

Performing masculinity in *shōnen* anime

A look at *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood*

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract:

This thesis investigates how the ideas of boyhood and what it means to be a man are constructed and performed in Japanese *shōnen* anime and how these representations contribute to gender stereotypes. The original assumption of the writer is that performances of masculinity cannot be separated from those of femininity, as the duality is present in every individual, and the negotiation of their gender performance of gender is inherently personal, although culturally informed. The analysis focuses on the Japanese *shōnen* anime Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood (Hagane no Renkinjutsushi). The case study is justified by the role media plays in portraying the culture, and it is essential to analyse representations of gender and sexuality in popular culture to grasp how these are understood and reproduced in films, books and tv shows that influence the way people relate to each other. To start the conversation, Japanese anime history is firstly introduced. Then the leading concepts of patriarchal gender roles, gender performance and male gaze are explained and put in dialogue with representations of androgyny and masculinity/femininity in other *shōnen* manga/anime.

The analysis focuses on three supporting characters: Envy, Alex Armstrong and Olivier Armstrong. The method used in this thesis is visual and focuses on meaning systems and perception of reality as culturally situated. Through the analysis of visual elements, speech, non-verbal communication (NVC), gestures and camera angles, the researcher claims that the three subjects of the study perform gender in both a subversive and conforming way to patriarchal gender norms. To summarise, masculinity exists in many forms as it is individually performed and transforms socially and culturally through time. It has never been a fixed and static concept; as such, the masculinity we have known under the patriarchal rule is doomed to change (Kimmel, 1994). How it changes is something that we will see gradually.

The main findings of this thesis are that gender play in Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood is encouraged and praised rather than condemned. Those characters associated with patriarchal gender norms are severely punished, whereas those who openly resist them avoid fatal punishment. Masculinity in this thesis is reduced to elements of gender stereotypes formed under the patriarchal ideology and is played inconsistently within FMAB as we encounter characters who fit the gender stereotype and the expectations. Still, we also find characters that subvert gender performance and gender norms while being aware that specific contexts require them to adopt a performance more closely related to the gender they present on the outside. From the dichotomy old generation (Father)-new generation (the protagonists), FMAB can be seen as a commentary on shifting views of gender but also as a shifting in generational understandings of it overall. This can be seen in the group of characters who survive until the end. These are all characters who have no issues with gender fluidity.

“心を繋ぐ強い絆は
けして解けはしないさ
探し続けて辿り着いた
この場所でPeriodに

*The strong bonds that tie our hearts,
Will certainly never be undone.
We have continually searched and finally reached,
This place and period.”*

Period - CHEMISTRY

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	5
IMPORTANT LANGUAGE INFORMATION	6
INTRODUCTION	7
1.1 Aim of the thesis	7
1.2 Research Questions	9
1.3 Structure of the thesis	10
THEORETICAL BACKGROUND	12
2.1 Japanese animation.....	12
2.2 Femininity and masculinity in Japanese manga and anime.....	14
2.2.1 Leading concepts	14
2.2.2 <i>Saint Seiya</i> and <i>To LOVERu</i> as examples of femininity and masculinity representation	16
2.3 Androgyny in Japanese manga and anime	18
DATA AND METHODOLOGY	21
3.1 Empirical material	21
3.2 Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood, a summary of the show	22
3.3 Selection of characters and scenes	23
3.4 Method of analysis	24
ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION	27
4.1 Envy the Green.....	27
4.1.1 Homunculus Envy	27
4.1.2 Performance of masculinity and femininity	28
4.1.3 Envy's death as a letting go of the Other	31
4.2 Alex Armstrong	34
5.2.1 Alex Louis Armstrong.....	34
5.2.2 Performance of masculinity and femininity	35
4.3 Olivier Armstrong.....	38
5.3.1 Olivier Mira Armstrong.....	39
5.3.2 Performance of masculinity and femininity	40
4.4 Alex and Olivier's relation to patriarchy	44
CONCLUSION	48
REFERENCES	53
FILMOGRAPHY.....	56

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This thesis has been a challenging project that has accompanied me for the summer of 2022. It allowed me to critically reflect on my own position as a cisgendered heterosexual woman and how my own worldviews have been shaped by my surroundings and by the various media forms I consume and consumed on the daily growing up. I found *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood* for the first time in 2015, when I wanted to drop out from my undergraduate studies due to loss of passion and interest in my studies. It taught me that living is not supposed to be easy, not it is meant to always bring joy. There is, somehow, joy also in hardships and this anime has been an inspiration for my personal growth ever since. *FMAB* helped me put hardships into perspective and taught me how to be resilient and kind, so it felt right to dedicate my master's thesis to this work of art and a piece of me.

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IMPORTANT LANGUAGE INFORMATION

The transliteration system used from here on is the Hepburn, a romanization method which uses English orthography to phonetically transcribe sounds.

The Hepburn style of romanisation is applied in rendering Japanese words, and macrons indicating long vowels—for example, ‘ō’ as in *ryōsai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother)—in order to convey the pronunciation of Japanese words. Those Japanese words in the Hepburn style are italicised, as exemplified in the above example. They are intentionally used because of their importance in the Japanese discourse on sociology, these terms being followed by English translations in brackets.

The division of words from Japanese is completely arbitrary and more elements are incorporated in the same word without the use of the hash (-), which is not present in the original form of the word in Japanese. Therefore, it is *jidaigeki* and not *jidai-geki*.

The marker on vowels (macron) signals a long sound and not a double. However, macrons are not used for the Japanese words that are commonly used in English—for example, Tokyo. Some words have entered the mainstream and will, therefore, be written in plain font instead of italics.

INTRODUCTION

In Japanese literature at large, manhood and masculinity have received less attention than femininity and womanhood, while categories such as “the female author” and “the male author” consistently define the construction and reception of literary texts. Similarly, when looking for studies of masculinity within *anime* and *manga* in Western scholarship, often we are presented with masculinity defined against femininity, where the focus is entirely on representation of the latter and of the female body through the ‘male gaze’.

1.1 Aim of the thesis

This thesis combines efforts from gender studies, film studies and cultural studies to investigate how the ideas of boyhood and what it means to be a man are constructed and performed in Japanese *shōnen* anime and how these representations contribute to gender stereotypes. In carrying out this research, the writer speculates that performances of masculinity cannot be clearly separated from those of femininity, as the duality is present in every individual and the negotiation of their gender performance of gender is inherently personal, although culturally informed. The rise of feminist studies has powered a large body of (Western) literature concerning the representation of women and female characters, both human and non-human, in the *shōjo* genre, which primarily targets teenage girls and where the storylines often revolve around romance, coming-of-age and school. In Japan, manga (and anime) are sold and marketed in four main genres: *shōnen* (boys’), *shōjo* (girls’), *seinen* (men’s) and *josei* (women’s) manga. They are named after the assumed gender and age of their target group, therefore the characters in them are going to be reflective of the desired readership (Flis, 2018). Hence, it is safe to assume that this format allows for the creation of a framework where images within these stories influence the way gender is represented.

The focus of the analysis will be the Japanese *shōnen* anime, more specifically *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood* (*Hagane no Renkinjutsushi*). The case study selected is justified by the role media plays in portraying culture and, vice versa, that of culture as informant of media (Yoshida, 2008). It is, therefore, crucial to analyse representations of gender and sexuality in popular culture in order to grasp how these are understood and reproduced in films, books and tv shows that influence the way people relate to each other. Additionally, following World War Two, Japanese society has adapted the patriarchal

values of Western society (namely, American values) to create a strong nation where everyone's role is rigidly defined. These roles are taught to children from a very young age, using books, songs and ultimately manga and anime (Yoshida, 2008). Secondly, animated media constitutes a liminal space for multiple identities to be constructed where viewers are encouraged to identify with and create new experiences of identities. Hence, the representation/subversion of reality and its cultural norms is a constant presence in animation, which makes Japanese anime an interesting site of investigation. Thirdly, performances of masculinities in Japanese manga and anime are under-researched in Western academia, which leaves a gap in research that this thesis intends on informing.

The term *shōnen* in Japanese means “young” and is generally used to refer to boys. Thus, *shōnen* anime and manga are aimed at young boys between the ages of 10 and 15 and feature sport, brotherhoods, or bloody action. Until the 1990s, very few *shōnen* manga series were written by women and it was not until the last few decades that female authors of this genre have become more common, with famous examples being Rumiko Takahashi's *Inuyasha* (1996-2008), Shinobu Ōtaka's *Magi* (2009-2017) and Hiromu Arakawa's *Fullmetal Alchemist* (2001-2010). This shift has also affected the readership of this genre, with female readership increasing noticeably. The phenomena of female authors writing a genre that is primarily targeted at young boys, can challenge perspectives of *hegemonic masculinity* as well as stereotypical gender representation, which could subvert gendered frameworks and critique gendered relations more easily than male authors' works (Flis, 2018).

In Japanese literature at large, manhood and masculinity have received less attention than femininity and womanhood, while categories such as “the female author” and “the male author” consistently define the construction and reception of literary texts. In Western scholarship, we are often presented with masculinity defined against femininity, where the focus is entirely on representation of the latter and of the female body through the ‘male gaze’. The male gaze is a term that originated in film studies, and the first mention of it can be found in Laura Mulvey's paper *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, from 1973 and, later, published in *Screen* magazine in 1975. The author describes the camera as the gaze, which looks upon female bodies as objects. Mulvey (1975) situates the male gaze within a patriarchal society, constructed around and for heterosexual men, and where men are considered to have an active role and where women submit. Given that *FMAB* is

an animated series, we have the opportunity to experience the unfolding of the storyline from the spectator's view.

Lastly, the choice to use *FMAB* as empirical material was motivated by my personal relation with the show. It is a respectful homage to what this anime did for me in the past and still does today. Additionally, the majority of characters in the series adhere to gender norms, but few of them play with the concept of gender extensively. Sometimes this is visible in a character adopting personality traits associated with the opposite gender, shapeshifting or siblings who are constantly performing opposite gender roles.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the literature that supports that animation can and does influence the views of the world of its spectators, on the literature that argues that it also has an impact on how a young audience behaves and thinks about themselves when performing gender and on Inglehart's (2008) socialisation hypothesis, it is important that the most popular *shōnen* anime are examined.

This thesis is concerned with gendered stereotypes in anime in such genre, and more specifically, with the gender performance of the ideas of man and masculinity, a gap has been identified and addressed in this thesis. While some research on gendered stereotypes in *shōnen* anime is present, *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood* has not been analysed extensively. This anime is relevant to analyse to fill the gap especially in relation to ideas of man and masculinity, and the characters show clear differences in conceptualisation compared to other characters from other anime within the same genre. Additionally, this thesis explores masculinity performance through the analysis of body language, fashion, and speech observation, comparing them against what academic literature has identified as the 'right' performance of masculinity according to hegemonic ideals.

The following questions guide the analysis:

RQ1: Can animation strengthen or weaken gender norms?

RQ2: How are masculinities constructed and performed through gendered stereotypes in *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood*?

1.3 Structure of the thesis

First, the Theoretical Framework section will provide an overview of key concepts that emerge and are used in this thesis, patriarchal gender roles, gender performance and the male gaze as first introduced by Laura Mulvey (1975). Then, animation as a medium is introduced, along with a brief introduction of the history of Japanese anime to situate this research project. Finally, this section brings together two different studies on gender representation and performance in *shōnen* manga and anime: Masami Kurumada's *Saint Seiya* (1986-1991) and Saki Hasemi's *To LOVERu* (2006-2009). The focus is mostly on how gendered bodies are represented in these two narratives as it an important and tangible way to incorporate gender studies in the conversation. The chapter then moves on to look at how popular culture has influenced the concept and performance of masculinity in Japan through TV shows and male beauty marketing as explained by Yumiko Iida (2005).

Third, the Methodology outlines the methodological approach that guided the analysis from choosing *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood* as an object of analysis, to conducting the analysis. The aim of this thesis is to collect, through scene selection and body language, fashion and speech observation, performances of masculinities in the Japanese anime *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood* and compare them against what academic literature has identified as the 'right' performance of masculinity according to hegemonic ideals. Firstly, the research problem is briefly outlined as well as the research questions that emerged from it. Secondly, a description of the empirical material is provided and lastly, the method for data analysis is described and justified.

Lastly, the Analysis and Discussion chapter is the final chapter of the thesis. In this chapter the characters Envy, Alex and Olivier Armstrong are analysed by applying the analysis model described above and with the use of a visual approach, their NVC is analysed against the qualities that a man should possess under the ideal of hegemonic masculinity as defined by Kimmel (1994). *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood* is a *shōnen* anime and as such its demographic tends to be more conservative when it comes to social norms; however, *FMAB* still shows some fluidity in regard to gender, and this chapter will show why. This chapter will also summarise the most relevant findings of the analysis and discusses them against previous literature and research. It will start with the analysis of

the character Envy and will end with the analysis of the characters Alex and Olivier Armstrong, who are explored together as a good meter of comparison of gender norms and roles.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this chapter, the theoretical framework of the thesis is presented. It is an overview of existing literature that serves as background for the discussions around gender performance. It briefly presents a history of Japanese animation, moves on to defining the leading concepts used in the discussion part of this thesis and provides two examples of performances of masculinity and femininity in *shōnen* manga and anime.

2.1 Japanese animation

Japanese animation dates back to far before the popularity of anime reached the West. The word ‘anime’ is rather recent and appeared in the 1970s as a shortened version of the English version “animation”. Because of the historical context in which they emerged, both anime and manga show strong influences from Western animation and comics but have, also, undeniably strong ties with Japanese traditions. Napier (2005) stresses the connection with *emakimono*, long picture scrolls that were printed during the Edo period between the 16th and 17th centuries. When Japan opened to the West in the late 19th century, the influences on comics and animation from this area reached Japan and began changing the way Japan did narration. As it is today, animation is an interesting medium of expression to look at when investigating how media representations intertwine with the articulation of cultural identities. Nonetheless, a large part of anime’s history is interconnected to the rise of manga, as seen in a considerable number of anime being based on popular manga. While connected, anime allows for the movement and transformation that manga alone cannot deliver and offers a chance to embrace creativity in a way that live-action filmmaking cannot do.

The term ‘animation’ comes from the Latin verb *animare* which literally means ‘to breathe life into something’ or ‘to give life to’ and in the context of the animated film “this largely means the artificial creation of the illusion of movement in inanimate lines and forms” (Wells, 1998, p. 10). Taking this as a starting point, it can be argued that creators of animation manipulate reality based on their intentions, utilising the concept of a subjective reality. Animation is conventionally done in a two-dimensional space which allows for this world to be illustrated more effectively due to a greater flexibility to manipulate the assumptions of reality, infusing it with the creator’s own ideas (Yoshida, 2008).

Another characteristic of animation can be argued to be its low level of cultural location. Iwabuchi (2006) defines “culturally odourless” all those products whose cultural specificity cannot be recognised. This characteristic becomes a strength when looking at animation, as it makes it easy for it to travel across national boundaries. Due to its nature as a content-based medium, animation is a communication vehicle which acts as a gateway for viewers to acquire or exchange with the texts’ creators ideas of ideologies; during consumption as well as production, discourses on national, gender and class identities can be established both in the producing and receiving countries (Yoshida, 2008). This process is called ‘linear narrativization’.

Linear narrativization denotes a plot that proceeds from beginning to end without deviation, where the writer guides the reader to their preconceived story. The pleasure for the reader lays in being guided through the reading with no involvement in meaning-making. Secondly, linear narrativization can be ulteriorly employed to conceal cruel aspects of reality, historical events, simplifying cultural problems as such in an attempt at escapism. Escapism is understood as a process that enables the individual to move away from threatening situations by using their preferred symbols or imaginative states. An example of this can be found in the depiction of enemies or representations of specific cultures of peoples in Disney animations, i.e., wiping out the context of politics and unpleasant realities and guiding the viewer in a make-believe world where there are no conflicts. Bolton (2018) argues that this rationalises the dominant and authoritarian culture and normalises its violent tendencies. Oftentimes, this comes with an essentialisation of complex identities.

Japan was recognised as a relevant animated film production centre only after the Second World War, also thanks to the fact that in the 1960s the economic boom allowed many families to purchase televisions and TV animated cartoons became an institution in Japanese houses. In the 1980s, anime started targeting older age groups shifting to become the media we know today; but it was not until the global boom of the 1990s, that anime began to demonstrate a clear “Japaneseness” in its narrative and visual stiles. As a cultural medium, anime functions as a gateway to identity articulation through its narratives. Anime can be viewed as both a global and a local player in the creation of national narrative, as the fact that the term became international from the 1990s shows, constituting to the perception of anime and Japan itself (Yoshida, 2008). By attributing to anime, the role of representer of “Japaneseness”, Japan becomes a power opposing

force to the Western world, which in turn fuels nationalist discourses that place Japan as a superior country to the United States, for example.

Lastly, anime as text can represent ideologically different narratives, both those which reinforce dominant ideologies and those which subvert dominant ideologies. The latter can be identified in use of humour and parody in the representation of specific identities like nation, race, gender. Napier (2005) argues that anime is, indeed, the perfect medium to depict the shifting nature of identity through performance in accordance or opposition with the dominant world views. Cultural categorisation is quite blurred in anime and according to Napier (2005) this is particularly visible in the science-fiction genre, where the stateless fantasy space makes it impossible to recognise cities and/or a specific nation or culture. This allows for a more flexible exploration of identity and for a stronger potential for subversion.

When looking at the elements of shōnen anime and manga, male characters are defined by their physical actions and female characters are defined by conventional “feminine” traits and their being “different” which makes the animated body a burning site for inscribing masculinity or femininity, in the way gender is embodied through the characters’ appearance and performance (Wells, 1998). The emphasis on the “difference” is instrumentalised to reinforce the gender binary and favours the infantilisation and sexualisation of women.

2.2 Femininity and masculinity in Japanese manga and anime

2.2.1 Leading concepts

This thesis is built on the interaction between patriarchal gender roles, gender performance and the male gaze.

Patriarchal gender roles are a concept rooted in patriarchy, which is a system that preaches a strict gender binary according to which only heterosexual men and women can be considered “natural” and within this binary, social roles are constructed while eliminating any possibility for divergence from the heteronormative order (Gasparrini, 2020). These patriarchal gender roles define how an individual shall perform their gender to be recognised in society and serve the dynamics of the heteronormative order which

“bring[s] out the interconnections between different areas of life [...and...] provides a permanent reminder that men are the dominant and structurally privileged gender group” (Bryson, 1999, p. 312)

According to Bryson (1999), and more recently Gasparrini (2020), patriarchy constitutes a naturalised system reinforced and upheld by processes of socialisation across spheres of personal life, from family to education, where individuals are taught ways of functioning on the binary in a patriarchal society. The power exercised by men, politically and economically, intersects with the power in the private sphere which legitimises women’s oppression and subordination, while elevating and legitimising male power (Bryson, 1999). Every system acts as an amplifier for a dominant view which reflects the interests and abilities of the dominant group as the most valuable, while belittling those of the weaker. It is within a patriarchal system that men are taught to perform their gender and conform to *hegemonic masculinity* (Gasparrini, 2020). This is of major relevance for this thesis, where masculinities are portrayed within a fictional but nonetheless patriarchal, military-heavy society.

Feminism understands gender as one of the basic structures of human society, which is taught to children through socialisation. Parents influence the socialisation of their children by reinforcing societal expectations and gender rules, rewarding gender-appropriate behaviour and suppressing deviations. This order is intertwined to *gender performance*, which are a set of behaviours that disclose whether a person holds the status of a boy or man, girl, or woman (Connell, 1987).

As Michael Kimmel (1994) states in his essay “masculinity is historical, created in culture and means different things at different times to different people” (Kimmel, 1994, 120). Identities – feminine or masculine alike – are, therefore, crafted from a plethora of co-existing and possibly conflicting discourses that exist in a social, economic, cultural, and political context. Certain discourses have more power and exercise more influence than others. In Western society, and with it all those societies that have adopted Western values through colonisation, the discourse of white, middle-class, heterosexual masculinity occupies the pole position. This does not mean that divergent discourses do not exist, but they are subordinate to the hegemony of white, middle-class, heterosexual masculinity (Dasgupta, 2000). Judith Butler (1988) states that discourses around gender are a product of the sexed body as much as the sexed body is a product of discourses about gender. Men

and women are socially conditioned to perform gender using the body as the vehicle of expression of practices.

The dominant discourse is constantly searching to construct identities upon a variety of discourses and practices, much like it was a never-ending project where men seek to perform at their best under societal pressures to conform (Dasgupta, 2000). Departing from here, the decision in this thesis to focus on masculinity as gender performance. While characters in the empirical material are not questioning their gender, they are made to perform their gender in a way that could subvert the expected gender performance in a patriarchal society.

The *male gaze* is a term that originated in film studies, and the first mention of it can be found in Laura Mulvey's paper *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, from 1973 and later published in *Screen* magazine in 1975. The camera represents the gaze, which looks upon fragmented female bodies. Mulvey (1975) situates the male gaze within a patriarchal society, which is constructed around and for heterosexual men, and where men are considered to have an active role and where women submit. In the context of cinema, it is mostly men who write and direct movies and therefore, intuitively, it is men who take lead roles which are complemented by supporting female characters. Understandably, such movies portray a heterosexual male perspective of female bodies, where they function as an erotic object for both the male characters in the movies and for the spectator.

In feminist theory, the term 'male gaze' has been adapted to other forms of art, including literature, and has come to represent the act of depicting women as sexual objects or the pleasure of heterosexual male viewers, stripping female bodies of agency. In fact, female characters in movies often serve as props for the heterosexual male narrative; the woman in herself is not important in the slightest (Mulvey, 1975).

2.2.2 *Saint Seiya* and *To LOVERu* as examples of femininity and masculinity representation

The study of the representation of gender in manga (and anime) and how gender is performed in these mediums is not a new topic in academic research, although less researched in the West compared to Japan. As an example of how gender is performed in contemporary manga and anime, I will introduce two works that fall within the *shōnen*

genre: cult manga by Masami Kurumada *Saint Seiya* (1986-1991) which was then turned into a cult anime; and harem-style romantic comedy anime by Saki Hasemi *To LOVERu* (2006-2009). These works serve as an example of how masculinity and femininity have been represented in Japanese *shōnen* manga and anime before and set the scene for discussions on performances of gender in the empirical material used in this thesis.

Lorna Piatti-Farnell (2013) analyses *Saint Seiya – Knights of the Zodiac* in relation to representations of masculinity within the hegemonic discourse, to describe what a man is traditionally thought to be in the *shōnen* manga universe. The plot follows the adventures of the five knights, Pegasus Aiya, Dragon Shiryu, Andromeda Shun, Cygnus Hyoga and Phoenix Ikki, in their fight to protect the mortal incarnation of the goddess Athena. Their mission is not only to protect her, but it is also to maintain justice in the world. This manga (and later on its animated version) features discourses around brotherhood, coming of age and justified violence for a higher end by the heroes of the story. Characters perform their masculinity by engaging in multiple fights, where they fight together as connected by a spiritual brotherhood to defeat their enemies. In *Saint Seiya* aggression and violence are justified when carried out by the heroes and seen as the only effective approach to rid the world from injustice, as also a “gift that the hero must embrace in order to complete his mission” (Piatti-Farnell, 2013, 1138). In this manga we also find an example of *bishōnen* in Andromeda Shun, who is often presented in delicate poses and boasting gentle looks, while also being a skilled fighter. Stylistically, there is an emphasis on the character’s actions and mobility, which seems to be connected to the Japanese fantasies of masculinity as unequivocally mobile (Gill, 2002). The knights’ exaggerated mobility could also be an inspiration for the average Japanese man, the ‘salaryman’ and inspire the readership to adopt masculinity as performed by the heroes of the plot, to achieve a stress release and “be a good man” (Piatti-Farnell, 2013, 1140). The author places emphasis on characters’ actions by adopting a drawing style that is not too detailed, but where the reader can clearly identify emotions through the extreme facial expressions and the focus placed on eyes and eyebrows, and on their muscular bodies in fighting scenes, where their skin can be seen from under their armour as they charge their opponents.

Showing skin can be used to bring attention to the strength of a male body, or to sexualise a female body. This is often the case in *To LOVERu*, where female characters do not show much depth in terms of personality or role in the plot, but whose naked bodies seem to carry the whole story from beginning to the end (Jones, 2013). While this anime falls into

the *shōnen* category, its scope is entirely different from *Saint Seiya*'s. The latter focuses on showing how masculinity should be performed, by exalting the physicality that is expected from men who subscribe to patriarchal values. According to Jones's (2013) analysis, *To LOVERu* positions itself as a coming-of-age tale where the protagonist Rito, a schoolboy, is faced with challenges regarding romantic life and sexual tension with princess Lala, who appeared in his bathroom one day and declared her love for him. The anime features multiple scenes of nudity, where princess Lala seems unaware of how her nude body affects Rito. Moreover, the anime features a strong pornographic narrative, with not only nudity, but also instances of sexual harassment and the infamous tentacle rape, all tropes common in Japanese hardcore pornography (Allison, 1996). Feminine bodies are presented here as objects that are to be watched and used as the protagonist pleases, they do not have any authority nor agency. This is a perfect example of male gaze used in anime. By showing male characters staring at exposed female characters, *To LOVERu* transmits the idea that watching and looking is only for men. Women in this *shōnen* anime are the fragmented subjects of the camera and play the role of the supportive and kind side character instrumental to the success of the central (male) hero.

2.3 Androgyny in Japanese manga and anime

In most societies masculinity is constructed in opposition to femininity (Connell, 2005). Clearly, diverging from gender norms is unacceptable for either gender but it is considered to have a more negative cultural meaning for men, in contrast to women (Ishii-Kuntz, 2003). Masculine performance understood as the repetition of specific acts and behaviours to their naturalisation (Butler, 1990) may reinforce the gender order in a given society, but it may also challenge and resist hegemonic social arrangements. As Butler (1990) and, later on, Kimmel (1994) have put it, men perform gender to others both as a way to be accepted as 'real men' and as an escape from emasculation.

Androgyny in relation to males has been present in Japanese popular culture for quite some time, as the Kabuki and Noh theatre inform us (Darling-Wolf, 2004). After the banning of women from public performance in Japan in the 1600s, the practice of male actors playing cross-gender roles became the norm. The increasing trend in Japanese media of young men with a feminised image, has helped in creating a "sensitised aesthetic consciousness in the minds of young men" (Iida, 2005, 59) leading them to focus on their appearance more. In popular culture, this trend is identified in the *bishōnen* (beautiful

boys) in anime and manga, who push the image that romantic relationships go beyond the "boundaries of currently dominant constructions of gender roles based on compulsory heterosexuality" (Darling-Wolf, 2003, 79). *Bishōnen* show kindness and beauty alongside their strongly masculine attributes of honesty and loyalty or are sexualised as sensitive men who are in touch with their emotions and behave brotherly to female characters. They are also prominent in *yaoi*, a genre of boy love that is mostly consumed by female readership.

The gender-bending practices of Kabuki theatre offer multiple views on how bodies can be read and understood in more than one way (Darling-Wolf, 2004). Japanese media crafts young male talents who are marketed as "New Men" with great care and attention to detail, creating a strong link between the new representations of masculinity and the shift towards an emphasis on male bodies as sexual objects in popular media.

Influence from this new tendency can be seen in the newer generations of male idols, who show more delicate features and personalities as well as louder hairstyles, makeup, or jewellery. This shift has collected different responses from the female audience, with some women appreciating androgyny as a newly found form of self-expression; while others expressed concern over men looking weak, almost like someone a woman needs to baby (Darling-Wolf, 2004). As mentioned above, androgyny is one of the main components of traditional Japanese masculinity and certainly this is not a forgotten reality as post-bubble economy hybrid constructions of masculinity in Japanese media brought together both this element of traditional Japanese masculinity and the silent machismo integrated in media during post-war years. What is of interest here, is how men themselves have reacted to this shift towards a more gentle-looking representation of masculinity.

The emergence of aesthetically conscious young men is a consequence of an intense commercialisation of culture from the 1980s onward, which has assigned greater importance to feminine aesthetics. In what Iida (2005) calls the 'postmodern cultural condition', bodies become visible representational surfaces where the trend of 'feminisation of masculinity' has found fertile grounds. While some may argue that a 'feminisation of masculinity' essentialises young Japanese men into passive and commodified bodies, their use of feminine aesthetics can also be interpreted as a counter-hegemonic practice to challenge accepted masculinity values (Iida, 2005). Such a view opens up possibilities for gender ambiguous identities, which can question patriarchy.

Moreover, by subscribing to an ambiguous gender position, young males reposition themselves in a de-gendered space where they construct alternative identities in the present historical and discursive contexts; additionally, this relocation distances them from the corporate masculine ideals and expectations, allowing these men to pursue their own goals.

To recap, because this thesis focuses on masculinity on the binary and leaves out all other masculinities that do not exist within the binary, it has identified it as the combination of gender stereotypes borne out of the patriarchal ideology which are reproduced culturally, and which are subject to the male gaze.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodological approach that guided the analysis from choosing *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood* as an object of analysis, to conducting the analysis. The aim of this thesis is to collect, through scene selection and body language, fashion and speech observation, performances of masculinities in the Japanese anime *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood*, compare them against what academic literature has identified as the ‘right’ performance of masculinity according to hegemonic ideals and investigate how such performances aid in maintaining or subverting stereotypes.

3.1 Empirical material

The Japanese *shōnen* anime *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood* (*Hagane no Renkinjutsushi*) constitutes the empirical material. The Japanese anime show is adapted from the original *Fullmetal Alchemist* manga series by Hiromu Arakawa, and directed by Yasuhiro Irie, written by Hiroshi Ōnogi. Currently, there are two animated version of the manga *Fullmetal Alchemist*, one that was published alongside the publishing of the manga and Hiromu Arakawa assisted the production team in the early development of the anime but was not involved in the making of the scrip. This first animated version of the manga has a different storyline and ending from the manga and is known as *Fullmetal Alchemist*. The second anime series was produced alongside the manga and Arakawa showed director Yasuhiro Irie her plans for the manga’s ending, making the ending of the manga and of the second anime series coincide. The story from the second anime series, *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood*, coincide with the original work but the manga still has a darker feeling and fits a more mature readership. This thesis takes into consideration the second anime television series. The choice is justified by the fact that this thesis wants to look at performances of masculinity and the effects gendered stereotypes can have on the socialisation of young readers. Hence, it makes sense to choose a *shōnen* anime that is aimed at young boys but whose readership includes a large number of girls alike.

The protagonists of *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood* are the typical *shōnen* anime heroes. They put aside their personal goals in favour of a more altruistic end, despite spending the entire TV show trying to retrieve their bodies. While the plot is per se quite predictable, there are some new and more interesting elements to this anime compared to similar ones from the same time. Some characters within the narrative play with gender

extensively and while the majority of characters in the show conform to gender norms, a few of them play with them in more or less subtle ways. When Japan ‘opened’ to the West during the 19th century, it had to begin aligning its gender roles to those of the West (Deacon, 2013). This meant that Japan combined Western conceptualisations of gender with its Confucian teachings to create hybrid gender norms which, at least in the public sphere, are quite similar to the Western ones. In this thesis, as we have seen previously, gender norms are discussed from a Western perspective as most of the theorists the researcher has used are from the West.

Starting from the conceptualisation of masculinity as a performative act, as discussed by Judith Butler (1990) in *Gender Trouble*, this thesis carries out an analysis of the visual representation of masculinities in *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood*. Masculinity is a mobile concept and, therefore, there is no one way to “do masculinity” and there are infinite possibilities to construct it; therefore, the discussion part of this thesis will present different ways in which masculine traits are absorbed and performed by three different supporting characters, one villain and two protagonists: Envy and the Armstrong siblings.

3.2 Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood, a summary of the show

Brothers Edward and Alphonse Elric are raised by their mother Trisha Elric in the village of Resembool, in the country of Amestris. Their father Hohenheim, a known and very talented alchemist, abandoned his family while the boys were still young, and while in Trisha's care they began to show an interest in alchemy and became curious about its practice. However, when Trisha died of a lingering illness, their best friend Winry Rockbell, and her grandmother Pinako took care of them. The boys travelled to advance their alchemic training under Izumi Curtis. Upon returning home, the two decide to try to bring their mother back to life with alchemy. However, human transmutation is a taboo, as it is impossible to perform properly. In the failed transmutation that results in Al's body being completely obliterated, and Ed losing his left leg. In an attempt to keep his brother alive, Ed sacrifices his right arm to bring Al's soul back, attaching it to an armour. After Edward receives automail prosthetics from Winry and Pinako, the brothers head to the capital city to become government sanctioned State Alchemists. After passing the exam, Edward becomes the "Fullmetal Alchemist" by the State Military, and the brothers begin their quest to regain their full bodies back using the Philosopher's Stone, under the direction of Colonel Roy Mustang. Along the way, they discover a deep government

conspiracy to hide the true nature of the Philosopher's Stone that involves the homunculi, the alchemists of the neighbouring nation of Xing, the scarred man from the war-torn nation of Ishval, and their own father's past.

3.3 Selection of characters and scenes

Firstly, the choice of Envy as a subject of this analysis will be motivated, alongside the choice of scenes for exploring his performance of gender. Envy is also shown as an integral villain to the story, but he is also quickly shown to be simply a subordinate of Father, the creator of all Homunculi. The decision to choose Envy as a character for my analysis comes from the fact that he is the only androgynous character in the show and therefore his performance of gender is different from that of other characters in that it allows the dichotomy man-woman to coexist and one gender to be conveniently performed over the other at any given time. In manga and anime, androgyny is usually associated with protagonists, but what happens when the androgynous character is a villain?

Envy and his subversive gender performance is examined against Roy Mustang's performance of masculinity, a character who represents the standard of hegemonic masculinity as a man of the military and a heterosexual man. To do this, few selected interactions will be analysed. In the analysis, body language, physical appearance and speech will be looked at and compared to the qualities that a man should possess under the ideal of hegemonic masculinity as defined by Kimmel (1994) and Mulvey's (1975) concept of 'male gaze' will be employed to discuss how Envy's body is presented to the spectator. Additionally, Envy's death by suicide will be explored as the rebuttal of the "other", which in Envy's case can be interpreted to be the 'feminine other', tying the character to the old patriarchal value system. The interactions are selected from six episodes as follows: ep. 10 "Separate Destinations", ep. 5 "Rain of Sorrows", ep 17. "Cold Flame", ep 14. "Those Who Lurk Underground", ep. 53 "Flame of Vengeance", ep. 54 "Beyond the Inferno". The researcher chose these episodes because they are the most relevant to discuss Envy as a character from the beginning of the show, when the viewers are introduced to him to the end, when he commits suicide.

Secondly, the Armstrong siblings while not playing as main protagonists, still provide extensive help to the main characters. As it will be explained in more depth in the following chapter, Envy is associated with the older generation with a focus on hegemonic,

phallogocentric power and therefore is punished on several occasions for his play with gender. The Armstrongs, Alex and Olivier, can be argued to be standing on the cusp between generations due to the fact that they perform gender in a peculiar way (namely, they perform each other's gender) but hold high positions in the military, a notoriously hegemonic institution.

Alex and Olivier Armstrong's gender performance is examined against each other. To do this, few selected interactions will be analysed. Like for Envy the analysis will focus on body language, physical appearance and speech. Lastly, their battle with Sloth, another Homunculus controlled by Father, will be studied to examine the ways in which the old power (Father) punishes both Alex and Olivier for their subversive performance of gender and for occupying the liminal space between generations. This punishment will be compared to the one Roy Mustang always seems to evade. The interactions are selected from six episodes as follows (the battle against Sloth has been grouped as one episode for convenience): ep. 1 "Fullmetal Alchemist", ep. 29 "Struggle of the Fool", ep. 33 "The Northern Wall of Briggs", ep. 34 "Ice Queen", ep. 35 "The Shape of This Country", ep. 45 "Promised Day", ep. 51 "The Immortal Legion", ep. 52-55 The Battle against Sloth, ep. 54 "Beyond the Inferno".

These three characters can be seen as occupying the liminal space between the older generation and younger generation, where they can play more freely with gender and subvert its norms. In this liminal space it is also easy to see how the hegemonic powers represented by Amestris (or Father, who is the ruler of Amestris) try to control and push gender play to specific directions. The choice to focus on characters rather than other aspects of *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood* comes from the fact that characters are an important element of anime and manga. Ian Condry (2011) states that characters are not only linked to the story itself but are someone viewers can relate to and "become friends with" throughout the storyline. For this reason, in this thesis the researcher chose to focus on characters over the plot.

3.4 Method of analysis

This thesis employs a relativist ontology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) and a constructionist epistemology (Berger & Luckmann, 2011) that supports the idea that manhood and masculinity are socially constructed, varying according to time, place and specific

elements that characterise the individual. Additionally, the thesis builds on qualitative methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) supported by Gary Thomas's (2013) interpretivist paradigm, according to which the interpretations of reality are culturally derived and historically situated. He also states that the social world is constructed by each individual in a different manner, and it is, hence, not perceivable in a one-fits-all manner (Thomas, 2013).

When investigating communication systems and meaning systems, we are generally met with several processes. For example, the perception of reality through experience or symbols is in itself an encoding process and it involves making sense of the data in front of us. The perception of reality is as specific to our culture as our language is. Reality as a social construct is made up of codes, some presentational and some representational (Fiske, 2011). While representational codes and presentational codes tend to exist together at the same time, as the former are used to produce texts and the latter reveal aspects of the communicator and their present social situation, this thesis is mostly interested in the latter.

Throughout the analysis, the researcher will pay close attention to visual elements, speech and non-verbal communication (NVC), which use presentational codes such as gestures, eye movements or qualities of voice to carry the message. Presentational codes are useful in the context of this thesis as they carry information about the speaker, their situation and aid the listener/receiver in learning about the speaker's identity, emotions, attitudes, social position and so on. Secondly, another function of presentational codes is that of interaction management, which means that they are employed to manage the kind of relationship the encoder/speaker wants with the other (Fiske, 2011).

These codes will be searched in specific scenes from the episodes listed in the section above. The scenes selected and described for each characters represent, in the researcher's opinion, the most salient moments in their performance of masculinity. Using them to observe the attitudes, behaviours and qualities which have been identified to represent a man in hegemonic masculinity discourse (Kimmel, 1994), the point is made that each character subscribes or subverts such discourse in their specific way. This method of analysis can be called a "visual approach" or a "descriptive visual approach" where the observations noted will be compared to the existing literature to confirm or confute the

hypothesis that Envy, Alex and Olivier Armstrong conform or subvert hegemonic masculinity.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter is the final chapter of the thesis. In this chapter the characters Envy, Alex and Olivier Armstrong are analysed by applying the analysis model described above and with the use of a visual approach. *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood* is a *shōnen* anime and as such its demographic tends to be more conservative when it comes to social norms; however, *FMAB* still shows some fluidity in regard to gender, and this chapter will show how. This chapter will also summarise the most relevant findings of the analysis and discusses them against previous literature and research. It will start with the analysis of the character Envy and will end with the analysis of the characters Alex and Olivier Armstrong, who are explored together as a good meter of comparison of gender norms and roles.

4.1 *Envy the Green*



Figure 1. Envy (left) and Lust (right) as seen in Episode 5. Accessed 03.10.2022. Retrieved from <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/397020523370997267/>

4.1.1 Homunculus Envy

When the viewers are first introduced to Envy, in episode 5 “Rain of Sorrows”, he has taken the shape of the priest of Liore an old man who according to one of the other Homunculi, Lust, has a “gross appearance”. It is at this point that Envy transforms back into his usual teen-like form. From the tower where Envy, his sister Lust and his brother Gluttony are standing, the city of Liore can be seen in flames and we know that bloodshed

has just occurred as per an orchestrated act by the three Homunculi. The setting is dark since the scene is at dusk, and the music is ominous, due to the circumstances of the shot.

Envy is a villain that accompanies the viewer for a large portion of the show (54 episodes out of 64) and can easily be thought of as a main villain, but he is actually subservient to his Father, his older sister Lust (pictured above) and his brother Pride, the first Homunculus to be created by Father. He is, therefore, not acting out of personal agency but is rather following orders from his superiors throughout the whole show. This subservient role may also be critical in his suicide, as he is expected to perform in a certain way but upholds his personal agency by performing gender in his personal way.

Envy represents the embodiment of jealousy and is one of the seven Homunculi created by and from Father, a living philosopher's stone and the main patriarchal figure in the show. In his human form, Envy's hair is black but has a green tint to it and in his "natural" form he is an entirely green, massive creature. Since green is the colour usually associated with envy, both the human body and the natural monstrous form present traces of it. Envy has an androgynous appearance that makes it difficult to determine whether his gender is feminine or masculine throughout the whole show. We know, however, that he identifies as male as this is how others refer to him. He is outspoken about his dislike for humans and uses harsh language to talk about and to them; he also has a generally arrogant attitude that is especially noticeable when he boasts about having played with humans' emotions to their damage.

It must be pointed out that Envy actually has three shapes that he takes throughout the show when he is performing as himself. We have already mentioned his human form, his monstrous form but twice during the show, he assumes the "original" form: this is a lizard-like creature with 6 legs, a bulky body, one huge mouth and resembles a leech. This is not casual, as Envy feeds off hatred humans have for each other and, in order to assume his human shape, has to gain control over a human body and engulf it into his existence. He does this by biting the person's neck and absorbing their soul into the philosopher's stone which constitutes his artificial heart.

4.1.2 Performance of masculinity and femininity

Envy is a shapeshifter. Shapeshifting in Japanese folklore is usually associated with animal mesomorphs which have an outstanding role in the anime (Foster, 2012). Quite many characters are chimeras and have the ability to shapeshift from human to human-animal beings and Envy is one of them, as he can choose to shapeshift to a dog or, when showing his true form, to a giant green dinosaur creature. Worth noting is that chimeras in the show are mostly men. There are only two characters who are both codified as chimeras and women.

Shapeshifting in relation to gender is seen as a form of deception and a form of performance where the subject plays the role of another person. To portray another person satisfactorily, a shapeshifter needs to perform the person's gender with accuracy, which makes shapeshifters inherently masculine and feminine. However, shapeshifting may be considered a feminine trait as it is dynamic, unpredictable, and unbound (Iida, 2005); therefore Envy, thanks to his shapeshifting abilities, is naturally feminine. More specifically, he chooses to appear as a teenage male when he is not acting another part but when he is in disguise, he does not discriminate between genders. When shapeshifting, he specifically chooses the gender that is easiest to perform in a given situation. Moreover, he only performs as three named female characters which puts pressure on him to perform their gender well to pass convincingly as each of them, whereas when he performs as a man it is mostly in the shape of a soldier, which is easier as this occurs when he is around other soldiers and cannot be singled out if he does not act perfectly.

As mentioned already, the usual form that Envy assumes is that of an androgynous teen male. It can be argued that even in his usual form he is performing both genders. While looking as a teen male, he still has some curves and his hips sometimes appear quite feminine; he has long, stringy black hair with a green tint to it to give the appearance of a grouchy character ("Rain of Sorrows"). Envy shows more skin than any of his other siblings and he is always seen wearing a black sleeveless shirt that covers his chest until his pectoral muscles, shorts that often appear like a skirt and arm and leg warmers that expose his fingers and toes. According to Anne Allison (2006), showing a lot of skin through a skimpy costume is a feature normally associated with *bishōjo hīrō* (beautiful girl hero) and creates the chance for the audience to scrutinise Envy as an object, making him adopt the female position in relation to the gaze, rather than letting him be the bearer of the look (Mulvey, 1975).

His physical performance is at times more feminine and at times more masculine. This is visible in episode 5 already (see picture above), where he is seen standing with his hand on his right hip and leaning with his weight on his right hip, which is a generally accepted feminine stance (“Rain of Sorrows”). He is often shown to be standing in this same exact position or with both his hands on his hips. In “Cold Flame” he is shown stretching his arms away from the camera, which focuses on his back. The focus on parts of Envy’s body reminds of the fragmented view of women bodies by the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975) and in all these scenes Envy is seen taking as little space as possible, a typically feminine trait. There are also other instances where he takes up more space. In these scenes, his movements are prominently masculine and feature very active gestures. Nonetheless, his attention to his appearance ascribes him a more markedly feminine aura and it can be argued that the form he chooses to take is an attempt at performing as *bishōnen* (Darling-Wolf, 2004). He often comments on other characters’ appearance in a deprecating manner (“Those Who Lurk Underground”) as if he wanted to shift the focus away from his performance as a *bishōnen* and by calling the attention to poor performances of masculinity or femininity by the characters around him.

Envy’s desire to be seen as *bishōnen* can be linked to the cult of male beauty discussed by Yumiko Iida, according to whom there is a growing trend of conscious young men in Japan, whose practices attempt at countering hegemonic practices around masculinity (Iida, 2005). This counter-movement comes with the need to sway away from traditional gender roles and create more fluid views of gender. If we consider the protagonists of *FMAB* as the representatives of the newer generation and Envy as a representative of the older generation, his search for aesthetic beauty in his looks can represent his effort to deceive them more effectively.

In contrast to his feminine attributes, Envy feels very strongly about humans. He is openly racist against them due to the fact that he considers them easy to fool and more emotional than Homunculi, who are not blinded by emotions. Logic and rational thinking are attributes normally associated to masculinity (Kimmel, 1994). Envy is constantly reprimanding his enemies for being too emotional and makes fun of them for being easily fooled by his emotional manipulation and is often seen calling them “morons” (“Flame of Vengeance”).

Envy, after he killed Maes Hughes by assuming the appearance of his wife: “*You humans really are such fools. You risk your life for such pointless things.*” (Episode 10, “Separate Destinations”)

When accepting traits such as being emotional, romantic, cute, tender and warm as feminine, Envy’s jealousy of humans for possessing all of them can also be seen as a sign of his femininity (Dasgupta, 2003). This femininity is also visible in his death.

4.1.3 Envy’s death as a letting go of the Other

Envy’s death can be considered an example of his duality. Upon discovering that Envy was the culprit of Maes Hughes’s homicide (Maes Hughes is a supporting character and Roy Mustang’s best friend), Roy Mustang proceeds to torture him by repeatedly incinerating him. Unlike Lust, Envy’s sister, who is punished by death at the hands of Roy Mustang, Envy is definitely punished but not fatally (“Beyond the Inferno”). Envy chose suicide as his parting wish, which ascribes masculine agency to the character, although his suicide is quite tame and hence could be considered “feminine”. This is because just before his death he is reduced to his original form, a small, harmless, and extremely emotional creature (“Beyond the Inferno”).



Figure 2. Envy in his true, harmless form crying because Edward Elric has unmasked his true feelings for humans. Episode 54. Accessed 03.10.2022. Retrieved from <https://worstgen.alwaysdata.net/forum/threads/fullmetal-alchemist-the-mafia-brotherhood.8696/p>

In episode 54 “Beyond the Inferno”, as Envy is brought back to his original harmless form thanks to Roy Mustang’s alchemic attacks, Edward Elric picks him up and holds it in his hand while looking at him with pitiful eyes.

Edward Elric: *“You’re...jealous of humans. Humans are supposed to be so much weaker than you Homunculi, and yet even when we’re beaten down, and get discouraged, or seem like we’re about to go astray and fall, we will stand up to the challenge, again and again.”*

Envy: *Humans...It’s so humiliating, ending up like a worn-out dishrag...walked on all over by you humans...you loathsome beings...What’s worse of all the scum out there, this scummiest pipsqueak had to be the one..(starts crying and screaming). How humiliating! (Episode 54, “Beyond the Inferno”)*

This dialogue is followed by close ups of Envy’s teary eyes, while he collapses on the ground crushed by the humiliation for finally feeling understood by the same individuals that he so much despised. (*“Me, Envy? Jealous of Humans?! Me, Envy, being understood by this kid?”*). The camera shows the next scene from Envy’s level, the ground. He is sitting on his tail in the dark dungeons and looks at Edward Elric and Scar. His last words are a challenge, he invites Edward to wait for the real nature of humans to show in the events that will unfold in Central City in the next days. After these last words, Envy takes the philosopher’s stone that is his heart, rips it out of his chest and crushes it, disappearing into dust with it.

I argue that this suicide can be seen as feminine because it leaves no trace unlike suicides by gunshot usually performed by men, and Envy’s life during his final moments slips away slowly much like what happens when wrists are cut, which is a suicide method typically associated to women (Fetch, 2014). Based on what Roy Mustang says a few moments later, this form of suicide is seen as cowardly and therefore not living up to the proud and courageous image a man should have.

Roy Mustang: *He terminated his own life? Cowardly bastard.*

Envy blames Edward Elric (one of the protagonists) for his choice of committing suicide because Edward was able to see through him and understand his jealousy of what he lacks in comparison to humans. Envy performs, or attempts to, the masculine gender throughout the majority of the show, hence this much sentiment in regard to Edward “unmasking” his true feelings can be seen as a representation of his femininity which leads to believe that this suicide could be an attempt at escaping this side of him.

Envy’s death could also be investigated from a different point of view, that takes into consideration the fact that Envy, and the other Homunculi, is closely tied to the government of Amestris which is a hegemonic patriarchy led by Father, who is the ultimate patriarch in this show. Due to the tyrannic powers Father exercises on his children, Homunculi strive to uphold hegemonic discourses. As discussed briefly above, Father, the Homunculi and the army in general represent the older generation that clings onto traditional patriarchal views of the world and supports a traditional view of gender roles and gender play. Taking this into consideration, Envy’s suicide can also be seen as his punishment on himself for going against the traditional views. Envy is hyperaware of his performance of the feminine. Every time he performs as a woman, he becomes self-conscious and adopts hyper masculine traits as a defence mechanism; this shows as being cocky, aggressive, or rowdy (“Separate Destinations”).

If we consider Envy’s suicide in connection to his perceived bad performance of the masculine gender, his departure can be linked to his position in between generations, the older being associated with Father and Amestris, and the younger being reflected in the protagonists of *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood*. His ability to shapeshift and his attention to his appearance ascribe him feminine traits, but his natural form’s size and his aggressive personality assign him masculine attributes, placing Envy on the line between a rigid and a fluid gender play. He wants to fit in the traditional view of gender roles, but his feminine attributes hinder his association with the patriarchal discourse. Lastly, being “outed” by Edward Elric he is marked as the “other” who failed to perform masculinity as well as he would have liked, which caused him to reject this other within himself (“Beyond the Inferno”).

4.2 Alex Armstrong

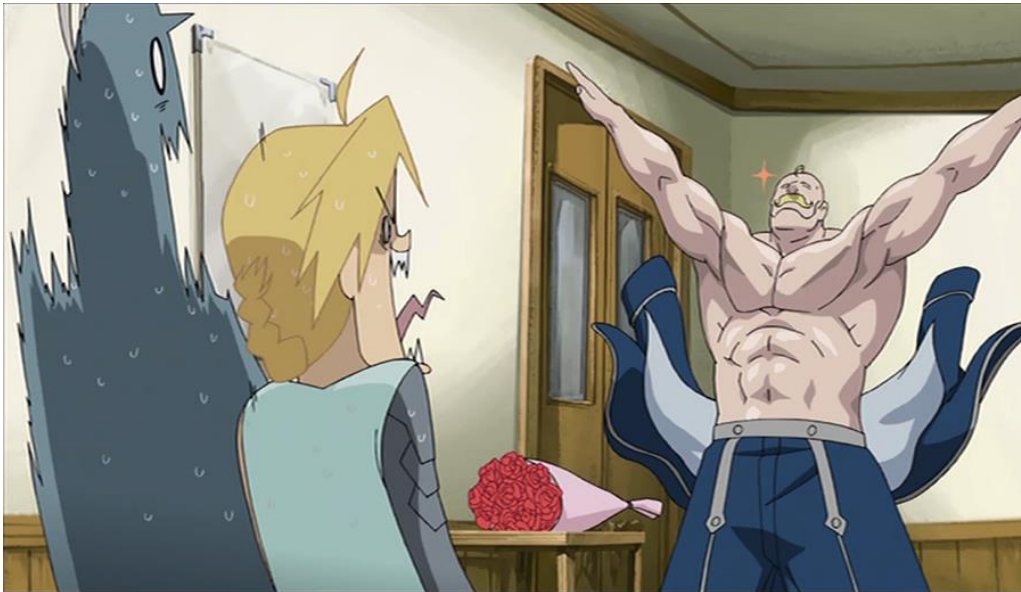


Figure 3. Alex Armstrong (right) pays Edward Elric (left) a visit at the hospital after his injury. Episode 1. Accessed 4.10.2022. Retrieved from <https://www.tumblr.com/tagged/alex-watches-fnab?sort=top>

5.2.1 Alex Louis Armstrong

Major Alex Louis Armstrong (Alex) is one of the first side characters to be introduced in the show and can already be seen in episode 1, acting as a personal guard to Edward and Alphonse Elric following the commands of Roy Mustang, who is in charge of capturing a former State Alchemist in Central City. The first time Alex is pictured in the episode, he is fighting the criminal State Alchemist in an alleyway. The viewer first sees Alex's alchemic spears appear from the wall and then hears Alex's deep voice. When Alex appears on the frame, the camera looks at him from the bottom up and emphasises his size, both in height and width. He walks confidently towards the enemy and already at this point a key marker of this character is noticeable: the shiny sparkle.

From this first encounter, Alex does not seem to be any different than the average male character in a *shōnen* manga. He presents himself a tall, actually the tallest human character in the show, Caucasian-looking man with a nicely-kept moustache and a single blonde curly lock of hair on his head, the physique of a bodybuilder and a stend look in his eyes. Even the way he talks, which sounds a little muffled as if he was grinding his teeth, gives reasons to think he is an extremely serious character. This could not be further from the truth as we get to learn at the end of episode one, when Alex visits Edward at the

hospital after him and his brother fought the criminal State Alchemist (see Fig. 3). The vibe of the scene is entirely different from the rest of the episode. The room is light, and the music is cheery, Alphonse is sitting by Edward's bed and is reassuring him that their plans will continue on track when the frame moves to a zoomed in bouquet of red roses covered in shiny sparkles. The frame then moves to Alex Armstrong's face, also surrounded in sparkles.

Alex Armstrong: Edward Elric, when I heard you were in the hospital, I dashed over!

Both Edward and Alphonse react to such burst of emotion by showing surprise and concern, as we may assume that they are not used to such genuine display of affection by a male figure. From this small interaction, we may determine that Alex Armstrong is not shy about showing emotions and is actually tender at heart. The following scene (pictured above) is his attempt at making Edward feel less bored by giving him something to contemplate, which makes it understood that Alex, much like Envy, is attentive of his physical appearance.

During the unfolding of events, we learn that Alex Armstrong was involved in the Ishvalan Civil War as a State Alchemist. During the war, State Alchemists were used as human weapons and had to obey orders given by their superiors to carry out the genocide of the Ishvalan people. In a flashback, Alex is seen holding the lifeless body of a child while crying copiously. He refuses to fight further and is dismissed from the battlefield ("Struggle of the Fool"). Among the other characters who were involved in the war and who carry trauma in connection to it, Alex is the only one who openly shows emotion. Lastly, he has four sisters, an older one Olivier whom we will meet in the next section, and three younger ones. It can be speculated that he has learnt to engage his emotions from them, but as we will see just below, this is not entirely the case.

5.2.2 Performance of masculinity and femininity

Already from episode 1 we have gathered enough information that help us describe Alex as a typical heterosexual man on the outside and a tender man on the inside. He is trained in the military and upkeeps his appearance due to the high rank he has. His muscular body is barely hidden under his military uniform which he is often removing to show off his

muscles in outbursts of emotion. As seen previously, muscles are usually associated with strong masculine energy and power and are used in *shōnen* anime and manga to identify those characters who play the role of the hero or who side with the heroes of the story (Kimmel, 1994; Piatti-Farnell, 2013).

Alex Armstrong: Here, let me relieve your boredom while you're here. I'm sure the beauty of my muscles will warm your heart.
(Episode 1, "Fullmetal Alchemist")

The willingness to be looked at and admired for his physical appearance, assigns Alex Armstrong a considerable feminine attitude. As we have seen above, Envy also craved for the look of the spectator and was, therefore, often pictured in ways expected for female characters. However, while for Envy being looked at meant to be recognised as a *bishōnen* and hence his performance of masculinity accepted as valid, for Alex it has a different meaning. He wants to be looked at with the sole purpose of being considered beautiful and charming as well as in hopes that his body would lift the mood of the watcher, performing his gender as opposite of his. Theoretically, it is impossible for a man or male figure to be the subject of an objectifying gaze due to the funding principles of the male gaze and the belief that only the female body can be sexualised through the camera. Alex is, in this way, controlling the gaze that is placed on him while also embracing the role of the subject of the look, which is normally reserved to women and female characters (Mulvey, 1975).

Alex Armstrong is not only invested in the aesthetics of his physical appearance but is also extremely fond of the arts and humanities. Having a predisposition for fine arts and humanities is a trait normally associated with female figures as those interests require a careful eye for detail and beauty as well as great patience and refinement that are usually skills mastered by daughters, sisters and wives. his fondness can be appreciated in his alchemic creations, which are always blemish-free and look hand-crafted, unlike the creations from other alchemists that show slight cracks or lines revealing their crafted origin. Such care and attention to detail is omnipresent in Alex's creations, from actual sculptures present on his family estate to the heavy stone spikes he uses during combat. This is exemplary of a highly sensitised aesthetic consciousness that not only focuses on the practicality of alchemic creations but also on rendering them pleasing to the eye (Iida, 2005).

Alex Armstrong: *Take a good look at the artistic alchemy that has been passed down through the Armstrong family for generations* (Episode 1, “Fullmetal Alchemist”)

Alex Armstrong: *This artistic muscular and artistic alchemic collaboration, is excellent and elegant!* (During an attack to Homunculus Sloth. Episode 54, “Beyond the Inferno”)

The only time when Alex’s alchemic creations are not blemish-free is during the battle with Homunculus Sloth, which extends over three episodes. In this battle, Alex is seen fighting alongside his sister Olivier and has very little time to polish his creations because he is busy trying to distract the Homunculus from charging his sister. Nonetheless, even during this battle he preserves his charms and shots of him proudly basting for the powerful attack are not uncommon during this fight either. He is, in these shots, surrounded by the same sparkles mentioned above.



Figure 4. Alex Armstrong showing off after a successful attack during the fight with Sloth. Episode 51. Accessed 5.10.2022. Retrieved from <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/354306695665290390/>

We have already mentioned the sparkles that surround Alex Armstrong whenever he boasts about his body, his attacks or shows any kind of joyful emotion. They are signifiers of his effeminate nature and are indicative of his aesthetic consciousness. Alongside sparkles, another signifier of his effeminate nature are the shiny red roses. They also appear in connection to gleeful emotion or display of his body. In Japan roses are a

signifier of boy love and sexuality and it is singular to see them associated to a, visually, extremely masculine character.

Lastly, family is greatly important to Alex. Not only his biological family, but also the friends that he acquires throughout the show as well as his comrades from the Civil War. This detail also feeds into the idea that Alex performs gender in a subversive manner, by embracing his feminine nature, given that caring for one's family and family home is usually considered to be a "woman's job" (Kimmel, 1994). There are several characters who we know hold family dear, the protagonists included who can be argued are comfortable showing love and care for their extended family in a more complex way as simply as the headman of the house. In episode 45, Alex meets his older sister Olivier as she returns home to demand leadership of the family. The viewer meets their family and there are several elements connected to gender performance that are worth noting. Philip Gargantos Armstrong, the father, shares with Alex the interest in aesthetics and is constantly surrounded by the same sparkles that characterise Alex. The mother and middle sisters, Amue and Strongine, have stern expressions similar to Olivier while the youngest of the family, Catherine, is the only one who fits best into patriarchal gender roles but is incredibly strong physically much like her brother Alex. Family tradition is extremely dear to the Armstrong family as the recurrent line "XYZ has been passed down the Armstrong line for generations" (see dialogue above), hence it is safe to assume that the flipped performance of gender roles in the Armstrong family goes back generations.

4.3 Olivier Armstrong



Figure 5. Olivier Mira Armstrong. Episode 43. Accessed 5.10.2022. Retrieved from <https://www.pinterest.com/SabertoothRules/olivier-mira-armstrong/>

5.3.1 Olivier Mira Armstrong

Major General Olivier Mira Armstrong's (Olivier from now on) first appearance is in episode 33, when Edward and Alphonse Elric are sent north with a letter of introduction from Alex to see his older sister. While finding their way to the Briggs Fortress, the two protagonists are attacked by Captain Buccaneer who then takes them directly before the General herself. They are standing outside the fortress and Olivier is looking down at them from the opening on the wall, in a strong and intimidating way.

Edward Elric: *Olivier Mira Armstrong, Major Armstrong's older sister?!*

Alphonse Elric: *But...she doesn't look like him.*

She is in charge of guarding the Northern border to Amestris and despite Edward and Alphonse's introduction as State Alchemist, Olivier is still suspicious of them and claims that anyone could show up in Briggs announcing to be someone famous. One of her soldiers find a handwritten letter by Alex Armstrong, her younger brother, in Edward's luggage. The letter, however, gets torn into pieces as Olivier announces that she does not need anyone else's appraisals as she is accustomed to judge people with her own eyes. Despite not having read the letter, she welcomes the two protagonists into the Fortress.

Olivier Armstrong: *Enough with the talking, dirtbag (to Edward) before I yank out that antenna on top of your head!*

Physically, Olivier Armstrong fits her gender perfectly. She has long, blonde and voluminous hair, full lips, a waist on the thinner side and full hips. She is usually seen wearing her military uniform, a black coat over it and white gloves on her hands. Her physical built can, therefore, only be assumed from her combative skills which reveal a quite muscular and agile body, matching the expectations of someone in her ranks. While not being as physically imposing as her brother, Olivier has a stern character and displays a cold and calculating personality, focused on bravery, ambition, knowledge and loyalty. This is why she does not entrust Alex with the judgment of her guests, but rather puts them to work right away to gauge their spirits, as she dislikes having useful hands sit idle.

While her appearance is feminine, her way of talking is quite abrupt and similar to the one used by Edward or Envy, where the use of a more vulgar language emphasises that she is

someone who does not joke around (see quote above). Olivier keeps her emotions in check and puts the needs of the Briggs Wall and soldiers before her own, which granted her full respect from the army she leads. Her strong character can also be seen in episode 51 “Beyond the Inferno” when she convinces soldiers not under her command to side with her and follow her orders to defeat the Immortal Legion. This lets us assume that she radiates a trustworthy and respectable aura, which leads people around her to trust her.

She is not fond of the alchemic principle of the “equivalent exchange” for which when something is created, something of equal value must be lost or destroyed. Olivier thinks this principle and mindset promotes easy handouts and unnecessary compromise. Her mindset, which she utilises in Briggs and has taught to her soldiers too is the “survival of the fittest” philosophy. She personally trains her soldiers to be independent and to act confidently when she is not able to give orders. This means that if she was to die during combat, her soldiers and her subjects are instructed to carry on with the orders and trust their instincts. We often hear Olivier Armstrong say, “this is the strength of Briggs men”, so emphasise that her soldiers are not muppets who follow her blindly, but trusted individuals who are capable of thinking independently.

Lastly, she is extremely skilled at reading people and conscious of her own limitations, so much so that she understands that in order to succeed she has to rely on her subordinates and her peers. Additionally, Olivier is extremely perceptive and adaptive and has sharp skills in predicting which courses of action will lead to the most beneficial results, which can be clearly seen in the episodes preceding the battle with Sloth.

5.3.2 Performance of masculinity and femininity

Already from the first encounter, the viewer can gauge that Olivier Armstrong is not at all similar to her younger brother Alex. She has a colder and more detached personality than Alex and she does not share emotion freely. Rather, her personality is more masculine in that she is calculating in when and how to show emotions different than anger, which she uses as motivator for herself and her subordinates. As Kimmel (1994) informs, loyalty, bravery and ambition are the guiding values that inform patriarchally raised men and constitute the core of masculine performance (Piatti-Farnell, 2013). As soon as she learns that there is a plan to get rid of King Bratley who is the guiding figure of the country

Amestris, Olivier Armstrong decides to side and collaborate with an old comrade from the Ishvalan Civil War: Roy Mustang.

Olivier does not like Roy Mustang, and it seems from their first interaction that there is some history between the two of them, but this is not expanded on during the show and hence left to interpretation. Nonetheless, since Roy Mustang's request to join forces comes only after Olivier Armstrong meets Homunculus Sloth in Briggs, she sees in this an opportunity to get to the command centre of Amestris. In episode 34, "Ice Queen", Edward and Alphonse receive a visit from Olivier Armstrong as they receive maintenance at the automail mechanic. Since they arrived recommended by Alex, she firstly asks about his condition but does not seem particularly impressed to hear that he is healthy and well. Because the brothers have reached the Northern Wall bypassing the central command, Olivier prompts them to tell her everything they are hiding from her, including why Alphonse resides in a hollow suit of armour.

Edward Elric: *This is something we'd prefer not to have other hear about.*

Mechanic: *There's nothing to be anxious about. The folks here have all sorts of things to hide.*

Edward Elric: *But if this gets out, it could get me court-martialled.*

Olivier Armstrong: *I've done some things like that myself.*

(Episode 34, "Ice Queen")

The brothers decide to tell their story without mentioning Homunculi or the new information they have on the ruler of Amestris, King Bratley. At first, Olivier scolds them for having reached Briggs with the intention of creating chaos, but due to her interests in alkahestry, the type of alchemy practiced in Xing, a neighbouring country to Amestris on the East, she agrees to help the protagonists in their quest. If it was not for the benefit that collaborating with them would bring her, Olivier would have had them escorted outside.

Olivier Armstrong: *One more thing...I can tell that they have a secret they can't tell us.*

After having talked to the brothers, Olivier senses that parts of the whole picture have been withheld from her. It can be assumed that she deduced it because she is good at reading

people, but as a Major General she is aware that bypassing central command means that certain activities are being carried out under the radar. Towards the end of the episode, one of the pieces of untold information makes itself known: Homunculus Sloth. He appears from a hole under the basement of Briggs, creating chaos and fear among the soldiers and mechanics. He is immune to all attacks, but is also not reacting to any of them, which gives Olivier time to gain more information, told and untold, from Edward Elric.

Despite covering a high rank position, Olivier Armstrong is not fond of the military exactly like her brother. She is the only woman to hold a respected position and does not trust anyone beside her own men and subjects. Following Edward's half-answers, Olivier understands that something is going on in the higher military ranks and that the Homunculus is part of it. Olivier Armstrong is aware that she is not liked by the high ranks of Central administration, therefore in episode 34 "The Shape of This Country", she lets go of her performance as a strong-willed woman and performs femininity in a patriarchal sense. She becomes extremely pleasing, compliant and submissive especially because she needs more information about what is going on in Central from General Raven, who is visiting the North Wall.

During their meeting, Olivier talks in a polite and almost tender way to General Raven, and even the stern looks on her face sweetens, revealing a relaxed, innocent expression such that is expected of a submissive female character. She flirts with General Raven, apologises for how chaotic things are at the Fortress at the time of his visit, feigning ignorance about Sloth and his involvement with the military.

Olivier Armstrong: *They wouldn't tell me a thing about the creature...I thought about getting the words out of them by torture, but I am a woman. Just thinking of making those children suffer pained my heart ever so.* (Episode 35)

Her knowledge of femininity and masculinity and which to perform for the best outcome in any given situation, gives her total control over the conversation as well as functioning as bait for General Raven, a middle-aged man.

As we know already, Alex Armstrong deeply cares for his family and has no qualms with expressing his affection. In episode 45, Olivier returns home to demand leadership of the

family and inherit the family estate. The music is regal, the house is elegant, and the scene is extremely bright as it is a sunny day. Everyone is sitting around the dinner table in the congress room. Olivier urges her parents and sisters to leave the estate to her and go abroad for a long vacation, in hopes they would be safe from the chaos that is soon to be unleashed in Amestris. While announcing that she will now be leading her family, her brother Alex who is also present in the room is prompted by his father to fight Olivier for the role. While Alex has a strong built and is skilled in physical combat, one of the scenes shows him flying out the dining room and landing on the wall, begging Olivier not to drag him back to the battle ring. The music has turned into a charging tune, typically used for combat scenes. Olivier wins the battle and inherits the estate.



Figure 6. Olivier Armstrong as she makes her way through Central Command Centre to escape Sloth. Episode 51. Accessed 6.10.2022. Retrieved from <https://everyolivier.tumblr.com/post/164303325613/the-time-major-general-olivier-mira-armstrong>

Olivier is more focused on traditionally masculine pursuits exemplified by her being active, intelligent, courageous, and able to plan and control (Saito, 2007). Additionally, her weapon of choice is typically masculine and a phallic object, a sword that has been passed through the Armstrong family for generations (“The Immortal Legion”). Due to her skills in swordsmanship, Olivier is extremely fast with her sword and the way she handles it allows her to pierce objects fast and precisely. In media created for teenage males, it is common to find objects symbolising the phallus although normally associated with villains. Such choice allows for physical fetishization and helps alleviate the anxiety adolescent males could feel (Mulvey, 1975).

Lastly, it is worth noting that despite being a female character, Olivier's performance of gender is extremely masculine as evidenced also in the way she is pictured on the screen. Olivier is always shown wearing her military uniform and a thick coat over that, making her body an uninteresting site for the viewers gaze. Instead, the focus is redirected to her face which is half-hidden behind her hair. Moreover, most of her shots are full body and only rarely is the focus of the camera placed on her mouth, which is one of the prominently feminine traits visible.

4.4 Alex and Olivier's relation to patriarchy

Alex and Olivier's relation to the patriarchy is, in my opinion, noticeable when looking at the battle against Sloth. The Homunculus was sent by Father to kill Olivier, as she had rebelled against the higher Central command and opposed the unfolding of events according to the plan created by the ruler of Amestris and his "children". The battle is a chance to look at comradeship, brotherhood and to investigate how neither of the characters receive the final punishment despite being a clear obstacle to the villain. The battle extends for three episodes and starts in episode 51, when Olivier Armstrong sits in a room with other high officers involved with the search for eternal life, which was promised to them by Father as a reward for cooperating.

In the room, Olivier is the only woman and is looked at with suspicion, as if the male officers do not regard her as worthy of eternal life. It is here that she meets Father and Sloth for the first time, as they enter the room to inform everyone that the next stage of the plan has started: the Immortal Legion has been set free. At this point of the story, Father is aware of Olivier's act and it's shortly after this scene that Sloth is sent after her. When Father leaves the room, the high officers celebrate their soon-to-come immortality; this is when Olivier informs them of the truth. Her tone is arrogant, she assumes the position of commander even in this situation, which wins her a great dislike from everyone else in the room. The men present do not appreciate the arrogance and knowledge the only woman high officer in the military seems to have, and which they lack. Upon hearing that no one present will survive Father's plans unless they follow her lead against him, everyone is in a commotion. Some are in disbelief to hear the information, some other are angered by the fact that this woman has dared mistrust the 'gentle man'. Overall, even in this situation, performances of gender according to hegemonic discourses are reversed as the men are shown overwhelmed with all sorts of emotions while Olivier is calm, collected,

calculating her next move. Aware of the dislike and mistrust Central forces have for her, Olivier's only way of joining her troops to start the second phase of their plan, is by taking a high General hostage. One General Commander has been especially disrespectful to her; hence she is the one she selects as her human shield. She pierces his hand with her sword and moves for the hallway. Once there, her move is slowed down by central troops. Shortly after having asked them to join her side, Sloth appears behind her declaring his orders are to end her life.

Despite being the biggest of the Homunculi, Sloth is extremely agile and surprises Olivier who ditches his attack last minute. His great apathy for everything and his claims that life is a pain in itself, could indicate the resistance the older generation has for change raising the possibility that this battle is one between generations: a static generation rooted in traditions and a more mobile generation which wishes for dynamic action. The battle moves to a large room with elegant décor, the music is fast paced and indicates that fighting is about to happen. At this point, Olivier Armstrong is being attacked both by Sloth and by the Central troops and it seems that she is aware that facing both at the same time is not an option. Unexpectedly, Alex Armstrong appears in her aid. And the battles resumes, now with both Olivier and Alex charging Sloth, who becomes so annoyed that he unlocks his light-fast speed skill.

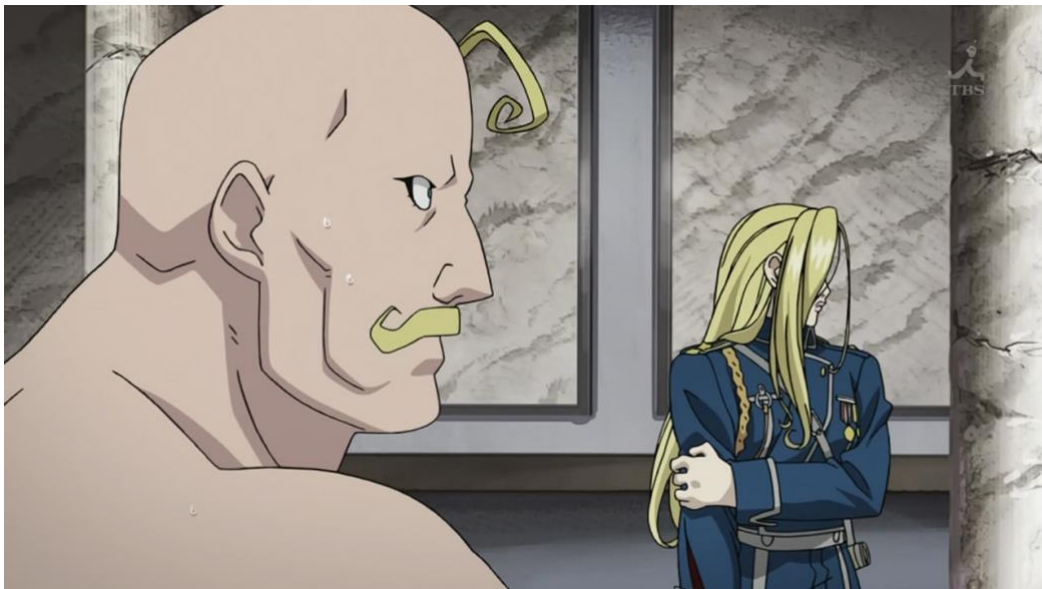


Figure 7. Alex and Olivier as they prepare to fight Sloth. This is the first encounter with an Homunculus for Alex. Episode 52. Accessed 6.10.2022. Retrieved from <https://www.anime-evo.net/2010/04/18/fullmetal-chemist-brotherhood-episode-52/>

During the battle, Alex and Olivier display great synchrony and work together to defeat Sloth. Being Olivier the main target of Sloth, Alex takes the role of the protector as well as that of the attacker. He is here performing his gender according to patriarchal values, which see women as weaker and in need of a protector. Two separate times he is seen protecting Olivier, the first one when he shields her with his body and the second time when he uses alchemy to impale the Homunculus, stopping him from fatally hitting her.

Olivier Armstrong: *Alex?!*

Alex Armstrong: *Oh, it's just dislocated (about his shoulder). You, Sister?*

Olivier Armstrong, with a smirk: *Just a few fractures. (Episode 52)*

Olivier, contrary to what she has expressed until this point, places great trust in her brother, sending away soldiers who offered to help him.

Olivier Armstrong: *That's my brother! He's trained better than to be killed like that!*

In episode 55, at the end of the battle with Sloth, few soldiers plead Alex to leave the battlefield as it seems that neither him nor his sister will last longer, and Sloth does not look any weaker than he was at the beginning of this battle. Alex is seen having flashbacks from the Ishvalan War where he left the battlefield declaring that he would not fight this unjust war any longer. He has been reprimanded by his sister for this choice, ultimately losing her respect. Alex refuses to leave, as that would mean abandoning his sister as well as acting weak once again. It is at this point of the battle, that another character joins the scene. It is Izumi Curtis, Edward and Alphonse's alchemy teacher. She introduces herself as someone who has been sent to help Olivier Armstrong by her subordinate, Captain Buccaneer. Olivier seems embarrassed to need rescuing, but also shows gratitude by displaying a faint smile at the news. Here, Olivier submits to the performance of her femininity, letting go of her masculine side and accepts help sent from her subordinate.

Ultimately, the battle against Sloth could not have been won if Alex and Olivier did not work together as a team and, at times, adhering to the gender performance assigned to their gender by hegemonic discourses around masculinity. Despite the initial depiction of a cold relationship, Alex and Olivier entertain a positive sibling relationship, which is also

one of the main themes of *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood* and where this lacks, problems arise; for example, many of the Homunculi deaths can be traced to lack of teamwork and positive relationships.

As mentioned above, this battle can also be looked at from a different angle as an example of clash between different generations: Sloth representing the old patriarchal generation and the Armstrongs representing the young fresh generation. Both Alex and Olivier Armstrong reject the current hegemonic workings of the military, which means rejecting the patriarchal and traditional Father. In the case of Envy, as explained above, he is punished several times by Roy Mustang for having performed his gender poorly. Additionally, it can be also argued that what lead to the death of each Homunculi was the lack of teamwork and the absence of a figure on whom to rely on. Alex and Olivier are not punished by death, partially because of their exceptional teamwork, but do leave the battle grounds in a beaten-up state. Despite this battle being between the Armstrong siblings and Sloth, it is relevant to notice how the sole target for assassination is Olivier, the only woman in a high-rank position in the military. It can be argued that this choice was dictated by Olivier's refusal to live her life according to traditional gender norms. As an example, Roy Mustang is never targeted for assassination although he is more of an obstacle to Father's plans than Olivier is. Roy Mustang kills two Homunculi (Lust and Envy) who are directly associated with Father but does not receive any kind of backlash unlike Olivier, as well as orchestrates a plan meant to overturn Father and the unfolding of events in Amestris. The injuries Alex and Olivier receive are a punishment serious enough that their allies beg them to stop fighting, but they are not punished as harshly as Envy for performing their genders in an unconventional manner.

Considering Envy's suicide as connected to his perceived bad performance of the masculine gender, his departure can be linked to his position in between generations. Armstrong siblings' subversion of traditional gender roles is punished less severely because it is breaking away from the old generation to a more open-minded generation. Despite being connected to the Amestrian military, both Alex and Olivier resist the old powers rejecting the patriarchal rule over gender performance and fill alternative gender roles showing flexibility regarding new ideas of gender.

CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed at uncovering how *shōnen* anime *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood* represents manhood in opposition to femininity and whether such representation conforms to or subverts patriarchal gender norms. As we have discovered throughout the last 40 pages, animation and popular culture at last plays a key role in reproducing cultural discourses around identities, gender identities included and it can, therefore, be rightfully speculated that it is a medium through which dominant discourses around gender performance are reinforced. When looking at Disney animation, since it portrays value systems closer to us here in Europe, it can be easier to detect whether a narrative pushes forward patriarchal ideals or not. Japanese animation is more intricate and can assume different positions on the same topic across genres.

Because the *shōnen* genre is quite traditional in its representations of gender performance, the assumption at the beginning of this project was that *FMAB* would strengthen or confirm pre-existing gender norms. However, upon watching the whole TV show in detail the answer is contradictory. While there are characters who perform their gender according to patriarchal norms, there are many that subvert these same values and present new and fluid representations of gender, which are motivated by individual reasons. Additionally, the anime features a clear clash between generations represented through various rebuttals of the militaristic way of doing things and a focus on preserving life, showing empathy. What is interesting to see is that the characters associated with the old, patriarchal generation represented by Father and the military, are all antagonists; even those characters who at the beginning seem opposed to the protagonists' quest, finally reveal themselves to be supporting of it.

While this thesis has specifically looked at characters who do not fit the traditional gender roles imposed by patriarchy, it has briefly explored other characters who fit their gender performance perfectly. Roy Mustang is the typical heterosexual male who performs the role of the protector, whose violence is always justified as its end goal is justice. According to Kimmel (1994), justice and honour are traits typically associated to the patriarchal man, which locates Roy Mustang in the old generation. However, his ambition to become the next ruler of Amestris is met with his emotional attachment to Maes Hughes, which leads him to join forces with Edward and Alphonse to overturn the current government with higher goals in mind than just his personal greed.

The assumption is that masculinities are multiple and can be performed in multiple ways. Masculinities are performed and constructed on fluid terms in *FMAB*, as multiple characters show us. There is no named character that performs their gender in the same manner as the next, and there is a clear distinction between those characters that move between masculinity and femininity and those who are rigid in their roles. At this point, the writer can confidently say that *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood* brings a fresh look to patriarchal values, subtly stating that they are in need for a revamp to keep up with the new generations.

The researcher has mainly explored gender performances of Envy, Alex Armstrong and Olivier Armstrong as support characters to the coming-of-age story of Edward and Alphonse Elric. We met Envy as the first villain of the story, but definitely not the most long-lived. He is the embodiment of jealousy and as such we can already assume some of his characteristic traits. Despite his teen-like appearance, he is quite rude and arrogant in his way of communicating and positions himself above everyone else, sometimes even over his own siblings. He is invested in his physical appearance and is therefore often represented in a woman-like angle. His gender performance is mixed and thanks to his androgynous appearance, he plays with gender extensively, performing both as a calculating and cold-blooded assassin and as a *bishōnen* man, who enjoys being pretty to look at. Ultimately, since he is related to Father as a pseudo-son, his subversive performance of gender as an in-between the binary has cost him his life. This is because he his performance has been outed and he was made aware of having challenged the patriarchal norms set by his Father.

Alex Armstrong is the second character in this analysis, and he presents himself as a predictably patriarchal man. However, after a closer look we discover a sensitive man who has a passion for aesthetics, bodybuilding and who deeply cares for the people around him. Not only he enjoys pursuits typically associated to women but is also outspoken about the brutality of the military and how he cannot stand by its values when they require him to make use of his talents for unjust purposes. Alex's subversive performance of gender is learnt from his family, which performs gender roles in opposition to what patriarchy teaches and preaches.

Olivier Armstrong is Alex's older sister and the only woman in the high ranks of the military. She shows no interests in fine arts or humanities but is a stern and rigid woman

whose priority is defend the northern border of Amestris. Her life philosophy is the principle of the “survival of the fittest” hence configuring her a more masculine personality in the sense that she counts on no one and asks for no one’s support. People are drawn to her and respect her because of her knowledgeable and trustworthy personality. She cannot let herself appear weak, since she is the only woman in the high offices, hence she has completely let go of the traits typically associated with women in a patriarchal society. Because of this decision, she is targeted for assassination, as a probable attempt at reminding her that her subversive gender performance is not welcome in a militaristic and patriarchal society.

Throughout the analysis, the writer has carefully used the notion of male gaze as it has been used to explore gendered performances in other anime and manga within the same genre. It has been especially useful here because it allowed us to distinguish between how male and female characters are looked at and how this aspect can give or take away agency even from fictional characters. In the case of Envy, he is often shown as a fragmented being where the focus of the gaze lingers on parts of his body and the angles used to show his full figure are often top-down, causing him to assume a position of subordination. In opposition to this, Olivier is rarely shown as a fragmented figure and when she is shown usually the angle is bottom-up to evidence her status and her position as a high rank commander with an iron fist, someone who does not let anyone sway her. This is interesting to see because as *To LOVERu* in section 2.2.2 has shown us, female characters in *shōnen* anime tend to be side characters whose presence is often a distraction to the main protagonist. Normally, this representation of Olivier would be surprising to the viewer if *FMAB* was a regular *shōnen* anime, but already from the beginning it is clear that the tone here is usual.

Nudity is absent for female characters and the only time muscles are shown, they are exhaled as something aesthetically pleasing and not sexualised in any shape or form. It is male characters who show most skin, but unlike what we have seen in *Saint Seiya*, they are not highlighted in fighting scenes only. Rather, they are a recurrent presence in different settings, in a way normalising them as something that simply *is*. Similarly, while Envy as an androgynous character dies for his poor performance of masculinity, androgyny is not condemned as a concept itself. Rather, it seems to the writer that androgyny could, here, also represent the masking and unmasking of the self to better fit a society whose values do not align with the current needs of younger generations. It is a

way to express one's own identity in a safe territory, evidencing the fluid nature of gender performance.

To summarise, masculinity exists in many shapes and forms as it is individually performed and transforms socially and culturally through time. It has never been a fixed and static concept and as such, the masculinity we have known under patriarchal rule is doomed to change (Kimmel, 1994). How it changes, it is something that we will see gradually. Already currently, individuals all over the world are adopting new performances that fit their identities better than the hegemonic masculinity reality. As an example of this, we have seen strong reactions against new ways of doing masculinity and femininity from traditionally patriarchal institutions. There is an active attempt at shutting down all the developments that come with a shift away from patriarchal values, and we are seeing them all over the world, but we are more attentive to those actions that occur in Western or Westernised areas of the world.

To stay within scope with this thesis, masculinity is here reduced to elements of gender stereotypes that were formed under the patriarchal ideology (a man should be strong physically and emotionally, a bread-winner, loyal) is played inconsistently within *FMAB* as we encounter characters who fit the gender stereotype perfectly and who adhere to the patriarchal view of the world; but we also find characters, like the ones analysed in this project, that subvert gender performance and gender norms while being aware that certain contexts require them to adopt a performance more closely related to the gender they are assigned and present on the outside. This can be seen as a safety measure to avoid mistreatment (see Olivier's attempt at pleasing General Raven) or to blend in better with the environment one is in or a result of the author being a woman and therefore wanting to adhere to the patriarchal view of the world while denouncing it as antiquated. This thesis has focused on gender stereotypes conceptualised for gender on the binary. Due to the lack of characters who identify differently than within the binary, the conversation has not touched upon other gender identities at present. However, it would be interesting to analyse gender performance of such characters in the future research.

The main findings of this thesis, however, are that gender play in *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood* is encouraged and praised rather than condemned. Those characters associated with hegemonic views on gender are severely punished, whereas those who openly resist them avoid fatal punishment. *FMAB* can be seen as a commentary on shifting

views of gender, but also as a shifting in generational understandings of it overall. This can be seen in the group of characters who survive until the end. These are all characters who have no issues with gender fluidity. Overall, this anime (and its manga counterpart) is still extremely relevant today in the *shōnen* genre and I argue that its fluid views on gender and gender performance are one of the main reasons why.

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