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THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF PATRIARCHAL-EMBEDDED CULTURAL NORMS ON MODERN WORKERS IN JAPAN AS INVESTIGATED IN PERSONA 4

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ABSTRACT

This project aims to perform a thorough multidisciplinary investigation that reveals how individuals of all backgrounds suffer due to the oppressive patriarchal norms that are embedded in their culture by demonstrating how the personal struggles they develop are responses to the perpetuation of these norms within their society's economic social systems—which harms them on both psychological and economic levels—by responding to the cultural critiques present within the Japanese video game *Persona 4: Golden*. The traditional patriarchal structuring of modern economic systems pressures workers to conform to the inherently discriminating cultural values of their society through their social positioning in the workforce, which perpetuates the dominant patriarchal hegemony that is enforcing the institutionalized marginalization of non-heteronormative/female populations. This project contends that the lives of people of all gender are limited by the patriarchal context of their labor and economic systems, which robs them of their agency of their own lives as the implicit social pressures within their culture's gender norms pressure them to conform to detrimental traditional values that psychologically traumatize them by denying the legitimacy of their own gender identities and ostracizing them in their communities.

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Introduction of Persona 4: The Golden
Gender Norms of Japan and their Influence on Characterization

The award-winning video game *Persona 4* is a celebrated Japanese role-playing game (JRPG). It is one of the most critically-acclaimed games in the genre, which is due in part its profound storytelling as it concentrates on the psychological struggles of Japanese teenagers who find themselves limited in how they can express their own gender identities under the pressures of deeply enforced gender norms. Persona 4 critically addresses the ongoing gender crises taking place in Japan, which are seen through the careful psychological construction of its characters and in its demonstration of their struggles to preserve their own psychological wellbeing as their society actively rejects them for their own identities, while at the same time they wrestle with their deepest desires in longing to obtain social acceptance from the people in their communities as they express who they are. Scholars have recognized Persona 4 for its significant exploration of gender in its construction and have critically responded to its depiction of how characters respond to their own gendered personal crises (Xu). However, what has not been discussed is how the game crucially identifies that the psychological crises that its characters that struggle with the limitations of how they are expected to express their gender identity are caused by the sociocultural pressures coming from their economy. As the historical development of their economic system's structure has resulted from the institutionalization of inherently prejudiced social norms that are integral to the patriarchy, which has resulted in workers being forced to adapt to detrimental social norms that invalidate the worth of their own psychological beings and prohibits nonconformity through intense social rejection by their community.

Through linking the critical psychological and economic development of the game's characters together in relation to the ongoing social issues present in Japanese society, it becomes evident that the game is illustrating that the overarching patriarchal structure of Japanese society itself has shaped how the nation's economic system functions. The inherently discriminatory nature of the cultural values enforced in the pressures of society's conformative structuring causes individual citizens to struggle to psychologically cope and appropriately accept themselves for the elements of their identities that their own society rejects them for. The sociocultural state of the Japanese workforce system as it is now psychologically distresses workers by limiting their ability to identify with their own conception of their identity and enables the active ostracization of those who do not fit the crippling mold that the discriminatory nature of the workforce demands its workers conform to. The characters of Persona 4 demonstrate this gendered crisis brilliantly in showcasing how individuals of a variety of gender identities—ranging from an 'ideally' heteronormative man to a crossdressing detective to a closeted gay teen—all struggle dramatically in attempting to conform to the patriarchal norms that pressure them through their community. The perpetuation of traditionally established patriarchal values that societies continue to rely on are what form the structural development of modern social systems, which results in the sustained development of a toxic social work environment in which discrimination is the norm.

As of 2019, one of the largest social and economic issues facing Japan is how women are culturally accepted within the workforce, as the substantial projected decrease in the available male working population prompted the creation of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's "womenomics" project, in which Japan's large domestic female population is being encouraged to enter the workforce to offset the catastrophic impact on a smaller workforce on the Japanese economy.

Unfortunately, this plan has been complicated by the implicit gender norms that structure how Japanese society physically functions, as the role of women is so thoroughly engrained within the traditional domestic sphere that the workforce and the household are essentially pictured as exclusively male and female social spheres respectively. Women who are in the workforce face such discrimination that the people in their own workplace strive to have them removed either through harassing them to a degree that they leave their jobs or create working conditions in which they simply cannot hope to thrive in. The manner in which Prime Minister Abe's plan addresses how women should be treated in the economic system has been criticized for how it fails to provide women with the actual political support necessary to achieve sustainable success or the appropriate cultural change necessary for women to be received openly in the workforce (Larmer). This nationwide gender crisis ongoing in Japan is clearly demonstrating how deeply embedded the patriarchal gender norms are within the social organization of the nation's economic system and how these detrimental norms have resulted in the oppression of the Japanese workforce, which is paralleled in Persona 4's thoroughly psychological depiction of its characters' gendered identity crises.

Overview of Core Concepts of Persona 4

The *Persona* series itself is a historically and critically acclaimed video game series first published in 1996, derived as a spin-off series from the overarching *Megami Tensei* (Reincarnation of the Goddess) series which first released in 1987. The Persona series has surpassed its predecessor in terms of higher sales and in terms of having emerged from the overarching series' reputation as a beloved cult classic into becoming accepted as one of the

most popular *JRPG* (Japanese Role-Playing Games) series within mainstream popular culture. Following the 2006 entry *Persona 3*, the series became famous for its stylistic design, strong thematic concentration on the sociological difficulties of modern life, and its unique gameplay elements. Additionally, the series is known for its incorporation of Jungian psychology in its gameplay and storyline development, building upon the initial conception found within the *Megami Tensei* series of players being able to summon religious/mythological beings referred to collectively as *demons* in the human realm into summonable beings that exist as the psychological manifestations of the collective unconscious: their *Personas*.

All entries of the Persona series hold a strong focus on exploring the metaphorical masks that people wear when interacting within their society, including the reasons for why and how people choose to project themselves in certain ways, along with how they are received by others in addition to how all of this serves to influence their underlying psychological states. Human psychology bears a strong role in the Persona series' narrative and different aspects of humanity are concentrated upon in the games, most notably in how individuals negotiate their own identity to conform to their modern society. The setting for each game is a particular area within modern Japan and most entries in the series focus upon the dual-lives of Japanese high schoolers as they interact with the supernatural events threatening their environment along with dealing with their everyday lives in their roles in society. Key concepts from Jungian psychology are thematically played upon and manipulated within the format of the Persona games. Originally, the Persona series began by using Carl Jung's psychological conception of the human *persona* as the name for supernatural beings, known as *demons*, that can be summoned by human beings from the *collective unconscious*. Later, the series went on to include the Jungian concept of *shadows* as a

theme within the series starting with *Persona 2* and has since then developed the in-game notion of Shadows into representing the opposing surface of the games' Personas.

The nature of the human consciousness, subconsciousness, and unconsciousness are taken under intense scrutiny within the Persona games, primarily within the lens of a character's relationship to their psychological state. Carl Jung's concept of collective unconscious, in which all members of a given species collectively share innate structures of their unconsciousness (such as their instincts and perception of archetypes), is accepted within the Persona series and is supernaturalized in the form of an existing (but only selectively accessible) psychological realm from which the beings known as Personas and Shadows can be summoned from. Additionally, the dungeons in which the player explores in the latter Persona games are physical manifestations of the collective unconsciousness, with certain symbolic alterations made to specific locations within the dungeons that represent and concentrate on a given individual's personal psychological state. All individual minds contribute to the series' collective unconscious and function as a part of it. To an extent, the overall Megami Tensei series accepts the notion of the collective unconscious as well, as demons (no matter their religious and/or cultural association) are associated with conception and manifestation through the human psyche.

Carl Jung's psychological concepts of the *persona* and *shadow* are a notable point of inspiration within the Persona games, as these psychological notions are materialized as supernatural beings that emerge from the sea of the collective unconsciousness based on archetypal associations. Jung's concept of the persona as a metaphorical mask a person wears in order to appropriately function and be viewed in society, thereby successfully adapting to their environment, is elaborately played upon in the Persona series. The beings known as Personas are

the psychological manifestation of a given individual's perception of themselves within society and their underlying identity beneath this so-called mask. As the series progresses, the games become more concerned with a person's perception of their recognition and interpretation of their role in society on the psychological level, which is reflected within the presentation of both these psychological beings as well as the characters themselves. Depending on the game entry, the character can gain better control over their Persona through accepting the differences between the persona they present externally with their internal "true" self or through other means (such as using force or using their Persona as an adaptation to rebel against the confines of society rather than negotiate with it). Conjunctively, the Persona series employs Jung's concept of the shadow as the unconscious psychological elements of the individual self that a given person does not identify with or accept to create beings from the collective unconscious that are derived from these elements. Typically, enemies that the player encounters throughout the game are these Shadows, and the designs of most shadows tend to be inspired by archetypical images associated with the repressed/suppressed elements they are based upon.

The structure of Persona games has largely been influenced by the critical success of *Persona 3*, which has been attributed to have been the catalyst that has generated the series' notable popularity. The gameplay features introduced in this game have since then become standard for main-entry games in the series and have been explored further in-depth since their inception. One of the most central aspects of this gameplay formula involves balancing the player character's daily life as an ordinary high schooler with their investigation of the supernatural forces that are influencing their world by traversing explorable locations (such as buildings, separate realms, or other forms of enclosed areas) containing enemies, which is referred to in video game terminology as *dungeon crawling*. The role of the protagonist in their

daily life is that of a transfer student who has just moved, and the game follows the course of their life over the span of the academic year that follows their transferal. The protagonists of each entry of the series each have a unique reason for moving to their new location and explore different social situations in their community within each entry.

Outside of dungeon crawling, the player has the opportunity to explore branching storylines by developing relationships with the central people in the protagonist's new life and exploring the personal issues they face in their given lives. Doing so grants the player certain benefits such as being able to summon stronger Personas to battle against enemies with and unlocking new skills for the supporting members that make up the protagonist's team as they traverse deeper within dungeons, which generates incentive for the player to participate in this form of gameplay. This social simulation function, referred to in gameplay terminology as a *social sim,* can only be completed with the improvement of player character's five social stats, which are commonly renamed in Persona series entries but express similar attributes (such as naming an attribute *knowledge* versus *intelligence*). These categorized stats can include characteristics such as knowledge, charm, kindness, understanding, courage, expression, and even diligence. Participating in activities in the protagonist's daily life, such as joining in during club activities, studying, or even playing video games within a Persona video game, have the potential to increase a certain stat by a predetermined amount based on performance. The higher the player character's level in a certain stat, the more gameplay features are unlocked. Certain activities can only be performed (or performed well) with a high level in a given stat, and some relationships can only continue to be developed if the protagonist is personally developed enough in a given characteristic to effectively communicate with another particular character.

The price for participating in these activities is the passage of time, which is an essential element of how the game progresses. The player is given an allotted amount of time within an in-game day during which they can decide what to have the protagonist do, which leaves it up to the player to determine how certain features of the game will develop (such as the character's personal stats, his relationships, or his progress in the dungeons) will develop within a given time period of the story. Deciding to spend time with another character, choosing to go explore a dungeon, or perform most stat-enhancing activities all take up time individually within a given day. Sometimes, story-related events occur which take up time and are prescribed to occur on certain in-game dates regardless of what the player chooses to do. For example, holidays such as Christmas are set to occur on their given date, which in this case would be December 25th. The player has no control over this but may decide to select an activity out of a prescribed few available for that time (such as spending time celebrating with one character over another). This time-allotment mechanic is derivative of a type of gameplay known as *resource management*. This mechanic can appear more literally in a game, such as in a game based around managing the local resources of a community, but the key concept is that it is up to the player to decide how to manage the potential resources they are given within the game depending on their own strategy for playing the game.

Persona's key resources are time and energy. While the passage of time is an essential consequence of deciding to perform an activity, energy is the resource of concern when traversing through a dungeon. Within dungeons, characters' health and stamina are measured in *HP* (health-points) and *SP* (spiritual-points) gauges that appear on a menu on the screen. These gauges can rise and fall depending on what occurs in the game. The cost of using a Persona's skills is a certain amount of SP per skill (which lowers the gauge), and if the amount the

character has left in their gauge is too low, then they cannot use their own skills. Physical attacks, namely simply attacking an enemy with a weapon, are still possible at this point and are perhaps the player's only option if they do not have an item within their inventory that can recover the character's SP. On the other hand, HP directly measures a character's health level. HP is lost when a character is hit by an attack or otherwise harmed in some other fashion. If a character's HP gauge falls to 0, then they fall in combat and are restored to have 1 HP after combat with the engaged enemy force is completed. If all characters within a dungeon crawling team, known as a *party*, fall in battle, then it is game over and the player loses the progress they had made after their last *save*. Saving is a game mechanic common to essentially almost all games, in which the player records their progress in the game as stored data for later use. A game over typically results in a player being forced to load their save file or may be given the option restart from a certain point that the game had saved on its own accord, known as an *auto-save*. *Game overs* are the traditional way of technically losing in a video game.

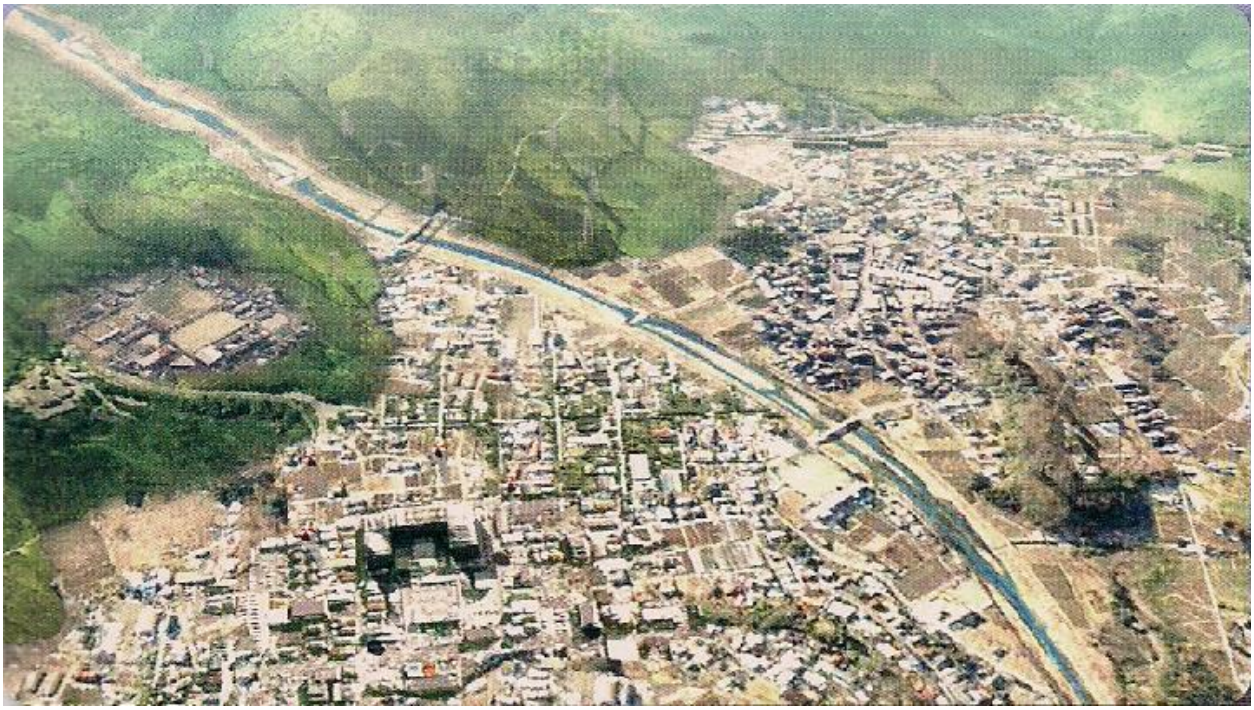

Figure 1: A screenshot from the game of Inaba as viewed from above

Persona 4 takes place in the fictional rural town of Inaba (See Fig. 1), in which the player character, commonly named in the franchise media as Yu Narukami, is a high school student who transfers from the city to live with his extended family as his parents take on work overseas during the beginning of the Japanese school year in the spring of 2011. Shortly after his arrival, the media circus surrounding the scandal of a female TV anchor's affair with a big-name politician comes to town with her sudden murder and the discovery of the next victim's body, a high school girl attending the same school as Yu, found dangling from a television antenna in Inaba. The game covers the length of the investigation that takes place following the serial murders and attempted crimes as Yu investigates the supernatural elements at play behind the case with his newly discovered power to enter another realm, referred to as the *TV world*, which he can access by phasing his body through television screens. Yu, along with a few of his friends, accidentally discover that the murders have been taking place in this other realm and that

the murderer's next targets are foreshadowed by a mysterious program that appears on TV at midnight on rainy nights, which is known as the *Midnight Channel*. If the player does not enter this realm and save the potential victim before the coming fog rolls through town, the targeted victim will die, and the game will end prematurely in a Game Over.

Yu awakens to the power of his Persona, a being manifested through the form of the Japanese god *Izanagi*, and the friends that he brings with him into the TV world develop the ability to summon their own Persona as well. Their group, which they name the *Investigation Team*, expands with each attempted attack as each target joins their investigation and gains their own ability to summon their Persona. While in the TV world, characters have the ability to meet their "Shadow" selves in areas of the realm dedicated to them personally, and the outcome of their encounter depends entirely on how they interact with their Shadow. These Shadows represent the aspects of themselves that they reject, suppress, or simply cannot psychologically cope with. The Shadow will force their counterparts to face these aspects of themselves, and if they are successfully come to terms with their "true self," the Shadow will become tame and transform into their Personas, which the character can then summon freely while they are in this other realm. If they continue to reject their Shadow self, the Shadow will attack them with the intent to kill, which is how the serial killer arranges for their victims to die. If the person dies in their confrontation with their Shadow, their body will manifest in the "real" human realm as a corpse in a location psychologically associated with TVs, namely, an antenna.

While in the TV world, the characters confront other generic shadows that are not associated with any specific individual in the real world. Instead, they are manifestations of the psychological unrest of the collective unconscious of people in the real world and take on the form of archetypal beings in accordance to the overall "theme" of a given area. For example, in

the area of the TV world based on the psyche of Yukiko, another high school girl in Inaba that joins the Investigation Team, the area's design is based upon the stereotypical idea of a giant, romantic castle, and the Shadows that appear fall in line with this romantic vision, such as appearing as "knights." The appearance of this area is based on Yukiko's feelings of personal entrapment in her real-life situation as she struggles with how others perceive her based on her role as the obedient, seemingly ideal daughter taking over her family's traditional business, which conflicts with her own personal desire to pursue her own ambitions as an independent woman. This is complicated by the sexual harassment she endures from exploitative gossip media that stalk her through her daily life as scandals follow her family's business and seek to profit off of sexualizing her role as a young, traditional innkeeper. She feels she has no control of the direction her life takes and that the responsibility for how she is treated is in the hands of others, people that serve as her "knights", therefore bringing to mind the archetypical image of a princess trapped in a castle.

In order to progress in the *dungeon*, as these areas are traditionally called in video game terminology, the player often has to fight and defeat these Shadows before confronting the central Shadow of the person whose psyche the area is based upon, which is often the most symbolically significant figure of the area. The role of this central Shadow is reflective of the actual Jungian conception of the Shadow representing the aspects of one's personality that one does not identify in themselves or unconsciously rejects as being a part of their self. The central Shadow's main intention is to confront the person whose psyche they are based upon in order to force their other self to acknowledge the psychological elements of their identity that they are actively rejecting or repressing to their own personal detriment. The confrontation between the real individual and their Shadow self may be resolved peacefully if the individual is able to come

to terms with their own inner turmoil and recognize the manner in which they have been neglecting their psychological conflictions has been harmful to their wellbeing. However, if the individual refuses to acknowledge the Shadow as a part of themselves and cannot be swayed to reflect on their psychological state of being, the Shadow will respond to the rejection violently, likely killing their other self if there is no interference.

Following the inception of Persona 3, a key gameplay mechanic known as *Social Links* became a strong focus of the series and an integral component of how the game works. The Social Link system involves the player interacting with other notable characters in the game that he forms a Social Link with, which involves interacting with this other character in a separate storyline centered around their relationship with one another and their own personal life. Each link takes its name from an *Arcana*, a category of which a potential Persona is organized, and the player's ability to summon a Persona of a certain kind is strengthened the closer they become to completing the corresponding individual's Social Link. The arcana themselves are based on the categories of the Tarot cards, in which Personas are organized into depending on the archetype that they are most closely associated with. For example, Personas based on mythological queen figures are often categorized within the "Empress" arcana while malevolent figures with associations of chaotic violence, disasters, and traditional notions of demonic nature may more likely be found in the "Devil" arcana. The characters that represent each arcana often have something in their personal lives or characteristics within their psychological profile that fall in line with the archetype that the arcana represents, thus fitting their role in their particular Social Link.

The Sociocultural Context of Japanese Feminism

Persona 4 contains an interesting perspective on how the social structure of the Japanese workforce functions as a cultural product of implicit gender norms and is composed of an accumulation of overarching societal expectations that are thereby placed upon the individuals that interact with this environment. Likewise, the game explores how gender norms influence and structure how individuals are psychologically pressured into conforming to these norms on an inherently personal level in their daily lives, which determines how they behave in the social settings of their societies, whether it be in their homes, in their communities overall, or in their individual relationships. The gendered struggles that the characters within Persona 4 experience reveal how the established patriarchal norms of their society negatively impact their psychological state of being and limit the extent to which they can healthily express as well as acknowledge their own identity in their social environments, which harms their ability to function in a manner that satisfies their own psychological desires for closeness and acceptance within their personal lives.

While this project will incorporate a feminist analysis of the cultural expressions and context of Persona 4 developed largely through the teachings of American feminism, the game exists as a cultural product of Japan that has been translated and incorporated within American culture. It is important to consider the influence of Japanese feminism on how the game is structured as a critical response to patriarchal cultural norms, as Japanese feminism arose within a differing cultural environment than American feminism and incorporates its own unique values system in its application; to attempt an examination of a Japanese cultural product without regard for the significance of the fields that influenced its development would run the risk of overlooking the significance of its development in its cultural context or potentially implying a

superiority of American feminism over Japanese feminism rather than emphasizing the importance of critical communication between studies conducted within both fields. For this reason, a brief overview of the development of modern Japanese feministic studies will be included and discussed before getting into the analysis of the game itself.

Modern Japanese feminism is a highly developed and diversified field, with its modern influences stemming from historical events following the Meiji Restoration in which prominent female figures publicly advocated for women's rights and insisted on the inclusion of women within the public sphere of political concern. The Meiji era (1868-1912) provided women activists with an opportunity to enter the political foray (Bullock 3) as the dust continued to settle from the events leading to the political reform that installed the emperor and imperialism back into the position of the dominant hegemonic force in Japan, over the deteriorating military forces of the Tokugawa shogunate regime (Takano 83).

This transition was largely influenced by rivaling political ideologies over whether Japan should continue to preserve its greatly isolationist historical policies that fell in support of the shogunate regime or begin to assert its political mettle by adapting more Western governmental practices, which had already been in part forced upon them by external forces (notably after the American military-enforced visits made by Commodore Perry and Russian influence), that supported imperialistic development (Takano 85). Following this, women advocates found opportunity to advocate for changes in the public considerations of women through public speech and writing, although developing regulations limited the ability of women to participate in the political sphere (Bullock 3). Many institutions of the modern-state of Japan were founded in the 1890s, which inculcated a new ideal of women through the concept *ryōsai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother) that women strove to combat in the following decades (Bullock 3).

What progression was made during this time period was halted and morphed in the aftermath of Japan's defeat in World War II, in which Japan was ruled for seven years by an Allied Occupation that overwrote many of its existing policies. While this in part led to positive benefits for women in politics such as enforcing new policies that granted women political rights (including the right to vote as well as the right to own and inherit property), there were consequences of policies that seemingly functioned to protect women that limited women to particular roles in society (Bullock 5). Conservative policies concerned with stabilizing the economy made in the following decades sought to align women with domestic roles and manipulated public education, often through mandating that girls be educated in domestic studies, with the supposed goal of enabling men to concentrate on their jobs with their wives taking care of the home (Bullock 5-6). The influence of the conception of ryōsai kenbo is so strong that it continues to influence how women are viewed today in Japan and limit them in how they can "appropriately" act as women.

As state feminism began to gain more leverage in the public eye, the emergence of active feministic movements in the 1960s began to develop into what is known now as *uman ribu* (women's lib) movement during the 1970s, which inspired legislative changes in the 1980s and continues to provide essential historical background for the development of Japanese feminism today (Bullock 7). It is important to note that while the *ribu* was inspired in part by the American women's liberty movement during the same time period, declaring this wave of feminism a Japanese import undermines the legitimacy of the forces of Japanese women that made this movement take place and the great resistance Japanese feminists had with the male hegemony that pervaded Japan (Bullock 6). This principle should also be applied to current feminist movements and political shifts: a year following the #MeToo movement in America, Japanese

organizers and advocates worked to develop the #WeToo movement, which draws inspiration from the Western #MeToo movement but is concentrated upon addressing the unique cultural pressure exerted upon women experiencing sexual harassment and abuse to remain silent due to the influence of Japanese societal norms (Mori and Oda). While Japanese feminism may certainly take influence from other feminist movements throughout the world, the specific roots of discrimination against women in Japanese society are unique to their sociocultural environment and political history, which naturally requires feminist movements to recognize and address these roots in a critical manner.

The Japanese school of women's studies, known as *joseigaku*, began to emerge in the mid-1980s and became formally institutionalized in the years that followed (Bullock 7). Similar to the influence that American women's studies received that resulted in the modern development of feministic studies concerning what are now referred to as gender studies and/or queer studies, *joseigaku* has experienced influence from feminist concerns for gender overall as well as queer rights (Bullock 1-2). Japanese feminism is as highly debated as American feminism in what it details and how it is even universally defined. Scholars are divided on to what they think is appropriate to consider feminism, but they utilize their diverse positions to further the development of the field of Japanese feminism (Bullock 1). Japanese and American feminism parallel one another in various ways, but the great historical and current activity of Japanese feminists prevents the field from simply being decried as an ideological import from the West without original merit in what is considered "inherently" Japanese culture.

There are a great deal of social issues stemming from the limitations imposed by the influence of patriarchally-inspired traditional Japanese gender norms in Japanese society as it functions currently, including complicated forms of gender as well as sexual discrimination, the

cultural normalization of harassment, and extensive cultural reinforcement for marginalized victims to remain silent. The most prominent gender-concentrated movement ongoing in Japan is the economic project outlined by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, nicknamed “womenomics”, which seeks to solve the serious economic issue of Japan’s shrinking workforce by motivating the tons of women who have been excluded from the workforce take up employment in addition to fulfilling cultural expectations that they raise a family (Oda and Reynolds). This issue is serious in that Japan’s population of those from the age of 15-64 is projected to fall from its 77 million estimated in 2015 to 45 million by 2065, dramatically cutting down the number of eligible men that are capable of working (Oda and Reynolds).

While the percentage of women in Japan that work has indeed increased, the majority of the occupations that these women hold are part-time and relatively low paid pink collar jobs; additionally, the gender wage gap in Japan is the third-worst of all developed countries, at 24.5% (Larmer). These women have a remarkably low glass ceiling hovering above them, and women are notably excluded from fields in business as well as politics: women compose 13% of managerial positions in Japan, while 44% of women make up the managerial population in America, and Japan ranks 161 out of 193 countries in terms of female political representation with barely any women composing Japan’s major political organizations (Larmer). The seemingly progressive implications within the womenomics movement may appear superficially concerned for the wellbeing of Japanese women, but the actual economic practices being developed through it reveal how it continues to perpetuate the discrimination against women.

Although the womenomics movement continues to struggle to address the actual concerns of female workers in a greatly patriarchal economic environment and generate sustainable practices of gender equality, the movement has brought attention to the position of

women in Japanese society overall. This can be seen in the global attention that has directed towards the development of womenomics as well as arising gender-related scandals, including the revelation that the Tokyo Medical University (one of the most prestigious medical schools in the country) had been systematically excluding female students from attending in favor of male students inspired nationwide outrage (Oda and Reynolds) and the rapid deterioration the careers of a few notable high-profile men after allegations of sexual harassment/abuse became public, including the Finance Ministry official Junichi Fukuda (Mori and Oda). In addition to the even extreme forms of sexual and gender-biased harassment that women regularly experience in the work environment, working mothers are a specific target for harassment by their colleagues, which has so notoriously proliferated in the workforce that it has been termed *matahara*, or maternity harassment (Larmer). The verbal and even violent discrimination that working women experience in their daily lives has been attributed to the deeply rooted cultural belief that women belong in their households rather than in the male workforce, which is so ingrained in Japanese norms that a poll in 2016 found that 45% of the men surveyed agreed with the notion that "women should stay at home" (Oda and Reynolds). The fact that these issues are coming to surface in mainstream media as a social concern reflects a shifting attitude, no doubt present within the protestors that take to the streets of Japan to advocate for women's rights, that the way in which women are treated is significant and suggests that a Japanese feminist perspective that women are free to belong in the work environment while expecting equally respectful treatment is making headway.

A Brief Overview of the Structure of the Thesis

The manner in which this project will approach analyzing and interpreting the significance of the characters' psychological states of being will fall into a specific pattern that will be consistent throughout the thesis. The first chapter will serve as an introductory perspective to how Persona 4 develops the psychological dilemmas of its characters and how this relates to gendered sociocultural issues of Japanese society through an analysis of a significant supporting character that does not have a Shadow self or access to the ability to summon a Persona. The following two chapters will expand upon the cultural observations made in the first through detailing the profiles of two unique main supporting characters that undergo a confrontation with their Shadow self and develop the ability to summon their own Personas, which is enhanced when they achieve a state of psychological clarity in considering their own self.

These two chapters will begin by providing Japanese cultural background information that is necessary to consider in exploring the symbolic significance of both of these characters, followed by an in-depth overview of the psychological complications that these characters are experiencing as a result of the pressures to conform to the patriarchal cultural norms present within modern Japanese gender norms. The nature of the confrontation that these characters have with their Shadow selves as a result of the culturally complicated psychological aspects of themselves that they have been forced to reject and repress will then be detailed, followed by an extensive analysis of the symbolic significance of the forms their Shadows take. Following that, the forms their Personas take will both be analyzed on a visual level as well as a mythological level pertinent to the cultural values expressed in the forms they take. Lastly, the state of being that these characters achieve by the end of the game's story through their Social Links will be

detailed as well as the individual resolutions they have made in learning to recognize how the pressures that their society has placed upon them has shaped their psychological states and how they have successfully learned to navigate the pressures placed upon them.

Chapter 1

The Struggle of the Father in Patriarchal Society

The burden of being the breadwinner in Japan is considered the man's role within his family, to the point that it is more normal for men to dedicate their entire lives to their jobs rather than developing relationships with their own families. This can be seen in the relationship between Yu and his *NPC* (non-player characters) family members: his uncle Ryotaro Dojima and his cousin Nanako. Ryotaro, often politely referred to as Dojima, is the sole living parent of his 6-year old daughter Nanako, but his devotion to his job as a seasoned police detective separates him from interacting with his daughter and contributes to his own personal insecurities as a father. Overworking is a large social issue in Japan currently: death of working men in the workplace from stress-related causes (heart attack, stroke, suicide) is so frequent that it has been termed *karoshi*, workers typically work over 20-40 hours of overtime weekly, and there is little support available for various kinds of working men. It is very common for men to sleep and in many cases essentially live in their workplaces (Weller). This prevents men from having the option to partake in their family life as they please, having already been predetermined by their

society to belong in the workforce, and this often isolates them from the very social network of their immediate family.

Figure 2. Concept Art of Ryotaro Dojima

This stress is clear in Dojima's life: he is constantly working overtime, stays at work overnights, and has little social connection to anyone outside of his job. Nanako, at six years old, is left alone. Workers in Dojima's situation frequently do not know their families very well, and a husband's presence is a common source of stress put on families, as they are not structured with his presence in mind. This is put to the extreme in the Dojima family household; with Dojima out of the home most of the time, it is essentially just Nanako. This structuring requires that Nanako,

a first-grader, takes care of the house; she does all the laundering, answers the phone, cooks basic meals, and handles her own problems on her own. Considering that Dojima isn't home a lot of nights, she even locks up and puts herself to bed. Given this, Nanako is begrudgingly mostly independent of her father despite being a small child and her painfully desperate desire to become closer to him. Even when she reaches out to her father for his time or his affection, Dojima awkwardly or evenly harshly rejects her.

It becomes clear when the player interacts with Yu's uncle during the evenings that they're together that Dojima is a rather socially awkward man. He doesn't have any real established social connections outside of work for the most part, and what familial relationships he has tend to make him uncomfortable. While he's clearly comfortable yelling at his subordinates and is a confident man, Dojima isn't sure what to do when interacting with his family. When Dojima is stressed, he doesn't truly have a support network to rely on or remarkable coping skills to deal with his emotions. His only accessible ways to deal with his stress come in the form of lashing out at others and to go out drinking with his subordinate, which is in itself a culturally accepted practice within Japan's social norms. It is very common for bosses in Japan to take their subordinates out for nights of drinking and going home drunk, which grants Dojima the opportunity to drown in his suffering without truly coping with or emotionally processing his problems. Although this behavior is not to say that Dojima is an alcoholic; it's uncharacteristic for Dojima to get smashed unless he is at his absolute wits end, which he goes through during the process of the police's investigation. At home, both his daughter and his nephew have to watch from the sidelines as the stress of endlessly tracking an active serial murderer that is on the loose in his own town while knowing that his unit's investigation is going nowhere takes its toll on him.

During conversations with his nephew Yu, Dojima either stumbles over conversation topics or falls into interrogating him about his decisions in his day to day life. Their interactions bring out Dojima's suspicions as to why Yu keeps appearing in the dangerous situations he's investigating and what his connection is to the murders taking place in Inaba, which began just about at the same time that he moved to town. As time goes on, it gets to a point where Nanako frequently interrupts their conversations with demands to 'stop bullying' her cousin and to stop "fighting," even though it is typically Dojima that is particularly riled up. Throughout the game, there is a natural tension between the two as Yu hides his involvement in personally investigating the murders and preventing kidnappings from occurring in town while his uncle is working on the investigation with the police at the same time. Given that Yu becomes close friends with those who the police consider to be the most likely next murder victims during their investigations, the suspicious picture that Yu's actions paint naturally causes Dojima concern and plenty of complicated feelings. As their relationship gradually improves, Dojima's primary concern for his nephew becomes less about his distrust of him and more about his genuine worry for his wellbeing.

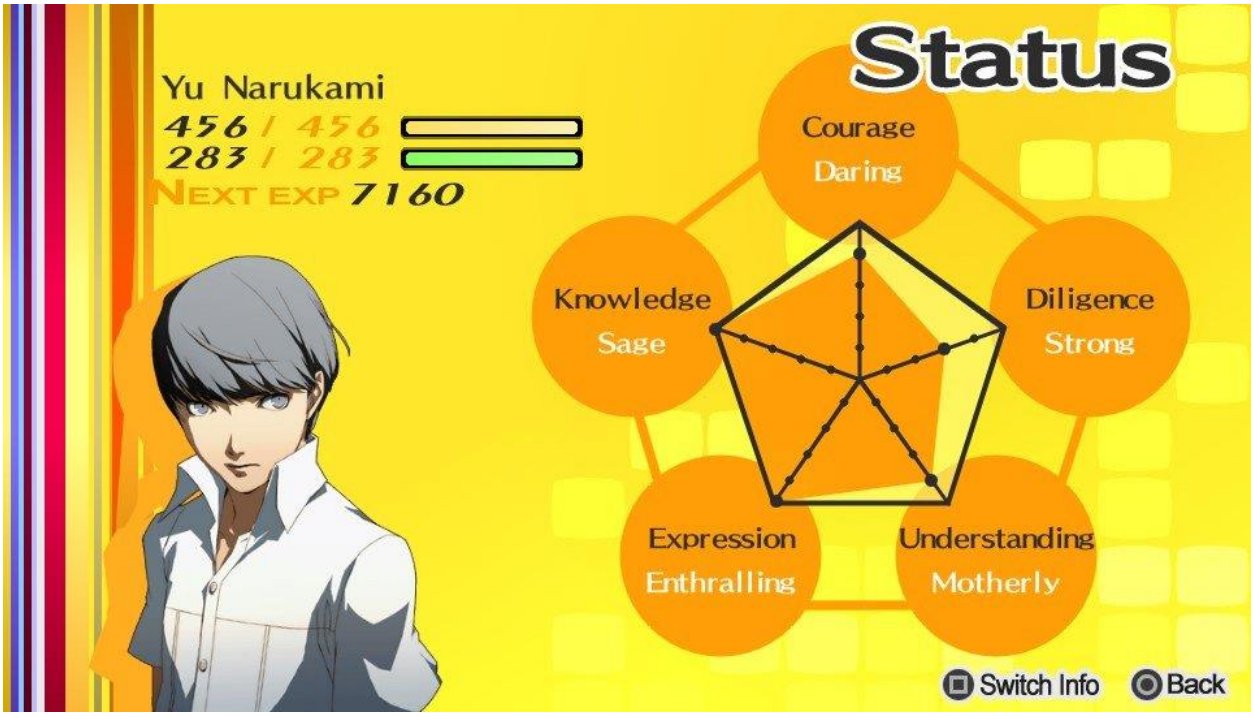

Figure 3. A screenshot of the Social Status menu. The graph on the right demonstrates for the player Yu's social stats level, which in this case shows his Expression and Knowledge as being maxed out. Yu's Courage and Understanding are scored at level four while his Diligence is at scored at level 3.

The situation in the Dojima household is so complex that Yu cannot even interact with his family members without actively developing his own social stat levels of understanding and expression beforehand (See Fig. 3). In order to complete Dojima's Social Link, the player almost has to reach the maximum level of personal expression to even speak with him. Otherwise, the game will prevent the character from continuing with the Social Link and halt their progression into his character's independent story. The same goes for Nanako: in order to communicate with her, the player has to develop Yu's level of understanding (which he can most notably do through working part-time at a children's daycare) so that he can talk with her as she sorts out remarkably difficult emotional tasks; including helping her explore her own feelings regarding

her relationship with her father, coming to cope with how her mother's death has shaped her life, and even in learning the concept of death itself.

Although the social norm of a working man clearly contributes to the development of the distance in Dojima and Nanako's relationship, Dojima himself intentionally utilizes it to justify avoiding interacting with his daughter. When Nanako approaches Dojima for anything, he naturally tends to look for an excuse to avoid doing anything with her and regularly breaks promises he makes to her, which causes her to develop the automatic expectation that her father to be absent when events come up in her life. Issues at work are an easy way to justify his absence and sudden change of plans; additionally, the responsibility that Dojima feels as a police officer subconsciously interfere with his natural priorities and tendencies as a father. This can be found both in his speech through the game's dialogue and the cinematic arrangements of the characters in a scene. Early on in his interactions with Yu, during one of the events of his Social Link, Nanako approaches them during an evening conversation and weakly tells them that she is in a lot of pain. The normally collected Dojima bursts up from his seat, clearly panicked, and rapidly begins trying to talk himself through finding a way to help her. However, his cellphone rings, and he immediately stops to answer it. On the other end of the line, a subordinate informs him about a new lead in a cold case that Dojima is investigating. After picking up the phone, Dojima has clearly changed focus and doesn't show a hint of being frazzled as he had been a moment before. Without any hesitation, Dojima tells his subordinate he will be right there. After hanging up, he takes a brief pause, and then he tells Yu to take care of Nanako before he bolts right past her, without sparing a glance.

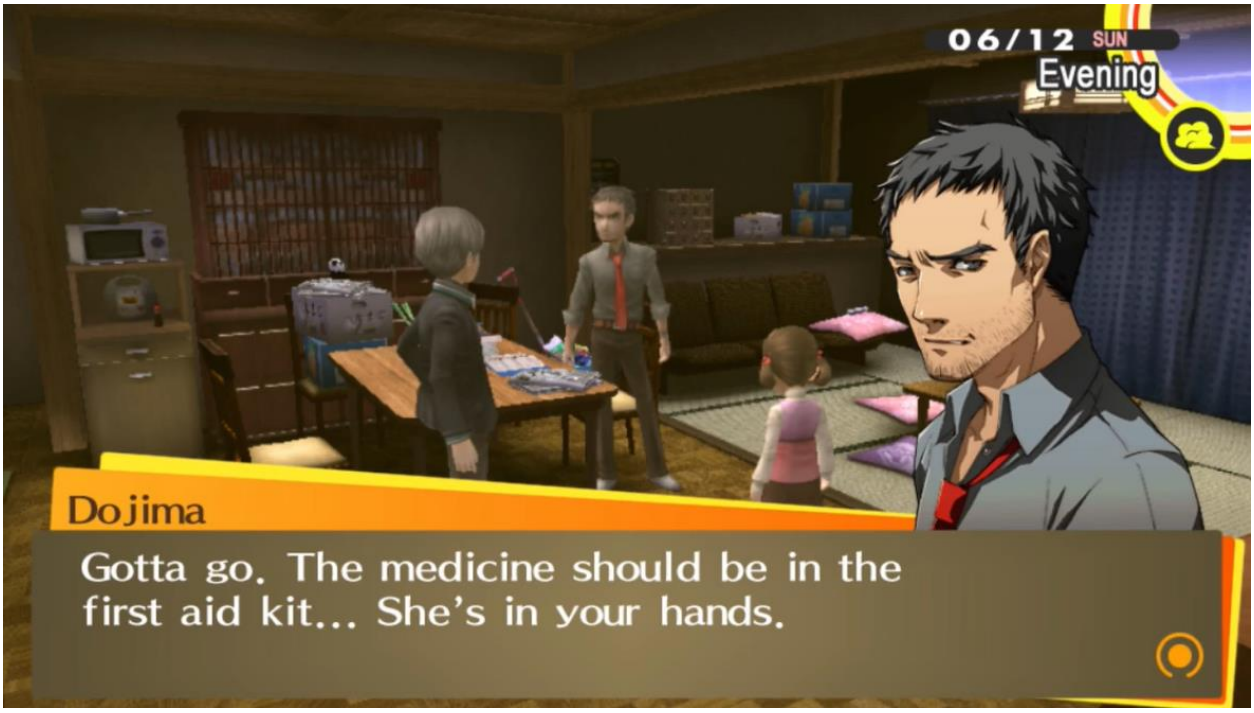

Figure 4. Dojima delegates caring for his sick child to Yu as a result of his struggle over how he should act as a father

Dojima struggles with both his strong desire to avoid having anything to do with Nanako, his personal consideration of what he considers his natural duty as a cop, and his clear, yet increasingly buried affection for her. Although he struggles in his relationship with her, Yu's prods into his true feelings more consistently reveal that he does truly love his daughter, but he doesn't know how to overcome his own insecurities in learning to interact with her. Following the incident where Dojima ignores his ill daughter, Yu becomes more confrontational about how Dojima treats Nanako and makes it clear that he expects Dojima to take care of her: physically as well as emotionally. In moments where Dojima falls back on using work as a justification for not spending time with her, Yu calls him out on his decisions and forces him to consider that what he is really doing is making excuses to make himself feel better about not prioritizing her. In time, Dojima reveals to Yu that the cold case he's investigating is the hit-and-run of his wife, Chisato,

which had killed her. Dojima doesn't consider himself worthy of being Nanako's father because he had never really been there for her, even prior to his wife's death. He admits that he left raising her up to Chisato. When he considers these self-defeating thoughts, he succumbs to his insecurities and creates a self-fulfilling prophecy about being an unworthy father by choosing to act as one.

Figure 5. A screenshot of a dialogue choice in the game, in which the player gets to choose how Yu will respond to Dojima in conversation. The highlighted text indicates the choice the player is in the process of selecting.

The most complicating factor in Dojima's relationship with Nanako is that he has never had a proper chance to grieve for his wife and is still grieving her loss as he is raising their daughter. Dojima genuinely loves Chisato, to the point that he still thinks of her constantly, and his feelings about the end of her life influence how he views himself. Chisato had died on her way to pick Nanako up from nursery school. Dojima recounts with Yu how by the time he had reunited with his family, Chisato was already dead, and Nanako was still waiting for her mother

at the nursery for what Dojima hopelessly lists as a mother that would never come. The pain is evident on his face as he openly grimaces, and the delicate manner in which Dojima speaks of these events is a clear indicator of the great psychological turmoil this loss had on him and how it has reshaped his life. Chisato's absence is a strong reason for how Dojima grew to be so insecure in his interactions with his daughter and his own feelings of legitimacy as a parent. Dojima doesn't blame Nanako for her mother's death, but her presence served as a continuous reminder of the woman he loved being killed, particularly when the wounds of losing Chisato were still fresh. While he was just beginning to mourn, Dojima was suddenly thrusted into the role of being a single parent to a child he barely knew on top of having to cope with his lover's death all on his own and continue working on the case as a police officer. The psychological trauma of experiencing this led him to establish minimal interactions with his child as he grew used to distancing himself from his daughter and distancing himself from the topic of her mother altogether. In this way, Nanako is deprived of the opportunity to learn about her mother and grow up with knowledge of her love as her scant memories fade away in addition to being deprived of the opportunity to grow up knowing her father.

The addition of Yu into the family home becomes a healthy turn in the lives of both Nanako and Dojima. With his presence in both of their lives, Nanako and Dojima experience the opportunity to explore their own pain with the emotional support they need to cope with their own traumas. Despite the difference in their age, Yu's maturing disposition compliments Dojima's no-nonsense attitude and creates a filter through which Dojima can reflect on himself in a healthy manner. Dojima in part knows that what drives him to sacrifice the health of his relationship with Nanako are his own feelings of inadequacy for being unable to track down the person who murdered his wife. This, in a disastrous conjunction with his own unprocessed grief,

in turn caused him to consider himself less capable as a police detective, less of a husband for losing his wife, and ultimately unworthy of being Nanako's father.

Without any opportunity to mourn for his wife and come to terms with her death, Dojima lets himself suffer and grows to consider the deterioration of his private life to be a just consequence for being unable to protect his family. Although Dojima had no control over the random events that led to his wife's death or the case going cold because of the police's loss of interest as no feasible leads came up, Dojima responded to his grief by blaming himself, which prevented Dojima from reaching a better opportunity to achieve any real form of closure. With Yu's emotional support and active presence as Dojima begins to process the issues he faces years after his wife's loss, Dojima develops a healthier emotional wellbeing. During the later events of the Social Link, Dojima discusses how he has realized he can't allow himself to give in to his own malicious feelings of inferiority if he wants his daughter to grow up well. He has realized that it is up to him to prioritize how his daughter's wellbeing develops by being at her side, which leads him to make it a part of his duty to be with her, and his relationship with her greatly improves. Through the relationships he develops with his daughter and nephew, Dojima comes to stronger terms with his insecurities and his sense of responsibility to keep others safe. In this way, it is through redefining his responsibility as a modern working man in his own terms, rather than passively conforming to the expectations of society and perpetuating the isolation that enabled the development of his negative psychological state, that Dojima achieves a healthier state of being.

Chapter 2

The Rejection of Womanhood in the Japanese Workforce

A Cultural Background of Womenomics in Japan

Sexism is a hotly debated issue within Japanese culture, and cultural norms derived from traditional gender roles in Japan have developed differently, yet similarly to traditional American gender roles. For example, sexism in both countries is most visually apparent in social environments such as the work place: it has been a social norm for women to pursue a post-secondary education and even jobs. However, there is still a notable social pressure placed on Japanese women based on the modern expectation that women will immediately retire from their jobs upon marrying. While this social expectation has arguably seen reduction in many areas of America, the weight of this expectation is still heavy on most women in Japan. The expectation is that these women will adapt to the role of housewife after their marriage and, shortly afterwards, become a mother. However, many modern women do not desire to be forced into these roles, and many have adapted to this social expectation by taking on a career while intending to never marry (Larmer). Those that seek marriage often seek one of their own making; these women wish to define the constraints of their marriage without dependency on the interference of social norms and wish to have an increasingly equal voice in outlining the relationship.

The ability for women to define themselves in Japanese social settings is limited by the traditional patriarchal norms that have been enforced for generations, and this necessitates that

women must challenge the socio-cultural roots of their economic system to achieve their own goals, as well as conceive of them. Careers in male-dominated fields are ultimately challenging for women in even being recognized by their colleagues and accepted within their working environment. The Japanese police force is a notable example of such a male-dominated field: only about 7% of the population making up the Japanese force were recorded to be female during 2012 (Statista). The opportunity and reality for women pursuing career paths in these male-dominated fields are often stunted by issues generated by the perception of their gender rather than actual issues regarding their level of professional qualifications for their occupation. The manner in which women are treated within their working environment is just as well influenced by their gender; women experience discrimination, intimidation, and isolative social pressure for their gender to discourage them from continuing to work in their occupations as well as from even having occupations. (Larmer). It's important in considering this state of affairs to not equate the experience of American women in the workforce with what Japanese women are experiencing—while both must contend with unobliging and even dangerous patriarchal cultural norms in their work environments, Japanese women are largely limited to low paying, part-time work without access to career advancement opportunities, work-related violent practices, and the third-worst gender wage gap amongst developed countries. While the Japanese economy is in a state where it needs female workers to sustain its global economic position and make up for its decline of male workers, Japanese women are broadly being used as capital assets without significant political efforts being made to benefit their wellbeing beyond surface-level claims of support (Larmer).

Figure 6. Concept Art of Naoto Shirogane

This is the sort of environment that Naoto must deal with in attempting to fulfill her ideal role as a professional detective despite her gender and her notably young age within a male-dominated police force. At the beginning of the game, Naoto Shirogane is a fifteen-year old high-schooler working as a highly reputed private investigator nicknamed in the media as the "Detective Prince." She works as an independent consultant for the police force, and she is brought into stronger focus in the story when she is officially hired by the police to work on the

investigation taking place in the Inaba serial-murder case after weeks of little progress by police detectives. This lack of progress does not make her reception by the local police force any warmer; in fact, Dojima gets drunk one night when the higher ups officially call in a kid to do his job for him (which, for him, directly implies that the higher-ups believe his team simply can't do it, but that surely this child could) and is a restrained example of the resentment that her newfound colleagues develop towards her. Her other colleagues are far more direct in making their displeasure with her presence known to her. Her capabilities as a detective are continuously challenged as the professionals that make up the police force repeatedly brush her off whenever her intellect is not needed due to her age and the media's determination to capitalize on her remarkable position in their attempts to sensationalize her as a quasi-celebrity personality undermines the legitimate recognition of her truly professional credentials. Naoto has no interest in becoming a household name as a popular figure: her truest desire is to achieve recognition for her merits as a detective and be taken seriously in her occupation as herself. However, the preconceptions that others develop of her due to both her age and her gender cause her to psychologically reject these aspects of herself, to her own emotional detriment.

Her investigation runs parallel to Yu's supernatural investigation with his team; she is highly suspicious of the group's activity in relation to the case and installs an interesting tension in the progression of the story as she is essentially on to them from the get-go. She knows that most members of the team qualified as the most likely targets of the suspect during different parts of the investigation (which was in fact true), that they are likely more than "just friends", and that they are very likely performing their own investigation of the case if they are not in any way differently involved in it. What progress the group makes in their investigation is matched by her: she identifies potential victims, interviews the same people they do, and even identifies

the perpetrator's pattern. Yet, none of this results in her receiving respect from her colleagues and being belittled by others simply because of their attitudes toward her age. The fact that Naoto is female is something that is unknown to all of them, the police force and Yu's Investigation Team alike.

The severity of the sexism that Naoto encounters in her life does not simply result in her developing personal insecurities regarding her identity—it also results in her developing a complex rejection of her female gender itself. Prior to the events of the game, Naoto grows ashamed of herself for her female identity as a result of the way that gender is socially depicted within her culture; her shame is manifested in her daily life to the point that she alters her appearance to appear more masculine, as well as beginning to alter her identity itself to be more masculine. At this point Naoto begins to wear men's clothing on a daily basis, puts on platform shoes to make her appear taller, and it is demonstrated through her appearances that her seemingly flat chest is the result of her daily wearing of binders (See Fig. 6). What is notable is that the beginnings of her shift into a masculine identity are not witnessed during the game. She has already assumed the role of a male by the time she moves into her work in Inaba, which implies that she must have been psychologically motivated to have begun this transformation earlier than the age of fifteen, prior to even her first year of high school. The role that discrimination has played in her life and the extent to which it has influenced her psychologically caused her to reject her own gender identity as a *child*, which resulted in her remarkably tumultuous experiences as she struggled to maintain any emotionally stable form of identity.

Figure 7. Naoto reflects on her struggles in an intimate moment with Yu during her Social Link

Naoto is highly critical of herself, which is a notable contributing factor in what drove her to change her lifestyle in conjunction with the relentless pressure put on her self-esteem in the sexism that pervades her social environment. The criticalness Naoto directs at herself in response to external stressors functions as an unhealthy coping mechanism for all of the stress that she endures, which is what generates her increasing willingness to change virtually any aspect of herself in order to "fit in" with the conditions her sexist environment impose on her. Additionally, her unrelentingly harsh evaluation of herself causes her to believe that her acceptance within her environment is prevented by aspects of her own self rather than the forces that reject her. Through the increasing unhealthiness in her self-deprecation, she comes to believe that she is responsible for being rejected by others because of her own state of being, her own age and gender, as opposed to those who actually make the decision to shun her. Her ultimate desire, her desire for respect, becomes contorted with her desire to be as accepted as a

conventional member of her social environment, which results in her conflicted conviction that she must want to become male.

Rather than being psychologically conflicted about what gender she identifies as or simply identifying as male, Naoto has issues with deciding what her gender means as well as what is means to her, particularly her ideas regarding what it defines her as. What is notable is that Naoto does not ever identify herself as a male: she allows others to assume that she is male and still considers herself to be female while she struggles with her own sense of self. The closest she comes to identifying as male is using the pronoun boku in the original Japanese text. There are various first-person pronouns that can be used in Japanese speech and each one has its own connotations depending on the social setting, with certain pronouns being associated with one gender more than another. The pronoun boku is often associated with masculinity, but it is used by both genders to refer to themselves (Nakano). Naoto's choice to refer to herself with this typically masculine pronoun is downright convenient for her in that it helps her to avoid potential suspicion about her gender by evoking a male-oriented gender norm in her speech rather than use another conventional pronoun such as the polite watashi, which is seen as more feminine than boku and less assertive (Nakano). The use of boku in daily speech by men is considered both conventional and appropriate for men in many social environments, including professional ones (Nakano). In the original Japanese version of the game, Naoto and Yu can have a conversation towards the end of her Social Link in which she confides in Yu her insecurity about how he must feel about her pronoun choice knowing that she was a girl. Amongst the responses, if the player has Yu respond that he thinks it would be nice to hear her comfortably using a more feminine pronoun someday, she will later trust Yu to be with her during one of her first attempts to wear feminine clothing again and feel normal in it. Due to the English translation having Naoto use

the pronoun I, the conversation is altered, and the social significance of this conversation is balanced differently in the absence of this exchange.

Analysis of Naoto's Confrontation with her Shadow Self

As the game progresses, Naoto becomes a potential target of the serial-killer, and instead of acting to protect herself, she intentionally allows herself to be kidnapped in order to make progress in her investigation. Yu's team catches on to her plan and worriedly pursue her disappearance into a dungeon within the TV world, where they find her in the lowest level confronting her shadow-self. Her dungeon, the Secret Laboratory, is notably sci-fi in design and reminiscent of a secret military base. It differs from most of the other psyche dungeons in that the obstacles present require puzzle solving in order to continue traversing through it rather than strictly requiring brute force, as there are a series of locked doors that require key cards hidden within the dungeon and traps, which reflect Naoto's guarded personal demeanor as well as her difficulty opening up to others. In contrast to the other team members' confrontations with their shadows, it is Naoto who is calm and seemingly in control of this confrontation, as her shadow is desperately expressing her emotions to Naoto's unflippant response. However, it becomes clear that it is the shadow that has the upper-hand in this situation as Naoto's shadow challenges the physical Naoto with a surgical table prepared with all of the implements needed to conduct a sex-change operation and forces her to confront her distorted desires for what she thinks they are, lest she never have a "reason to live".

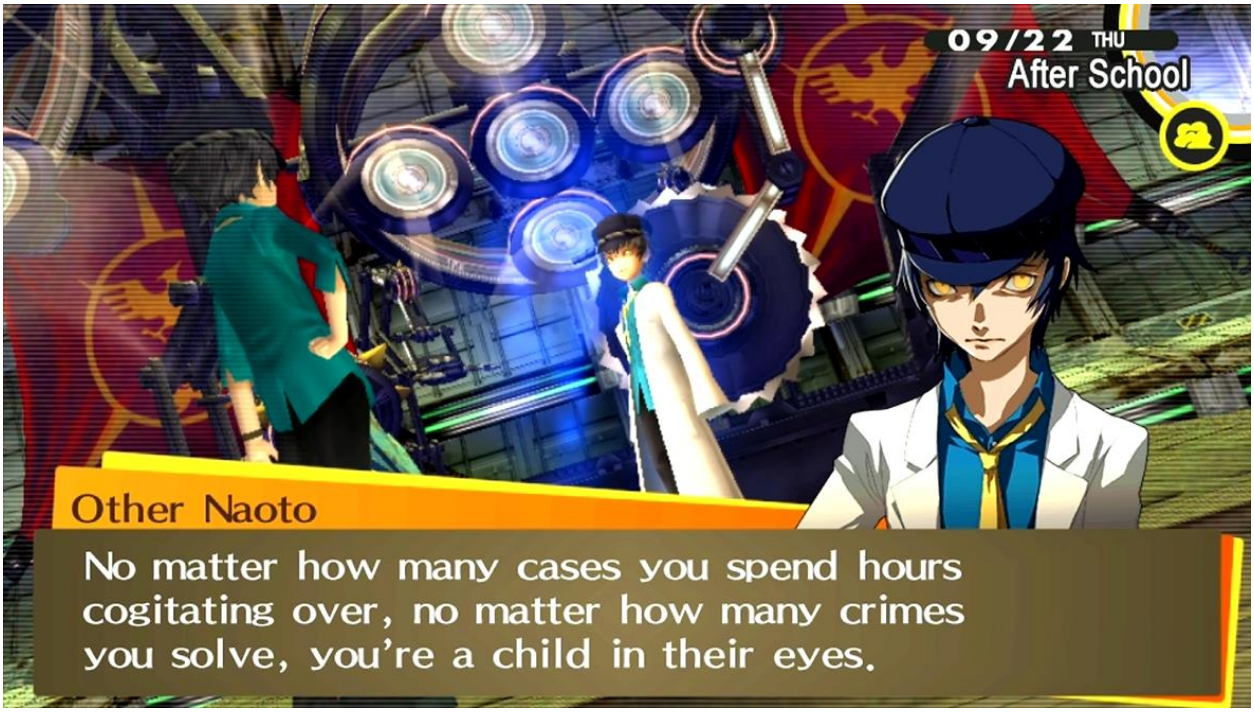

Figure 8. Shadow Naoto confronts Naoto over her rejection and repression of her insecurities. The Shadow stands in front of the operating table intended for Naoto's gender reassignment surgery with barbaric medical equipment looming overhead.

The Shadow continues this method of emotional assault against Naoto with increasing success until finally Naoto reaches a point of clear emotional distress where she vehemently rejects her shadow, essentially the existence of her own emotions, and this provokes the Shadow to attack. After Naoto's Shadow is subdued, Naoto approaches with better clarity the reasons why she struggled with her gender identity and how this has been entangled with her own sense of worth. Rather than attaining what she considers her true identity through becoming male, Naoto realizes that she came to hold this idea through the distortion of her wish to become accepted by others: she believed that she could come to be accepted if she overrode her own self to become someone else, and believed that she could only become accepted through becoming someone else. Naoto's Shadow listens patiently while the real Naoto describes to herself how the

greatest issue she has is that she does not accept herself for who she is and that responding to her insecurities about her identity by treating these personal aspects of herself as flaws that she be actively trying to get rid of has only been unhealthy for her, as she can only begin to find true acceptance if she lives her life as her own self. It is through this speech that her Shadow recognizes her resolution and transforms into her Persona, which allows her to join the welcoming Investigation Team in their joint-mission to stop the serial murders as a respected and truly, personally, accepted friend.

Visual Analysis of the Provoked Shadow Naoto

Figure 9. Concept Art of Shadow Naoto In-Combat

The appearance of Naoto's Shadow form after it transforms, when it is provoked into combat, is interesting in how greatly similar it is to Naoto's form and how it rejects natural elements of her being. Half of the Shadow is simply Naoto's daily form, while the other half is an augmented robotic form. This is reflective of both the body-augmentation scenario of the laboratory setup and Naoto's psychologically-driven desire to augment her own self in order to form a more ideal, albeit artificial self that will enable her to gain acceptance from others. The artificiality of this psychological strategy that Naoto imposes upon herself is highlighted in the Shadow's depiction as a half-robotic figure, as it shows how this mechanical process is manufactured rather than naturally developed, and the way in which the robotic half almost symmetrically encroaches upon the biological self visually depicts how Naoto's distortion is increasingly harming her own being. The inclusion of the robotic elements of the Shadow contribute to the sci-fi inspiration that Naoto's dungeon embodies and evokes elements from popular culture that call upon themes of childishness (such as the Shadow's notable similarity to Astroboy, a cartoon about a robot boy that fights crime, which is most notably captured in how the Shadow uses a jetpack to fly). The tactics that the Shadow employs in combat likewise highlight its artificiality: the Shadow enhances itself with moves that boost its combative stats (including its offense, defense, and mobility) and essentially alters itself to a preferable state. Her Shadow ultimately embodies her own rejection of her natural state of being and how she has consequentially come to force herself to 'change' these elements of herself to her own harm.

Visual and Mythological Analysis of Naoto's Initial Persona

The depiction of Personas throughout the entirety of the series has been largely influenced by mythological figures and archetypical elements found within worldwide folkloristic traditions. Persona 4's particular artistic inspiration draws from the themes of traditional Japanese folklore, including fundamentals of its traditional creation mythology, various religious motifs throughout time, and elements of historical storytelling. This is exemplified in Yu's initial and character-specific Persona being depicted as Izanagi, the original father figure of all beings (including the gods) in Japanese mythology and as one of the two deities credited within Japan's traditional creation myth as being responsible for the formation of the land. The later implementation of an exalted Izanagi in the form of Izanagi-no-Okami (the Great Deity) as a Persona of the World Arcana, the cohesive representation of the world's collective psyche, in order to defeat the deity responsible for the degradation/reformation of the world that takes place in Persona 4 is analogous to the traditional creation myth in which Izanagi swears to bring new life into the world (paralleled with the creation of hope Yu represents in Persona 4) for every life destroyed by the opposing deity's intentions of fulfilling humanity's unconscious 'wish' (effectively symbolized as suicide in the face of humanity's loss of hope in itself).

Likewise, the characteristics of the Personas of Yu's teammates are derived from traditional Japanese mythos and implemented in congruency with the character's individual psychological state. Within Persona 4 Golden, members of the Investigation Team (excluding Yu) have the chance to attain two forms of their given Persona: the form of their initial Persona that manifests after their successful confrontation of their Shadow self and their evolved Persona, which is the upgraded form of their initial Persona they unlock after the player's completion of

their Social Link. Both forms of their Persona are modeled after traditional Japanese narrative figures in which their characterizations symbolically resemble, but the appearance of the characters' later Personas coincides with how they develop throughout the story as they grow to accept their psychological states of being in their own individual ways through the reformation of their Persona as another mythological being.

Figure 10. Screenshot of Naoto's initial Persona Sukuna-Hikona learning a Social Link skill

Naoto's initial Persona is named after Sukuna-Hikona-no-Kami, a male Japanese deity that worked alongside a major Japanese deity known as Okuninushi (sometimes regarded as Onamuchi in this tale) to settle the Izumo prefecture of Japan, a region that is significant symbolically both religiously and historically in Japan. Sukuna-Hikona is the Japanese deity of what is essentially modern chemistry: drug development and alcohol brewing, which contributes to his association as a god of healing ("Sukunahikona"). The scientific quality of Sukuna-Hikona's position is present both within the thematic depiction of Naoto, including the sci-fi

inspiration and methodological elements her dungeon is inspired by, as well as in the consideration of her own great scientific intellect. What is noteworthy within the general plotline of Sukuna-Hikona's involvement in Japanese mythology in relation to Naoto is how he is frequently depicted as a helper-figure, one who guides and contributes to the objectives of others. Naoto essentially fulfills this role all throughout her career as a freelance detective, working for hire by the police force in order to assist in their investigation, as well as in how she serves to guide the Investigation Team throughout the process of their investigation as both a rival to their efforts relatively concerned for their wellbeing and eventually their teammate. Sukuna-Hikona is notable both for his collaborative effort with Okuninushi and his great friendship with him, which forms despite his brief resistance against the latter in their initially separate allegiances.

The appearance of Naoto's Persona in general highlights Sukuna-Hikona's nature as a diminutive size, particularly through his relationship/association with the development of the traditional Japanese fairytale narrative of Issun-B*ō*shi (One-Sun Boy), a greatly told folktale that focuses on the journey a wise, miniature boy takes in order to become a warrior (Kurahashi 173). The narrative has been related to similar stories of dwarf-like figures, such as Tom Thumb, and the nature of the Issun-Bōshi is highly relevant to how Naoto personally struggles with how she is regarded by other's due to the discrimination she experiences for her "diminutive" social status in their eyes—as she is a small, youthful individual that has been forced under the microscope of her society's gaze. The challenges Issun-Bōshi must overcome are based in both the struggles he faces due to his abnormally diminutive size (as he is one sun, or about three centimeters) and the resistance he faces from the people who reject him for his very biological being, which tend to be solved in part through his sharp intellect (Kurahashi 173). This is a direct reflection of how

Naoto has been forced to navigate through social obstacles in working with the police force under the influence of prevailing patriarchal social norms.

Sukuna-Hikona's nature as a mythological figure of wisdom deliberately reflects Naoto's characterization as a figure of wisdom, as her role within the game's narrative is largely made possible through her intelligence, and the means by which she grows to accept herself is made possible through her own reconsideration of how she evaluates her self-worth. Naoto's negative conception of her identity as a young woman is one of her most psychologically charged challenges in her life, and through having her Persona appear as such a youthful figure is significant in demonstrating that she has undergone the emotional growth necessary to accept this aspect of her identity. The fairy-like appearance of the Persona, while also exemplifying youth, also works to reflect elements of diminutive authority by wearing an outfit that resembles both Naoto's daily wear and a child's school uniform. While Naoto has been ashamed of her identity as a young student due to the discrimination against her both in the work environment and in the media, her Persona embraces this youthful consideration even further by directly aligning her with childhood. Rather than detracting from her authority, as Naoto so greatly fears, Naoto has come to accept herself is being capable regardless of how she is treated for her age. The depiction of Sukuna-Hikona reveals her acceptance of her diminutive stature in the eyes of others and herself, which demonstrates how Naoto has come to accept the elements of herself that she has rejected the most.

Visual and Mythological Analysis of Naoto's Developed Persona

What is interesting about both Sukuna-Hikona and Naoto's ultimate Persona, Yamato Takeru, is that they are both male figures. While it is implied in the initial depiction of Sukuna-Hikona as Naoto's Persona that she is able to identify with a male figure as a woman after she comes to realize that she has been harming herself by rejecting her female identity, the depiction of Yamato Takeru intentionally concentrates upon her developed acceptance of her gender identity. The figure of Yamato Takeru (The Brave of Yamato) comes from the legend of Prince *Ō*su, the second son of the twelfth emperor of Japan, Emperor Keikō (circa 71-130 AD), who was granted his famous title by an oppositionist foe that he successfully slays in a great feat of cleverness. Heroic tales of his exploits are detailed in the culturally significant text known as the Kojiki (Records of Ancient Matters), which was compiled over 1300 years ago in 712 AD (Littleton). Similar to traditional European epics such as Beowulf, Yamato Takeru essentially functions as the epic hero of his tales and serves as a symbol of national pride in Japanese history. Similar to other cultures, the Yamato dynasty of Japan is traditionally linked to godhood through being attributed as direct descendants of the creator gods of Japan (thereby granting them the sociological equivalent of the divine right to rule), which is emphasized further in the godly/heroic depictions of royal figures such as the prince Yamato Takeru.

Legend holds that the Emperor Keikō came to fear his son Prince Ōsu for his brutal disposition when Ōsu revealed that he slew his elder twin, the first prince, who is said to have been rebellious toward their father. In response, the Emperor sends him away (rather than exile him) out of his fear of his son, but the prince continues to remain loyal to his father. During the expansive ventures that follow, the prince goes on to heroically defeat foes of the dynasty and defends the rulers of the realm (Kawagoe). The fact that the prince is neither exiled nor actually

resentful toward his father is significant as this depiction demonstrates his loyalty to the dynasty, thereby installing his loyalty to the developing nation of Japan and enabling his figure to become rightfully exalted as a heroic figure. This aspect of Yamato Takeru's figure ultimately highlights Naoto's capable nature and her rightfulness in her own capabilities, rather than in how others measure her capabilities.

One of the tales that Yamato Takeru is most famous for is the slaying of the warrior brothers of Kumaso (Littleton), but the reason he has been made famous from this tale is not so much because of the slaying of these warriors as much as it is because of the manner in which he defeated them, which is highly linked to Naoto's depiction within the game. Yamato Takeru gained access to the domain of these two warriors through his clever use of subterfuge: he cross-dressed as a maiden and smuggled a bladed weapon into their party within these feminine clothes, which he goes on to use to assassinate both of them (The Kojiki 256). The brothers are notably taken in by his appearance and the mannerisms that he adopts, which quite directly reflects the manner in which Naoto successfully cross-dresses to fulfill her objectives without raising notable suspicion regarding her biological gender. The successes both of these characters experience (both in cross-dress and not) are associated with their intelligence and cleverness, which is an aspect of Naoto's Persona that is deliberately continued on from its preceding form as Sukuna-Hikona in reflecting Naoto's psyche.

The nobility behind both of their intentions in cross-dressing is interesting to consider, as Yamato Takeru uses cross-dressing to fulfill his duty in protecting his as well as the nation's imperial household in an unashamed manner, while Naoto likewise uses her cross-dressing to fulfill her ultimate personal duty, serving as an investigator working to protect the people. This subverts some standards of the stereotypical depiction of shame associated with gender norm-

breaking activities within heteronormative societies, which grants further agency to those who employ this method. However, it is notable that the brothers' belief in Yamato Takeru's subterfuge is employed by the original text in a comedic manner, which would arguably diminish the value of the crossdresser as a respectable person by implying that his actions are a form of comedic relief, but this choice appears to largely be for the sake of shaming these fooled brothers in order to associate shame with enemies of the imperial body rather than for mocking nonheteronormative activities. This observation is supported by the manner in which Yamato Takeru manages to slay the younger brother: the warrior flees, and Yamato Takeru fatally stabs him in the buttocks (The Kojiki), which is a remarkably shameful manner for a warrior to be wounded, let alone fatally.

The shame in this scenario is therefore associated with the non-cross-dressing party, and the cross-dresser is exalted for his actions within this garbing; before the warrior dies, he requests the prince to let him say some final words, which the prince dignifiedly allows. He praises the prince and grants him his famous title of Yamato Takeru before he dies, which the warrior accepts gracefully. What is interesting in this scene is the established hierarchical relationship Yamato Takeru's victory has installed: despite inflicting a remarkably humiliating defeat onto his opponent, Yamato Takeru makes the decision to respect the man as a warrior by not only allowing him to speak but heeding the warrior's words. By making this decision, Yamato Takeru essentially prevents the warrior from being utterly dishonored through his death by accepting the title granted to him in the defeated warrior's final moments. This demonstrates that the social power within this exchange belongs to Yamato Takeru, despite his depiction within a nontraditional gender role as a crossdresser, which elevates his status to a heroic figure within this seemingly nonheteronormative role. Through being associated with this esteemed,

legendary crossdressing figure, the transformation of Naoto's Persona from Sukuna-Hikona into Yamato Takeru demonstrates the manner in which she has come to respect herself has matured to include the respect she has for the emotional journey that she underwent before she reached this level of self-respect.

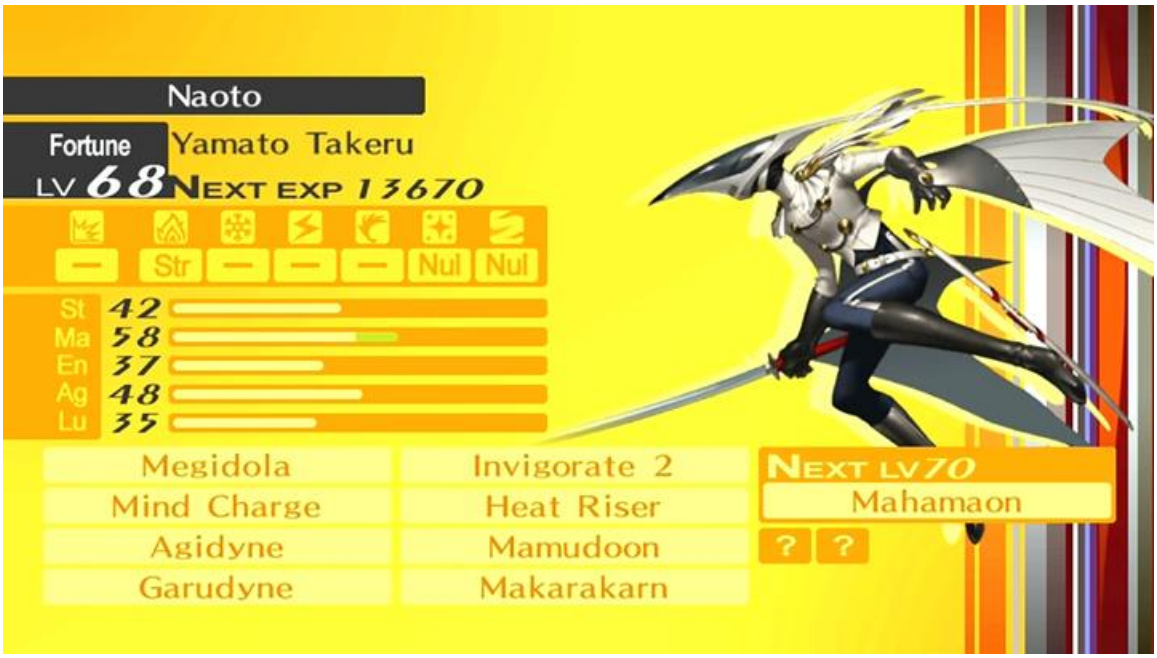

Figure 11. Screenshot of Naoto's evolved Persona Yamato Takeru after the completion of her Social Link

The physical transformation that Naoto's Persona undergoes shifts her Persona into a more traditional illustration of a Persona in that it is now adult-height, reflecting the shift away from prioritizing demonstrating her growing acceptance of the aspects of herself that she rejected and instead depicted the subtler nuances of her developed perception now that she has achieved a more solidified form of self-respect. Namely, the shift in appearance moves away from exemplifying the most immediately apparent aspects of Naoto that she considered made her worthy of disrespect (namely, childishness) and now largely concentrates on the maturity in her perspective of herself as female. The figure of her Persona, in addition to being adult-sized, is not notably masculine in nature despite being the embodiment of a male figure. Rather than

being tall and muscular, her new Persona is slender and petite. The fairy-like elements of Sukuna-Hikona are gently retained in the form of its wings, with the childish elements of heroism reflected in Yamato Takeru's small cape, but the little school uniform has developed into a full-on royal uniform. This princely look is often associated in Japanese popular culture with male pop idols, and Yamato Takeru's depiction wearing it could both allude to the historical figure's royal heritage as well as Naoto's media-inspired title of the Detective Prince. Rather than continuing to resent the label she has been given, the physical evocation of princely elements illustrates Naoto's developed ability to accept this label and negotiate what it defines her as within the scope of her identity.

On Naoto's Psychological and Economical Resolution in her Social Link

The maturity evoked in the development of her secondary Persona is reflective of how Naoto emotionally develops through the events of the game and in building social relationships with her new friends in which she is able to honestly express her gender identity. Naoto gains access to Yamato-Takeru through the player completing her Social Link, which is only accessible later in the game due to her being the final member to join the Investigation Team. The Social Links presented in the game require the player to have developed Yu's stats more intensely as they come about: Social Links that are initially available to the player do not require as many stat developments as later Social Links do. To initiate Naoto's Social Link, Yu must have both maxed Knowledge and Courage in order to complete the side quest to unlock the Social Link option. Due to Naoto's serious personality and task-oriented mindset, Yu has to be on a similar intellectual wavelength in order for her to take an interest in spending time with him

individually and for a specific purpose: her Social Link is instigated by Yu being given a letter to Naoto challenging her to perform a side investigation involving a theft at her family home, the Shirogane Detective Agency. Naoto will not initially reveal all of the details of investigation, but as she grows more trusting of Yu through the player's demonstration of his competence, she will gradually open up to him about what has led up to her becoming the "Detective Prince". Naoto was raised by her grandfather in lieu of her parents, as they had passed away while she was a child, and her household has been running a well-repudiated for generations. Rather than being consumed with internalized pressure to live up to her parents' legacy as detectives, Naoto was drawn to detective work out of a true fascination for mysteries and admiration for detectives. However, Naoto noticed how all of the detective figures she aspired to be like were male, and as she grew older, she began to detach herself from her childhood passion in order to assimilate within the patriarchal structure of the workforce.

The relationship she develops with Yu matures into an essential friendship over the course of the Social Link, which is partially enabled due to Naoto being too caught up in her investigation to realize that she is being emotionally vulnerable during the time she spends with Yu, whom she grows to consider an intellectual partner. Naoto is able to express her emotions more freely in the context of the investigation she undergoes with Yu due to the lack of social discrimination present in the police force, which she has grown so accustomed to that Yu's respect for her as a woman occasionally throws her for a loop. However, it is due to this treatment that Naoto has the opportunity to evaluate how she functions in a social environment and learns how to act for her own benefit in her daily life whilst still embracing her gender identity. Naoto's friendship with Yu enables her the precise conditions that she needs to form a healthy perspective of herself as a woman capable of functioning in a male-dominated society

without having to reject her own feminine identity in order to be accepted in the presence of others. Naoto quietly spends the time of the Social Link reconsidering the psychological pressures she has endured throughout her life under the influence of her society's gendered expectations of how she should live as a woman and consider her gender identity in relation to her economic positioning. With the boon of Yu's respectful support of her during her emotional transition into accepting her own consideration of her identity as legitimate and worthy of value, Naoto comes to accept herself in light of the newfound recognition that she does not have to negotiate how she presents her own gender identity to be considered worthy of social acceptance. By coming to consider how gender discrimination within the framework of her society has resulted in her rejecting her gender identity throughout her life, Naoto developed the self-awareness necessary to reevaluate how she measures her own self-worth and benefit her psychological wellbeing in overcoming the gendered expectations of the social pressures forced upon her.

Chapter 3

The Fragmented Union of Masculinity and Sexuality in a Heteronormative Culture

A Cultural Background of Nonheteronormative Identity in Japan

While on the surface Japan appears to be a relatively LGBTQ+-friendly nation in terms of the absence of explicitly discriminatory laws made historically (such as its lack of anti-sodomy laws) and that traditional values don't have any significant religious-imbedded ideals of the persecution of homosexuals (Shibun). However, without a doubt, homophobia permeates within Japanese society. The nature of this homophobia in Japan is seen in its silence in recognizing the LGBTQ+ individuals, issues, and rights. While homophobia may be more obvious in societies in which violence and public outcry for the condemnation of LGBTQ+ individuals are explicit, the way in which homophobic behavior is integrated within daily life in Japan demonstrates the normalization of discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals on a systemic and cultural level. To avoid dealing with the stigma of being non-heterosexual or nonconforming to publicly accepted gender roles, the majority of LGBT individuals in Japan avoid coming out, especially to those within their immediate family (Tamagawa). This is believed to be due to the overall engrained cultural value of the family within Japanese culture (Tamagawa), which would make coming out to someone outside of the family comparatively less risky. The lack of openly contentious conflict surrounding LGBTQ+ issues is not indicative that Japan is non-discriminatory nation: the way in which LGBTQ+ individuals are dealt with through silent, psychologically driven methods of exclusion reflects how they are often belittled

and are in general treated with the expectation that they will take on heteronormative roles in their daily life if they wish to be included (Shibun).

Masami Tamagawa of Skidmore College notes two particular kinds of homophobia that permeate throughout Japanese society: quiet and familial. While the condemnation of LGBTQ+ individuals isn't considered as openly hostile as other nations, the majority of non-heterosexual individuals experience regular pressures to conform to heteronormative standards in the workplace and their own homes. Since the official recognition of the Meiji Constitution of 1890, the nuclear family unit has been politically and socially recognized as the "basic unit of Japanese society" (Tamagawa). The ramifications of this classification serving to politically enforce traditional gender norms are clearly seen within the ongoing economic gender disparity in Japan but are equally as prevalent in influencing the way in which people can personally identify themselves in terms of both their gender and their sexual orientation. The social consequences of enforcing set norms are influencing how individuals must negotiate with characteristics of their personal identity in order to achieve forms of acceptance within any given role within Japanese society. However, it is important to note in considering these issues from a Western perspective that the Japanese concept of homosexuality itself is different than American perceptions. Homosexual activity is more broadly seen as a lifestyle choice in Japan and as a form of interaction outside of daily, heteronormative life: "Because outward unorthodox behavior is frowned upon in Japanese society, many people who engage in homosexual activity see it as a world separate from their day-to-day lives." (Xu). As a result of this perception, there have been instances of Japanese homosexuals openly rejecting American notions of gay rights and the 'necessity' of their implementation within their culture. This can arguably be attributed to the differing values that have structured the development of both societies, in terms of American

values of individualism versus Japanese values of groupism, and the silent nature of persecution embedded in Japanese culture versus the more typically explicit homophobia prevalent in American culture.

The representation of LGBTQ+ people in popular culture complicates the perception of the reality for LGBTQ+ individuals facing discrimination, violence, and rejection in Japanese society. Homosexual characters are a common trope on Japanese TV shows, as well as transgendered individuals and crossdressing celebrities. However, this media presence is not truly indicative of legitimate cultural respect for queer individuals: the presence of such characters frequently serves to gloss over the cultural tensions present over LGBTQ+ rights and caricaturizes LGBTQ+ individuals. While the presence of LGBTQ+ individuals in the media can be argued to show growing cultural acceptance of LGBTQ+ populations in Japanese society, the fact that these roles are being directed and managed by overarching heteronormative values demonstrates the culturally significant difference between how a heteronormative society *tolerates* nonheteronormative presence rather than *accepting* it as a social norm, as noted by . LGBTQ+ characters are constructed for an assumed largely heterosexual Japanese audience with sensitivity to heteronormative values on the part of the creators in order for a show to be produced and accepted, which leaves the representation of nonheteronormative individuals in the hands of heteronormative forces. As long as it is heteronormative individuals that are in charge of determining how nonheteronormative characters and traits are projected in the media, the binary opposition between the two qualities will continue to reflect heteronormativity as being hierarchically superior to nonheteronormative values, enabling heteronormative values to dominate the formation of Japanese social norms.

The inclusion of nonheteronormative characters within popular culture does not typically embrace the differing values carried and represented by these people: rather, it is a method of controlling the characteristics of and broadcasting selective images of these individuals without accounting for their agency in defining their own lives. However, by including nonheteronormative characters in popular culture, it enables Japan to appear more politically correct on a global scale through its surface-level 'inclusion'. The characterization of LGBTQ+ individuals within popular media (particularly variety shows) often involves making them comedic characters, which at time perpetuates stereotypes of LGBTQ+ individuals as flamboyant, nonsensical, and ridiculous (Tamagawa). For example, Fuji TV came under fire in 2017 for their revival of their 80's character *Homoo Homooda*, whose skits were used to ridicule LGBTQ+ people through negative stereotypes of a 'typical gay man'; the term 'homoo' is in fact a derogatory term used in Japan directly against gay men (Morgan).

Through perpetuating these generic stereotypes, nonheteronormative qualities are 'included' without threatening society's heteronormative structure, as it is this structure that is enabled to define nonheteronormative values for itself. By pointing to the common media representation of such individuals, the question of whether LGBTQ+ individuals are treated with acceptance within Japanese society can be dismissed without probing into the nature of their representation, which glosses over legitimate existing issues such as ongoing lack of protective legislation and continual discrimination, as well as other social issues that are simply easier to overlook. The act of investigating in itself lends more credence to the argument that LGBTQ+ characters may not supportively represent actual individuals, which is a potential point of cultural tension that content creators would likely not be very motivated to confront. However, it can be argued that the acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals has been relatively increasing as pride

events gain more prominence and notable figures in Japanese society have advocated for LGBTQ+ support, quite notably First Lady Akie Abe (Daimon).

The Rejection of Masculine and Queer Identity's Coexistence in Kanji Tatsumi

Figure 12. Concept Art of Kanji Tatsumi

Persona 4's character Kanji Tatsumi is an interesting investigation into how Japanese society treats ideas of gender and limits what it can encompass into heteronormative roles,

particularly in relation to the perception of how stereotypically nonheteronormative qualities make a person ‘less’ in tune with their gender. Kanji struggles with how the perception of others influences his perception of himself, especially in terms of how others regard his gender. Kanji has been belittled throughout his life for his traditionally ‘feminine’ interests (most notably knitting, sewing, and crocheting), which others responded to as if these interests immediately distinguished him as being queer. While he was ostracized for his inherent ‘queerness’ in pursuing these activities, Kanji was naturally drawn to working with fabric due in part to his family running the local textile shop, and the enthusiasm that his family had for the woven arts heavily contrasted with how Kanji found others outside of his family expected him to behave as a boy. The consideration that his seemingly feminine interests indicated that he must be homosexual caused others to treat Kanji as if he were inherently ‘less’ of a male for having these interests, which ultimately caused Kanji to develop a complex towards his gender identity. Just as he was beginning his struggle with whether his interests made him ‘queer’ and whether that made him less of man, Kanji lost his father. Through his final conversation with his father, Kanji misinterpreted his father’s encouragement for him to be strong to be an admission that he didn’t think of Kanji as being like a ‘man’, which fueled his insecurities to the point that Kanji began to associate himself with as much conventional hypermasculinity as possible. As Kanji grew older, he sought to hide his interests from others as well as his gentle personality in order to avoid having his gender identity be rejected. He gradually began to ‘act out’ in a stereotypically masculine fashion by going against traditional authority figures in his life, running his mouth off, and taking on the role of a typical juvenile delinquent. To this end, he alters his appearance by rebelliously dying his hair bleach-blond and took up wearing punk-inspired clothes, often with a common skill motif. His physical appearance only helps him: at six feet tall at just fifteen, with a

scar running across his eyebrow, and the way he parades around his small town with all of the implied antiauthority teenage rage, Kanji easily looks the delinquent he plays.

Kanji's intentions in taking up this image are largely to keep people from realizing his true disposition and ultimately prevent them from rejecting him for his truest self. By taking up this delinquent appearance, Kanji knowingly causes others to distance themselves from him and preemptively reject him for what he appears to be before they have the opportunity to see him being personally vulnerable. This functions well in satisfying the default level of interest most others take in getting to know him before they make their judgements on him. Many members of Kanji's community simply take his punkish appearance at face value and accept it as the basis for defining him in their own minds of who he is: a punk. Kids at his school spread rumors of how he beats people up, strangers innately distrust him, and even members of the police simply believe that he must be a worthless punk just based on his attitude towards them. Interestingly, Dojima is actually aware of Kanji before the player meets him and only demonstrates a bit of wariness in the development of Yu's friendship with him as the game progresses, which reflects how Dojima (a notably wary judge of character) is actually more willing than his professional colleagues to consider that Kanji is indeed a teenager that is poorly trying to sort out some personal issues rather than being the makings of a future criminal.

Figure 13. A screenshot of the player's introduction to Kanji in which he appears on the local news during the Dojima household's family dinner. In this moment, Nanako, Yu, and Dojima himself are all watching.

The player is introduced to Kanji relatively early in the game through a scene where Yu is watching the local evening news program at home with his family. The news segment tantalizingly describes a would-be dangerous scenario in which a reporter goes on the scene of a motorcycle gang brawl only to meet with danger when he decides to interview a witness on the scene. The game screen then shows a poorly blurred image of Kanji as he yells at the reporter to "Get bent!", and Dojima perks up from his newspaper in recognition of his voice. Nanako is surprised her father knows him, and Dojima explains that he knows Kanji because of his history of getting into trouble with authority figures, which is largely due to his defiant, threatening demeanor. Despite the fact that this scene introduces Kanji in association with violence, the game immediately makes Kanji sympathetic to the player as Dojima reveals that his reason for fighting with the bikers is simply because the gangs keep his mother up at night and refuse to

leave the highway by their home. Dojima's brief display of sympathy is interesting in this moment because of the player's knowledge of his hardhearted and skeptical disposition at this point in the game, which makes his quiet revelation that he had hoped that Kanji would have improved behaviorally even more significant in terms of how this scene influences the player's likely consideration of Kanji. This scene builds off of the player's established familiarity with Dojima in order to instill a sense in the player that there is more to Kanji than his demeanor reveals and suggests that if someone as cynical as Dojima had a reason to have hope for Kanji, then there is a strong reason to believe in Kanji's potential to be a good, kindhearted individual.

Shortly after this, the Investigation Team grows suspicious that someone in the Tatsumi family might be the next target of the serial killer, so they begin their first official stakeout mission by following Kanji. Interestingly, this is when the player is first shown Naoto, as it is later revealed that she is simultaneously conducting her own investigation and has approached the Tatsumi family in order to gain further information. The player stumbles upon Naoto talking with Kanji, after which the player hears Kanji confusedly mumbling to himself about his conversation with Naoto. Kanji believes that Naoto is a boy due to her crossdressing, and Kanji is visibly conflicted as he talks to himself about what Naoto meant when 'he' mentioned that he was "interested" in Kanji. The potential homosexual implications in Naoto's statement has unexpectedly stirred questions in Kanji's mind of how he should react to another guy developing a homosexual attraction to him and the reality of how he is actually reacting to the notion of such an interest, which is complicated by his history of being bullied for his 'queer' nature as a child. This is the beginnings of a psychologically complicated moment in Kanji's life as he experiences the loss of stability in his identity; he does not know for certain his sexual orientation, and he

does not know what his sexual orientation means in terms of how it influences his identity as a man.

Kanji's newfound insecurity regarding his sexuality becomes the central focus as the Investigation Team continues their stakeout, which quickly turns comedic as Kanji catches part of the group following him to his meeting with Naoto and starts chasing them around the park in circles, desperately trying to explain how their meeting wasn't indicative of them having a homosexual relationship. Though the group tries to deescalate the situation, Kanji reacts sensitively to their use of the word "strange" and takes it the wrong way when they ask him if he has observed anything around him that he would consider strange out of concern for his safety. Kanji repeats the word aloud before he completely loses his composure, screaming violent threats in a panic and chasing them away (one of them actually runs into a wall out of his fear of Kanji before running off in the correct direction). Later in their investigations, Naoto will reveal to the player that she told Kanji in that she thought he was an odd person and noticed that he took it in a manner that suggested he had a complex, which likely predisposed him to reacting to the term "strange" so extremely. Although this reaction is still partially contributive to the gag approach taken to handling the public question of Kanji's sexual identity, this moment is remarkably effective in capturing the intensity of the internalized psychological turmoil that Kanji is undergoing through this stark depiction of sheer panic. Moreover, the ignorant manner in which the Investigation is depicted in their response to Kanji is intentionally amplified through the gag-like approach taken in this scene and makes it evocative of the flippant manner figures of homosexuality in Japanese media have historically been regarded with.

Kanji's character explores the tricky line between portraying a character in a manner that actively questions the typical homophobic depiction of a nonheteronormative male as a gag

character by making the Kanji the butt of many jokes while at the same time attempting to avoid participating in that same trope. This pitfall is strongly avoided in how dedicatedly the game's narrative fleshes Kanji's existence out as a well-rounded character with diverse and realistic psychological experiences in relation to his gender identity as well as how he relates to the people around him. His experiences of bullying as a child primed him for later insecurity about his gender identity as an adult, and the great cultural association between gender identity with sexual orientation made him particularly vulnerable to experiencing psychological stress upon beginning to question his own sexual identity. With great similarity to Naoto, the surface psychological issue that Kanji is experiencing and ineffectually coping with is actually being driven by a subconscious fear of rejection as well as a great desire for social acceptance. However, in contrast to Naoto, Kanji is more in tune with his desire to be accepted in terms of for who he is and is almost dangerously unwilling to change the aspects of himself that people reject, to the point that his behavior is causing members of his community to ostracize him as a potential criminal. As a response to his fears, Kanji reacts by intentionally acting in a manner that he knows will cause people to reject him for the sake of preventing them from judging him for his true character, which thereby prevents them from rejecting him for his true self.

Analysis of Kanji's Confrontation with his Shadow Self

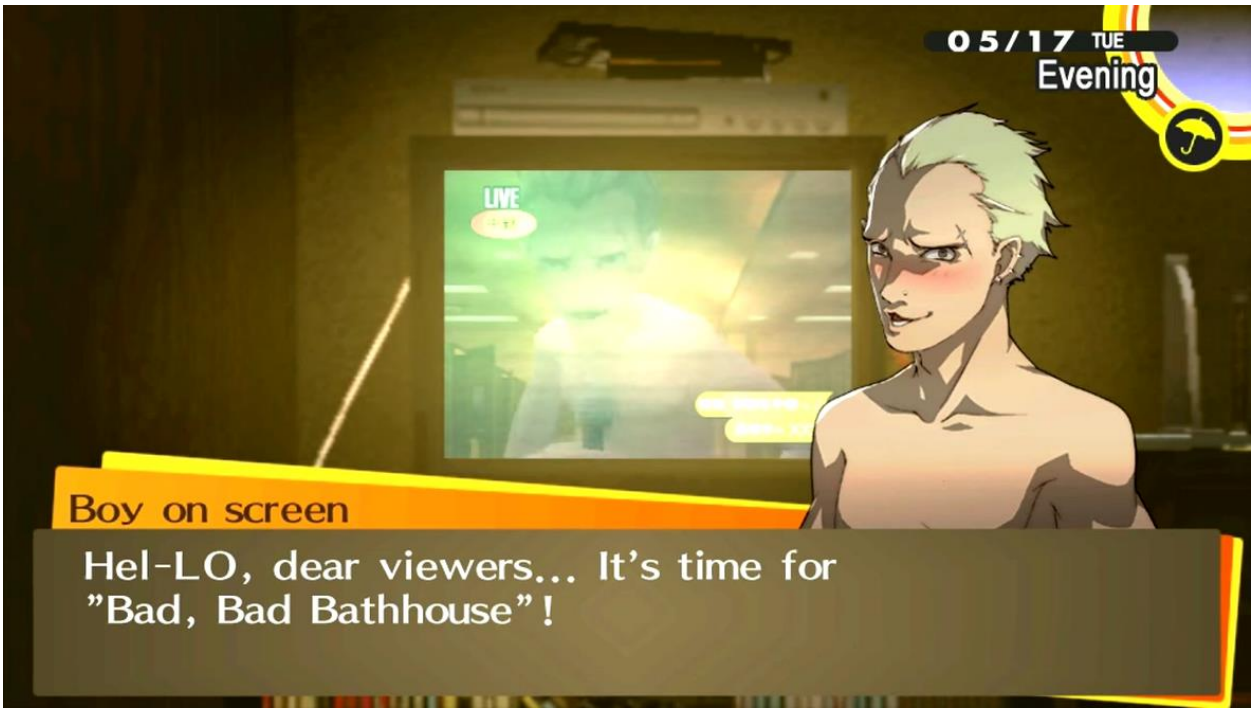

Figure 14. Shadow Kanji as he appears on the Midnight Channel making suggestive innuendo.

Despite the Investigation Team's efforts to prevent the Tatsumi family from being victimized by the serial killer, Kanji is abducted and thrown into the TV world. The dungeon that his psychological conflictions over his identity crisis inspire takes the form of an exclusively male sauna, which is termed the *Steamy Bathhouse*. Kanji's Shadow is notably energetic and conflicts with Kanji's typical tough-guy attitude by encompassing the stereotype of a 'flamboyant' gay man, effeminizing himself by intentionally alliterating in his speech and making suggestive comments whenever possible. Additionally, the Shadow makes whiny noises and exaggerated facial expressions largely for the sake of rubbing salt directly into Kanji's insecurities. This depiction is notably reflective of typical stereotypes employed in the presentation of homosexual characters in Japanese media, which is dually appropriate in that these are stereotypes which deeply haunt Kanji and that this Shadow form appears in the *TV*

world. To top it off, Shadow Kanji is practically nude. The Shadow is only seen in traditional male Japanese undergarments, which consists of a white cloth that drapes over the groin that is tied around the waist and secured in a manner similar to a modern thong. Kanji's Shadow is intent on getting an emotional rise out of Kanji during their encounter, and its scandalous appearance is a deliberate method employed by the Shadow to provoke Kanji, just as its behavior is.

The fact that the Shadow is semi-nude is symbolically significant in how it expresses Kanji's internal psychological conflicts and symbolically 'reveals' his true relationship with these issues. The nakedness of the Shadow contrasts with how Kanji puts on a façade in order to disguise his true emotions, and the vulnerability of this nakedness broadcasts Kanji's own desire to be accepted for his most authentic self while simultaneously demonstrating Kanji's fear in exposing this desire. As the Shadow is a manifestation of the elements of Kanji's identity that he suppresses, the fact that the Shadow wishes to confront Kanji with his rejected emotions demonstrates Kanji's own desire to come to terms with his insecurities. This is further supported by the game's depiction of an individual that refuses to psychologically recognize themselves in their Shadow: the Shadow acts almost incomprehensibly and is driven to violence without the intent to achieve a resolution with its 'real' self, which is what motivates the other specialized Shadows to behave violently.

The layout of the dungeon is relatively simple, with the only real obstacles aside from Kanji's Shadow being the generic Shadows that lurk throughout it which are appropriately associated with Kanji's sexuality (as they appear as flittering cherubs, snakes passionately twisted around each other, and scantily clad musclebound men) and the steam that conceals their movements. Queer critic Jordan Youngblood takes a strong interest in this steam, as he states:

"The motif of steam, while clearly playing on the "steaminess" of Kanji's suppressed desires, also points to the larger rhetoric of concealment and uncertainty. As the player moves through the dungeon, her spatial experience mimics the larger confusion of Kanji's sexual needs: objects appear and disappear, bodies are harder to locate" (Youngblood). The steam serves as a physical representation of what is both apparent and unapparent: the steam reflects Kanji's reluctance to openly express nonheteronormative elements of his identity as well as his personal confusion over the meaning of his unexplored sexuality. Furthermore, Kanji's ongoing struggle to conceal his own insecurities in his daily interactions with others is mirrored in how the Shadows are masked by the steam but are still discoverable upon further investigation: for all he tries to hide, Kanji still wants to be found and accepted for who he is.

The simplicity of this layout contrasts with the exaggerated appearance of Kanji's Shadow, but this simplicity does not merely serve to thematically clash with the Shadow's personality; the simple layout of Kanji's dungeon is reflective of his straightforwardness and his capability of great honesty, which is being underscored by the psychological pressures he is facing as he struggles with how he interprets his identity. The nature of the violent Shadows being the sole obstacle the player faces in reaching the end of the dungeon concentrates on their violent presence and parallels how Kanji allows the public to consider him a violent delinquent in order to prevent them from reaching the true depths of his identity. Kanji's frank nature becomes a pivotal aspect of his character as the game progresses; as Kanji matures, his ability to express himself and utilize this honesty beneficially in his social life improves. The way Kanji's Shadow addresses the Investigation Team is reflective of this aspect of Kanji's nature as well: rather than demand that the Team leave, the Shadow encourages them to further "penetrate the facility" with him. By having the exuberant personality of Kanji's Shadow essentially

overshadow the simplistic design of the construction of Kanji's dungeon, the player is effectively put into the unwitting position of the public that Kanji regularly shuts out by being directed to overlook the underlying elements of Kanji's true disposition.

Kanji confronts his own Shadow at the end of the dungeon and is already having a conversation with it by the time the Investigation Team arrives. Kanji is visibly uncomfortable talking with his Shadow, but he is clearly listening to what his Shadow has to tell him: the fact that he is listening attentively to his Shadow is interesting to consider because of how easily Kanji tunes others out when he does not consider what they're saying worthwhile (to his own detriment at times). The gentleness that Shadow Kanji approaches his real self is reflective of this: there is a mutual coming together in their meeting, which the Shadow comments upon in asking him if he truly wants to "deceive" himself. The conversation only turns when the Shadow wants it to, as the Shadow begins to badger Kanji over his insecurities, going increasingly deeper into the thoughts that Kanji is terrified of. The Shadow treats Kanji as a wuss, sissifying him for his fear of girls, and acts pathetically desperate for attention in order to prod at Kanji's internalized insecurity over his desire for more intimate, accepting relationships.

However, the manner in which Shadow Kanji expresses his fear of females and preference for males is interesting in that: "Each comment links to a question of performativity, with—in a rather fascinating inversion of hegemonic expectations—the female community as arbiters and controllers of heteronormative behavior, while the male community offers acceptance, respect, and the freedom to determine manliness. Being a "queer," rather than a label instituted by male peers as a failure to meet certain expectations of behavior, is here declared by the shadow as a failure to live up to the other sex's assumptions of male identity" (Youngblood). Kanji's experiences of being labelled "queer" by girls has prevented him from fully

understanding his own masculine identity, as evidenced by his continual confusion over his levels of heteronormativity, and so he has to a degree idealized acceptance within male relationships. However, the fact that it is his male Shadow that antagonizes him now over his queerness turns the situation back to Kanji's own insecurities over anyone potentially rejecting him. Upon its defeat, Shadow Kanji actually continues to prod at Kanji (due to Kanji's continual rejection of it) and begins to flirt with the guys of the Investigation Team. It is only when the Shadow yells desperately for someone to accept him that Kanji confronts his Shadow directly. After dramatically punching his Shadow, Kanji quietly begins to explain how he knows that this desperation truly resides within him, and that his greatest issues are not the direct result of his confusion over his sexuality; his greatest fear is that he will be rejected by others for his true self. In encouraging his Shadow to sit up, Kanji acknowledges that he is stronger than his insecurities and that the only way to move beyond his fears of how others perceive his value as a man is to learn how to define it for himself.

Visual Analysis of the Provoked Shadow Kanji

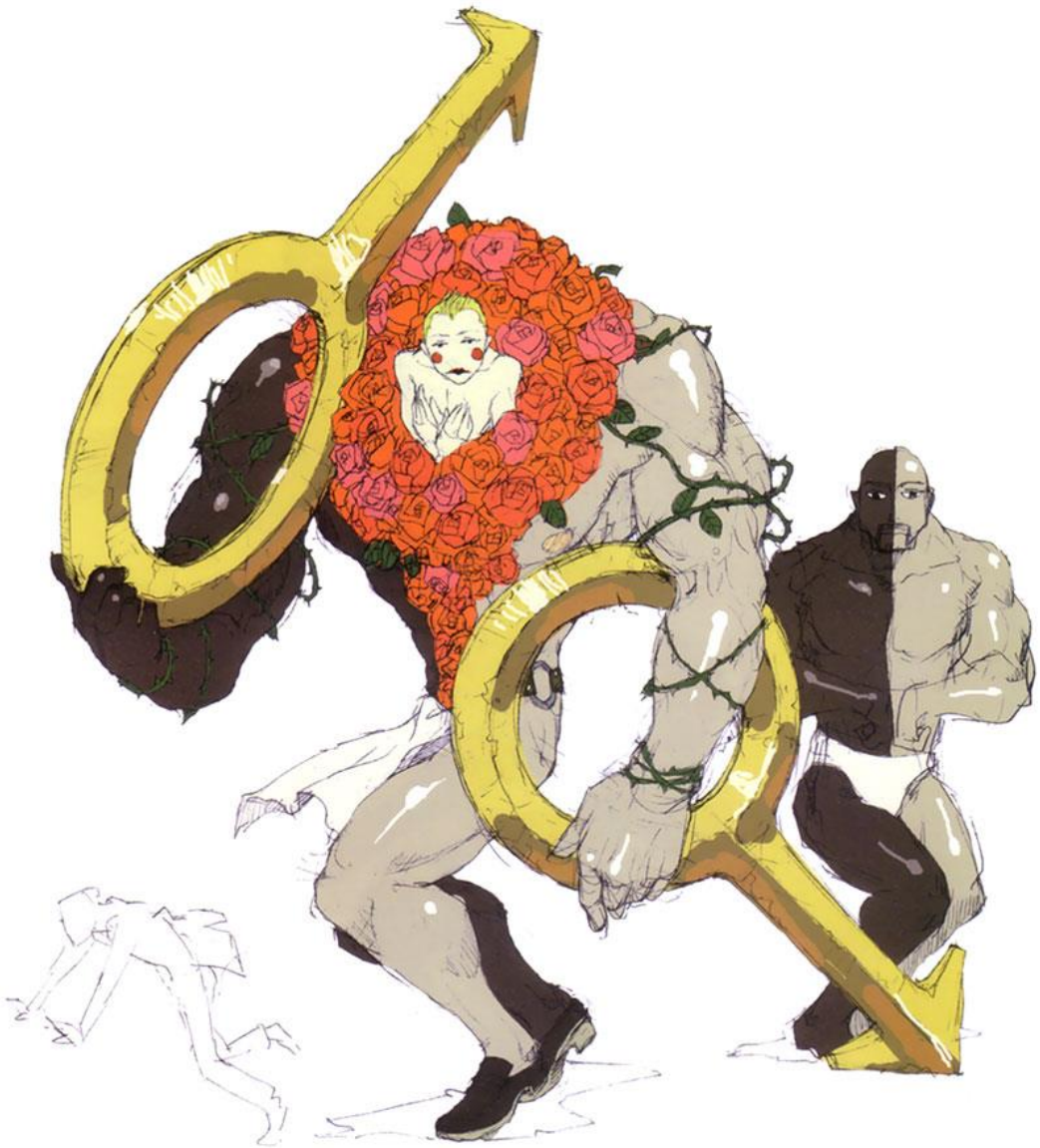

Figure 15. Concept Art of Shadow Kanji In-Combat accompanied by one of the Guy Shadows. A sketch of Kanji in the lower left corner is a visual reference for size.

The transformation Kanji's Shadow takes on in combat is interesting in how it simultaneously evokes differing symbolic representations of gender and puts them at odds with one another (). The Shadow is huge, standing at about three times the size of Kanji (making it

around 18-20 feet), with strong, defined musculature. Its skin tone is split straight down the middle, with the left half taking on a lighter, almost metallic grey tone and the right half taking on a shadowed, pitch-black coloration. This skin coloration is the most direct indicator of the symbolic duality that Kanji's Shadow now embodies. The Shadow carries in both arms an enlarged symbol of Mars, which it uses in combat as weapons and easily tosses in the air as it waits to make a move. While at first the fact that the Shadow is carrying emblems of Mars, the classic symbol manhood, makes it appear that they are meant to serve as visual emblems confirming their representation of masculinity, the complexity of their symbolic purpose is further developed by the fact that the Shadow carries them specifically on either side of its divided body. The depiction of two emblems of Mars linked together at their bases has been used to symbolize homosexuality, but the uncertainty of Kanji's sexual identity is stressed through their isolation. Due to their association with division, the symbols reflect instead an uncertainty of a 'whole' masculinity, which works to implicate the question of how unified aspects of masculinity are with one another. This is further reflected in the glaringly bright trail of roses that have sprouted around where the Shadow's neck would be visible down to its covered groin. Although the roses function as an obvious clash with the black-and-white masculinity that the Shadow's basic structure embodies, they are even more glaringly apparent due to the fact that Shadow Kanji himself is sprouting from the center of these roses, delicately covering his bare chest with a blush. Having Kanji's actual human body emerging from where the Shadow's head is supposed to be is both visibly jarring and directive of the player's gaze, forcing the player to take in these typically 'feminine' images in the framework of an overly 'masculine' body.

The nature of concealment versus nakedness is brought into focus once again with the visual aspects of the transformed Shadow. Both the overall figure and the form of Kanji

emerging from the Shadow's chest both appear nude enough to bring attention to their implied nakedness underneath their coverings: in the case of the humanoid Kanji, its covering consists of the roses that surround it, while the overall figure is entangled in rose vines and retains the cloth that Shadow Kanji wore that covered his groin. However, instead of emphasizing the nakedness of the Shadow, the cloth now works to direct attention to and emphasize the elements of the Shadow that are concealed. The cloth now specifically conceals the area where the rose trail down the Shadow's chest apparently ends: whether it continues past the cloth or ends it is unknown due to the cloth's cover. This creates the question of what is actually being concealed in this picture, as the appearance of the smaller figure of Kanji emerging in the center of the roses creates a circle that mirrors the circles on the dueling rings of Ares. The recognizable point at the end of the ring that denotes the symbol of Ares and therefore asserts the masculinity associated with this symbol is concealed by the cloth, preventing the player from knowing whether this rose path too is a symbol of Mars, a symbol of masculinity that would be physically evoked on Kanji's body, and raising the question of whether these 'feminine' aspects constitute manliness. This is evocative of the Kanji's questioning of whether the 'feminine' aspects of his personality prevent him from being recognized as a man and whether being identified as queer would prevent his association with masculinity, while also furthering Kanji's personal association of femininity with his potentially queer identity. The delicate posture of the smaller Kanji is likewise associated with the conflicting imagery of masculinity in its inherent 'femininity', and the Shadow uses the smaller Kanji as a mouth piece to shout pleas for acceptance throughout the battle; pleas for someone to answer his questions and allow him to assert his identity.

The Shadow appears along with two smaller Shadows that appear in its basic likeness: they are muscular men with differing skin tones on either half of their body, and they situate themselves on either side of the giant Shadow in generic muscle-builder poses that emphasize their muscles. In contrast to Shadow Kanji's cloth, these Shadows instead opt for white speedos and have their own heads attached to their visible necks, which are both bald as well as masculine in facial structure. Through their appearance, they continue the theme of conflicting aspects of identity and division through the supposedly opposite natures: one is dubbed "Nice Guy" and heals Shadow Kanji of his wounds, while the other, "Tough Guy", attacks his opponents. Youngblood interprets their symbolic significance in the following lines: "While there is a clear evoking and mingling of the gay manga genres known as bara and yaoi (bara being akin to a more masculine, "bear" depiction of gay desire, while yaoi takes a more feminine approach) in the two wrestlers, the shadow's neck wreath, and the roles of effeminate "nice guy" and overtly masculine "tough guy," the split black/white appearance of all three bodies also indicates a mixing and rupturing of sexual expectations along the lines of… gender." (Youngblood). He likewise recognizes the questioning of what constitutes masculine identity in terms of the "mixing and rupturing" of gendered cultural expectations. However, an interesting point that he does not describe is that the *bara* genre is well known for being produced by typically gay male writers for gay male audiences and that *yaoi* is especially well known for being produced by typically female writers for female audiences, which tend to risk fetishizing gay men for female consumption. While Youngblood identifies the significance of these designs in his observations, he does not detail how the symbolic connection with these two genres in these figures reflect how Kanji has conceptualized people of differing genders responding differently to homosexuality. In this way, Kanji's anxieties over how he is defined and

interpreted by people of differing gender are likewise reflected in the appearance of the supporting Shadows, as well as how these definitions clash with one another.

Visual and Mythological Analysis of Kanji's Initial Persona

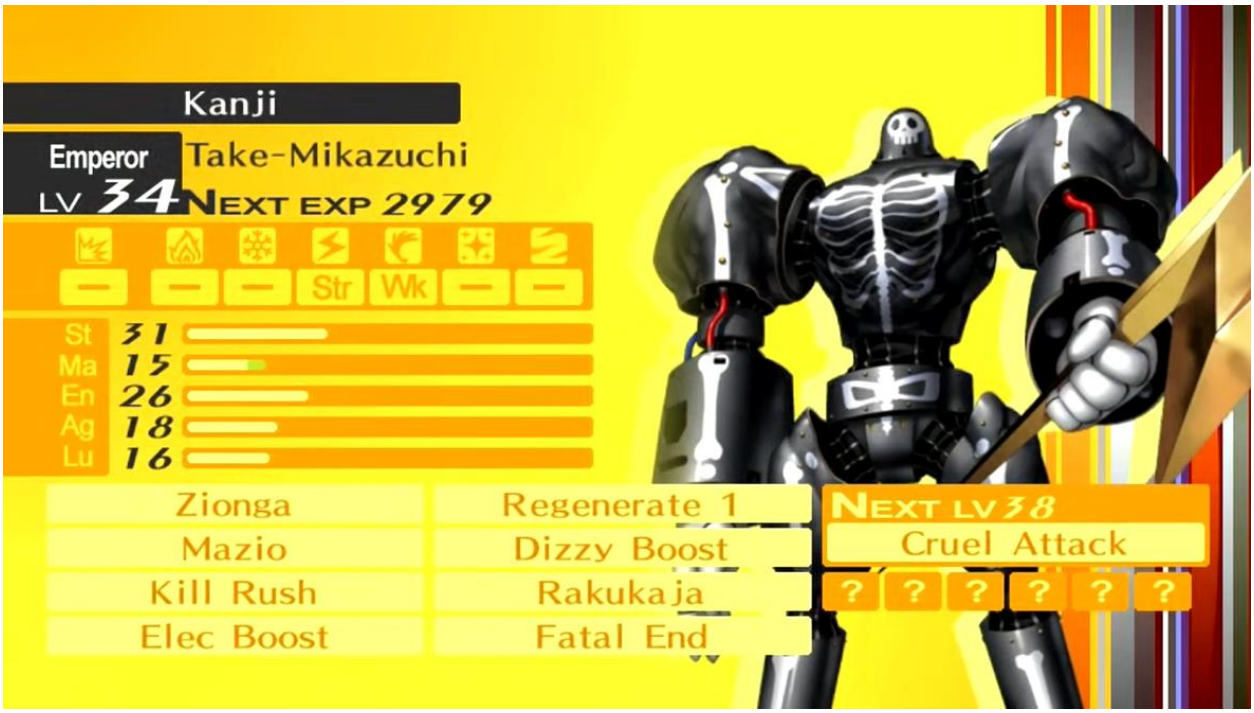

Figure 16. Screenshot of Kanji's initial Persona Take-Mikazuchi

The mythological figure that Kanji's Persona is based upon is the legendary *Take-Mikazuchi*, the Japanese god of thunder and warfare. True to its namesake, Kanji's Persona uses both electricity-based attacks and physical skills that are evocative of Take-Mikazuchi's role as a brave warrior in the conquest of Japan'. According to the Kojiki, Take-Mikazuchi was one of multiple entities born from the blood that splattered from Izanagi's blade when the creator god beheaded his newborn son, the fire god *Hino-Kagatsuchi*, out of grief that his wife Izanami died giving birth to him. Hino-Kagatsuchi's death has been said to have resulted in the formation of

Japan's volcanoes, and his early death instigated many of the legends that have arisen as a result of Izanagi's decision, including those of Take-Mikazuchi, as he is sent by his divine father figure to claim territories of Izumo from the sons of Okuninushi (The Kojiki). The themes of fatherhood in the tales of Take-Mikazuchi and his role as a legendary masculine figure are significant to Kanji in reflecting his own relationship to his deceased father, whom he conflictedly looks back on as a role model for what it means to be a man and transitioning from boyhood into adulthood. The design of Kanji's Persona reflects Kanji's growing comfort with his own insecurities and his growing ability to conquer his own fears in presenting himself to the world: the giant, metallic figure is depicted with the lines of a human skeleton trailing along the contours of its body and red wires mirroring the human bloodstream, deliberately exhibiting the internalized structure on the outside. The presence of this bone-structure directly reflects how Kanji has overcome his insecurities in expressing the vulnerabilities of his masculine identity and now uses this acceptance as his own strength. The fact that Take-Mikazuchi is a direct figure of manliness only amplifies this connection and contributes to the reflection of Kanji's values further in depicting the great importance of his role as a son in consideration of his own identity.

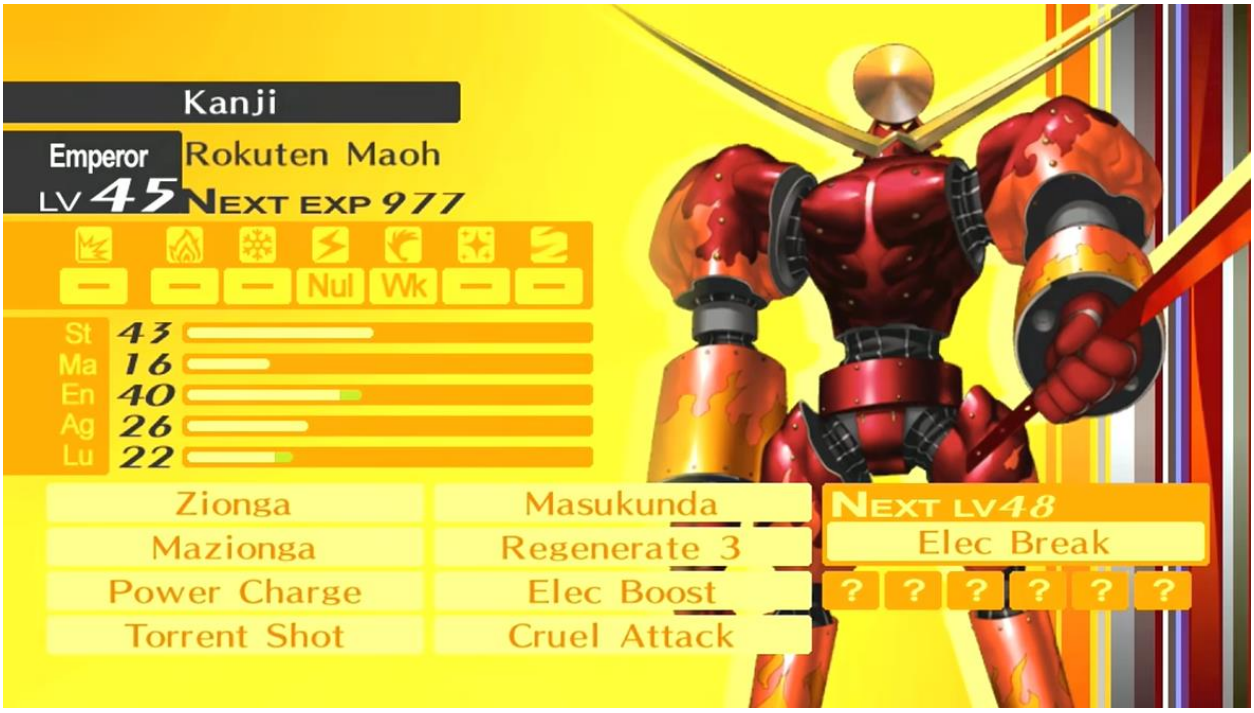

Figure 17. Screenshot of Kanji's evolved Persona Rokuten Maoh after the completion of his Social Link

The form that Kanji's Persona takes on upon the completion of his Social Link is known as *Rokuten Maoh*, which is both a reference to the symbolistic value of the Japanese Buddhist mandala *Dairoku Tenmaou* (Demon King of the Sixth Heaven) and is a title of the legendary samurai Oda Nobunaga. Unlike Naoto's Persona, the transformation of Take-Mikazuchi into Rokuten Maoh is less drastic visually and is subtler in its implications about Kanji's identity. While the Dairoku Tenmaou is associated with evil in Buddhism, as a figure of temptation that leads practitioners away from their spiritual path (Aleph), Kanji's attainment of this form demonstrates how he has reacted to being demonized by his community by embracing his identity and inversely determines he will determine his identity's worth on his own accord. The significance of the physical transformation that Kanji's Persona has undergone is deliberately

subtle in that its new appearance underscores the fact that the shape of its body has not been remarkably altered by providing stark contrast to its previous form through its now bright colorization and the illustrated flames reaching up its body. Similar to how Shadow Kanji's subtler aspects were concealed by its dramatic flair, the flames that now decorate the Persona's body create shock-value that removes attention away from their symbolic significance: the torso of the Persona is now highlighted as if to show the musculature of a naked chest. The flames are not simply decorating the body of the Persona: the flames are consuming the form of a human man.

This subtle design detail is a nod to the death of Japanese ruler Oda Nobunaga at the temple of Honnō-ji, where he was forced to commit suicide by his own general, which ended his quest for power. As his enemies laid siege on the temple, Nobunaga is famously believed to have had his page, Mori Ranmaru, set the temple ablaze with his dead body within it for the sake of preventing his remains from being collected by the attacking force. While Nobunaga is most renowned for his historical significance in the political establishment of Japan through his activities as a cruel, ambitious warlord in the 16th century, his role as a warrior is not the most symbolically significant aspect of himself in relation to Kanji's psyche. It is the quieter fact that he is historically rumored to have been a practicing homosexual that his connection with Kanji is more strongly established. Neill notes in his work on documenting the historical development of homosexual practices the *shudo* tradition of Japan; *shudo* emerged during intense warfare during the Sengoku period (1478-1605), in which the practice of older samurai warriors establishing a loving bond with younger warriors was idealized and considered a very valuable tradition to be carried on by generations of samurai warriors. Nobunaga's lover in this traditional relationship was believed to be the very page that died alongside him in the blaze of Honnō-ji, and their

relationship in their war-torn land has been romanticized for centuries (Neill 283). The fact that Nobunaga's homosexual activity is not the most famous aspect of his character is reflective of how some of the subtlest aspects of Kanji's character are what establish the most crucial foundations of his psyche. The established connection between such a legendary figure and Kanji is in part a very quiet revelation of Kanji's sexuality, which has been questioned constantly throughout his life and throughout the game. In evoking a homosexual figure as Kanji's evolved Persona, which is the embodiment of his matured acceptance of his own identity, it is revealed that Kanji has come to terms with the homosexuality within his identity and the great impact being considered queer has had on his life through his developed acceptance of himself as a man.

On Kanji's Psychological and Economical Resolution in his Social Link

The emotional growth that Kanji experiences during his Social Link is what enables him to develop a healthy approach to handling his insecurities, which he learns to emotionally manage in his daily life in order to properly express himself to the people around him. Kanji's Social Link with Yu can be initiated only after hearing a rumor in their school that Kanji has been bullying other kids, which allows the player to have Yu confront Kanji over what is going in. Through the serious conversation that follows, Kanji comes to see Yu as someone that he can actually rely upon, and for the first time in his life, he finds someone that he feels he can comfortably confide in about his insecurities. Kanji has grown anxious to change the aspects of himself that prevents him from being honest with other people after his confrontation with his Shadow, but he is discouraged by instances where he falls into old habits of pushing people away that hinder him from actualizing his desire to change. Yu provides him with emotional support as

Kanji comes to realize that such change will take time, and that making the efforts to change will indeed help him in the long run. Over the course of the Social Link, Kanji continues to be regularly profiled by the local police as a suspicious figure, but he comes to meet people that respect him for who he truly is, which grants him the courage to openly express himself in public, regardless of how he thinks he will be received for his 'queerness'.

This courage comes from the realization that there are people in his life that accept him for who he is and see value in him as a person. The support Kanji receives from Yu as he continues to struggle with his public perception aids him in coming to this realization, just as his growing ability to recognize the acceptance he is receiving in his community is. During the time Kanji spends with Yu, they meet a young boy that comes to idolize Kanji and is enthralled by his abilities as a seamster. The interactions Kanji has with this boy challenge his insecurities of being rejected by people who come to know his true nature, and the change that he wants to experience in his life is bolstered by the fact that he is receiving the social acceptance for the nonheteronormative elements of his personality that he has so dearly desired throughout his life. This is further encouraged by the fact that the more that Kanji is honest with himself in helping the young boy with his problems, the more that the boy demonstrates his admiration for him. This is the exact reverse of the rejection Kanji received in his childhood; having a young boy respect him for his talents contrasts against Kanji's perception of how the world sees him and how he saw himself as a young boy, believing that his 'queerness' made him susceptible to rejection. Kanji is encouraged by both the boy and Yu to start selling his knitted toys at his family's textile shop, which his mother is highly receptive to, despite Kanji's uncertainty over the quality of his craftsmanship. The acceptance that Kanji begins to realize that he is receiving from others is what allows him to make the decision to openly express himself to adults, which

demonstrates how Kanji has come to fight the misconceptions that he has allowed people to associate him with out of his fear of being rejected in order to be seen for his true self.

Kanji comes to face his own insecurities about how others perceive his worth as a man through determining how he perceives masculinity itself in the light of being accepted for his nonheteronormative traits. Over the course of the Social Link, Kanji reveals to Yu how he has been compensating for how he believes his father perceived him in terms of his masculinity prior to his death, which is what pushed him to adopt an overly hypermasculine appearance and violent attitude in his daily life, striving to protect his mother by fighting others off instead of confronting them rationally. In addition to the insecurities he developed over his masculinity as a bullied child, Kanji has clung to his father's parting words: "If you're a man, you have to become strong". This infuriated Kanji, as he began to believe that his father didn't see him as being worthy of being a man, but after reflecting on his confrontation with his Shadow, Kanji began to more critically question the meaning of being "strong" just as he had been questioning the meaning of being a man. Kanji admits that he doesn't understand what his father meant when he told him to be strong, but he believes that he can gain a better understanding of strength by being his true self. Through the revelations that Kanji has during his Social Link, Kanji begins positively expressing himself in his daily life by openly selling his cutesy crafts in his family's shop, dreaming of becoming an arts and crafts teacher after graduating from high school, and accepts his nonheteronormative identity as making him worthy of being a man.

The stark differences between how provocatively Kanji's Shadows are depicted and how subtly his Personas comment upon his identity are not meant to undermine the psychological development that he has undergone through the process of coming to embrace his own identity. Rather, the design of Kanji's Shadows and his Personas are meant to function in different ways.

Kanji's Shadows are meant to appear confrontational, as the role of Shadows in the game is to confront characters with the most repressed and rejected elements of their psyche, which is deliberately reflected in the manner they are designed. Kanji's Shadows serve to blatantly question his own psychological response to his uncertain sexuality and masculine identity through their provocative depictions. Personas, on the other hand, are meant to more quietly reflect how the character they represent has grown to accept themselves in their social contexts and how they have overcome the social issues that have challenged them in their lives.

The subtleness employed in the design of Kanji's Personas is reflective of how practicing homosexuals in Japanese society tend to treat their sexuality as an element of their identity amongst other elements, rather than how in American conceptions one's acceptance of their homosexuality as at times equated to being 'out' in social spheres. The ambiguity in the design of Kanji's Personas is intentional, as it builds upon the ambiguity through which practicing homosexuals in Japan culturally live with in their social spheres. Rather than failing to dynamically comment upon Kanji's acceptance of his queer and masculine identity, the subtleness in his Persona's designs reflect how he has quietly come to accept the more 'queer' elements of himself in his own culture. As the provocativeness in his Shadows' appearances reflect Kanji's psychological and emotional immaturity, the appearance of Kanji's Personas reflects how his developed acceptance of his personal anxieties has permitted him to develop psychological stability in maturing into a healthy young man.

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The Pennsylvania State University, *The Schreyer Honors College* Graduation May 2019
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The Psychological Consequences of Patriarchal-Embedded Cultural Norms on Modern Workers in Society as Investigated in a Japanese Video Game

- Analysis of how the depiction of human psychology has developed and been presented in video games
- Investigation on how Japanese and American cultural norms have interacted through the exchange of stories
- Examination of how the patriarchal development of the Japanese economy limits expression of social roles

Undergraduate Literary Research | Penn State Beaver & Erie August 2015 – April 2019

- Detailed studies on the influence of the evolution of philosophical discourse and cultural norms in literature
- In-depth analyses of classical and contemporary texts identifying the social significance of literature
- Reflections on the consideration of philosophical and biological concerns regarding the human mind

COMMUNITY SERVICE INVOLVEMENT

Recipients: **Local Families** | Greater Pittsburgh Area, PA Summer 2008 – Present

- Providing support and aid in the preparation of community-related events for disabled children
- Assisting individuals through providing emotional support, physical aid, and ensuring appropriate care
- Continuously promoting caring, understanding, and loving treatment towards children disabled or otherwise

HONORS & AWARDS

- **Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society**
- **Sigma Alpha Pi** | The National Society of Leadership And Success
- **Penn State College of The Liberal Arts English Department Award** | Distinguished Student
- **Penn State Behrend Outstanding English Major Award** | Distinguished Student
- **Penn State Behrend Archie Loss Outstanding Thesis Award** | Award for Academic Excellence
- **Penn State Beaver Campus Scholarship** | Award for Academic Excellence
- **Blue and White Scholarship** | Honors Student Award for Academic Excellence
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- Aided in the continuous and timely overhaul of all physical documents to electrical formatting
- Sustained and monitored the conversion of urgent, confidential documentation to an accessible format
- Advocated for the improvement of document organization and helped restructure the archiving system

SKILLS

- Software: Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint
- Other Significant Coursework: Art Philosophy, Human Psychology, and Biological Science