

$BA^3 + JA^2$
**Black Americans and Anime + Japanese and
Anime:**
An Analysis of Two Communities' Relationship with One
Form of Entertainment

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Step #1 - The Beginning

Brief History of (Shounen) Anime

With the creation and spread of anime in Japan during the 20th century, domestic audiences were the only direct and notable receivers of this cultural commodity. Towards the end of the 20th century, more commonly known series started to be produced and gained recognition, although more domestically. Series such as *Astro Boy*, *Lupin III*, and *Mobile Suit Gundam* made huge breakthroughs for *anime* as an entertainment platform, being part of the first generation of anime series around the 1960s and 1970s (and some of the first series) to make it abroad and gain global popularity.¹ Fast forwarding to the 1980s, the success of breakthrough series such as *Dragon Ball*, *Fist of the North Star*, and *Urusei Yatsura* gave anime a considerable boost in domestic presence and value. Within Japan, new subcultures and groups began to form (i.e., *otaku*), magazines began more anime coverage, more anime genres or subcategories were made, and more anime production companies were established and expanded (i.e., Gainax and Studio Ghibli).

Although the international blockbuster film *Akira* made headways and achieved international acclaim, helping to bring more attention to anime abroad, the late 20th century, 1990s films like *Dragon Ball Z*, *Digimon*, *Pokemon*, *Rurouni Kenshin*, *Yu Yu Hakusho*, *Hunter x Hunter*, and *Neon Genesis Evangelion* made global headlines, most notably in the U.S. This is not to say that these were the only critically acclaimed and well-received series but to point out a few. Others include, but are not limited to, *Sailor Moon*, *Cowboy Bebop*, and *Ghost in The Shell*. Of the series that brought anime recognition abroad and domestically, most are classified as *shounen* (lit. boy), a category that appeals to a young male audience. Despite these series supposedly being targeted at young males in their youth and adolescence, it is a genre of anime produced and consumed the most out of the other demographics, *seinen*, *josei*, and *shojo*.

Entering today, the 21st century, widely known and famous series broadened and shaped anime's interpretation, reception, and consumption. Early 2000s anime such as *Yu-Gi-Oh! Duel Monsters*, *Bakugan*, and *Beyblade* were shown on American cartoon and children-friendly channels such as *FoxBox* and *4Kids Entertainment*, with edits occurring as some series were deemed religiously insensitive or too violent. On more young adolescent networks such as Cartoon Network, specifically its *Toonami* segment geared to and hosting anime-like series, series like *Shaman King*, *Naruto*, and *Zatch Bell* were aired. Lastly, in Cartoon Networks late-night segment Adult Swim, a time reserved for adult shows, anime such as *Bleach*, *Death Note*, *Inuyasha*, and *Fullmetal Alchemist* (and its successor *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood*) aired. While the last four series are not adult-like or aimed towards them, they were seen as hyper-violent, overly aggressive, and bloody scenes that could not be edited.

Nevertheless, anime continued to rise in popularity during the 2010s thanks to big hits like *My Hero Academia*, *Attack on Titan*, and *One-Punch Man*. At this time, this coincided with the rise of the anime streaming service *Crunchyroll*, which is now the leading anime streaming service in the U.S. Later, before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, series like *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure*, *Demon Slayer*, *Jujutsu Kaisen*, and

¹Wikipedia. 2024. "History of Anime." Wikimedia Foundation. Last modified June 14, 2024. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_anime.

Chainsaw-Man, brought upon increased international attention and attraction to anime as a whole, and by extent, Japan. At the same time, these series have found strong fandoms and domestic followings. However, with that success and acclaim comes the question, “Why?”

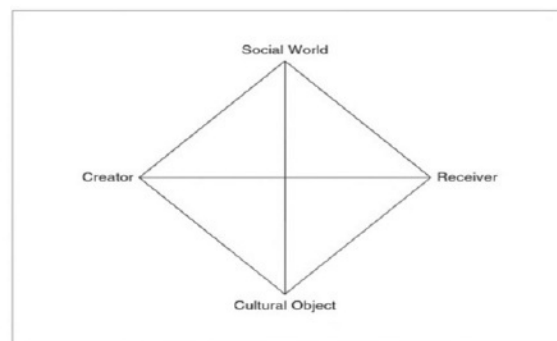
With the rise and success of various anime and the founding of a company to properly distribute it abroad (due to mass acts of online piracy), academics, media, and entertainment experts have leaped at the opportunity to make anime more marketable to new and old consumers alike. Today, news outlets, websites, magazines, bookstores, and community events now frequently discuss and hold anime-related events. Researchers and commentators continue to grasp what makes anime a unique cultural object and phenomenon.

When analyzing the big hits and common names when anime is mentioned, the common link is the type of anime being discussed. Of the anime listed so far, except for three (*Cowboy Bebop*, *Sailor Moon*, and *Ghost in The Shell*), all are classified as *shounen*. As these big names share this commonality, experts and researchers are left pondering what makes this type of anime treasured and well-received. What is it that makes *shounen* anime stand out? And to whom? Why?

Step #2: Thesis Basis (TB)

Phase #1: Literature Review - Griswold & The Cultural Diamond

To begin, I would like to provide a proper introduction of what previous media and literary studies have contributed to the pursuit of this research. Starting with Wendy Griswold and her book *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*, Griswold introduces the *cultural diamond*, a diamond accounting for the four significant elements concerning culture: the creator, the social environment, the cultural object, and the receiver.² The diamond is neither a theory due to the lack of explanation of how points on the diamond relate nor a model due to the lack of a strict cause-and-effect relationship.³ The diamond serves as a visual to show that relationships between the four elements exist.



As all cultures are constructed and known by humans enacting them, then that must mean that all cultural objects, as a manifestation of the culture, have creators. The

² Griswold, Wendy. 2012. *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*. SAGE Publications, Inc; 4th Edition (January 10, 2012).

³ Griswold, Wendy. 2012. *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*. SAGE Publications, Inc; 4th Edition (January 10, 2012).

social environment (or social world, by Griswold's terms) is the point in time and context where an object exists. This environment can be constructed and dictated by politics, social and economic patterns, and cultural trends. Naturally, receivers (aka consumers, aka audiences) are taking in and interacting with the cultural object itself.

That now leaves us with the cultural object. What is a cultural object? In Griswold's words, "shared significance embodied in form."⁴ Griswold herself later expands upon this shared significance to be a "socially meaningful expression that is audible, visible, or tangible that can be articulated" and that what expresses meaning is a story, a message, an idea, or even a dream.⁵ For the sake of my research, it is essential to clarify and stay consistent with the definition of a cultural object. I will be relying on Griswold's specifications. As the object is of a broader culture and its system, when specifying a cultural object, I am taking that aspect, creation, or phenomenon and analyzing it through the lens of the relevant culture.⁶

With the cultural object being introduced and explained, so must the relationships between it and the other elements in the cultural diamond. Along with the other three major components, there are six connections, each depicted by a line connecting them. While each link holds insight and significant weight about how cultures and societies are formed and connected, this research pays close attention to just one relationship: that of the cultural object and the receiver.

As noted previously and to be later elaborated on, cultural objects embody importance, and that importance conveys some concept or value. This concept is first interpreted and received by the receivers. The receiver does both actions. With this being said, Griswold emphasizes that when it comes to the reception of an object, it is critical not to lean too much or too heavily to the side of individuals (receivers) or of the inherent meaning of the object (cultural object). The interpretation and reception of an object is not "firmly and undeniably embedded in the object itself or subject entirely to individual quirks."⁷ In other words, these acts of understanding and taking in of an object to its receivers is that the receivers' interpretation and reception of it, their feelings towards the object, is composed of many different factors including but not limited to themselves or the object.

However, what exactly does that mean, that importance (reception) being demonstrated? And how or why is it being manifested (interpretation)? Griswold points out, "The ultimate success of a cultural object depends on its listeners, viewers, audiences, or consumers, in other words, on the cultural recipients who make their own meanings from it"⁸. So, for those trying to understand a cultural object, to ascertain its value and meaning, we must look at it holistically from the lens of the receiver, considering their

⁴ Griswold, Wendy. 2012. *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*. SAGE Publications, Inc; 4th Edition (January 10, 2012).

⁵ Griswold, Wendy. 2012. *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*. SAGE Publications, Inc; 4th Edition (January 10, 2012).

⁶ Griswold, Wendy. 2012. *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*. SAGE Publications, Inc; 4th Edition (January 10, 2012).

⁷ Griswold, Wendy. 2012. *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*. SAGE Publications, Inc; 4th Edition (January 10, 2012).

⁸ Griswold, Wendy. 2012. *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*. SAGE Publications, Inc; 4th Edition (January 10, 2012).

“social attributes, their positions in a social structure, condition what they like, what they value, and even what they recognize.”⁹

What are they saying about it? What does it mean to them? As Griswold puts it, what ideas and stories are receivers taking away from the cultural object? How and why are they interpreting it as such? I see this as the interpretation of cultural objects (receiver to object), and it is one of the two significant components driving Griswold’s analysis of the link between cultural objects and the receiver. She dubs this the “receivers are strong/cultural objects are weak” standpoint, an extreme of unlimited freedom where people can interpret and decide cultural objects for themselves, irrespective of the inherent value.¹⁰

This idea of the receivers deciding an object’s value or significance is not revolutionary. Even today, the value of the stock market, goods, land, and other objects (physical or not) is heavily influenced by whoever is consuming it, if not outright determined. Stocks rise and fall as investors watch the interest and impacts of their relevant fields (i.e., electric cars), and home prices increase or decrease depending on buyers’ (receivers) desire for a home and mortgage prices. While a stock or a house may be made with the intent to be high value and have significant meaning (creators’ intent), it is the one who ends up with, or at the very least has the object passed on to them, who will have the most or final say. Griswold makes sure to point this out, writing that “the meaning of a cultural object may be initially suggested by the intentions or period eye of its creators, the receivers of culture have the last word.”¹¹

However, this is only half of the puzzle in understanding the connection between an object and its receiver. The remaining half lies in the reception of cultural objects (object to receiver), the second major part of the link between the former and receivers. This half focuses on what the cultural object *itself* does, making the receivers receive and interpret it in a particular fashion. Going back briefly to my example on stocks and homeownership, how high a stock or home price starts (or is potentially made to start via creators’ intent) could affect whether or not the buyer is intrigued much more to purchase it. If a home or stock starts at a relatively low price, the buyer might feel it is an easier, less heavy financial purchase and will lean more toward buying it. On the other hand, if prices are much higher and incite a higher economic cost, the buyer may have differing feelings about purchasing it, not wanting to lose so much money. This same concept can be applied to the cultural object’s inherent value.

This half of the puzzle is what Griswold dubs the “cultural objects are strong/receivers are weak” viewpoint, another extreme where the cultural object holds supreme and the receivers, the individual’s opinions, and feelings do not matter. To those who are not privy to the cultural object’s surroundings and nature, they will never understand it. Additionally, those aware of it agree on a meaning but never find a consensus on one definition. In the end, Griswold categorizes the extremes as **Mass Culture Theory**, where culture and, therefore, the cultural object dominate the receivers,

⁹ Griswold, Wendy. 2012. *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*. SAGE Publications, Inc; 4th Edition (January 10, 2012).

¹⁰ Griswold, Wendy. 2012. *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*. SAGE Publications, Inc; 4th Edition (January 10, 2012).

¹¹ Griswold, Wendy. 2012. *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*. SAGE Publications, Inc; 4th Edition (January 10, 2012).

and **Popular Culture Theory**, where the receivers dominate the cultural object.¹²

Step #3: Towards The Thesis (TTT); Literature Reviews, Research & Discussions On Anime

Phase #1: Suan's Individuality & Identity

Looking at these questions and connections has led me to my thesis and research: the relationship between anime, specifically *shounen* anime, which is the most popular genre, and Black Americans. Simultaneously, I will also look at the relationship *Shounen* anime has with its domestic audience, Japanese citizens. It is common knowledge that the black community has a deep connection with this entertainment and cultural object, and it is common knowledge that it is linked with Japanese people as its domestic consumers.

While the reception of *shounen* anime by Americans and Japanese is known, the reasoning behind it, the *why*, and the *how need to be better known*. Why is this specific anime genre so prevalent? What gets consumers not just engaged but continuing to come back? What does *shounen* anime do or possess that makes it so well received? How does it make itself so palpable and transferable? Academics and researchers have already offered viewpoints and approaches to such questions with varying success and understanding.

I will first introduce Stevie Suan and his book *Anime's Identity: Performativity and Form beyond Japan*. In his book, Suan analyzes how anime acts, what comes of those actions, and why. Stevie is quick to point out early that "Anime acts as the conduit through which something is conveyed, an invisible "in-between" through which one views Japan."¹³ The form of entertainment as a whole, like many others, is a bridge, a link, that allows the flow of ideas, knowledge, culture, and experience between viewers (receivers) and an object. What these ideas and others might be specifically is up to debate and the viewers, but as a media that exists within spaces of discord, various cultures, and events, and as viewers who exist similarly, if not the same, anime can be and is a mechanism to explore contexts that it is placed or exists in.

One would argue that anime, as it was born in Japan, exists in Japan. Still, Suan challenges this by arguing that while Japan does house anime, that does not and should not prevent it from being seen through a different lens, from being discussed from other viewpoints, and from being placed in or existing in areas beyond its initial capacity or placement.¹⁴ This is primarily due to globalization and transnationalism, which make creating, distributing, and consuming things such as cultural objects (in this case, anime) more ubiquitous. Due to that ubiquity, the interpretation and reception of a product may be transformed; as a result, the meaning and value in one place may not be the same as in another. Suan further supports this by stating, "The niche of frequent anime viewers has developed its own taste communities, meaning anime viewers in Japan may not have the same readings and tastes."¹⁵ As a result, it is critical that when analyzing anime, one does

¹² Griswold, Wendy. 2012. *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*. SAGE Publications, Inc; 4th Edition (January 10, 2012).

¹³Suan, Stevie. 2021. *Anime's Identity: Performativity and Form beyond Japan (English Edition)*. University of Minnesota Press.

¹⁴Suan, Stevie. 2021. *Anime's Identity: Performativity and Form beyond Japan (English Edition)*. University of Minnesota Press.

¹⁵Suan, Stevie. 2021. *Anime's Identity: Performativity and Form beyond Japan (English*

not equate the interpretation and reception of one group or locale to another's and that differences, just as many as similarities, will exist.

With Suan's stance towards differing interpretations and receptions being set, he begins his interpretation of anime with a direction toward individualism and neoliberalism. He points out that at the beginning of his book, significant works such as *Evangelion* tackled individualism frequently throughout its run and that the idea would be revisited more often through neoliberalism discussed in future anime.¹⁶ Suan references moments throughout the series in which the characters question their values, sense of self, and identity.¹⁷ Asking questions like "Who am I?" or "What type of self am I?" at the significant male and female series leads, Shinji and Rei, respectively, provoke thoughts of identity and individuality.¹⁸

Taking things further, Suan argues the role *Evangelion* plays in debating ideas and perceptions of selfhood. In searching for identity, *Evangelion* pushes its characters, namely Shinji, into situations with more fluid and shifting elements, which may cause characters not to have a grounded, consistent identity or selfhood but one that is constantly changing based on aspects of the time.¹⁹ Suan identifies this as going against the modern perception of an individual who is "logically consistent, a character who is self-contained within his or her own bodily borders, maintaining a strict internal-external separation."²⁰

However, Suan acknowledges the role of anime in challenging this when series such as *Evangelion* invite external influences, outside codes that may influence and shape one's identity, thus creating an identity crisis and conflicting selfhoods. This is most prominent with Shinji, who, while struggling to have his own identity, eventually realizes that he must make decisions to pursue that desired identity, but those decisions are in conjunction with others around him.²¹ As a result, according to Suan, *Evangelion* runs into many obstacles, for better or worse, in trying to convey the theme of individualism and identity. The overlapping, conflicting, and consistent push and pull between the internal and external represent the theme of conflict in shaping selfhood and identity for Suan.²²

Phase #2: Napier and Apocalypse, Festivals, and Elegiac

Edition). University of Minnesota Press.

¹⁶Suan, Stevie. 2021. *Anime's Identity: Performativity and Form beyond Japan (English Edition)*. University of Minnesota Press.

¹⁷Suan, Stevie. 2021. *Anime's Identity: Performativity and Form beyond Japan (English Edition)*. University of Minnesota Press.

¹⁸Suan, Stevie. 2021. *Anime's Identity: Performativity and Form beyond Japan (English Edition)*. University of Minnesota Press.

¹⁹Suan, Stevie. 2021. *Anime's Identity: Performativity and Form beyond Japan (English Edition)*. University of Minnesota Press.

²⁰Suan, Stevie. 2021. *Anime's Identity: Performativity and Form beyond Japan (English Edition)*. University of Minnesota Press.

²¹Suan, Stevie. 2021. *Anime's Identity: Performativity and Form beyond Japan (English Edition)*. University of Minnesota Press.

²²Suan, Stevie. 2021. *Anime's Identity: Performativity and Form beyond Japan (English Edition)*. University of Minnesota Press.

Moving forward, I will introduce Susan J. Napier. In her book, *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*, Napier points out that in comparison to child-like, innocent, and surface-level stories and media that American cartoons provide, all anime, including *shounen*, contain more dark and mature, complex and provocative plotlines, characters, and elements that make the experience of watching, understanding, and interacting with the media, the text, more entertaining.²³ The ability of anime to reflect constantly shifting identities and ideas through pacing, scenery, and animation allows it to strike various chords as a “cultural form whose themes and modes reach across arbitrary aesthetic boundaries to strike significant artistic and psychological chords” in industrialized societies.²⁴ As industrialized societies are ever so changing, and modern societies are either industrialized or becoming industrialized, anime can permeate and connect with it.²⁵

Like Suan's argument, Napier points out that with globalization and transnationalism, Japan and Japanese culture are no longer purely Japanese and will continue to be mixed with more Western and non-Western influences.²⁶ The opposite also holds; just as much as the West and non-West cultures will affect Japan, so will Japanese culture affect the West and non-West.²⁷ Napier then discusses prevalent themes in anime, beginning with apocalyptic, moving to festival-related themes, and ending on elegiac tones or ideas. The former entails darker, more severe elements regarding death, destruction, and catastrophe. On the other hand, the latter, through the usage of more Japanese-like customs and beliefs like religion, familiar tropes and ideas such as sex, gender, social hierarchy are inverted, broken, and regressed, and with mournful ideas, loss, sadness, and disappearance are the core messages being portrayed.²⁸

Napier describes a pervasive darkness within anime conveyed to the viewers, and this darkness can come about in ways that signify the end, an apocalyptic theme. This end can be the decline of a society or culture and the resulting feeling of despair or melancholy that may follow a civilization's downfall. This is most prevalent in Napier, connecting the apocalyptic theme to Japan's economic downturn after its postwar economic success. Describing the weakness and faults of the lost decades as leading people to lose faith in values that brought upon previous success, Napier writes that this “disillusionment has led to permeated throughout society, leading to record-breaking suicide rates across the generations” and that such ideas of despair, emptiness, and anxiety that are present in real life are, in apocalyptic anime, expressions of social

²³Napier, Susan J. 2016. *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*. St. Martin's Griffin; Second Edition, Revised.

²⁴Napier, Susan J. 2016. *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*. St. Martin's Griffin; Second Edition, Revised.

²⁵Napier, Susan J. 2016. *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*. St. Martin's Griffin; Second Edition, Revised.

²⁶Napier, Susan J. 2016. *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*. St. Martin's Griffin; Second Edition, Revised.

²⁷Napier, Susan J. 2016. *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*. St. Martin's Griffin; Second Edition, Revised.

²⁸Napier, Susan J. 2016. *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*. St. Martin's Griffin; Second Edition, Revised.

pervasive pessimism.²⁹

Shifting the lens to more festival-themed anime series such as *Urusei Yatsura*, Napier voices that some anime may be more whimsical and fun, not containing as much despair and unhappiness with society as the former apocalyptic anime implies. Regarding festival-themed anime, the focus is more on leveling or combating standard social order, tropes, and norms in ways that celebrate a sense of anarchy and the absence of authority or authoritative structures.³⁰ To Napier, *Urusei Yatsura* and *Ranma ½* are perfect examples of this as the lead female characters display strength, power, and independence to an audience that may feel as though they are denied that in their society, in this case, Japanese women in Japanese culture.³¹

Finally, when it comes to elegiac themes, Napier connects them to the bittersweet passage of things like youth, beauty, and love. She comments that the passage of things and the pain that comes with it passing, as well as the love for those things while they last, is a common trope in Japanese culture and that this is reflected in anime such as *Evangelion* and *Ghost In The Shell*.³² In the latter, the protagonist questions her potential lack of a human soul, and in the former, the protagonist has a moment where he escapes the stress of his turbulent life to the countryside, searching for peace that he may not have.³³

The apocalyptic, festival, and elegiac themes or approaches are not the only types of anime that exist, nor are they the only endings or ideas portrayed. There are other, more light-hearted and easy-going series out there that possess more happy endings, with Napier noting this herself. Napier identifies and categorizes trends in anime through their tones, characters, and artistic styles to deliver ideas on what anime represents and conveys to an audience. This approach gives rise to and encourages analyzing anime as a medium for different outlooks and cultures, especially when she compares anime to Western media in the sense that while Western films encompass ideas of hope, validation, social issues, and modern problems, anime does this, it does not to it in ways that are single layered or direct³⁴. Furthermore, it does not limit itself to those ideas alone or “ideological containment” but instead branches out and implores a multitude of representations “that are both culturally traditional and representative of the universal properties of the human imagination.”³⁵

²⁹Napier, Susan J. 2016. *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*. St. Martin's Griffin; Second Edition, Revised.

³⁰Napier, Susan J. 2016. *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*. St. Martin's Griffin; Second Edition, Revised.

³¹Napier, Susan J. 2016. *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*. St. Martin's Griffin; Second Edition, Revised.

³²Napier, Susan J. 2016. *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*. St. Martin's Griffin; Second Edition, Revised.

³³Napier, Susan J. 2016. *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*. St. Martin's Griffin; Second Edition, Revised.

³⁴Napier, Susan J. 2016. *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*. St. Martin's Griffin; Second Edition, Revised.

³⁵Napier, Susan J. 2016. *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*. St. Martin's Griffin; Second Edition, Revised.

Part #3: Condry & The Soul of Anime

Finally, I will discuss Ian Condry's approach to animes' globalization and reception throughout his book *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity And Japan's Media Success Story*, in which he, much like Suan and Napier, discusses animes' globalization and transnationalism along with its pervasiveness, interpretation, and reception. Opening with the prominence of anime in conventions and school clubs scattered throughout the U.S. and the widespread broadcasting of Japanese anime, Condry moves into social and cultural dynamics that fueled animes' success worldwide, thus the "soul" of anime.³⁶ Condry acknowledges the platform of creativity, including the characters, plot elements, and worldbuilding, that anime presents to people, which then functions as both a social space and cultural production where the anime is given value.³⁷

Quickly transitioning to talking about the animated film *Summer Wars* and its director, Mamoru Hosoda, Condry points out that one of the ideas in the movie and by the director, heroism, takes the form of collective, concentrated, and planned efforts of a diverse group of individuals, who while individually have specialized skills and connections may not solve the issue at hand, but by banding together successfully do.³⁸ Similarly, he draws connections to virtual space and reality. People are often convinced that only what is in front of them, what is visible, such as familial relationships, are accurate and that whatever is virtual is not. Condry refutes this by understanding that the film brings to the table the idea that virtual spaces can and do have genuine relationships with real consequences.³⁹ The collective mentality or the group effort is often emphasized in films, anime or not. However, it is not the only, or even the largest, idea to be highlighted.

Immediately after *Summer Wars*, Condry shifts to Hosoda's other film, *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time*, to speak more about the individual. Condry recalls Hosoda having to make characters more relatable and understandable to a broader audience, most notably younger generations, when designing the story and creating characters.⁴⁰ Hosoda thought that the current generation was not so much focused on society as a whole, being part of a collective, but more so on individualistic ideas. As such, he created character to traverse time, not for society and to benefit the world before his time, but for his desire.⁴¹

This transformation and shift to a different audience and time is not only in the film's male lead but also in the female lead. While initially unable to control her time leaps, the girl is changed so she can. Hosoda attributes this to younger Japanese women discovering their independence, power, and control over themselves and their lives, and

³⁶Condry, Ian. 2013. *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan's Media Success Story (Experimental Futures) (English Edition)*. Duke University Press Books.

³⁷Condry, Ian. 2013. *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan's Media Success Story (Experimental Futures) (English Edition)*. Duke University Press Books.

³⁸Condry, Ian. 2013. *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan's Media Success Story (Experimental Futures) (English Edition)*. Duke University Press Books.

³⁹Condry, Ian. 2013. *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan's Media Success Story (Experimental Futures) (English Edition)*. Duke University Press Books.

⁴⁰Condry, Ian. 2013. *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan's Media Success Story (Experimental Futures) (English Edition)*. Duke University Press Books.

⁴¹Condry, Ian. 2013. *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan's Media Success Story (Experimental Futures) (English Edition)*. Duke University Press Books.

as such, wanted to create the heroine representing that mentality.⁴²

Condry concludes that the film is multilayered in its goal of emphasizing finding one's path and future through the heroine and having one's desire through the hero.⁴³ Despite the sense of independence and individuality the film depicts, Condry highlights the role and effect of external factors, most notably the relationship between the heroine and the hero. Through their relationship, they realize more about themselves and what they want. The heroine wants the hero's love, and the hero desires to keep his newfound friendships, culminating in another idea of friendship or love.⁴⁴

The most striking thing in Condry's book is the realization that creators do not dictate the interpretation of their work. In his interview with Hosoda, the director acknowledged that he wants the audience to have their takes on his films, even if he may not see or agree with them.⁴⁵ Condry returns to this notion of diverse perspectives in his *Samurai Champloo* anime series analysis. After interviewing the director, Shinichiro Watanabe, Condry understood Watanabe's intentions and deliberate usage of the non-Japanese cultural art of hip-hop. Through hip-hop and remixes, Watanabe introduces, defines, and re-invents characters in the series. Condry attributes this to understanding that "there is a home for hip-hop in Japan, just as there is a home for anime around the world."⁴⁶ This is reflected in *Samurai Champloo*, as the two distinct art styles are used in one production, and they are mixed, demonstrating that Japanese culture does not *have* to be separate from foreign culture.

Condry ends his book on elevating anime by understanding anime's success and value by finding its meaning in various spaces.⁴⁷ He encourages the journey to realize that "dynamics of niche and mass have a lot to do with one's location and perspective."⁴⁸ This makes artists and audiences question or disturb their environments and cultures by looking at others. This is even more clear in his reference to Takashi Okazaki's anime *Afro Samurai*, where Okazaki expresses his admiration for African-American music and culture, coupled with his fixation on samurais, which led to the creation of *Afro Samurai*, now an anime with a cult of followers. Condry writes, "Hip-hop went from the United States to the world, while anime traveled from Japan to the world."⁴⁹ This push and pull

⁴²Condry, Ian. 2013. *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan's Media Success Story (Experimental Futures) (English Edition)*. Duke University Press Books.

⁴³Condry, Ian. 2013. *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan's Media Success Story (Experimental Futures) (English Edition)*. Duke University Press Books.

⁴⁴Condry, Ian. 2013. *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan's Media Success Story (Experimental Futures) (English Edition)*. Duke University Press Books.

⁴⁵Condry, Ian. 2013. *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan's Media Success Story (Experimental Futures) (English Edition)*. Duke University Press Books.

⁴⁶Condry, Ian. 2013. *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan's Media Success Story (Experimental Futures) (English Edition)*. Duke University Press Books.

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⁴⁹Condry, Ian. 2013. *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan's Media Success Story (Experimental Futures) (English Edition)*. Duke University Press Books.

of differing cultures and areas of reception has been seen many times throughout history, and anime is no exception. The exchange in this situation is focused on anime and hip-hop, and while the locations and lens may be different, the art can still be enjoyed with the audience enjoying it in numerous ways, some of which may be understood by others, and others may not.

Step #4: Approaching The Research

The authors are aware of animes' prominence and value as both an object and phenomenon, so they do not debate that but rather seek to answer why and how it has come and continues to be as such. While different in the examples they use and the overarching intentions of their works, Suan, Napier, and Condry all tackle three things: 1) the globalization and transnationality of anime, 2) the themes and messages that anime possesses, and 3) how those themes and messages are received. All three objectives are pursued in a way that elaborates upon animes' relationship with audiences, domestically and abroad, as a cultural object.

As Griswold points out, the cultural object's relationship with its audience and vice versa changes based on locale, context, person, and many other things. The trio of authors I introduced in my literature review also discuss this. Taking the *cultural diamond* and its link between the cultural object and receiver, what is being received depicts more of the receiver's end, while what is being given, transferred, and interpreted depicts more of the giver's end.

My thesis project and research do not intend to refrain from debating which is more right or less wrong, nor do they tackle which is more accepted or better. My research utilizes the foundations of media theory and literature, interpretation, and reception to introduce a new foundation for examining the dominance of anime in one particular area: race. While the authors above acknowledge, identify, and separate the boundaries of the West, most notably the U.S., from Japanese audiences and feelings towards the cultural object of anime, they rarely, if ever, go deeper than just global, hemispherical locations. They do not speak to the role of religion, ethnicity, race, and other cultures *within* Western culture that play similarly, and in some cases, differently, to the cultural object-consumer relationship, which is, in this case, anime to anime consumers. Knowing how locale and other factors of an individual, and indeed a larger group, can affect relationships with objects, I plan to look at anime through the lens of race and a cultural object.

As such, in this thesis, I plan to use the established approaches to tackle the globalization and transnational relationship, interpretation, and reception that *shounen anime* has as a cultural object in the form of entertainment outside of Japan and its domestic relationship within its borders, with an emphasis on race. Looking at the relationship between Black Americans and anime, and then between Japanese and anime, my research attempts an approach of racial dynamics with groups and the cultural object: Black Americans and Anime (BA³) and Japanese and anime (JA²).

Step #5- Research Questions & Objective (RQO)

As mentioned at the end of *Step #4*, I plan to use established thoughts of anime, themes, and cultural objects to introduce and discuss the relationships different communities, native and non-native, locale and global, have with the commonly shared entertainment that is shounen anime. Anime, as a cultural object of Japan, now resonates strongly in different parts of the world, especially with Black Americans in anime. As it

already possesses a strong connection at home, it is worth understanding why and how it has an equally, if not stronger, relationship broad. While there are not many academic books, articles, or papers on the role of race in anime, particularly shounen anime or anime and black culture, there have been instances of dialogue regarding the connection between the two and their influence on each other; most notably in music, YouTube Videos, and American animated shows.

In his analytical video detailing the history and expansion of anime to the Black community, especially in America, YouTuber *Beyond The Bot* attributes animes' rise in popularity and connection with anime with the Black American community to music, most specifically arts such as hip-hop and jazz.⁵⁰ *Beyond The Bot* references the soundtracks used in famous works such as *Cowboy Bebop*, *Samurai Champloo*, and *The Boondocks*.⁵¹ He points out that director Shinichiro Watanabe (director of *Cowboy Bebop* and *Samurai Champloo*) used art styles founded in and heavily tied to the black community, such as jazz and hip-hop, as well as depicted more accurate, fair representations of Black people in his work of *Cowboy Bebop*.⁵² The former was used in *Cowboy Bebop* to contrast its more futuristic setting by including references to the past through jazz music. On the other hand, the latter utilized hip-hop to juxtapose its more historical samurai setting. As many know, jazz and hip-hop are regarded as being founded by black people and in black American culture. With their art ingrained and a part of entertainment and being spoken about at times in music, Black Americans were steadily drawn to this cultural object.

Now that aspects of their culture were becoming more ingrained in anime, Black Americans became more attracted to this art style and media platform. However, it was not just a one-way street of anime, shounen anime, using black culture (*Samurai Champloo* is a shounen series, but its predecessor, *Cowboy Bebop*, is not); it was also black culture, mainly Black Americans beginning to adopt anime and make it part of their culture as well. As *Beyond The Bot* points out, various rappers and musical artists quote or reference animes (typically shounen) in their music. Famous rappers such as RZA of the Wu-Tang Clan and Del the Funky Homosapien reference anime in their music, in the case of the latter, or their lives, in the case of the former. *Beyond The Bot* emphasizes RZA's stance on anime by referencing RZA's take on *Dragon Ball Z* as it represents the journey of the black man in America, and then following up by summarizing RZA's opinion as *Dragon Ball Z* being the story of the black man in America.⁵³

The most significant breakthroughs came with *The Boondocks*, an American anime-influenced film depicting and analyzing the life of a Black American family in a white, suburban setting, and *Afro Samurai*, an anime about a black Samurai with an afro. While the former may not be an anime, it draws much of its animation and art style from

⁵⁰"Why Anime Is for Black People - Hip Hop X Anime | Beyond the Bot." *Beyond The Bot*. February 7, 2021. Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rj-9i04lvHQ>.

⁵¹"Why Anime Is for Black People - Hip Hop X Anime | Beyond the Bot." *Beyond The Bot*. February 7, 2021. Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rj-9i04lvHQ>.

⁵²"Why Anime Is for Black People - Hip Hop X Anime | Beyond the Bot." *Beyond The Bot*. February 7, 2021. Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rj-9i04lvHQ>.

⁵³"Why Anime Is for Black People - Hip Hop X Anime | Beyond the Bot." *Beyond The Bot*. February 7, 2021. Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rj-9i04lvHQ>.

Japanese anime, a deliberate choice made by the show creator, Aaron McGruder.⁵⁴ McGruder desired to incorporate anime-like elements into his show as a way to express humor and more complicated and darker concepts into his show, in a way that American cartoons could not.⁵⁵ However, the latter is an anime created and directed by a Japanese who respect black culture, music, and Japanese samurai. This inclusion of multiple ideas and more difficult ones, such as discrimination, isolation, freedom, understanding, and acceptance, were core ideas that resonated with black audiences. And as those concepts were more visible and relatable within anime, black audiences were more drawn to them.

An example of this is the significant hit series *Naruto*. The protagonist faces constant discrimination, isolation, and rejection for being alive. Due to circumstances outside his control and elements, he did not desire; he lacked resources, support, and a proper, fair life. In his YouTube video, the Youtuber Blxxk Anime comments that this trope, this situation, and rejection from society is what many black people can relate to and confide in.⁵⁶ For them, watching the protagonist fight against these odds and prove various stereotypes and images of himself wrong while finding acceptance, building his network, acquiring resources (friends, new abilities), and pursuing his dream are all core elements of a black experience.⁵⁷

Similarly, in another popular anime series, *YuYu Hakusho*, the protagonist is a high school student who, as Black YouTuber GrizzOn13th TV says, is “loud, rude, aggressive, obnoxious,” and that is something he could relate to as that is how his teachers described him.⁵⁸ Despite the outwardly negative traits, GrizzOn13th TV points out that the protagonist, Yusuke, was a good guy who was misunderstood by many.⁵⁹ While in many stories, characters like Yusuke are seen as villains, in *YuYu Hakusho*, he is the hero. He is someone who GrizzOn13th TV sees as trying to overcome challenges and make something of himself.⁶⁰ To GrizzOn13th TV, shounen anime, in particular, points out the recurring idea of starting from nothing and becoming successful or, as he puts it, “getting it from the mud” and “starting from nothing and becoming something is how a lot of black Americans define success.”⁶¹ The idea of perseverance and chasing your dreams despite being disadvantaged and facing adversity resonates strongly with the Black American community.

⁵⁴ "Why Do Black People Love Anime?" Blxxk Anime. February 7, 2021. Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-nTXbgOSOWE>.

⁵⁵ "Why Anime Is for Black People - Hip Hop X Anime | Beyond the Bot." Beyond The Bot. February 7, 2021. Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rj-9i04IvHQ>.

⁵⁶ "Why Anime Is for Black People - Hip Hop X Anime | Beyond the Bot." Beyond The Bot. February 7, 2021. Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rj-9i04IvHQ>.

⁵⁷ "Why Anime Is for Black People - Hip Hop X Anime | Beyond the Bot." Beyond The Bot. February 7, 2021. Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rj-9i04IvHQ>.

⁵⁸ "Why Do Black People Love Anime?" GrizzOn13th TV. August 27, 2022. Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h70iedKCYCI>.

⁵⁹ "Why Do Black People Love Anime?" GrizzOn13th TV. August 27, 2022. Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h70iedKCYCI>.

⁶⁰ "Why Do Black People Love Anime?" GrizzOn13th TV. August 27, 2022. Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h70iedKCYCI>.

⁶¹ "Why Do Black People Love Anime?" GrizzOn13th TV. August 27, 2022. Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h70iedKCYCI>.

A common trend between these series and the depicted messages is that they are all shounen anime, something that even the YouTubers notice. With that being said, watching shounen anime can and does lead consumers, Black Americans and Japanese, to approach it and leave it with different and varying exits when interacting with it. With their different approaches and departures, it is worth examining what those approaches are and why, as well as what the departures are and why. This translates into my research to understand these approaches and exits, or as I call them, interpretations and receptions of this cultural object, its form being entertainment, of these consumer communities and, from that, understanding the commonalities and differences between the two consumer cultures and groups. Finally, using those parallels to open up similarities between the groups. In summary, my research can be seen as tackling the following three questions:

1. What are the ideas, themes, and messages each community receives from these forms of entertainment?
2. Are there any similarities and differences between the ideas/themes each respective community receives?
3. What can these trends and data points tell us about how these communities interact with popular culture?

Step #6 - The Methodology: A Crucial Framework for Understanding

Phase #1: Qualitative Research & Surveys

To understand how connected Black Americans and Japanese were to shounen anime, I created two online surveys to assess their general approach and backgrounds towards this entertainment, one for English-speaking Black Americans and the other for Japanese speakers. I designed the surveys to gather data regarding demographics, viewed series, and viewers' relationships with them. Furthermore, the surveys needed to be as exhaustive and inclusive as possible, thus allowing individuals to select multiple answers regarding questions having various answers and present the most results.

The survey began with demographics to understand the volunteers' approach and mentality. I asked standard questions about age, gender, and occupation (student, worker, part-time worker). Then, the survey posed questions about popular shounen works that stand out to the standard anime-viewing audience.

When referring to famous shounen works, I refer to critically acclaimed, long-running, and well-received series. This includes but is not limited to the *Big Three* anime (series known to be more famous than any other series at a given time), such as Eichiro Oda's *One Piece*, Tite Kubo's *Bleach*, and Kishimoto's *Naruto*. Along with these three and other famous works, past and present, I had volunteers first choose which among the lists they had watched. Volunteers could select multiple works if they saw more than one series. Additionally, if they had seen series outside of these and wanted to write them in, the survey contained an "other" option to write in a shounen series of their choice.

Once volunteers had selected or written in watched series, they were asked to choose one series from the previous list that was their most favored. As with the question earlier, they also had the option of writing in anime, which was their favorite. I then asked about individuals' favorite and disliked characters, moments, and aspects of the show.

Considering those things, the survey closed with inquiries about messages, ideas, and themes the volunteers took away from their favorite shounen anime.

As authors and I have repeatedly touched upon, relationships between receivers and objects vary. With that, the ideas, messages, and themes that the audience will interpret and receive will change from person to person, group to group. When it comes to anime (and any media form for that matter), particularly shounen anime, themes are incredibly diverse; some broad, some specific, some targeted, and some not targeted. To list them all would be too exhausting and ineffective, so I had them grouped under five larger, overarching themes and assigned more specific ones to those broader notions (i.e., Depression and anxiety falling under Mental health). The following thematic categories were listed as such:

1. Culture (History, Religion)
2. Mental Health (Depression, Anxiety, Trauma)
3. Society (Government, Politics, War)
4. Identity (Freedom, Success, Hopes, Dreams)
5. Social Life (Friendship, Love, Work, School/Social Spaces)

As with most questions with multiple answers in the survey, volunteers also had the choice to select various themes that they felt their favorite series included, were attached to, and represented. Depending on the viewer, the conveyed message(s) may differ, and selecting multiple represented this notion. Volunteers were then asked to write a brief statement regarding their selected themes and why they chose them. The survey ended with a follow-up request for an interview to understand more about individuals' responses and relationships with shounen series.

Conducting a quantitative survey was the most efficient method for finding general trends, patterns, and opinions regarding consumer feelings about shounen anime. The survey was efficient in keeping questions short and direct but was also easily accessible and distributable. Since I am in Japan, reaching and presenting the study to Japanese audiences was incredibly effective. There are numerous online and in-person events related to or about anime specifically. Events like anime cafes, concerts, conventions, clubs (students and adults), and cosplay gatherings were spaces that catered to this entertainment and, thus, were influential in finding volunteers.

As for Black Americans, while not as effective, there are still Black Americans and Black American spaces within Japan where I distributed the survey. Similarly, there are online spaces for Black Americans, such as Discord, Facebook, and Instagram, to reach out to this group and deliver the study. Finally, the survey's questioning allowed data to be gathered without endangering volunteers' privacy and found those willing to engage in further dialogue through in-person or online interviews. This set the stage for more in-depth, specific, and analytical-qualitative research.

Phase #2: Qualitative Research & Interviews

After a month and a half of having volunteers taking surveys, I moved forward in reaching out to those who were comfortable giving more intricate and detailed experiences about their connection with shounen anime. Those willing to be interviewed met me for an hour to discuss their relationships with this specific anime genre. The

interview was the same for every interviewee and focused on the individual's love for shounen anime, what got them into it, and what keeps them interested. This resulted in a range of questions I had prepared concerning the quantitative survey that all interviewees had taken.

First, I asked all interviewees to answer and describe why they enjoyed anime, specifically shounen anime, so much. Moving forward, using their favorite shounen series as the main talking point and occasionally referencing other famous works they had said they watched and enjoyed, I opened the conversation to narrow questions about the works they watched. Questions such as "Why is this series your favorite?", "Why do you gravitate to series classified in this genre?" and "Is there something in shounen anime that you feel is special and distinctive from other genres?". Of course, these were not the only questions I had asked, but they allowed the conversation to go further into the research and the purpose of the interview.

After hearing the interviewees' responses, I questioned them on why the specific aspect of shounen anime that they responded with resonated with them. This correlated to the themes and ideas question in the quantitative survey. Interviewees expanded upon their answers and reasoning for said answers, connecting ideas and themes being portrayed through characters, scenery (favorite moments), and relationships to aspects of real life, the world, culture, and society, or at least what those things were to the respective group (Black Americans and Japanese) in their favorite shounen series. The interviewees then connected the aspects mentioned above with other series, thus establishing a chain and a trend between the shounen series.

While qualitative interviews were not as abundant as the quantitative survey, they did not allow me to hear more specific stories, relationships, and mentalities from the consumers about this shared cultural object: shounen anime. The quantitative survey gave me a more shallow but broad idea of what perspectives were being brought into the relationship and what messages were being taken out. On the other hand, the qualitative interviews allowed me to see why those lenses were being applied to shounen anime and why those ideas were being extracted. Furthermore, the answers and data from qualitative interviews fell in line with much of what was answered in the surveys, not just with the individual interviewee but with others who had chosen not to be interviewed but still had similar, if not the same, answers, thus embracing and solidifying a trend amongst and between groups.

Step #7 - Quantitative Data Findings

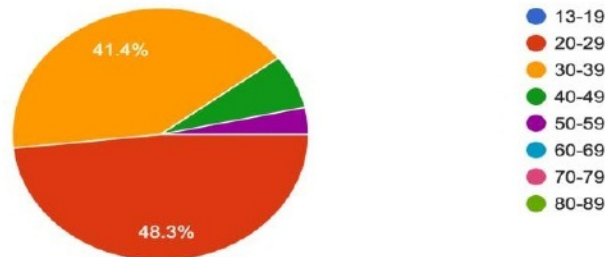
Phase #1: Black Americans And Shounen Anime

Beginning with Black Americans, I will introduce the survey data about the relationship between Black Americans and shounen anime. There are 29 survey respondents, and the data reflects their dispositions; the first is about demographics. Most respondents tended to be younger adults between 20 and 29 (48.3%), followed by those in their 30s (41.4%), and the remainder were full-fledged adults in their 40s and above. This corresponded well with the rise in shounen anime and anime as a whole, given that series such as *Dragon Ball*, *YuYu Hakusho*, *Fist of The North Star*, and *Rurouni Kenshin* aired in the 1980s and 1990s in Japan and was distributed in the states late 1990s and early 2000s. This would mean that those in their 40s and 50s were young to late adults when these series came out, giving them an easier time understanding and mixing with the shows'

deeper, more profound context and messages. In comparison, those in their 20s and 30s were either young teens or children who grew up and became attached to series like these for reasons to be discussed later.'

How old are you?

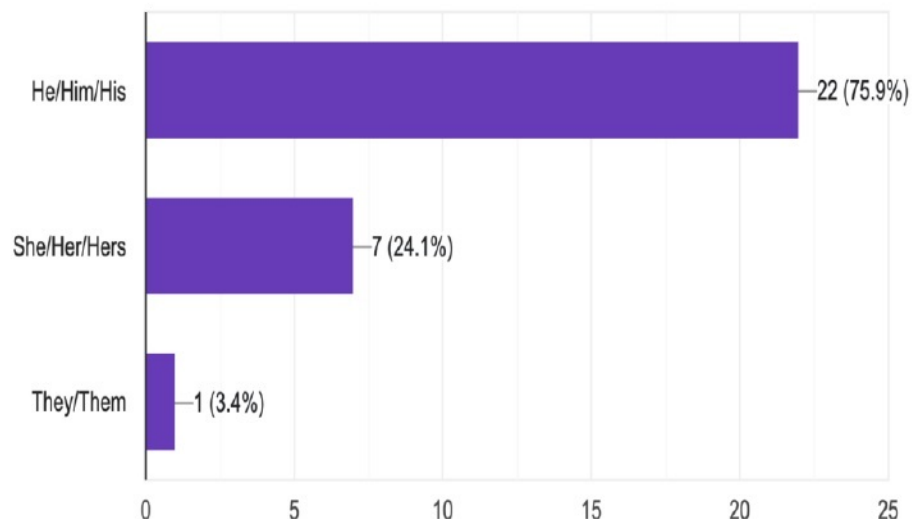
29 responses



Another vital demographic to discuss is the role that gender plays in the Black American community's engagement with shounen anime. As depicted below, data from the survey indicates that more Black American men are consumers and receivers of shounen anime than their female counterparts. Of the 29 respondents, 22 identified as men (75.9%) and seven identified as women (24.1%). What makes this discrepancy so significant could be gender norms or expectations, but that is not what this research focuses on or prioritizes. However, this will be touched upon later in discussions.

How do you identify?

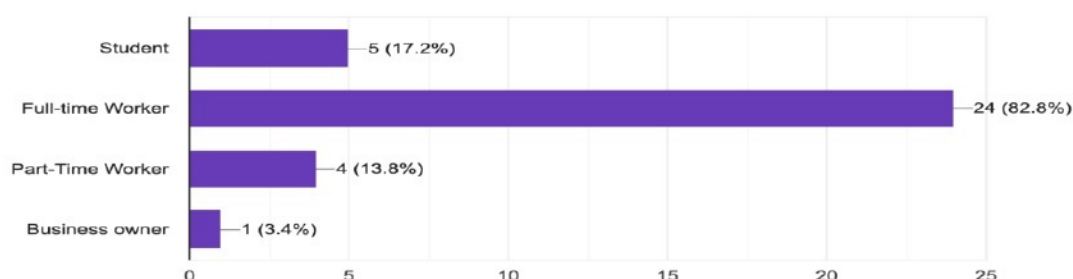
29 responses



In concluding demographics regarding disposition and occupation, the survey revealed that many shounen anime watchers are full-time workers in the Black American community.

What is your employment status? (You can choose more than one)

29 responses

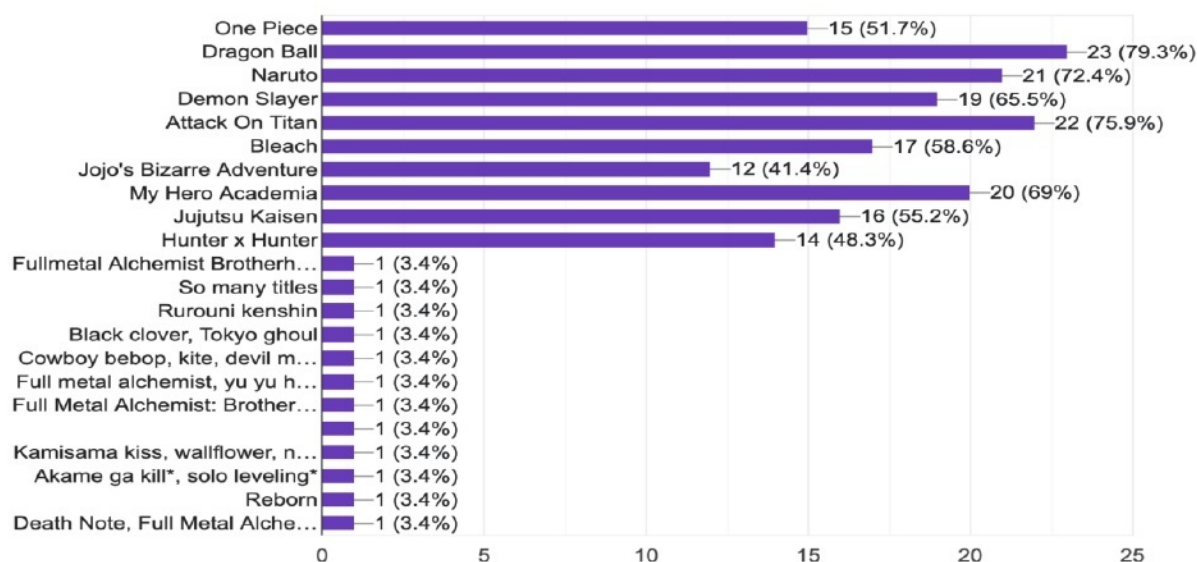


Of the 29 respondents, 24 (82.4%) identified as full-time workers, five (17.2%) identified as students and four (13.8%) identified as part-time workers. As this question allowed respondents to select multiple categories, there was a clear overlap with some individuals. Nevertheless, it reveals a pattern among working adults: many are active watchers of shounen anime.

Moving on to popular shounen anime, respondents selected titles they watched and had a relationship with from the ten series list. At least 40% of all respondents had seen the series for the titles listed. Looking at the chart below, the most famous works among respondents were *Dragon Ball* (79.3%), *Attack on Titan* (75.9%), and *Naruto* (72.4%). Popular shounen like *One Piece*, *Demon Slayer*, and *My Hero Academia* still hold up very favorably as more than half of the respondents claim to have seen them.

Which of these works have you seen/read?

29 responses



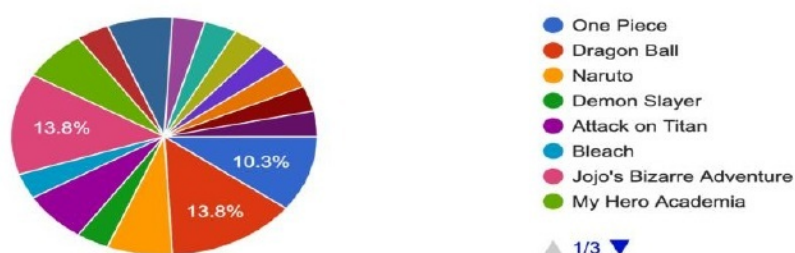
While the shounen list is extensive, I found a limit to the series necessary to include in this survey. Respondents who watched more than just the listed titles used the write-in option further to expand their history and consumption of shounen anime. This is reflected in the lower half of the chart as other famous titles such as *Fullmetal*

Alchemist, *Rurouni Kenshin*, *Yu Yu Hakusho*, and *Death Note* were written in by some via the “other” option.

Although respondents chose *Dragon Ball*, *Attack On Titan*, and *Naruto* as the most popular from the list of shounen anime series, they were not all voted the most favored series. Respondents demonstrated that a shounen anime series may be popular but not necessarily the best. Regarding which series respondents liked the most, *Dragon Ball* and *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure* tied for first place, with 13.8% voting it their favorite, and *One Piece* coming in second with 10.3% voting for it. From this data, while a series is seen by many within a community (this case being the Black American community), it does not correlate with being the best within the community.

Of all the works you have seen/read, which one is your favorite?

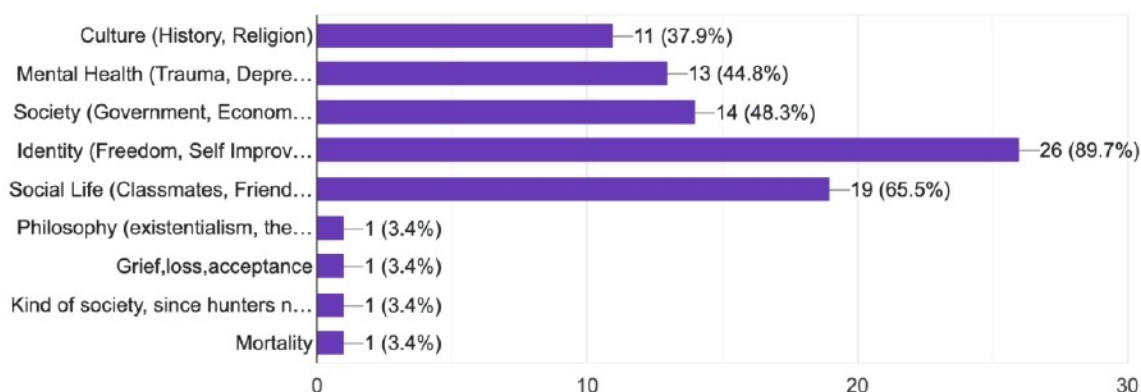
29 responses



Finally, closing out quantitative data regarding Black Americans and shounen are the themes and ideas they feel are connected to the series and genre they watch. As I mentioned, I grouped the themes into five categories, and respondents could choose which ones they felt resonated with them and their series. The chart below exhibits the results of the respondents, and as always, respondents were given the option to write in a differing answer if they felt there was more to say or the listed options were not sufficient.

In regards to your favorite series, which of the following themes/messages do you feel is prominent or plays a major role in the series? (You can choose multiple.)

29 responses



Of the definite themes offered, respondents chose Identity (89.7%) and Social Life (65.5%) as the most prominent ideas, surpassing the other categories by at least 16 percent. The former encompasses notions of freedom, growth, dreams, and success, while

the latter is more about connections between people and environments such as friendships, romance, and family. While the other ideas have some interpretation and reception among this community (i.e., society with 48.3% claiming connections and mental health having 44.8%), they are not Black Americans' most significant takeaways or common threads.

When asked to expand upon their reasons for selecting the themes mentioned above, common responses among respondents included bonds of friendship, building characters up and revealing new things about themselves and the story, chasing one's dreams, and overcoming any obstacles that get in their way. They also endure trauma, pain, and failure to accomplish things such as friendship and achieving one's goals.

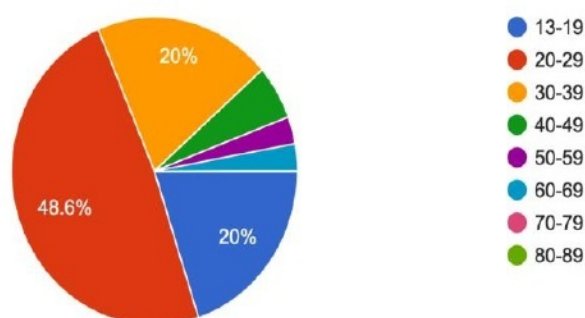
These answers also correlated with characters chosen by respondents as their favorites. Respondents' explanations regarding why they favored selected characters mirrored much of their chosen themes when describing characters cherished and loved by individuals. For example, in *Dragon Ball*, Goku and Vegeta were selected by respondents who favored *Dragon Ball* the most. In their explanations, they believed Goku represented identity by never giving up, always fighting against the odds and those stronger than him, and pursuing his goal of reaching new heights and breaking limits. Similarly, Goku embodied identity by responding to failure or loss by continuing to train and unlock new abilities, defying expectations and limits imposed on him by others. Shifting to Vegeta, respondents who favored *Dragon Ball* and claimed Vegeta as their favorite noted his character development and change after losing to Goku in their first battle.

Phase #2: Japanese And Shounen Anime

Shifting my focus to the Japanese community, the demographics for age were slightly different. Compared to the survey for Black Americans, the Japanese survey had 35 respondents. Of the 35 respondents, the largest age group to watch shounen anime was those between 20 and 29 (48.6%). Following them, respondents between the ages of 13 to 19 and 30 to 39 equally watched shounen anime, coming in with 20 percent respectively of the respondent pool. As shown in the chart below, those ranging from their 40s and upwards still engaged with shounen anime but did not make up the majority.

何歳ですか

35 responses



However, the most significant difference came in terms of gender. Of the respondents, 16 identified as male (45.7%) and 19 as female (54.3%). While there is a difference in the amount of men and women who took the survey, the difference is not as

significant as in the Black American community. The reason behind this is most likely coincidence, as the survey was not targeted at specific genders within a community and was given to consumers at random who watched anime and were gathered in spaces catered to that culture.

性別を教えてください。

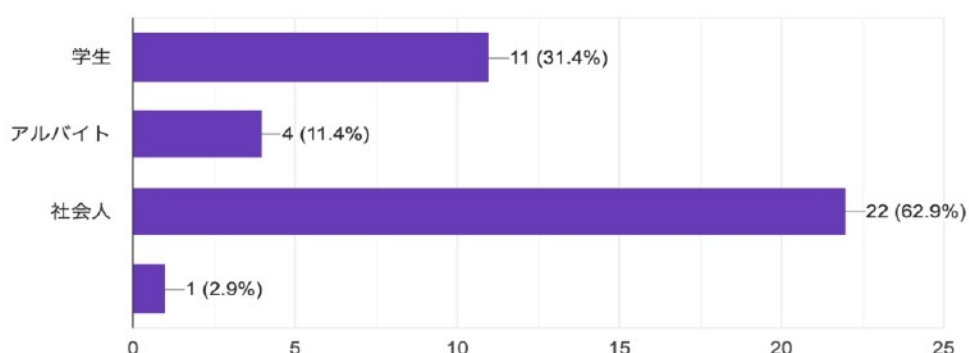
35 responses



Ending demographics with their occupations, most respondents identified as *shakaijin* (62.9%), a Japanese term for full-fledged members of society and full-time workers. Afterward, 11 respondents (31.4%) classified themselves as students and four (11.4%) said *arubaito*, meaning part-time worker. Lastly, one respondent classified themselves as another. As the numbers total 38, respondents likely identified with more than one category, reflecting the potential for individuals in Japanese society to come from multiple stages in their lives when it comes to watching anime.

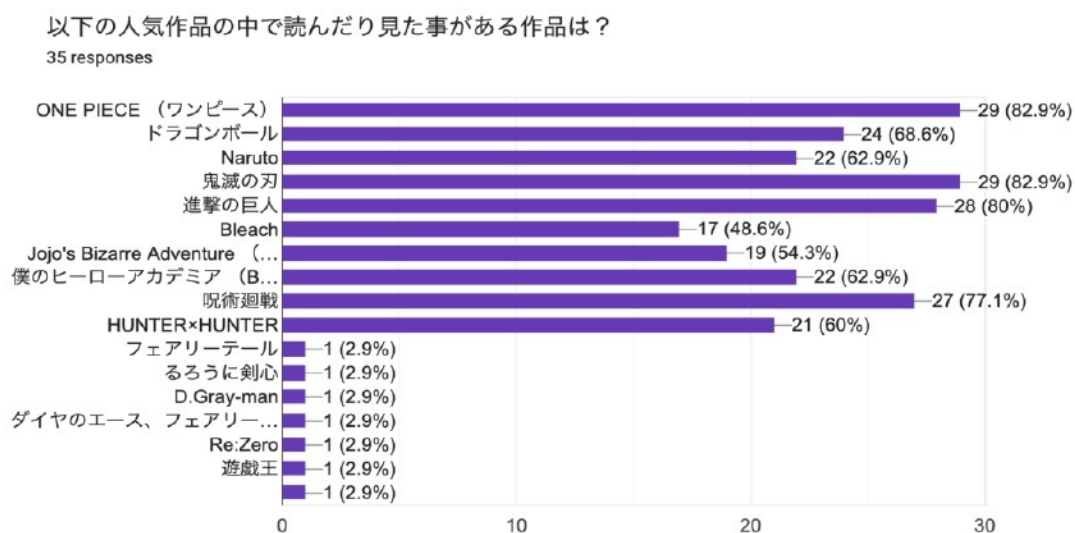
職業を教えてください。

35 responses



Regarding the Japanese community and famous shounen works, there were notable differences in which works were more popular and well-known. According to my survey, 29 respondents (82.9%) stated that they had seen *One Piece* and *Demon Slayer* (Japanese translation for *Kimetsu no Yaiba*; I will also be using English translation for this paper), and these two series are the most popular among Japanese shounen anime watchers. Following *One Piece* and *Demon Slayer*, *Attack On Titan* (the Japanese title is *Shingeki No Kyoujin*, but I will refer to it by its English translation title) and *Jujutsu*

Kaisen came in second and third, with 28 (80%) and 27 (77.1%) respondents claiming they had seen these series. These numbers align with expected trends in Japan today, where *One Piece* is the longest-running manga series in history and consistently ranks in the top five best-selling series in the country every year.⁶² *Demon Slayer* has taken the country and world by storm, with its movie *Demon Slayer: Infinity Train* becoming the highest-grossing film in Japan and its manga taking the best-selling series in 2020.⁶³ *Attack On Titan* and *Jujutsu Kaisen* have also gained critical success in Japan, with the former holding a spot in the top 5 best-selling manga series in 2020 and the latter holding the top spot in 2021 and 2022.⁶⁴



Of the popular shounen series listed, the chart below demonstrates that the most favored series was *Attack On Titan*, with six respondents (17.1%) claiming it to be their favorite. Following suit, there was a three-way tie between *One Piece*, *Naruto*, and *Dragon Ball*, with each series having five respondents (14.3%), each voting in favor of them being their favorite. Coming in third place is *Demon Slayer*, with three respondents (8.6%) saying they favored it above the rest. Many of these favorites are reasonable choices as they have left a lasting impact on the anime, specifically shounen anime, genre, and community. The *Attack On Titan* anime recently finished in 2023, with fans of the community widely anticipating it. *Dragon Ball* continues to have a legacy and is seen as the father and predecessor to the following two of the *Big Three* anime: *One Piece* and *Naruto*, and *Demon Slayer* (along with *One Piece*) is still running as a shounen anime series in Japan and receiving heavy coverage.

⁶²Wikipedia. 2024. "History of Anime." Wikimedia Foundation. Last modified June 14, 2024. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_anime.

⁶³Wikipedia. 2024. "History of Anime." Wikimedia Foundation. Last modified June 14, 2024. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_anime.

⁶⁴Wikipedia. 2024. "History of Anime." Wikimedia Foundation. Last modified June 14, 2024. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_anime.

Which of the following works is your favourite?

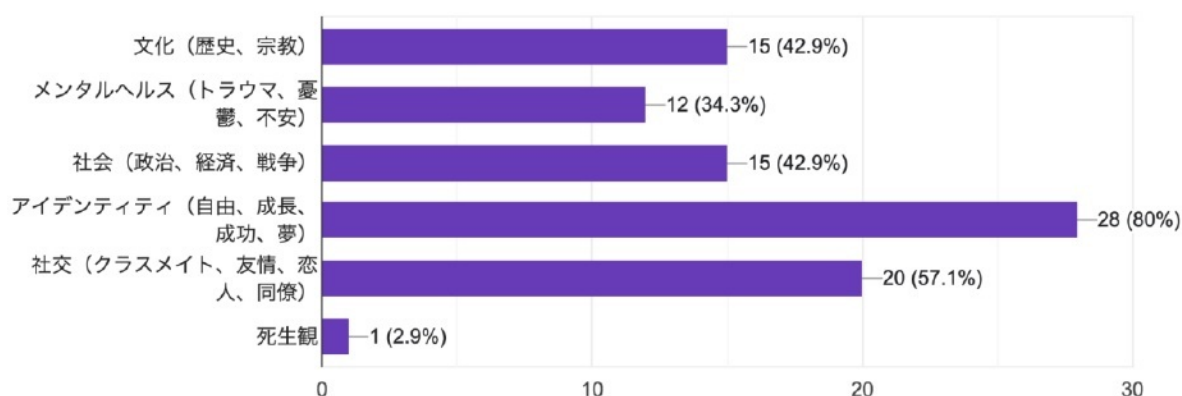
35 responses



Finishing questions with thematic connections once again, most Japanese respondents, like the Black American community, selected Identity and Social Life as prominent ideas connected to their favorite shounen series. Identity was chosen by 28 respondents (80%), while Social Life was selected by 20 respondents (57.1%). Given the large number of respondents who likely selected both, if not more than one thematic category (given that the question allowed multiple choices to be chosen and that the total number of themes selected exceeds the number of respondents), individuals likely felt as though their favorite series overlapped with multiple themes. This may explain why Identity and Social life have much more interpretation and reception than most.

一番好きなシリーズについて、リストからどのテーマ...か選んでください (複数選択しても大丈夫です)

35 responses



While not as received or understood as the previously mentioned themes, Culture (文化) and Society (社会) had some resonance with Japanese audiences. This can be attributed to the fact that anime, especially shounen anime, takes place in Japanese settings such as schools and the country and embodies elements of Japanese culture such as cultural festivals, Japanese gods, and Shintoism.

Respondents later explained their selection of themes to their favorite series with one writing that, in response to their choice of Identity, Social Life, and Society, *One Piece* exemplified them all. They commented that every central cast member, the

Strawhat Pirate Crew, and side characters had dreams they were chasing, such as Luffy wanting to be the king of the pirates and Coby wanting to become a member of the navy, and then actively pursuing that dream. Regarding his social links, the respondent clarified that Luffy connected with various characters beyond his main crew, creating a solid social network of reliable friends, allies, and confidants. Finally, with society, the story depicts the societal structure and hierarchy of different people and groups and the effect of politics and discrimination.

Another respondent later followed up and added to the previous respondents' remarks about *One Piece* and the idea of Identity by writing that pirates are a symbol of freedom, and that freedom comes about from the dreams of each of the main cast and how they all have "a dream's end," something they are working towards or somewhere they are trying to reach. However, the respondent points out that along the way to their dreams, they encounter diverse people, locations, and situations in which they must not only interact with and understand others but discover and understand the history of said people, places, and environments, as they are connected with the larger story and world around them, thus leading to historical and social themes.

Other respondents shared through other favorite animes like *My Hero Academia* and *Naruto* the struggles of growing up, being teenagers, and finding oneself in a setting with so much going on. One respondent commented on the struggles *Naruto* faced as he pursued his dream of becoming the Hokage, the village leader. However, he never gave up on his pursuit and eventually obtained it. However, the respondent points out that while *Naruto's* actions and personality played a significant role, he did not do it alone. His relationships with others taught him many things and shaped his path as he walked it.

In *My Hero Academia*, other respondents highlighted the role of society in creating and shaping heroes and villains. One respondent pointed out that the relationships between the heroes fighting for justice and the villains fighting for their justice mirror each other and are products of the environments they were subjected to. Furthermore, the high school setting of the main cast exemplifies the internal struggles that each character goes through during their youth and finding themselves while dealing with external conflicts, all while supporting and being there for each other, personifying identity and social relationships.

Step #8 - Qualitative Data Findings

Phase #1: Black Americans And Shounen Anime

With the quantitative data establishing a framework and lens for how black people feel towards shounen anime, I looked for a deeper understanding of why they think the way they do and what shapes their interpretation of the genre. I did this by interviewing individuals willing to come forward and share their relationships with shounen anime. Six Black American respondents were interviewed, three men and three women, four online and two in person. After interviewing all six, there were common threads, including but not limited to perseverance, empathy, and the underdog story coupled with support and encouragement.

Beginning with interviewee #1, when asked why they felt connected to shounen anime, the respondent answered with feeling lonely as a kid, that shounen anime gave them a sense of being able to enter new settings of characters and fantasy, and that they could feel a part of the cast of characters and exploring settings along with them. Furthermore, studying these settings with the characters allowed the interviewee to relate

more to their feelings and why while fulfilling their desire for adventure. Interviewee #1 feels that shounen anime serves as an escape mechanism for watchers like themselves to get a glimpse of what it is like to have different fantasy elements in their lives and take a break from the struggles and burdens of real, everyday life and society.

While interviewee #1 sees shounen anime as providing relief and comfort, they also see it as a platform for connection and understanding. They remark that shounen anime reflects human behavior in the form of entertainment. Going deeper, they point out that in the shounen series, the protagonist and other characters are often placed in situations where their sense of morality, right or wrong, and justice are questioned. According to the interviewee, This leads them to ask themselves and their identity and thus become more self-conscious and insecure. However, this reflection of self and identity only comes about in collaboration. The interviewee believes one's flaws, strengths, and specialties improve through interaction with others and systems. To them, seeing how imaginary characters build, maintain, and progress interpersonal relationships (friendships and romance) is fascinating to watch and serves as a potential reflection for people as a whole.

He uses their favorite anime, *Bleach*, as an example. Interviewee #1 points out the relationship between characters such as Ichigo Kurosaki, Byakuya Kuchiki, and Rukia Kuchiki. In his journey to save Rukia from death, Ichigo is forced to confront her older brother, Byakuya, a captain, a high-ranking official, and a leader in their society. While at first content with her upcoming execution and giving into the supposedly inescapable reality of her death, Rukia comes to realize through Ichigo's efforts, along with others who came to rescue her, that she does want to live and does not want to die. In Byakuya's case, after a long and tense battle with Ichigo, resulting in his loss, he comes to realize that he and Ichigo were never indeed enemies and that the young boy's true enemy was the law deciding Rukia's death, with Byakuya simply standing in Ichigo's way of that as he was a captain carrying out the law. Realizing that even the law and the system can be wrong sometimes, Byakuya relents and begins to protect his sister and her friends in his way.

With this, interviewee #1 voices the intricacy and complexity of friendship and identity in shounen anime. Without having met Ichigo and his friends, Rukia would not have discovered or held on to the value of life, specifically, her life, and her will to live becomes a more defining part of her character. Regarding Byakuya and his connection with Ichigo, one which starts antagonistic, becomes a lesson and stepping stone for Byakuya's growth as a character. From his clash, he begins to show affection more openly to those he cares about and protects while exploiting loopholes and areas in rules and the system he operates in does not cover. The interviewee sums this up as saying, "To grow as people, to better understand ourselves, sometimes it's helpful to learn from other people," and there are "moments where you can not accomplish things on your own; you may not recognize an obstacle until someone shows it to you, and that by someone showing you that obstacle, you may help shape their journey."

Moving on to interviewee #2, referencing shounen series such as *Magi: The Labyrinth of Magic*, *One Piece*, *Jujutsu Kaisen*, and *Naruto*, interviewee #2 points out several themes associated with the series, the first being society and politics. In *Magi: The Labyrinth of Magic*, four powers dominate the physical, economic, and political landscapes: The Kou Empire, the Sindria Empire, the Reim Empire, and Magnostadt. With each power attempting to either maintain its status or elevate it, the main cast and

other characters are drawn into conflicts involving them directly or indirectly. Actions such as political sabotage, manipulation, romantic courting, colonization, war, and slavery are evaluated in the series, and all have ramifications, not just for their respective powers but for the story and characters.

Interviewee #2 then pointed out the similar dynamics in *One Piece*'s story revolving around the world government, navy, and royal families. The societal order in charge of various affairs, ranging from security and order to covering up historical secrets, staging political espionage and coups, and maintaining a dominant status quo, are all parts of thematic components of society. *Jujutsu Kaisen*, by the interviewee's stance, does much of the same thing where the older conservatives of sorcery society restrict the actions and decisions of various sectors such as technique usage and studying or advancement of specific abilities, all to maintain their control on the sorcery sector. While these aspects of society and politics are present in many shounen series, interviewee #2 does not stop at this but includes messages about identity and friendship.

Regarding identity, interviewee #2 stated that the message of a lot of shounen is "be yourself." According to them, this message comes in many shapes and forms, like never giving up on your dream, getting up when you fall, and making mistakes sometimes, which is okay if you can learn from them. They pointed to the famous shounen series *Naruto* to emphasize the value of identity. To them, despite all the hardships Naruto had faced, he still stuck true to himself and his values, or as the interviewee pointed out, "his ninja way." While there were many reasons for Naruto to become bitter, angry, detached, and hateful towards people due to the bullying and discrimination he faced (societal issues that I will discuss later), he did not give in to these urges or reasons. Additionally, while Naruto did lose, or at least feel like he lost, to rivals and opponents throughout the series, he never stopped moving forward. Naruto took the losses he experienced as motivation to move forward and become stronger.

Returning to *One Piece*, they highlight the challenges one must face in pursuing a goal, moving forward, and defining themselves while emphasizing the roles of relationships. The interviewee selects two scenes in doing this; the first is the Strawhat's crew burning their first pirate ship, *The Going Merry*, and the second is the captain and protagonist, Luffy, losing his brother Ace to the hands of a major villain. In the first, while a painful decision to make given the emotional ties to the ship, the crew was forced to let it go, as it was damaged beyond repair. Knowing that it was beyond salvation, the crew lit the fire that burned the ship but had to do so and look for a new one to continue their journey and chase their dreams.

In the latter event, when Luffy's brother was killed in front of his eyes, and he spiraled into depression and despair, a close friend and ally of his, Jinbei, stepped up and sternly scolded Luffy to put him back on course—reminding him that his journey was not over yet and that he still had other people in his life, namely his crew. Heeding Jinbei's words, Luffy steels his resolve to get stronger, using the loss of his brother to encourage him to get stronger so he does not lose someone again, and continues on his quest to become the king of the pirates. To the interviewee, these two major plot points serve as exemplary moments in understanding that one's life may not be full of easy, happy decisions, and there will be challenging moments that will test one's resolve and ability to overcome a dilemma. Although this elevates the meaning of identity, it also demonstrates that with the right people at your side (in this case, Jinbei for Luffy), people can help push or pull you forward.

Next in line is interviewee #3. In this interview, the respondent highly emphasizes the shounen series *Black Butler*. To summarize, the series depicts a young boy traumatized after being kidnapped, abused, and left on the verge of death by a cult of demon worshippers who also murdered his family. Seeking revenge, the protagonist, Ciel, forms a pact with a demon, Sebastian, to aid him in discovering his family's murderers and abusers, uncovering their schemes and motives, and exacting vengeance upon them. In exchange, he offers his soul to the demon once he has fulfilled his goal.

Interviewee #3 makes several connections to themes and ideas that this series portrays to them, the first of which is mental health, more specifically, trauma in the form of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Ciel is consistently haunted by the memories of the torture and abuse they had endured and the images of his family being massacred, sometimes being unable to sleep at night and experiencing panic attacks. Because he is his assistant through their contract, Sebastian becomes his butler and supports him in maintaining his composure and mentality. While coming to terms with his trauma, it is what drives the entire story, according to Interviewee #3. Ciel manipulates and coordinates all of his moves around exacting revenge.

The relationships within the series also highlight the benefits of friendship and support networks. Interviewee #3 regards the maids, other assistants, and temporary alliances Ciel forms as critical to helping him reintegrate into society and regain aristocratic standing after the tragedy that befell his family. And while his relationship with his demon butler, Sebastian, is based on a mutually agreed-upon contract, the bond the two share is one of Sebastian continuously supporting him in his goals.

In the end, Interviewee #3 acknowledges the role of identity and endurance. Throughout the series, despite the unfortunate events Ciel has been through, he never stops in his quest for retribution. Although he is not always mentally and emotionally stable, his eyes stay on his prize, punishing those who wronged him. To the interviewee, this trauma and thirst for vengeance is what defines Ciel; it is the core of his identity (not to ignore or discredit other aspects of his identity, like being of noble origin), and it is what drives him to bear with anything that may come his way.

Following up with Interviewee #4, they used their love for *My Hero Academia* to express that they took away friendship, identity, and societal themes whenever they watched the series. Going in with the idea of most shounen talk about these three things, the respondent opened that the protagonist, Izuku Midoriya (also known by his hero name Deku), was capable of chasing his dream of becoming a hero because of a chance encounter with his role model who passed on his abilities to young Midoriya. As someone born without a quirk (superpower) in a world entirely of people born with them, Midoriya was subject to being ostracized, bullied, and belittled by those who had quirks. In a moment of courage and heroism, Midoriya attempts to save an innocent bystander in a dangerous situation but ends up entangling himself. At this time, the world's #1 hero and his role model, All Might, appears to rescue him. Sensing his resolve and desperation to be a hero, All Might bequeaths his quirk to Midoriya and takes him on as his apprentice.

Interviewee #4 first emphasizes the master-student relationship and the friendship that All Might and Midoriya share. The former tutors, mentors, and provides emotional support to the fledgling latter, who struggles to master his abilities and come to terms with what it means to be a strong, reliable, and righteous hero. To the respondent, this is an example of social relationships playing a massive role in identity and sense of self. However, they also respond by saying that identity affects the social relationship.

From this, the interviewee introduced the push and pull, the dual relationship of the themes of identity and social life. Midoriya's urge to pursue his goals and be a hero for those around him led to his meeting with All Might and subsequent relationship, which enabled him to become an actual superhero.

However, according to the respondent, the relationship with his mentor is not the only one he constructs, nor is it the only one that leaves a lasting impact on him. While attending U.A High School, the high school for heroes seeking to become professionals, Midoriya encounters several students who have their motives for becoming heroes and their views on what makes and does not make a hero, once again leading to him questioning his morality and viewpoint. Midoriya creates friendships and rivalries between other students and classes. These experiences, while also fighting and dealing with villains, shape Midoriya's approach to obtaining his dream.

On the other side, when it comes to villains, the respondent elaborates on seeing society through their lens, the oppression they faced, and the unfortunate circumstances they had to endure despite having quirks. Interviewee #4 makes an interesting distinction: even though certain characters are villains and work together, they still care for one another, facilitating the establishment of family, kinship, and comfort amongst themselves, filling the void of lacking a proper support network. To the respondent, this was a reflection of both society sometimes failing individuals and groups who experienced struggles in their lives, but also how trauma and mental health can lead people to find comfort and relationships in shared struggles.

Interviewee #5's introduction to shounen anime was watching Japanese samurai films. Through those films, they found their way to *Rurouni Kenshin*, a shounen anime about a wandering samurai named Kenshin, who attempts to redefine his life and redeem himself after participating in years of conflict, bloodshed, and violence. Kenshin struggles to lay his inner demons, regrets, and mistakes to rest. This desire to let go of the past and redeem himself leads Kenshin to perform random acts of kindness toward those around him. As the interviewee notices, Kenshin feels as though his identity is tethered to his violent past and is now trying to escape it by forging a new identity. To the respondent, taking these steps to create a new persona is all about identity but comes with adversities. The past that Kenshin is trying to escape, the persona he attempts to leave behind, constantly pursues him. The act of Kenshin trying to evade his past elicits thoughts from the respondent as to what extent an individual can shape their own identity, to accept or reject it. The respondent wondered if there is a way for people to change and become someone or something new when watching Kenshin's journey.

Another point the interviewee makes about Kenshin's identity is its relation to the other characters in the series. Old friends, allies, and enemies appear, while Kenshin's new friends are forged in his stride to improve. The two sides of his life constantly clash with Kenshin in the middle, trying not to be pulled back into his old ways. Although there are moments where he reverts to his violent and ruthless ways, Kenshin does so only to protect those who need protection, including his friends. He is no longer who he was before, as his motive to fight has changed. While there are moments he laments prior actions and leans towards depressive tendencies, he reflects upon what and who he has helped so far, using those acts of kindness to remind himself there is good within him, and that change is possible. The interviewee points out that carrying one's sins, bearing one's burdens and responsibilities, and not being crushed under the weight of it all is a strong message of perseverance. These more mature, serious, and darker themes in shounen

anime, specifically *Rurouni Kenshin*, resonated more with someone like the respondent, who often wonders what consequences their actions have once they have been done and cannot be undone.

In the last interview with interviewee #6, the respondent pointed out that the shounen anime *Katekyo Hitman Reborn* connects shounen anime with themes of mental health (anxiety), identity, and social life. The respondent answered that the series is about “a young child that has anxiety over his inability to do things correctly” and that his story is about discovering an “identity that he has to grow into with the guidance and help of friends and family.” In summary, the *Katekyo Hitman Reborn* is about a high schooler named Tsunayoshi Sawada (nicknamed Tsuna for short) who is chosen to become the next mafia boss of the strongest mafia family in the world, the Vongola Family. While a running gag in the series is that he is against inheriting the position, Tsuna always comes to the aid of his friends and allies. Although he is initially useless at everything he does, from schoolwork to basic chores and day-to-day activities (garnering the nickname No-Good Tsuna in the process), it is through the moments of danger and desperation that proves when push comes to shove, Tsuna can and will rise above the challenge.

Interviewee #6 acknowledges the role that those around Tsuna play in his growth into, ironically, a fitting mafia boss. Mainly through the efforts of his tutor, a legendary hitman named Reborn, Tsuna amasses subordinates who help him lead the next generation of the Vongola Family, overcome anxieties, and sharpen his resolve in the face of adversity. According to the respondent, Tsuna’s initial characteristics as a no-good crybaby, incompetent, and unreliable individual gradually begin to fade as challenge after challenge pushes him to stand up and face what is in front of him. From interviewee #6’s perspective, this does not mean Tsuna always went beyond what was asked but knew when and how to do what was necessary to deal with a situation. He did not fight for the sake of fighting, nor did he take things too far to resolve a problem, but he dealt with circumstances to the degree it was called for, and that was it. As far as the respondent felt, Tsuna never overcompensated or needed to show off.

The anxiety that Tsuna felt in the face of uncertainty of succeeding and the fear of failure was an idea the respondent thought they could relate to and envision in their lives and others. To them, many, including themselves, fear taking the first step or taking a risk in pursuing something or trying to be good at something. This, in their words, leads to a sense of anxiety paralysis, where the individual will stay complacent and never grow. However, this theme is mixed with the other themes of becoming a better you (identity) through facing your fears and anxieties and that in those moments, when you do, the people you have connected and formed relationships with serve as a force to elevate and encourage you just as much as they are a cushion for your fall.

Phase #2: Japanese And Shounen Anime

Switching to the Japanese perspective, I interviewed six Japanese citizens, three male and four female, to better gauge their responses and approaches to shounen anime. Like the Black Americans I interviewed, I asked them to elaborate upon their history with shounen anime and their deeper connections to it beyond mere entertainment. Taking individualized answers from their respective surveys, they answered my questions in ways that illustrated the more significant effect and range of shounen anime’s ideas. The common thread between all the interviews was the following four words: empathy (ryokan), friendship (you), effort (do you), and victory (short).

In my seventh interview (but the first interview with a Japanese audience), the respondent spoke *Demon Slayer*, their favorite series, exemplifying the themes they felt spoke to them the most. Through their favorite character, the love pillar, Mitsuri, the interviewee felt a sense of effort to fight against sexism and the notion of women being weak. In Japanese history (culture) and modern society, the image of a woman being weak and dependent on a protector (usually male) felt to the interviewee very sexist and undermining towards the potential of female characters in shounen anime. Still, Mitsuri, a strong female character, directly contrasts that mentality. This made her feel more potent as a woman in real life in a society that makes women like her feel like they are not, empowering her identity. The interviewee highlighted the idea of female characters protecting other characters, striking a chord with them. This extends beyond just Mitsuri protecting younger fighters in the show from more dangerous enemies, but also when the protagonist's (Tanjiro) sister, Nezuko, stepped up to protect him from danger.

Additionally, the respondent believes the relationships between characters in shounen anime are lovely, honest, and warm. This theme of having genuine and loving friendships between individuals is something she feels is and should be represented in anime and shounen series specifically. This idea of love is described not just as romantic love but as a platonic one. Interviewee #7 remarked that Japanese people feel cold, distant, and uncaring. Still, in shounen anime, especially *Demon Slayer* (but others as well), there is the feeling of sincere support and concern for and between characters, which the respondent also desires.

These themes reflect real-life elements and play an important role when connecting the interviewee to the series. They answered that it is essential for a shounen series to have some realistic connections, implications, and themes so that the viewers can relate or empathize with the show and characters. Also, when the show contains ideas such as friendships, love, and women empowerment, it may be a lesson for those watching them. While being realistic serves higher purposes and may leave a more significant impact, interviewee #7 also remarked that a shounen series being too realistic might be off-putting as there are people like them who enjoy watching shounen for a break from reality, a form of escapism and relaxation from life that can sometimes be too difficult. The fantastical themes or elements of a series give them hope and entertainment that allows them to pursue similar aspects in their lives (strength, love, support) while not being reminded too much of the harsh realities of life.

Interviewee #8 connected with the shounen series *Your Lie in April*, a shounen anime about a teenage boy, Kosei, rediscovering his passion and talent for the piano after his mother's passing. To this respondent, the series embodied ideas of moving forward from trauma and facing the difficulties that come with it to emerge stronger. The interviewee can empathize with the feeling of losing someone dear to you and being unable to contend well with their passing. However, the interviewee also felt regret watching Kosei not pursue his talents and passion for playing the piano. This regret stemmed from the interviewee's experiences of not having spent more time discovering passions or pursuing something they felt interested in. To them, it lights a fire inside of them to explore as much as they can with the time they have and try not to regret doing something that seems interesting.

The interviewee continued by commenting that the stories written and portrayed in shounen animes are entertaining for them to watch due to the fusion of realistic and fantasy elements. While the former evokes empathy and understanding, the latter gives a

sense of joy and comfort. They expand upon this by pointing out that while shounen series poke at ideas such as discrimination, bullying, and trauma, they do it in a way to teach others not to engage with that behavior and, for those that have experienced it, to try and move on from it. As they watched Kosei overcome his mental block due to his mother's death, they felt a sense of character growth and evolution, an idea that they think is imperative to living life, trying to better, and moving on. The risks that come with facing challenges such as trauma are crucial in achieving success. The interviewee said, "If you don't take risks, nothing will happen."

Shifting gears to interviewee #9, through their favorite series, *Naruto*, the interviewee believed the main ideas to be love (specifically familial love), friendship, and effort. Beginning with the theme of love, the respondent highlights the relationship between his favorite character, Itachi Uchiha, and Itachi's younger brother, Sasuke. Despite committing acts of genocide and homicide, Itachi does it all for the sake of keeping his younger brother safe. After killing their family, living in exile as a wanted man, joining a terrorist organization, and being hated by his brother he swore to protect, Itachi still loves him deep down inside and does everything he can to protect him. This love extended so far as to betray allies he made and to threaten high-ranking officials into staying away from his only living relative. The respondent saw this as a message about familial love and relationships in Japanese society, where they believe there is not enough familial love, support, and stability, commenting that there needs to be more and that *Naruto* as a series speaks to that.

When talking about friendship and effort, interviewee #9 referenced one moment when they both shined. In *Naruto*'s friendship with Sasuke, despite all of Sasuke's attempts to go rogue, commit acts of violence, and fall into despair and self-destruction, *Naruto* never once gave up on bringing him back to sanity and restoring their friendship. As the respondent said, "*Naruto* always yelled out to Sasuke countless times," by the end of their series, Sasuke returned to their home village and reforged their bond. To the interviewee, they felt that this friendship was symbolic of what true friendship can and should be. True friendship involves difficulties, trials and errors, and occasional conflicts. Still, somebody can overcome these bumps with commitment, understanding, and communication, aspects of reality that they feel should be in friendships but are not always there.

Engaging in conversation with interviewee #10, they referenced *Attack on Titan* by pointing out the messages from shounen anime they understood and connecting them to reality's bigger picture. Taking a different route than most other interviewees up until now, interviewee #10 saw the more significant meaning of their favorite shounen as connected to society through war and communication. They elaborated on this by saying that the discrimination, lack of communication, and refusal to exchange history or engage in dialogue between the characters of the series led to unnecessary bloodshed, conflicts, and repeated violence in the form of war. To briefly sum up the series, *Attack on Titan* follows the story of the protagonist, Eren Jaeger, who, along with the rest of humanity, lives behind walls that keep them safe from giant humanoid figures called titans who feed on humans. In discovering he can transform into a titan (along with other skills that come with it), Eren seeks to liberate his home and friends from the titans but is dragged into international conflicts, wars, and social issues spanning centuries of convoluted history that come with trying to accomplish that goal.

The respondent believes that many problems in society and the world (i.e., war)

can be avoided through communication and a willingness to understand the other side. However, these peaceful and non-confrontational results are often impaired by those refusing to understand and listen or others who are not honest and forthcoming in their communication. Interviewee #9 believes this extends to Japanese society, where people are not always straightforward and are more indirect in dialogue. To them, the message is that, as a society, we ought to talk more to each other and build open channels of dialogue to avoid unnecessary conflict.

However, interviewee #10 does not stop there; they also use their admiration for their favorite character, Commander Erwin, to exemplify ideas of identity and challenging norms and limitations. As the Commander of the Survey Corps, a branch of the military that explored the world beyond the walls that kept humanity safe, Erwin always looked forward, seeking new ways to advance and expand humanity outside of the walls he felt kept them enclosed. This drive to challenge the current situation and seek something better is an aspect they feel is lacking but necessary in Japanese society and individuals today. To work towards better things, such as dreams, the respondent feels a drive to challenge is essential; otherwise, one will not move forward.

Coming toward my eleventh interview, the respondent used shounen series that others had yet to introduce or claim as their favorite. With their comments regarding series such as *Slam Dunk*, *Inuyasha*, and *Tokyo Ghoul*, interviewee #11 raises the themes of learning through failure and effort, women empowerment, and mental health and trauma. Beginning with *Slam Dunk*, a shounen sports series about a high schooler named Sakamichi playing basketball, interviewee #11 voices what makes anime, even more so, shounen anime, special is how proactive and assertive the characters and settings are, calling them “*sekkyokuteki*” (Japanese for assertive or proactive). Sakamichi, while initially driven by popularity and attention from girls, gradually grows to enjoy the sport and learn to be better at it. This drive to improve makes him feel more realistic, a core element that the respondent believes to be critical to enjoying anime.

After competing in matches against other players and teams, Sakamichi experiences crushing defeats and thrilling victories that serve as milestones throughout the story. The former is very important as the interviewee points out that failing and losing is a part of life and reality and that one will not always succeed the first time. To interviewee #11, there are meanings and lessons to be learned or studied in loss and failure. *Slam Dunk* had a straightforward message of practicing basketball and teaching rules and fundamentals that involved making mistakes, but to try nonetheless and gradually improve, signifying growth and change in an individual regarding passions and ambitions. The respondent believes this is an idea that people in Japan can benefit from, as many are too afraid to make mistakes or attempt something unknown. This makes Japan stagnant and not pursue things that could be better out of fear of failure. Still, in shounen anime, characters can try repeatedly, eventually succeeding, giving people some hope.

Regarding *Inuyasha*, the respondent brought up the idea of strong, independent female characters. The respondent highlighted how the female lead, Kagome, is an outspoken, firm, and strong-willed female character, a rare trait in female anime heroines. Additionally, the ability to control and restrain the male lead, Inuyasha, by uttering a specific word (*sit*) is another hidden gem in female characters. In Japanese society and culture, gender standards are established so that women are subservient and dependent on men, or as the respondent puts it, women are portrayed and expected in many series to be

“*juuzokuteki*” (Japanese for subordinate and dependent). Watching *Inuyasha* nurtured a message in the interviewee that women could aspire to be just as powerful, independent, and forthcoming as men and that the idea of a woman's identity was not just to be quiet and protected.

Ending the interview with *Tokyo Ghoul*, interviewee #11 alludes to the struggles and trauma many ghouls face to survive in a society that hunts them. *Tokyo Ghoul* follows the story of college student Ken Kaneki, who is unwillingly and artificially turned into a ghoulish via surgery, a cannibalistic humanoid who must eat others to survive. Having his peaceful life torn from him and now having to hide his new identity as a ghoulish, Kaneki is forced to adapt to ghoulish life in which he avoids being hunted by ghoulish investigators and other ghouls, all while remaining out of territorial issues concerning other gangs of ghouls. This trauma and mental health crisis is drastically worsened when he is kidnapped and subjected to brutal forms of torture. Unfortunately, this breaks his already timid and fragile mental state, leading him down a path of isolation and PTSD. The respondent clarifies that while mental health issues and trauma are not as prevalent or talked about (though this is increasing) in Japan, series like *Tokyo Ghoul* and its protagonist are helping to bring it to light and raise awareness.

Lastly, my final interviewee, interviewee #12, used their favorite anime, *Psycho-Pass*, to elaborate upon his bond with shounen anime. Set in a dystopian Japan, citizens are monitored through an advanced tracking system dubbed the *Sibyl System*, which evaluates and grades individuals' threat and criminal activity levels based on their brain waves. The protagonist, Akane Tsunemori, is part of an organization working with the *Sibyl System* to track and apprehend individuals the system deems too dangerous and capable of committing crimes based on their brainwave readings.

Akane begins working for the organization but soon finds herself questioning the system and methods used to apprehend criminals due to personal beliefs and ideological values. Instead of killing potentially dangerous people, interviewee #12 commends Akane for trying to change people instead, believing in her ideology that potential criminals are not yet criminals and can still be saved, putting her at odds at times with the organization she works for and the system she works with. The interviewee believes this to illustrate identity, believing that people's mindsets and characters are not inherently fixed and can change with time and effort.

While watching the show, the respondent comments on the many crimes people commit or have the potential to commit. However, some individuals are still trying to make the world a better place (this being the protagonist and her allies), thus eliciting feelings of effort and passion in what they believe they are fighting for. However, this comes with drawbacks as the system they are using and following is revealed to be complicit and imposing its own oppressive and manipulative ways on the larger populace, only enabling acts that will keep it in power. This extends to elected government officials who are not voted in for an actual change but rather on their popularity. This led the respondent to have similar thoughts on politicians and leaders in Japanese society. Some are not trying to bring about better conditions or systematic change but rather keep the existing infrastructure and benefit from it, thus leading them to believe that the people running society do not act in the interest of those who live in said society, making them question the role of leadership and government.

These interviews gave a much more qualitative understanding of the Japanese's more profound, complex relationships with their popular culture of shounen anime.

While it is fun to watch and has garnered followings, merchandise, and recognition, it has rarely brought about more extensive conversations about what it means to people and why. While the descriptions of my interviews do not entail word-for-word transcripts of the discussions and relationships the individuals have with shounen anime, they provide a lens to look at things and a framework for us to understand entertainment culture regarding shounen anime.

Step #9 - Data Dissection & Discussions (DDD)

After introducing and breaking down the quantitative survey and describing the qualitative data, I will draw the links and connect the dots between the Black American and Japanese communities regarding shounen anime. I will start by answering my first two research questions: What ideas, themes, and messages does each community receive from these forms of entertainment, and are there any similarities and differences between the ideas/themes each respective community receives?

As demonstrated in the quantitative survey data and results, the notions of identity and social life significantly overlap in interpreting shounen anime tropes, with more than 80% of each community agreeing that identity is a crucial message in their interpretation of shounen anime series. I will clarify that with the former; this can be interpreted in many ways. People attribute identity to various concepts, traits, and exemplifications. In the survey and this study, identity is seen as finding, creating, changing, or maintaining one's persona. In performing those acts, the audience examines the individual's feelings, goals, and morality as they play critical roles in an individual's movement, thoughts, and decisions. Thus, the theme of identity includes aspects such as success, hopes and dreams, freedom, and improvement (growth, moving forward, etc.)

As *Dragon Ball* and *One Piece* are the series that overlap the most in terms of favorite series among the communities, I will examine how they exemplify identity in the form of freedom based on the moments in each respective series. The former focuses on Goku, a Saiyan warrior (alien) who resides on Earth and protects it from danger. Goku strives to find and fight strong opponents, living to test and push his abilities and seek higher heights. In his journey to do so, Goku does, at times, cause unintended consequences such as risking his universe's destruction. Still, it is a testament to his desire to keep fighting and becoming more robust, not complacent. In the latter, Luffy seeks to become the king of the pirates, a status he attributes to the person with the most freedom. Because of this, he refuses to be seen as a hero or a savior, feeling as though titles such as those are restrictive with the expectations and images that come with them. One respondent commented that his freedom was his defining quality when it came to Luffy, which touched the respondent the most. To them, Luffy was not a hero, just a person who did not want to see those he cared for get hurt. *Attack on Titan* also exemplifies the idea of freedom and the pursuit of it. Everything that Eren does throughout the series is for the sake of humanity regaining its freedom. While his actions were questionable at best, it shows his unwavering resolve in pursuing a choice and being able to move in the desired direction.

That said, according to responses from both surveys and interviews, a pivotal element in interpreting identity is the ability to empathize with the identities being portrayed and encouraged through various shounen anime series and the characters within them. For Black Americans, systematic racism and discrimination, along with oppressive actions and problematic depictions, have led them to connect on a deeper level

with more mature, darker, and sometimes unjust settings that unfortunate characters may find themselves in. This is especially evident in series such as *Naruto* and *My Hero Academia*. As I already discussed earlier, *Naruto* suffered from having no parents, no support network, and no friends due to being the vessel of a mighty demon fox. While *Naruto* does not know he is a vessel, others within his village do and shun him for a fate he neither knows nor willingly chooses. *Naruto* was ostracized and discriminated against simply for being *Naruto*, just for existing, a fact that Youtuber Blxxk Anime comments on in his video⁶⁵ Black audiences can resonate with *Naruto*'s journey as they in the West, specifically in America, lack fair and adequate resources due to the color of their skin, a trait they have no control over.⁶⁶ That is why watching *Naruto*'s journey toward doing what no one thought he could and gaining recognition and respect is so satisfying to Black Americans. Black Americans can resonate with the feeling of climbing towards success despite the setbacks.

On the Japanese side, respondents in interviews felt a strong empathy for *Naruto*'s status as different from everyone else in the village. With no way to understand his status of being different and being ostracized, some respondents felt it was similar to how they were treated in their youth for not being the same. In my interview with them, one respondent noted the Japanese phrase "the nail that sticks out gets hammered down," a common Japanese phrase used to describe the notion of conformity with the more significant majority, and that being different is usually met with firm resistance, with some encountering bullying and ostracization similar to *Naruto*. For the Japanese audience, watching *Naruto* endure the hardships of being himself and being different, and still finding success in and despite those qualities demonstrated to them that standing out is not necessarily something to scorn or feel ashamed of.

Naruto's story is similar to Midoriya's in *My Hero Academia*. As I mentioned, the latter was born into a society where having a quirk was the norm, but he was the exception. Despite having a dream to be the world's number one hero, there was no path for him to become one, much less the number one hero, because he did not possess a quirk. He faced ridicule and harassment from a young age by neighbors and classmates alike, although they were not adults and not much from society as well. However, Midoriya still had to struggle with the anxiety and despair that he would never be able to have a chance at what he wanted to do. This changes when he encounters All Might by chance and is given the famous hero's quirk. Respondents on both sides who enjoy the series commented that being allowed to chase their passions and dreams and then taking that chance is something they want to experience. They could imagine themselves reacting similarly to Midoriya, filled with hope and joy.

Another theme that fits this idea of empathy and struggle is perseverance. One respondent connects heavily to the series *Food Wars!* and *Jujutsu Kaisen*. The former revolves around young, aspiring chef Yukihiro Soma, who serves as a cook at a local shop in his town. Soma enrolls at Totsuki Academy, the world's best cooking school, intending to surpass his father as a cook. While at the cook, Soma rises and falls at various moments, such as cooking competitions between other students. Despite feeling bitter about loss

⁶⁵ "Why Do Black People Love Anime?" Blxxk Anime. February 7, 2021. Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-nTXbgOSOWE>.

⁶⁶ "Why Do Black People Love Anime?" Blxxk Anime. February 7, 2021. Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-nTXbgOSOWE>.

and failure, Soma does not give in to it but instead uses it as motivation. The respondent points out Soma's defining ability is to take criticism, feedback, and advice from others, including opponents who have beaten him, to improve himself. This act makes Soma stand out from others as it prevents him from truly giving up. Whenever Soma loses, he searches for the reason for that loss and then works to ensure that he can overcome it, and in doing so, he has gained a new skill and moved forward.

Regarding *Jujutsu Kaisen*, the protagonist, Itadori Yuji, is thrust into the world of jujutsu (sorcery) after he eats a cursed finger to prevent an evil curse from obtaining it and becoming stronger. Although Itadori eats the finger, he, like other shounen protagonists, becomes the host of a mighty cursed figure, the King of Curses, Ryoumen Sukuna. While in control most of the time, there were instances in which Itadori lost control of his body, and Sukuna took over, wreaking havoc and murdering a multitude of innocents. In addition to having to carry the guilt of not being able to maintain control, Itadori was constantly being hunted by the higher officials in jujutsu society because they viewed him as the vessel for Sukuna, too dangerous to be left alive. Despite all this, Itadori strives to prove himself as a sorcerer and exorcise curses with his innate strength. He continues to push forward, enduring the tragedies he has faced and caused (albeit unwillingly) until he finds his meaning.

Approaching the shared message of social life, the series mentioned above, such as *Katekyo Hitman Reborn* and *Slam Dunk*, somehow emphasize relationships with other people. Beginning with *Katekyo Hitman Reborn*, Tsuna is, at first, a laughable, loner student with no one but his mother who supports him. As his tutor, Reborn pushes him (willingly and sometimes by force) into meeting more people, friends, or foes, Tsuna's circle of people slowly expands. By the end of the story, Tsuna reflects with his tutor that things are different. He acknowledges that he had no one to rely on in the beginning. Still, by the end of the series, Tsuna realizes that the most significant difference since his tutor arrived is that he has people he can rely on when necessary. This sentiment is echoed by other respondents and interviewees who had mentioned the series, with them coming to the consensus that a clear message is the importance of having a close-knit team and a wide enough circle where you can reach out to others if needed.

In *Slam Dunk*, the sport of basketball is one where Sakamichi must play with his team, which is composed of other individuals. He must connect, understand, and, most importantly, cooperate with them. However, this is tested frequently throughout the series. Due to personality conflicts, skill level, and experience with the sport, Sakamichi does but heads with other team members. Even so, Sakamichi understands the value of teamwork in and outside of basketball. In doing so, he recognizes the importance of getting to know his team, their characters, likes and dislikes, and play styles while learning about basketball and winning games against other teams. This invokes the idea of teamwork and team-based relationships, where all participants must step up and take an active role, but there are more. Individuals may have to go the extra mile, even in team settings, and support people more individually to better the team.

Both share this theme of friendship and social networks being critical to individuals, Black Americans, and Japanese communities. In the former, there is a strong sense of loyalty and camaraderie where those from the same city, town, and even block would support each other through the good as much as the bad. Similarly, in the latter, some people actively seek true friendship. According to Japanese respondents, the fear of being disliked by others or having discord between individuals, much worse, a group,

leads many to not being honest and committed to each other. The concepts of *honmae* (true face) and *tatemaie* (fake face) sometimes inhibit the forging of a genuine relationship. Some respondents remarked that they need more friends or feel that their friendships are not authentic.

Taking a break from similarities, one of the most significant differences is in the interpretation and reception of mental health as a theme. There is a ten percent difference between Black Americans and Japanese when it comes to mental health being seen as a theme. While the reasoning may not yet be clear, Japanese interviewees noted that mental health is still not seen as prevalent in Japanese society or culture. Mental health is seen with stigma, and those who may connect with it or relate are not always viewed positively or respectfully, leading them to stay silent. This is in stark contrast with Black Americans and the U.S. as a whole, where conversations on mental health, trauma, and anxiety are much more common and discussed on media platforms.

Even so, some series, such as *One Piece* and *Jujutsu Kaisen*, portray moments of trauma and uncertainty well. The former illustrated Luffy's mental shock and heartache from watching his brother die in his arms when Luffy lost consciousness in the middle of a war. Later on, Luffy went on a rampage, destroying wildlife and nearby terrain in a fit after his surgery because he could not forget the image of his dead brother. The latter illustrates it very well in two instances: the sealing of Satoru Gojo, a teacher at the school of sorcery and the world's strongest sorcerer, and Itadori Yuji breaking down after seeing two of his close friends killed in front of him. In Gojo's case, when seeing the body of his dead best friend approach him and speak to him alive and healthy, Gojo could not fathom what was happening. Gojo exclaims that he had killed his friend himself and that his soul knew whoever was before him was a fake. However, amid Gojo's shock, the plan to seal him took place as he was distracted and debating the reality of his friend being alive long enough for him to be sealed. As for Itadori, after failing to save his mentor and then his friend, he broke down psychologically, begging to be killed and that he had no reason to live. Itadori welcomed the brutal beating he suffered at the hands of his opponent, deciding not to fight back, and passively embraced death, only regaining his composure when another friend of his came to support him.

To reevaluate the similarities, themes of culture and society, while receiving different reception levels, were not too dissimilar between the communities. While some Black Americans felt like aspects of culture were present, most did not see it as a defining message regarding shounen anime. According to some respondents, the inclusion of culture comes in typical things like food, clothing, or school life-related elements and does not play too heavily into what shounen means to them. On the other hand, the Japanese were slightly more receptive and understanding of their culture being included in shounen series. This can be attributed to shounen anime being set in different periods, such as historical Japan, and using beliefs like Shintoism (Amaterasu, Susanoo, Izanagi) regarding characters or abilities. However, based on the respondents' answers for the Japanese, it is easier to recognize their cultural messages in a cultural object that originates from their country.

Step #10 - Conclusion: Where does this go?

Now, for the final question: What can these trends and data points tell us about how these communities interact with popular culture? In other words, why is this all important? Where does this go? This goes towards expanding consumer culture,

specifically shounen anime consumer culture. Now that data and studies shed light on the connection between these two facets, two distinct consumer groups and one object, the opportunity to expand markets and experiences through shounen anime becomes increasingly feasible. This means that creators, vendors, and promoters now have a glimpse of what not only their domestic consumers want to see but also what groups abroad want to see.

However, the ability to understand and cater to the masses is one of many things that are important here. Through this research, we are beginning to see that audiences in the Black American and Japanese communities have started to step back from the typical pretty, happy-go-lucky, and high-strung series (not that they are no longer entertaining or popular) and have leaned more towards profound, provocative and realistic ideologies. Viewers are looking for series that can serve them a healthy mix of fantasy and reality. Angela Drummond Mathews's article writes that when it comes to shounen characters, they "spend the bulk of their narrative time in the initiation phase of the hero's journey, while American heroes spend most of their narrative time in the return phase of the journey."⁶⁷ Mathews uses Superman as an example by saying that the audience does not take part in his journey to become a hero and that he starts as a hero; he is given that status.⁶⁸ Whereas, with shounen characters, they spend much of their time and journey building up to becoming the hero, and it is in that story that viewers feel a connection.

Going back to Youtuber GrizzOn13th TV, he comments that Western superheroes are more akin to gods when it comes to animation, being born with heroic powers and attributes, or being in advantageous positions.⁶⁹ He acknowledges that he cannot relate to people like that as he is just an ordinary person trying to figure things out.⁷⁰ Unlike Superman, shounen anime characters reflected the same trials and tribulations that regular people like him face.⁷¹ This matches Mathews' take on why shounen anime, and anime in general, is becoming more popular because shounen series characters are mirrors of people's real lives who are also "learning, growing, and having struggles and trying to overcome them."⁷² This is the opposite of American-made heroes who are self-made and go through the story only to continue validating their heroic status, so they are not necessarily being challenged or developed as they have already achieved

⁶⁷Drummond-Mathews, Angela. "What Boys Will Be: A Study of ShōNen Manga." *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives*, (2010): 62-76. Accessed June 24, 2024.

⁶⁸Drummond-Mathews, Angela. "What Boys Will Be: A Study of ShōNen Manga." *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives*, (2010): 62-76. Accessed June 24, 2024.

⁶⁹Why Do Black People Love Anime?" GrizzOn13th TV. August 27, 2022. Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h70iedKCYCI>.

⁷⁰Why Do Black People Love Anime?" GrizzOn13th TV. August 27, 2022. Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h70iedKCYCI>.

⁷¹Why Do Black People Love Anime?" GrizzOn13th TV. August 27, 2022. Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h70iedKCYCI>.

⁷²Drummond-Mathews, Angela. "What Boys Will Be: A Study of ShōNen Manga." *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives*, (2010): 62-76. Accessed June 24, 2024.

their heroic status, resulting in a static character.⁷³ The shounen characters are living life in real-time, making gains, and going through trials to become a hero, a journey that feels more real. These characters have always been popular with the Japanese audience and are now crossing boundaries with overseas audiences who recognize the more realistic tones of shounen anime.

With this data, it is clear that concerning race, Black Americans are more drawn to stories they can relate to and feel represented in. Given the inclusion and rise of more black anime characters, Black American consumers are strongly urged to be more connected to shounen anime. Coupled with the feelings of day-to-day struggles, this community is drawn to media where the story being told is one they can connect to and see themselves fulfilling. Similarly, Japanese audiences enjoy seeing pieces of life that they can relate to. The fictional and fantasy-like aspects make things more enjoyable for them. Still, through meeting, interviewing, and reviewing their survey data, there were responses, emotions, and correlations with Black Americans in the feelings they experienced and what they sought and took away from shounen anime.

In short, both communities are drawn to popular culture that they can identify with and see a version or part of themselves in. This may sometimes lead them to support a particular series or characters to support that version or image of themselves that they see in them. Research like this is necessary because it paves the way for transnational and intercultural conversation. Of course, as I spoke of earlier, there is the advantage of Japan's soft power, reputation, and growing anime market. However, as the world increasingly becomes more intertwined and interconnected, expanding social networks and understanding different environments through shared attraction to a mutually loved cultural object may benefit all parties involved. Looking back at Griswold's cultural diamond, the cultural object and consumer may possess a relationship with each other, but so do they with different aspects.⁷⁴ If the relationship between the consumer and object stays limited to each other, then the conversation and results will remain limited as well. However, suppose we can bring in another consumer with a relationship with that cultural object. In that case, we might learn about differing cultural diamonds in other regions, enabling popular cultures to flourish even more.

⁷³Drummond-Mathews, Angela. "What Boys Will Be: A Study of ShōNen Manga." *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives*, (2010): 62-76. Accessed June 24, 2024.

⁷⁴Drummond-Mathews, Angela. "What Boys Will Be: A Study of ShōNen Manga." *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives*, (2010): 62-76. Accessed June 24, 2024.

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