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GENDER BENDING IN ANIME, MANGA, VISUAL KEI AND LOLITA FASHION

Representations from
Portugal

GÉNERO FLEXIBLE EN ANIME, MANGA, VISUAL KEI Y MODA LOLITA

Representaciones desde
Portugal

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Article based on the
investigation made for
the Sociology MA

RESUMEN

Mi artículo tiene como base una investigación más profunda y original sobre algunos elementos de la actual sociedad japonesa en Portugal. Mi interés fue entender, al mismo tiempo, cómo la sociedad portuguesa abraza e integra influencias externas muy diferentes de lo que se conoce, y cómo la construcción de género puede ser tan distinta y tan parecida a lo que es usual en Portugal. Usé la entrevista semi-estructurada, y las muestras de acuerdo con los cuatro grupos de análisis recogidas en todo el país. Japón ofrece mayores oportunidades para la mezcla de género/sexo y, como esperaba, las perspectivas tradicionales se vieron reforzadas por los niños, mientras que la aceptación de las niñas es mejor y más flexible.

ABSTRACT

My article is based in a deeper and original investigation about some elements of the Japanese society present in Portugal. My interest was to show, at the same time how Portuguese society embraces and integrates external influences very different from what is known, and how gender construction can be so distinct and so similar to what is usual in Portugal. I used semi-structured interviews, samples according to the four groups of analyze gathered from all over the country. Japan offers wider opportunities for gender/sex mixing and, as expected, gender traditional perspectives were reinforced by boys, while girls accepted better gender bending situations.

Palabras clave

Género; Sexualidad; Japón; Portugal, Anime; Manga; Visual Kei; Moda Lolita.

Key words

Gender; Sexuality; Japan; Portugal; Anime; Manga; Visual Kei; Lolita Fashion.

1. Introduction

The decision to go deeper into my educational Sociological path, and start my master studies adventure was mostly based on my desire to present a new reality truly undervalued both in social research as well as in society in general. I was also a newcomer since my contact with these dimensions was quite recent and still very superficial. I already have some knowledge about the traditions of the Japanese culture but the information about modern features was greatly centered in conventional animation (the one that passed on Portuguese public television channels) and the Japanese labor system. Since I have a strong orientation towards gender and sexuality studies, these four cultural groups that I will describe and interpret in the following pages, emerged as one of the greatest opportunities to reevaluate and update all my previous learning. I consider that one of the major defaults in the formal institutional education in Portugal is the inattention to distant societies. The focus only on the surrounding territories creates a bubble that circumscribes and narrows our vision range. When these faraway lands come into light, they usually are treated with the sense of Otherness, the different and peculiar by comparison with Us, the normal and the norm.

Since there are no other similar studies in my country, besides the basic stereotyped sight that the nationals created about the Japanese, the gender and sexuality domain grows very conditioned and much centered in a few subjects. Therefore, my intention is to open possibilities to new directions and cultural domains that are expanding in many of the western countries. The selection of the domains was not an easy task. The richness of the information that I was receiving seemed all

too much important to be overlooked. Yet, since all my resources were limited, I decided to highlight four interconnected universes that I described in the next lines:

- **Anime:** Japanese animation (in Japan, all kinds of animation, either national or international);

- **Manga:** Japanese comics (in Japan, all the kinds of comics, either national or international);

- **Visual Kei:** "Visual style", musical movement that centers much attention in the appearance of the musicians, the scenarios and photos apparatus, the extravagance of the clothes and make-up;

- **Lolita Fashion:** is a style based on the appearance of a porcelain doll, in the clothes and mannerisms of the Victorian aristocracy, in the Rococo, in the Gothic but also have other influences such as the punk, the macabre, the sweetness and selfishness of childhood.

For my investigation, I have chosen to contact with just individuals that appreciated one of this dimensions, that is, general people that have no affection to Japan whatsoever were not included. My purposes were quite wide. First, I intended to understand how the admirers were exposed to these worlds and what their initial reactions were. At the same time, apprehend what meanings they constructed around these cultural spectrums and how they integrated them in everyday life. The focus of my investigation was put on the interpretations admirers created about the gender construction, namely the situations of androgyny in general and male femininity in particular. These means that I compared the girls and boys definitions and explanations to gender bending and to male homosexual behavior and feminine

manners and appearance. This is the matter that I wish to share in the following pages.

2. Objectives

My main research question can be summarized as follows: "What are the interpretations of Portuguese fans of *Anime*, *Manga*, *Visual Kei* and *Lolita Style* concerning the situations of androgyny and feminine men in these four universes?" More clearly, my objectives were the next:

- The understanding of how *anime*, *manga*, *visual kei* and *lolita* fashion are divulgated in Portugal
- The comprehension of the types of perception and appropriation made by each fan
- The capture of how sex, gender and homosexuality are created and represented in these universes
- The analysis of the connections between sex, gender and sexual identity
- The insight of the similarities and differences between the interpretations of the girls and the boys in relation to the masculine femininity and androgyny
- The dissection of the active role of girls in the deconstruction and reconstruction of symbols and meanings associated with the hegemonic masculinity

- The acquaintance of the mass media as instruments of socialization and sociability.

3. Methodology

I am an apologist of the Sociology as a science of proximity and contact with the groups it wants to study. Without disregarding the importance of the quantitative data techniques, I am very fond of the deeper meanings that can be obtained with qualitative methodology. Therefore, as my main technique, I have selected the semi-structured interview, as it allows to achieve a quite broad knowledge but it is also limited when the sampling is somewhat large and too much data would be impossible to analyze in the time that I was granted to accomplish my master research. Finding people to interview presented another challenge, because of the small number of admirers. So, since I wished to do a national research, and because most of the people were from the south, the interviews were scheduled by forums and a live journal and were realized, almost all of them, by Messenger. The interviews were agreed by private messages in the forum or live journal. There is still, in social sciences, a high suspicion concerning the use of the Internet to do interviews. I found out that, within technological societies as ours, this can be an extreme useful resource to reach individuals from distant places with the minimum of resources. We also have to bear in mind that limitations and advantages exist in all techniques and ways they can be applied. I found that, even separated by a screen, many of my interviewees assumed a posture that seemed as we were together personally. I always tried to maintain an interested speech, to inculcate a feeling of trust and comfort, adopting a simple and, sometimes, more youthful language. The fact that I was also a knower

and admirer of some elements of the Japanese culture, was a helpful in reducing the constraints that they might felt, because they considered that I would not be going to discriminate them or treat them in a weird manner.

After the interviews period, I started with the analysis of visuals productions. The used material came almost all from the Internet (photos, books , videos, etc.). I selected two very famous series in Portugal, *Dragon Ball* and *Sailor Moon* since they represent the ideal-types of masculinity and femininity. On account of the extension of these series, and the impossibility of viewing and analyzing all episodes, I chose two movies (OVA) of each one, according to my purposes and answers.

4. Content

And We
We were made for much more
Made for anything we want
Blasted Mechanism, We, Sound in Light

Traveling in the sands of time, we see how religious prejudices occupied a central position in the directives about the social prestige and consideration about men and women. Eve and Mary were the role models: a sinner and a saint. Two different and opposite paths that women could follow. The Mary, as sign of perfection, was the harder model to copy. At least sexually, it was impossible for women to have children without sexual intercourse, therefore, sacrificing their immaculate virginity. The Eve, a woman with critical thought that dared to break the rules and discover the truth. Putting it in a very simplest way, until the present days, there were two different standards of conduct for men and for women. Although events like the French and the

Industrial Revolutions have brought a new light into the past, seen as a dark age, where people were subjugated to the false ideas and domination of the clergy, gender and sexual issues have not suffered very transformations. In spite of the women movements and all the feminist writings on the parts of both men and women, the new free men, instructed, with a salary and a professional career was, indeed a specific one: a Caucasian, middle-class, married heterosexual. The notion of gender emerges to justify and maintain the differences between the sexes. Since the traditional ways of discrimination were no longer possible to accept, the gender served as explanation for the so-called feminine essence. Behind it, the opportunity for resistance, since it implied that women and men were not products of the biology, but they were affected by cultural procedures and, at the same time, as a reason for the reproduction of the sexist views, since it was quickly associated with older perspectives of the innate and natural ways of being a man and a woman. This association is quite obvious if we think about the terms created to distinguish the genders: Feminine, for women, and Masculine, for men. The rising of a new class, the bourgeoisie, brought also the work ideals and the major life objectives in life, at least for men. Instruction and sobriety were two great concerns, although for women they were specifically about home and motherhood tasks, and sexual discretion.

The science appears as the new "God", that does and explains everything. The belief in the power of reason permeated all the aspects of the human life, including intimacy. Sexuality has been always the subject to religious and morals decompositions. The novelty is that science comes showing the face of the ulterior truth, based on facts and not on myths and blind faith. Now, everything can be objectified according to the quantitative and hierarchical positive procedures, including human beings and sexuality. All the values of the reason are associated with men.

Therefore, women continue to be seen as inferior, now proven by the scientific and allegedly real information. Sexuality is deconstructed and reconstructed in a series of new categories that refer not only to practices, but especially to identities. In the words of Foucault, “the nineteenth century and our own have been rather the age of multiplication: a dispersion of sexualities, a strengthening of their disparate forms, a multiple implantation of «perversions». Our epoch has initiated sexual heterogeneities” (Foucault, 1978, p.37). The norm was heterosexual intercourse, between a masculine man, and a feminine woman. So, all the deviations to this model were considered reasons for treatment or punishment. The sexual regulation would also include the right practices for the couple that should be interested in maintaining far away from perversion.

Reaching our days, evolutions and revolutions occurred. At the same time that changes did happened, there is sometimes a false idea of freedom in the matter of gender. So, during the next pages, let's see how these changes transformed the attitudes and mentalities, and how sexist reproduction is still the reality. Before, just a brief introduction to some concepts, that will continue during my analysis.

Anime, is the Japanese term for animation, used inside the country for all kinds of animated productions. International territories use this concept to refer exclusively to Japanese animation. The same goes for *Manga* that translates as comics, namely Japanese comics outside Japan. *Visual Kei*, meaning *Visual Lineage*, refers to a musical movement that unites quite musical distinguishable bands. What unites them, and differentiates them from other bands and musicians, are the extreme importance and attention dedicated to body appearance, including adornments, makeup, clothes and mannerisms. As for Lolita Fashion, its primordial focus relies on tender looks and correct behavioral values. It is highly influenced by Victorian aristocratic standards,

but also from the Rococo, and the Gothic Subculture. The appearance is also deeply developed and well cared for. All garments must combine into a harmonious semblance.

All these four dimensions are extremely diverse on the inside, and are sources for the rupture of gender stereotypes, but also for the highest repetition of these. All are dominated by men at the commercial production level, although women find their ways and freedoms through the creation of new paths, and with their influences on consumption.

Even before a baby is born, one of the first information that is looked for is if is a girl or a boy, in other words, to have either one set or the other of sexual and reproductive organs. Despite the much-acclaimed progress of human brain, that has given us abilities that we consider to be good enough to put us at the top of the life hierarchy, as deeply abstract mental calculations, we have still very difficulty in understanding gender and sex bending. One of the justifications for this difficulty is the fact that gender permeates everything, in such a way that is almost unquestionable. Only when there is a sort of disruption of gender expectations, is when someone realizes the existence of these expectations, but almost always in a sense of restoring them, and not in such a way of consciousness of the social construction of gender (Lober, 1994).

Assuming the assumption of naturalization as legitimation for discrimination is quite interesting, since humans, now more than ever, play with nature, according to their wishes. And all the rising and fighting of environmental movements do not promote the return to the primitive ages, only the handling with the planet with precaution. Also, since women have more possibilities of action and identity than before, it might

seem unnecessary to keep on equality speeches. The so proclaimed freedom and democracy is, actually, still framed on gender. We still need the never-ending maintenance of a whole apparatus to make our bodies match with our femininity or masculinity. This requirement to display the appropriate characteristics of either gender means that the attributes offered by nature are not enough to justify the sexual order. The imprecision of the doubt is reduced by classification and by stereotypes, which facilitate and accelerate the clarification of situations. Gender serves to clarify what someone is, since it is the first identity category in which a person is inserted. Soon a baby is born, she or he is immediately dressed accordingly to her or his sex, so that the mother and the father don't have to be constantly asked about the baby sex. And this is the very first information we seek about others. Facing the impossibility of understanding other kind of indicators, gender is expected to be, at least, always obvious. Being from different social classes, ethnic groups, subcultures, religious beliefs, has always a singular connotation and expectation if someone is a woman or a man. So, if someone assumes herself as a woman, independently from other social categories, she should integrate some basic principles of the feminine gender, putting aside others considered too manly. Obviously, all this goes in terms of an ideal, because the reality is full of intersections and mixtures, especially after the changes brought by feminism.

One of the most striking and shocking peculiarities to the Western standards, is the constant presence of characters with ambiguous sexuality and gender, both in *manga* and *anime*. This is without a question, one of its most alluring qualities. It takes all certainty about the dichotomy gender/sex, and twists it, distorts it, and mixes it up. So, I was interested to see how Portuguese admirers reacted to and interpreted these situations:

"They are interesting as Oscar of Versailles in Bara or Saint-Juste of Onii-sama E (same author), and in this case they present behaviors that are not socially accepted and they are always punished for that. Nowadays are common [this kind of characters] and they are used more for marketing and to please the audience, than by anything else. I find them very pretty like Oscar, because they can be feminine but they refuse the submissive role that society imposes on them."

Kiseki, male, 31 years, call-center director, Lisbon, anime/manga fan

His words show that the escape from social constraints cannot be done lightly, because it always carries penalties for the failure of following the rules of the group. Another idea present here is the association of force and bravery to the masculine side. The *Rose of Versailles (Berusaiyu in Bara)* is a series of *manga* and *anime* created by *Riyoko Ikeda*. The narrative focuses on *Oscar François Jarjeyes* who is educated according to the commandments of masculinity, since her father, who wished for a son, wanted her to succeed him as General of the Guard at the Palace. The fact that Oscar had been taught, means that the gender is a matter of education. However, as noted *Kiseki*, this transformation is not absolute, because she still maintains feminine elements, giving an idea of essence that resists in spite all efforts. Finally, the impression is that, for a woman to succeed in a male universe, she must adopt certain aspects of the masculine gender. *Kiseki* stresses another important aspect concerning submission and femininity. The relation between these two features is not instantaneous and innate. In the matter of fact, it depends on the expectations that are related with the feminine gender. Therefore, it is possible to assume feminine traces and assume tasks that can be, usually, assigned to men.

What happens is that, along with femininity and submission, also comes a prejudice about mental and physical abilities, normally regarded as inferior.

I do not intend to fall into the radicalism that sees attempts to subjugate women everywhere. My perspective is as gender as a continuum, something that is neither masculine nor feminine, but a set of abstract possibilities of appearance, behavior, values that can be joined and mixed independently of the sex of each person. Therefore, I do not consider gender to be either feminine or masculine. Yet, for better understanding and because of the lack of neutral terms, I used these concepts to refer to the gender ideal-types that are constructed considering the female or male sex.

Speaking about the situations where men assume the feminine gender, my next interviewee assumes the jesting positions very common among boys facing these subjects:

"well haha depends, some can be considered «homo» [homosexual], others, usually by girls, «good, sexy» hahaha nicer and funnier...hahaha...(...) Naruto I think it has that hahaha...we don't know if it's a girl or a boy...hahaha and boys that look like girls...haha...is pretty usual but I don't know why haha."

Link, male, 17 years, student, Vila Nova of Santo André, anime fan

Paying attention to these words, we get in touch with the reality of the relation between gender, sex and sexual orientation. A man that is masculine enjoys and desires women that are feminine. The uncertainty of gender works as a snowball, functioning as a motive for questioning sexual preferences, since each gender is supposedly attracted by the opposite one. Therefore, the stereotypes of

homosexuality consider men as feminine, and women as masculine. The example gave by *Link* is the *anime* and *manga* called *Naruto* where, to him, there might be some character who is difficult to define her or his sex. When asked about the existence of androgynous characters, the answer of another interviewee was the following:

"I think it doesn't fit in the definition of anime...maybe because I am already used to watch straight characters, I don't know..."

Kakashi, male, 17 years, student, Santarém, anime fan

We see here, even more clearly, how gender is applied as a bodily essence, like the soul of a machine that regulates it according to just one path: the sexual desire for the different gender/sex. What we can already obtain with these useful appointments is the contrast between girls and boys. *Link* reveals us that women might present another interpretation of the gender bending, namely the cases where men assume the so-called feminine side. The automatic incorporation of homosexual identity on androgyny is a strategy of adjustment to the perturbing reality, so that we still somehow manage to integrate those situations into our bipolar categories of male/masculine and female/feminine. Therefore, a feminine man can be problematic but, as long as he prefers other men (because of his "feminine essence"), the gender dictatorship is not called into question.

"depending on why he does it [boy that looks like a girl]...(...) About the men with mannerisms or transvestite, I don't see anything wrong because all the characters in the anime go crazy because of them, and kick their asses or something like that, they ended up being funnies."

Blestud, male, 16 years, student, Entroncamento, anime fan

"It is something that I don't like to watch on anime, unless if it is used to give a little of comedy to the anime."

Wolfkin, male, 17 years, student, Abrantes, anime fan

"hm...well, I think that... is already normal. I remember when I was a kid, I saw...The Three Musketeers, and there was that figure of Aramis, that we never knew if it was a woman or a man. So, I think they [the Japanese] always had that tendency for characters a little doubtful... (...) I think that, if the character is well justified, there is no problem."

Ashitaka, male, 27 years, unemployed, Porto, anime fan.

Since these kinds of behaviors are seen as unnatural, they require some explanation for their existence, as we see in the words of *Blestud* and *Ashitaka*. The simple personal will and preference about elements that are crystallized as gendered attributes that do not correspond to one's sex are not accepted, since they break with the "essence" justification of the naturalized gender perspective. Putting in another words, why should they assume another gender without a higher purpose? It is still expected that, like instinct, men and women to have different behaviors and orientations. One of the reasons appointed by the interviewees if the eventual finality

of creating comic moments. The comedy, at the same times, violates our predefined logics and reinforces them. The fact that these sorts of characters provoke laugh represents clearly that something not natural, that is, usual, normal, assumed by the majority, is happening. This form of expression and communication, based and create for laugh, it's a strong instrument of repetition of discrimination procedures, but also a place of controversy and discussion. In *anime* and *manga*, both possibilities happen, although somewhat different according to the kind of audiences that they pretend to target. Male audience, as we can see in the excerpts, are open to androgyny only if it has some (at their eyes) valid justification, while women, in the thoughts of *Link*, may accept more rapidly these moments and characters. During my master investigation, I had the opportunity to analyze two of the most known *anime* in the West. *Dragon Ball* and *Sailor Moon*. The results were very directed to what I just said previously. The first one is an action animation. The main characters are almost all male, and the stories are filled of movement and fights scenes outdoors. The few situations of gender bending are, as we saw by the affirmations of the interviews, for funny breaks. Even when the characters, like *Son Goku*, are in their regular form (without the magical transformation), their attitude and bodily pose are extremely masculine, that is, in agreement with the stereotype of a masculine man. *Sailor Moon*, on the other hand, is a cartoon series extremely rich in gender playing and ambiguity. The characters are usually drawn according to beauty patterns, including the evil ones. The *bishounen*, or beautiful boys, associate beauty with femininity, and are common on productions directed to female consumers. At last, *Wolfkin* is quite precise assuming immediately that he doesn't enjoy those type of characters.

"about the hair and makeup, we see that already very much, makeup especially in the world of famous, and the long hair, there are many boys with that (...)"

Mizuka, female, 16 years, student, Santarém, anime fan

Mizuka was the only one reflecting on how men are growing in their attention about their looks. My female interviewees were few, comparing to the male group, which leads me to consider how the world of consumers of *manga* and *anime* are dominated by men, at least in Portugal. This view is enhanced by some visits to Internet nation forums and comic stores. Working as volunteer at a Japanese culture event, *Yukimeet*, I could also realize some differences in the amateur *manga* production. During a contest, the drawings of girls had the higher number of cute aspects. This would, of course, vary according to age but, in a general term, men had the tendency to create characters that represented force, either male or female. This difference depends, among other things, of the gendered education, and this directs too to the kinds of animation and comics that they consume. In these cosmos, there is a culture of self learning, where they beginning imitating the characters that they see and they like, what can mean continuation but also novelty and rupture. I am referring to *Yaoi*, creations made by and for women, involving male homosexual scenes. The importance of these productions relies not only in the ways that girls manipulate the stereotypes and bodies of masculinity and femininity, but also when they put together manly characters of famous series. *Yaoi* is not merely based on comics and cartoons.. All male universes are potential objects for these productions that include literary fictions and musical videos too.

"I love their styles. I have a very open mind and the fact that men use feminine clothes and makeup doesn't bother me. By the contrary, I think they look pretty good."

Tami, female, 15 years, student, Seixal, Visual Kei fan

Although still associating certain clothes and makeup with women, *Tami* reveals that, not only she doesn't have any prejudice about androgynous musicians, but she even find them attractive. The connections of beauty with female gender and, therefore, the feminization of male characters to look more visual appellative is not just a freedom act. It is also a great marketing strategy. Femininity catches the attention of women, and in the *Visual Kei* scenery, the audiences are dominated by girls. Like the *onnagata* of the *Kabuki* Theater, the male impersonators of the female roles, also in *Visual Kei*, the musicians function as role models of imitation, namely through *cosplay*, that is, when a fan dresses up and tries to create the look and behavior of some musician¹. When asked if she had talked about the Japanese bands with someone, *SaTuni* answer was:

" - Yes, with my friends. But because they react badly to what I hear, this time was no different and they judged them by their appearance. "What awful" and "what an unusual thing" and above all they said they were girls and the Japanese suck. (...) people don't like very much of their appearances. They make fun with these things.

Who made more this kind of comments: boys or girls?

¹ *Cosplay* is not limited to the music world. It's also present in the world of animation, comics, cinema, videogames.

Boys...without a doubt. The boys (in general) pay much attention to appearance. Something unusual is a reason for joking. They like to call names and make fun of these things.”

SaTuni, female, 14 years, Torres Vedras, Visual Kei fan

Her words demonstrate two basic gender issues. The first is the agreement of gender with sex. Because “(...) evidently, we expect that the relation between appearance and manner is of confirmation and consistency “(Goffman, 1993, p.37). Society lays her foundations of mutual expectations according to the played roles of each one. Transformation and changes are always happening, because the rules, norms and values are guiding lines of action, but don’t eliminate choice. The mechanisms used to regulate and create a certain level of order are diverse, and applied differently. Being a man is, despite all the advantages that the status brings, to bear a high pressure to conform to appropriated gender standards. Assuming qualities from the feminine side implies the assumption of the inferiority, both of the women and of the homosexuals. While the reputation of women is mostly based on sexual behavior and bodily exposure, men are analyzed following the ideal of what a real man should be. The problem is that “hegemonic masculinity is a cultural ideal that, although not being attainable by almost any man, it exercises over all men a controlling effect, by incorporating in the ritualization of everyday practices of sociability and discourse that exclude an entire emotive field considered feminine (...)” (Almeida, 1995, p.17). This implies the permanent surveillance to any signs of deviation, especially when in the presence of other male humans. The sanctions for none conforming are insults and derogatory comments, because be seen as a women

is a signal of submission and weakness. The reactions of mockery and insulting are strategies of defense against all elements that might shake the masculinity paradigm. Acting that way, the gender safe area of boys continues almost untouchable since the Other was seen as abnormal, while they perpetuate the natural normal.

"I don't mind at all. Like I say, it's part of what the musician wants to transmit, so if in that band he wants to transmit a feminine appearance, I think that he should do it. We need to understand that what they do on stage is about art. So, what they are doing is, first of all, a representation. What they do on stage, and how they are, how they act on their private life, I think are two totally different things. (...) For example, when one sees one dressing up in a feminine way, or androgynous, a person start to think that he is gay, or what? This is wrong because, in his privacy, he can dress up in a completely different way. (...) Like when one sees an actor that is representing a role of homosexual or transvestite, nobody says that he is transvestite. He is just playing a role (...)

Kiaiku, male, 18 years, student, Vila Nova de Gaia, Visual Kei fan

To *Kiaiku*, there is the distinction between something that is false, just a representation, and the actual identity of a person. He doesn't see humans as social actors that assume a whole range of roles during their lifetime. The representation as imitation of reality, meaning that it's just creation that is situated in specific times and spaces, and that has nothing to do with what that musician assumes for his identity. So, music as art, as vocation, as a natural gift, is easily accepted almost as a heavenly ability that is particular to that person. The same way that we are very open to speak about others competences and faculties, and that give the sense of essence,

of something that comes from birth, of from some special power. Nevertheless, the possibility of creation and transformation is not so readily accepted when talking about gender. No one says that the musicians also leave with the stage their instruments, their musical knowledge and interests. Professional issues, namely in the universe of arts, are seen as surrounding all the other aspects of life. They are one of the most important bases of each person identity. The possibility of gender bending as something that is also natural or an identity constituent is not so lightly embraced. The shock of non conformity of the sex-gender categories is handled by the strategies of assuming that everything is temporary, just for the show, that is, a fake identity, since this one is represented as a unitary and peaceful world, without contradictions. The other way of managing this type of situations is, as the interviewee reveals, assuming that they are homosexuals, because the institution of medicine and science as the new divinities with all the answers, gave rise to the creation and dissemination of a range of sexual practices that became identities. And, since everything about sexuality is connected to the dichotomous perspective about the feminine and the masculine, all the persons that don't fit the model of heterosexual feminine female/masculine male, are still considered a deviation, an abnormality. They bring confusion to the stereotypes, and to whom one, as a heterosexual, should see as sexually attractive. It looks like, as a burlesque celebration, the subversive movement is well delimited, keeping the social order intact. Awareness of the difference between what each musician is on stage and in their common life shows that, despite the eccentricity, chaos continues far away from the "true reality".

In fact, apart from the public spectacles (including promotional photos, autographs sessions), the musicians put on a more corresponding appearance. Even so, we cannot assume that there are no interferences in the social world as a whole. Mass

media have a strong impact on social changes and, despite the discrimination that these musicians might be target of, they help to create the “habit”, the routine that is transformed into something so usual that is unquestioned. Besides, the majority of fans are adolescents, that are, therefore, socialized with different values that their parents or older generations.

"At first, apart from the extravagance, I thought effeminate, but I got used to it. (...) From the point of view of a girl, I think they are cute. Some make me remind of Emos and Punks that had a very egocentric look. From the point of view of boys, like they usually say: «he's gay, he's a faggot, etc.»"

Buffy, female, 15 years, student, Cascais, Visual Kei fan

"I simply think BEAUTIFUL ^^ hmm...the makeup I love it when is not too much that eliminates the natural beauty of musicians, the hairstyles I like them a lot (...). I like feminine elements in all the visual but usually I don't like when they transform a boy into a girl completely =/"

Moonless, female, 16 years, Porto, Visual Kei fan

The societies function according to a set of social shared memories, that include routines, social roles, values, norms, hierarchies. All of these are permeated by habit, that is, by the standardization of a behavior or phenomena, in such a way that is unquestioned, and considered as naturally appropriated, genetically or social obvious in its rightness. The first impact of the musicians of *Visual Kei* is, almost all the times, a tremendous shock to the bipolar gender/sex perspective that we highlight in our societies. Confusion and misleading are the most proffered feelings that emerge, and that are stronger if the viewer is male. These musicians are related to the concept of

bishounen, that is, pretty boys that are very common on *anime* and *manga* oriented to female audiences. *Bishounen* are boys or men that combine some elements of what we might call the perfect feminine gender, or, the models that the media, especially the ones of the cosmetic, music and cinema industries, try to impose. With this I am talking about soft skin, light makeup, modern hairstyles, use of different types of clothes and body accessories. Their eyes are bigger and drawn with more details and light effects than the ones directed to a male public. They are also tall and skin, not so much muscled. The tendency to associate the beauty with the feminine and, therefore, with women, gives the idea that, to a man be attractive, he must adopt what we call feminine. This, besides limitative and discriminatory, neglects the historical construction of beauty. If we think about ancient Greece, we see that the beautiful human was male. There was "(...) a huge valor given to the beauty of young boys, the esthetic relevance of the manly body that we know that was completely displayed naked at the gyms or at the games fields" (Lipovestky, 2000, p.106), in such a way that "(...) until the V century, the feminine representations are strongly influenced by the model of the masculine body, appearing with muscles, with the same stature of men, large shoulders and a manly thorax, where just the breast highlight the feminine identity" (*idem*, 2000, p.106). What is important here is to erase the dichotomy of the notions of masculine and feminine that are associated with gender, and see it as a continuum of multiple choices and creations, that are not dictated by sex but that are neutral. These would rise a major transformation in our societies, since everything is filtered by gender/sex, and could also eliminated sexual preferences discrimination since, without the certainties of the bipolar perspective, maybe the sexed body would no longer be more relevant than all others aspects of the person identity.

"-Of course that in the beginning it was something that gave me a little confusion, but I didn't disliked some looks, of course I thought some were abusive and bad (perhaps because I still didn't see the Japanese way of thinking). After I realized that some elements of the bands were more normal than me in their regular lives. "

FranSapo, male, 16 years, student, Pontinha, Visual Kei fan

"(...) For one to have a fair view of what is the other, maybe it is necessary to identify with him, even in a momentary way, and examine his acts from the inside, without judgmental or normative *a priori*" (Maffesoli, 1998, p.142). Despite the importance that we know that the context (in the wider conception, including historic and cultural backgrounds, present paths, future visions) for understanding the Other (and even ourselves), whether a society, a group, a person, for diverse reasons, we leave this concern outside our considerations and explanations. It is easier and faster to rely on established categories and stereotypes. *FranSapo* speaks, as we saw previously, how the musicians adopt other appearances during their regular days, giving a kind of justification for him to like them, since they are not what they represent on stage. Girls accept better because the pressure on them is of another nature. Women are evaluated according to their sexual availability and body display, in a sense that they should maintain a sexual low profile. Men are also examined in their intimacy, but they should maintain an insatiable hunger for sexual contact and contexts. Therefore, they must maintain the status and expectations of what being a man implies: being masculine. The fear of femininity means that, not only men avoid adopting any kind of behavior that can indicates that they are not manly enough, but also any type of openness to feminine men, since there is the danger of identification with another subaltern group, that is, the homosexuals. While perhaps the worst

insult that one can do to a woman is questioning her sexual discretion, to a man is calling him gay, because gay are stereotyped as submissive, not real men because they are not truly masculine (even if they look so). This fear extends to the possibility of attraction to one of these musicians, precisely because of the relation that we establish between the sex and the gender.

"- You talked about Mana [from the bands Malice Mizer, Moi dix Mois]. What did you think on the first time that you saw him?

- «Look what a pretty and attractive woman!» lool

- What did you think when you found out he was a man?

- I was shocked and I thought to myself that it was the last time I was «mislead», but I didn't think about the question of sexuality. Only later I noticed that he never spoke, and even in his normal life he wears makeup or feminine clothes.

- What do you mean with «question of sexuality»?

- If he wanted to be a woman... but at that time I was more used to the world of visual kei."

FranSapo, male, 16 years, student, Pontinha, Visual Kei fan

A true actor is someone that makes the others believe in his performance. The illusion of reality is a construction, a manipulation, but also a deconstruction, a revolution. Without previous knowledge and habit about cultural aspects of Japan, the first impact is usually strong and confusing. To a man it is even worse because, like I

referred before, of the dangers of homosexuality. This can cause behaviors of anger and avoidance, or, if someone is really interested in the music, of precaution before judging the sensual appeal of a performer. *Visual Kei* bands can be, at the same time, very diverse and very similar. One of the famous characteristics is, as we saw, the adoption of the feminine gender by the elements. What happens is that there is almost always a member that is even more feminine than the others. He represents the strongest ideal of femininity, therefore, even more than others, he has to erase and disguise all signals of his natural sex. His behavior is also accordingly to the perfect feminine, in her cuteness, sweetness, quietness. *FranSapo* says that, only when he knew that *Mana* adopted the femininity even during his routines, he considered this a wish to become a woman. The sense of representation was broken, and substituted to the idea of reality. What happens is that this mode of thinking is immediately imposed to any man that intent not to follow just the impositions of his male condition. He wants to be a woman and, because woman, like men, he also likes men. This happened with women too, during their hard battles in the conquering for their rights. The feminists were considered to be manly, men-haters and lesbians. The basic assumption is that, adopting the (supposedly) opposed gender is a manifestation of the desire to have the corresponding sex, and so, to be interested in homosexual relations. The all female bands also follow the model of one more feminine, that serve to give a more masculine look to the other members, when we compare them (function that also applies to the all male bands). The difficulty at the distinction between boys and girls is, from my point of view, an openness of possibilities and opportunities of identity construction. Even if we say that the stereotypes are reproduced, they are also deconstructed and mixture. For example, *Peggy* from the band *The Candy Spooky Theater*, joints the sweetness with the horror and perversion.

The feminist concerns cannot forget that the reproduction of a sexist ideology based on the principle of a dominant heterosexual masculinity (although never true, but just and ideal-type), have a powerful negative impact not just on the female and feminine subordination, but also on the oppression of the creative, communicative, sentimental, of contact and body reflexivity, opportunities of men. His first attraction towards *Mana* and his posterior trauma reactions shocked his convictions, that why he speaks of “mislead”, being treated like a fool. “ All the moments of contestation of the symbolic order are important by the fact that they put in question what seems obvious; what is put out of question, unspoken. They shake the evidences (...)” (Bourdieu, 2003, p.15). These musicians are, therefore, a conjunction of continuity and rupture. They can recreate basic categories, but just the fact that, beneath all the production, the sexual organs are male, makes tremble all the certainties. Initial confusion might be the result, since the expectations of how to think and act to those musicians cannot be immediate. First, there’s the necessity to discover their sex, something that is, with time and habit, easier since there are usually little signs that can crack the performance.

“ How is the level of male participation in the Lolita Fashion world?

I would say very low, unfortunately. There are boys that dare with the aristocrat or dandy, but in their most is because the girlfriends are lolitas and drag them. There is also a percentage even lower (...): the brolitas, or boys that dress lolita with everything that they have right to- dress, petticoat, etc etc.”

Why you think they don’t care?

Basically because they think is for girls only, or because they even might know the style aristocrat or dandy that open the doors to them but they don't care about «dressing up differently»."

Crowitched, female, 18 years, student, Faro, Lolita Fashion fan

"- Why do you think there are more women in the style?

Because in Japan most of the people that I saw with that style were women (...). The Lolita magazines show only women (in general, of course). And because when we search for Lolita style in the Internet, usually appear just women."

Kat Thirteen, female, 22 years, kindergarten assistant, Caneças, Lolita Fashion fan

" We, because we are girls, we have facility in everything, right? Even outside the Lolita Fashion. You can dress a suit, you can put a tie, and you can do whatever you want. If a boy dresses a skirt «Oohhh», righ? (...) Of course that, supposedly, there are styles for girls and styles for boys. But girls already dress the boys' styles too. And there are boys that dress the girls' styles too. "

Red Tonic, female, 24 years, student, Vila Nova de Gaia, Lolita Fashion

The participation of boys and men at the Lolita universe can be analyzed following the indications about the avoidance of femininity. Throughout history there have been a separation between the spatial and temporal spheres considered appropriated for men and for women. This division has been developed following a graduation that puts at the top of the social supremacy all the functions that are attributes of the male sex. With frequency, feminist critics, viewing the familiar world as inferior to the professional, or treating phenomenon like motherhood almost as body deviations, reinforced this ideology, when the necessity is to abolish it. The problem is, besides this difference of social prestige, the divergence on the opportunities of use and manipulation of the various areas of social reality, and its double classification superior/inferior. What happened is that women tried to enter the masculine worlds, without giving up their feminine possibilities. The same has not happen yet with men, and this is very because of the discrimination that female and feminine characteristics still suffer nowadays. Men do not realize that, even though they might agree with equal rights, when they do not allow feminine aspects on themselves or on other men, they are recreating the sexist ideology. Like *Red Tonic* puts it, about fashion and looks, women have a much more open and fluid liberty than men, even wearing clothes that are assumed as completely masculine. Although the idea of lesbianism can float around them, this is not so much an insult like the homosexuality is for men. Sexism is viewed usually as negative just for women, since they are the ones that suffer the most with it in almost all the world. What we have been reading during these pages is that men are also imprisoned and caged, although this is something that is still very repressed and unconscious because of the force of the feminism and women's movements, and the lack of consideration for the limitations of the dominants.

Despite the existence of styles inspired in the masculine (more than dedicated to male), boys do not seem to follow this fashion with very intensity. One of the reasons, together with the liberty of women in these issues (both of appearance and gender bending), is the divulgation of the style through females. There are some *brolitas* (brother+lolita), that are men or boys that dress up the feminine styles. Like the *Visual Kei* musicians they also tend to hide their maleness. One of the most famous magazines about this subject is *Gothic&Lolita*, where the majority of models are girls, but there are also male examples, that wear all kinds of styles.

"That adopts the style no. But that likes and thinks it's funny, I know my boyfriend. But he thinks is funny on women. So...I think the majority are persons from the female sex. I photographed one in Harajuku and honestly I just realized he was a man when I saw the photo lol. I think there's no problem. If they like, why not?"

Kat Thirteen, female, 22 years, kindergarten assistant, Caneças, Lolita Fashion fan

Kat Thirteen is the example that *Crowitched* has spoken, that is, her boyfriend get in touch with the fashion because of her, and he does not accept the *brolitas* cases, while to her is just a matter of individual preferences and likes. She also highlights what I have said a few lines before. She just noticed that the person was male when she paid a little more attention to the photograph, meaning that for him to adopt the style, he had to omit and disguise every signal of his maleness and masculinity. This does not signify that to women is an easier task simply because they are used to the feminine gender. Like we can observe in the pages of the indicated magazine (but also in the internet social networks), there are a whole set of advices of "how": combine

the pieces of clothes and accessories, behave, stand and sit, talk, makeup, hairstyles; and even domestic advices like cooking and sewing. The stereotypes and prejudices of fashion as a shallow and useless world, instigates misleading ideas of this universe that is permeated by different kinds of knowledge, including economic ones. This is important because there is an informal market among fans, where they sell, trade pieces, and where they know how, where, what and when to do so. There is also a great level of self-creation, like the punk paradigm "Do It Yourself", including in Japan where all the brands are available. Lolitas made their own productions and manipulate them following the models, but also including novelty elements. This creative side is not enough to attract males attention, especially since it is a world that is characterized by its extremely dedication to the perfect feminine model.

"I know some foreign boys that dress. Some that like and others that really liked to wear. And there are some that truly dress the feminine styles. I think it's a little confuse. (...) And although people tend to assume right away that they have a sort of sexual deviation, that is not quite right, because I know some that are very heterosexual, but that they think that the clothes are so pretty, so pretty, that they want to wear (...)."

Red Tonic, female, 24 years, student, Vila Nova de Gaia, Lolita Fashion fan

I would like to finish my little sharing with this testimony because of two basic ideas. The first is that feminine clothes are more elaborated and diversified than masculine. Not only girls can dress men's fashion, but also they have a wider range of selection in the feminine gender. The second point that I wish to notice is that women can also incorporate the sexist ideology, and behave accordingly. Unlike others

interviewees, this one has more difficulty in dealing with gender bending, and we see again the sensation of confusion and loose of certainty.

5. Conclusions

“Before being thought at her essence, social or individual existence gives herself by her appearance” (Maffesoli, 1998, p.181). The importance of appearance as gender distinction is perhaps one of the strongest, and therefore harder to change, principles of the gender inequality ideology. This is even truer when we talk about the difficulty of men to accept the bending, molding and limits extravagations, because of the pressure to be masculine, sexuality promiscuous, and dominant. The toughs times that women had (and still are) been passed for equality seems to not to interest yet but to just a very small and specific men. The union of the appearance and fashion with the feminine, and its association to futility, is not congruent to the stoic and rational professional masculine world. One of the most powerful insults that a male can say to another is precisely calling him “girl/ie”, as a way of expressing his lack of masculinity and, so, his weakness and submission. These ambiguous characters provide the impression that Japan is more open considering gender and sex issues. Although there is a long tradition of androgyny and travestied, namely in theater, the reality is a more divided². For example, even the Visual Kei bands, when they enter the mainstream and get widely famous, they leave behind the extravagancy, and adopt a more discrete looks. Like happens in our societies, in productions for general audiences or publics, there is a tendency to use gender bending for the purpose of

² The own japanese language is gendered, since it has particles that can be added to a word or used in the end of a sentence to denote if the speaker is a woman or a man” (Murakami, 2008).

comedy. Usually, the character has troubles when assuming the gender that is considered inappropriate, and so the socialization is that, if someone tries to do it to, the same will happen. Creations for females are, as we have seen, different and more readily embracing deconstructions at this level. Anime, Manga, Visual Kei and Lolita Fashion are places that, both, reproduce and even highlight the bipolar vision of gender and sex relation, and deconstruct and create chaos on the stereotypes. Body, appearance and mannerism are extremely molded, manipulated, reconstructed. The general consequence in my interviewees has been the habit to these situations. Even if there is no acceptance, at least the discrimination is faded by some indifference. Girls assume a more open position concerning gender bending, while boys tend to search for justifications for those sorts of situations. For them, revealing an immediate acceptance could cause a questioning of their own sexual orientation.

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