

Black Americans And Anime + Japanese And Anime

An Analysis of Two Communities' Relationship with One Form of Entertainment

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With the emergence and rapid development of globalization, along with its impact, there continue to be cultures and ideas that spread far and wide. The effects of these cultures, their aspects, physical or abstract (and sometimes a mix), and their objects have varying effects not just on the native culture, area, and people but also on regional, transnational, and global communities, cultures, individuals, and markets. When observing and interacting with consumers and markets of a globalized cultural object, one will eventually question the relationship between the cultural object and its recipients.

Anime has been and continues to be a staple brand commonly associated with Japan's cultural ideas and image. Widely known and well-received series have become social and cultural icons for communities within and outside the country. With the exponential increase and output of entertainment, commentary, coverage, viewership, and goods, there is no questioning the reality that the Japanese popular culture of anime continues to dominate and influence global media and entertainment markers, especially in the United States, not to mention within its domestic boundaries.

However, within the United States, one community stands out from the others in their commitment to, consumption of, and love for anime: Black Americans. The previously stated observations about a cultural object, its relationship with consumers, and its effect on global and domestic communities can be applied to the Black American and Japanese communities.

My research intends to bring into academia a more extensive educational discussion on media and art, the relationship between shounen anime and the Black American community, and shounen anime and its relationship with its domestic community, the Japanese people. My research also strives to highlight the commonalities and divergences between the relationships of both

communities, demonstrating what this commodity does and where it does it to bridge these groups together and how anime does this.

First, I will introduce the basis, along with evidence and research, prior and current, for the idea and pursuit of my research topic. Wendy Griswold's Cultural Diamond is an excellent foundation by which many media, literary, and art analysts and researchers employ and reference when examining and understanding the intricate connections, influences, reactions, and results of and between cultural objects, their creators, their audience, and their broader social environments. The relationship between the object and the audience (consumer or receiver, as some may call them) carries weight and is the key to providing insight and answering the previous questions. With this foundation, I plan to explore anime's transnational and global connections with Black Americans and its domestic connection with Japanese consumers.

Other academics, authors, and researchers have not just introduced the idea of anime being a cultural conduit and object for people to interact with and through but also expanded upon that notion by explaining what is being conveyed. Various academics reveal why and how these effects of a cultural object, in this case, anime, exist and are. One such is Angela Drummond-Mathews' article "What Boys Will Be: A Study of Shōnen Manga," which explains why so many individuals are fascinated by the themes of shounen anime.

However, to understand why the Black American and Japanese communities are so enamored with the ideas of shounen anime, I must first find out what those ideas are. From there, I need to compare and contrast the themes both communities agree on, and feel are represented by shounen anime the most and why. Finally, after comparing and contrasting the responses from the two communities, I need to analyze and

understand the meaning of two communities sharing similar sentiments towards a mutually shared object and what that means to popular culture on a broader scale.

By surveying the two communities through an online form, I gathered data to categorize their feelings and interpretations of shounen anime, thus creating a framework for the themes and relationships made in response to interacting with this form of entertainment. Through watching shounen anime, recording respondents' survey answers, and categorizing them, I found a strong connection between feelings and ideas of identity and social life (networks and relationships) to Black American and Japanese watchers. My approach to why this connection is so important and these ideas so valuable was to conduct follow-up qualitative interviews with individuals from the two groups to explore their history with this specific genre.

When respondents from both communities were interviewed, the common factor that led to the themes being interpreted and accepted by the parties was a sense of empathy. This feeling of empathy is tied to aspects of real life and reality within shounen anime through characters, struggles, interactions, and reflections of viewers' own lives. The audience wants to be able to feel for the character and imagine themselves as the viewed character to invoke a sense of living a shared experience. This shared experience can come in many forms: challenges, relationships, success, failure, and growth. Because these shared experiences are essential to the viewer, the most significant similar takeaways are identity and social life messages.

After discovering their similarities, I also analyzed their differences. Looking at the two communities, there was a noticeable difference in perception and interpretation of mental health in shounen anime. This is likely due to the difference in cultures in America and Japan. In the former, mental health is far more noticeable, discussed, and destigmatized. Meanwhile, the latter still holds a negative image in the country. Because of this, Black Americans may be more open to seeing it have a place in shounen anime and are willing to explore it, and the Japanese may not.

The data and relationships demonstrated the potential for transnational, intercultural exchange and dialogue. The shared passion for shounen anime that the Black American and

Japanese communities have can create a bridge to understanding each other's various aspects and approaches. The history, infrastructure, life, and traits of being black in America and the same as being Japanese can be discussed to teach each other why their relationships are similar and different, creating a learning experience for each group.

## References

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