and Kagawa argued, "male characters also outnumber female characters in animation" (2006, p. 208).

My second text is the series *Samurai Champloo*. It is important to include this series in my analysis because of the presence of a single character. The series is set in the Edo era of Japan and *Mugen* is a rogue warrior and *Ryukyu* native. This is a rare representation of a Japanese ethnic minority in popular media, as Ryukyu natives are considered direct descendants of a prehistoric population known as the Jomon people (Weiner, 1997). Since Ryukyu was annexed at the beginning of the Edo period, hostility arises between Mugen and the other characters he meets on the mainland. Another aspect that makes this series prime for analysis is the hybridity displayed in the aesthetic style of the show. Japan has positioned itself somewhere between Western Technology and Eastern tradition (Wahab, Anuar, & Farhani, 2012), and this series is exemplary of that positioning. Although it is set in Edo period Japan, complete with building and clothing of the period, it also has a hip-hop soundtrack and Mugen's style of fighting is redolent of contemporary breakdancing. The two series also take place in Japan, which is important

in examining performances of Japanese/Asian femininities. For these reasons I have selected these two series.

I briefly summarize the main plots of the two series in order to contextualize the gender performances of my analysis. *Bleach* follows Kurosaki Ichigo in his transformation from normal Japanese fifteen year old to a *shinigami* (死神, death god).

In order to protect his family from monsters called *hollows*, he accepts shinigami powers from Rukia, who is the shinigami in charge of his town. The very premise of this series relies on negotiating gender performance, as the female shinigami gives up her powers to the male protagonist. In an effort to save Ichigo and his family Rukia lends him some of her power, and Ichigo becomes a shinigami. Within in this story we have several female characters that enact a broad spectrum of gender performance as well as male characters that take up femininity.

The series *Samurai Champloo* does not delve into the supernatural as *Bleach* does and does not have as many female characters; however it provides a rare opportunity to examine a rarely shown identity in Japanese media, the indigenous Japanese. In addition to the Ryukyu native Mugen, the series *Samurai Champloo* follows *Fuu* and *Jin* on their journey across Japan. Fuu is a 15 year old girl who we first meet working at a *dango* (団子, a type of sweet Japanese dumpling) shop and Jin is a stoic skilled samurai with no master. Both Jin and Mugen become involved with the local authorities in the first episode and their willingness to display their swordsmanship gets them arrested. After Fuu rescues Mugen and Jin from the execution she bids them to help her find a samurai

who smells of sunflowers, which is actually her father. The two rogues reluctantly agree and the series follows the three strangers on their journey across Japan.

Before moving on to an analysis, I would like to reflect my entry into this study that emerges out of being a long time viewer of anime. My interest in anime as a subversive text existed long before my years in higher education. As a teenager I looked up to female characters in anime, especially the kind explored here, as my heroines. They were bold and they had the strength to act on their conviction even if it meant getting hurt or being rejected by their peers and society. Growing up in a very conservative Seventh-Day Adventist Puerto Rican family, these were qualities that I admired, yet were far out of reach. In my own reality I could not voice my own convictions, and felt stifled by the silence imposed on my gender by religious and ethnic tradition. As I grew older I decided I would go against the tradition of home-maker, and instead used my intellectual gifts and rebellion as a driving force to make my own way through college. Further along I turned to male and female characters as role models for gender performance in a time where I felt unsure about my own gender identity. Without these heroines I could not have motivated myself to get this far, and might not have realized my own potential or possibilities outside of a tradition of female silence and subjugation. This is why I critically approach to the subversive potential of anime, and especially non-normative performances of gender.

## Chapter 4: Analysis

While analyzing these two series (20 episodes of *Samurai Champloo* and 80 episodes of *Bleach*), I identified three salient patterns regarding the performance and possible implications of femininity. Firstly, that femininity is performed in different ways depending on intersections of race, class, ethnicity, and sex. Secondly, these performances of femininity can reinforce, alter, or disrupt hegemonic constructions of femininity. Lastly, these feminine performances have implications for the understanding of Japanese gender performance in the U.S. I begin this analysis by explaining how the multiple forms of femininity are constructed in anime.

### **Femininity Comes in Intersectional Forms**

Intersectional forms of femininity are clearly visualized in anime. They particularly relate to intersections of race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and class. These intersectional identifications operate in performances of femininity, and none of them works in isolation (e.g., Anzaldúa, 2012; Alexander, 2005; Calafell, 2012; Eguchi, 2014; Johnson, 2005; Muñoz, 1999). Performances of femininity can be accessed and assessed based on the ways in which class, race, and sex intersect. When speaking of access, I refer to the social and performative constructions of hegemonic femininity that is read as White, middle to upper-class, and female. However, all characters are not constructed in ways that allow access these traits. Instead, they are constructed as performing alternative femininities.

For example, both male and female anime characters are constructed to access different forms of femininity. Since the authenticity of femininity is mostly associated with the female body, female characters accentuate female body parts through their

physique or use of clothing. They can perform femininity through particular Japanese speaking styles and lexical choices. Characters in *Bleach* like Inoue Orihime (井上 織姫) and Hinamori Momo (雛森 桃) who refer to themselves using the pronoun *atashi* (私), instead of the commonly used *watashi* (also 私), are feminizing their speech in a deliberate and discursive manner. They use the feminine form of other phrases. Using polite registers of language over informal registers and even through pronunciation can achieve this. Different verb endings can be used with the same verb root to convey different levels of politeness or informality and become part of gender performance. Different verb endings include *-masu* (ます, polite), *-ru* (て, informal), or *ro* (ろ, informal and assertive form), among others. Polite forms are used to convey respect and deference, often used to speak to a superior. Feminine performing characters to emphasize humility and subservience also use it.

The use of politeness and discursive humility contrasts sharply with characters that use assertive informal language. This intensifies the perception of feminine submissiveness through polite language. Both male and female characters are represented to use the phrase *gomen* (御免) to apologize. However, you increase the level of politeness by using *gomen nasai* (御免なさい). Anime characters using this form reflect over-accommodation on behalf of the speaker. They are represented as subservient to the person they are apologizing to. Conversely, hypermasculine males in the series use a different phrase for apologizing, *warui* (悪い). This word translates to “bad”, but is often

interpreted as the English phrase “my bad”. This can be considered a rude way to apologize in Japanese, as it does not humble the user, positioning them on equal terms with the one they are apologizing to. In the contents of the two anime, I viewed this phrase was only used by hypermasculine male characters like Ichigo (*Bleach*) and Mugen (無幻) (*Samurai Champloo*). While female characters feminize their speech, male characters did not perform femininity this way in these two particular series.

This kind of feminine performances is clear when watching the anime in Japanese audio; however it is obscured in the English dubbed versions of the anime. This gender performance becomes lost in translation to some extent. The English production companies use different ways to convey this feminine performance, relying mostly on tone to convey these performances of gender. While it is difficult to increase politeness in English, some female characters in both English and Japanese versions use high-pitched and gentle voices to perform femininity through verbal cues. This positions them as *nonthreatening as if they are the model minority*. This can create some of the same subservience that using polite language can. It reifies female-bodied characters as being nurturing and male-deferent by using a gentle and high-pitched voice that highlights male characters masculine performance.

Conversely, masculinizing characters is attempted through other means. In the case of Mugen (*Samurai Champloo*), the English version has sprinkled his vocabulary with vulgarity to convey nonconformity to communication practices. This is one reason why some U.S. fans insist on subtitled anime rather than dubbed anime to preserve how characters perform their (gender, class, and social) identities in Japanese (Clements &

Mcarthy, 2006; Exner, 2012). While translating these gender performances does not fully imitate the original Japanese audio, U.S. producers still take these performances in to consideration. They reconstruct femininities and masculinities in ways that are understandable to a U.S. audience and reify these normative gender constructions.

Femininity can also be performed by what is left unsaid, or silence. Alternatively, some feminized bodies are given fewer and shorter lines. In *Bleach*, for example, Inoue Orihime is not a character with many lines even though she is a main character. If she is speaking at all it is usually to only call out to the male protagonist's name, "Kurosaki kun!" Likewise, Hinamori Momo is likely to call out "Aizen taicho!" another male character in the series. Other lines performed by these characters are usually to give the male characters encouragement, providing emotional support. Having their main lines reduced to calling out to the male characters creates an androcentric reality where these women are solely concerned with their male interests, and nothing else is important or even *worth saying*.

Heteronormative masculine characters are constructed as more complex characters and central to achieving the goals of the plot. Thus, these characters are privileged in the greater scheme of the series. The female characters can *only* rely on the strength of their male protectors. On the other hand, female characters have a tendency to have longer lines that are more varied, and fewer lines that are simply calling out a male character's name. While it may take on a different form, limited air time and speaking lines for female characters has also been criticized in U.S. television and film. In Lauzen's report on the top 100 films of 2013 she explained that only 15% of the films featured a female bodied protagonist (Lauzen, 2014). Even when female characters are

present they serve insignificant roles “[o]ften when women are included in a film for the sake of simply having a female in the film, she is relegated to a stock character role.” (Scheiner-Fishera & Russell III, 2012, p. 222). Further, many of the lines they deliver are andro-centric (centered and reflective of male experiences (Plumwood, 1997), revolving around the male-bodied characters of the show or film, as is the case with Orihime and Hinamori. This has led to the emergence of the *Bechdel Test*, created by feminist comic strip writer Alison Bechdel (2013). She argued for film to meet 3 requirements 1) there be at least 2 female characters 2) who talk to each other 3) about something other than a man. This guide has been taken up by feminist film critics (see for example: Burleigh, 2013; Dockterman, 2014; Guest, 2013).

Male characters who are represented to perform femininity do not necessarily share these qualities. Most male-feminine performances serve a comedic purpose, rather than the support role. These overt performances of male femininity are so excessively extravagant they verge on camp, as if they are not meant to be taken seriously (Rhyne, 2004). For example, *Bleach*'s Ishida Uryuu (石田 雨竜) appears to possess a kind of stoic masculine nature. However he engages in a hobby that does not fit this image. When Ichigo suddenly needs a stuffed lion mended he brings it to Inoue to fix. She tells him that she is unable to do so but refers him to the handy crafts club. Inoue takes him to see Ishida, who is quietly reading a book. Upon showing him the ripped lion Ishida is hesitant to engage in the task, but when he is goaded on by Ichigo he reveals a sewing kit and with a dramatic flourish threads a needle and stitches up the lion. In answer to being goaded on by Ichigo, Ishida not only mends the small rip but gives the stuffed lion a complete Victorian make-over. He dresses it in a pink frilly frock and blond curly wig.

This becomes even more comical because the stuffed lion is possessed by a masculinized soul, and this act feminizes both characters. Yuzu, the younger sister of Ichigo, is delighted by the makeover and decides to add the stuffed lion to her collection of dolls and teddy bears, further humiliating the stuffed lion. Male characters do not perform femininities in ways to consider femininity as part of their intersectional identity. Instead, femininity is used as a comedic gesture, preserving heteronormative masculinity by making the feminine performance the tagline of a joke.

Racialized femininity is represented in ways that limit or give access to particular gender performances. While the social construction of race is usually based on phenotype or physical appearance, *Bleach* also defines it by spiritual energy and abilities. While these spiritual energies may not fit the definition of race as a particular appearance, the fan community has conceptualized these spiritual cultural groups as “races” (Bleach Wiki). There are several races in the series that are divided by the kind of spiritual energy they possess instead of physical appearance alone. In the context of this series, spirituality is used as a way to gloss over racial conflict. Spiritual races are constructed through the use of particular spiritual skills and colorful auras. To non-human races these spiritual signatures are recognizable in ways that allow them to sense each other’s presence and determine whether they belong to the same spiritual race. This allows for races like Shinigami and Hollow monsters to sense each other across long distances. By and large the different spiritual races are always in conflict so that this recognition becomes a precursor to an inevitable battle. The different races include Shinigami, Humans, Vizoreds, Quincy, Plus, Hollows (further categorized as Normal, Arrancar, and

Espada), Fullbringer, and Bount. Each use a specific set of spiritual abilities and have differently colored energy signatures.

To demonstrate these spiritual interracial relationships I will briefly describe a few races' spiritual abilities, signatures, and planes of existence. Note that while there are tensions between the races they are all interconnected and essential to each other's survival and existence. There are three races that are constantly presented in the series, though other races are introduced for short periods. The main races in *Bleach* are Humans, Shinigami, and Hollows. Humans are beings tied to the physical world known as Gense (現世, the human world), and generally have such low spiritual ability that they are unable to recognize the other spiritual races or even see them. While they are unable to sense the other spiritual races they do have a spiritual signature that allows Hollows and Shinigami to trace them. After humans die, they can become souls that will pass onto Soul Society as a Plus. If they do not pass into the spiritual realm they will become Hollows, who are monsters that consume the souls of living humans. Alternatively, human souls who have passed onto Soul Society can eventually become Shinigami if they show spiritual gifts. Therefore, these races are interconnected such that the destruction of one race would destroy the other two races.

While humans live in Gense, Shinigami reside in Soul Society, and Hollows reside in a plane known as Las Noches (Spanish- the nights). Hollows go to Gense to hunt humans, in turn the Shinigami hunt Hollows. Although Hollow attacks have red energy signatures Shinigami's visual spiritual display comes in different colors depending on the person. This represents Hollows visually as a homogenous race.

Additionally human spiritual signatures do not manifest visually. Instead, Hollows sense them through smell, much like a predator senses its prey. The use of visual energy signatures reflects racialized hierarchical structures that give power to Shinigami, followed by Hollows, and lastly humans who are unable to protect themselves at all.

Notably, each of these spiritual races includes a range of material races such as Japanese/Asian, Black, Latino, and White characters. This emphasizes spiritual race rather than material race, particularly as conflicts arise between these spiritual races. However, material racialized body is performed through particular stereotypes despite the hypervisibility of spiritual race. At the same time, it can be difficult to discern people of color when most of the characters have Japanese names even when they do not appear to be like Japanese. Thus, material race is ambiguously constructed, making it impossible to construct a world where material interracial conflict and hierarchy occurs.

Spiritual race is privileged as a source of conflict, but material race is still performed in *Bleach*. Shihouin Yoruichi (四楓院 夜一), Tousen Kaname (東仙 要), Zarakhi Kenpachi (更木 剣八), Don Kanonji (ドン 観音寺), and Aikawa Rabu (羅武 ラブ)<sup>1</sup> are all *Bleach* characters with Japanese names, but they also have darker skin than the other characters. With the exception of Yoruichi they have hair that is worn in dreadlocks, afros, or cornrows, styles that mark them as racially Black rather than Japanese. There is a tension between being nominally marked as Japanese but materially constructed as black. This reifies the cultural myth of Japanese as homogenous. Multiple

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<sup>1</sup> Although the name Aikawa is Japanese, his given name is written in katakana. This suggests his given name is foreign rather than Japanese, and it is sometimes pronounced “Love”.

indigenous bodies are positioned as outsiders in Japan, occupying lower social and economic status than light-skinned Japanese (Weiner, 1997). By positioning spiritual race as a source of conflict, the creators are able to ignore material racial issues present in Japan.

This glosses over the complex histories of indigenous populations; which includes people with darker skin color and more coarse hair (Henshall, 1999; Hudson, 2007; Weiner, 1997). Additionally, from U.S. perspectives, these bodies are racially marked as Black rather than possibly indigenous because Japan is imagined as a homogenous nation. The Black bodies are marked as racially different from the Caucasian and Japanese appearing characters in the show, but in ways that provide no indigenous background as to how the character identifies. Further, some characters appearance does not match any human race we know of, like having pink hair or yellow eyes. This creates a blurring of racial identity and creates a fallacy of racial neutrality. Some bodies are unmistakable however, and this is emphasized by the ways in which they are able to access femininity. These bodies are racialized both materially and within their performances of gender (Eng, 2010; Johnson , 2013).

Additionally, all characters of color are not represented in the same way or access the same femininities. The Japanese creators of the series often represent Japanese characters as if they are White characters. As Eguchi and Starosta (2012) suggested, this phenomenon paradoxically reinforces the model minority stereotype as if Japanese/Asian Americans are like ‘honorary Whites.’ It also reflects Japanese international and intercultural desire for Westernization (Kowner & Daliot-Bul, 2008). By internalizing the globalized discourse of Japanese/American as the model minority, the creators have

closely aligned Japan with the West and White bodies in such a way that it can be convoluted to decipher which bodies are Japanese or White. By extension, this constructs other bodies of color as markedly different. This racialized difference is visualized and imagined even clearer through gender performance.

For example, women of color are limited to using their bodies to perform femininity. Although there are only a few women of color in *Bleach*, and none shown in *Samurai Champloo*, none of these female-bodied characters engage in polite or feminized speech. Instead Yoruichi, Mila Rose, and Harribel use informal and assertive language that is characterized as being more masculine. They have deeper voices than their light-skinned counterparts. While Orihime and Hinamori have light sweet voices, Yoruichi, Mila Rose, and Tier Harribel<sup>2</sup> speak at lower octaves, making their dark skin and racialized status more visible and denying them access to femininity through verbal cues. Additionally, they do not participate in emotionally supportive roles. Instead femininity can be expressed by the materially and discursively constructed body (Jefferies, 2007). Screen shots place emphasis on the thighs, breasts, and butt. In other instances, the shot pans upwards or downwards to facilitate appraisal of these bodies, offering them up for the viewers' evaluation. In anime the bodies of women of color are hypersexualized as they are in U.S. news, music videos, and film media (respectively: Aldama, 2003; Jhally, 1995; Mowatt, French, & Malebranche, 2013; Washington, 2012).

I observe that there are significantly less representations of women of color in Japanese anime. Yoruichi, Mila Rose, and Harribel are the only women of color portrayed in the first 12 seasons of *Bleach* –a total of 208 episodes. Mila Rose and

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<sup>2</sup> Mila Rose and Tier Harribel are not Japanese names and therefore katakana was not included

Harribel only appear in a handful of episodes as side characters with very few lines. Yoruichi is the only woman of color who is not a cameo or side character, leaving me with only one woman of color to fully analyze. While *Bleach* has representations of many different body types, from slender to curvy, however the few women of color all fall along the curvy (read sexy) end of the spectrum. These bodily traits are emphasized by revealing skin and the composition of the frame. These women of color are not constructed through delicate femininities. Combined with a lack of emotionally supportive roles or polite speech, this is their only shred of normative femininity, eroticizing the bodies of women of color. Mila Rose and Harribel belong to the same team of Espada, along with two other female characters. This collective of women show competition amongst themselves and little interest in performing normative gender roles. Rather than deferring to the male leader of the Espada, Mila Rose and her two companions are fiercely loyal to Harribel. In this way, the small collective resists the patriarchal standard of femininity, which requires them to defer to the male-bodied leader, by placing more importance on the authority of the female leader. This creates a small structure of resistance within the patriarchal system of the Arrancar.

Presenting men of color as hypermasculine further emphasizes the lack of access to multiple forms of femininity for people of color. At the same time, the Japanese and White male characters are constructing in such a way that they can perform femininity. The similarity between Western and Japanese gender performance is emphasized in ways that marks other bodies of color differentially. While Black, Hispanic, and Native men of color are represented in these anime, they are positioned as hyper-masculine and without hope of performing femininity. This hypermasculinity contrasts sharply with the

submissive femininity of Japanese and White characters and makes their normative feminine performances more visible. In *Bleach* there are a few men of color in the series with various parts. There are also a few male characters that appear to have ambiguous racial identities as they have Japanese names, but do not appear to be like Japanese.

Central to the plot of *Bleach* are Tousein Kaname and Sado Yasutora (茶渡 泰虎).

Tousein is shown with various hairstyles over the years, including an afro, dreadlocks, and cornrows. He is the only person of color at the rank of taicho in Soul Society. He is one of only two characters<sup>3</sup> to have a different-abled body, being born blind. This blindness transcends the physical level into the moral one when Tousein decides to follow the rogue shinigami and main antagonist Aizen Sousuke (藍染 惣右介). Not only is he constructed as racially ambiguous, but his material body positions him as less abled than the Caucasian and light-skinned Japanese bodies around him, and with questionable morals. While Sado is explicitly constructed as being Mexican-Japanese, Tousein's racial and ethnic identity is never explicit. This reproduces discourses of homogenous Japanese racial identities as it constructs him as an outsider and allows for the continual disavowal of racial struggle in Japan.

Another male of color is Sado, a Mexican-Japanese *mestizo*. His racial identity is constructed through the use of Spanish words as well as personal narratives. He frequently speaks about his upbringing in Mexico and his *abuelo* (Spanish- grandfather) as his source of inspiration in many battles. Additionally, his attacks and abilities are named in Spanish, racially marking his difference from other characters. These narratives

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<sup>3</sup> The other different-abled character is Kukkaku, discussed in the section on Monstrous Femininity.

and use of language position him as the only character in *Bleach* whose race and ethnicity is made explicitly visible. His body is fabricated in ways which cement this Mexican-Japanese identity. His large muscular hypermasculine body is constructed as threatening and imposing and he eventually increases his physical strength when Ichigo bestows him with his own spiritual energy without realizing it. Sado is usually seen with Orihime, and the performance of his hypermasculinity makes her normative femininity much more salient. He provides a target for her accommodating and subservient nature.

Like Sado, Mugen is defined by his racial and ethnic background. He is a Ryukyu native and in the very first episode explains that his complete disregard for societal norms is because he is from Ryukyu. To understand the implications of this statement it is important to put this into historical and political context. Ryukyu is one of the Okinawan islands, one of the last areas of Japan to be colonized by Korean and Chinese immigrant descendants (Weiner, 1997). Originally it was inhabited by indigenous Japanese populations. However, Korean and Chinese began to immigrate and push indigenous populations southward and Ryukyu was forcibly into a tributary relationship with China and then Japan in 1609; eventually it was annexed into Japan completely (Totman, 2005). Considering that *Samurai Champloo* is set in the Edo period (1603-1867), Mugen's emphasis on making this identity position hyper-visible is a political move on his part. While *Bleach* obfuscates the racial struggles in Japan, *Samurai Champloo* capitalizes on this identity position and colonial contexts. However, to the U.S. viewer who is not familiar with the history of Japan, his Ryukyu identity may seem irrelevant as this political and historical context is not explained.

While this representation of Japanese heterogeneity makes racial tensions in Japan visible, the gender performance of Mugen positions him within stereotypes of the primitive. Not only does Mugen perform hypermasculinity through a penchant for fighting, he is described as animalistic<sup>4</sup>, at times engaging in unnecessary violence. He has been known to stab random men with their own barbeque skewers to steal their food. At other times his violent acts are simply a rebellion against political and social structures. His bestial nature contrasts strongly against the feminine traits of the other two characters of the series. In contrast to Mugen's unbridled wildness, Jin (仁) is always calm and composed. Considering Mugen's bestiality is linked to his indigeneity, Jin's self-control is linked to being Japanese. However, Jin is feminized in comparison due to his quiet composed nature. In the societal construction of a U.S. viewer, performative aspects of hegemonic masculinity require one's ability to directly and assertively speak one's mind (Eguchi, 2009). Here Jin is feminized because, much like the submissive feminine performing females, he rarely ever speaks or expresses himself. In contrast, Mugen repeatedly says whatever is on his mind and expresses himself with confidence. Mugen's hypermasculine performance also makes Fuu's (風) performance of femininity become more visible, even if she does not always perform normative femininity. As a man of color he has no access to feminine performance because his dark body is already marked as threatening, masculine, and over-sexed (e.g., Darling-Wolf, 2006; Washington, 2012). His hypermasculine performance becomes a threat to White and Japanese-masculinity by positioning his attacks as unwarranted and inescapable. This reifies the de-facto criminalization of men of color (Cacho, 2012). At the same time this

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<sup>4</sup> In his character profile and show summary on the producer website Funimation.com

hyper-masculine performance emphasizes his heterosexuality as well (Eguchi, 2009). As Eguchi argued “Men must express themselves as heterosexual in order to be perceived as masculine.” (2009, p.194). Mugen is consistently represented as a notorious womanizer, going as far as fighting an entire underground organization in order to sleep with a girl. In comparison, Jin does not usually display any sexual desire, except for one episode, which positions him as feminine in contrast. Mugen’s oversexed performance and criminality become intertwined in ways that reify stereotypes of indigenous blood/sexual lust, placing femininity out of his reach.

While characters of color are marked racially, the same cannot be said of sexuality. Performances of sexual identities are represented through one character’s sexual or romantic relationships with other characters. However, sexual relationships are constructed solely through heterosexual male desire in *Samurai Champloo*, as is constructed through Mugen and Jin’s performances. Although Fuu becomes the object of desire on several occasions, sexual desire is never reciprocated. Between Mugen’s oversexed performance and Fuu’s complete lack thereof this anime reproduces a narrative of Asian masculine sexual desire and female sexlessness (Osella, 2012). On the other hand, *Bleach* expresses neither sexual nor romantic relationships. *Bleach* does not include any kind of romantic, marital, or sexual coupling. This series terminates the explicit sexual, romantic, reproductive, marital couple. The representations of this kind of relationship exist in the context of the widower. Kuchiki Byakuya, Shiba Isshin, and Ishida Ryuken are all male characters who have tragically lost their female spouses. Even in flashbacks the couples are very rarely shown in the same frame. Since the survivors are all male, this representation positions females as the weaker sex. It also

reduces the number of female characters. The frailty of femininity is constructed through the deaths of the female spouses and in turn the sullen, mourning, and stoic widowers are constructed as more masculine through their survival of tragedy. These are the explicitly defined romantic or sexual relationships; however, there are those that are implied in *Bleach*.

In *Bleach*, implied relationships come in both queer and heterosexual forms. At the same time, I argue that there are more same-sex couples rather than heterosexual couples. However, this ultimately reifies the ultimate heterosexual coupling between Ichigo and Orihime because they are the only heterosexual couple. The relationships between Yoruichi and Suì-Fēng, Ikkaku and Yumichika, Kyouraku and Ukitake are all same-sex relationships that are presented as very *strong friendships* but often lead to expressions of intense admiration. These characters are rarely seen without their partners and the constant visual coupling may imply something more than friendship. This coupling is visualized in other ways, such as Kyouraku and Ukitake's weapons which are the only dual blades in Soul Society. This emphasizes a belonging together that is unavoidable or fate, which is usually reserved for romantic coupling. Notably, these couplings also emphasize gender duality as there is always a more feminine and more masculine partner. Even in the implied context of these same-sex couples normative gender-roles are reproduced. The implied existence of these same-sex couples function to make the ultimate heterosexual couple more visible. The relationship between alpha-male and main protagonist Ichigo and ultra-feminine Orihime is more strongly implied than other couples. This is reflected in the very plot as half the series involves Ichigo trying to rescue Orihime. Despite of representations of potential same-sex couples, this particular

relationship is privileged through normative gender performance and a bond that is implied more strongly than others by positioning it central to the plot.

Performances of race and gender are also influenced by class identities. Class allows for some characters to access to different forms of femininity. Class is also made more complex in *Bleach* by the ranking system in Soul Society. Upward mobility is made possible by honing one's spiritual abilities and through Hollow combat. However, there are also the four noble houses to consider, whose status lie outside of this ranking system. These class identities become visible through the performance of race and gender.

For example, one character who exemplifies the ways in which gender and race performance intersects with class is Ayasegawa Yumichika (綾瀬川 弓親) from *Bleach*. He is a feminine performing Japanese shinigami with a girlish face, but was initially from one of the poorest districts of Soul Society. When we see him prior to becoming a shinigami he performs a very submissive and polite form of femininity. He is about to head to Seireitei when a young girl faints because she can feel the pressure of his spiritual energy<sup>5</sup>. He goes over to her and generously gives the girl some onigiri (おにぎり) assuring her that she will become strong. This kind of maternal instinct is how Yumichika is portrayed before becoming a shinigami. However, as a shinigami he embodies a catty type of femininity and becomes vain about his appearance and skills. He transforms from a submissive nurturing femininity to catty vanity by elevating his rank as a shinigami. Even the same character can access different kinds of femininity by changing their class status.

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<sup>5</sup> Bleach episode 32

This also happens with Suì-Fēng (碎蜂) taicho, a Chinese woman who belongs to a lower noble house that serves the Shihouin clan. Although in present times she is shown as the fierce and ruthless leader of the 2<sup>nd</sup> division and the special tactics force, flashbacks into her childhood show a very different personage. Here ethnicity and nationality become associated with class by positioning the Chinese house as inferior to the Japanese noble family. This reflects the way in which Chinese immigrants have been marginalized in Japanese society, discursively and materially placing them as inferior to Japanese (Weiner , 1997). A hundred years prior Suì-Fēng was shown to be a sweet girl who admired and strived to serve Shihouin Yoruichi, constantly seeking her approval. She becomes frustrated with her inability to protect her mistress properly and is eager to improve her skills for the sake of her mistress. Her meek and subservient performance of femininity is part of her class identity. Her position as a lower house requires femininity to be performed in particular ways in order to fulfill her duties in the Fēng family. This becomes apparent when she takes Yoruichi's position as taicho of the 2<sup>nd</sup> division, as both her class and gender performance change drastically. She is no longer sweet, submissive, deferent, or self-doubting. Instead, she becomes a capable and confident leader who strikes fear into the heart of enemies and foes alike. By shifting her class status her gender performance also experiences a shift. While she is able to access hierarchical power through this alternative feminine performance this upward mobility is also demonized.

The demonization of upward mobility through alternative feminine performance is enacted upon our first encounter with Suì-Fēng. We first meet Suì-Fēng taicho just prior to Kuchiki Rukia's imminent execution. Before the execution can transpire Rukia is

rescued *valiantly* by Ichigo and his Soul Society Allies. Sui-Fēng's sense of duty to the Gotei 13 causes her to react strongly to this betrayal. Insulted that some of her peers have sided with the humans and against the ruling of the Soul Society court she attacks Kiyone (清音). Although Kiyone is not involved with the intervention of the execution, she is the subordinate of one of Ichigo's allies. Within this hierarchical structure, Kiyone becomes responsible for her taicho's act of rebellion and must be punished. Sui-Fēng's attack is excessively cruel; as the younger shinigami lies on her back panting she grinds her foot into Kiyone's chest, cracking her ribs. In this scenario Sui-Fēng's upward mobility through alternative femininity is made inseparable from her unwarranted violence. While later portrayals of Sui-Fēng show a much softer side, this first impression of her cruel violence is automatically grafted onto her performance of alternative femininity. This also prompts questioning of whether women can/should actually be in power, as they can become atrociously vicious. While alternative femininities are present they are constructed in negative ways that demonize this gender performance.

In this section, I have identified the ways in which the complex intersections of identities shape constructions of femininity in *Bleach* and *Samurai Champloo*. Feminine performances occur within and in concert with performances of race/ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, class, and multiple social positionings. None of these identity representations can occur in isolation. In the following section, I will explicate that intersectional identity performances may reinforce, alter, and shape how we construct and understand feminine performance.

### **Reinforcing, Altering, and Shaping Perceptions of Femininity**

Reinforcing ideology about feminine performance involves reproducing messages of hegemonic femininity and rewarding those performances. At the same time, counter-hegemonic performances alter our perceptions of femininity by presenting alternative ways of being. These may not be rewarded in the same ways as normative femininity, and may be censured instead. Performing normative femininity can reap benefits for the user in the form of upward mobility or romantic relationships. By being ostracized from their communities and denied certain relationships, characters are constructed to reject normative performances of femininity.

### **Reinforcing hegemonic femininity**

By enacting femininity through the female body and in ways that maintain patriarchal standards of submissivity, nurturing, objectification, incompetence, and domesticity hegemonic femininity is reinforced. In the series *Bleach*, abilities and fighting styles are gendered, racialized, and classed. The types of abilities used, perfected, and preferred by different shinigami reflect different gendered performances, and therefore some basic knowledge of techniques is necessary. All shinigami (死神) have a special sword for defeating Hollows called a zanpakuto (斬魄刀), which involves a style of swordsmanship known as zanjutsu (斬術). However, there are other techniques and abilities that can be used in battles with Hollows or other shinigami. They will rely on either spiritual or physical attributes. These techniques can reflect masculine qualities of strength and power or feminine qualities of nurturing. The two techniques that reflect these gendered constructions are hadou (破道) and kaidou (回道). Hadou techniques can

be used for powerful physical attacks while kaidou is a specialized healing technique. The valuing of hadou over kaidou parallels the patriarchal structure of Soul Society. For the most part proficient hadou users are male-bodied, while kaidou users are female-bodied. While nurturing is considered a feminine attribute in the real world, kaidou uses up the user's spiritual energy as well. To heal another person literally requires giving up your own life force. Thus, femininity is symbolically performed through the use of kaidou because of the self-sacrifice performed by the user. This kind of sacrifice is not as valued in Soul Society as physical skills, and the reason becomes very upon realizing that most kaidou users are female.

The entire fourth division is dedicated to kaidou skills, and the majority of this force is female. This includes both taicho (隊長, commanding officer referred to as captain in the English version) Unohana Retsu (卯ノ花 烈), and fukutaicho (副隊長, 2<sup>nd</sup> in command referred to as vice-captain in the English version) Kotetsu Isane (虎徹 勇音). Unohana and Sui-Fēng are the only two female taichou and their gender performance contrast strongly and are reflected in the specialization of their divisions. Sui-Fēng performs an alternative femininity that is constructed as vicious, but her division is also in charge of secret tactics and punishment.

On the other hand, Unohana performs femininity through her use of kaidou. This characteristic is emphasized as most of the divisions do not have a specialization. To have a female taicho in one of the few divisions with a specialty defines her as that specialty such that Unohana is the embodiment of nurturing and healing. Instead, the

other male captains can enact multiple skills and personality traits and are not confined to their specific roles. This relegates, limits, and reduces Unohana taicho to the caretaker role. While she is unable to escape from the feminine role ascribed onto her female body, she uses her healing skills and femininity to rise to the rank of taicho. This emphasizes the ways in which normative femininity is rewarded in positive ways. Unohana's performance of normative femininity is celebrated and encouraged; conversely, Sui-Fēng is demonized in her upward mobility because of her gender performance.

Unohana's high rank in the medical division is not her only way of performing and reinforcing hegemonic femininity. She has a communication style that is consistently polite, even when she is actually invoking a threat. This style is an example of the carefully formed message. Scholars (e.g., Ishii, 1984; Miike 2003) have proposed in the *enryo-sasshi* model of communication. This model involves the encoding of a message that can be interpreted in multiple ways. This also requires subtlety so that neither party is humiliated. However, it symbolizes a performance of feminine submissivity, politeness, and subservience because it positions the speaker as nonconfrontational and accomodating. Unohana performs this kind of communication in ways that make her femininity more legible. From a U.S. perspective this form of communication is feminized because she does not express her self in a straight forward or confrontational manner. This cryptic way of speaking is associated with femininity. It reflects less skill in verbal expression. Combined with her devalued healing ability her feminine performance portrays female bodied characters as nurturing, polite, and subservient to their male counter-parts. This avowal of hegemonic femininity is then rewarded through upward

mobility as one of two female taicho. Constructing feminine conformity as rewarding performance encourages normative feminine performance outside of the anime.

Most of the female members of the 4<sup>th</sup> division (medical specialists) reinforce the notion of nurturing which continue to define the performative aspects of hegemonic femininity. Surprisingly, the first member we meet is a young male named Yamada Hanatarou (山田 花太郎). He is the male member of division 4 that has any lines or is named, so his performance of gender as a male body is important to consider. While this had the potential to subvert the notion of nurturing through the female body, Hanatarou performs his healing duties with little grace. Despite his seeming incompetence Hanatarou insists on helping to save Rukia. He is introduced as her gawky caretaker when Rukia is first imprisoned. He brings her food, cleans her cell, but is often pushed around and bullied by male characters in other divisions. While he tries to comfort her he is presented as mostly useless, with very little confidence in himself. However, he proves to be quite adept at healing when he helps Ichigo recover from very serious injuries. His skills and attributes do not have any value until Ichigo acknowledges him as a healer. He is portrayed as having no confidence, deferring to other male characters, and incompetent. The female members of the squad seem to have confidence in their own skills even if those skills are not valued within the larger social structure. This shows the ways in which the male body is somehow alien in this feminized squad, naturalizing femininity performed through the female body. While femininity is less valued than masculinity within this militaristic space, its role is to be supportive of the combative (read masculine) members of the 13 divisions. Simultaneously, femininity is valued far less when performed through the male body. It is made alien and unnatural in such a way

that female bodied performances of femininity appear to be capable and valued within the hierarchy of feminine performance.

While the majority of healers in *Bleach* are part of the 4<sup>th</sup> squad Orihime also possesses special healing abilities. Her abilities emerged due to her connection with the main character, Ichigo, all of her powers are possible because of Ichigo. Her power has 3 distinct parts including shielding, attacking, and healing by reversing time. However, she is most valued because of her healing ability and she rarely ever attacks anyone. Symbolically and materially, Ichigo gave her the ability to heal but restricted her fighting ability, binding her to feminine performance. Once again, the female role as caretaker and nurturer is emphasized.

While healing is feminized and undervalued within the context of the hetero-patriarchal Gotei 13, healing is not always constructed this way in the series. Two characters in *Bleach* also have healing abilities, but they are not of the spiritual variety. Nor is this healing performed through female bodies. Both Ishida Ryuken (石田竜弦) and Kurosaki Isshin (黒崎一心) are men who reside in Gense but neither is human. Isshin is a former shinigami and Ryuken is part of the race known as the Quincy. They are former combat specialists who currently own medical facilities. Although Ryuken owns runs and entire hospital and Isshin only runs a small clinic neither of these facilities have diminished value. Instead, they are seen as doctors, as professionals with prestige that is grafted on to their healing skills through masculinity. Thus, the gendered constructions of healing are valued differentially in ways that reinforce colonial

heteropatriarchy. Feminine healing requires self-sacrifice and nurturing while masculine healing invokes prestige. This places feminine healing in the role of the caretaker.

The role of caretaker and nurturer ties closely with another prevalent theme, domesticity. Through hegemonic constructions of feminine performance, femininity is relegated to the private sphere and the home, oftentimes exclusively. By performing a femininity inescapably tied to the home, these anime reproduce and reinforce the hegemonic domestication of femininity. In addition to being in charge of medical treatment, the 4<sup>th</sup> division also takes care of maintenance and housekeeping duties. This is attributed to their non-combat role in Soul Society, thus they specialize in unmarketable skills. The 4<sup>th</sup> division is given all the *other* jobs around Soul Society because they are *not as busy*. This runs parallel to the belief that domestic work is not *real* work. Instead, the value of a squad is determined through their ability to exterminate Hollows. Out of all of the divisions in Soul Society, this one has the least to offer in the completion of this task. However, they hold a support role, a feminine trait, to the more masculine divisions who do the *real work*. They only work in the field in order to give treatment or to take in injured shinigami. They clean up the mess left behind by shinigami, Hollows, humans, and whoever else was engaged in the fight and this is the extent of their usefulness. Not only does division 4 become the thankless nannies of Soul Society, they must do so quietly and as invisibly as possible. To get around Soul Society members use underground sewer systems. This reminds us that this set of skills is invisible, both literally and symbolically. In the literal sense you cannot see the inner workings of division 4's maintenance of Soul Society. Symbolically however, being unseen equates to

being unacknowledged in this world. This reproduces the idea of domesticity as undervalued compared to the hypervisibility of masculine performance through combat.

Individual characters are shown to perform domesticity. In the case of the Kurosaki (黒崎) family, which includes Ichigo (一護), Isshin (一心), Karin (夏梨), and Yuzu (遊子), only one character is ever seen as taking care of household duties. The youngest daughter of the Kurosaki family, Yuzu, is 11 at the start of the series and undertakes housecleaning and cooking duties in order to help out the family. Yuzu is usually shown handing off a homemade bento (弁当, Japanese lunch box) to her older siblings or carrying a ladle or broom. She speaks quietly in a high-pitched voice and her speaking manner is polite. Her siblings seem to take after the father, Isshin, and are rowdy and use informal speech even when it is inappropriate to do so. It is clear that Yuzu did not learn her communication style from her family, so her polite and submissive manner is normalized and naturalized. She never complains about her role in the family, instead she always looks happy while partaking in feminine domesticity. Meanwhile, Ichigo and Karin are usually out playing sports or having fun with friends and are not shown to contribute to the household in any way. Conversely, Yuzu is never shown outside of the home unless she is with her family. Thus, her femininity makes her literally homebound.

Hegemonic femininity is also reinforced through the female body as an object of hetero-patriarchal sexual desire. In *Samurai Champloo* Fuu is literally transformed into a sexualized object. She agrees to model for an ukiyoe (浮世絵) art print, popular during

the Edo period. Little by little the artist convinces her to show more and more of her skin for the sake of art, and she hesitantly agrees. Unbeknownst to her however, the artist is part of a smuggling circle which relies on his art prints and she is kidnapped shortly after the painting is completed. The prints of the girls he paints are displayed in a shop. Potential buyers could then select women they wanted to buy by purchasing the print. In this case, Fuu is turned into a sexual object by removing parts of her clothing very literally.

The sexualization of characters is further intensified depending on the character's awareness of their body. Matsumoto Rangiku (松本乱菊) (*Bleach*) is one of the frequent female characters who constantly bares all. Even though the shihakusho uniform she wears is a modest kind of clothing her breasts cannot be contained in them, leaving her cleavage to show constantly. As if to emphasize her breasts, she has a necklace that dips in between them. She draws attention her body by not acknowledging it. She does not seem concerned that her breasts are hypervisible, nor does she make any effort to hide them or move in ways that will not display them more intensely. At times she may bend over or lay back in ways that will make them more visible, but does not seem to have any motivation for doing so. This invites the audience (male) gaze to the female body and leaves her open for viewing.

The ways in which Fuu and Rangiku are sexualized are different from the sexualization of darker women of color. Characters like Yoruichi and Harribel show sexual intent within their nudity. They are constructed to be inherently sexual beings who are active agents in their performances of nudity. This is implied by how they take off

their clothes without prompting from other characters. Rangiku and Fuu however, seem oblivious to their sexual nature. Fuu is led to believe that she is a model for an art piece rather than a sexual painting, and Rangiku is seemingly unaware that she even has breasts. This perpetuates ideas of Japanese women lacking sexual desire (Osella, 2012). In contrast dark skinned women of color are constructed in ways that render them as permanently sexualized.

Another kind of baring and sexualization comes in the form of transformation. That is, characters that evolve or transform sometimes access new skills, attacks, and abilities. Along with evolution always comes a physical transformation in *Bleach* and other anime series as well. Physical transformation does not mean the body changes always, but oftentimes the clothing of the user does. Interestingly, there is a tendency for the transformation of female powers to bare more skin than male characters. As male characters that evolve often get more clothing and cover up instead. Ichigo for example dons a long black jacket in his evolved form. Another male character, Abarai Renji (阿散井 恋次) has an evolved form that adds a heavy red fur mantle. Female characters, on the other hand, become sexualized beings in their transformation. A sexualization that negates whatever abilities and skills they may have because the attention of the audience is drawn to the female body instead of skill.

A good example transformative sexualization is Nelliel Tu Odelschwanck (*Bleach*), a highly evolved Hollow known as an Espada (Spanish- spear) which is given to the top ten Arrancar (Spanish- to rip off). When we first meet Nelliel she appears to be a small child of ambiguous sex, but it turns out that she has lost her memories of being an

Arrancar. When faced with protecting Ichigo and his friends she regains her memories of being an Arrancar. At that moment she transforms into her evolved form, a beautiful busty female with flowing aqua colored locks. In the process her small dress rips conveniently to cover part of her breasts and around her hips. Similarly, Harribel must bare her breast in order to show her ranking mark; tattoos that all the Espada have declaring their rank. While being the 3<sup>rd</sup> strongest Arrancar should be impressive, attention is drawn to the sexualized body instead. This diminishes her importance as the 3<sup>rd</sup> strongest by emphasizing that despite her rank she is still a woman, still a sexual object constructed for the male gaze. Since she can be turned into a sexual object to be used and looked at then her threat as an Espada is dismissed. Her objectification is further underscored by her silencing. While her uniform bares her breasts to us, it also covers her mouth and she rarely speaks. She symbolically gives away her voice while becoming a sexualized object, as if the two can never exist at simultaneously.

While it is very common for women to bare their skin during transformations, male bodies can do so as well. The meaning ascribed to this nudity is vastly different however, emphasizing masculine strength rather than sexualized object. This contrast accentuates the ways in which the nudity of the female body is feminized through hypersexuality. While nudity hypersexualizes the feminine body by reducing it to an object of sexual desire, masculine nudity exudes physical power. Together they reinforce patriarchal standards of feminine objectification and subservience to masculinity.

When male characters take off clothing it is in a show of power and can be deliberate or incidental. However, female character's nudity is always sexualizing, it is never to show power. The commander of the Gotei 13 for example intentionally removes

his kosode (こそで, top part of the shinigami uniform) before a serious battle. This is an indication of how far he will go in a battle against his two former students. With this act alone they understand that he will not be holding back against them. This kind of nudity focuses the on the raw power of the male body, a well-defined abdomen as well as arms and shoulders. Other male characters that perform masculinity through their bodies this way are Madarame Ikakku (斑目 一角) and Zaraki Kenpachi, whose shihakusho always shows off their muscular chests. In the midst of battle the slashes to their clothing eventually reveal more. By positioning male nudity as a sign of physical prowess, feminine nudity is further positioned as sexualized for the male gaze. Presenting nudity in this way enforces hegemonic feminine performance as sexual objectification available to the male viewer's gaze.

Female incompetence is represented as a way to define femininity. This is made more visible by performing incompetence in conjunction with the masculine ability and desire to protect. In *Bleach* masculinity's ultimate form is the ability to protect those you care about. In contrast, an inability to single-handedly protect people who are important to you becomes a feminine trait because it shows weakness and incompetence. In this way femininity and masculinity accentuate each other by who can protect (usually male characters) and who needs protection (usually female characters). At the beginning of each episode we hear Kurosaki Ichigo explain that his reason for becoming a shinigami is to achieve this, to be strong enough to protect his family, friends, and town. Although this often requires collaboration between him and other shinigami there is also the trope of

fighting a battle for the sake of pride. This kind of battle is always fought alone, and it is limited to male characters.

Conversely, female-bodied characters are repeatedly told to rely on others (read: males). This happens often when female characters realize the limitations of their abilities. For example, Inoue trains hard to improve her shield and attack abilities, while her healing abilities are never doubted once. Despite all of her training she realizes in the midst of battle that she cannot win at her current level. Her inability to rise to the occasion makes her a burden to the rest of the group. At this point a male character would find a way to get stronger, sometimes through sheer will or perhaps some hidden power. Alternatively they will lose this battle, but train to become stronger and eventually will get another opportunity to defeat the enemy. For Inoue however, there is only reliance on others. This trope is intensified when she is kidnapped by a rogue shinigami, once again she must rely on Ichigo and the others to be saved. These representations are used to affirm male viewer's construction of the damsel in distress that cannot survive without them.

By constructing female characters that adhere to patriarchal standards of feminine inferiority anime can reinforce hegemony. These performances position female bodied characters as being less capable than their male counterparts. The skills they do possess and excel at are devalued compared to masculine achievements and bind them to the domestic sphere. In turn these performances of femininity encourage and reward female characters' reliance on male characters. The constructions of these feminine performances allow male viewers to position women as inferior, sexual objects, who need males to protect them. At the same time rewarding hegemonic femininity encourages

female viewers to continue conforming to feminine standards. In order to disrupt rather than reinforce these hegemonic constructions of masculine superiority, performances that do not conform to hegemonic femininity must be identified.

### **Disrupting hegemony through monstrous femininity**

There are myriad ways to disrupt this heteronormative gender system through alternative feminine performance. Monstrous femininity is an alternative to hegemonic femininity that “reflect[s] the anxieties of [our] time...” and addresses the ways in which women of color are “animalized, exoticized, tokenized, and sexualized”(Calafell, 2012, p. 112). Calafell argued that monstrous femininity is a breaking away from hegemonic White femininity through the use of monstrous, aggressive, and angry gender performance. Monstrous femininity is a performance that highlights racial otherness.

While most of Japanese looking female characters are shown to perform normative femininity, some of them take up monstrous femininity in order to break away from the racialized expectations of gender performance. They are constructed as less authentically Japanese as they do not conform to hegemonic femininity through submissivity. Their angry and bestial performances disrupt notions of femininity and patriarchal dominance. For many characters this bestiality is symbolic, but animation allows for the bestial nature of monstrous femininity to manifest materially.

In *Bleach*, Shihouin Yoruichi is initially presented as an old black (male) cat. The other characters believe she is male because her speaking voice is very deep in her cat form and her speaking style mimics that used by older Japanese males. However, these presumptions are dispelled when she transforms into a human, revealing that she is actually a dark-skinned female shinigami. By constructing Yoruichi as transcending the

division between animal and human she breaks out of the confines of normative gender performance. Additionally, her status as a rogue shinigami constructs her animalistic body as a site of rebellion against the patriarchal order of the Gotei 13. Not only has she rejected the policies of the Gotei 13, but she is able to escape sexual objectification in her animal form. Her animal form is constructed and performs alternative femininities that are not sexualized. Monstrous femininity allows her to resist the sexualization of her female body and cannot be reduced to just her body. Instead, Yoruichi can be viewed as a complex character who is extremely smart, the fastest hohou (flash step) user in Soul Society, a skilled user of hakuda (type of hand-to-hand combat) and kidou (spiritual attacks), and a mentor to Ichigo, Orihime, and Sado. If she did not perform femininity in this way it is possible that these complexities and roles would not be accessible to her.

Shiba Kukkaku (志波 空鶴) is another female character in *Bleach* who is considered to be a scary female, but her performance is symbolic rather than literal. She does this by rejecting standards of femininity that require her to be submissive and defer to male counterparts. Instead, she takes the leadership role within her clan eschewing the male members. Taking on this role can be considered a part of monstrous femininity because driven women who take on the leadership roles meant for men do so by rejecting submissivity and subservience. Doing this constructs a character that is feared by others and abnormal or even insane. This abnormality is further highlighted by her role within Soul Society as a bomb maker. Her explosive escapades have left their marks on her body, one arm replaced with a prosthetic. Yet she continues to make bombs, and building a reputation as a dangerous bomb lover. This gives her an edge of insanity, for putting herself in harm's way in the first place and still continuing to make the bombs after. For

Kukkaku, rejecting hegemonic femininity in this way is both a blessing and a curse. She is able to be a leader for her clan but at the same time she becomes an outcast within Soul Society.

Kukkaku's rejection of normative femininity is reflected in how other characters perceive her before meeting her. Like Yoruichi, she is thought to be male until you meet her. As Ichigo, Sado, Inoue, and Ishida wait to meet her they produce different imaginaries of this person being a wizard or a sage, but always male. When they finally meet Kukkaku her female-bodiedness comes as a surprise. By performing a femininity that does not conform to hegemonic femininity she is even mistaken for a male person but she also disrupts how femininity is constructed. Kukkaku offers a different form of femininity that potentially frees her from expectations of submissivity, male deference, and from the hierarchy of the Gotei 13. Her performance causes the viewer to question how the female body can be performed and how femininity does not necessarily follow norms of submissivity or passivity. While this performance simultaneously positions her as an outsider, she appears to be content living as a reject of the patriarchal society. Her performance of monstrous femininity offers a sense of freedom within the acceptance of otherness.

These two female characters have another aspect in common, which is class and status. By intersecting with upper class statuses, these women are further disrupting the norms of femininity. Upper class characters have a tendency to adhere more closely to hegemonic gender performances in order to maintain their statuses. There are higher expectations for them because of the duties they have to their noble houses. Both Yoruichi and Kukkaku were born into prestigious clans in Soul Society. They were both

highly regarded before they rebelled. It is unclear how the Shiba clan fell out of favor with Soul Society and lost its place, but it is made clear that Yoruichi may also cause the downfall of her clan for not conforming to the expectations of her clan of feminine and class performance. The consequences of these performances of monstrous femininity are the potentiality of being rejected from society. In this case refuting normative femininity puts them at risk of losing their class status. They reject the patriarchal order of their clans and race by performing monstrous femininity and disrupt the ways in which upper class femininity is performed. The implications of these constructed gender narratives are that gender performances that do not conform lead to ostracization, so while there are representations of alternative femininities they are not necessarily encouraged or rewarded.

Performances of monstrous femininity are described as intersecting with the lower classes and women of color. However, monstrous femininity is also performed differently in the context of age. Female characters in lower classes who performed monstrous femininity were also much younger than Yoruichi and Kukkaku. For example, high-school student Arisawa Tatsuki (有沢 竜貴) (*Bleach*) becomes a threat to the masculine male through her monstrous femininity. She performs this monstrous femininity through outrageous physical strength and fighting ability that cannot be categorized as normative femininity. She and Ichigo were formally karate partners, and she never lost a fight to Ichigo. Arisawa continues to practice and win competitions for a sport that is dominated by males, disrupting the ways in which physical strength is associated exclusively with male bodies. She is also fiercely protective of Orihime, who is ditzy and easily taken advantage of. Arisawa has been known to attack boys or girls who try to approach

Orihime with potentially bad intentions and most of the males at their high school are fearful of her. This protective nature is not the nurturing protection associated with femininity; it is too violent to be associated with normative femininity. Interestingly, she is not bestowed with any spiritual powers by Kurosaki the way Sado and Inoue are. If she were to receive spiritual abilities the potential of her monstrous femininity could become more of a threat to the masculine male body, which would nullify the role of the male protagonist. If she was able to beat him in karate without supernatural powers, she would completely annihilate him if she also had spiritual abilities. Therefore, her strength has been limited by her lack of spiritual ability.

Compared to quiet and domestic Yuzu, Kurosaki Karin (*Bleach*) is fierce and aggressive. She is often invited to play sports with the boys in her class who depend on her super kick. Rather than expressing herself in a polite or feminine manner she speaks as Ichigo would and has a similar scowl plastered on her face. This facial expression defies the constant smiling faces of feminine performing characters like Orihime. The extent of her monstrous femininity becomes apparent when she is attacked by a Hollow. Although she does not have sufficient spiritual ability to see the monster she is able to attack it even without a zanpakuto or spiritual weapon. None of the other human characters who see Hollows have been able to counter any attack, so this act is notable even if she is saved by Sado in the end. Her monstrous nature is a force even Hollows would reckon with, and she eventually begins to fight Hollows in secret. She symbolically and materially positions herself as a threat to the masculine constructed hollows, this disrupting patriarchic notion of feminine frailty.

Fuu (*Samurai Champloo*) also demonstrates a monstrous kind of femininity. While Karin and Arisawa appear to be middle class, Fuu becomes homeless after the dangoya (団子屋, a shop where sweet Japanese dumplings are served) she works at is destroyed by a fire. Since her mother died a few years ago, she decides to search for her father who mysteriously disappeared when she was young. We get the impression that this will not be a warm family reunion, but rather a violent kind of revenge. Fuu saves two male swordsmen in the hopes that she can bully them into traveling with her in exchange. Mugen and Jin reluctantly agree. As a young girl of 15, it may seem dangerous to travel with two older and suspicious looking men. Although Jin is simply a wandering samurai with no master, Mugen comes from a Ryukyu island where criminals are exiled to. She is able to temper their masculinity by showing a feminine strength that positions her as an *Other* in relation to the other females in the series. Again, monstrous femininity allows her feminine body to become a threat to the masculine performances of Jin and Mugen. Within this series, this monstrous femininity privileges the goals of the female character even within the masculine/male dominated genre of shounen anime.

On one occasion they happen upon an eating contest in their travels. Jumping at the opportunity to eat free food the three enter the contest. Jin, calm composed and adherent to social etiquette, quits after his second unadon (鰻丼, a bowl of rice served with grilled eel on top) and Mugen gives up after 17 bowls or so. Fuu out-eats them all, eating at least 27 bowls. Her monstrous appetite is matched only by an enormous Dutch man who snuck into the competition. In the next scene she is shown sitting on the steps and bloated to massive proportions, further emphasizing her monstrous nature through

physical transformation. Her eating practices and physical manifestations disrupt associations of femininity with food portion control or consideration for a slender physical appearance. By taking on this grotesque appearance she refuses to comply with the demands of normative femininity to be slender, pretty, and exhibit the outmost consideration for her appearance.

Other physical monstrous transformations are those of the Tres Bestias (Spanish-three beasts). This is a trio of elite Espada females in the Arrancar army who report to Harribel. Like all Hollows, Espada bear a whole where their heart should be. However, Harribel has her void lower, where her womb would be. This symbolically removes her from normative womanhood and femininity and emphasizes the beastly nature she releases during transformation. Espada experience physical transformation through a skill known as Resurrección. This evolved state causes physical transformation of the user that releases their full power, and for many of the Espada there is a resemblance to an animal. For the Tres Bestias and their leader, their animal forms are a shark, snake, deer, and a lion. This trio has an additional unique skill they share. By ripping off their right arms they are able to summon an enormous chimera that bears resemblance to each of them. The monster nearly annihilates the Gotei 13, an organization made up of mostly men, momentarily disrupting the patriarchal order. While summoning a monster that towers over sky-scrapers is beastly in itself, the required penance for doing so makes this act even more monstrous. By shedding off a normative performance of femininity and taking up monstrosity they are able to overpower the 13 divisions.

These characters embody monstrous femininity by literally or symbolically transforming into monsters that disrupt the patriarchal order. By drawing out this

animalistic source of strength they supersede the strength of male characters and defy feminine deference to masculinity and weakness. In this form femininity does not require submissivity, passivity, or incompetence. These females perform a different kind of femininity that proves their strength and value. It requires the taking up of monstrosity that disrupts hegemonic gender performance. Simultaneously, the inclusion of these gender performances allows for the appearance of gender diversity while still maintaining the status-quo (Ahmed, 2012; Eng, 2010; Ferguson, 2012). In reality these representations function as fulfillment of a diversity quota that ultimately continues to reify normative gender formation by othering non-conforming gender performances.

## Disidentification and femininity

In addition to performances of femininity that alter hegemonic constructions, some characters are constructed in ways that perform the potentiality of *disidentification*. Disidentification is a type of cultural performance that creates new identity constructions within the tensions of assimilation and opposition of hegemonic identity formations (Muñoz, 1999). This new positioning allows for reconstructions of identity performance that verge away from limiting stereotypes. By locating themselves within this tension minority subjects may also navigate through their social realities in ways that escape the material violence inflicted on racialized, sexed, classed, and gendered bodies. As Muñoz explains, “[d]isidentification is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate the phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects that do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship” (location 270). Minoritarian subjects can sometimes navigate the world in a different way through this identity performance. At times disidentification involves *passing* in ways that allow minority subjects to inhabit spaces they could not access otherwise.

Kuchiki Byakuya (朽木 白哉) is constructed in ways that locate him in the tensions between masculinity and femininity. As the head of the highest noble house in Soul Society, there are expectations of heteromasculine performance. However, he also has qualities that construct Byakuya as feminine. He negotiates these gender identities by performing femininity and masculinity simultaneously at times, constructing alternative ways of being that protect his social status. His stoic nature and fighting ability position

him within masculinity. At the same time his signature outfit includes a pretty white accessory that holds back his hair called a kenseikan (牽星箝, Star-Pulling Insert). Hair accessories are feminized objects and have been normalized for female bodied use. The very existence of a male bodied person wearing a hair accessory is feminizing in this sense. Additionally, the manifestation of his zanpakuto has a highly feminized appearance. When released his blade takes the form of pink cherry blossom petals, an accurate depiction considering the blade is called senbonzakura (千本桜), meaning a thousand (long/pointy) cherry blossoms. He contrasts the beautifully feminized form by making it a lethal weapon. The tension between masculine sword ability and feminine beauty constructs a tension and alternative way of performing femininity and masculinity. By using disidentification, the binary between femininity and masculinity is disrupted. This performance shows both genders being performed in collusion with each other. Not only does this tension allow Byakuya to maintain his social status, but it also positions him as one of the strongest taichou in Soul Society.

Yumichika is constructed within performances of disidentification that make some aspects of femininity more visible and other aspects of femininity less visible. This is possible through the feminization of kaidou spiritual abilities. The devaluing of kidou becomes a central crisis for Yumichika, the 5th ranked member of the 11th division whose primary concern in life is beauty. He is tall and slender with large expressive eyes and straight short black hair. His lashes and brows are adorned with colorful feathers. These visual feminine markers allow for him to make other femininities less visible. In Yumichika's division there is a strong preference for zanpakuto with physical abilities

rather than spiritual abilities. This explains why he has never revealed to his comrades the true nature of his zanpakuto ability. He explains that his best friend and taicho will dislike him if they knew he possessed a kidou type zanpakuto, instead of a physical type one. We first see him release this ability when fighting a member from the 7th division. While he sustained some slight injuries, the scene after the battle shows him without a scratch. He finds his captain, Zaraki Kenpachi (更木 剣八), sitting after his own battle and proceeds to sway his hips and spin around on tip toe in a happy dance while he hums in excitement from the battle, his posture accentuating the curve of his hips and butt. Zaraki immediately orders him to stop his “disgusting” dancing as he realizes Yumichika won the battle without a scratch and looks even more refreshed than he did before the battle. He then explains to his taicho that he got dirty and had to go home to change clothing, another indication of his obsession with beauty and appearance. In order to maintain the high regard of his fellow division members, Yumichika must pass as a physical zanpakuto user. This performance reveals how disidentification can be used to avoid some of the material implications of performing minority identities.

Performing disidentification allows Yumichika and Byakuya to maintain their social positions in Soul Society and escape the censure of particular feminine performances. The performances of disidentification persuade audiences (myself included) that anime producers value diverse intersections of race and gender. Alternatively, it may be easy to assume these representations are included in order to add versatile and dynamic characters. However, the inclusion of difference here is folded into anime in order to present an illusion of diversity (Ahmed, 2012; Eng, 2010; Ferguson,

2012). This illusion is constructed in ways that present diversity without addressing the material implications of nonconformity to White heteromascularity.

Through different performances of femininity these anime reinforce, alter, and disrupt hegemonic femininity and oppressive patriarchal structures. Representations that continue to reify femininity as submissive, deferent, inferior, incompetent, and sexualized reinforce hegemony. However, these anime also present different construction of femininity by offering alternative gender performances, like that of monstrous femininity. Still other characters are constructed in ways that disrupt normative feminine performances by engaging the tensions between femininity and masculinity in disidentification. While these performances are altering and disrupting hegemony they also have further implications and create queer fantasies, as I explain in the following section.

### **Creating Fantasy through Queer Femininity**

*Bleach* and *Samurai Champloo* offer alternative gender performances that alter and disrupt hegemonic femininity. However, even these performances can produce essentialist narratives of Orientalism and fantasy. In this fantasy world the material consequences of queer performance are not engaged as it would be in the real world. This makes it easy for the viewer to forget these potential consequences.

Some of anime characters in *Bleach* and *Samurai Champloo* are shown in ways that disrupt hegemonic formations of gender performance. By having male bodies perform femininity or presenting alternative femininities characters, these representations alter notions of what femininity is and can be (Muñoz, 1999). This simultaneously creates a potential narrative of acceptance if queer feminine performance which does not

necessarily apply in the real world (Eguchi, Calafell, & Files-Thompson, 2014 in press). These queer performances of femininity may idealize the ways in which femininity can be performed without considering the material implications those performances will have outside of anime.

Yumichika is a good example of this idealization as he performs femininity through a male body but still gains acceptance in a male dominated community. Furthermore, he is able to move up through the ranks while performing femininity. This disregards the material limitations of alternative gender performance by creating a fantasy of upward mobility potential despite non-conformity to ascribed gender roles. Suì-Fēng is also able to sit as a commanding officer in the Gotei 13 while performing monstrous femininity. Many women who occupy leadership roles may be considered monstrous as well and because this challenges male masculinity it can have negative consequences. Even within a leadership role women are expected to perform normative femininity, doing otherwise categorizes them as bitchy, scary, and bossy (Calafell, 2012).

These narratives produce an ideal world where queer femininity can be performed and accepted. While Rukia is able to exist in multiple social spaces through her fluid performance of gender, but there do not appear to be any material consequences. In actuality performing multiple gender and class identities is often marked as being inauthentic, trying to fit in, or even having multiple personalities. This kind of performance is categorized as being unstable. Further, these narratives of disruptive gender performances allow us to believe that multiple forms of femininity can be performed and accepted without negative consequences. The bullying, criminalizing, and persecution of these characters due to their identity performances do not occur in these

representations. However, outside of the world constructed in anime, it is impossible to perform these nonconformative gender identities without implications on one's material realities (Calafell, 2012). These performances of gender do seem to disrupt patriarchal norms, however there are always material consequences to these performances.

There are times where material implications to alternative gender performances are presented. In subtle ways these nonconforming performances are disciplined and punished through social censure and physical displacement. Yoruichi and Kukkaku perform monstrous femininities that appear liberating and empowering. However, they have also lost their positions and status in the process. Particularly because the series does not explain how the Shiba clan lost their place in Seireitei it is easy to connect the downfall to her performance of monstrous femininity. The reason why the Shiba clan is dismissed from the 5 great noble houses is unknown, and as the representative of the clan Kukkaku does not take up a performance of nobility or normative femininity. Additionally, we do not realize the Shiba clan was a noble house when we first meet Kukkaku. All we see is a female who beats up her brothers and is missing an arm because she blew herself up. By the time we realize that the Shiba family was dismissed we automatically attribute it to Kukkaku and her monstrous feminine nature. We link the material consequence to her performance of femininity, because the series does not explain otherwise. Likewise, Sui-Fēng suggests that Yoruichi will cause the downfall of her house if she continues to disidentify with her class status and the duties that come with it. By opposing the patriarchal policies of Seireitei and her clan there are very serious social consequences. In this way monstrous femininity is disciplined and punished in order to diminish its capabilities. As monstrous femininity becomes a

potential threat to heteromascularity, its performance is discouraged through practices of social ostracization. This neutralizes the threat of monstrous femininity by placing physical distance between monstrous feminine performers and heteromascularity performers. Yoruichi is physically displaced by leaving Soul Society to live in Gense. Likewise, Kukkaku is forced to live outside of the (heteropatriarchal) protection of Soul Society's wall. Thus, while alternative gender performance may appear self-determined, it is controlled by potential loss of status and physical displacement.

The idealizing of anime gender performance can be likened to Orientalism. Said (1979) explained that the ideology of Orientalism primitivizes and romantacizes Eastern culture and bodies in ways that justifies colonization by the West under the premise of civilizing. As Eguchi, Calafell, & Files-Thompson (2014, in press) posited, the representations of alternative gender constructions in media creates queer fantasy when material realities and intersectionality are not addressed. For the most part, these anime present non-normative gender performances that are accepted by other characters. In the case of Yumichika, his secret feminine abilities become mysterious since no one knows the true extent of his abilities. It reifies the idea of the mysterious geisha (芸者) through the male body. Furthermore, while there are nonconforming performances, the hegemonic femininity is still more common in anime. Although I chose *Bleach* particularly because it includes more alternative performances of femininity than other anime, it still portrays women as sexualized bodies that exist for the (white) Orientalizing male gaze. Anime allows the viewer to eroticize the Japanese characters portrayed by constructing bodies as sexual objects. Using particular screen shots or panning to emphasize the body of Japanese female characters enforces the (white) heteropatriarchal

gaze. Normative feminine performance through subservience and submissivity continues to reify the Oriental romanticization of the Japanese female, meant to serve. Unonaha taicho's use of the enryo-sasshi model of communication also reproduces Orientalism by rendering her as mysterious. Thus, anime presents a wide variety of gender performance and multiple forms of femininity. Some may initially appear to achieve resistance against normative gender performance; however they are disciplined and bridled. Conversely, normative femininity continues to be constructed as inferior to white heteromascularity.

Performances of femininity can come in many different forms in anime. While feminine performance is influenced by intersections of race and class it can be expressed in multiple ways. The body, verbal cues, self-perceptions, and roles occupied by the characters are all elements of feminine performance. Characters that perform politeness, subservience, and deference to male characters can reinforce hegemonic constructions of femininity. However, these constructions are also refuted by other performances of femininity. Disidentification and monstrous femininities can resist the patriarchal standard of feminine inferiority and allow them to break out of the restraints of normative femininity. These sites of resistance have implications for U.S. perception of Japanese performance of femininity. By presenting characters that perform alternative femininities anime constructs a fantasy where there are no material consequences to resisting normative femininity. It can also reproduce Orientalist notions that eroticize Japanese female characters and creates mystification of Japanese characters and people.

While alternative representations of femininity can and should be included in anime, they are at times disciplined and punished. Conversely, the fantasy of these worlds can obfuscate the material realities of queer gender performance. These fantasies also

reproduce Orientalist ideologies of mystery and romantic Japanese/Asians. These anime produce understandings for U.S. constructions of Japanese/Asians, and therefore anime should continue to be critically examined.

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, I utilize Queer of color critique as a central analytical framework to examine performance of gender intersectionally. Queer of color critique is a combination of several critical theoretical constructs including women of color feminism, historical materialism, and queer critique (Ferguson, 2013). Queer critique offers the discursive construction of the body, gender, and sexuality (Butler, 1999). Conceptualizing gender and sexuality in this way allows us to dis-establish the binaries between female-male and feminine-masculine (Wilchins, 2004). This reconceptualization allows for people to exist between these constructs of gender and biological sex. Additionally, queer critique rejects the strict categorizations of sexual orientation such as gay and lesbian (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). However, the complexity of this framework and the ways in which it can be used to unpack how gender is performed in anime is a long process, and one that requires further development than was possible within the scope of this study. Yet, using this critique to analyze this text was critical to uncovering the power structures represented in anime which construct particular material realities in the context of gender performance.

With the queers of color critique, I have attempted to unpack and uncover the ways in which feminine performances in anime reinforce, alter, and disrupt social and performative constructions of hegemonic femininity. Femininity is performed through the body and clothing, language, skills and ability, and through character's relationships with other characters. When performed through the body and clothing, feminine performances often reinforces the female body as an object of desire. By rendering the female body bare and offering it to the patriarchal gaze these performances can reinforce hegemonic constructions of femininity. However, when the body performs monstrous femininity these constructions can alter ideologies surrounding normative femininity. Language that

humbles the speaker, creating hierarchies, can also be used to perform hegemonic feminine performance. Skills and abilities can function to reinforce, alter, and disrupt notions of hegemonic femininity depending on how they are performed and perceived. At the same time, characters are constructed in ways that disrupt perceptions of feminine performance can use abilities like hand-to-hand combat.

It is easy to believe that the strong willed feminine performing character found in *Bleach* and *Samurai Champloo* are disrupting the ways in which we think about feminine performance. Indeed, some viewers may believe this to be true and be prompted to reconsider their own gender performances. In this sense, watching anime may result in questioning and reconstruction of gender performance for fans. As a fan, I reflect that anime offers alternative gender/queer possibilities to viewers who find normative feminine performances of some characters contrived and limiting. At the same time, these performances are paradoxically disciplined by patriarchal structures like the Gotei 13 and the Arrancar. These structures reward normative femininity and punish feminine dissenters. In the context of U.S. viewers this reify the ways in which the image of Japanese/Asian femininity has been historically constructed. Submissivity, deference, and the sexualization of the Japanese/Asian female body are lauded. Thus, characters who are punished or disciplined through loss of status and ostracization emphasize that their performances of femininity does not conform to U.S. perceptions of Japanese femininity.

The examining and unpacking of the ways in which performances of femininity in anime are represented is critical. Investigating anime as an intercultural text addresses several gaps in critical intercultural communication scholarship. Primarily, very few studies have examined anime as an intercultural text. This is relevant considering its

implications for intercultural communication in a historical moment when anime is becoming increasingly popular and consumed in the U.S. As Moon (2008) argued, “how we understand ourselves as cultural members and our interactions with “Others” is too influenced by media representations.” (p. 18) Therefore, unpacking the potential implications for this intercultural text is critical to understanding Japanese-U.S. American interactions.

While it is critical to research anime as an intercultural text – a text influenced by multiple cultural positions (Darling-Wolf, 2006)- doing so has also presented limitations. As an intercultural text in the U.S. context anime is originally in Japanese and then either subtitled or dubbed over in English by licensed production companies or fan based services. As I am not fluent in Japanese it was necessary to rely somewhat on these translations. A fluent speaker of Japanese would likely have more insight into the verbal nuances of gender performance. For this reason it was necessary for me to take the point of view of a U.S. viewer with varying levels of Japanese language competence. I also do not have a fully developed understanding of Japanese culture, and so it is possible that cultural performances may have been overlooked or misinterpreted. Additionally, my position as a passionate fan of anime presents some emotional bias. As anime has influenced understandings of my own identity construction, I remain ever hopeful for anime’s potential as a site resistance.

Another limitation of this study is that I have only analyzed 2 series in an entire industry of anime production. Multiple genres, creators, and production companies will construct femininity in different ways that reinforce, alter, or disrupt hegemonic feminine performance. Additionally, this study examines the content of these media while not

addressing audience reactions and perceptions or the production technologies necessary to produce these series. Another aspect that influence anime are the creative players: producers, writers, voice actors, artists, editors and other people who make artistic and business decisions to create the final product. These people deliberately and unconsciously make decisions that shape the identity performances of anime characters and the realities created within anime. These other layers of analysis would be helpful in examining this media text, as no piece of media is content alone. Therefore, further research in this area requires attention.

While this work contributes to the growing area of research of anime and intercultural communication, many aspects of anime remain unexplored. Studies looking at queer representations and presence in anime have been limited to the homoerotic genres of yaoi/yuri, primarily focusing on sexual orientation within sexual/romantic relationships (see for example: Miyake, 2013; Wood, 2013; Zanghellini, 2009). However, queer gender as performed in anime has not been explored despite many representations of gender non-conforming characters. In the future, I would like to continue examining alternative gender performances in anime as a potential site of resistance. Anime offers alternative gender performances to mainstream U.S. media that may make audiences more aware of hegemonic gender as socially constructed and normalized performance. Despite the potential queer fantasy being constructed, the repeated representation of gender queer performance potentially disrupts understandings of normative gender constructions. U.S. media limits many representations of queer individuals to structured categories of gay, lesbian, and trans, but anime allows for more fluid performances of gender, sexuality, and kinship. By including characters that perform disidentification,

ambiguous sexual orientation and kinship formations, and monstrous femininity normative identity constructions may be challenged. This presents the audience with alternative possibilities and ways of being that is generally not available in U.S. media.

Another topic of interest as anime relates to intercultural communication is the construction of Japanese intersectional identity. This work examined gender in relation to class and race, but does not fully address multiple racial/ethnic identities in Japan. The inclusion of *Samurai Champloo* and the Ryukyu character Mugen was an attempt to explore this cultural identity. However, his performance of Ryukyu and hypermasculinized identity could not be fully explored within the scope of this work. As one of the only representations of indigenous Japanese character, this series is important to examine further as it has the potential to dispel myths regarding Japanese homogeneity. Racial homogeneity is a narrative perpetuated both within Japan and abroad. Therefore, this representation is both rare and significant as a form of identity representation. The implications of this particular representation and identity performance have been limited by my focus on femininity within this anime. Consequently, further examination of this text is critical for understanding racial diversity representations in Japan.

Moreover I argue that the translation aspect of anime has not been explored within academic scholarship, even though it is a topic of hot debate in the U.S. anime fan community. Most U.S. viewers rely on subtitles or dubbed versions of their favorite anime. Not only do these translations have implications for gender performance, but they also construct particular understandings of Japanese identity and performance. As anime

can be a vehicle for identity construction and performance (Wahab & Anuar, 2012) this is a critical text to examine from an intercultural communication perspective.

In conclusion, anime has potential implications for the understandings of Japanese/Asian-American gender performances. Anime is also a valuable text for intercultural communication as a media text produced in Japan and becoming increasingly popular in the U.S. In future research I aspire to continue examining the construction of Japanese intersectional identities in anime. I also hope that anime will continue being studied by other communication scholars.

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