

VOLUME 1

Issue 1, May 2024

THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN VARIOUS GENRES OF JAPANESE COMICS: A SEMIOTIC STUDY

Herlandri Eka Jayaputri

Akademi Perikanan Kamasan Biak-Papua Indonesia

Article || Published: 30/05/2024

 10.58989/appling.v1i1.5

herlandrieka@gmail.com

How to cite || Jayaputri, H. E. (2024). The Representation of Women in Various Genres of Japanese Comics: a Semiotic Study. *Applied Linguistics: Innovative Approaches and Emerging Trends*. 1(1), 72–93.
<https://doi.org/10.58989/appling.v1i1.5>

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e-ISSN: 3047-549X

Abstract || Manga, or Japanese comics, have garnered immense popularity in Indonesia, appealing to readers of all ages with their diverse fictional narratives. Across genres like action, romance, comedy, and supernatural, manga portrays a myriad of characters and scenarios, from lone male protagonists to shy girls exploring romantic dynamics. Yet, amidst its widespread appeal, manga often depicts female characters as mere sexual objects, sparking scholarly inquiry into their representation. Through Roland Barthes' semiotic lens, researchers dissect the portrayal of women in various manga genres, uncovering prevalent ideologies. While women exude body confidence, they are frequently subjected to sexual exploitation by male characters, ranging from intimate gestures to harassment. This pervasive depiction reinforces the objectification of women, normalizing harmful behaviors within manga narratives, prompting critical examination of gender dynamics in popular culture.

Keywords || Women, Japanese Comic, Semiotic Study, Manga

Abstrak || Manga, atau komik Jepang, yang telah menjadi sangat populer di Indonesia, menarik pembaca dari berbagai usia dengan narasi fiksinya yang beragam. Di seluruh genre seperti aksi, romansa, komedi, dan supernatural, manga menggambarkan berbagai karakter dan skenario, mulai dari protagonis pria penyendiri hingga gadis pemalu yang terbalut dinamika romantis. Namun, di tengah-tengah daya tariknya, manga sering menggambarkan karakter perempuan sebagai objek seksual semata, hal ini perlu dikaji secara ilmiah tentang representasi wanita. Melalui lensa semiotik Roland Barthes, peneliti mengkaji penggambaran perempuan dalam berbagai genre manga, sehingga mampu mengungkap ideologi yang dominan. Meskipun perempuan menunjukkan kepercayaan diri terhadap tubuh mereka, mereka sering kali menjadi korban eksploitasi seksual oleh karakter pria, mulai dari gerakan intim hingga pelecehan. Penggambaran yang nyata ini memperkuat bahwa Perempuan hanya sebagai objek seksual semata, dan menormalisasi perilaku pelecehan dalam narasi manga, sehingga kajian kritis terhadap dinamika gender dalam budaya populer menjadi penting.

Katakunci || Wanita, Komik Jepang, Kajian Semiotik, Manga

Introduction

For the past two decades, manga, or Japanese comics, has held a significant place in the hearts of Indonesians, garnering widespread acclaim and enthusiasm, particularly among the nation's youthful populace. This cultural phenomenon traces its roots back to the early 1990s, when seminal works like "Akira" and "Candy Candy" Ahmad & Mansoor (2009); Bryce et al. (2010); Grennan (2018); Pimienta (2022) captured the imaginations of readers, igniting a passion for the art form and spurring a burgeoning interest in manga creation.

The allure of manga lies not only in its captivating narratives but also in its diverse array of genres, catering to a wide spectrum of audiences. From *kodomo-muke* manga (子供向け漫画) tailored for children to *josei* manga (女性漫画) aimed at adult females, and from *seinen* manga (青年漫画) crafted for adult males to *shoujo* manga (少女漫画) designed specifically for women, and shounen manga (少年漫画) tailored to men, the genre's multifaceted offerings serve to deepen readers' engagement and broaden their horizons within the realm of comics.

Manga encompasses a diverse spectrum of genres, ranging from pulse-pounding action and thrilling adventure to heartwarming slice-of-life tales, rib-tickling comedy, tender romance, and spine-tingling supernatural mysteries. However, within this rich tapestry of storytelling lies a nuanced facet known as the *ecchi* genre (エッチ), where themes of sexuality intertwine with the narrative fabric. This genre often blurs the boundaries between the sensual and the suggestive, frequently portraying intimate encounters and erotic scenarios between characters.

Instances of nudity, the sexualization of female characters, passionate kissing, depictions of lovers entwined in bed, and explorations of homosexuality are recurrent motifs within this genre. Moreover, manga frequently showcases female characters endowed with exaggeratedly voluptuous and provocative appearances, diverging markedly from the conventional standards of realism found in traditional Japanese culture (Rawson, 2010). This departure from reality underscores manga's unique ability to both challenge and subvert societal norms, offering readers a tantalizing glimpse into worlds where fantasy and desire intertwine with the complexities of human relationships.

Consequently, the portrayal of narrative arcs and character development emerges as a central concern, particularly when examining the depiction of female characters relegated to the role of mere objects of sexual desire. Within the vast landscape of manga, the interplay between genres, storylines, and characterizations serves not only to captivate and entertain but also to elicit visceral reactions, whether evoking fear or fostering emotional attachment (Masoko & Mawitjere, 2023).

This thematic exploration has catalyzed a notable shift in manga's stylistic tendencies, with an increasing emphasis on themes of torture, violence, scatology, and erotica. Moreover, the pervasive presence of the *ecchi* or erotic style is unmistakably evident across various genres of manga, further accentuating the medium's inclination toward exploring the complexities of human desire and the darker facets of human nature.

Take, for example, the realm of supernatural comics exemplified by works such as *Gantz* (ガンツ) by Oku Hiroya. Within this narrative, the character Kei Kishimoto emerges as a focal point, depicted as a woman possessing an ostensibly ideal physique with ample proportions. However, her portrayal is fraught with instances of victimization, as she endures repeated instances of mistreatment, including the distressing implication of sexual assault at the hands of her peers.

Similarly, in action-oriented comics like *One Piece* (ワンピース) by Eiichiro Oda and *Fairy Tail* (フェアリーテイル) by Hiro Mashima, female characters are often presented in a manner that accentuates their physical allure, characterized by voluptuous figures, generous busts, and suggestive dialogue. These depictions reinforce prevailing stereotypes surrounding femininity and contribute to a broader pattern of objectification within the genre.

In the romantic genre, exemplified by works like *Namaikizakari* (なまいきざかり。) by Mitsubachi Miyuki, female characters are often portrayed as possessing stoic demeanors, yet are easily swayed by the romantic advances of their male counterparts. This dichotomy between outward composure and inner vulnerability serves to perpetuate traditional gender dynamics and reinforces societal expectations regarding female behavior and emotional responsiveness.

Conversely, in comedic fare such as *Shokugeki No Soma* (食戟のソーマ) by Yuuto Tsukuda, Shun Saeki, and Yuki Morisaki, the narrative centers on a young culinary prodigy named Soma Yukihiro as he navigates the challenges of a prestigious cooking school. However, the

comedic elements take a more risqué turn as female characters' reactions to Soma's culinary creations are depicted in a manner suggestive of heightened arousal, further perpetuating the trope of women's desires being easily inflamed by male prowess. Collectively, these examples underscore the pervasive nature of gendered stereotypes and objectification within the medium of manga, highlighting the need for critical examination and discourse surrounding representation and portrayal of female characters in popular culture.

Hence, within the multifaceted landscape of manga spanning diverse genres, a pervasive trend emerges wherein the portrayal of female characters predominantly fixates on accentuating physical attributes such as the bust, waist, hips, legs, and abdomen, effectively reducing these characters to mere vessels of sexual allure. This emphasis on sexualized imagery perpetuates a narrative framework wherein women are primarily valued for their physical appearance rather than their depth of character or narrative agency.

Moreover, this phenomenon is not confined solely to the realm of manga; rather, it reflects broader sociocultural attitudes prevalent within Indonesian society. The widespread acceptance of such depictions indicates a cultural normalization of objectification, wherein female characters are commodified and consumed as objects of desire without critical scrutiny or reflection.

This normalization of sexualized representations within manga suggests the emergence of an underlying ideological framework, wherein the portrayal of women as objects of sexual desire becomes ingrained within societal consciousness. As theorized by Fairclough (2013), effective ideologies operate subtly, permeating the fabric of discourse and thought without overt acknowledgment. In the case of Indonesian culture, this ideological underpinning has successfully taken root in the collective psyche, exerting a lasting influence on societal perceptions and norms surrounding gender and sexuality.

Several scholarly investigations delve into the representation of women as subjects of inquiry. One such study, conducted by Aryani (2014), scrutinizes the depiction of women in the design of detergent packaging and the underlying ideologies therein. Aryani's findings reveal a multifaceted portrayal of women, characterized as feminist, nurturing, maternal, mature, self-reliant, affectionate, aesthetically pleasing, charismatic, amiable, and joyous. These depictions manifest a feminist ideology communicated through both visual and nonverbal means.

Similarly, Leiliyanti's (2009) exploration of ideological constructs within cosmopolitan magazines sheds light on the portrayal of women as sexual commodities aimed at boosting readership. Leiliyanti (2009) discerns a pattern wherein women are depicted as objects of desire, embellished with slogans promoting a persona of a "fun fearless female." Additionally, Rawson (2001) critical linguistic analysis, delves into the dominance of male characters within Japanese comics. Rawson's investigation highlights the prevalence of male-centric narratives in children's comics such as "Crayon Shin Chan" and "Chibi Maruko Chan," revealing linguistic cues that reinforce notions of male superiority. These studies collectively underscore the nuanced ways in which gender ideologies are perpetuated and reinforced within various cultural artifacts, from product packaging to media representations, shedding light on the complex interplay between gender, representation, and societal norms.

This research delves into the representation of female characters within Japanese comics, commonly known as manga. Focused specifically on four frequently consumed genres—action, comedy, romance, and supernatural—this study aims to uncover the underlying semiotic structures and ideological underpinnings embedded within these narratives.

Two primary inquiries guide this investigation: firstly, an exploration of how the representation of women in manga aligns with the semiotic theory proposed by Roland Barthes, and secondly, an examination of the ideological messages conveyed through the various genres of manga. By adopting a semiotic lens, this study seeks to elucidate the nuanced ways in which female characters are depicted and the symbolic meanings attributed to their representations within the manga medium.

The overarching objectives of this research endeavor include providing a comprehensive analysis of the portrayal of women in manga through the theoretical framework of Roland Barthes' semiotics and unpacking the ideological messages that permeate these narratives. Consequently, this study endeavors to shed light on the complex interplay between gender representation, semiotics, and ideological discourse within the realm of manga.

The Types of Manga (漫画)

The term *manga* (漫画) carries profound significance within Japanese culture, rooted in its linguistic origins. Etymologically, the word *manga* is composed of two kanji characters: “man” (漫), denoting notions of fullness and irregularity, and “ga” (画), representing the concept of imagery or depiction through irregular images (Wulansuci, 2010). This linguistic breakdown hints at the nuanced complexity and richness embedded within the medium. Furthermore, *manga* embodies a dual semantic essence. Firstly, it serves as a comprehensive descriptor encompassing Japanese comics as cultural artifacts, alongside the vast array of industries and communities intertwined with the production and consumption of these comics. Secondly, *manga* encapsulates a distinctive visual language, often referred to as an “aesthetic style,” Cohn & Ehly (2016) which permeates the artistic landscape of Japanese comics.

The expansive landscape of manga is characterized by its diverse array of genres and target demographics. From *Kodomo* manga catering to children, to *josei* manga tailored for adult women, and *seinen* manga targeting adult men, the medium spans a wide spectrum of interests and preferences. Notably, the popularity of *shoujo* and *shounen* manga prevails within Indonesian readership, showcasing the cross-cultural appeal of these genres.

Within these varied genres lie a plethora of narrative themes and motifs, including action, adventure, slice-of-life, comedy, romance, and supernatural elements. Through these diverse storytelling avenues, manga serves as a powerful medium for expressing the fears, hopes, and aspirations of humanity. By employing an eclectic mix of artistic styles, thematic explorations, and characterizations, manga captivates and resonates with readers, fostering a profound connection between creator and audience. In essence, the multifaceted nature of manga underscores its enduring appeal and cultural significance, transcending geographical and linguistic boundaries to become a universal medium for artistic expression and storytelling.

The Sexual Issue on Manga

The sexual themes portrayed in manga have been extensively discussed by several experts. Perper & Cornog (2002) provided a synopsis of a prevalent theme in manga, which often depicts violence, cannibalism, and archery, akin to figures like Saint Sebastian—a spirited individual

who is typically persecuted. Moreover, manga encompasses various other themes such as romance, ero-guromanga (erotic and grotesque), and sports manga featuring baseball, mahjong, and gourmet themes (Kacsuk, 2018). Graphically, manga images often accentuate sexual depictions and transgressions (Lent, 2010). Consequently, many manga or comics contain depictions of abusive, unnatural sexual acts, and scatology, often portrayed through female characters, even in children's comics (Mukai et al., 2023).

The portrayal of women as sexual objects relates to the theory of objectification, wherein individuals are treated as objects for use, manipulation, and control based on their physical attributes (Calogero, 2012). This theory identifies seven qualities describing the treatment of individuals as objects: instrumentality, denial of autonomy, inertness, fungibility, hardness, proprietary, and denial of subjectivity (Zanghellini, 2009). These qualities align with the sexual objectification of women, highlighting discussions concerning women's bodies and why such objectification is viewed negatively.

Sexuality encompasses various dimensions, including biological aspects related to reproductive organs and genitalia, social dimensions involving relationships between individuals, behavioral aspects concerning sexual conduct, and cultural dimensions shaping perceptions of sexuality within a given environment. Sexual concepts give rise to sexual orientations, encompassing emotional, romantic, and sexual attractions between individuals of differing genders or sexual orientations. Most manga often portray women as objects of desire for men, prevalent across various genres. In Western societies, such depictions are often labeled as "sexist," reflecting a male-dominated narrative where women are depicted primarily for male gratification. Sexual situations in manga often involve romantic scenarios, such as a girl getting wet with water or pouring liquid onto her chest for a man to lick. Furthermore, the biological portrayal of sexuality in Japanese manga is often depicted with realism in pronominal systems, verbal endings, and gender markers (Rawson, 2001).

Sexual themes in manga typically manifest overtly between women and men, featuring scenes of nudity, the sexual characteristics of women, kissing, lovers in bed, and homosexuality. These themes are not limited to adult manga alone; nowadays, sexual themes have become integrated into various manga genres under the label of the *ecchi* genre. This incorporation serves as a form of soft power for authors to engage and attract readers. Manga often presents female characters with exaggeratedly sexy and erotic appearances, diverging from reality, which

may be somewhat shocking to Japanese sensibilities (Luck, 2017). Furthermore, males are often portrayed as more dominant than females in manga society, subjecting women to poor treatment such as rape, harassment, and sadomasochism.

The sexual themes in manga align with aspects of Japanese history. Many perceive Japanese people as reserved, shy, and adherent to strict social norms, with women displaying polite attitudes and men embodying disciplined samurai behavior. However, this portrayal is often deemed excessive and inappropriate within Japanese social and historical traditions (Egilsdóttir, 2016). Additionally, Japanese culture has a mythological foundation for sexuality, contrasting with the pure religious beliefs of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, where God is not associated with sex. In Japanese mythology, documented in *Kojiki* (古事記) or the Record of Ancient Matters, the gods Izanagi and Izanami are depicted as birthing other gods through sexual relations, establishing a belief that gods originate from such interactions. This understanding has led to the worship of temples and statues bearing sexual symbolism by many Japanese (Egilsdóttir, 2016). Furthermore, modern ero manga blends contemporary eroticism with traditional Japanese origins, depicting sexuality as a positive and healthful aspect of life. Alongside strong female characters, innovative storytelling, and captivating art, the exploration of sexual themes contributes to the appeal of manga for readers. Hence, the backdrop of Japanese society's longstanding acceptance of natural sexuality and women's influence shapes the foundation of modern manga (Rawson, 2001).

Methodology

This study aimed to elucidate the portrayal of female characters as sexual objects in manga or comics, employing a descriptive qualitative research design. The investigation centered on four popular comic genres: action, comedy, romance, and supernatural. Each genre was represented by a single title: 1) *Fairy Tail* (フェアリーテイル) by Hiro Mashima, categorized under the action genre and ranked 1; 2) *Shokugeki No Soma* (食戟のソーマ) by Yuuto Tsukuda, Shun Saeki, and Yuki Morisaki, falling into the comedy genre with a ranking of 7; 3) *Namaikizakari* (なまいきざかり。) by Mitsubachi Miyuki, representing the romance genre and ranked 34; and 4) *Gantz* (ガンツ) by Oku Hiroya, categorized under the supernatural genre with a rank of 86.

Data collection techniques included documentary studies, involving the gathering of data describing female characters as sexual objects across various comic genres, and literature studies relevant to the research. Subsequently, data analysis was conducted using Barthes's (1994) semiotic approach, examining signs and their functions. Three concepts of semiotics were employed: markers and signs at the denotation level, connotations beginning at the connotation level, and the production of myths at the connotation level, which served as a form of ideology (Leiliyanti, 2009).

The data analysis comprised five stages: firstly, the researcher organized documentation relevant to the research; secondly, data were analyzed to identify comics based on the focus of the problem using Roland Barthes's semiotic approach, involving denotation and connotation meaning; thirdly, the analysis delved into the connotative meaning, including imagery, object selection, words, and other elements; fourthly, the analysis explored the mythic level to understand the underlying ideologies within Japanese comics; finally, conclusions were drawn to ascertain the overall meaning across various Japanese comic genres.

Results

This study focuses on four comics: *Fairy Tail* (フェアリーテイル), *Gantz* (ガンツ), *Shokugeki No Soma* (食戟のソーマ), *Namaikizakari* (なまいきざかり). Firstly, Hiro Mashima's *Fairy Tail* holds the top rank, 1, on the mangarock.com website. The story follows Lucy Heartfilia, a young female wizard, who meets Natsu Dragneel, a fire-fighting magician. Lucy joins the *Fairy Tail* guild and teams up with Natsu to complete guild missions. Lucy's character exudes confidence in her appearance and sexuality, portraying women as self-assured about their bodies and attractiveness. Secondly, *Shokugeki No Soma* (食戟のソーマ) by Yuuto Tsukuda, Shun Saeki, and Yuki Morisaki falls under the comedy genre, ranked 7 on mangarock.com. The narrative centers on Soma Yukihira, a young man aspiring to become a chef at his father's restaurant, showcasing his exceptional cooking skills. Soma faces various challenges, including culinary school, where he encounters rivals like Erina Nakiri. The comic emphasizes cooking competitions led by Soma, with female judges depicted as highly desirous when tasting his dishes.

Next, Mitsubachi Miyuki's *Namaikizakari* (なまいきざかり。) is a romance comic ranked 34 on mangarock.com. The protagonist, Yuki Machida, becomes the basketball club manager to be closer to the team's captain. Despite her serious demeanor, Yuki's feelings are uncovered by Shou Naruse, a junior in the club. Naruse takes advantage of this revelation to approach Yuki, who reluctantly complies with his requests for physical affection. Lastly, Oku Hiroya's *Gantz Gantz* (ガンツ,) falls into the supernatural genre, ranked 86 on mangarock.com. The story revolves around Kei Kurono and Masaru Kato, who die saving others and find themselves in a room with a mysterious black ball. Alongside other deceased individuals, they must complete missions assigned by the ball, involving killing aliens. The female character, Kei Kishimoto, is depicted as having an attractive body and frequently experiences harassment from her peers.

The Semiotic Analysis of the Illustration from Japanese Comics

In the first panel, Lucy examines a beautiful plate and negotiates with the seller. However, panels 2 and 3 reveal that the seller maintains the price at 2000 jewels. Subsequently, Lucy employs persuasive tactics to secure a lower price. A comprehensive analysis of the signs depicted in Figure 1 is provided in Table 1.



Figure 1. Lucy Bargaining for a Beautiful Plate with the Seller in Fairy Tail

In Figure 1, a compelling narrative unfolds through the analysis of symbols, each imbued with layers of semiotic, denotative, connotative, and even mythological significance. At the heart of this tableau lies an exploration of human interaction, particularly the complexities of communication and persuasion.

Table 1. The Analysis of Symbols in Figure 1.

Icon	The Semiotic Meaning	
Panel 1	1. The symbol signifies affection or fondness.	
1. The symbol of love	2. An area designated for food placement.	
2. A plate	3. Repetition of identical questions.	
Panel 3	4. Focus solely on Lucy's upper body.	
3. Lucy's same questions	5. Complimentary language.	
Panel 4	6. Symbol representing intrigue or fascination.	
4. Lucy's half body		
5. The word, "Dandy Mister"		
6. The symbol of two loves		

Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning	Mythological Interpretation
Lucy attempts to negotiate for the plate. She then employs persuasive tactics, emphasizing her upper body to the seller, but ultimately fails in her efforts.	Lucy exhibits an exceedingly confident demeanor regarding her physical appearance, believing she can attain anything by showcasing her body.	However, it is evident that not everything can be influenced by a woman's sexuality

Panel by panel, the scene unveils symbolic elements, each carrying profound meaning. From the symbol of love to the word "Dandy Mister," every detail serves as a conduit for deeper interpretation. In Panel 1, the symbol of love stands as a testament to affection, while a seemingly innocuous plate takes on the role of a bargaining chip in Panel 2. Yet, it is in Panel 3 where the narrative takes a fascinating turn. Here, Lucy's same questions echo, hinting at a cyclical nature of inquiry or perhaps a futile pursuit. Panel 4 delves deeper into Lucy's character, portraying her half body and the intriguing phrase "Dandy Mister," symbolizing both physical allure and linguistic charm.

The denotative meanings of these symbols, while significant, merely scratch the surface of their power. Lucy's attempt to negotiate for the plate exposes her confident demeanor, leveraging her physical appearance in a bid for persuasion. However, the connotative meanings offer a more nuanced understanding, hinting at the limitations of relying solely on one's sexuality for influence. In this mythological interpretation, Lucy embodies the archetype of the confident seductress, believing in the potency of her allure. Yet, as her efforts

falter, the scene becomes a cautionary tale, reminding us that true influence transcends mere physicality. Thus, Figure 1 emerges not only as a visual tableau but as a rich tapestry of symbols, inviting viewers to unravel its layers and contemplate the intricate dance of communication and persuasion in human interaction.

In addition, a young woman visits Yuki's father's restaurant and participates as a judge in the cooking competition between Yuki and his father. Despite Yuki's efforts, he loses the competition. Afterwards, Yuki offers the girl a taste of his grilled squid, but she finds it unappetizing. This moment is depicted in Figure 2, where her body is humorously twisted to resemble a squid. Table 2 provides an analysis of the signs.



Figure 2. In *Shokugeki No Soma* by Tsukuda, Shun Saeki, and Yuki Morisaki, Yuki's friend samples her cuisine

Table 2 offers a fascinating exploration into the intricate web of symbols present in Figure 2, unraveling layers of semiotic, denotative, connotative, and mythological significance. At the heart of this analysis lies a captivating narrative of taste, rejection, and the evocative power of imagery.

Table 2. The Analysis of Symbols in Figure 2.

Icon		The Semiotic Meaning	
1.	The girl's facial expression	1.	Her facial demeanor
2.	The exclamation "Nooooooooooooo!"	2.	A statement of rejection
3.	Tentacles of the squid contort her body	3.	Gestural sign indicating holding something
4.	The phrase "cooking is an endless wilderness"	4.	Cooking is a continuously evolving pursuit
Denotative Meaning		Connotative Meaning	Mythological Interpretation

The girl finds Yuki's grilled squid unsatisfactory.	The taste of Yuki's grilled squid is unappealing to the girl, evoking imagery of her body being enveloped by a large squid.	Unappetizing food can evoke negative associations for the taster, such as reflecting the girl's disappointment or lack of desire.
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Each icon presented in the table serves as a gateway to deeper understanding. From the girl's facial expression to the exclamation "Noooooooooooo!" and the tentacles of the squid contorting her body, every element contributes to the rich tapestry of meaning. Even the seemingly mundane phrase "cooking is an endless wilderness" takes on profound significance within this context. The denotative meanings of these symbols provide a surface-level interpretation, illustrating the girl's dissatisfaction with Yuki's grilled squid. Yet, it is the connotative meanings that unveil a more nuanced understanding, painting a vivid picture of the sensory experience and emotional response evoked by the unappetizing food.

In this mythological interpretation, the girl becomes a vessel for universal themes of disappointment and desire. Her rejection of the squid not only reflects her individual taste preferences but also taps into broader archetypal narratives of longing and disillusionment. Ultimately, Table 2 transcends its role as a mere visual aid, inviting viewers to delve into the depths of symbolism and contemplate the complex interplay between taste, imagery, and emotion in the human experience.

Figure 3 illustrated that Machida Yuki, a high school student, was assisting her friend in welcoming new students. Unexpectedly, a male student named Naruse inappropriately touched her breast. In response, Yuki remained silent while maintaining a flat facial expression. The analysis is detailed in Table 3.



Figure 3. In *Namaikizakari* by Mitsubachi Miyuki, Naruse touches Yuki's chest.

Table 3 unveils a captivating narrative of social dynamics and nonverbal communication within Figure 3, dissecting symbols to reveal layers of semiotic, denotative, connotative, and mythological significance. At its core, this analysis offers a profound exploration of gender norms, respect, and the complexities of human interaction.

Table 3. The Analysis of Symbols in Figure 3.

Icon	The Semiotic Meaning	
Panel 1:	1. People are shocked.	
1. People display expressions of shock.	2. A human of the female gender.	
2. A woman.	3. A body part is used to touch or grab something.	
3. A male's hand.	4. An object.	
4. A pin.	5. Yuki remains silent.	
Panel 2 and 3:	6. Something has a pleasing form.	
5. Yuki maintains a flat expression.		
6. Naruse utters the sentence, "...pretty big."		
Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning	Mythological Interpretation
Yuki remains silent only when Natsume touches her breast.	Yuki appears shocked, as indicated by her flat expression, when Natsume touches her breast.	A respectable man should show respect towards women.

The icons presented in the table serve as portals to deeper understanding, each carrying its own weight of meaning. From the expressions of shock displayed by people to the presence of a woman and a male's hand, every detail contributes to the rich tapestry of interpretation. Even the seemingly innocuous pin takes on significance

within this context. The denotative meanings of these symbols provide a surface-level understanding, illustrating the interaction between Yuki, Natsume, and others. Yet, it is the connotative meanings that unveil a more nuanced narrative, shedding light on the underlying emotions and social expectations at play.

In this mythological interpretation, the tableau becomes a reflection of societal norms and expectations surrounding gender and respect. Yuki's silence and shock in response to Natsume's actions speak volumes about the importance of treating others with dignity and respect, particularly in matters of physical boundaries. Through Table 3, viewers are invited to contemplate the complexities of interpersonal relationships and the subtle nuances of communication, ultimately prompting reflection on broader themes of respect, consent, and gender equality in society.

The numeral "4" indicates that Kei Kurono and his group have successfully completed the first mission. They promptly return to the Gantz room to prepare for the next mission. However, the sudden arrival of new members, a group of thugs, directs their attention to Kei Kishimoto's body. Various indicators are analyzed in Table 4.



Figure 4. In *Gantz* by Oku Hiroya, the members of Gantz return to the Gantz room

Table 4 offers a meticulous examination of symbols within Figure 4, unraveling layers of semiotic, denotative, connotative, and mythological

significance. At its core, this analysis delves into themes of observation, bodily autonomy, and societal perceptions of modesty. Each icon presented in the table serves as a conduit for deeper understanding, capturing the nuances of human interaction and perception. From the presence of a man to the close-up of Kei Kishimoto and the depiction of sweat, every detail contributes to the complex narrative unfolding within the image.

Table 4. The Analysis of Symbols in Figure 4.

Icon	The Semiotic Meaning	
Panel 1:	1. A human male.	
1. A man.	2. Focus panel exclusively on Kei Kishimoto.	
Panel 2:	3. A body part functioning to observe everything.	
2. A close-up of Kei Kishimoto.	4. The outcome of bodily metabolism resulting from exercise or stress.	
Panel 3:	5. Proceed towards the objective.	
3. yes.	6. A prohibition or restriction sign.	
Panel 4:		
4. Sweat.		
Panel 5:		
5. Footsteps.		
Panel 6:		
6. Crossed hands.		
Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning	Mythological Interpretation
A man is solely focused on observing Kei Kishimoto.	He gazes at her intently because she is wearing a revealing shirt.	Women who wear minimal or revealing clothing may attract unwanted attention.

The denotative meanings of these symbols provide a surface-level interpretation, illustrating the interaction between the man and Kei Kishimoto. Yet, it is the connotative meanings that unveil a more nuanced narrative, shedding light on the societal attitudes and assumptions surrounding clothing and attention. In this mythological interpretation, the tableau becomes a reflection of broader cultural norms and expectations. Kei Kishimoto's attire, depicted through the man's intense gaze and the portrayal of sweat, serves as a focal point for discussions of modesty and the objectification of women. Through Table 4, viewers are prompted to consider the implications of societal perceptions of clothing and behavior, ultimately inviting reflection on broader themes of consent, respect, and gender equality.

Discussion

Women have become predominant as objects of vision across various genres of Japanese comics. This study focuses on the portrayal of

female characters as sexual objects in manga or Japanese comics. To uncover the depiction of female characters, the researcher employed Barthes's (1994) semiotic method, which concentrates on signs and interpretations as myths.

Through a comprehensive analysis spanning four distinct comic genres—including *Fairy Tail* (フェアリーテイル) by Hiro Mashima, *Shokugeki No Soma* (食戟のソーマ) by Yuuto Tsukuda, Shun Saeki, and Yuki Morisaki, "Namaikizakari" by Mitsubachi Miyuki, and *Gantz* (ガンツ) by Oku Hiroya—this study meticulously examines eleven instances across various narratives wherein women are depicted as objects of sexual desire.

A recurring motif observed in these comics is the portrayal of women as sexual objects through the emphasis on their physical attributes. The data extracted from these narratives reveals a common trend wherein female characters exude confidence in their bodies, unabashedly showcasing body parts such as thighs, chests, and stomachs. For instance, in *Fairy Tail*, the character Lucy consistently dons minimal attire during confrontations with both male and female adversaries, thereby accentuating her physical allure.

Similarly, in the comedic setting of *Shokugeki No Soma*, female characters are depicted as exhibiting a fervent passion when sampling food, with their reactions often framed in a suggestive manner. This portrayal not only reinforces traditional gender stereotypes but also perpetuates the objectification of women by reducing them to objects of male desire.

Moreover, the analysis underscores the pervasive nature of sexual objectification within the medium of manga, highlighting the need for critical examination and discourse surrounding gender representation and portrayal in popular culture. By dissecting these narratives through a scholarly lens, this study aims to illuminate the underlying societal norms and ideologies that inform the depiction of women as sexual objects within Japanese comics. Through rigorous analysis and interpretation, the researcher seeks to provoke meaningful dialogue and foster a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics at play in the portrayal of gender within the realm of comic storytelling.

The pervasive portrayal of women as objects of sexual harassment within the pages of Japanese comics, or manga, serves as a disquieting testament to entrenched gender dynamics. This phenomenon is exemplified across diverse genres, exemplifying a troubling pattern

wherein women are subjected to unwanted advances, ranging from kisses to physical harassment.

In the romantic genre, exemplified by *Namaikizakari*, the character Machida Yuki endures relentless abuse at the hands of Naruse, her male junior, who repeatedly subjects her to unwelcome kisses and embraces. Similarly, in *Gantz*, the character Kei Kishimoto finds herself prey to sexual harassment perpetrated by male acquaintances such as Kei Kurono and other male figures, who subject her to lecherous gazes and inappropriate advances.

The depiction of such incidents within the narrative fabric of manga not only perpetuates harmful stereotypes but also reinforces the normalization of sexual objectification. By repeatedly showcasing women as targets of unwanted sexual attention, manga subtly reinforces the notion that such behavior is not only acceptable but expected—an insidious form of ideological conditioning that contributes to the normalization of sexual harassment in society.

This troubling portrayal serves to underscore the urgent need for critical reflection and discourse surrounding gender representation within manga. By shedding light on these problematic depictions, readers are challenged to confront the pervasive nature of sexual objectification and recognize the harmful impact it has on perceptions of gender and sexuality. Only through open dialogue and conscientious examination can we hope to dismantle the entrenched ideologies that perpetuate the objectification and marginalization of women within popular culture.

Conclusion

Upon conducting a comprehensive analysis of the representation of women as sexual objects across various genres of Japanese comics, or manga, it becomes evident that such depictions manifest in two distinct ways. Firstly, women are objectified through the overt emphasis on their physical attributes, reducing them to mere objects of desire. Secondly, women are portrayed as victims of sexual abuse, subjected to unwelcome advances and harassment by male characters. This dual portrayal serves to reinforce societal ideologies regarding gender and sexuality, perpetuating the notion that women exist primarily for the pleasure and gratification of men. By repeatedly depicting women as sexual objects or targets of abuse, manga subtly reinforces the normalization of such behaviors, thereby contributing to the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes and gender inequalities.

Moreover, this study adopts the semiotic methodology pioneered by Roland Barthes, delving into the symbolic meanings and cultural signifiers embedded within manga narratives. Through this analytical framework, the study seeks to unpack the underlying ideologies that inform the representation of women as sexual objects, shedding light on the ways in which these narratives reflect and perpetuate societal norms and power dynamics. Furthermore, this feminist study underscores the importance of employing critical discourse analysis as a valuable tool for interrogating and deconstructing dominant ideologies within popular culture. By critically examining the portrayal of women in manga through a feminist lens, this study aims to challenge prevailing norms and foster greater awareness of the ways in which gender and sexuality are constructed and reinforced within the medium of Japanese comics. Through rigorous analysis and scholarly inquiry, it is hoped that this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between representation, ideology, and power dynamics within manga and beyond.

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