

Consuming Pleasures: Women, Sexuality, and Postfeminism in Post-Growth Japan

(快樂を消費する：成長後の日本における女性、セクシュアリティ、
そしてポストフェミニズム)

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論文の内容の要旨

論文題目 Consuming Pleasures: Women, Sexuality, and Postfeminism in Post-Growth Japan

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In Japan, as a result of an education system and mainstream media that denies women active sexualities, and the limited success of second wave feminism, the rhetoric of women’s right to sexual pleasure never gained a strong foothold. Second wave feminism made great inroads into legislation, but widespread cultural change remained elusive—particularly in regards to female sexuality. This dissertation is a study of representations of female sexuality in post-growth neoliberal Japan. Based on more than two years of fieldwork conducted in the Tokyo area and discourse analysis of various media I question why feminist conceptualizations of women’s right to pleasure have failed to make inroads in a Japan that clings to a pronatalist, pro-growth ideology as the result of growing anxiety over the country’s economy and future. I examine women’s magazine *anan*, alternative sex education providers, and the growing number of female-friendly pleasure product companies who are working to change perceptions of female sexuality and contemplate whether their work can be considered feminist. This sector—an example of what Andi Zeisler (2016) has termed “marketplace feminism” may be thoroughly commercialized, yet it also offers a space in which women may explore discourses of sex and pleasure that were not previously available.

In Chapter 1, I examine the social conditions of contemporary Japan that deny female pleasure and explain how second wave feminism failed to address desire. I then

detail the methodological challenges associated with this research and explain how I addressed them. Chapter 2 traces the history of women's magazine *anan* and its yearly "sex special issue", arguing that the potential for the magazine to perpetuate a feminist agenda was there in its early years, only to be lost as commercialization and celebrity culture took over. In Chapter 3, I analyze sex education in Japan and the raft of sex self-help literature, medical specialists, and non-government organizations working to educate the public on issues of sex and pleasure. Finally I consider why they cannot break into the mainstream in the wake of the "gender free" backlash. Chapter 4 examines the contemporary sex toy industry, its customers, and the women responsible for a new generation of sex-positive businesses. I reveal that the sector both offers spaces for the exploration of notions of pleasure, while commercializing female desire and encouraging women to subscribe to phallogentric ideas of sex. In Chapter 5, I examine the female-friendly pornography industry, explain the reasons behind the porn industry's move to cater to a female clientele, and illuminate the marketing strategies the sector employs to appeal to women. Finally, I consider the way in which the consumption of pornography can be considered transgressive, whilst simultaneously commercially co-opting women's sexual desires.

Throughout each chapter, sex, pleasure, and information are demonstrated to be commercial products. Sex for pleasure's sake, for *women's* pleasure's sake, is almost nonexistent. Instead, it is viewed through a neoliberal lens in which everything can be packaged, marketed, and sold. The women involved in the industry are compelled to participate in paid affective labor in the form of sex-positive businesses in the hope that they may find satisfaction in their work and affect social change. Within neoliberal Japan however, these small spaces for the exploration of female sexuality may serve as a form of "vaccination" against more active forms of feminist engagement as women are propelled to

demonstrate their progressive stance on sex, whilst reiterating their desire to be beautiful and attractive to men. Feminist discourses of pleasure filter in from overseas, mediated by women who have developed an interest in female sexuality and presented through the lens of consumer capitalism—a small-scale form of marketplace feminism. The subversive behavior of the women outlined in this dissertation is thereby simultaneously made possible by the commodification of female desire, and commodified by the market in which it appears.

Finally, I conclude that despite its links to consumer capitalism, marketplace feminism in the female-friendly product industry may just offer a space for feminist exploration. The women in this thesis are engaging in transgressive acts in that they are not quietly putting their sexuality to use in the service of men and the state, but are instead seeking to find new and creative ways to be sexual beings in an environment that does not welcome, or even tolerate, such behavior. That the female-friendly sex-positive industries exist at all indicates that there are many women involved in such transgressive behavior and the ongoing backlash against “gender free” and sex education since the mid-2000s suggests that the dominant forces of contemporary Japan legitimately fear the subversive potential feminist sex-positive discourses, and feel they must remain engaged in an ongoing battle to suppress them. Within this unwelcoming environment, purveyors of female-friendly pleasure products provide room in which to discuss issues of female sexuality that have previously been overlooked. These serve as spaces for education and feminist consciousness-raising as women discuss not only sexual pleasure, but also birth control, work, family, and child-rearing. Inadvertent everyday feminism, rather than explicitly activist feminist engagement is the result. “Small victories”—in the form of women discovering that they have the right to pleasure, discussing the injustices they experience as women, or realizing that perhaps they do not need men—abound.

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Author's Note

Romanization of Japanese words follows the modified Hepburn system, with the exception of long vowels which are represented using macrons as ā, ī, ū, ē and ō respectively. Excepted are place names and other Japanese words which have been adopted into English, such as Tokyo, Osaka, manga, and anime, which are presented un-italicized and in their conventional English spelling.

The Japanese naming convention of family name preceding given name is utilized throughout, unless the individual has demonstrated a preference for or published using the English convention.

Translations of book, film, television program titles and other materials published in languages other than English are given in both their original language and the English translation, as devised by the publisher or distributor. All other translations are my own work.

1. Laws Over Love: Japanese Feminism and the Problem of Sex

On a sweltering July day in Tokyo, I am crammed into a bright pink room located on the second floor of a non-descript office building. The narrow space is filled with nearly 30 women aged between 20 and 60, all dressed in various interpretations of the event's one-word dress code—lingerie. We pass around a bottle of champagne, raise our paper cups, and toast Kitahara Minori in celebration of her female-friendly sex shop, the Love Piece Club, reaching its 15th anniversary. Kitahara thanks the participants and gives a short speech, mentioning that when she was growing up in the 1980s women were taught almost nothing about sex. She recalls girls having babies in school toilets, being forced into having sex by classmates, and believing that they had no control over their own sexuality. Kitahara concludes that much has changed, but that there is still a long way to go in a country in which the slang for penis—*chinko*—is perfectly acceptable language for children, yet its female counterpart—*manko*—is considered an obscenity.¹ She raises her paper cup, tells the audience that masturbation is their one and only “eternal friend”, and finishes with a rousing call of “*manko banzai!*” (to the cunt).

As the event progresses, I take a tour of the various workshops on offer. In a back room, I join in a workshop on harness and dildo use, but decline politely as the leader—a Love Piece Club staff member—asks if anyone would like to try one on. She explains how strapping on a harness and dildo under her trousers makes her feel powerful as she moves about the city, enthusiastically grasping her crotch for effect as we all giggle. Later in the

¹ This is reminiscent of the differences in English between the words “dick” or “willy”, compared to the much more offensive “cunt”. Of note however is the lack of commonly used word for female sex organs in Japanese. The gap between the medical terms *joseiki* (female sex organs), *chitsu* (vagina), *gaiinbu* (vulva), *inkaku* (clitoris) and the more confronting *manko* is often filled with katakana versions of the English vagina (pronounced u-wa-ghina). Interestingly, the clitoris is usually referred to in a cute, familiar way as *kuri-chan*, shortened from *kuritorisu*.

day, artist Rokudenashiko appears with a group of women she has been leading through a decoration *manko* (*decoman*) workshop. A few hours earlier, the women waxed their pubic hair and had Rokudenashiko take plaster casts of their bare vulvas, decorating the plaster after it dried in ways that symbolized their relationships with their genitals. Rokudenashiko displays the results along with works from her own personal collection, including a bright pink glitter-covered *decoman* resplendent with Hello Kitty motif and a relatively sparse *decoman* accentuated with a padlock glued to the clitoris. Most intriguing however is the participant who painted her *decoman* in camouflage, covering the mounds in tiny plastic toy soldiers with guns raised. She explains that her *manko* is contested ground, often invaded and dominated by men, symbolized by the figurines. Rokudenashiko encourages her workshop participants to open up about their relationships with their bodies by sharing her own story of how she had hated her genitals, underwent a labiaplasty which failed to solve the problem, and finally learned to love her body through the practice of her art. Throughout the event Rokudenashiko seemed like a genuine woman, if a little unusual, but I never thought of her artwork as particularly provocative as it blended into the dildos, vibrators, pornography, and sex self-help books displayed prominently throughout the event space.²

Celebrating with the women in 2012 I never dreamed that I would see Kitahara and Rokudenashiko arrested just two years later. In July 2014 police detained the artist after an

² Known by the pseudonym Rokudenashiko (good-for-nothing girl), artist Igarashi Megumi may have an unconventional career, yet she has not completely opted out of a “mainstream” lifestyle. In April 2016 she announced her engagement to musician Mike Scott, and revealed that she was expecting a baby a few months later. The pair met in the wake of the artist’s arrest and Scott supported Rokudenashiko throughout the trial. He has even recorded a theme song for her with his band The Waterboys. Rokudenashiko’s choice to marry a non-Japanese man may be construed as a way in which to opt out or escape the gender pressures placed on her as a woman in Japan. See Kelsky (2001) for a discussion of this issue. Nevertheless, the artist’s choice to marry and have a child is in great contrast to her colleague Kitahara Minori, who has been vocal of her dislike of the institutions of marriage and motherhood and the constraints they place on women.

investigation into a project in which she made 3D digital scans of her genitals and emailed the resulting data to several people. Recipients received the files in return for providing financial assistance through crowd-funding to build a full-sized “pussy boat” (*manbōto*, a portmanteau of “*manko*” and “boat”)—a kayak in the shape of the artist’s genitals with the seat positioned in the vagina, surrounded by the labia and clitoris. Rokudenashiko was eventually released without charge but remained under investigation. In December of the same year police raided the Love Piece Club (where Rokudenashiko had been working part time, as well as displaying her art), seizing paperwork, computers, art work and a number of cute “manko-chan” figurines for which the artist is known (figure 1). Rokudenashiko was re-arrested, along with proprietor Kitahara Minori. After being held for several days Kitahara was released without charge. Rokudenashiko was less lucky, held for a number of weeks before being charged with several obscenity-related crimes and released on bail.

In May 2016 Rokudenashiko was found not guilty of displaying obscene materials publicly for exhibiting vagina-shaped artwork at the Love Piece Club as the court deemed the items too colorful to resemble real vaginas. On the charge of distributing 3D data of her vulva Rokudenashiko was found guilty of obscenity and fined ¥400,000. The artist is considering appealing the ruling. There is a particular irony in prosecutors attempting to prosecute Kitahara and Rokudenashiko for displaying obscene objects in the middle of a sex shop overflowing with vibrators and dildos. The reality is however that images of female genitalia can be considered so obscene they have to be severely sanctioned, while the annual Kanamara and Hōnen Festivals—at which giant erect penises are hauled through the streets—grow bigger every year.³ In the Japanese press, reactions were mixed.

³ Had Rokudenashiko’s “manko-chan” displays at the Love Piece Club been more lifelike she most likely would have been found guilty of both charges and faced a much steeper fine, an issue the artist criticized as demonstrating that the law still viewed her genitalia as obscene objects.

Alternative online media provided a sympathetic space for Kitahara and Rokudenashiko to argue their cases. In the mainstream media however, Rokudenashiko was belittlingly described as a “self-proclaimed artist” (*jishō geijutsuka*) and portrayed as somewhat of a joke. Even the judge in Rokudenashiko’s case described the pussy boat’s artistic merit as “too low to balance out its sexually titillating nature”.⁴ Throughout the entire ordeal the artist’s central message and motivation for her work—that women need more positive representations of their sexuality—was completely overlooked.



Figure 1. Rokudenashiko’s Manko-chan character.

⁴ See Japan Times, 2016. “‘Vagina artist’ Igarashi loses obscenity case over 3-D data but is acquitted over pop art replicas” Accessed May 9, 2016. <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/05/09/national/crime-legal/vagina-artist->

Japan is a society saturated with sex. Red light districts can be found scattered around all major transport hubs, pornographic manga are available for purchase at every convenience store in the country, and the pornography industry is one of the largest in the world. To the uninitiated Japan appears to have few taboos regarding sex, and is instead a country that openly celebrates a wide variety of deviant and fetishistic sexual desires. The truth however, is far more complex. While male sexuality is lauded, female sexuality remains hidden from view, wrapped in discourses of reproduction, and rarely discussed. When female sexuality is considered, women are usually situated as the object, rather than subject. In contemporary Japan, women are positioned not as independent sexual beings. Instead, women are objects of male sexual desire, mothers reproducing subjects for the state, or consumers supporting the growth of the economy. As David Evans argues, developed economies employ policies and pressures “seeking to maximize private domestic commodification whilst developing women’s access to public leisure and lifestyle consumption, all the while asserting traditional family values and the crucial role of the female in maintaining and retaining them” (1993, 242). Within this ideology, as Breanne Fahs describes, “woman is marked as object—and can only have value to the extent that she subscribes to this status—she is stripped of her own subjective desire” (2011, 184). Stripped of their subjective desire, women become objects whose sexuality must be co-opted and utilized to ensure the future of the nation—through reproductive sex.

Stemming from the interwar years in which women were encouraged to “give birth and multiply” (*umeyo, fuyaseyo*) in order to strengthen the wartime state, this functionalist view of female sexuality has sustained throughout the majority of the postwar period. In 1969, a report published by the Nikkeiren (a major economic interest group) recommended that Japan’s remarkably progressive abortion law be revised to remove the clause that allowed women to seek abortions for “economic reasons” (responsible for 99.7 percent of

abortions) “in order to secure the necessary labor force in the population” (Takeda 2005, 166).⁵ In other words, women should be forced to continue unwanted pregnancies for the sake of Japan’s economic growth.⁶ Growth is the central tenet of modern Japan—population growth, economic growth, and the growth of Japan as a global power (Garon and Maclachlan 2006; Norgren 2001; Takeda 2005). Yet since the mid-1970s, Japan has experienced below replacement level birth rates, a recession during the 1990s widely referred to as “the lost decade”, and the loss of its status as the world’s second largest economy to China. As the “lost decade” becomes three and population decline begins in earnest, anxieties about the future of Japan continue to grow (Allison 2013). Japan has entered a post-growth era. Nonetheless, the hegemonic ideology in Japan today remains pro-growth—growth at all cost. Within this ideology male and female sexuality are positioned very differently. Male virility is highly valued, signifying the strength and power believed necessary to get Japan back on track. Much media coverage has been dedicated to what Ayako Kano calls hand wringing over “young women rejecting marriage and motherhood, young men unable or unwilling to engage in carnal pursuits, and ‘sexless’ couples neglecting their conjugal activities” (2016, 29).⁷ One central reason for this anxiety is that in popular discourse the decline in the Japanese birthrate is linked to a “decline in Japanese potency on the global stage” (ibid.). This “potency” is expected to be present in men, yet even today women are widely believed not to experience the same levels of sexual desire as men, instead desiring sex for procreation rather than pleasure.⁸ The

⁵ The Nikkeiren (Japan Federation of Employers’ Associations) was absorbed into the Keidanren (Japan Federation of Economic Organizations) in 2002. The organization is considered the mouthpiece of big business and maintains the power to influence government policy, with growth a key mission.

⁶ Feminist activist Tanaka Mitsu posited that the revisions were “an attempt to imprint the logic of productivity in women” (Tanaka 1972, quoted in Takeda 2005, 169).

⁷ See Castro-Vázquez (2016) for a detailed discussion of reproduction in Japan today, and Chapter 3.

⁸ The endurance of discourses of weaker female desire will be explored in greater detail in

naturalization of these ideologies throughout the postwar period means female pleasure is an area of great contestation, highly problematized, and often overlooked. Although forgivable within the confines of heterosexual marriage, female sexuality becomes contested territory once liberated from reproduction.

Elise Tipton (2005), drawing on the work of Gayle Rubin (1984), explains that “‘sex is always political’ and the media is one of the ‘primary producers’ of sexual ideology”. As women’s bodies and sexual behavior have long been symbolic sites of nationalist traditions (Yuval-Davis 1997), media purporting to cater to women’s sexual desires offers a fascinating window through which to examine the role of women in contemporary Japanese society, the way in which their desires are simultaneously manipulated for the benefit of the nation, and completely ignored. Women matter, because as Luce Irigaray explains, “it is because women’s bodies—through their use, consumption, and circulation—provide for the condition making social life and culture possible, although they remain an unknown ‘infrastructure’ of the elaboration of that social life and culture. The exploitation of the matter that has been sexualized female is so integral a part of our social cultural horizon that there is no way to interpret it except within this horizon” (1997, 174). In Japan, women’s sexuality is not their own, and the Japanese state demonstrated through the Rokudenashiko case that it is willing to resort to coercion to ensure this remains the case. The exercise of bio-power in contemporary Japan ensures that sexuality is “the theme of political operations, economic interventions... and ideological campaigns for raising standards of morality and responsibility” (Foucault 1978, 146). Most important for Japan is the way in which sex is “put forward as the index of a society’s strength, revealing of both its political energy and its biological vigor” (ibid.). In post-growth Japan, despite the extraordinary social change of the past 70 years, the state clings to the idea that

it is growth—population and economic—that will ensure future prosperity for the nation.

This is not to say that attempts to counter hegemonic ideologies of reproduction and growth do not occur. The advent of the internet has, to some extent, allowed for the diversification of messages about female sexuality. These messages however remain firmly on the margins of society, unable to make inroads into the mainstream.⁹ As will be explored in greater depth in the coming chapters, this results from socialization and education, from media discourse, and—as will be canvassed in the following section—the failure and inability of feminism to address the issue. Nevertheless, within this hostile environment exists an burgeoning market for what I term “female-friendly pleasure products”—pornography, sex toys, and books produced for, and actively marketed to, women. Female sexual pleasure may be relegated to the margins, but within the realm of consumer capitalism exploration is increasingly possible.

Dubbed “marketplace feminism” by Andi Zeisler, this form of feminism “is the result of a larger neoliberal framework that over the past five decades has come to unite politics, economics, and culture in a web of individualism, privatization, and decreasing focus on both community and compassion” (2016, loc 1369). Marketplace feminism is at once a product and a marketing tool which seeks to change feminism from a political movement to a decontextualized and depoliticized popular movement linked with fashion and celebrity. The positioning of feminism as a form of consumer capitalism has a long history in the western context. In contrast, in the case of Japan feminist discourses have

⁹ Of the research that does examine how women attempt to subvert hegemonic ideologies much has focused on direct feminist activism (Dales 2008, 2009; Fujimura-Fanselow and Wakakuwa 2011; Mackie 2003). More specific explorations of female sexuality in Japan most often center on ladies and boys love comics (Jones 2002, 2005; McLelland 2000; McLelland et. al 2015; Mori 2010; Welker 2006), as spaces for women to “work within and against the local heteronormative paradigm in the exploration of alternatives” (Welker 2006, 841). It is arguable that feminism can be found within these texts and their adaptations into other media forms, however they are rarely able to cross into the mainstream (and their feminist elements are severely compromised when they do).

rarely been used in the marketing of products for women. In recent years, however, as a result of pressures felt in a shrinking domestic market, manufacturers of adult products have increasingly sought to expand their market beyond their traditional male customer base. Consequently, discourses remarkably similar to Zeisler's marketplace feminism have appeared in Japan as the female-friendly pleasure product industry attempts to expand its reach. It is this area with which this dissertation is primarily interested as I explore how consumer capitalism in neoliberal Japan is allowing for the examination of ideas of female sexual pleasure in ways that feminist activism was never able to make possible.

Feminism in Japan—the Unresolved Problem of Sexuality

A brief examination of the status of women in Japan today would most likely conclude that the feminist movement in postwar Japan has been far from successful.¹⁰ Diverse feminist groups may have contributed to considerable improvements on the level of legislative reform—yet cultural change has largely remained beyond reach. In a bid to reverse Japan's post-growth fortunes by encouraging greater female participation in the workforce, Prime Minister Abe Shinzo called for a Japan in which all women can “shine” (*kagayaku*) at his 2013 UN General Assembly address.¹¹ Yet today Japan has one of the lowest rates of female workplace participation in the developed world and on average women do five times as much domestic work as men.¹² For their part, many women demonstrate a great

¹⁰ It is impossible to provide a full description of the history of Japanese feminism here. See Mackie (2003) and Kano (2016) for comprehensive histories of feminism in Japan, Shigematsu (2012) for a detailed history of *ūman ribu* (women's lib), Dales (2009) for contemporary feminist movements, and Norgren (2001) and Takeda (2005) for discussions of the role of feminist activists in debates surrounding reproduction.

¹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. 2016. “Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality.” Accessed April 5, 2016.

http://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/pc/page23e_000181.html.

Newsweek. 2016. “*Nihon wa sekai ichi 'otto ga kaji o shinai' kuni.*” Accessed May 13, 2016. <http://www.newsweekjapan.jp/stories/world/2016/03/post-4607.php>.

¹² See Ayako Kano and Vera Mackie's 2013 article in the East Asia Forum for a skeptical analysis of Abe's “womenomics”. Accessed September 17, 2016.

resistance to integrating into the Japanese labor system, lest they be subjected to the same long hours, compulsory transfers, and dearth of free time as the typical salaryman.

Additionally, in post-growth Japan increasingly those who are interested in pursuing a career find that the shift towards precarious labor means fewer stable full-time positions are available, and that wages are often low.¹³ As a result, despite the financial dependence such a choice would entail, in 2015 one in three women aged 15-39 expressed a desire to become a fulltime housewife.¹⁴

As Kano notes, Japanese women today “find themselves at a paradoxical juncture... They are often celebrated as carriers of tradition and sources of stability, yet they are also often pitied by their sisters abroad as second-class citizens inhabiting a first-class nation. They are portrayed by many as happy consumers content with the status quo, but they are also criticized for their seeming complacency in the face of blatant sexual inequality” (2016, 2). The apparent reluctance of women to embrace the goals of second wave feminism indicates that for many women the movement either failed, or was unable, to address their concerns and desires. Accordingly, today Japan ranks 101st in global gender equality rankings and women still face discrimination in many arenas. As recently as 2015 the Supreme Court ruled in that married couples must legally share a surname (96 percent of couples opt for the husband’s surname), and that women (but not men) must wait 100 days after a divorce before they may remarry.¹⁵ In the media female idols and

<http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2013/11/09/is-shinzo-abe-really-a-feminist/>

¹³ See Allison (2013) and Chiavacci and Hommerich (2016) for further discussion of the impact of deregulation of the labor market and the shift from lifetime to precarious employment.

¹⁴ The Diplomat. 2016. “Poll: Japanese Women Don’t Want to Lead.” Accessed May 13, 2016.

<http://thediplomat.com/2015/07/poll-japanese-women-dont-want-to-lead>.

¹⁵ World Economic Forum. 2015. “Global Gender Gap Report 2015.” Accessed April 5, 2016.

<http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/rankings>.

tarento are regularly sanctioned for perceived transgressions involving dating or relationships while their male counterparts continue their careers with impunity.¹⁶ The question of how feminists were able to make great legal gains whilst failing to address cultural attitudes is complex, and necessitates an understanding of the Japanese feminist movement, along with the environment in which it was forced to operate.

The ideology of *ryōsai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother), cast a long shadow on postwar Japanese womanhood, with motherhood influencing women's social movements right up to and beyond the second wave feminist activism of the 1970s.¹⁷ Kathleen Uno argues that “although overt attempts by the state to dictate womanhood have decreased in intensity since 1945, a transmuted vision of women that often emphasized their difference from men as homebound wives and mothers continued to influence state policies toward welfare, education, employment, sexuality, and reproduction at least until the late 1980s” (1993, 294). In the immediate postwar period, the Labor Standards Act (*Rōdō Kijun Hō*) of 1947 dictated the rights of workers, with particular provisions for female workers. All women were entitled to menstruation leave (deemed necessary due to a shortage of paper and cotton essential for the production of sanitary products), and pregnant women and new

¹⁶ Idol group AKB48 member Minegishi Minami was forced to shave her head and apologize publicly after being caught leaving her boyfriend's house, in contravention of rules which ban the group's members from dating. “Girl next door” *tarento* Becky also saw the possible end of her career after it was reported that she had been in a relationship with a married man. The man, singer Kawatani Enon, has seen his career go from strength to strength in contrast. Courts have even weighed in on the issue, handing down decisions both in favor of, and against dating bans for idol group members. See Japan Times. 2016. “Court Rules Pop Idol Has Right to Pursue Happiness, Can Date.” Accessed April 6, 2016. <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/01/19/national/pop-idol-right-pursue-happiness-not-liable-damages-breach-dating-ban-court/#.VwSuVPI96a6>.

¹⁷ The “good wife, wise mother” ideology was the cornerstone of women's education, beginning in 1899. It asked women to contribute to the nation by dedicating themselves to managing the home (including helping with household enterprise when necessary), caring for adult members, and raising children—labor that would complement their husbands' work outside the home. See Uno (1993) and Koyama (2012) for a detailed explanation of the history of *ryōsai kenbo*.

mothers were entitled to maternity and nursing leave. One unusual provision however was that all women, whether mothers or not, were treated under the law as “potential mothers”. As Mackie explains, “the legislation does not distinguish between women who do and do not have children. All women are protected from shift work or late-night work on the grounds that they potentially have responsibility for childcare. The health of young women is protected for future childbearing” (2003, 181). These laws were categorized as “protection of motherhood” (*bosei hogo*), a revealing phrase which indicates exactly what was expected of women, whether they be mothers, workers or both, in Japanese society of the time. This is not to say that valuing motherhood was forced upon women exclusively by the state. Within the context of Japanese feminism motherhood has always held a privileged position, with “maternal love” (*bosei ai*) considered a value worth retaining (Buckley 1997, loc 562).¹⁸ Nevertheless, in the 1960s and 1970s feminists became increasingly eager to campaign for an expansion of women’s roles beyond that of wife and mother.

Tiana Norgren reminds us that “it was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that feminist notions of the rights of women as individuals began to infiltrate the Japanese discourse on women's activism, loosening the ideological stranglehold of ‘good wife, wise mother’—although by no means vanquishing it” (1998, 78). A number of factors combined to challenge the image of motherhood as the ultimate goal for women. The first was the growth of second wave feminism, stemming from the involvement of women in the new left student movement of the 1960s and 1970s and the discrimination they experienced there. Vera Mackie explains how many women “came to feel dissatisfied with their marginal role in these organizations” (2003, 147), an experience which spurred women to

¹⁸ See Garon (1998) for a discussion of the way in which women have willingly cooperated with the state’s “good wife, wise mother” ideology.

work to become “the subjects of their own struggle” (ibid., 149). Schooled in political protest, these women came together in to form the women’s liberation movement (*ūman ribu*), described by Setsu Shigematsu as closely approximating “radical feminism in other contexts” (2012, loc 147). Shigematsu explains how *ūman ribu* served as a “feminist critique that deciphered the interlocking logics of capitalism and imperialism and its reproduction through the regulation of gender roles in the family system” (ibid., loc 109). At the same time, feminist literature was filtering in from overseas and provided a framework through which women could articulate their concerns (Ueno 2009, 190).¹⁹

Society however, was slow to change. Mackie explains that “it was not until the debates of the 1980s on equal opportunity and protective legislation... that this view of women as weak and in need of protection of a strong state was finally analyzed and transcended” (2003, 125). 1976-1985 was designated by the UN as the Decade for Women and by the 1980s Japan was increasingly under international pressure to reform its laws in relation to equal opportunity for men and women, with the expectation that Japan would become a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This act required, among others things, an overhaul of workplace law and in 1985 the Equal Employment Opportunity Act (Danjo Koyō Kikai Kintō Hō) was passed. Women were now afforded the right to work in the same way as men, with motherhood (real or potential) no longer (legally) defining their workplace participation. Feminists were divided over the new laws, with some seeing them as removing protections for women without ensuring equality would follow (Kano 2011, 42).²⁰ Others saw the EEOA as a starting point, with further gains for women to come once

¹⁹ As will be discussed in Chapter 2, throughout this period the media played a large role in redefining women’s roles for a new era.

²⁰ These predictions proved somewhat accurate as the post-EEOA work environment differed dramatically to the equal and fair workplace imagined by proponents of the law. Jobs were no longer split along gender lines, however the introduction of systems

they made inroads into the working world. Kitahara Minori and Rokudenashiko came of age in this period, and were shaped by the major social change they saw taking place. Kitahara writes of the hope that society would offer her different options than the previous generation of women, spurred by the diversification of media representations of women (2011). This in turn informed her politics and set the stage for Kitahara's sex-positive activism as the limitations of second wave feminism's focus on legislative change became apparent in the period that followed.

After the legislative success of the EEOA progress slowed until the 1990s when a number of factors combined to offer the potential for true change. Kano describes the period as defined by "fortuitous circumstances" with the conservative Liberal Democratic Party forced into a coalition with two progressive parties from 1996-1998, combined with the influence of global feminism and the rise of domestic grassroots feminism (2011, 45-46). In 1996 Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryūtarō established the Advisory Council for a Gender Equal Society (Danjo Kyōdō Sankaku Shakaku Shingikai) with the goal of creating a Japan in which "every Japanese national can have dreams and objectives for the future, fully exercise their creativity and spirit of challenge" (Osawa 2002, 54-55). The stated objectives of the council may have been equality between men and women, however behind its establishment lay Hashimoto's belief that the realization of a gender-equal society was key to tackling the low birth rate (Takeda 2005, 176-177). Practical concerns, rather than true cultural change, were once again central. Nevertheless, leaving aside ideological underpinnings, this particular period offered perhaps the best opportunity to date in which to truly alter the gender ideologies of Japan. In 1998 the government passed the Basic Law for a Gender Equal Society (Danjo Kyōdō Sankaku Shakai Kihon Hō),

categorizing workers into *sōgōshoku* (career-track) and *ippanshoku* (non-career track) served to further entrench inequalities in the workplace. See Mackie (2003), Ueno (2009), and Takeyama (2016) for details of post-EEOA company policies.

marking what Tomomi Yamaguchi describes as “the mainstreaming of feminism” in Japan (2014, 541), and for the first time feminists found themselves given central roles in planning and policy. Kano describes the move as “state feminism”, arguing that it was “remarkably progressive” in nature (2011, 42). In the wake of the Basic Law local governments began creating municipal ordinances and plans directed at gender equality, resulting in all prefectures but Chiba having gender equality ordinances in place by 2011 (Yamaguchi 2014, 545). Suddenly, the concept of gender equality—titled “gender free” by educators—had moved beyond the work of feminist groups and into the mainstream.²¹

Despite these successes, many feminists were critical of academics and activists who chose to work with government authorities, accusing them of selling out. Yamaguchi (2014, 548) describes how “groups with close governmental ties became stronger thanks to increased funding, while the grassroots groups that remained critical of governmental projects struggled”. Yamaguchi criticizes the actions of The Tokyo Women’s Foundation (established in 1992 by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government), explaining how the group’s “project on ‘gender free’ functioned to legitimize this transformation of power by ignoring the history of grassroots feminism in Japan and by situating bureaucrats and scholars as the appropriate leaders of feminism to educate ‘ignorant’ citizens and ‘enlighten’ them on issues of gender consciousness” (ibid.). Yamaguchi argues that the rhetoric of “gender free” altered the history the feminist movement, with the choice of the term “gender free”, rather than the previously favored term *danjo byōdō* (equality between men and women) serving to erase decades of feminist activism (2014). To some extent this criticism was warranted as decades of grassroots activism were overlooked in favor of the work of a privileged few women who found favor with the government. Nevertheless, the work of

²¹ The use of the term “gender free” was not without controversy. See Yamaguchi (2014) for an explanation of the complex history of the expression.

the Tokyo Women's Foundation and other similar organizations could also be read as an attempt to take gender issues into the mainstream in the only way they believed would succeed—by forming partnerships with government. These partnerships would allow feminists to move beyond theoretical debates, influence education policy, and in turn could pave the way for a true cultural shift.

In the 1990s women's studies became firmly established as a field of academic study, a development which allowed discussion to move beyond the question of how to deal with two categories of people—men and women—and instead permitted feminist theorists to “distinguish between bodily difference (sex), socially constructed difference (gender, and sexual practices and psychic structures (sexuality)” (Mackie 2003, 234). Yet feminism becoming a part of the academy did not propel wider social understanding of gender issues. Instead, “abstract and theoretical” debate among feminists abounded (Yamaguchi 2014, 556) as conservative backlash against “gender free” and perceived “extreme education” was growing. Conservatives politicians, intellectuals, and journalists attacked the “gender free” ideology, along with the subject in which it was taught—sex education. Conservatives conflated the two, arguing that teaching children about the specifics of sex would encourage sexual behavior, and that teaching students about “gender free” would present an ideological threat to the traditional family. While feminist groups continued to inwardly focus intellectual discussions on definitions of “gender” and “gender free”, antifeminist backlash gained momentum, in part due to concerted efforts by a small number of powerful individuals, conservative media, and politicians keen to return to a pro-growth, traditional family ideology. Opposing “gender free” on the grounds that it would lead to the destruction of masculinity and femininity (erasing biological sexes), contribute to “extreme” sex education (*kageki na seikyōiku*), and promote homosexuality and “free sex” (ibid., 559), conservatives mounted a sustained campaign to quash any gains

made in the mid-1990s.

The fear that the promulgation of a “gender free” ideology through sex education conducted in schools was a feminist plot to destroy traditional gender roles—and with them the culture and tradition of Japan—propelled conservative groups to rail against local ordinances, education policies, and the teachers and activists who promoted them. Abe Shinzo went so far as to declare gender equality a “threat to Japanese culture and family values” during his first term as prime minister (2006-2007) (Schieder 2014, 55).²² To counter the perceived threat to culture and tradition, 2006 Abe cabinet advisor and Meisei University Professor Takahashi Shiro advocated for widespread education reforms, the revival of “such institutions as the Family and the State”, and called for stronger family bonds in which “fathers should teach children a sense of order and rules, while mothers should nurture children” (Fujimura-Fanselow and Wakakuwa 2011, 341, capitalization in original). Takahashi also opposed sex education which advocated sexual autonomy, promoted “chastity education”, and argued that “behind the radical sex education with its emphasis on sexual autonomy lurks a dangerous ideology that aims to dismantle the community of the Family and the State” (Takahashi 2004, in Fujimura-Fanselow and Wakakuwa 2011, 341). Takahashi specifically targeted feminist groups, stating that “feminism is ideologically linked to radical sex education, which advocates sexual autonomy and human rights education” (ibid.). While a limited number of politicians were involved directly in the debate, conservatives took to the internet as a way to ensure “the antifeminist discourse appeared as if it was flourishing in many different sectors, which impacted the direction of real-life politics and activism” (Yamaguchi 2014, 557). As a result, the backlash against “gender free” gained momentum, resulting in the persecution of

²² Abe arguably still subscribes to this ideology, only adopting policies promoting women’s workforce participation out of necessity due to Japan’s worsening demographic crisis, aging society, and resulting labor and revenue shortages. See Kano (2016).

educators over “extreme” sex education, and quashing efforts to bring gender equality to mainstream Japan.²³

In the wake of the backlash, while national laws and many local government ordinances remained, the opportunity for widespread social change was lost. Feminist groups were blindsided by the vicious nature of the attack, particularly as they had believed that the introduction of the Basic Law for a Gender Equal Society (Danjo Kyōdō Sankaku Shakai Kihon Hō) and subsequent establishment of ordinances around the country indicated that they had begun to make significant gains after decades of agitating for change. Laura Dales argues that Japanese feminism “is not bound to formal political movements” which has permitted the movement great flexibility (2009, 122). Yet this decentered approach, combined with a lack of clear goals beyond legislative change, and infighting as a result of feminists’ involvement with government authorities ultimately resulted in the movement being portrayed as extreme in the media, and viewed as unappealing and irrelevant by many women. Instead, in the decade since the backlash conservative discourse has once again dominated and feminist voices have been further marginalized.

Despite the beliefs of conservative critics during the backlash period, very little feminist activism has actually focused on the issue of sexuality, and even less on the rights of women to sexual pleasure. Consciousness-raising was central to western second wave feminism and much of it occurred in regards to sex, sexuality, and the body (see Baxandall and Gordon 2001; Gerhard 2001). For second wave feminism in Japan, as Kazuko Tanaka explains, “the aim of the new feminist movement of the early 1970s was to transform the entire cultural outlook from the standpoint of the oppressed segments of society through the consciousness-raising of women” (Tanaka 1995, 346). As detailed above Japanese

²³ The issue of “extreme” sex education will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 3.

feminism never truly achieved these aims, particularly in relation to sexual pleasure. In her extensive history of Japanese feminist movements Mackie writes that sexuality was a major focus of the women's liberation movement in 1970s Japan, but that "sexuality" mainly referred to heterosexuality, with lesbians marginalized within mainstream feminist movements (2003, 159-160). Mackie argues, by the time Tanaka Mitsu's famous 1970 article "Liberation from the Toilet" (*Benjo kara no kaihō*)—in which women Tanaka used "toilet" to signify women as object for male release—was published commodified sexuality "was already becoming apparent in Japanese popular culture" (2003, 144-145). Tanaka's article, written as a manifesto for the group *Tatakau Onna* (Fighting Women), railed against the "mother" or "whore" dichotomy and the conventions of sexual behavior that meant that women were condemned to be one or the other. Tanaka believed women's sexuality was suppressed, masculine sexuality was distorted, and that the system served to uphold the "patriarchal family system and the capitalist system" (Mackie 2003, 145; Shigematsu 2015).

"Liberation from the Toilet" was the most well-known manifesto from the *ūman ribu* (women's lib) movement of which Tanaka Mitsu was a central figure. The movement "adopted and politicized the term *onna*, a term for women that was imbued with sexualized connotations" (Shigematsu 2012, loc 103).²⁴ As *onna* emphasized sexual beings, women with many desires, and was considered dirty or negative in the 1960s, the use of this term was quite deliberate. Tanaka Mitsu used her position in the movement to advocate for "liberation of eros" (*erosu no kaihō*) and "liberation of sex" (Shigematsu 2015, loc 1618), often in handwritten manifestos she distributed at political gatherings. *Ūman ribu* may have viewed women as beings capable of desire, however the movement did not frame

²⁴ For a discussion of the genealogy of the imported term *ūman ribu* (women's lib) and the impact the use of the "imported" term had on perceptions of the movement see Ueno (in Buckley 1996) and Shigematsu (2012).

discourse in terms of women's rights or sexual subjecthood. The issue of female sexuality has always remained on the periphery of feminist activism, and social consciousness as a whole. Today, as Dales argues, "the issue of female sexuality and erotica is problematic for much Japanese feminist discourse" (2008), and widespread social acceptance of female sexual desire remains elusive.

Tanaka's writing on sex may have been revolutionary, but her ideas on the suppression of female sexuality failed to gain widespread recognition. For the majority of second wave feminists, liberating women sexually meant a focus on contraceptives and abortion, with pleasure notably missing from much of the discourse (see Mackie 2003, 155; Shigematsu 2015). Tanaka Kazuko (1977) writes of new feminist movements in the early 1970s, propelled by the need for "sexual liberation" trying to provide knowledge about the female body to a wide range of women, while others provided information about contraception and fought proposed changes to abortion law and the Japanese government's ban on the sale of the contraceptive pill. The vast majority of postwar debate on abortion and contraception was conducted not from a feminist standpoint, but rather centered on the issue of population control in "chaotic postwar conditions", (Norgren 2001, 37). Abortion was legalized in Japan in 1948, yet even during attempts to revise the law in subsequent decades feminist voices were rarely at the forefront. Many feminists also opposed to the contraceptive pill due to fear of "negative and unnatural side effects" (Shigematsu 2012, loc 3285) and potential "state control of the body", not wishing to rely on a contraceptive method the government could easily regulate (ibid., loc 1425). Although "reproductive control was a major focus of feminist activity in the 1970s" (Mackie 2003, 164), the complete Japanese translation of *Our Bodies, Our Selves* did not appear until 1988, and was nowhere near as successful as its US counterpart.²⁵ Feminists may have viewed

²⁵ This issue will be canvassed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

reproduction as a central area of dispute, but their view of contraceptive technology was colored by their fear that it could be used to control or even harm, rather than the hope that it would provide women the ability to control their own fertility—and with it the opportunity to explore pleasure.

As the dust settled on the legislative successes of second wave feminism 1990s Japan was a country in which women were afforded world class “equality of participation”, yet cultural change had very much failed to materialize.²⁶ Instead, focus fell squarely on consumption as an area in which women could self-actualize, as they molded and performed their identities through the one social arena fully open to their participation—consumer capitalism.²⁷ Tanaka Tōko argues that the 1990s heralded a shift in feminism globally, one from which Japan was not immune (2012, 4-6). The global rise of neoliberalism, combined with the belief that second wave feminism had achieved many of its goals, paved the way for “postfeminism” (McRobbie 2007). Women were encouraged to demonstrate their agency through the consumption of fashion, lifestyle products, and “self-searching” experiences such as travel, and it was young women—with few responsibilities and considerable disposable income—who led the way. If second wave feminism’s *ūman ribu* addressed the *onna*, then post-backlash, postfeminism addressed a very different type of woman—one who found her identity through participation in consumer capitalism. As Akiko Takeyama explains, “women’s liberal politics had thus become complicit with postindustrial consumerism’s endless pressure on people to solve problems and liberate themselves by exerting purchasing power” (2016, 30). Unaware of the struggles of the feminists who went before them, today these women often disavow

²⁶ For a discussion of the Japanese government’s choice of language surrounding “gender equality”, and its insistence on ensuring “equality of opportunity” (*danjo kyōdō sankaku*), over “equality of outcome” (*danjo byōdō*) see Kano (2011).

²⁷ This issue of women, consumption, and feminism will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 2.

feminism, believing that they are not in need of an ideology that paints them as victims (Tanaka 2012, 9). They are often too young to have experienced workplace discrimination, marriage, motherhood, or any of the other arenas in which they may discover that feminist activism is still relevant to their lives. Instead, consumption is painted as liberating and is widely embraced by young women as feminism remains a marginalized movement with little mainstream appeal in Japan today.

Throughout its postwar history Japanese feminism did not, or perhaps more accurately, was *not able* to address the issue of female sexuality effectively. As Kano explains, “control over one’s own body and sexuality has remained an important and elusive goal for many feminists, who point out the extent to which female sexual behavior is still policed, disciplined, and punished in today’s Japan” (2016, 33-34). Consequently, in Japan today there exist very few places in which women can access sex-positive, pro-pleasure messages. Instead, as the following chapters will demonstrate, the provision of places in which women may explore their sexuality in neoliberal Japan is almost entirely left to commercial entities such as women’s magazine *anan*, Kitahara Minori’s Love Piece Club, and a burgeoning market of female-friendly pleasure product purveyors. Within these spaces women demonstrate agency as they contest hegemonic discourses which represent them as lacking in sexual subjectivity. At the same time, however, they are participating in consumer culture in a manner consistent with marketplace feminism. Nevertheless, as I will explore, these spaces may just hold the potential for subversive, sex-positive feminist activism, even if it remains contained within the sphere of consumption.

Let’s Talk About Sex

This dissertation is based on more than two years of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Tokyo between 2011 and 2014. I employed participant observation, interviews, and analyses of newspaper articles, magazines, television programs, and online media dealing

with female sexuality. I began my fieldwork by searching online for female-friendly events and workshops, most commonly shared on Twitter and Facebook. I then attended at the rate of several events a month for approximately two years, and occasionally thereafter. Events were held in bars, restaurants, event spaces, public conference rooms, and shops that had been closed to the public for the night to ensure privacy. Often advertised with names such as “Women Only! Secret Christmas Party” and “Vibrator Girls’ Night Out”, events were frequently open to women only and commonly sponsored by female-friendly sex shops, pornography producers, sex toy manufacturers, and non-government organizations that specialized in sex education (figure 2). Costs ranged from ¥1,000 to ¥5,000 and when held in bars or restaurants light snacks and drinks were provided. Often a gift—ranging from condom and lube samples to sex toys—was provided by the organizers at the end of events and advertising material and pamphlets were ubiquitous. I paid to participate in all events, and as is customary provided small gifts to interviewees as an expression of my appreciation for their time. Takeyama explains the way that most of the businesses she contacted during her investigation of host clubs were willing to consent to her research, believing that “any sort of media attention, including from overseas anthropologists, served their business interests” (2016, 17). Elements of this discourse ran throughout my fieldwork period also—particularly when conducting interviews with company representatives—but for the most part I was treated as a paying customer at the majority of events and workshops I attended.

Most workshops began with organizers imploring participants to respect each other’s differences and promise that no information that could identify anyone involved would be shared outside of the event. Posting on social media was particularly frowned upon, although organizers would usually post a blog about the event in the following days with a summary of the discussion that took place, augmented with pictures carefully taken

from the neck down or with participants masked to safeguard their privacy. Spending an extended period of time in the industry, in time I got to know the main participants and was able to follow up event and workshop observation with one-on-one interviews with a number of these interlocutors. Interviewees in turn introduced people they believed I should speak to for this project, either via email or in person at events, and in this way I was able to collect data from hundreds of women, in addition to conducting dozens of interviews with people working in the pleasure product sector. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic all interlocutors and interviewees received a detailed explanation of the project and were given the opportunity to decline participation. For those who agreed to participate, I guaranteed that no names or identifying information would be revealed. In the case of one-on-one interviews, all were recorded with the permission of interviewees, and interviewees were assured that recording data would be kept private. Despite the warnings at the beginning of events and the sensitive nature of the topics discussed, in the vast majority of cases interlocutors were more than willing to share their stories with me, explaining that they had never really felt “heard”, and that they were thrilled to discover like-minded people who also felt that the issue of female sexuality in Japan was fraught with problems.

Event participants were all women who lived in the greater Tokyo area and were aged primarily in their early 20s to their 40s (although occasionally I came across women well into their 60s and beyond). Most were childless, and importantly all had sufficient time and financial means to be in a position to explore their sexuality by paying to attend events, buying products, and participating in a variety of “self-searching” and education workshops.²⁸ This “self-searching” often began after an encounter with women’s magazine

²⁸ See Adkins (1999), and Gill and Pratt (2008) for a discussion of the way in which involvement in creative work requires participants to be free of care responsibilities.

anan. As will be explored in Chapter 2, from the 1980s *anan* annually published what it called “sex special issues” (*sekkusu tokushū*) which dealt with issues of love, sex, contraception, and, most importantly, pleasure. The majority of the women I spoke to—both event organizers and participants—would cite *anan* as one inspiration for their participation in the sex-positive sector, often claiming that the magazine had opened their eyes to a world they never knew existed. *anan*’s sex special issues may have been revolutionary, but they were also decidedly heteronormative. In keeping with this theme, the women on whom this dissertation focuses are predominantly heterosexual.²⁹ In recent decades, much research into sexuality in Japan has concentrated on sexual minorities.³⁰ Such excessive focus on marginalities has meant that for the most part, the sexuality of heterosexual women—outside of the arena of explicit feminist activism—has been overlooked. This dissertation explicitly focuses on representations and experiences of heterosexual women—women who may not be explicitly involved in feminist activism, yet whose activities reveal much about the status of feminism in Japan today.

Key to the success of my fieldwork were women who had gone beyond simple participation in sex-positive events, and chosen to participate in the industry as even organizers, entrepreneurs, advisors, and volunteers. These women came from a wide range of backgrounds, and were more likely than event participants to agree to be identified by name. Many had been in the industry for years, if not decades, and were involved in such work as sex toy manufacturing and marketing, pornography production, publishing, sexual

²⁹ It is important to note that, as Debra Curtis describes, “homosexual or heterosexual categories do not work empirically because sexual practice does not always follow sexual identity” (2004, 96). While bearing this in mind, for the sake of this investigation I defer to the voices of the *tōjisha* (women concerned) and how they choose to identify themselves. See McLelland (2009) for more on the role of the *tōjisha* and sexual identity formation.

³⁰ For just some of the extensive work on lesbian women in Japan see Curran and Welker (2005), Khor and Kamano (2007), McLelland, Suganuma and Welker (2007), Welker (2010), and Maree (2014).

health, and sex education. In interviews I often I felt that I was being given the “press talk” version of events. Spending many hours with people at their workplaces, events, and workshops however allowed for better understanding of their beliefs, motivations, and struggles, and offered greater insights than interviews alone. When given explicit permission I name companies and interviewees. For those unwilling to be identified I provide pseudonyms and remove any details which may lead to the identification of people or their employers.



Figure 2. Promotional material for sex-positive events.

In addition, on the periphery of these middleclass, often well-educated women were a number of sex workers and former adult video performers, usually from less privileged backgrounds.³¹ These women spoke at events and worked as educators and advisors in the female-friendly pleasure industry. Throughout my interaction with women from the sex

³¹ In Japan, like many developed economies, the term “middleclass” is an increasingly irrelevant social category. See Gill and Pratt (2008) who draw on the work of Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004) to argue for a reconceptualization of divisions, and seek ways to organize solidarity around work beyond traditional notions of class.

industry, I witnessed how they wrestled with the difficult task of straddling their role as “experts” in the field of sex, while also attempting to assert their subjectivity and move beyond the dominant discourse of sex workers as victims. Differences between these two groups of women would occasionally surface during events. Organizers and participants were commonly lauded for making the choice to explore their sexuality. In contrast, while always warmly welcomed, sex workers would often move to preemptively defend their participation in the industry, lest they be subjected to judgement. What both groups shared in common however was their perceived need to justify their interest in sex, and a desire to change discourses of female sexuality in Japan today.

While this dissertation does not deal explicitly with the issue of class, it must be acknowledged that the issue of increasingly precarious labor has permeated every area of contemporary Japanese society, including in the sex-positive circles in which I conducted my fieldwork. As described above, the gap between women choosing to run and attend events, and sex workers acting as experts and facilitators was stark. The issue, however, did not end there. Through my fieldwork I discovered a female-friendly pleasure product sector filled with women for whose activities went far and beyond what could be described as simple work. Inspired by *anan*, and by their own experiences of feeling as though there was no one with whom they could open up about sex, women commonly channeled their own experiences into promoting their companies and events. Accordingly, event organizers were perpetually involved in what Gabriella Lukács describes as struggle to turn their “unpaid emotional labor into paid affective labor” (2015, 488). They viewed the internet age as, as Lukács explains, “a realm of new work opportunities”, and despite their entrepreneurial prowess and goals, to some extent were willing to “accept precarious work conditions” upon which the current Japanese economy is built (Lukács 2013, 47). This precarity offered women something they had been unable to find in traditional work

environments—the freedom to explore and push boundaries. Yet it also meant that they often straddled several careers, finding meaning in their sex-positive work while supplementing their income with work in other industries, as part-time or contract employees. Essential to success in the sex-positive industries is an investment not only of time and labor, but also of oneself. The weaving of individual experience—both as motivation to enter the industry in the first place, and as a way in which to draw other women experiencing similar issues in—is emblematic of the destabilization of the “separation between paid/productive and unpaid/reproductive labor” that Lukács critiques (2015, 488). One element that Lukács overlooks however, is the way in which the phenomenon may not be as significant a shift as she argues. By virtue of their status as women in a society inhospitable to them, my interlocutors in the female-friendly sex-positive sector were perhaps not making that great of a choice. Instead, they were taking on the type of work that has always been overpopulated by women—in precarious, affective and emotional labor. The difference this time is that work in the sex-positive sector was meaningful and fulfilling—a vast improvement on the opportunities otherwise available. Rosalind Gill and Andy Pratt argue that work styles commonly dubbed “precarious” by researchers can also be filled with “deep attachment, affective bindings, and... self-expression and self-actualization through work” (2008, 15). In other words, work filled with pleasure and satisfaction. Angela McRobbie has coined this “passionate work” (2016), a potentially fulfilling yet also highly problematic form of labor. My fieldwork centered on the many women invested in “passionate work” throughout the female-friendly pleasure product sector that has developed in contemporary Japan.

The employment of ethnographic methodologies can be fraught. In her work on the BDSM community in the San Francisco Bay Area Margot Weiss discusses the problems she experienced being viewed as an “outsider” (not a BDSM practitioner), and a source of

curiosity for the people involved in the community on whom she was conducting research (2011). The question of *why* an outsider would be interested in a particular issue is one which requires constant addressing throughout the fieldwork process, even more so when the field is situated in a culture and language very different from the researcher's background. My position as a non-Japanese woman no doubt had an influence on the way in which I was perceived and required me to constantly reflect on my position. More often than not I was the only (overtly) non-Japanese woman in the room. This meant that I became an object of curiosity, and many times felt I represented an idealized "other" from (what my interlocutors viewed as) a western postfeminist paradise. I fielded questions on everything from sex, contraception, pornography consumption, and what men are like *mukō* ("over there", a Japanese expression commonly used to mean "where you're from" in reference to anywhere outside of Japan) and many informants expressed envy that I had grown up in an environment in which feminism had been successful, and where women are able to live life on their own terms. It could be extremely challenging to have to disavow interlocutors of this belief and explain that to the best of my knowledge, no such place on earth exists.

Although the vast majority of my fieldwork was conducted pre-pregnancy the fact that I also spent some of the time (quite visibly) pregnant had an impact on the way in which I was perceived by interviewees and interlocutors, and the conversations to which I had access. Pregnancy is the physical representation of reproduction; a symbol of a woman having "opted in" to a mainstream life, and (inadvertently perhaps) the pro-growth ideology of contemporary Japanese society. As only around two percent of children are born out of wedlock in Japan pregnancy marked me as heterosexual, married, and very much on a mainstream path. This no doubt colored the way in which informants interacted with me, and impacted the information they were willing to share. Unexpectedly,

pregnancy frequently opened doors as the public status of a pregnant body meant that people were more likely to strike up conversations with me and share stories about their own lives and families. My belly appeared to give informants an “in” to speak to me in a way that I had not experienced pre-pregnancy. Male informants discussed their wives’ experiences of pregnancy and birth, often talking about how *taihen* (difficult, challenging) having a child had been and the impact it had had on their marriages. In the case of female informants, since so few were married or had children, questions instead centered around curiosity about the physicality of pregnancy and wistful comments about how much (or how little) they desired a family. Many informants spoke of how they would love to have children, but felt that they would have to sacrifice their careers, hobbies, and participation in sex-positive events and workshops in order to do so.³² These discussions would inevitably turn to my marriage, and whether I would run my household and parent like an “Australian” or in “Japanese-style”, with the assumption again being that Australia (i.e., the west) is a feminist paradise where all domestic work is shared equally between partners.

Charlotte Davies reminds us that “anthropology must give up attempts to find or create populations that are imagined to be circumscribed and isolated from other social forces. Instead they must embrace the complexity of interrelated peoples and search for topics outside their conventional concerns” (1999, loc 676). Since the seminal work of James Clifford (1986) and George Marcus (1998), the very idea that ethnography could possibly be objective has been widely debated and gradually dismantled. The complexity of the lives of interlocutors and interviewees, their relationships, and the information that

³² Many of these comments recalled the debates of Japan’s early 20th century feminist movements as women struggled to reconcile the importance of their role as mothers, and their desires to be free of the great burden of reproduction and motherhood. See Buckley (1997) and Mackie (2003).

they chose to share means that it is impossible to perfectly reproduce every story I heard. Instead, I have chosen to focus on specific discourses that occurred time and time again throughout my years of fieldwork, themes that shone through at every event and in every conversation. Clifford reminds us that “[e]ven the best ethnographic tests... are systems, or economies, of truth. Power and history work through them, in ways their authors cannot fully control” (1986, 7). By placing the focus on the most recurrent discourses I hope that this dissertation can best reflect the truths of my interlocutors and interviewees, whilst place them in historical and cultural context. Nevertheless, as Marcus argues, “probing moral ambiguities and contradictions should be an often fearless goal of cultural critique” (1998, 20). The issues that arose throughout my fieldwork were endlessly complex and filled with ambiguity. I can only hope that I have been able to convey this complexity throughout the following chapters. There is a tendency in writing on Japan to fetishize the country, commenting on weird and unusual phenomena as though they are specific to a particular Japanese set of characteristics or values. As Davies reminds us however, “there are compelling theoretical and ethical grounds for anthropologists to reject a definition of their research as based on exotic others” (1999, loc 676). This dissertation is not the story of an exotic, under (or over) sexed, “other” and it would be offensive to the hundreds of women (and men) who shared their experiences with me to write it as such. Instead, it is an exploration of the limitations and possibilities of feminism in the neoliberal market of post-growth Japan.

Dissertation Outline

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. In the introduction I have traced the history of the women’s liberation movement in postwar Japan, questioning why the issue of female sexuality has never been properly addressed and illuminating the reasons that the issue remains problematic even today.

Chapter 2 examines the history of information about sexuality and consumption in Japanese women's magazines, beginning in 1970 with revolutionary magazine *anan*. I employ discourse analysis to track the shifts in *anan*'s yearly sex special issues from 1984 to today as I seek to explain the links between historical, social, and political influences on women's lives throughout the period, and the magazine's approach to women's sexuality over the past three decades. I conclude that feminism in Japan has failed to reach its full potential as it neglected to fully consider, let alone change wider social perceptions of women's right to pleasure. Instead, discourses of female sexuality have been allowed only within safely demarcated and controlled zones co-opted by the mainstream media.

Chapter 3 canvasses evolving information and education discourses surrounding sex and sexuality in the Japanese media. Beginning with a historical examination of formal sex education in Japan and recent controversies, I investigate the growing ways in which traditional and new media supplement this information. I then examine and the new discourses that are emerging as a result of social change, including an analysis of popular "sexual self-help" books—often written by medical professionals. Finally, I discuss NPOs who have been quick to adopt new technology in order to disseminate information about sex and sexuality to new audiences online, and the impact this has had on traditional discourses of sexuality. This chapter concludes that save for a small number of NPOs, in sex education the notion of female pleasure has remained controversial or even forbidden. While male pleasure is considered a natural, uncontrollable force from which girls must protect themselves, women are told that their sexuality is inexplicably linked to reproduction and the "importance of life". Female pleasure is entirely absent from the discussion.

Chapter 4 focuses on the way in which "pleasure" is taught, marketed and sold to women in Japan through various media—both old and new. I focus on a number of case

studies of female-friendly sex shops, and pleasure events held by women, for women. With the advent of the internet and increasing global commerce, Japanese female-friendly sex shops have been able to not only source products that differ vastly from the Japanese norm, but also create business and education opportunities surrounding pleasure and sexuality. This in turn has allowed for the creation of opposing discourses in which pleasure is no longer in the hands of a male partner, but something that can lead to self-fulfillment and individualization. I examine how sex toy marketing is commonly linked to medicalized discourses of health and beauty, and consider the rift between traditional Japanese sex toy manufacturers and a new generation of female-friendly companies. Finally, I debate whether all avenues for sexual enjoyment must ultimately be colored or controlled by phallogocentric discourses, marketing, and consumption—where even pleasure and individualization become products.

Chapter 5 draws upon fieldwork conducted with female-friendly pornography production company Silk Labo. I analyze the economic factors that led to the birth of the company and the content of its films before examining the multiple ways in which Silk Labo utilizes technology and events to build a community of fans and expand its reach. I then investigate the role of the female gaze in creating a product that draws upon Japanese media tropes to appeal to a mainstream audience whilst remaining both radical and subversive. Finally, I consider the complexity of female-friendly pornography—a product that is at once celebrated as a postfeminist victory for female desire yet is also thoroughly commercialized—and ask if a commercial forum such as that provided by Silk Labo is the only place in which sex-positive ideas for women may be expressed in Japan today.

In Chapter 6 I summarize my findings and consider their greater relevance.

Conclusion

The arrest of Rokudenashiko demonstrates that female sexual pleasure, long denied a place

in the reproductive, pro-growth discourse of postwar Japan remains highly problematic. That the state felt that it must resort to force as it censored the artist for her open celebration of female sexuality reveals how truly difficult it is to make inroads into the dominant hegemonic discourse of Japan today. In the wake of the introduction of government policy advocating for a gender-equal society the late-1990s there appeared to be a moment in which true consideration of gender equality—and accompanying open discussion of sexuality—could occur. This period was short lived however with the return of conservative, hegemonic ideologies in the form of a strong backlash against gender equal policy. This push for a return to “traditional” Japanese family values quashed any hope that widespread social change could occur, and the fact that it was tied to so-called “extreme” sex education was telling. Sex, or to put it more precisely, the potential for women to take control of their sexuality, remains a source of great anxiety.

Feminism in Japan however has been largely unsuccessful in addressing the issue of female sexuality and the limitations of the second wave movement, though highly successful at pushing for legislative change, loom large. Instead, the only spaces in which female sexuality can be openly addressed emerge from consumer capitalism as female desire is co-opted by companies struggling to survive in post-growth Japan. This marketplace feminism may be marginalized, but it also offers the potential for cultural change. Rokudenashiko’s case demonstrates that there are real risks in attempting to upset hegemonic discourses of female sexuality in Japan today. Yet, despite the threat of social sanction, coercion, or even force, many on the margins continue working to change how female sexuality is viewed, creating their own pro-pleasure discourses, and offering messages that are not available in the mainstream. This dissertation sheds light on their stories, their struggles, and the feminist potential of their work.

2. Sex Is Our Specialty: Discourses of Sexuality in Women's Magazine *anan*

On a warm June morning in 2012 I find myself at a nondescript film studio near Tokyo Bay to attend a women-only preview screening of the 3D erotic Hong Kong movie *3D Sex and Zen: Extreme Ecstasy*. The film tells the story of Ming dynasty scholar Wei Yangsheng, who—unable to fulfil his wife—goes on a quest into the underworld to hone his sexual skills. As the story progresses, I find myself increasingly cowering in my seat to escape the 3D undulating breasts, protruding penises (human, horse, and mythical), flying mahjong pieces, thrusting knives, exploding bodies, and all manner of bodily fluids spraying towards me.¹ Wei suffers both from a lack of endowment and premature ejaculation, problems underworld boss Prince of Ning offers to solve through the use of magic and by providing Wei access to his harem of beautiful, scantily clad women. Scene after scene, orgy after orgy we watch Ning and his enormous penis tempt Wei into the dark underworld in a film that is more remarkable for its unexpected graphic violence (penises are only shown once detached from bodies in an attempt to circumvent censorship) than its eroticism.² As I instinctively lurch to avoid a penis thrust in my face, I find myself wondering: does the studio believe this is what women really want? Two hours later the lights come on, we remove our 3D glasses, murmur that we found the film surprising and shocking to the people around us, and then the discussion begins. The film is followed by a “talk show” featuring the female star of the film Suo Yukiko and *anan* editor Yamauchi

¹ 1991's *2D Sex and Zen* and 2011's *3D Sex and Zen: Extreme Ecstasy* were both billed as retellings of the ancient Chinese tale *The Carnal Prayer Mat*.

² The showing of penises only after detachment is reminiscent of Oshima Nagisa's controversial 1976 film *In the Realm of the Senses*. The French-Japanese production, which tells the (semi-biographical) story of Abe Sada who killed her lover and severed his penis, was controversial due to scenes of unstimulated sexual activity between actors. These scenes were reframed and mosaicked for the Japanese release and character Ishida Kichizo's penis is only shown clearly after having been severed from his body. See Cather (2012) for a discussion of the *In the Realm of the Senses* controversy and Chapter 5 of this dissertation for a detailed discussion of Japan's censorship laws and the depiction of genitalia.

Sachiko. They discuss the lack of foreplay in the film and laugh about how sex on film and in “real life” are completely different—something they say many men fail to realize. The pair conclude that despite its shortcomings they would love women to see the film, and to more openly embrace their sexuality, a goal that Yamauchi has been working towards in her role at *anan*.³

My interest in *anan* began five years earlier when I was browsing the magazine stand at my local convenience store. On the cover was Johnny’s idol and boy band Arashi member Matsumoto Jun, lying face down on a bed, naked, and staring seductively at the camera. In the background the naked back of a woman facing away from the camera was visible, but the camera’s gaze was squarely on Matsumoto and his sexy, come-hither look. Positioned just under Matsumoto’s face was the title “The Correct Way to Love a Man” (*tadashī otoko no ai shikata*) and the subtitle “I want his heart and body, everything to be mine!” (*kokoro mo karada mo subete jibun no mono ni shitai!*) (figure 3). Used to seeing Matsumoto (better known to his fans as Matsujun) as a clean-cut, preppy, and bubbly pop idol I was shocked to see him in this new incarnation as sex symbol. Intrigued, I bought a copy, flipped through it, considered briefly how interesting it was to see an approach to female sexuality in Japan that for once assumed that women might actually enjoy sex (and male nudity), and then promptly misplaced the magazine. I never forgot Matsujun and his seductive stare however, nor the erotic short stories, advertisements for lube and condoms, or surveys on readers’ sex lives that the magazine contained. Every August I began looking forward to *anan*’s yearly issue dedicated to everything erotic (known as the “sex special issue” or *sekkusu tokushū*) and struggled to reconcile the publication’s position as a mainstream fashion magazine with this annual celebration of female sexuality, particularly as other media would barely touch the issue. Little did I know when I was first drawn to

³ Yamauchi Sachiko is a pseudonym in keeping with the editor’s request not to be identified.

Matsujun's bedroom eyes (among other things!) that the magazine would play on my mind for years to come, inspiring the project that has become this dissertation and leading me to a 3D genitalia filled cinema on that sunny morning in the hope that Yamauchi would reveal more about the media's attitudes towards female sexuality.



Figure 3: Matsumoto Jun's 2007 *anan* cover.

More than 70 years since Japanese women were granted the right to vote, 40 years since the beginning of second wave feminist activism, and 30 since the introduction of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (*Danjo Koyō Kikai Kintō Hō*), the ways in which the Japanese mainstream media discuss, depict and wrestle with issues of female sexuality have changed substantially. This chapter focuses on the case of women's magazine *anan* and its annual sex special issue, which sells three times as many copies as any other issue throughout the year.⁴ *anan* appeared in the Japanese magazine market in 1970 and its history is not just one of the magazine itself but also of the women's liberation movement, consumer culture, and celebrity culture in postwar Japan. In 1989 the magazine grabbed headlines with a cover proclaiming "Become Beautiful Through Sex" (*sekkusu de kirei ni naru*). Although it would be easy to argue that the title alone says much about how the magazine viewed women's sexuality, deeper analysis suggests that the reality is in fact far more nuanced and is influenced by a combination of factors including tradition, social change, the women's liberation movement, patriarchal ideals, and commercial interests. As one of the few mainstream media in which women's sexuality is openly discussed, the development of the *anan* sex special issue provides an important window through which to examine issues of pleasure within feminist discourse in Japan today. Since the 1980s the magazine has continued to push the boundaries of social acceptability with a wide variety of erotic content and an ongoing sex survey of readers that gauges changing sexual norms. As a result, *anan* has arguably been responsible for shaping discourses concerning women's understanding of their bodies and their sexuality. As the first *anan* generation came of age in the 1970s—an era when sex and pro-pleasure information was difficult for

⁴ Newspaper and magazine publishers in Japan rarely provide sales figures. Rather, the data available reflects not the number of copies sold, but the number distributed. This data offers some insight into the number of issues the publisher expects to sell but does not reveal how many remain on newsstands and ultimately end up pulped.

women to obtain—the magazine played an important role in altering attitudes to women’s sexuality, and bringing pleasure and self-awareness into a discourse that was previously focused almost solely on health and reproduction. With the proliferation of consumer and celebrity culture in late 1980s-1990s, *anan* moved away from its feminist-inspired roots and has become a symbol of the commercialization of female sexuality in contemporary Japan, whilst also inspiring a generation of female-friendly pleasure product providers. This chapter explores the development of the sex special issue, and with it the evolution of social attitudes to female sexuality and the trajectory of sex-positive feminism in contemporary Japan.

A Brief History of Sex, Texts, and the Women’s Magazine Market

Literature on sex, sexuality and pleasure has been produced for centuries in Japan. As far back as the 12th century Buddhist texts entitled “A Companion to Solitude” (*Kankyo no tomo*) linked enlightenment to women’s pleasure (Pandey 1995) and the proliferation of *shunga* during the Edo period demonstrate that Japan has a long history of publishing on matters related to sexuality (see Chapter 4). In conjunction with the development of the publishing industry and increased literacy rates in the prewar period, many women—not just those from privileged backgrounds—were for the first time able to access information about sex and sexuality through mainstream texts. Since then magazines have been an important medium in shaping the ideals and expectations for Japanese women, and educating them on matters of sexuality in accordance with the values of the time. The first women’s magazines published in Japan appeared in the late 1800s as Japan moved to modernize in the aftermath of the Meiji Restoration (1868). These publications promoted the *ryōsai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother) ideal, a state adopted ideology outlining the role of women in the new Japanese nation. According to Wöhr and Sato (1998, 17), “without exception, these magazines adhered to the ideal of the ‘good wife, wise mother’”. Early

magazines were a vehicle of the official state ideology and were aimed at graduates of girls' schools and educated elites who were expected to be the pillars of the nation's morality. Both mainstream publications such as magazines, as well as more academic titles were at this time owned and staffed by men. As Mackie reminds us, "[u]ntil the 1900s... the space for women to debate ideas was still provided in journals edited by men, and women still gained entry to literary and journalistic forums through the patronage of men" (2003, 37). Publications aimed at women provided little space in which to debate the issues faced by women of the day and focused on what was in reality a very narrow demographic of society—middle class women who were of sufficient financial means and did not need to work. In publications of the time women were valued in relation to their relationships with the people around them, first linked to their husbands, then children, and then to the nationalistic aims of the government of the day (*ibid.*, 28). When sexuality was discussed, it was in relation to these roles. As the work of Barbara Sato (2003) and Sabine Frühstück (2003) reveals, early women's magazines often provided sex information under the title of education for a population of women burdened with the responsibility of providing the next generation of citizens for the prewar Japanese state. Euphemistically titled "sexual hygiene" (*sei no eisei*), the discourse of the time focused on issues such as filial duty, health, and contraception—all areas in which female readers were continually reminded of the way in which their lives and fertility were deeply connected to the prosperity of the Japanese nation-state.⁵

This is not to say that some women did not attempt to break free from the roles

⁵ Sexual hygiene was part of the greater discourse of "social hygiene" (*shakai eisei*) and "public hygiene" (*kōshū eisei*) that filtered in from Europe during the mid to late 1800s and formed the basis of Japan's first public health administration. The Central Sanitary Bureau (*Eiseikyoku*) was established in 1873 to protect citizens' health through state campaigns aimed at influencing mass society. See Frühstück (2003, 2005) for further information on the history of sexual hygiene in Japan.

prescribed to them in the 1920s. While the creation of a modern, industrialized nation-state centered on what Mackie terms a “particular ideology of familialism” (2003, 3), some women were questioning the roles prescribed to them. Established in 1911 by Hiratsuka Raichō, *Seitō* (Bluestocking) was founded as a literary journal, but soon evolved into a publication which considered issues of gender equality through editorials and essays attacking the family system, arguing for the importance of reproductive freedom, demanding economic independence and political rights, and lauding the “new women” of the time. Certain issues of *Seitō* even received warnings or bans as articles covering chastity, abortion, and reproductive health garnered attention from the censors (Mackie 2003; Tipton 2005). *Seitō* came at a particular time in Japanese history when (some) women were discovering the possibility of lives free of the patriarchal family system and the expectations it imposed on them as daughters, wives, and mothers. The 1920s was the age of the “modern girl” (*mogāru*, often abbreviated to *moga*)—young women who threw off the expectations of the day to work, play, and love in ways that were external to the productive and reproductive family unit. *Moga* disregarded the role of daughter, wife, and mother, worked for their own wage, indulged in conspicuous consumption of fashion and culture, chose their own lovers, and were generally regarded as hedonistic and selfish (Group et. al 2003; Reitan 2011; Sato 2003; Sato 2008; Tipton 2005). Richard Reitan (2011, 84) explains that at the beginning of the Meiji period, as the modern girl phenomenon began, “major journals... denounced the new woman position as ‘dangerous,’ ‘unhealthy,’ ‘unnatural,’ and ‘immoral’.” Reitan argues that the danger of the *moga* was that they threatened to “undo or subvert the authority of some hegemonic narrative”, but that the greatest danger lay in the new woman’s “claim to ‘personality’ (*jinkaku*)—to personhood.”

Seitō provided educated women with insights into life as a modern girl. At the same

time, more mainstream publications began enjoying increased freedom to publish on reproductive issues. Established in 1922, *Josei* (Woman) encouraged women to break free from social expectations and lauded the modern girl. The magazine discussed sex as a central element of marriage, and even contained articles examining “the trend toward regarding sex as a source of pleasure rather than as serving only reproductive purposes” (Tipton 2005, paragraph 16), considering the double standard in which women, but not men, were expected to remain faithful to their spouse, and even questioned monogamous marriage as an institution. *Josei*’s contemporary, *Shufu no Tomo*, similarly enjoyed the opportunity to publish on sexuality, although the mainstream magazine’s articles tended to focus on practical issues such birth control, using an anecdotal style to take information about reproductive health to a wider readership in a way that had not been done before (Tipton 2005). Taisho era (1912-1926) magazines demonstrated an unprecedented interest in sex and sexuality, along with the freedom to publish without attracting the ire of the censors. This freedom however was to be short lived.

Publishing freedom and the *moga* phenomenon faded as Japan’s war effort escalated in the 1930s and the publishing industry returned to focusing on *ryōsai kenbo*, with the goal of building a strong nation ready for war. Women were viewed as essential to the war effort as they were encouraged to “go forth and multiply” (*umeyo, fuyaseyo*), and to raise healthy citizens essential to support the development of a “wealthy country and strong army” (*fukoku kyōhei*). Heavily censored publications reflected these values.⁶ In 1937 the government banned the publication of written material on birth control and numerous policies were introduced to encourage women to “move from an individualistic view of marriage to a national one and to make young women recognize motherhood as the

⁶ For a detailed discussion of women’s magazines in interwar Japan, see Frederick (2006).

national destiny” (Havens 1975, 927).⁷ Post defeat, in the immediate postwar period, very little changed in terms of ideological discourse on the role of women. In October 1945 the National Defense Security Law, which had prevented women from joining political parties, was abolished, and laws ensuring universal suffrage were revised in December 1945 (Mackie 2003, 121). Nevertheless, on the home front Japanese women were expected to continue to serve as good wives and wise mothers. Publications including *Shufu no Seikatsu* (Housewives and Life) and *Fujin Seikatsu* (Women’s Life) focused closely on household management and childrearing, at a time when legal barriers to women’s participation in spheres outside of the home were coming down. As Mackie describes, “it is one of the paradoxes of that period that the forces of political economy and familial ideology increasingly pushed women into an identification with the domestic sphere as housewives, while the legal changes of that time removed official obstacles to their activities as citizens in the public, political sphere” (ibid., 122-123).

There was however a substantial shift in one major area—family size. The population boomed in the early postwar years as soldiers and civilians were repatriated from former colonies, climbing by 11 million people in the five years from 1945 to 1959 (Norgren 2001, 37). At the same time many faced homelessness and starvation as food, fuel, and housing shortages continued, particularly in major cities. This trend was halted with the legalization of abortion in 1948, and then by the New Life Movement as it gained traction and encouraged women to “rationalize family life” (Norgren 2001, 101) and limit their family size through family planning education and the provision of condoms.⁸

⁷ The sale of contraceptive devices may have been banned in 1930, and the publication of information about contraception banned in 1937, but condoms remained available as an essential part of the war effort as men were encouraged to protect themselves (and by extension the women they would marry upon return) from venereal disease. See Norgren (2001) and Haig (2014).

⁸ The “New Life Movement” was a set of initiatives from government, women’s groups, and corporations which addressed issues related to sex roles, the home, hygiene, and

Women's sexuality and labor were mobilized throughout the early modern period of Japan for the good of the family and the nation state, within a system that ignored the subjectivity and desires of women themselves. Female sexuality has long been subordinated to the interests of the state, a phenomenon that has continued to the present day.⁹ As the next section will consider, in the postwar period women's subjectivity has additionally been leveraged through the utilization of their desires as consumers with the goal of improving the Japanese economy, and ensuring the economic future of the nation.

Postwar Japan, Cultural Shifts, and the Birth of *anan*

There are several theories as to when Japan's postwar period came to an end. Karatani Kojin argues that the term "postwar" (*senjo*) ceased to be used in literature around the time of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics (1993, 292). In contrast, Yoshimi Shunya contends that the postwar period continued until the oil crisis of 1973 (2009). Hara Hiroyuki marks the period as even longer, arguing that the postwar period came to an end sometime between 1984 and 1986 with the maturation of Japan's economy, consumer culture, and popular culture (2006). Despite diverging theories on just when Japan can be said to have moved beyond the postwar, it is certain that by the mid-1980s the country's economy, media, and distribution infrastructure was well established, providing a rich and mature market for popular culture and fashion. Lise Skov and Brian Moeran point out that despite such rapid economic development, however, Japan's political development from the Second World War "has been out of synch with its economic recovery, resulting in a time lag which in itself has also influenced contemporary Japanese consumer culture" (1995, 10). This lag

reproduction. See Gordon (1997) for a detailed description of the way in which the movement encouraged women to see household management and child rearing as professional skills.

⁹ As Chapter 3 will address, there has been remarkably little change in this discourse throughout the postwar era.

can be seen in feminist activism, and wider cultural and social notions of the role of women in contemporary society.

It was this postwar, high-growth era which saw the launch of larger publications—magazines which featured dreams of a life outside of homemaking and childrearing for women. Enabled by improved access to contraception, decreased family size, rising standards of living, and increased disposable income, magazines began offering women a view of a life very different to that of their mothers and grandmothers. In this period women's magazines began to feature articles more focused on fashion than housekeeping, and began to tackle the issue of sexuality in ways that had previously predominantly been encased in language focusing on sexual hygiene, contraception, and family health. There exist parallels between the modern girl and women of this period. However, what was markedly different this time was that consumption, far from being viewed as hedonistic and selfish as it had been in the 1920s, was now viewed as integral to the Japanese economy. In Japan's postwar consumer culture, women have been central. As the postwar economic miracle continued, women were encouraged to find themselves through consumption, a trend which began in the 1970s and has continued to this day. In contemporary Japan, the ongoing struggle for female personhood, self-actualization and individualization—while often viewed as dangerous—can conclusively be co-opted into a commercial conceptualization of freedom which serves to protect the dominant ideology of post-growth Japan.

Within the context of a rapidly developing economy, a number of new magazines aimed at young women appeared in the 1970s—arguably the most popular of which were *nonno* and *anan*. Despite a long history of publishing magazines for women in Japan, these two new publications were significant for a number of reasons. First, they were very different to their predecessors, featuring more color pages and advertisements than staple

publications such as *Fujin no Tomo* (Housewife's Companion) and *Fujin Kōron* (Women's Review), which had been around since the early 20th century. Secondly, *anan* and *nonno* took inspiration from overseas publications (in particular the French magazine *Elle*, which lent its name and brand to early issues of *anan*) and provided content that was very much consumer oriented in nature. Launched in March 1970 as *an • an ELLE JAPON*—the Japanese sister publication of popular French fashion magazine *Elle*—*anan* was marketed to a demographic of young, unmarried female readers. The first issue of *anan* featured a message from the French ambassador to Japan at the time, Louis de Guiringaud, in which he expressed his desire that the magazine would serve to bring an exciting new era of fashion, food and design to the next generation of Japanese women. The ambassador reminded readers that *Elle* was not only a French phenomenon, but one of the top women's magazines in the world (*furansu no daizasshi de aru no minarazu, sekai ichiryū no joseishi de arimasu*). In this way, he welcomed the contemporary Japanese woman into an international world and highlighted the very market *anan* was hoping to attract—Japanese women searching for something new, different, and a life outside of the confines of 1970s Japan. Similarly, Japanese editor Akagi Yoichi expressed his desire that the magazine provide something novel and exciting to the Japanese market and spoke of his excitement at creating a whole new type of publication. In fact, the focus in the first issue of *anan* was very much on the international. Almost half of the pages were dedicated to a photographic essay of model Yuri visiting Paris and London, dressed in the latest fashions, exploring the streets, and discovering new food, shops, and sites on her own (figure 4).

Here it is pertinent to consider just who the new women early 1970s magazines were created to cater to were. According to Kazue Sakamoto, *anan* and *nonno* readers could be characterized in the following ways: they lived in urban areas—only 17 percent of *nonno* readers, and only nine percent of *anan* readers lived in villages. Second, they had a

higher level of education—at the very least high school but often university. Sakamoto describes this as a readership of women who “were living a new kind of life that few women had experienced before, which centered on preparation for college or university” (1999, 179). Third, readers were almost exclusively in their teens and twenties—a great contrast to previously popular magazines such as *Shufu no Tomo* which had a readership of women from both urban and rural regions, as well as women across diverse age brackets. Sakamoto concludes that the readers of these magazines were the first generation of women to go to college en masse, and to swell the ranks of female workers—thereby leading very different lives to the previous generation of Japanese women as they were highly educated, working, and possessed disposable incomes of their own.



Figure 4. Model Yuri explores London in the first issue of *anan* (1970).

A New Generation of Women Find Themselves

Published twice monthly at its inception, *anan* began as a fashion and lifestyle publication for young women, featuring articles on everything from clothing and make-up to fortune telling, travel, movies, manners and, of course, love and sex. Unlike many magazines

aimed at a similar demographic, each issue of *anan* focused on (and continues to this day to feature) a particular theme, such as traveling to a particular city, fortune telling, popular desserts from around Japan, or the latest spring make-up trends. Early issues of *anan* created the image of young, uninhibited women with the freedom to choose their own paths to fulfillment—very different to the traditional images of good wife and wise mother espoused by magazines of the prewar and early postwar periods. The magazine aimed to create what Tomiko Yoda has coined “a ‘girlscape’—an ambient context of consumption linking feminine bodies, affects, objects, and environment” (2015). This marketing strategy sought to harness the defiance and transformative power of the generation coming of age in the early 1970s, and to shape it into the power to consume en masse (ibid.). The *anan* of this era encouraged women in their 20s to travel alone for the first time, to develop their own personal sense of style, celebrate their agency, and “find themselves” through what the magazine titled “self-searching” (*jibun sagashi*). The May 5th, 1970 issue of *anan* featured numerous articles compelling women to move freely about the world and consider their place in wider international society. A seven-page spread celebrated summer and *anan* staff’s desire to go to the beach, Hong Kong, and Macau, culminating in a double page photograph of (bicultural) model Sugiyama Emma, stylist Suzume and designer Horikiri Mio (both Japanese), smiling at the camera from a moving convertible car. The wind in their hair, and their wide, open-mouthed smiles lend the photograph a sense of movement and freedom. The three women are off to see the world. The issue also included hints of the political, calling for readers to consider issues outside of Japan with a seven-page photo spread dedicated to the children of Vietnam, peppered with facts about the Vietnam war, and for them to revel in their bodies with an off-the-wall (by contemporary standards) photo series by photographer Nagahama Osamu called “petit panty” celebrating cute bottoms and underpants of all styles.

anan's broad focus on a world outside of the home for a new generation of women was revolutionary. Young women were no longer depicted in magazines as being solely valued by how they were linked to their surrounding family, community and state. Instead for the first time *anan* told them that they could be fulfilled by following their own dreams—albeit dreams enabled by consumption of products and services—as evidenced by the advertisements featured in the publication. Early issues of *anan* were peppered with advertisements for lifestyle products including makeup, double eyelid glue, underwear, pens, watches, stereos, and even banks. An advertisement for Tokai Bank encouraged readers to think about the future and open accounts to save for their weddings (perhaps misguidedly, considering *anan*'s readership and the magazine's focus on living for the now). In contrast a 1970 advertisement for Dai'ichi Bank compelled *anan* readers to live for today and to consider taking a loan to travel to Hawaii (or the destination of their choice). Linking its commercials with *anan*'s focus on travel, Fuji Bank's advertisement reassured women that they could utilize the bank's "online systems" to withdraw money when they travelled around the country, and could thereby avoid carrying around large amounts of cash (figure 5).¹⁰ Access to their own funds was centrally important to the *anan* generation as money could be used not for running a household, but for discretionary spending. The magazine compelled young women to access new freedoms through advertising spread throughout editorial content and advertising. As Sakamoto argues, "commercial magazines offered their readers guidance and support about how to express themselves and attain a certain freedom. The common theme of the editorial matter dealing with fashion, interior design and travel was how to establish and protect the developing self-identity of young women in an adult world that was either hostile or indifferent to them... Readers found that they were able to find pleasure in new dimensions of

¹⁰ For example, see *anan* 1970.5.5 page 44; 1970.5.5 page 60; 1970.5.20 page 60.

experience, breaking out from long-established gender restrictions.” (1999, 183).

In early issues of *anan*, the most popular articles focused on travel, encouraging readers to emulate the fashion they saw in the publication whilst visiting the places shown. Second to travel were fashion and interior design, followed by beauty, cooking, horoscopes and a variety of other topics, including two or three translated articles from the French publication *Elle* every month. Sakamoto mentions that *anan* and *nonno* also contained many articles about interior design and putting together a room or apartment that “reflect one’s own taste” (1999, 181), an action that does not necessarily connote that readers were being reared to be housewives upon graduation. Instead she argues that such articles most likely represented the dream of a space of one’s own, outside of the family home and away from parental surveillance. *anan* focused on young women living away from home, often in Tokyo, an idea that was somewhat revolutionary in the early 1970s when most unmarried women still lived with their parents, or in university or company dormitories which acted as pseudo-parental homes, complete with security and surveillance.



Figure 5. Fuji Bank advertisement in *anan* (1970).

Surprisingly for those familiar with the contemporary publication, three particular staples of today's *anan* were missing—celebrities, men, and sex. At its inception *anan*'s editorial policy stated that the magazine was to avoid celebrity gossip and scandal—mainstays of women's magazines of the time (Ueno 1992, 145-146). Sakamoto's analysis concludes that the 12 issues of *anan* published in 1974 contained not a single article on pop stars or celebrities, and only one article on male nudity (1999, 180). When men did make a rare appearance they were more likely to be foreign celebrities such as David Cassidy, Burt Bacharach, and James Taylor. Japanese men however, were almost entirely absent. Fashionable, independent, and free was the mainstay of *anan* articles in the 1970s, selling a dream of escape from the traditions and expectations of the older generation. Men were superfluous to this dream.



Figure 6. *anan* model Lisa as Jean Harlow.

Although men were largely missing, *anan* was far from advocating that women reject their femininity or aspire to act like men. Instead the focus fell very much on

fashioning oneself as a beautiful, modern woman. In the January 5th 1971 issue, the magazine presented popular model Lisa in a variety of poses, asking her to emulate famous Hollywood actresses of years gone by. Lisa was shown as Jean Harlow, described as “an actress with even more sex appeal than Marilyn Monroe” (figure 6). In the accompanying article the model spoke of the difficulty she experienced posing in such a way as to highlight her femininity and sex appeal, and even joked that the male staff on set laughed and described her as “not really a woman” (*risa wa onna ja nai nē*). The resulting photograph however was startling, as it showed Lisa posing in a low-cut red dress, holding a lit cigarette, staring seductively into the camera as a suit-clad singer Nishikino Akira (in a rare appearance of a Japanese male) kneels behind her. Despite being shown with a handsome man Lisa is clearly posing as her own woman. She smokes, despite the taboo surrounding women smoking (later in the issue the “letter box” section contains a letter from a reader who smokes herself, despite thinking it’s something women should not do), and is not giving any of her attention to Nishikino. The remaining photographs in the series were similar—Lisa remained center stage and Nishikino was nothing more than a prop, there to highlight Lisa’s sex appeal and beauty. Lisa had an air of confidence about her that demonstrated that she did not believe that Nishikino’s approval was necessary in order to be valued as a woman.

The average age of first marriage for women began rising in the early 1970s, from 24.2 in 1970 to 25.2 in 1980, and 29 in 2011.¹¹ This shift towards increasingly later marriage meant that women were afforded a longer period of relative freedom in which they could live life without the responsibilities a husband and children entail. The *anan* of the 1970s encouraged the enjoyment of this period, rather than compelling readers to hurry

¹¹ Government of Japan. 2011. “Portal Site of Official Statistics of Japan.” Accessed November 17, 2015. <http://www.e-stat.go.jp/SG1/estat/ListE.do?lid=000001101888>.

to find a husband and settle down. Men were not considered essential and marriage was treated as just another lifestyle choice. In January 1971, *anan* posed the question “Do You Kiss Your Husband Every Day?” (*goshujin to mainichi kisu shimasu-ka*), in which it interrogated 32 well known married women in their twenties, thirties, forties, fifties and beyond, about their relationships. The article highlighted the very different approaches to marriage—the joys, and the disappointments long-term partnership in 1970s Japan entailed—and served to provide a space in which both the 32 participants and readers could examine marriage as an institution, discussing what it meant to women of the day. The picture they painted of married life was not a particularly flattering one. Famed photographer (and *anan* contributor) Tatsuki Yoshihiro’s wife Michiko spoke of her husband hitting her over the head so hard that she temporarily lost hearing in one ear during an argument while on their honeymoon. Many of the contributors spoke of their husbands’ infidelities. Costume designer Wada Emi explained that she found out about her husband—NHK producer Wada Ben—having his latest affair through a weekly magazine she just happened to read at the hairdresser. There was a sense that even though the married couples were described objects of readers’ admiration (*minna, akogareten da ne!*), the magazine was trying to demonstrate that the reality of married life for women in 1970s Japan was far from fulfilling.¹²

During the 1970s an increasing number of young women were turning away from the dream of marriage. Arguably Japan’s most famous feminist sociologist and cultural critic, Ueno Chizuko has written extensively on Japanese feminism since the 1980s. In exploring the image of the fulltime housewife in the early 1970s Ueno explains how surveys revealed a particularly negative picture of women who committed their lives to looking after their families. Associated with “being worn out with domestic chores” and

¹² See *anan* 1971.1.5, pages 58-63.

“lack of individuality”, becoming a housewife was not a goal to which most female students aspired (2009, 52). Offering an alternative to a life of domestic drudgery, in the *anan* of the early 1970s careers were shown as something exciting and worth aspiring too—not just something women could use to fill in time before marriage. Examples include a January 1971 article about becoming a stylist (*suchiristu ni narimashō*), which explained that stylists were able to keep up with the latest fashion, makeup, design, and interior decorating ideas as well as learn photography techniques. The article followed the traditional women’s magazine format of providing a manual for readers to learn about something new—usually fashion or makeup—but in this case focused instead on how readers could study and work towards a fulfilling career of their own.¹³ Similarly, an article in the May 5th 1971 issue explained the benefits of becoming a window trimmer for stores and once again showed how women could earn a very good salary and change the environment around them at the same time, explaining that window trimmers could “change the landscape of the city”. The potential for readers alter their environment in such a tangible way was a power few young women had, and *anan* made it look like a very attractive choice.

Throughout each issue ran the quiet discourse of ever expanding consumer culture. Hiejima Takeshi (2005) argues that the magazine and its contemporaries were responsible for the proliferation of readymade fashion as they showed readers not only the clothes, but explained where they could be bought and for how much. Unlike magazines from the prewar and immediate postwar years, publications of this period no longer featured primarily articles and text based editorial content, instead preferring to focus on photographs, color advertisements and a visually pleasing aesthetic. As Ueno (1992)

¹³ See Tanaka (1998) for an explanation of the way in which Japanese women’s magazines serve as prescriptive manuals for their readers.

argues, this content allowed *anan* and its contemporaries to focus on a discourse of self-searching (*jibun sagashi*) as they encouraged readers to find their true selves by emulating the lifestyles depicted in the magazine, and consuming the products that made such lifestyles possible. Rather than find their identity in their roles as daughters, wives, and mothers, women were told that they could sculpt or collate an identity through expressions of “taste”—a discourse Ueno refers to as “the myth of individuality” (*kosei shinwa*) (1992, 91). There is a particular irony in readers seeking new ways to express their individuality by modeling the images they saw in magazines, an issue that Ueno pointedly critiques. Acting as catalogues from which readers could pick and choose an identity, magazines encouraged women to see the interior of their homes, clothes, outward appearance, and hobbies as an expression of their inner, self-actualized selves. This discourse may have been liberating to those wishing to move beyond the confines of traditional roles for women, however it could also be seen as undermining the feminist potential of *anan* as the magazine served to prescribe lifestyles—albeit new and different ones—to readers much in the same way as its predecessors had. Nevertheless, as the following section will address, 1970s *anan* did take a feminist approach to female subjectivity through its nude photography, if only for a short period.

Nudity and Freedom: Our Bodies Our Choice

The *anan* of the 1970s had a particularly artistic focus, reflected in the nude photography that was later to make the magazine notorious. In April 1973, the magazine held a week-long photography exhibition in the Tokyo Nihonbashi Takashimaya department store, displaying photographs that had featured in its fashion and travel articles. Rather than celebrities, *anan* models and photographers were in attendance to sign posters and meet with fans. Other portents into *anan*'s controversial future could be seen in the January 5th 1974 issue, which dedicated eight pages to “a collection of naked men” (*otoko no hadaka*

taishū). The beautifully artistic photographs depicted seven celebrities including singers Noguchi Goro and Aida Kenji, as well as folk group Garo all topless, telling readers that the photographs just may allow them to get that little bit closer to their idols (*hontō ni karera ni ippō demo chikazukeruka to...*).¹⁴ Similar to the “petit panty” article, the photographs remained fairly benign, and lacked the sexual undertones of later issues for which *anan* became known.

Nudity was a common theme throughout the women’s liberation movement in 1970s Japan. Featured in Tanaka Kazuko’s 1977 edition of *A Short History of the Women’s Movement in Modern Japan*, photographs by photographer Matsumoto Michiko showed women at the first women’s liberation weekend in the Japan Alps in August 1971. The women were pictured naked, enjoying being out in nature. The accompanying caption read, “Feeling free/everyone suddenly, spontaneously/felt like running naked/through the fields/like in primitive days/Unfortunately,/because of the Japanese ‘obscenity laws’,/they are not allowed/to be so liberated/in this pamphlet” (Mackie 2003, 153). The obscenity laws referred to are those which banned the depiction of genitalia and pubic hair, even in photography described as “relatively innocent” by Mackie (2003, 153).¹⁵ Mackie contrasts this with an industry which at the time was increasingly seeking to commodify images of the female body. In the case of feminist literature and 1970s (and early 1980s) *anan*, nudity was not for the purpose of commodification, but rather a celebration of a sense of freedom. This began to shift in the 1990s, as almost every element of the female body and experience became the target of commodification.

In the 1970s, *anan* was a very different magazine to what it has become today. van

¹⁴ See Chapter 5 for a discussion on the way in which women are encouraged to attempt to achieve “closeness” with idols and celebrities through media consumption.

¹⁵ See Allison (2000) for a detailed discussion of the censorship of genitalia in the Japanese media. See also Chapter 5 for an explanation of the impact of Japan’s obscenity laws on the way in which bodies can and cannot be depicted.

Zoonen (1994, 17) argues that the media reflects “society’s dominant social values and symbolically denigrates women, either by not showing them at all, or by depicting them in stereotypical roles”. *anan* broke out of this mold and showed young women enjoying themselves in a positive light, something that had not been done in the past. Unlike its predecessors in the women’s magazine market which subscribed to stereotypical images of women and their roles, *anan* instead was a powerful celebration of women’s agency, encouraging readers to see themselves not through the eyes of the people around them (families, boyfriends, husbands, or even other women) but instead to participate in self-searching (*jibun sagashi*) in a positive affirmation of female subjectivity. Positive portrayals of solo travel, fashion, careers, and a questioning approach to women’s traditional roles and marriage all came together to provide a new way of approaching life as a woman in Japan. This subjectivity was implicitly linked to the consumption of fashion, interior goods, and travel as readers were propelled to express their own “taste” and create new versions of themselves as independent, self-actualized individuals. Although *anan* was not explicitly linked to the second wave feminist movement gaining traction in Japan at the time, the publication both mirrored and propagated many of the ideas of the burgeoning movement as it encouraged readers to find their own place in a society which had previously dictated narrow roles to women.

The Birth of the Sex Special Issue

The 1980s were commonly referred to as the “age of women” (*onna no jidai*), in response to both legal and cultural shifts which saw women participate in spheres outside of the home. Ayako Kano describes how during the 1980s the percentage of married women working outside the home exceeded 50 percent for the first time, and how this “underscored the increasing significance of women as wage earners and consumers” (2005, 521). According to Kano, the “‘age of women’ became a slogan for activists as well as

advertising agents” (ibid.). The number of magazines published in Japan at this time reached an all-time high as new magazines were launched to fill (or create) new demographics created by the increasing gap between the age in which women graduated from school and university, and got married. In her book *Croissant Syndrome*, Matsubara Junko outlined how magazines such as *Croissant* (which launched in 1977) were pitched at women who had “graduated from *anan* and *nonno* but were still too young to be thinking about what to make for dinner or worrying about a husband who might be out cheating” (1991, 21-22). These new magazines meant increased competition and necessitated changes in *anan* so that the publication could survive as the Japanese magazine market expanded rapidly.

Women’s magazines—pseudo textbooks which instructed every stage of readers’ lives—were now publishing in an environment in which second wave feminist ideas were beginning to take hold in Japanese society. Although they rarely referenced the movement directly, these magazines were nevertheless influenced by wider social changes that were taking place. Bolstered by changing social mores readers enjoyed a longer period of freedom between graduation and marriage. This extended period of freedom in turn allowed readers to work and plow their earnings into fashion, travel, and lifestyle products as encouraged by *anan* and its contemporaries. In May 5th 1979 the magazine bode farewell to itself in an issue titled “the goodbye to *anan* issue” (*sayonara anan gō*), in which it garnered opinions from public figures and *anan* contributors about what *anan* had meant to them over the past ten years. The magazine promised to come back bigger and better, shifting from publishing fortnightly to three times a month, moving from semi to full color, and ready for the 1980s. In 1982 Heibonsha Publishing began publishing *Elle Japon* as a magazine in its own right, and *anan* became an independent publication—one that underwent a radical departure from its original aims, and from its feminist-inspired

roots.¹⁶

Despite early issues rarely discussing the topics, in 1982 *anan* began releasing issues annually dedicated to love and sex, including editions with cover titles such as “Erotic Feelings” (*erochikku na kibun*) in April 1984, “We Love Men!” (*daisuki yo! otokotachi*) in April 1985, and “I Want to Know about Other People’s Sex Lives!” (*hito no sekkusu ni tsuite shiritai*) in April 1988. The April 1985 “We Love Men!” issue demonstrated a great departure from the 1970s *anan*, which implored women to discover themselves through travel and fashion. Instead the publication was filled with prescriptive articles imploring women to grow their hair, paint their nails, wear red lipstick and brown eye shadow, and learn how to “naturally” perform gestures and behavior (*shigusa*) that make men’s hearts leap (*dokitto suru*). The same issue gained notoriety with its list of the top ten “Men We Wouldn’t Mind Having Sex With, Men We Want to Have Sex With”. Topped by actor Yamazaki Tsutomu, followed closely by comedian Akashiya Sanma and American actor Matt Dillon, the list was compiled by 850 *anan* readers and the accompanying article—an interview with four women aged 19 to 22—revealed that the reason for the rankings. Women found Yamazaki’s strong and animalistic image appealing, one stating that she thought it would be exciting for him to rip the buttons of her blouse open and throw her to the ground. The article’s introductory paragraph highlighted this desire, explaining that “The men we want to date, and the men we want to have sex with are different. In a boyfriend we want a man who is faithful and kind. In a lover we are attracted to men who are a little bad and dangerous”. Although today it is almost unthinkable that comedian Akashiya Sanma was at one time considered sexy, the women interviewed in the article explained that despite his personality and very thin physique, they would enjoy having sex with him out of curiosity. Second runner up American actor

¹⁶ Heibonsha Publishing became Magazine House in 1983.

Matt Dillion was more divisive, with one of the interviewees explaining that she did not find him at all attractive and did not like “overly muscly men”.¹⁷ Despite their youth, the women interviewed for the “Men We Wouldn’t Mind Having Sex With” article appeared very much in control of their own desires, and more than willing to have sex for recreation, rather than only within the confines of a relationship or marriage. The April 1985 issue did however indicate that sexual boldness and ownership of one’s sexuality may not have come easily for readers. This is most clear in the article “Tonight I Want to be Invited—Give him the OK to Initiate (Sex)”, written for women dating men who had been too shy to invite them home for the night (and who were presumably unable to invite their dates home themselves). Advice included sending 100 red roses to his apartment, leaving a lipstick kiss on a coaster, drinking martinis at a bar, getting a little bit drunk so you could “accidentally” pretend that you thought your date had already invited you home, and staring him for long periods of time. If *anan* hoped to demonstrate that university aged women were the subjects of their own sexuality, it also showed that to some extent this desire was held hostage by social norms as it implored readers to do their best to become attractive to men, and provided advice on how to encourage men to take the lead when it came to sex.¹⁸

Following occasional forays into sex throughout the 1980s, it was the April 1989 issue “Become Beautiful Through Sex” (*sekkusu de kirei ni naru*) that created the biggest splash. The cover of the issue featured a cartoon woman, with neither a particularly

¹⁷ For further discussion of physical physique and the type of men Japanese women find attractive, see Chapter 5.

¹⁸ This remains very much the case with a 2016 online survey revealing that a majority of women preferred (or believed that men should) take the lead the first few times a couple has sex, and that women should approach men for sex only after their relationship has become well established. See Love Research. 2016. “*Kare to tsukiaihajime... sekkuyokutekini ecchi ni sasou no wa itsu kara ok?*.” Accessed February 17, 2016. <http://www.lc-net.net/i/detail.php?id=1455>.

Japanese nor western face, wearing a very short pair of unzipped shorts, topless with one gloved hand covering her breasts and the other sitting suggestively on her hip. The subtitle read “Even more suggestive and bold, for all women, the sex special issue” (*sara ni kiwadoku daitan ni, subete no josei ni okuru, sekkusu daitokushū*) (figure 7). The issue featured almost 100 pages of advice on how to achieve a body worthy of being seen naked, as well as stories in which readers told of how sex helped them lose weight and cure acne—complete with graphs and a doctor’s analysis.¹⁹ There were also articles about contraception, sexually transmitted diseases, erotic short stories and feature interviews with celebrities in which they discussed what kinds of sexual activity they most enjoyed. Supplementing the content, almost every page featured advertorial-style information about products—including prices and where they could be purchased—for readers to buy and use in their quest to adhere to the magazine’s advice.



Figure 7. The cover of *anan*’s “Become Beautiful Through Sex” issue (1989).

¹⁹ This particularly functionalist attitude to female sexuality—that it allows women to become more beautiful (ultimately for men)—has remained central to discourses of female pleasure even to today. See Chapter 4.

Despite the advertorial content, much of the 1989 issue was boldly sex-positive. On page seven the magazine garnered opinions from actresses, beauty therapists, and doctors on the topic of becoming beautiful through sex, but the text was completely overshadowed by the accompanying illustration—drawn by the same artist responsible for the cover—of a woman looking suggestively at the reader, one eyebrow raised, legs wide open, her dress half removed to reveal a naked breast and genitals exposed. This figure of a woman masturbating and enjoying her own body was revolutionary, as the sex *anan* discussed was not necessarily what is traditionally thought of as sex—between a man and a woman, often with the man’s pleasure in mind—but instead was more diverse, pleasurable, and not even remotely shameful. Throughout the rest of the issue *anan* addressed common myths and misconceptions about sex, including whether it helps participants lose weight (concluding that the answer was unfortunately no, but that there was some evidence to suggest that those who are sexually frustrated are more likely to overeat and gain weight), whether too much sex could lead to genital discoloration (again, no), and whether swallowing semen was good for the skin (once again no, with the author concluding that this particular myth must have been spread by men). These sometimes confronting questions were addressed by a doctor, providing a veneer of respectability to an occasionally unpalatable conversation.²⁰ Several articles examining the divide between how women and men viewed female pleasure also appeared, including “masturbating—in secret from my boyfriend” (*kare ni naisho de, masutābēshon*) which was critical of the fact that women still felt the need to hide the fact that they masturbate, even in an era when sex was becoming less and less of a taboo (figure 8). Adding to the female pleasure-positive discourse were pages critiquing men’s sexual techniques and skills, reminding readers that they did not have to suffer unpleasurable sex, and that there were ways to improve the experience for themselves.

²⁰ See Chapter 4 for more on the role of the white coat in discourses of female sexuality.



Figure 8. Illustration of a woman openly masturbating in *anan* (1989).

The “Become Beautiful Through Sex” series continued until 2000, with each issue following a similar structure and pattern, but it was the first issue in 1989 that truly set the tone for the coming decade. *anan* implored readers to be “bold” and to take control of their sexuality, addressed myths about sex, and told women that their sexuality was normal and healthy. Yet despite the sex-positive message *anan*’s early sex specials sent to readers, in other ways the magazine had become increasingly commercial. In a manner consistent with Naomi Wolf’s beauty myth (1991), *anan* both encouraged acceptance and individualization, whilst simultaneously seeking to commercialize almost every aspect of women’s lives. Ueno Chizuko (1992) argues that *anan* in particular was responsible for pushing the widespread introduction of consumer culture amongst young women as it

served as a catalogue which not only prescribed to readers in great detail the type of fashion, makeup and lifestyle goods they should be purchasing, but also provided costs and details of where they could be bought. This began with the fashion and travel of 1970s *anan* but quickly permeated into all aspects of women's lives, escalating with the development of the 1980s bubble economy. Hara Hiroyuki contends that with the launch of magazine *Hanako* (a women's magazine emblematic of the bubble period in which each issue focused on a particular city or area and its shops, acting as a kind of shopping "guidebook") in 1988, the role of magazines as catalogues for fashion consumption truly came into its own (2006, 135).

As *anan* moved into the 1990s a similar trend was apparent. The consumption outlined in *anan* however was not just a way for readers to be fashionable. Gabriella Lukács describes the Japanese trendy dramas of the 1990s as "emotional products" (2012, 119) because they offered not only use value (i.e., content or entertainment), but also a sense of membership in lifestyle and attitude communities. From its very inception *anan* offered similar access to an identity and sense of belonging. Women could become part of the *anan-zoku* (*anan* tribe) and could share a sense of connection to a time, place, and community through following the magazine. Within this environment the presentation of sex and an enjoyment of one's own sexuality was just another "new" lifestyle option, something that young, independent, modern women should strive to do in order to remain fashionable and in line with their peers. In an event held to celebrate the release of her 2011 book *Did anan Sex Make Us Beautiful? (anan no sekkusu de kirei ni nareta?)*, female-friendly sex shop owner and well-known feminist Kitahara Minori discussed the way in which *anan* tapped into a sentiment felt by many women in the late 1980s and early 1990s that things could be different for their generation, but ultimately critiqued the magazine for following up with wholly commercial content, rather than agitating for

greater social change.

As the 1980s drew to a close *anan* had shown a marked departure from the heady discourse of freedom, self-searching, and self-expression visible in its early days. In the 1990s, another great shift in *anan*'s content took place. Coupled with the magazine's increasingly commercial content, the publication began to feature more stories on celebrities—in particular male actors and singers. As the following section will outline, this trend once again altered the tone of the magazine and had an impact on how it addressed issues of female sexuality and pleasure.

Shifting Discourses within *anan*'s Sex Specials—the 1990s and Beyond

My analysis of the sex special issues published by *anan* over a 30-year period reveals a number of surprises. Contrary to expectations, it is older issues that are more explicit and confrontational than those from recent years. As outlined above, sex special issues of *anan* in the late 1980s and early 1990s often employed graphic cartoons of women masturbating and couples in various sexual positions, as well as erotic photographs accompanying each article. On the pages of “Become Beautiful Through Sex: Part 2” (April 1990) young female adult video stars posed topless, smiling happily for the camera. In the accompanying article the women explained to readers how to obtain “skin that is pleasing to men” (in other words, skin like that which they are showing off in the picture), recommending bathing, lotions, massage, and getting enough sleep, amongst other methods. Later pages featured a large photograph of a grinning bondage mistress holding a whip as the accompanying article described her product recommendations for readers interested in trying sadomasochistic practices at home. The issue even discussed homosexuality, telling readers that even their own boyfriend may have homosexual tendencies and giving them advice on what to do should such an issue arise. In conjunction with taboo content, the pictures featured were usually of non-descript male and female

non-Japanese models in tableaux of love and sex.²¹ In contrast, more recent issues appear somewhat restrained in their content. Articles about sexually transmitted diseases and contraception remain, but the foreign models are all but gone, and less graphic content discussing potentially taboo topics such as sadomasochism and homosexuality is no longer a mainstay of the sex special issue. Instead, *anan*'s sex special issues have become less risqué, and more saturated with celebrities.

The trend towards featuring celebrities began in the May 1991 sex special issue. Titled “Become Beautiful Through Sex—Part 3”, *anan* once again featured a cartoon of a woman on the cover, boldly standing topless. Illustrating an article on foreplay were photographs of two non-Japanese models simulating sex—photographs much like those which appeared in previous Become Beautiful Through Sex issues. What was novel however was a five-page spread by controversial photographer Shinoyama Kishin featuring former Johnny's idol and actor Motoki Masahiro. The “hair nude” had become something of a fad in 1991 and Mokkun, as the idol was known, did not disappoint with an erotic series of photographs, each cleverly cropped to reveal as much as possible without crossing into being pornographic.²² Beginning with actress Higuchi Kanako's *Water Fruit* in early 1991, Shinoyama was the photographer behind three “hair nude” books released that year. The Japanese authorities had only just begun allowing the publication of material showing pubic hair and *Water Fruit* was subject to police investigations. The police eventually declined to prosecute, stating that *Water Fruit* could be considered an artistic work, but ongoing debate in the mainstream media focused on the timeless debate of

²¹ This phenomenon was in keeping with the trend of using non-Japanese (Caucasian) models in *anan* throughout the 1980s.

²² Actress and *tarento* Miyazawa Rie's photo book *Santa Fe*, famous for its topless and “hair nude” shots of the then 18-year-old Miyazawa taken by famed photographer Shinoyama Kishin, was released in November of the same year. See Allison (2000) and Schilling (1992, 1997) for further discussion of the controversy surrounding the publication of *Santa Fe*.

whether nude photographs should be considered art or pornography.²³ A few months later Motoki's *anan* pictorial brought Shinoyama's photographs further into the mainstream. Throughout the five-page, black-and-white spread Motoki was depicted nude, with wild tufts of dark pubic hair springing up from the bottom edge the page, encouraging the viewer to imagine what could be found just below the cropped margin (figure 9). Editor of *anan* at the time, Yodogawa Miyoko explained that the magazine could not rely on regular readers in order to maintain circulation numbers. Instead, the publication occasionally needed to release an issue which would appeal to a wider audience, something that would garner wider publicity and encourage greater sales (*Asahi Shimbun* 1992.9.27, page 13). The pictorial fulfilled that role since both Shinoyama and Motoki were both celebrities who provided just the celebrity spectacle the magazine required to "encourage those who would not usually buy it to pick up a copy" (Yodogawa quoted in the *Asahi Shimbun* 1992.9.27., page 13). The media reaction to Motoki's hair nude was telling. Motoki's nude pictorial (and nude photo book *White Room*, released in the same year) was subject to far less outrage than Shinoyama Kishin's other nude photobooks released in 1991—Higuchi Kanako's *Water Fruit* and 18-year-old idol Miyazawa Rie's *Santa Fe*, despite pushing the same boundaries surrounding the depiction of pubic hair. Nevertheless, the Motoki nude photo spread in *anan* provided the spectacle *anan* required to boost sales and launched an era in which celebrity appearances in the magazine became the key to survival.

²³ The police decision to not pursue charges of obscenity (*waisetsu*) in the case of *Water Fruit* focused on four aspects. First, that society had progressed to the point where people would accept that degree of content. Second, that the book could be considered an artistic work. Third, that the book was not aimed at juveniles, but rather at adults. Finally, the fact that experts had voiced caution about whether it would be possible to determine the criminal liability of the work. (*Asahi Shimbun*, 1991.6.11, page 31).

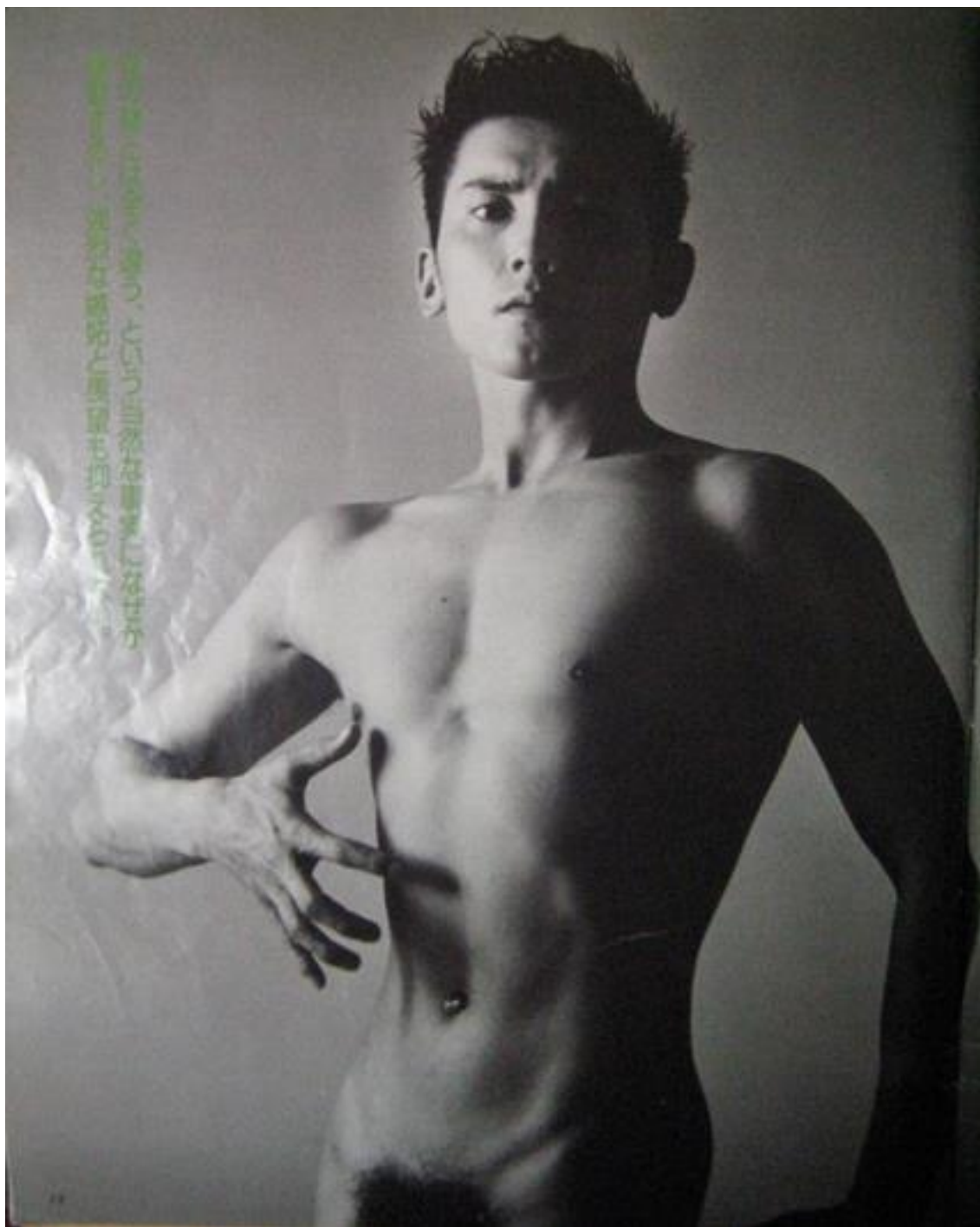


Figure 9. Motoki Masahiro in *anan* (1991).

In stark contrast to the artistic photographs of non-Japanese couples in various stages of undress common to the first 10 years of *anan*'s sex special issues, from the 1991 Motoki issue to today celebrity has become a key part of *anan*. Soccer player Miura Kazuyoshi stripped for the magazine in 1995, and in 1998 sales skyrocketed when Kimura Takuya—resident heartthrob of massively popular boy band SMAP—bared all (albeit with

“all” covered by strategically placed sheets). Kimura was followed in 1999 by band mate Katori Shingo in a surprising departure from his image as the comedic member of SMAP. Struggling to survive in an increasingly crowded magazine market, *anan* departed from its original manifesto of avoiding celebrity and gossip entirely behind and joined the increasingly intertwined world of Japanese popular culture. Patrick Galbraith and Jason Karlin describe Japan’s media landscape as “uniquely dense, accelerated, and interconnected... centered on idols” (2012, 2). Idol culture blossomed in the 1970s (Galbraith and Karlin 2012) and was increasingly employed in strategies to sell more to women and children in the 1980s.²⁴ By the 1990s idols and celebrities were a ubiquitous presence in the Japanese popular landscape, permeating television, radio, film, and print. Just as editor Yodogawa outlined in the *Asahi Shimbun* in 1992, *anan* required the buzz and spectacle provided by celebrities (and in particular celebrities undressing for the camera) in order to garner the free advertising that comes from the self-reflexive media mix that is the Japanese media landscape. Rather than paying for advertising, by choosing the right celebrity to feature *anan* could rely on what amounted to free advertising in the form of other media auto-reflexively discussing the celebrity and by extension, the issue of *anan* in which they appeared. The sex special issue provided the perfect place in which to create this spectacle, and allowed *anan* to stand out from an increasingly crowded and competitive magazine market. In my interview with *anan* editor Yamauchi, she described working on the sex special issue as “like a festival” (*omatsuri mitai-na kanji*), with each annual sex special issue creating a feeling of carnival both in the editing room and in the wider media. This carnival has become essential for survival in today’s increasingly crowded magazine market, and in the attention economy of post-growth Japan.

²⁴ For an in-depth discussion of Japan’s media mix and the autopoetic and self-reflexive ways in which the Japanese media is interconnected, see Steinberg (2012) and Galbraith and Karlin (2012).

Within this deeply interconnected media environment the power of talent agencies such as Johnny & Associates ensures that they retain full control of the idol's image, as well as the ability to refuse to cooperate with media who do not follow the directions of the agency. In my interview with *anan* editor Yamauchi, she mentioned that the biggest impediment to creating an online version of the magazine (and becoming competitive in an internet saturated era) was talent agencies such as Johnny & Associates. Indeed, when an issue of *anan* featuring a Johnny's idol on the cover goes on sale all official pictures of the issue online (including those in the product description on Amazon Japan) show the cover with the idol's picture "greyed out", with only an outline of where he was visible.²⁵ Johnny's and other agencies retain full control of how their idols are used, and are thereby able to dictate much of the content of the television program, magazine article, or other media in which they are employed. Due to the symbiotic relationship between media companies such as *anan* publisher Magazine House and Johnny's, the publisher is powerless to challenge the agency, for fear of retribution in the form of the withholding of idols and *tarento* for future issues.²⁶ In our interview, editor Yamauchi explained that when Johnny's idols do appear in *anan*, Magazine House and Johnny's conduct extensive negotiations around how the idol will be portrayed, with the power balance in Johnny's favor. Lukács draws upon the work of Fredric Jameson (1991) who has "lamented the trend that, in the condition in which culture has fallen prey to the massive forces of commodification, cultural producers are less and less capable of making political or critical statements" (2012, 41). In contrast to the explicit articles of years past *anan* has become

²⁵ It is ironic that the control exercised by Johnny's over the image of their idols is at once one reason behind the conservative shift in *anan*, while at the same time providing inspiration for the female-friendly porn aesthetic adopted by Silk Labo. See Chapter 5.

²⁶ Indeed, much of the inability or failure of Japanese media to move online can be attributed to talent agencies and management companies. As Galbraith and Karlin point out, Japan is a place where CDs still sell as companies provide information, goods, and access to stars along with the actual discs themselves (2012, 2-3).

increasingly bland as a result of the shifts in the Japanese market which saw *tarento*, not only advertisers, become central. As a result of its increased reliance on celebrities and the spectacle which they can generate, *anan* has been forced to move further and further away from its original position as a somewhat feminist agitator for social change, instead becoming just another mainstream women's magazine in a crowded market. Ironically the thing that *anan* relies on to survive—celebrity and spectacle—is the very thing that has contributed to its decline as inspiration and information for young women seeking diverse life paths.

Sex and the Male Body as Consumer Goods

At the same time that celebrities became a fundamental part of the sex special issue, the eroticization of men's bodies became increasingly central. Today, *anan* strives to outdo itself year after year by featuring the hottest celebrity on the cover and accompanying erotic pictorial feature. Since the first celebrity male nude picture-feature in 1991, excepting the appearances of actress Yonekura Ryōko in 2004, actress/singer Tsuchiya Anna in 2008, and AKB48 member Kojima Haruka in 2012, all other sex special issues have featured male Japanese celebrities, photographed male centerfold style.²⁷ Ishiguro's work on female models in fashion magazines explains that in the 1990s, a paradigm shift occurred in the type of "ideal body" depicted in women's magazines—from that of a western face on a western body, to a Japanese face on a Japanese body (2009). The move from *hāfu* (bi-cultural) models like Risa in 1970s *anan*, and non-Japanese models in 1980s *anan* to Japanese models and celebrities illustrates this trend. In the 1990s and 2000s the

²⁷ The use of Kojima Haruka from AKB48 in the 2012 sex special issue demonstrates just how ubiquitous the idol group has become in the contemporary Japanese popular cultural landscape. In my interview with editor Yamauchi, conducted just a few days before the release of *anan*'s 2012 sex special issue, she was unable to tell me who would appear on the cover. The element of surprise, as *anan* aims to get the most popular celebrity of the time undressed and in the magazine, is an essential part of selling the sex special issue.

role of sexual object has increasingly fallen on males, augmented with non-Japanese females in a variety of sexual, yet ultimately benign, poses. This shift has for the first time positioned men's bodies as a commodity; yet another product for women to consume, supposedly for their own pleasure. In recent years, each fortnightly issue of *anan* has featured a one-page nude photograph of an "ordinary" (not celebrity) man, entitled "male nudes" (*otoko no hadaka*). The pages feature the man's age, profession, height, weight, blood type and place of birth, along with a short interview with the participant. In *anan* men's bodies are now commoditized and consumed passionately as female readers are encouraged to gaze upon the male body for their own pleasure. As James Beggan and Scott Allison (2009, 446) explain, "[w]hereas traditional, male-oriented pornography treats women as objects and men as subjects, for-women pornography is intended to afford women the subject role as spectator and men the object role as target of female gaze." In contrast, Coward (1984, 26) argues that "[f]emale desire is to some extent the lynch pin of a consumerist society... Everywhere female desire is sought, bought packaged and consumed." Coward explains that in a "sexually divided hierarchical society" pleasure is "tied to positions of power and subordination" (1985, 106). Providing erotic pictorial features of famous men, *anan* invites women to feel empowered, modern, and in control through the consumption of the male body; an act that ultimately requires them to once again participate in contemporary society in very much the way that they have been for the past half century—as consumers. The mainstream media have situated female empowerment through the lens of male sexuality and dominance, overlooking the agency and autonomy of women and instead positioning them solely as the primary consumers in contemporary Japanese consumer culture.

While increasingly encouraged to consume men's bodies for pleasure, readers of *anan*'s sex special issues from the 1990s onwards began receiving very different messages

about sex and sexuality to the pleasure-centric approach of early sex special issues. Rather than open celebrations of masturbation, pleasure, and becoming beautiful through sex, the magazine began to run articles which explained what men desired from sex. Issues during this era included “The Kind of Women Who Hold Men Captive” (*otoko o toriko ni suru onna to wa?*) in 1997 and “I Want to Be the Kind of Woman Men Chase” (*otoko ga oikaketakunaru onna ni naritai*) in 2000. As the content became less directly centered on pleasure and more focused on catching the attention of men by being attractive and sexy, the tone of the special issue began to focus increasingly on how readers could pleasure their boyfriends or partners, rather than find pleasure in sex themselves. Sex became depicted as a skill all women must master in order to “hold a man captive” and readers were encouraged to hone their expertise by following the prescriptive advice presented. Articles in which women were taught—with the aid of cartoon sketches—how to give good oral sex most clearly exemplify this move. In the August 2014 sex special issue, the adult video director Tameike Gorō reminded female readers that “love can be expressed through techniques” and encouraged them to learn how to best give hand jobs and fellatio. Tameike cautioned readers that because men never really grow up, women should avoid making such remarks as “you already came?” (instead he recommends women say “thank you for coming”) and, “sex with you is better than with my ex-boyfriend” (rather he encourages the use of the phrase “sex with you is the best I have ever had”).²⁸

Even when discussing female pleasure, phallocentrism is present in sex special issues of this era. Manga artist Yamamoto Naoki, in an article titled “Tell Us! What Makes for Amazing Sex?” (*oshiete! saikō no sekkusu tte nan desu ka?*) explained that men really enjoy it when women enjoy sex, giving this as the reason he always draws women who

²⁸ Similar articles on how to perform oral sex men will enjoy also appeared in 2009.8.5., number 1670, page 41; 2012.8.15, number 1819, page 35.

“are really wet” in his manga.²⁹ In Yamamoto’s manga female characters are not “wet” as a result of their own pleasure, but because witnessing their sexual arousal is pleasing for men to see. *anan*’s readers were encouraged by Yamamoto to enjoy sex, but for the sake of their male partners. From the 1990s *anan* was a celebrity driven, increasingly conservative publication that would have been barely recognizable to its 1970s founders. In this way the magazine mirrored the unrealized dreams of the feminist movement which found very little room to move within a society in which everything—including female pleasure—has been commodified.

The commodification of women’s sexuality in magazines is one way in which women are socialized to view themselves as commodities and learn to market themselves accordingly. Fahs reminds us that “women’s magazines represent another key example of the ways which women’s sexuality enters into an economy of buying, selling, and trading, particularly in the sense that one commodity is compared with other similar commodities, and thus, their value assessed and revised” (2011, 190). She argues that women’s magazines teach women how to better themselves as commodities, and to “*concretely assess their own relative value*” (ibid., italics in original). Fahs, drawing upon Luce Irigaray, finds irony in the fact that women cannot increase or decrease their value in a marketplace in which every aspect of them is commoditized; that role is reserved for men alone. Fahs describes this as women being told to “garner a certain social currency through sexual knowledge and skill”, which in turn reinforces the idea that women should “perform as products of male sexual labor” (2011, 191). Women garner sexual knowledge and learn sexual skills in order to better market themselves in the sexual economy; in other words, such knowledge and skill is gained to benefit men.

²⁹ Vibrator collector and freelance author specializing in all things female sexuality related OL Momoco often writes of her disappointment in this shift in *anan*. See Chapter 4.

While women remain marginalized in higher education, the workforce, politics and other spheres of power, despite (or perhaps as a result of) their often marginalized roles in society, young women are frequently described as powerful consumers in Japan. In fact, it is young, unmarried women in their 20s—*anan*'s prime demographic—who often have the highest disposable income as they work full time but continue living with their parents. Karen Kelsky describes such women as commanding “a high level of expendable income, derived from their secretarial ‘office lady’ (OL) positions in Japan’s corporations, combined with often company-mandated residence in their parents’ home” (2001, 85). Although it is less common in recent years for companies to insist that workers remain living with their parents, for practical and financial reasons, workers often do—contributing little to the family finances and spending a large proportion of their income on fashion, play and travel. Due to the structure of the Japanese labor market OL positions are relatively precarious, provide little room for career development, and are emblematic of the way in which women are shut out of stable employment. It is women in OL type positions that most women’s magazines target, marketing a lifestyle and accompanying accessories to readers for whom consumption, rather than career, is positioned as purposeful. Skov and Moeran argue that women are seen as “key figures in Japan’s consumer culture” and are the country’s greatest spenders (1995, 5). This phenomenon is further described by Youna Kim as women “allowed to be, or coerced into being the primary agents of cultural consumption” (2010, 29). In fact, Tanaka has even gone so far as to describe consumption patterns as enabling women to become the “force behind major changes in society” (1998, 128). The concept of power through consumption, however, has its critics. By claiming that consumption is “a form of self-reflection offered to Japanese women by those media targeted directly at them” (1995, 5), Skov and Moeran question the idea that consumption leads to greater social influence and ask instead whether women actually compensate for

their subordination and lack of participation in politics and industry by participating fully in consumer culture. The very fact that many young women must continue relying on their families financially in order to be able to finance their buying habits indicates the contradiction of the liberation through consumption argument. Consumption may be the sole sphere of public life to which women have full access in neoliberal Japan, but it is difficult to view consumer culture optimistically as a place in which women can express agency and be empowered.

Postfeminist Media, Raunch Culture, or the Ultimate in Consumer Culture?

Attempts to place *anan*'s sex special issues in a global context may conclude that the phenomenon is a Japanese example of "raunch culture" or "fishnet feminism", in which women are encouraged to objectify themselves under the guise of sexual freedom (Charles Pearce 1999). Within this form of so-called female empowerment it is claimed that increasingly prevalent expressions of female sexuality in the media and wider culture are an example of how successfully feminism has allowed women to be liberated and express themselves sexually. Yet such a form of expression would only be truly possible in a society in which widespread cultural change as the result of a successful second wave feminist movement had occurred. Instead, detractors warn that such sexual expression remains a sign that women are still very much valued for their appearance and sexual attractiveness rather than the other ways in which they participate in and contribute to society, and that female sexuality is still presented in the media through the prism of masculine normative sexual expectations (Levy 2005; Dines 2010). When I first saw the sex special issue on newsstands I found myself wondering if *anan* was an example of the explosion of raunch culture reaching into the Japanese market and competing with the good wife and wise mother ideology for a way in which to define and limit women's roles. This explanation fits uneasily in the Japanese context however. As discussed above, if

anything the content of *anan* has become less, not more, explicit in recent years, despite a shift towards depicting Japanese male bodies for pleasure and consumption. Instead, the magazine has treated female sexuality very much as a product, one which can be marketed and sold in a capitalist marketplace. In an article published December 12, 2000 titled “Sex: From Hidden Existence to as Everyday as Makeup” the *Mainichi Shimbun* commented that as women’s magazines changed throughout the 1970s and 1980s, “sex” became just another feature alongside staples such as fashion and make-up. The article points to *anan* being a sensation initially, but maintains that as the market became filled with similar content it ceased to shock. Instead, selling sexuality became mainstream.

anan’s most recent sex specials also read as a backlash against the potential of the individualized woman of the 1970s and early 1980s. Women are once again given extremely prescriptive messages about what is socially required of them, including in the private spheres of relationships and the bedroom. The co-option and utilization of women’s desires may be nothing new, but selling out from newsstands every year the *anan* sex special takes the mainstreaming of sexual discourse to new levels. In examining why *anan* has failed to reach its full potential an understanding of wider social trends is essential. Mackie mentions that as a result of women remaining underrepresented at elite national universities, which feed graduates into the public service and management of large corporations, there remains a “lack of women in decision-making positions in government, in the civil service and private industry” (2003, 167-168). The same could be said for mainstream media organizations, who not only have the power to set the agenda for public debate but also shape how such debates are represented publicly, who may contribute to the discussion, and how long agendas remain in the public eye.³⁰ Despite the feelings of

³⁰ Even when women do reach positions in which they are responsible for agenda setting they commonly perpetuate masculine values in order to fit into the work environment. See Lavie and Lehman-Wilzig (2003).

hope and momentum for social change present in *anan*'s early days, very little has changed in terms of wider social structures. Ultimately the magazine has been co-opted into mainstream media and has been unable to reach its full potential—much like Japanese feminism itself.

Merry White observes that Japan remains “a culture of separate spheres” in which work life and private life are kept separate (1992, 61-62). This observation produces the concept of younger women as “short-term feminists”, in which women desire equality with the men in their work and personal lives while young, yet ultimately take up conservative roles in the home upon marriage (ibid., 71). Yamashita Etsuko, in her scathing critique of the “age of women myth” argues that it was capitalism, rather than feminism that propelled the social advancement of women (1991, 43). Within this environment, she argues, feminism was seen as another marketing tool, something that could be utilized to encourage women to work, and to consume everything from magazines, alcohol, food, and insurance (ibid., 46). In Yamashita's eyes, the “era of women”, not feminist discourse, freed women to pursue dreams that were manufactured and marketed to them by companies using marketing teams composed of women who were seeking to open up previously unexploited markets and make the employment of cheap (female) labor possible. *anan* has been at the forefront of this meshing of capitalism, discourses of freedom, and feminism. Reading and emulating the *anan* lifestyle provides a safe sphere in which to play at being a type of short-term feminist, giving readers a “gap period” between the confines of high school and the expectations that come with marriage and motherhood, in which they can explore freedom and individualization without having to commit to feminist activism long-term.

The failure of *anan* to reach its true potential as a beacon of feminist hope in a society in which women still experience discrimination in almost all arenas echoes

publications such as the US *Cosmopolitan* (1965-present) and Australian *Cleo* (1972-2016).³¹ These publications offered a similarly alternative vision of life to female readers in their teens and 20s during the 1970s and 1980s but, like *anan*, were never explicitly or politically feminist like their contemporary *Ms.* magazine. Angela McRobbie explains that “the *Cosmopolitan* brand of liberation throughout the 1970s and the 1980s only meant better or more sex for women” (1997, 191), and argues that “from the mid-1980s onwards the whole field of magazines shifted towards seeking improvements for the individual. Self-improvement became the underlying principle, with some gestures being made to better careers and financial independence” (ibid.). The *anan* experience is echoed in women’s magazine markets around the world, particularly as the publishing industry first reached maturity (and market saturation) in the early 1990s, and then began to decline as a result of the introduction of the internet and online media in the 1990s-2000s.³² The peak and subsequent decline of the publishing industry coincided with the shift towards neoliberal discourses of self-responsibility and the proliferation of celebrity culture, culminating in *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, and *anan* abandoning their feminist roots in favor of mainstream discourses of self-improvement and consumption. The *anan* of today has become so deeply intertwined with Japan’s ubiquitous consumer and celebrity culture that it is no longer able to be truly innovative or challenging.

Post-2000 *anan* serves as a strong example of postfeminist media in Japan today, albeit one that developed in an environment in which second wave feminism was never

³¹ Inspired by the US *Cosmopolitan* magazine and famous for its male nude centerfolds and edgy, controversial content, *Cleo* magazine folded in March 2016 after a long period of decline, and may prove to be a portent of things to come for the print media, not only in Australia but around the world. See Le Masurier (2007) for more on *Cleo* and feminism in the Australian context.

³² Nippon argues that the Japanese magazine publishing industry peaked in 1996 and entered a period of decline thereafter, culminating in a 42% fall in sales between 1998 and 2013. Nippon.com. 2015. “Japan Publishing in Free Fall.” Accessed February 15, 2016. <http://www.nippon.com/en/features/h00092/>.

truly successful in sparking widespread cultural change. The conspicuous consumption of sex as just another consumer good is similar to the discourse seen in *Sex and the City*—a program that Jane Arthurs (2003) describes as a postfeminist, woman-centered drama. She explains that “these are dramas that in the wake of second wave feminism selectively deploy feminist discourses as a response to cultural changes in the lives of their potential audience, an audience that is addressed as white, heterosexual, and relatively youthful and affluent” (2003, 83). Arthurs explains that throughout the series, “work is collapsed into the private sphere and becomes another form of self-expression, alongside consumption, thereby side-stepping the postfeminist problematic... *Sex and the City* is able to exploit fully the glossy women’s magazines’ consumerist approach to sexuality, in which women’s sexual pleasure and agency is frankly encouraged as part of a consumer lifestyle and attitude” (ibid., 84-85). While *anan* may not be a fictional work, it presents the same kind of lifestyle catalogue as *Sex and the City* and the Japanese trendy dramas analyzed by Lukács (2012). Designed to sell aspirations and images, and to encourage the purchase of products, Japanese trendy dramas of the 1990s were so intertwined with celebrity and the consumption of fashion and lifestyles as to make their actual content almost irrelevant. The sex special issue similarly serves to exploit a consumerist approach to sexuality as part of a lifestyle depicted as fashionable and worthy of emulation. Andrea Press speaks of the rise of postfeminist television in the 1990s explaining that “[p]ostfeminism... is characterized by a clear and constant undercutting of the ideals and visions of liberal feminism... which stressed the need for women to achieve equality with men in the workplace, the home, and the bedroom” (2009, 143-144). Recent issues of *anan* can be seen to undermine these ideals by pressing for women to adhere to prescriptive ideals of beauty, bedroom manners, to consume products, and ultimately have sex as part of a “lifestyle”, rather than for pleasure’s sake.

Safe (or Safely Contained?) Sex

Despite early sex special issues of *anan* attempting to position women as the subjects of their own sexuality, from the 1990s onwards the publication shifted to a position that subordinated female pleasure and sought to empower women not by providing them with alternative means of public participation, but instead through their capacity to consume. According to Kim “female individualization has emerged as a major mode of identity formation” but ultimately one that remains problematic in nature, due to the gendered nature of society and culture (2012, 33). As Kim explains, “[t]he individualization of life experiences may reflect a discursive shift in the ways that women today ‘imagine’ and ‘talk’ about their lives, rather than a substantive change in actual life conditions” (ibid., 34). Even when women’s issues are given space in the mass media, they are usually presented in such a way as to limit debate. Mackie explains that “feminist issues only appeared in the mass circulation dailies if they could be presented in the context of a sensational ‘angle’” (2003, 195).³³ *anan* provides yet another example of such sensational reporting, using women’s sexuality and nudity to increase circulation without offering a platform upon which to seriously debate the issues at hand.

anan manages to court controversy for financial gain, however it is done in such a way that it does not threaten the status quo. Parallels can be drawn with the gay rights movement in the US. As Lisa Duggan writes “[t]he new homonormativity... is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (2003, 50).

³³ One famous example of sensationalist reporting pushing feminist issues into the spotlight was the 1986 “Agnes Controversy” (*agunesu ronsō*) in which feminist scholar Ueno Chizuko and writer (and *anan* contributor) Hayashi Mariko were pitted against each other in a debate about work, motherhood, and the role of women in contemporary society. See Hambleton (2012) for further discussion of the controversy.

Duggan argues that “[t]he privacy-in-public claims and publicizing strategies of ‘the gay movement’ are rejected in favor of a public recognition of a domesticated, depoliticized privacy” (2003, 65). *anan* operates similarly, drawing a once controversial and taboo subject into the mainstream and creating safely demarcated boundaries in which it may be discussed and utilized for the benefit of the state. This process of “encompassment” is one in which ideas, ideologies or even groups of people who could be potentially threatening to a national ideology or framework are invited in and safely utilized within the dominant social group or ideology, their ideas made more palatable and less threatening. Just as Duggan writes of homosexual politics in the US, women’s sexuality within Japan has also been, through a mediated process, domesticated and depoliticized in a way that has meant that what discussion remains in the mainstream media is unthreatening and safe for the consumption of all. As Fahs reminds us, “[n]ecessary to the process of commodification is the near total loss of subjectivity imposed upon the commodity, the abolition of her sexual agency, and the construction of clearly delineated boundaries within which she can experience her sexual desires” (2011, 188-189). *anan* has, to some extent, been responsible for the construction and maintenance of these boundaries in the decades since the first sex special issue was published.

Providing the veneer of sexual freedom with a depoliticized and unthreatening form of female sexual expression underneath may have the impact of demobilizing and demotivating women who may otherwise have demanded spaces in which to become free, individualized sexual selves. Instead *anan* serves as a form of vaccination against the desire to protest the status quo by providing a small hint of emancipation bundled together with commercial co-option that instead serves to strengthen the dominant ideology of the time—in this case that women’s sexuality is something to be controlled and used to benefit a pro-growth ideology. Packaging sexual freedom and exploration with products, services,

and ideas of beauty and social acceptability means that in *anan* at least, sexuality is depicted as freeing, but can actually be safely used to benefit the Japanese economy.³⁴

Conclusion

The story of *anan* is one of the unrealized potential of feminism in Japan. After an initial push in the 1970s and 1980s, commercial interests in high-growth era Japan co-opted discourses of female emancipation and used them to encourage women to be the primary consumers in Japan's well-developed capitalist market. The space for women to discuss and debate issues of interest to them is still very much dominated by male journalists and editors who not only act as information gatekeepers, but also maintain the ability to dictate what ideas are put out into the social realm for discussion in the first place. Beginning with the *ryōsai kenbo* ideology and evolving postwar into an ideology of consumption for self-realization, for the past 120 years women's dreams have been molded and manipulated by magazines for the benefit of the state. Just as raising the new generation of workers and soldiers for the Japanese empire was seen as the ultimate role of women in the pre-war period, as they have increasingly participated in life outside the home women are now encouraged by the media to support the nation by acting as the primary consumers in post-growth capitalist Japan. *anan* operates within this framework and has sought to solidify sexuality and yet another sphere of consumption in contemporary Japanese consumer society.

Charles Pearce (1999, 272) argues that the idea of "gender" has been replaced with the construct of "sexuality" on the online battleground of third wave feminism. Examining *anan* the expectation is that women will view their sexuality through the male gaze and adapt their consumption patterns to match. In the case of the mainstream media at least,

³⁴ See Chapters 4 and 5 for further on the commercialization of female desire, and Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of the role of beauty in discourses of female sexuality.

women's desires are created, constructed and manipulated for the benefit of the capitalist state. The mainstream media have to some degree hijacked women's sexuality, repackaged it, and marketed it to female consumers. This sexuality can then be "correctly" consumed within clearly demarcated "safe" boundaries that do not threaten to subvert the status quo. *anan* provides guidance to the ultimate "gap year" in readers' lives—the period of freedom they will be allowed before once again being required to play the role of wife and mother. Despite early issues advocating for freedom, individualization and self-fulfillment, *anan* currently espouses an ideology that does not stray too far from the prescriptive nature wider social discourse. Ultimately sexuality and desire is mediated and the perceived danger of truly individualized, sexual women can be mitigated against.

Asahi Shimbun remarked in 2012 that *anan* has maintained an audience of women willing to pay around 400 yen for the magazine every two weeks despite ever increasing free and up-to-date information available online by providing information that resonates with readers. One way in which they achieve this is by gauging readers' interests, hopes and fears through online surveys offered on the publisher's website each fortnight. *anan* clearly still holds appeal for a new generation of readers, but for how long? It must be remembered that *anan* does not, and never did, stand alone in a society in which representations of women's sexuality remain loaded with expectations and deeper significance. *anan* both inspired other media, and drew inspiration from the social movements around it. In recent years, magazines such as the relatively short-lived *Vibe Girls* (1999-2003) and *Vanessa* (2011-2012), and books which focus on pleasure and sexuality have appeared as part of the trend to portray sexual pleasure and enjoyment as a lifestyle choice. Magazines such as the two mentioned above however struggle to survive beyond their first few issues as they cater to a particularly niche market and often take the discussion of women's sexuality beyond the mainstream ideas featured in publications

such as *anan*. Despite challenging taboos that not even *anan* can cover, due to the very nature of the media such magazines and books usually focus on sexuality from a particularly consumption driven perspective.

Throughout the period of conducting research for this dissertation I have had the opportunity to speak with many women who came of age during the 1970s. Many of my interlocutors—the majority of whom work in the female-friendly pleasure industry—were inspired by *anan* and spoke of the impact it had had on their lives and life choices.³⁵ They loved *anan*, appreciated the hope it provided, and dreamed along with the magazine about leading lives with the freedom to make their own choices. In most cases *anan* was responsible for sparking an interest in all things sex and has assisted in the launching of many careers in the female-friendly pleasure industries. As a result, the magazine can be considered a central actor in the female-friendly pleasure business, albeit a commercial and problematic one. Tellingly, the vast majority of these women were highly critical of the *anan* of today, expressing disappointment in the male-centric approach the magazine now takes to women's sexuality. However, as a result of the way in which these women are involved commercially in the production and sale of products featured in *anan*, they are less critical of the commercial focus of recent sex special issues. At a women-only event held in Tokyo at the end of 2011, sex shop owner and author of *Did anan Sex Make Us Beautiful?* (*anan no sekkusu de kirei ni nareta?*) Kitahara Minori and manga artist Uchida Shungiku reminisced fondly about the way in which *anan* was partially responsible for creating the first generation of women who not only learned explicitly of sexual pleasure, but also of the existence of the clitoris. Uchida detailed how the publication of early *anan* sex specials had given her the opportunity to consider her own sexuality outside of the

³⁵ It must be acknowledged that readers of any text will ultimately construct and create meaning in their own right. See for example Morley (1980); Radway (1984); and Ang (1996).

misinformation and prescriptive ideas she had been exposed to growing up in the 1950s and 60s. Kitahara echoed these sentiments and explained that the magazine had played a large role in changing how she perceived her own sexuality and sexual fulfillment, in particular after discouraging experiences in school sex education classes and in trying to find information that was not freely available at the time. The two women also made the connection that the discourse of the time was for women to work, enjoy the freedom of having their own income and find fulfillment not in marriage and motherhood, but in lives outside of the home for the first time. *anan* fueled this expectation with its depictions of female emancipation and encouragement of readers to enjoy their sex lives but ultimately stumbled as the feminist ideals espoused in the 1970s failed to come to fruition, both in the magazine and in wider Japanese society.

In October 2015 new magazine *Maria Oriente* launched with a sex special issue. Aimed at women in their mid-30s, the publication anticipated this demographic of readers—raised on *anan*'s sex special issues—would be hungry for information about sex and beauty tailored to their age group. Much like *anan*, *Maria Oriente* presented page after page of lingerie fashion spreads, the latest vibrators, surveys on sexual habits, all supplemented with advice on how to age well and remain sexy in middle age. The magazine insisted that “women become attractive in evolution” (*Maria Oriente*'s own translation of the text *shinka suru koto de yori miryokuteki-na josei e*), advising that women emit more pheromones as they enter their 30s, 40s, and 50s, but that they must ensure they remain modest despite their growing confidence and beauty. Launching a new magazine in the current publishing environment is a risky decision, and the editors of *Maria Oriente* aimed for maximum media coverage with their choice of cover model—singer Nakashima Mika—and sex theme. Perusing the generously stacked magazine racks at my local book store I often feel that not a month goes by without one publication or

another running an issue dedicated to sex. Ultimately *Maria Oriente* became just another voice in the crowd and folded after a single issue. *anan* may have been responsible for the conception of a once revolutionary idea, but the sex special issue is now a mainstay of the Japanese publishing industry, one that has been fully co-opted into the commercial fold and no longer holds the power to shock, let alone challenge women to reconsider their status in society.³⁶ If *anan*'s story is one of hope for feminism and sex-positivity ultimately eclipsed by commercial interests, then the remainder of this dissertation is what happens after that process, to those who were inspired, and by those who hope to seek a different path.

³⁶ Kitahara Minori argues us in her book *Did anan Sex Make Us Beautiful? (anan no sekkusu de kirei ni nareta?)* that *anan*'s sex special issue provided an example for other magazines that persists until this day (2011, 61).

3. Procreation Before Pleasure: Sex Education as Ideology

A few days before Halloween I find myself ordering drinks and making small talk with two men in a karaoke box in central Shibuya. Despite the enormous flat screen television, microphones, and thick song books positioned at the front of the room none of us have any intention of singing. Our drinks arrive, the staff leave us to our own devices, and one of the men presses buttons the DVD player under the television as I offer (ultimately unhelpful) advice on its use. When I turn back to the table I discover the second man unloading the contents of the very large backpack he has carried on the train from the suburbs into the city. I discover that he has been hauling around an incredible variety of sex toys, masturbation aids, lubricants, and DVDs, and watch as he chooses a Silk Labo and *anan* magazine collaboration DVD out of the pile and hands it to the other participant to play. Sweating, I realize that the two earnest men sitting opposite me are even more nervous than I am. One checks a last time that the karaoke box staff are not looking on, the other presses play on the DVD player, and the event begins.

Surrounded by “love goods” and with the *anan* porn DVD playing not-so-softly in the background the two men—nurse Yamaguchi and chiropractor Kato—explain why they felt compelled to attend today’s event.¹ As we pick up and play with the controls of the various sex toys on the table the men explain their dissatisfaction with the sex education they received at school and how little it has prepared them for married life. Following the birth of their children, both men feel that their relationships with their wives have suffered and that there is nowhere they can go to seek information and support. They describe how their wives have always been too embarrassed to talk about sex, an issue that came to a

¹ Yamaguchi is one of several names the founder of the Group to Consider Love and Sex for Married Couples (now known as JASH) goes by and Kato is a pseudonym at the request of the interlocutor. See Chapter 4 for a discussion of pseudonyms in the pleasure product industry.

head after the birth of their children (and subsequent death of their sex lives). The two men lament the fact that their partners have become “mothers” and elaborate that their wives’ inability to discuss sex compounds the problem, blaming the years of conditioning and education for the belief that women should not actively enjoy sex, let alone discuss it openly. Both men are pragmatic, understanding that DVDs and masturbation aids can only improve their situations so far. Instead, a general frustration with mainstream discourses of marriage, sex, and love permeates the conversation that unfolds amongst the bizarre scene of hundreds of sex toys laid out on a karaoke box table in central Tokyo on a sunny Friday afternoon. Contrary to how it may have looked to outsiders, this was not part of a cheap porn production or sex toy industry event. Instead, we were there to participate in the monthly meeting of a rather wholesomely named organization founded by Yamaguchi—the Group to Consider Love and Sex for Married Couples (Fūfu no Sei to Ai o Kangaeru Kai).

A common refrain I heard throughout my years of fieldwork at pleasure product, alternative sex education, and community events is that “sex education in Japan is just not good enough” (*fujūbun*). This chapter examines sex education in Japan today, the ideologies and agendas behind official education curriculum, and the groups and individuals who are working to change commonly accepted discourses of sexuality. As this chapter will demonstrate, there remains widespread conservatism and lack of willingness to tackle issues of sexual health, contraception, and pleasure in the official sex education curriculum of Japan today. Instead, the task is left up to self-styled “expert” authors, non-profit organizations, individual doctors, and numerous fringe groups on the margins of mainstream society. The work of these alternative sex education providers stems from a belief that the basic education provided to young people in Japan today does not fully prepare them for dating, sex, marriage, pregnancy, childrearing, or relationships in general. These groups are joined by unconventional organizations such as swingers’ clubs and

sexual hypnosis providers who are all involved in various ways in trying to educate women, albeit from the margins of society. Ultimately however the discourse frequently focuses on individual responsibility as women are propelled to make efforts seek information not available in the mainstream, and to create change within themselves. Sex education in Japan today produces a particular discourse of bio-power, one in which students are encouraged to use their sexuality “for the sake of increased force and productivity” (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983, 8). Non-reproductive sex—and in particular *female* non-reproductive sex—is denied a place in this ideology. This chapter examines the production of knowledge about sex—from the official sex education curriculum to the work of alternative sex education providers—and questions why, as sexuality is produced and mediated in contemporary Japan, female pleasure is almost entirely missing from the discourse.

A Brief History of Sex Education

In the years following the Meiji Restoration (1868), ideas of hygiene and “social medicine”—necessary for the modernization of the state and utilization of the populace to strengthen the state and army—began to filter into Japan from Europe. These ideas encompassed many facets of life including sexuality in a process Frühstück describes as having made “sexuality”, or transformed “sexuality into discourse” as the government sought to “understand, document, and regulate the sex lives of the Japanese populace” (2000, 332-333). Within this environment sex education became essential. Beginning with lectures at (all male) colleges, sex education and debates about how best to provide it raged at the turn of the 20th century, commonly focusing on the evils of masturbation and the importance of protecting young men from its ill effects.² When girls did feature, it was

² See Chapter 4 for more on the perceived ills of masturbation in interwar Japan.

within an official discourse preoccupied with girls as the future mothers of numerous healthy children to serve the Japanese empire. Frühstück argues that articles featured in pedagogical journals during the prewar and interwar period emphasized “the supposed ‘special characteristics’ of the female mind and physique” and that “authors insisted that girls’ and women’s sexual desire was inseparably pervaded and guided by their desire to have children” (2003, loc 904). Many authors even went so far as to declare women’s desire weaker in comparison to men’s, or to discount female desire altogether (Frühstück 2003, loc 904).

As women were expected to raise healthy citizens for the nation as it modernized and prepared for war, it was considered necessary to provide them with appropriate sex education. Women’s magazines of this era became preoccupied with providing information to women on how to ensure their sexual health, and consequently the health of their children.³ Frühstück argues, “it is clear that most pedagogues and physicians were convinced that sex education in general and at schools in particular would have a positive effect on sexual morals and behavior” (2003, loc 954). Nevertheless, education—along with surveys conducted by sexologists of the time—was very much focused on male sexual behaviors and desire. This was to change in 1948 when zoologist and sexology pioneer Asayama Shinichi included women in his work for the first time. Asayama’s findings revealed that girls “realized their subordinate status most of all in sexual relationships and thus suffered from ‘men’s egoism’ (*dansei no egoizumu*) and ‘society’s irrationality’ (*shakai no fugōri*)” (ibid., loc 2358). Asayama advocated for a shift in social policies “[i]n order that our daughters not be hurt, future wives become happy, and sexuality really liberated” (quoted in Frühstück 2003, loc 2358), bold statements in a Japan struggling to rebuild and limit population growth in the immediate postwar period.

³ See Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of this issue.

Asayama may have hoped that the relative freedom and subsequent prosperity of the postwar period would allow for the development of a discourse of sexual liberation, but he died in 1978 without seeing this dream realized. In 1947 the Ministry of Education published its first paper on “purity education” (*junketsu kyōiku*), and in 1949 the Council for Purity Education (Junketsu Kyōiku Inkaï) was established with the core goal being to teach abstinence before marriage—a message that was implicitly aimed at girls (Frühstück 2003, loc 2345). As population control became increasingly necessary and ever greater numbers of young people entered formal education, research into sexuality (pushed underground during the interwar years) was conducted on a wide scale by government departments, academics, and doctors. This research in turn informed government policy and education curriculum, but was not free from ideological debate. In examining the work of sexology study groups founded in the decade following the end of World War Two, Frühstück argues that their work towards the “development of measures for achieving a ‘wholesome’ sexual life, sexual morals, and sex education” (ibid., loc 2374) demonstrate the continuation of “a ‘colonial ruling apparatus’ of sex and sexuality... into the immediate postwar era” (ibid., loc 2385).⁴ Such control allowed for the introduction of abortion in 1948 to ease the pressures felt by rapid population increase, and was also apparent in the way in which businesses and the government turned against birth control once the economy improved and labor shortages began (Norgren 2001, 84). In comparing the current system with the period of rapid change at the turn of the 20th century, Frühstück reminds us that “the ways of making sexual knowledge, the attempts at administering sex and sexuality, and the emphasis on a hardly questioned heteronormativity have not been

⁴ These groups include the Japanese Association for Sexology (Nihon Seigakkai), founded in 1952 and comprised of university professors, officials from the Council of Children’s Welfare and the ministry of Health and Welfare, and even an editor from the *Yomiuri Shimbun*. This diverse group of participants demonstrates that rather than being informed by research or medical expertise, the group was beholden to political agendas.

subject to major conceptual changes comparable to those that took place during the first half of the twentieth century” (2003, loc 2392). Sex education is, to this day, conducted not as a way to empower individual citizens to make decisions related to their health, bodies, or pleasure. Rather, the Japanese government views sex education as an essential way to disseminate ideologies of gender roles and citizenship, with the goal of guiding young citizens to utilize their sexuality in a manner deemed productive by the state.

“Extreme” Sex Education, and Extreme Reactions

Official sex education in Japan today is often criticized as simplistic, dry, and overly focused on reproduction and the “importance of life” (*inochi no taisetsusa*). Hiroko Hirose (2013) explains how there exists no specific course dedicated to sex education, rather it is taught across a number of subjects such as health and physical education (in which reproduction and puberty is covered), home economics (family issues) extra-curricular activity (gender relationships) and moral education (respecting life). Genaro Castro-Vázquez and Izumi Kishi argue that postwar, “the rhetoric on sex education has not changed”, concluding that the dominant discourse of sex education in Japanese schools “appears to be ruled by *nemureru ko wo okosu mono dearu* (let sleeping dogs lie)”, due to fears that detailed sex education will encourage sexual behavior in young people (2002, 482). Instead, teachers are encouraged to disseminate “correct knowledge” (*tadashī chishiki*) with a focus on biology and reproduction, and instructed to avoid discussing anything too “specific” (*gutaiteki*).⁵ Due to the lack of a specific subject or time in which sex education is taught, teachers often pick and choose parts of the textbooks to cover, meaning that many students leave school with an incomplete view of the complexities of

⁵ What exactly constitutes “correct knowledge” remains unclear, even to educators themselves. Instead, the guidelines released by MEXT are vague and reflect a lack of consensus about what exactly sex education should cover.

human sexuality.⁶ The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) released updated guidelines in 1999 with the goal of improving sex education, specifying that “[s]ex education should aim to develop the full personality of pupils and nurture a rich sense of humanity among them so that they can act in desirable ways. Pupils should be able to respect life, respect people and respect gender equal relationships” (Ministry of Education 1999, 9 in Hirose 2013, 675).

According to Yukari Kawahara, the agenda at the heart of MEXT’s guidelines is concern with the falling birthrate and its implications for the future of the nation (2000, 295). Even when arguing for education about gender equality, the future roles of students as mothers and fathers is emphasized. As Castro-Vasquez and Kishi explain, “[s]ince 1986, the Monbusho (MEXT) recognized that “sexual equality between males and females” has to be attained by means of sex education. In order to attain sexual equality, students have to be fully aware of their sex role, to observe the appropriate behavior as husband, wife, father, or mother in the future” (2002, 467). Accordingly, in MEXT documents there is unsurprisingly no mention of pleasure, nothing on masturbation, and instead the focus is squarely on morals, health, and science. It is these areas to which schools are tacitly expected to keep, avoiding “extreme” topics or specifics. Instead, as Castro-Vázquez and Kishi’s work has revealed, educators walk a fine line as they attempt to disseminate accurate information in an environment in which many of their students have viewed pornography and believe that women have no sexual desire—two issues that sex education

⁶ In speaking with several non-Japanese mothers with children in the Japanese school system many expressed initial surprise and even delight at the quality of sex education their children were receiving, particularly in relation to puberty and physical changes. When pressed for further details however, they revealed that despite thinking that their children had received comprehensive education they later discovered that the details of sex and sexual behavior were left out completely with the expectation that parents would fill in the gaps. As one mother described, “when I was questioning her [interlocutor’s daughter] about it [sex] one night she seemed clueless about how the sperm gets in the woman” (personal communication, 2016.2.25).

is unable to address under MEXT guidelines (2002). In a manner eerily reminiscent of discourses of sexuality in prewar and interwar Japan, sex education in Japan today very much views students as potential mother and fathers, believing that their education and protection—so they may conceive and raise the next generation of Japanese citizens—must be valued over all else, simultaneously denying the wider social and media landscape in which students form ideas about their sexuality.

At a 2005 MEXT Education Council meeting attended by professors from universities around the country, PTA and education board members, and even a leader from the Boy Scouts, it was established that sex education must first focus on human relationships and communication, with the hope of providing students with an understanding of their developing minds and bodies, knowledge to protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections (from a scientific standpoint), and respect for themselves and others.⁷ The final report explained that from the perspective of participants, children are not in a position to make responsible decisions when it comes to sexual behavior, and that education should be conducted from the standpoint that sexual activity in children is inappropriate. The committee debated what could constitute the absolute minimal amount of education to provide, and the meeting report concluded that there was general agreement amongst participants that it was important not to simply rush to provide students with detailed knowledge of contraception. Finally, the report called for cooperation between local areas, parent and guardian groups, and individual schools, leaving much of the curriculum details up to local school districts. This final point is key to understanding sexual education throughout Japan today. Much is ceded to individual prefectures, regions,

⁷ MEXT Chūō Kyōiku Shingikai July 27, 2005. “*Sukoyaka-na karada o hagukumu kyōiku no arikata ni kan suru senmon bukai kore made no shingi no jōkyō—subete no kodomo-tachi ga mi ni tsuketeiru beki minimaru to wa?*,” Accessed December 27, 2013. http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chukyo/chukyo0/toushin/05091401/010.htm.

education boards, and schools. Yet educators may be subjected to intense scrutiny and criticism should they deviate too far from the standards dictated by MEXT, and are thereby indirectly pressured to provide sex education that deviates as little as possible from the ideologies of the Ministry.⁸

Individual schools may appear to have relative autonomy when it comes to creating a sex education syllabus, however they must do so in an increasingly difficult political environment. In 2002 a “campaign of criticism” began (Hirose 2013, 675), coupled with political backlash against what was termed “gender free” (used to refer to “gender equality”) education.⁹ By departing from the MEXT’s stated position, individual schools ran the risk of becoming the focus of media “bashing” and individual teachers risked ruining their careers. This was the case in Japan’s most famous sex education related scandal which occurred at Nanao School for Handicapped Children in 2003. The controversy stemmed from an incident in which teachers at the school—having discovered that a number of intellectually disabled students had been engaging in sexual activity and out of concern that intellectually disabled students may be the target of sexual abuse—embarked on a project to create a sex education curriculum which could be easily understood by students with intellectual disabilities. With the approval of parents, teachers used dolls and what were termed “specific educational materials” (*gutaiteki-na kyōzai*) such as penis models complete with ejaculation to demonstrate concepts to students who had previously demonstrated limited ability to take in lessons presented verbally. These lessons were viewed as so successful that the teachers responsible were asked to speak at Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education faculty development lectures (Yasukawa 2013).

Support from the education board dissipated rapidly when three conservative

⁸ For an example of such criticism see Kodama (2009) and Fujimura-Fanselow and Wakakuwa (2011).

⁹ For a discussion of the “gender free” education backlash, see Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

politicians from the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly visited the school and found what came to be described in the media as “things you would see in an adult (sex) shop” at the school (Yasukawa 2013). In the months that followed Nanao was the subject of great media scrutiny and teachers were reprimanded and demoted by the very board that had asked them to speak previously. As Kumiko Fujimura-Fanslow and Midori Wakakuwa outline, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Board of Education conducted widespread investigations that resulted in action in which the board “reprimanded and/or demoted 102 principals and teachers at 22 schools, including the principal of the Nanao School for Handicapped Children” (2011, 340). In 2013, after nearly a decade before the courts, the Supreme Court of Japan sided with the teachers and demanded the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Board of Education reverse all punishments. Despite the successful outcome the case served as a warning and has resulted in educators who remain fearful of potential sanctions and are unwilling to offer sex education that could possibly be perceived as “extreme”.



Figure 10. Abe Shinzo and Yamatani Eriko examine “extreme” sex education materials.

In his documentary *Nippon no seikyōiku: sekkusu o doko made oshieru ka* (Sex Education in Japan: What Should Be Taught?), Yasukawa investigates the sex education controversy sparked by Nanao and provides viewers an insight into the parliamentary debates that occurred at the time. In response to the Nanao incident the ruling Liberal Democratic Party formed a project team for the investigation of “extreme sex education and gender free education” headed by now Prime Minister Abe Shinzo. The project team gathered over 3,500 examples of sex education materials from schools around the country, presenting the most explicit to the parliament and the media for photo opportunities. In one scene of the documentary, the outrage in the Diet is palpable as Liberal Democratic Party politician Yamatani Eriko explains some of the more explicit materials, stating that “this kind of thing is unforgivable” to calls of “what were they thinking?” by fellow Diet members. In response, then Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro replies “I think this is a problem. In our day we weren’t taught these things. We just learned about them naturally” as knowing laughter and (male) voices calling “yes, absolutely” can be heard echoing around the chamber (Yasukawa 2013). In a photo opportunity clearly staged for the media Yamatani and Abe can be seen standing over two anatomically correct stuffed dolls (with clothes open and pillow genitals clearly on display) as Yamatani explains to the press that “the way in which students look at their parents (after viewing such materials) will change. They will end up with a warped concept of life (*seimeikan, nanika ga, yugande shimau*)” (figure 10). Most telling is the banner hanging behind the two lawmakers which reads “children are society’s treasure, the country’s treasure” (*kodomo wa shakai no takara, kuni no takara desu*) (Yasukawa 2013). For Japan’s conservative lawmakers children are a national resource, essential to the country’s ongoing prosperity. These politicians believe children must be protected from “extreme” messages and educated in line with the party’s conservative values. Yamatani even goes so far as to argue that in an ideal world sex

education would occur *after* marriage, criticizing the educators investigated by the project team as “wanting to destroy the family” (*watashi wa kazoku o kowasun janai ka to omotteimasu*) (Yasukawa 2013). Despite the media-saturated environment in which it occurs, sex education in Japanese schools does not cover the concept of sexual subjectivity, rather the roles men and women play in the reproduction of children (and consequently the country) are central.

The backlash against “extreme” sex education has had ongoing implications. Japan’s most famous feminist academic Ueno Chizuko had a lecture on elderly care planned for March 2014 cancelled by the city of Yamanashi due to the fact that she had “discussed the topic of sex in the past” (*Asahi Shimbun* 2014). This came almost a decade after a series of lectures on human rights in Kokubunji, Tokyo were cancelled after the Tokyo Metropolitan Government opposed the use of the term “gender free”, one element of “extreme” sex education that conservatives often oppose as they view the term as denying differences between males and females, leading to the destruction of traditional gender roles, and destroying traditional family values (Nakamura and Arita 2014).

Within this environment, it is understandable that public entities, from schools to local governments, are hesitant to touch upon issues of sexuality lest they become the next victim of media scandal and scrutiny. Specializing in global sex education trends, Kagawa Nutrition University professor Hashimoto Noriko explains that the type of sex education deemed “extreme” in Japan was completely in line with global standards (Yasukawa 2013). As a result of the political environment in which educators and schools risk “bashing” in the media, demotion or reprimand by education boards, or becoming the focus of parliamentary enquiries, teachers are understandably reluctant to exercise the relative autonomy they are supposed to have over the sex education curriculum and instead provide students with little beyond basic biology and messages about the traditional family. This

results in, for women at least, a particularly sex-negative environment—one which, as the following section will demonstrate, even alternative sex education providers are unable to adequately address.

Information or Paternalism?

As Japan's political and education systems fail to cater to the diverse needs of students in what Huiyan Fu describes as a “highly visible sexual environment where a variety of commercial sex activities are tolerated and even encouraged” (2011, 903), a number of independent actors—free from the restrictions placed upon public institutions—have stepped in to fill the void. Founded in 1954 with the cooperation of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, the Japan Family Planning Association (JFPA) now operates as a non-government organization under the slogan “Every Child a Wanted Child” (*subete no kodomo wa nozomareta kodomo ni*) to ensure that everyone in Japan is able to access reproductive health services, should they so desire. The JFPA describes itself as being backed by experts and “working with government agencies” to provide everyone in Japan with access to reproductive health advice. The organization publishes pamphlets and books to educate the public on sexual and reproductive health, runs education events, conducts the “Japan Sex Survey” together with condom manufacturer Jex, and works with a wide variety of clinics and hospitals to ensure as many people around Japan as possible have access to accurate information about sexual health.

The JFPA site hosts an online shop on their website through which educational materials, DVDs, CD-ROMs, books as well as JFPA developed and approved lubricants are sold.¹⁰ The JFPA website offers information about family planning-friendly clinics

¹⁰ Despite the JFPA working in cooperation with condom manufacturer Jex on the Japan Sex Survey, the organization does not sell Jex condoms (or condoms from any other manufacturer) on their site.

around Japan, where to access the morning after pill (which, unlike in many other advanced economies, is not available without a doctor's prescription), and runs hotlines for information on both contraception and infertility. In line with its mandate of ensuring that every child is a wanted child, the JFPA takes a strongly biological view of sexuality, with reproduction and health central. Educational pamphlets such as one titled *For Those Looking to Become Mothers and Fathers—the Limits of Pregnancy and Birth* (*Shōrai, mama ni papa ni naritai anata e—ninshin, shussan no rimitto*) remind readers that they only have until a certain age by which to become parents. These pamphlets—billed as suitable for distribution at coming of age ceremonies, school festivals, and graduation ceremonies—are advertised widely on the site.

The JFPA may appear to offer non-judgmental health advice to women from puberty to old age, but the organization still belies attitudes towards the sexuality of women similar to those seen in school sex education curricula. The October 2013 *Guardian* newspaper article “Why Have Young People in Japan Stopped Having Sex?” (Haworth, October 20, 2013) was both sensationalist and somewhat misleadingly titled, but one particular quote from the head of the JFPA, Dr. Kitamura Kunio, revealed ideologies about female pleasure, even within the apparently female-friendly association. When asked why in the 2013 Japan Family Planning Association 2013 study on sex among young people there was far more data on men than women, Kitamura remarked “Sexual drive comes from males... Females do not experience the same levels of desire.” Placing aside the eternally debated (and ultimately unanswerable) scientific question of difference between male and female levels of desire, the very fact that a doctor in Kitamura's position would make such a statement to the international press reveals much about attitudes towards female sexuality even within the medical profession.

Attempting to counter these misunderstandings within the medical profession is

OBGYN, author, and media commentator Dr. Song Mihyon, who explained in an interview I conducted with her in June 2013 that she felt that an understanding of the complexities of female sexuality was sorely missing in her specialist training in gynecology. Instead she was forced to look beyond Japan to English-language literature for further information, and to study on her own how to address the questions and concerns her female patients often came to her with regarding sex. At many events I attended throughout the course of my fieldwork I heard a common complaint from women that they were unable to discuss matters of sexual dysfunction, ask difficult questions about sex, or even consult on contraception with their gynecologists. Song's experience moving through the medical profession explains one reason why this may be a common problem—doctors themselves lack the knowledge to have meaningful conversations with their patients. Doctors in Japan are given very little training in patient interaction and the focus during their six years of medical school is on observation, rather than participation in clinical care (Teo 2007). It is this *minarai* (learning by observation) system, coupled with the hierarchical model seen in clinical departments within which interns undergo training that upholds what Leflar describes as “cultural paternalism” (1997, 705). Compounding the problem is the fact that less than 20 percent of medical students are women, a proportion that decreases with each move up the chain of command (Okoshi *et. al* 2014), and the fact that as late as the 1990s informed consent was a rare concept in medical treatment in Japan. Instead, until very recently the attitude of “doctor knows best” was considered normal by medical professionals and patients. Changes made to doctor education in recent years may emphasize greater conversation between medical professional and patient (Teo 2007), however the image of a doctor as someone a patient may turn to when needing to consult on potentially uncomfortable or embarrassing issues such as sex is yet to infiltrate the Japanese medical profession on a wide scale.

Paternalistic culture is apparent throughout much of the political discourse about contraception. Japan may have been one of the first countries in the world to decriminalize abortion (in 1948), but access to contraceptives has remained problematic throughout the entire postwar period.¹¹ Condoms are still the most popular choice of contraceptive with 88.2 percent of women and 94.6 percent of men using them as their primary form of contraception (JFPA and Jex, 2013).¹² IUDs were not approved for use in Japan until 1974 and the government famously refused to approve the oral contraceptive pill until 1999.¹³ In her extensive study of the political and social context that enabled abortion, rather than contraception, to become the central tenet of population control in postwar Japan, Norgren (1998, 2001) argues that timing was key. Norgren builds on the arguments of Coleman (1981, 1992) to explain how “Japanese abortion and contraception policy may be the product of politics, not culture” (1998, 65), in particular the work of different interest groups through key points of the postwar period, including doctors who had a monopoly over the procedure and therefore a vested interest in maintaining the status of abortion as central to birth control even after the invention of the contraceptive pill. Unlike in other developed economies, women’s groups had nothing to do with the process of

¹¹ Various revisions to what was originally the Eugenic Protection Law (Yūsei Hogo Hō), now known as the Maternal Protection Law (Botai Hogo Hō) have been carried out, however the law still centers around women meeting certain criteria in order to be eligible for an abortion up to 22 weeks’ gestation. The current criteria are rape and maternal health, with most doctors interpreting the latter in such a way as to mean abortion is effectively available to all those who desire (and are able to pay for) the procedure. See Norgren (1998, 2001).

¹² The second most popular form of contraception was the withdrawal method employed by 13.5 percent of women and 17.8 percent of men, followed by the rhythm method (5.2 and 2.0 for men and women respectively), and the oral contraceptive pill at 7.1 and 1.9 percent (JFPA and Jex, 2013). These figures vary a little according to source but have remained relatively stable throughout the postwar period.

¹³ High dose contraceptive pills were made available for the treatment of menstrual disorders in the 1960s, but were not available for strictly contraceptive use until 1999 when the newer generation low dose pill was approved. Norgren explains that this means that 500,000 to 800,000 Japanese women who took the contraceptive pill for therapeutic purposes faced more serious health risks and side effects than women in other countries who had access to newer, lower dose pills (Norgren 1998, 63).

decriminalizing abortion. Norgren draws on the work of Uno to argue that this was in part due to the way in which activist women in the early postwar years justified their political participation through “wifeist, maternalist and guardian-of-the-home arguments”, or “updated versions of the prewar ‘good wife, wise mother’ ideology” (Uno 1993, 308-310), meaning that advocating for abortion rights would have “seemed like a rejection of motherhood” (Norgren 1998, 78). This began to shift in the 1960s and 1970s as, as Norgren outlines, “feminist notions of the rights of women as individuals began to infiltrate the Japanese discourse on women’s activism, loosening the ideological stranglehold of ‘good wife, wise mother’—although by no means vanquishing it” (1998, 78).

If it was hoped that feminism would inform the work of women’s groups when it came to agitating for better access to contraception in the years following the invention of the contraceptive pill, this hope did not come to fruition. As pharmaceutical companies prepared to submit to the government for approval in the early 1960s, debate about the safety (both health and moral) of the medication exploded. In 1964 Japan’s two main family planning organizations (the Family Planning Federation of Japan and the Japan Family Planning Association), along with the Japan Association of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (the designated abortion provider’s group), the Japan Midwives Association, and the LDP’s Women’s Bureau all came out either actively opposing, or taking a “cautious stance” against the pill (Norgren 1998, 83). The desire to protect professional interests, concern over potential moral decay, and the medication’s side effects and potential effect on “natural hormone balance” were all cited as reasons the groups opposed the approval and sale of a medication already used by millions of women around the world. Women’s groups—wary of a government which showed a tendency to preface the interest of large corporations such as pharmaceutical companies over citizen’s health—were

hesitant to support the new medication, and the powerful OBGYN abortion providers group, the Nihon Bosei Hogo Sanfujin Kai opposed what they termed “an unsafe medication” in order to protect their member’s incomes from abortion (Coleman 1992, 36-38).

Women’s groups only became actively involved in the debate in the 1970s as notions of reproductive rights and health began to enter feminist discourse (Norgren 2001, 101). At the same time the government attempted to suppress debate on the issue, with the Ministry of Health and Welfare issuing regulations to the Private Broadcasters Federation, demanding that the words “the pill” and “oral contraceptives” not be mentioned on air, and insisting that no programs or commercials should touch on the issue (Norgren 2001, 113). These regulations failed as increasing articles in newspapers and women’s magazines, a “pill debate” (*piru ronsō*) in parliament, and increasing popularity of the medication (commonly prescribed for menstrual issues) demonstrate. Most feminist groups however remained wary of the contraceptive pill due to potential effects on women’s health, the potential for the government to justify limiting access to abortion should the pill be legalized (Norgren 1998, 87), and the fact that it was a favored cause of radical feminist group Chūpiren, a group that came to be seen (and ridiculed in the media) as representative of the women’s liberation movement, despite being just one small, fringe part of the overall movement (Norgren 2001, 115). Ultimately, these debates died down, leaving access to the pill difficult and many women unwilling or scared to use it. Behind the scenes however the discourse was slowly shifting, only to be stymied by the appearance of HIV/AIDS and the “1.57 shock” in 1990 in which the birth rate dropped to record levels (ironically without the aid of the contraceptive pill).

After decades of debate, the pill was finally approved for contraceptive use in 1999, paving the way for new generation low dose pills to enter the Japanese market, albeit not

covered by national health insurance. Norgren describes the ongoing attitude of the Ministry of Health and Welfare as perpetuating a “paternalistic pattern of reproduction policy making in which the interests of individuals have been subordinated to national or professional interests or both” (2001, 124). Ironically, what finally pushed the government to give the medication approval was the extraordinarily swift approval of the impotency medication Viagra the same year. This rapid approval, in contrast with decades of delays in the case of the pill, demonstrated the inherent sexism and unscientific nature of the Ministry of Health and Welfare’s drug approval system and ultimately shamed them into action after widespread outrage and media coverage. Castro-Vázquez argues that Viagra was approved in record time in part due to hopes that it would “‘promote’ male reproductive health that might help improve the demographic situation” (2006, 110). The contrasting cases of the two pills—one which promotes virility and the other which prevents pregnancy—provide rich insights into a system that preferences reproduction over individual choice, and the needs of men over those of women. Furthermore, these examples further highlight the disparate and problematic nature of second wave feminism in Japan as discussed in Chapter 1.

OBGYN, author, and media commentator Dr. Song Mihyon has her own theories about why access to the pill remained elusive for so long, arguing at an event in December 2013 that the medicine was refused approval due to a fear of “women going crazy and becoming sexually free and out of control”. When questioned at the event why the pill has such low rates of use in Japan nearly two decades since it became widely available (Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare studies show that around 2.2 percent of women currently use the contraceptive pill, JFPA surveys indicate the number is a few points higher), Song explained that in contrast to discussions of other medications, where the first question asked is always “[w]hat does it do?”, in the case of the pill, the initial question is

usually “[w]hat are the side effects?”¹⁴ For a medication with an over six decade long history, widespread global use, and a very low risk of side effects, the fact that it is the risks, rather than the benefits that are the center of focus points to prevailing attitudes about the importance of respecting the “naturalness” of the female body, reproductive cycle, and menstruation. In a Diet session on May 29, 2002 Liberal Democratic Party politician Yamatani Eriko criticized the sex education material *Love and Body Book* (produced under the guidance of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare) for telling “girls about a secret way to get the Pill” and for neglecting mention of side effects, saying “[o]nly the advantages are written... on the whole, this encourages girls to take the Pill” (Hirose 2013, 676-677). Yamatani expressed concern that “the message that sex is a sacred activity to nurture life is very much lacking in this booklet.” Local protests also focused on the perceived “excessive” *Love and Body Book*, and it was withdrawn from schools before eventually going out of print (ibid., 676).

For the individual women I spoke to as part of my fieldwork, the first most cited reason for not using the pill was fear of side effects and the unnaturalness of taking hormones.¹⁵ Second most common was the cost, which at the time of writing varied between 2,000 and 4,000 yen per month as newer generation low dose contraceptive pills, when proscribed for contraceptive rather than medical use, are not covered under the

¹⁴ Pilcon. 2014. “Pilcon Official Site.” Accessed January 15, 2014. <http://pilcon.jimdo.com/contents>.

¹⁵ It is pertinent here to remember that throughout the vast majority of human history women have spent most of their reproductive years either pregnant or breastfeeding. Consequently, the number of menstrual periods a woman would have had in her lifetime was vastly fewer than today. Recent research has suggested that the oral contraceptive pill, in addition to preventing pregnancy (an undertaking considerably more dangerous than using the oral contraceptive pill or having an abortion), prevents at least two types of gynecological cancers—cancers which are possibly the result of too many “natural” menstrual cycles. See coverage in *The Lancet Oncology*. 2015. [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanonc/article/PIIS1470-2045\(15\)00212-0/abstract](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanonc/article/PIIS1470-2045(15)00212-0/abstract). Accessed March 11, 2016.

Japanese National Health Insurance scheme.¹⁶ Several Japanese pharmaceutical companies produce the contraceptive pill, yet even today many doctors in Japan are reluctant to prescribe it to patients, and a number of my informants explained that they or their friends had tried to gain access to the pill, only to be subjected to unnecessary and inappropriate scrutiny, or to be told by doctors outright that the contraceptive pill is dangerous. Events run by NPOs such as Pilcon (a group formed with the goal of raising public awareness of contraceptive options) and OBGYNs Dr. Song and Dr. Kamimura attempt to allay fears and encourage women to consider using the contraceptive pill, but more often than not they find themselves working against decades of mainstream media and governmental opposition in which the contraceptive pill is painted as dangerous, unnatural, the cause of many unwanted side effects, and possibly leading to the spread of AIDS. Women are not trusted to make informed decisions about their own bodies, and are instead subjected to patriarchal ideologies which deem them as in need of protection by the state. The contraceptive pill, despite reported widespread use by female OBGYNs, has not found favor amongst the mainstream population. Instead, the condom reigns supreme.

Marketing the Glamorous Condom

Despite condoms serving as the primary mode of contraception for couples in Japan today, many of the women I spoke to throughout my fieldwork were embarrassed or unwilling to buy them or negotiate their use with partners. Faced with a falling population, condom manufacturer Jex discovered that it was becoming increasingly difficult to compete in a

¹⁶ In order to assist women in accessing the contraceptive pill under National Health Insurance, some OBGYNs recommend women come back for a second appointment at which to consult on “menstrual issues” so that the pill may be prescribed as a treatment, rather than a contraceptive. Women are encouraged to exaggerate symptoms of menstrual pain, excessive bleeding, etc. and are then eligible to receive the contraceptive pill or Mirena hormonal IUD at a vastly reduced cost. Other OBGYNs take a more paternalistic approach, telling patients that they are too young to have an IUD inserted, or insisting that they might want more children first.

limited market. The company decided that one potential strategy to increase market share could be to overturn notions that condom purchase is the male partner's responsibility, and encourage women to participate in the choosing and purchasing of condoms. Rather than lead with a safe sex or education message to encourage more young people to engage in safer sex, Jex devised the Glamourous Butterfly range of condoms and chose to focus on fashion and a cute aesthetic in order to appeal to female consumers. Samples of the Glamourous Butterfly are packaged in butterfly shaped black cardboard wrapping, augmented with a hot pink metallic butterfly. A full-sized packet of 12 condoms is sold in a hot pink box with metallic gold font and black butterfly stencils, more closely resembling a fashionable phone cover than a box of condoms (figure 11). Glamourous Butterfly condoms were ubiquitous at events I attended throughout my fieldwork. Sample packets were given to customers at vibrator bar Love Diamond, commonly seen at workshops run by sex toy manufacturers, spread out on the table at JASH events, and the company even spoke of promotional activities at which they handed out thousands of condoms to high school students, hoping to capture the interest of high school girls. The vast majority of condoms in Japan are sold with male purchasers in mind. Names such as "Super Thin" (*sugo usui, goku usui*), "Big Boy", and "Smart Boy" not only fail to appeal to female customers but may actively repel them. Men may wish to be flattered in regards to penis size and reassured that the thinness of a condom will allow them to enjoy sex to the fullest, but for young women in their first sexual relationships a thin condom and large penis may serve as sources of anxiety rather than excitement. The catch copy at the top of the Glamourous Butterfly condom website is "love being fashionable at all times, with everything" (*donna toki mo donna mono mo oshare ga suki*), a far cry from the traditional advertising extolling the pleasure a thin condom will bring the (male) user. Instead condoms are marketed as a lifestyle choice and women are encouraged to express their

tastes and sensibilities through participation in consumer capitalism.

Jex may draw upon discourses of “fashionability” in the promotion of the Glamourous Butterfly, but this is not to say they completely overlook condom manufacturers’ roles in sex education. The Jex site reminds us that “Japanese teens are in danger” (*ima, Nihon no tīn ga abunai*) and as part of their promotional activities the company produced a short animated video with the euphemistic title “Love Activities” (*rabu katsu*) (figure 12).¹⁷ The video, which has been viewed more than a million times on YouTube, never uses the words “condom” or “sex”, instead referring to condoms as “you know what” (*are*) and sex as “love activities” (*rabu katsu*).¹⁸ Employing an anime theme song style “Love Activities” encourages young people to be responsible whilst enjoying their sexual awakening. Although not unexpected from a condom manufacturer, the video is wholly nonjudgmental, recognizing that first love and first sexual experiences are an exciting, nerve-wracking, but ultimately important part of growing up. In the video, condoms signify safety, care, love, negotiation—multiple meanings beyond the usual disease and pregnancy prevention message highlighted in official sex education.¹⁹ Rather than relying on messages of fear to encourage condom use, Glamourous Butterfly employs popular cultural tropes, cutely fashionable packaging, and encourages young lovers to view condoms as more than just for the prevention of pregnancy and disease.²⁰

¹⁷ Although not central to their marketing message Jex relies on medical expertise and doctor’s testimonials on their website in order to maintain an air of legitimacy. This reliance on medical expertise and the way in which it creates an environment in which one can transcend social taboos surrounding the discussion of sexuality will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 4.

¹⁸ Jex. 2013. “Kondōmu sōchaku dōga ‘rabu katsu wa ato kyururi’.” Accessed February 26, 2013.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6I0BCsuCIUU>.

¹⁹ For a more detailed discussion of the significance of condom use in allowing women to feel cared for, see Chapter 5.

²⁰ See Kinsella (1995) and Yano (2009, 2013) for a discussion of the significance of cuteness in contemporary Japanese popular culture.



Figure 11. Glamourous Butterfly condoms by Jex. Reproduced with permission from Jex Condoms.

Marketing contraception as fun and accessible to young women however has not been easy. As Jex staff of over 20 years Inoue Takamitsu explained in an interview I conducted with him in October 2013, the path to developing the Glamourous Butterfly range was littered with obstacles, with initial designs rejected by focus groups of female high school students. The students were employed by Jex to give their opinion on what constitutes a “cute” condom wrapper and what would make them more likely to purchase condoms themselves rather than leave contraception up to their partners. Instead of demonstrating enthusiasm for the project, Inoue explained that the schoolgirls were acid-tongued and quick to admonish the project team when they did not think certain designs were attractive. In the end the distinctive black wrapping with pink metallic butterfly was a surprising choice to a design team who had initially expected cuter pastel colors to appeal. Instead, a mix of cute and sophisticated turned out to be the number one choice of the focus groups, chosen only after the designers were sent back to the drawing board multiple times.



Figure 12. Jex Glamorous Butterfly “Love Activities” promotional video (2013).

From the Jex advertising and public relations materials provided by Inoue, it is clear that marketing condoms as fashion accessories to women is the company’s current main marketing strategy.²¹ The Glamorous Butterfly range has been a success for Jex but has not escaped controversy. The company has been accused of encouraging young people to be sexually active due to their enthusiastic distribution of samples—echoing the debates surrounding “extreme” sex education in the early 2000s. Inoue was quick to dismiss these criticisms, but admitted that Jex struggled to be seen as a legitimate company. A greater problem for the future of Jex however, is Japan’s low birth rate and possible changes in young people’s sexual activity. Inoue reads Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare’s population data whitepapers regularly and concluded our interview by explaining that in

²¹ During our interview Inoue expressed surprise at my remarks that his company was attempting to sell condoms using many of the same strategies as the female-friendly sex pleasure product industry (see Chapters 4 and 5).

Japan today condom sales have become an issue of increasing market share, rather than expanding the market itself. In order to understand the sex lives of young people in Japan today, two of Japan's largest condom manufacturers have been inspired by the Durex International Sexual Wellbeing Survey and now conduct surveys of their own. In 2013 Sagami Rubber Industries surveyed 14,000 men and women between the ages of 20 and 70 about their sex lives. Similarly, Jex joined forces with the Japan Family Planning Association in 2012 to survey 7,137 participants. The results paint a bleak picture for condom manufacturers, demonstrating that fewer and fewer young people are interested in sexual relationships, an issue I will return to in the following section.

Appealing to female customers is a strategy also employed by Jex's competitor Sagami Rubber Industries as they join forces with female-friendly pornography producer Silk Labo. Through their Facebook page "Sagami 0.02 Kenkyūshitsu," the company provides comments from Silk Labo's Makino Eri to advertise their brand. Referencing Silk Labo's use of condoms in each of their films, Makino mentions that she believes many men are not enthusiastic about using condoms, but this leaves their female partners worried about pregnancy and unable to fully enjoy sex. Instead, Makino recommends that condoms should be seen as an item that makes sex more pleasurable (*kondōmu wa futari no sekkusu o yori yutaka ni shitekureru aitemu*) and encourages people to view them positively.²²

In Japan today, the condom remains the contraceptive of choice for the vast majority of couples. Nonetheless for Jex and Sagami Rubber Industries the marketing of their products in an increasingly difficult market has required the employment of strategies to overcome the sex-negative messages women receive in school sex education curricula as they vie for a share of a shrinking pie. Condoms may have been central to the postwar shift

²² Makino Eri. 2013. Sagami Original 0.02 Kenkyūshitsu Facebook page September 26, 2013. Accessed May 18, 2016. <https://www.facebook.com/SagamiOriginal002Lab>.

from high to low birth rates in Japan—encouraged in part by the government policies encouraging their widespread use in the 1950s and 1960s (Haig 2014)—but as Japan faces a falling population and fewer young people, even condom manufacturers who previously monopolized the contraception market are struggling. As a result, manufacturers are turning to strategies of consumer capitalism as they encourage women to view condom purchasing as a way in which to express themselves as fashionable, self-actualized beings.²³

Too Much Sex, or Not Enough?

In 1992, panicked articles about the Japanese populace’s collective sex life began to appear in newspapers and magazines. This time however, rather than fears that people were engaged in inappropriate sexual activity, the concern was that they were not having *enough* sex. As Ayako Kano explains, “the flip side of the fear of too much sex involving children has been the fear of not enough sex among adults—or, to be more precise, the fear of not enough reproductive sex among heterosexual married adults” (2016, 29). If you were to believe the press, the greatest reason for Japan’s continuing low birth rate is a lack of interest in love, dating, marriage, and sex on the part of young people.²⁴ Sensationalist, under-researched articles commonly link Japan’s “demographic time bomb” to reported decreases in sexual activity on the part of young people, and blame the spread of new forms of entertainment, mobile phones, and virtual worlds. What these articles overlook

²³ This issue will be addressed in greater depth in Chapter 4.

²⁴ The English-language press has leapt on this phenomenon in recent years with a number of articles including *The Guardian*’s widely read “Why Have Young People in Japan Stopped Having Sex?”, *Vice*’s “Why Aren’t the Japanese Fucking?”, and *Vogue*’s “Why Women Are Choosing Virtual Boyfriends Over Real Ones”, all under researched, sensationalist examinations of the perceived “sexlessness” of “weird” Japan. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/20/young-people-japan-stopped-having-sex>. Accessed March 15, 2016. <http://www.vice.com/read/why-arent-the-japanese-fucking-361>. Accessed March 15, 2016. <http://www.vogue.com/13411180/virtual-romance-apps/> Accessed March 15, 2016.

however are the nuances of the issue as they fail to interrogate whether sexlessness truly is the reason behind Japan's below-replacement level birth rate of 1.4. Yoshie Moriki suggests that "later and fewer marriages as well as fertility decline within marriage are responsible for lowered fertility since the 1970s to 2000" (2012, 28), indicating that a wide range of issues, rather than disinterest in sex, are responsible for the low birth rate.²⁵

The press is not the only place in which the perceived sexlessness of Japanese youth has been examined. In 2011 head of the JFPA Dr. Kitamura Kunio published the book *Young People Who Dislike Sex (Sekkusū girai na wakamono tachi)* in which he argued that up to one third of Japanese youth has no interest in sex. Drawing on survey data from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare Kitamura demonstrates that the percentage of boys between ages 16 and 19 with no interest in, or who actively dislike sex has increased from 17.5 percent in 2008 to 36.1 percent in 2010. For men aged between 20 and 24 the numbers were 11.8 percent and 21.5 percent. The only age bracket which showed an increase in the number interested in sex was men between 30 and 34. Whilst the growing number of boys and men who dislike sex was widely reported in the Japanese press as proof of the rise of the asexual herbivore man (*sōshoku danshi*) the numbers for women are even more startling (Kitamura 2011, 11). For the 16 to 19 age bracket the percentage of women with no interest in or an active dislike of sex rose from 46.9 to 58.5 percent, and for those aged 20 to 24, the numbers were 25 percent in 2008 and 35 percent in 2010 respectively (Kitamura 2011, 13). Nevertheless, media overwhelmingly focused on men, in part perhaps due to the widely-held assumption that women have never been, and are not naturally inclined to be, interested in sex.

²⁵ Moriki also examines how most married couples express the desire to have two or more children, but find themselves unable to do so, arguing that the Japan's ongoing recession, lack of workplace flexibility, and the costs associated with having a child are factors cited by most couples to explain why they stopped at one child (2012).

The accuracy of the data is disputed by some of Kitamura's informants. For example, when questioned about the results, 23-year-old interviewee J explains that despite enjoying sex he would have probably replied that he was not interested if questioned, if only because it would be “uncool” (*kakko warui*) to show such a brazen interest (2011, 105). Survey results showing increasing numbers happily admitting to a disinterest in sex may also serve to embolden others to do the same as becoming an herbivore man becomes an increasingly acceptable choice for a new generation of men. Nevertheless, it is ironic that a survey initially devised by Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare to gather information in order to implement strategies to prevent unwanted pregnancies (Kitamura 2011, 12) now reveals attitudes that make pregnancy less of a concern, instead sparking fear for the future of Japan.²⁶

Through a series of interviews with young people Kitamura uncovers the reasons for their lack of interest in sex, concluding that it is the result of a number of factors. First, he argues that many young people do have healthy libidos. Rather than find an outlet for their sexual desires through dating however, many believe sex to be a hassle (*mendōkusai*) and instead prefer friendships, online gaming, and masturbation over sexual activity with members of the opposite sex. According to Kitamura this attitude has been influenced by access to pornography, the proliferation of mobile phones (and subsequent changes to the way in which young people relate to each other), hobbies, a culture of overwork, the worry that sex will lead to marriage (before participants are emotionally or financially ready), and attitudes towards purity and pure love.²⁷

²⁶ Kitamura reminds readers that the phenomenon is not limited to Japan, citing a survey from Ohio State University which found that college students valued praise and recognition from the people around them or would even prefer to get better grades, over sex or money—results that were particularly surprising to the US researchers (2011, 36).

²⁷ Kitamura discusses the “pure love boom” of the early 2000s, citing the extraordinarily popular 2001 novel (and subsequent film and television drama based on the book) *Crying Out Love, In the Center of the World* (*Sekai no chūshin de ai o sakebu*— colloquially known

As for whether Japan's collective sex life can be rehabilitated, Kitamura's prescription is for better education in regards to communication, pornography, and the pressures young people face to be good at sex. Kitamura argues that young people raised in a pornography-saturated environment believe that they cannot live up to the images they see on screen and are therefore discouraged from having sexual relationships due to feeling pressure to perform (2011, 161). Similarly, with increased access to technology comes less communication between the sexes, resulting in boys who are afraid to talk to girls (*ibid.*, 172). Finally, the doctor reminds us that sex is not built into our DNA. Rather, it is something that needs to be taught, to be studied, and to be learned. (*ibid.*, 156-159)

Kitamura explains how he avoids the words "sex education", instead preferring to refer to it as "sexual health education" (*sei kenkō kyōiku*) in the hope that necessary sex education can be viewed as more than just a discussion of biology, but also of relationships, morals, marriage, divorce, and—most importantly—communication between the sexes (*ibid.*, 171-174).

Kitamura's book may be billed as the definitive text on youth and sex, but it is ultimately a story about young men. Media outlets did not express outrage and fear at the number of young women showing a disinterest in sex. Rather, it was only when the number of young men began to increase that panic ensued. *Aera* (September 7, 1993) reported that sexlessness came to public awareness through articles expressing alarm at the number of men disinterested in having sex with their wives. *The Asahi Shimbun* (January 5, 1995)

as *Sekachū*) as heralding a boom in popular cultural products fetishizing young, pure (sexless) love. The high school aged protagonists in *Crying Out Love, In the Center of the World* fall deeply in love with each other but never consummate their ultimately doomed relationship. Instead the climax of the story is the death of the female protagonist from leukemia before her boyfriend can take her to Australia to fulfil a lifelong dream to see Uluru. Several novels, films, and television series with similar themes emerged in the subsequent period including the spectacularly popular Korean television drama *Winter Sonata* (*Fuyu no sonata*), heralding a "pure love boom" (*junai būmu*) in which chaste, sexless relationships were portrayed as romantic and worth aspiring to.

similarly explained that men, rather than women were responsible for a lack of sex for the vast majority of sexless couples, explaining that in modern society there are so many more fun things to do than have sex, and that many men saw sex as a waste of time.²⁸ The assumption remains very much that men (should) have uncontrollable sexual urges, and that women do not.²⁹ When women do utilize their sexuality—for either their own pleasure or for other non-reproductive ends—the resulting discourse is markedly different.

One example of this difference can be seen in the outcry over sexually active young women involved in *enjo kōsai*. *Enjo kōsai*, most often translated as “compensated dating” refers to a broad spectrum of behaviors in which high school girls received money, clothing, brand bags, or other goods in return for going on dates with, or providing any number of sexual services to, older men. In the late 1990s this perceived morally reprehensive behavior of *kogal* (*kogyaru*, high school girls) was viewed as representing the moral decay of Japanese society as a whole. David Leheny outlines how “most of the public discourse about *enjo kōsai* appear(ed) to be motivated by a fundamental fear of the ostentatious sexuality of the high school girls involved” (2006, 73). Sharon Kinsella (2013) argues that this anxiety stems from male anxieties relating to gender equality, bolstered by a male-centric mass media chasing ratings and readers (2013). Little of the debate focused on the consequences of engaging in *enjo kōsai* for the girls themselves. Instead, Leheny argues that “the essential debate (was) over what the emergence of the *kogals*—symbols of materialism, or a decline in traditional values, or gender equality, or moral relativism—says about Japan and Japan’s future” (2006, 73). Conservatives worried about the risk

²⁸ It must be noted that this article was written in 1995, before the widespread introduction of mobile telephones or the internet. Nevertheless, reporting on Japan’s “sexlessness problem” often focuses on the digital world, overlooking the fact that the issue has a long history.

²⁹ This belief is by no way limited to Japan, sustaining through many historical periods and cultures. See Dean-Jones (1992), Hayden (2001).

posed to Japan by these women becoming wives and mothers, and many argued that having engaged in forms of prostitution the girls could not possibly be good mothers in the future (Leheny 2006, 75). Many conservatives shifted the blame from the girls to Japan's consumer culture and materialistic society, but ultimately failed to consider the impact the demand for *enjo kōsai* had on kogals, or the moral responsibility of the men who engaged them. Instead it was the “ostentatious sexuality” of the women and the moral decay it indicated that was the center of most criticism.

What explains the gap between the moral panic of compensated dating versus youth with no interest in sex? One possible explanation is the historically different ways that male and female sexuality are viewed. If sex education is still very much focused on encouraging women to protect themselves from male desires then the idea that young men may not have, or lack interest in expressing, such desires is both confronting and frightening as it suggests a decline in male virility, and accompanying decline in Japan's strength as a nation state. For women engaged in *enjo kōsai*, their willingness to employ their sexuality for their own (financial) gains indicates an unwillingness to be bound to the social expectation that they will utilize their sexuality for the sake of the nation, remaining pure until such time as they become wives and mothers charged with raising the next generation of Japan.

Despite recent media discourse on sexlessness, the fear of increasing “freewheeling sexual activity among school-age children” remains (Kano 2016, 29). At an event in Tokyo in December 2013 at which Dr. Song Mihyon and NPO Pilcon (a group that got its name from combining the words “pill” and “condom”, founded with the goal of better educating the youth of Japan about contraceptive options and sexuality) founder Someya Asuka answered questions about sex, pregnancy, and women's health, panelists were asked by a midwife in attendance about what could be done to improve sex education in an age of

increased sexual behavior between young people. Both Song and Someya immediately leapt to correct the questioner, explaining that sexual behavior amongst teens peaked some years ago and is now actually in decline. Sexuality is very much front and center in debates about morality, but only certain prescribed types of sex are deemed acceptable, desirable, and worthy of inclusion in the sex education curriculum. The government may have called for a general, non-specific teaching of sex education (Hirose 2013, 682), but it is precisely the specifics that participants at various events and workshops I attended throughout my fieldwork appear to desire, and that JFPA head Dr. Kitamura believes are essential to help reverse Japan's lack of interest in sex. At the same event Dr. Song mentioned that people have sex for three main reasons: for communication, for pleasure (*kairaku*), and for reproduction. If reproductive sex makes up only a very small percentage of all sex acts, it is only logical to conclude that sex happens for fun, communication, or other reasons the vast majority of the time.³⁰ It is this non-reproductive sex—long neglected in official sex education curricula—about which women are increasingly searching for information.

Help or Hindrance? Sex Self-Help Literature

Leaving aside the vexed (and ultimately meaningless) issue of whether women are actually having too much sex or not enough, many do appear to harbor anxieties about sex.

Hirayama (2016) argues that many Japanese feel that their sex lives are insufficient but do not know how to change the situation. For those who seek information beyond the focus on biology, reproduction, and disease presented at school there is a booming industry dedicated to self-help books focused on sex and pleasure. The market for sex self-help books has expanded with the spread of internet technology and through their connection to

³⁰ One commonly cited statistic is that human beings have sex approximately 1,000 times per single birth, and that humans are extremely rare among mammals in that we engage in sexual activity throughout the entire menstrual cycle. See Ryan (2013).

the wider pleasure product industry—including *anan*, the sex toy sector, and female-friendly pornography.³¹ Many sex self-help titles have been featured in *anan*'s sex special issue as referral texts for those seeking further information, and the authors have close relationships to the magazine, sex shops such as the Love Piece Club and Lovely Pop, and other events in the industry.

Six years after its release Dr. Song Mihyon's *A Female Doctor's Prescription for Really Satisfying Sex (Joi ga oshieru hontō ni kimochi no ī sekkusu)* (2010) remains in the top ten of Amazon Japan's best seller list in the category of "sex culture" (*sei fūzoku*). The popular book was followed by sequels *A Female Doctor's Prescription for Really Satisfying Sex: Advanced Level (Joi ga oshieru hontō ni kimochi no ī sekkusu: jōkūhen)* in 2011, *A Female Doctor's Prescription for Really Satisfying Sex: Advanced Techniques (Joi ga oshieru hontō ni kimochi no ī sekkusu: sugowazahen)* (2012a), and a comic book version (2012b). In recent years the genre has exploded with books such as *Body Talk Lesson (Joshi no hoken taiiku)* by female-friendly pornography production company Silk Labo's founder Makino Eri (2012b), *Mannerbook for Night (Yoru no manā bukku)* by "erotic writer" Pink Sensei (2012b), *Forever Makelove (Itsumademo meiku rabu suru hōhō)* (2011b) and the *Vagina Training* series (*Chitsu tore*) by female-friendly sex shop Lovely Pop's owner Ogiwara Kaoru (2010, 2011a).³² The books take wide-ranging approaches to female sexuality and pleasure, but the one thing they have in common is that they all feature pink covers and, with the exception of *Forever Makelove* (which features a grey and a pink rabbit, facing each other as if a couple), cartoon pictures of women in various stages of undress or sexual excitement—recalling *anan*'s first sex special issues in the late 1980s and early 1990s, *Become Beautiful Through Sex (sekkusu de kirei ni naru)*,

³¹ See Chapters 4 and 5.

³² English translations of all books were provided by the publishers.

which boldly displayed illustrations of semi-naked women proudly displaying their bodies. The books (a number of which were published by *anan* publisher Magazine House) draw upon magazine *anan*'s history and are unequivocally aimed at a female audience, calling for readers to unashamedly enjoy an active sex life whilst also reminding them that they are individually responsible for addressing any problems that may arise.

In her examination of sex self-help books in the western context, Meagan Tyler draws upon arguments from Irvine (1990) and Potts (2002) to argue that self-help books are “influential in constructing ‘normative notions of heterosexual sex’ and therefore, have a significant impact on trends in sex practices” (2008, 363). As Tyler demonstrates, feminist analysis often finds such texts problematic, arguing that they seek to teach women that their role is to service men sexually, rather than find sexual pleasure for themselves. This discourse is apparent in much of the sex self-help literature available in Japan today. *Forever Makelove* (Ogiwara 2011b) examines the reasons many couples become “sexless”, arguing that neglecting sex in a relationship will result in over 90 percent of men cheating. Through the lens of in-depth interviews potential explanations for sexlessness come to light, including rushing into marriage for financial security while neglecting to check compatibility, being too controlling, being too reliant on one's partner, and pressuring one's partner to perform (to the extent that he may suffer from erectile dysfunction). Ogiwara—who herself admits to divorcing as the result of a sexless marriage—encourages readers to be honest with themselves, to let things go (including housework), and to be themselves with their partners in order to overcome sexlessness. The (female) readers of *Forever Makelove* are encouraged to reform themselves so that their relationships may be transformed, rather than examine what responsibility lies with the male side of the partnership. Similarly, *Vagina Training* (Ogiwara 2010) tells readers that they are responsible for creating a “body capable of orgasm” through an intensive three-week

pelvic floor training regime. *Vagina Training* offers some advice to men about how to modify penetration to best enable their partners to orgasm, however women are expected to do the vast majority of the work to ensure they can enjoy sex with (and provide more pleasure to) their partners.

Many of the magazine, online and brochure-style publications available on sexual health and pleasure for women take a tone often seen in self-help books. The books place the reader at the center of the discourse, fully responsible for their own sexual enjoyment, and able to change their sex lives with enough hard work. Tyler questions contemporary culture in which sexual self-help literature is presented as “highly beneficial for women” (2008, 363) and is afforded legitimacy due to being written by well-known sexologists or therapists. Authors and publishers may argue that such books are feminist in nature and benefit those who read them, but for Tyler they actively promote the sexual interests of men and serve to reinforce submissive and harmful gender roles for women, demanding that they use their sexuality to benefit their partners. Tyler’s analysis of western texts concludes that many promote “the concept of women *actively* ‘sexually servicing’ men” (2008, 364, italics in original). In contrast, Wendy Simonds sees self-help literature as a more complex phenomenon, one in which women can find validation of their feelings of dissatisfaction and experiences while at the same time being encouraged to take responsibility for them (1992, 214).

It is far too simple a conclusion to be completely critical of the sex self-help literature available in Japan today. Self-help literature is a commodity, one that produces money for its authors and publishers in a system that encourages eye-catching covers and catch copy in order to attract readers. Nevertheless, in light of the dearth of information on pleasure for women, I view the proliferation of sex self-help literature and resulting variation in discourses about pleasure as potentially positive development. Despite their

problematic focus on personal responsibility, sex self-help books importantly position women as the subjects of their own sexuality, and provide their female authors a voice. Women's experiences are given a forum and their desires are presented as normal, rather than feared or fetishized. Self-help literature begins a conversation about a topic that, as argued earlier in this chapter, is completely overlooked in formal sex education. Self-help books such as those outlined above give readers a language to talk about problems which—as many of my informants constantly reminded me—are incredibly difficult to broach with friends, family, or even medical professionals. These books offer advice that women cannot find anywhere else, be it in textbooks or in their physician's office. Sex self-help literature reminds readers that they are not alone in wanting to enjoy sex, not alone in desiring more fulfilling sex lives, and not alone in feeling that the formal education they (and their partners) received was lacking. While feminist criticism of self-help may center on books' insistence that solutions to problems are the responsibility of the reader (Jeffreys 1990; Simonds 1992; Tyler 2008), it is important to remember that literature of this kind also offers conceptualizations of female sexuality broader than the narrow perspectives provided in sex education. The vast majority of writers of sex self-help literature however rarely see their books widely promoted outside of the female-friendly pleasure product industry, and struggle to be recognized as legitimate voices in the mainstream media.

Moving into the Media

As discussed above, controversy regarding discussions of female sexual pleasure is widespread and not even experts like Dr. Song are spared. The Okayama Prefectural Library keeps Dr. Song's books on sex off the shelves and only available to those who

request and reserve them specifically.³³ Despite her position as a medical expert a large proportion of Dr. Song's work is considered too controversial for display in public institutions, or for the mainstream media. In a February 2013 episode of morning television program *Tokudane* on which Dr. Song appeared as a panelist host Ogura Tomoaki was heard to proclaim, "I don't know about discussing it on morning television" (*asa no terebi de shōkai suru no wa dō ka na*). Ogura was not referring to the tabloid-style stories of murder, love triangles, celebrity meltdowns, violent killings, or terrorism common to Fuji Television's flagship morning program, but rather the books that regular guest Dr. Song had published previously. On this particular day however, Ogura was willing to make an exception and was more than happy to publicize Dr. Song's latest book, *Seen from the Examination Table: the Truth about Childbearing for Older Mothers (Naishindai kara nozoita: kōrei shussan no shinjitsu)* (2013), which examines the risks of pregnancy and birth over the age of 35. Ogura's comment reveals that in the mainstream media today female sexuality is an inconvenient truth, only acceptable when discussed in the context of reproduction and health, or when woven into wider discourses of motherhood and Japan's falling birthrate. When it comes to female sexual pleasure however, even the most tabloid of television programs is unwilling to consider exploring the topic in detail. Instead, presenters remain embarrassed, and on the rare occasion such a topic is discussed, viewers have been known to complain.

A few months earlier on November 27, 2013, national broadcaster NHK's flagship morning program *Asaichi* set internet forums alight by beginning the morning with a two-hour investigation of what it dubbed "Japan's sexlessness problem". Traditionally socially

³³ See the following blog for further information. "Joi ga oshieru hontō ni kimochi no ī sekkusu," Josanshi raifu ōganaizā yumi no jibun sutairu—okayama— blog, November 25, 2013. Accessed November 25, 2013. <http://ameblo.jp/rano3333/entry-11711575971.html>.

conservative NHK surprised audiences with its candid examination of the sexual desires of women who, despite having completed their families, wished to enjoy their sexuality on their own terms. In the months that followed, *Asaichi* continued with specials on sex after menopause, and sex during and after cancer treatment and while the majority of faxes received by the program appeared to praise the program for its courage in examining such a difficult issue, the occasional complaint, such as the following from a viewer in their 20s, demonstrate the extent to which sexuality is viewed as something that should be private, or hidden from view (*fūin sareru*). The viewer explained “I want you to stop talking about sex in the mornings. I can’t watch NHK without worrying about what I’m going to see. Is it really necessary to talk about these things openly?”

This is not to say that all forms of sexuality are hidden from view in the mainstream media. The unwillingness of the mainstream media to give a platform to experts such as Dr. Song unwittingly raises the prominence of other less expert voices. One example is model, actress, and *tarento* Dan Mitsu. Ubiquitous in the Japanese media in 2012-2013, Dan became known for her sexual and erotic persona, much of which hinged on her appropriation of traditional ideas of Japanese beauty and sexual attractiveness. Dan launched her career by appearing in “gravure” style photographic essay books (like those by Shinoyama Kishin discussed in the previous chapter), but in recent years has branched out to make regular appearances on television and leverage her erotic image to publish on love and sexuality. Her 2013 book *The Rules of Love* (*Erosu no osahō*, publisher’s translation) combined advice on love, dating and sex, with gravure style photographs of Dan in kimono and various stages of undress.

The Rules of Love is written in polite language with Dan referring to men throughout in the honorific “gentlemen” (*donogata*), and is divided into five sections in which she covers what she describes as her rules for every stage of dating and

relationships: “Rules of Appearance” (*mitame no osahō*), “Date Manners” (*dēto no osahō*), “Language Rules” (*kotoba no osahō*), “Bed Rules” (*beddo no osahō*) and “Heart Rules” (*kokoro no osahō*). In the section on rules for the bedroom, she discusses masturbation briefly, cautioning men and women not to masturbate too much, lest they become unable to enjoy sex with a partner (2013, 140-142). Dan concludes that although she does occasionally indulge in “solitary sex” (*hitori ecchi*) she experiences much more pleasure in watching a “gentleman” enjoy himself during sex (*ibid.*, 142). Dan has been able to successfully leverage her television appearances and discuss sexuality openly because she is the object of male pleasure, and does not operate to upset the prevailing common sense that women do not experience the same levels of sexual desire as men. In 2016 NHK even employed the sexy *tarento* in the role of a teacher on its education program High School Health and Physical Education (*Kōko hoken taiiku*), noting her ability to talk about “delicate topics” and providing her a highly respected forum via the national broadcaster through which to demonstrate her “expertise”.

In contrast to Dan Mitsu’s great success in the mainstream media, Dr. Song is required to remain mute on her area of greatest expertise—female sexuality and pleasure. This contradiction between the mainstream media (and society’s) discomfort with open expressions of sexual subjectivity by women, and the embrace of women who position their sexuality as the object of male desire may explain why so many women turn to other places to seek more diverse perspectives on sex and sexuality. One such example is the market for sex self-help literature.

Out of the Media and into Real Life

Often run by or associated with sex self-help authors, recent years have seen a booming industry in alternative sex education events. Groups including the Japan Association of Sexual Health (JASH), Pilcon, the Sexual Sense Up (SSU) Hypnosis Group, the School of

Play, and education sessions run by individual OBGYNs provide safe spaces in which to learn about sex and interrogate mainstream discourses of sexuality in Japan today. These organizations do not usually have strong connections with government, rather they remain very much on the fringes of society, struggling to make inroads. In an attempt to overcome their marginalization many of these groups rely on the sense of legitimacy provided by medical specialists—in this case OBGYNs—to facilitate discussion of the unpalatable. For such discussion to remain within the boundaries of acceptability however it must be carefully presented and refined to ensure that it serves a purpose, either economic or social, and does not seek to disrupt the status quo. The media plays a large role, commonly choosing celebrity over expertise. While James Bohman describes how the best media should be made up of “professional communicators who disseminate the best available information and technologies to large audiences of citizens” (2000, 55), the reality is that survival in the Japanese media marketplace requires not expertise in a particular field, but rather an ability to market oneself as an interesting (but not too controversial) *tarento*. Less “experts” than “expert communicators”, *tarento* are far less likely to question the cultural status quo and instead contribute to a bland, non-confrontational approach to topics discussed. Comments that are deemed “too extreme” risk being edited out, or may even become the subject of career ending controversy. Within this environment, experts and the educational organizations outlined above are consistently relegated to the margins and their members find themselves operating within an echo chamber.

Founder of the Women’s Clinic Kamimura in Okayama Dr. Kamimura Shigehito has spent decades trying to overcome taboos surrounding frank discussion of sex. The doctor regularly lectures at schools, universities, and local government events around Japan with the hope of educating both young women, and educators themselves, about safer sex, dating, love, and intimate partner violence—all issues he has confronted in his

many years as an OBGYN. Dr. Kamimura states in his 2013 book *To Young People in Love* (*Koi suru kimitachi e*) he that he believes that sex education must begin as early as possible, with a focus on “the importance of life” (*inochi no taisetsusa*). This focus however comes not only from a desire to teach students to support and value each other, but also with a hope to teach girls to value themselves. Dr. Kamimura reports that around 10 percent of the women he sees in his practice are victims of “date domestic violence” (*dēto dv*)—many who believe that being coerced or even forced into a sexual relationship is a normal part of love. According to Dr. Kamimura a large proportion of girls who present with sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies, and seeking emergency contraception are in unhealthy or violent relationships. The focus on the importance of life in the case of Dr. Kamimura is not about encouraging reproduction (as in official sex education curriculum), but instead encouraging self-worth in young girls as a way of protecting them from relationships in which they experience violence or abuse.

One of Dr. Kamimura’s strategies for promoting engagement with teenagers is by offering (non-medical) consultations via mobile phone. The doctor receives 100-200 questions from teen boys and girls via mobile phone email and messaging app LINE per day and prides himself on taking the time to answer each and every question. At an event held at the Tokyo Kita Ward Center for Gender Equality in July 2012, Dr. Kamimura explained that majority of questions he receives from girls ask about contraception, sexually transmitted infections, and menstruation. From boys, the number one question is about penis size, occasionally with photographs included for the doctor’s reference. Dr. Kamimura believes that sex education in Japan is sorely lacking, and overlooks what he describes as “the basics”, including sexual relationships and love. As a result, many of the young people he sees in his clinic and fields mobile phone questions from are in unhealthy or even abusive relationships. At the same event, Dr. Kamimura explained that many of

these women are surprised when he tells them that their relationships sound unhealthy, and that perhaps they should consider breaking up. Instead, many of the doctor's patients believe that they owe their male partners sex, even if they are putting themselves at risk of unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. Sex education conducted in schools does not cover issues such as safety, consent, or negotiation in romantic relationships, instead it focuses on vague notions of respecting others completely removed from the context of actual relationships. Dr. Kamimura believes it is his role to address these problems both directly through lectures at schools, and by educating educators to take his message back into their own school communities and continue his work.

Due to his belief that the current lack of appropriate sex education puts girls at risk of abusive relationships, Dr. Kamimura also addresses boys in his education events and books. The doctor argues that for boys, masturbation is a form of manners or politeness toward their female companions as it allows them to maintain proper control of their sexual desires so they do not feel the need to pressure girls for sex.³⁴ Dr. Kamimura however does not mention female masturbation openly, and appears to believe that male sexual desire is something from which women must be protected—either through the “manners” of masturbation, or by encouraging women to avoid men who do not control themselves sexually or emotionally. Despite openly criticizing official sex education both doctors Kamimura and JFPA head Kitamura display some ideological similarities to the curriculum. In their work they neglect discussions of female pleasure and sexual agency in favor of a safety-centered discourse in which women must be encouraged to value themselves and be protected from men's lack of control. Nevertheless, Dr. Kamimura's work reveals an important issue—that women are the ones who suffer when sex education

³⁴ This message is very similar to that given by JFPA head Dr. Kitamura who describes masturbation as having “saved” him in his youth and jokes about his record of seven ejaculations in one night as a teenager (2011, 152-154).

is inadequate. Most commonly it is women who suffer in abusive relationships, and women who are left to deal with the consequences of unwanted pregnancies.

One woman spurred into action by her own experience of unwanted pregnancy and abortion is Someya Asuka, founder of non-profit organization Pilcon. Started in 2007 and officially registered as an NPO in 2010, Pilcon employs Dr. Kamimura as an advisor as it puts together curricula with the goal of improving sex education. Someya's experience of an unwanted pregnancy during university and choice to have an abortion due to her desire to establish a career before beginning a family was a seminal one. In an interview conducted in January 2013 Someya explained to me that she believed the sex education she received in school left her ill prepared for the real world and she increasingly felt a responsibility towards other young women who may find themselves in similar situations unless better educated. Someya began by running small community-based events advertised on Facebook and Twitter at which she gathered university students to discuss love, sex, contraception, sexually transmitted infections, and pregnancy with the aim of revising the basics of sexual education. There are echoes of women's liberation group Chūpiren in Pilcon's work with its focus on contraception (and name), however Someya does not bring an explicitly feminist discourse into her activities. Instead she attempts to avoid connecting her work to any overarching ideology of activism or social change, preferring instead to affect change on an individual level.

In 2013 a Pilcon workshop held at (now defunct) vibrator bar Love Diamond was featured on NHK's *Heart Net TV* television program and on the basis of the NPOs growing success Someya left her job at an interior design company to fully focus on Pilcon in early 2014. The NPO bases its work on medical information garnered from OBGYNs (including Dr. Kamimura), midwives, and a wide variety of professional women who offer advice on work-life balance, pregnancy, and childrearing. Pilcon is not only active offline but relies

heavily on social media to expand its audience. The NPO's YouTube video *How to Correctly Put on a Condom (kondōmu no tadashī tsukekata)* has been viewed over 1.4 million times since 2012 (figure 13). The video features Someya dressed in a nurse's uniform demonstrating the correct technique on a knitted penis toy and ends with an explanation that should the condom break, women should seek information about emergency contraception on the Japan Family Planning Association homepage. Comments on the video range from excitement at seeing a young woman discussing condoms to criticisms of Someya's looks. While some commenters suggestively request that Someya comes and puts a condom on them (*boku ni mo tsukete kudasai*), others offer expressions of gratitude for an easy to follow and useful video (*kore wa sankō ni natta*), surprise at the existence of emergency contraception (*kinkyū tte arun desu ne*) and even questions about why a woman would be demonstrating such a thing (*nande onna ga shōkai suru no?*). Despite the risks involved in showing her face in such a potentially controversial video, Someya appears unfazed by the attention and is glad the video has been viewed as many times as it has.

Pilcon regularly retweets the condom video link, along with reminders that approximately one in five pregnancies in Japan today ends in abortion, with up to 200,000 procedures being carried out per year. Describing this fact as an “inconvenient truth” of sexuality in Japan (*futsugō na shinjitsu*), Someya, who is very upfront about her own experience with abortion, does not proselytize. Instead, she openly critiques Japan's current sex education curriculum, as well as the social environment which allows so many unwanted pregnancies to occur. Someya mentioned in our January 2013 interview that she felt that one of the greatest issues when it came to the sex education she received was the focus on the “importance of life” (*inochi no taisetsusa*) which left her feeling that pregnancy was a very remote possibility due to it being described as a type of “miracle”.

The sex education Someya underwent fetishized the creation of new life as something extraordinary, special, and very difficult to achieve. Within the Ministry of Education's official sex education curriculum, the creation of life is the essential meaning of sex, with all discussion of pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and the roles of men and women centered on the reproduction of "life", and with it the future of Japan.



Figure 13. Someya Asuka in “How to Correctly Put on a Condom” (2012).

Pilcon recognizes the limits of providing education to women alone, holding events for men at which they can openly discuss condom use, love, life, and the maintenance of healthy, respectful relationships. In his work on the official sex education curriculum and its reception in schools Castro-Vázquez has argued that many boys are unaware that women may enjoy sex, or experience sexual pleasure. In the age of the internet boys are also increasingly exposed to and informed by pornography (2007; with Kishi 2002, 2007). Someya is aware that men must be part of the discussion if attitudes to sex are to change but struggles to take her message beyond small events and into schools. Pilcon, like many NPOs, relies on private sponsors and government grants for its survival. Consequently,

Someya has had to rework Pilcon's charter and expand the group's objectives to "life and career planning" with the prevention of unwanted pregnancy (until marriage) viewed as just one element to putting together a successful life plan. Someya is pragmatic about the need to adjust Pilcon's trajectory in order to move from subculture to mainstream, but remains hopeful that the NPO can provide the education she believes every young person needs.

Echoing Pilcon's efforts to mainstream is the work of Japan Association for Sexual Health or JASH (formerly the Group for Thinking about Love and Sex for Married Couples). Founded in 2011 the group registered as an NPO in 2013 and founder Yamaguchi Iwao describes the NPO's goal as delivering "real voices"—experiences that cannot be seen in textbooks or statistics—in the discourse of sexual health. Yamaguchi is active on the JASH★TV YouTube channel, filming interviews with Someya, parenting educators, midwives, and activists, peppered with occasional reviews of vibrators and masturbation sleeves (provided by Tenga for JASH's consideration). As part of its more marketable offerings JASH offers lectures at high schools which approach sex education "from an often overlooked man's perspective".³⁵ JASH struggles to be recognized as a legitimate NPO and has in recent months joined forces to expand their mission beyond sexual health into the support of LGBT teens, joining with US group Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and holding a coming of age ceremony for LGBT young adults in January 2016. Despite dedicating several years of his life to his cause, speaking with Yamaguchi in 2013 he explained that his wife does not truly understand why he founded JASH, nor does she participate in its activities. She is however supportive of his work, yet despite Yamaguchi's best efforts remains too embarrassed herself to discuss

³⁵ JASH. "JASH Official Site." Accessed March 22, 2016.
<http://www.npojash.org/%E8%AC%9B%E5%B8%AB%E6%B4%BE%E9%81%A3-1>.

sex openly.

Dr. Kamimura, Someya, and Yamaguchi all desire to get their messages out into the mainstream, however their hands remain tied by their dependence on invitations to speak at schools and accompanying funding. Too controversial a message could spell the end of their careers. Consequently, as they expand their activities they dilute their initial *raison d'être* out of necessity. In this way their work begins to mirror that of educators in the mainstream schooling system, ensuring it is next to impossible to teach about sexuality too far beyond the boundaries set by politicians and MEXT. Any attempts to take their work mainstream ensures that alternative educators must ultimately be bound by the very same political ideologies that they are attempting to counter in the first place. Unable to move into mainstream schooling or the media, diversified approaches to female sexuality instead remain frustratingly marginalized and the pro-growth, pro-nationalist, conservative ideology of contemporary Japan endures.

Hypnotic Alternatives

Not all groups offering alternative forms of sex education are attempting to take their work mainstream, instead choosing to revel in their alternativeness and the freedom it provides. Two examples are the swingers group the School of Play (*asobi no gakkō*) and hypnosis group Sexual Sense Up (SSU) who enjoy relative distance from the mainstream as they attempt to provide something Dr. Kamimura and Pilcon overlook—discourses of pleasure. For the past eight years SSU has been holding monthly sexual hypnosis events at which writer Pink Sensei—author of several self-help books including *Sexful Life for Couples* (*Ganbaranai sekkusu*) and *Mannerbook for Night* (*Yoru no manā bukku*, publisher's translations), both published in 2012—and hypnotherapist Nanna encourage participants to take advantage of a female-only space in which to explore their deepest desires. In June 2013 I joined seven women in their 20s through a guided “sexual sense up healing”

hypnosis session held at Nanna's Kanagawa office. After a group discussion at which participants were asked to explain why they had come to SSU we were led through an hour-long hypnosis session in which we were asked to build a safe space for sexual fantasy within our minds. All of the participants revealed that they were grateful for a non-judgmental space in which to explore their desires, agreeing that they had always believed that they were different or strange for enjoying sex and having healthy libidos. Despite being willing to explore sexual hypnosis, several of the women stated that they struggled to approach their partners when they felt like having sex, either due to a discomfort with expressing their own desire or a fear that their partners would think it inappropriate for a woman to demonstrate a candid interest in sex. Protecting the feelings and pride of men was something all seven women grappled with, as was finding sexual satisfaction. The women spoke jubilantly of enjoying sex (often with men who did not make very good partners), masturbation, fantasies (described as "*okazu*"—side dishes to accompany the main dish of "rice"—sex), but lamented their inability to discuss these issues outside of SSU, either in wider society or alone with their partners.

While the women participating in the SSU session wished to find a place in which to openly express their desires, the swingers' group School of Play (*asobi no gakkō*) struggles to find enough women interested in joining. The group is attempting to address the issue by building bridges between their (predominantly male) members and other education groups by holding events and inviting female sex experts to lecture to their members. Not only has the group's gender imbalance been a problem, but the male members of the group have been disrespectful to female members, displaying what one leader termed "bad etiquette" (*manā ga warui*) and creating an unstable and uncomfortable environment for all.³⁶ The School of Play managers concluded that in order to make their

³⁶ It must be noted that bad behavior on the part of male participants is in no way restricted

group more attractive to female participants, men need to be reeducated about how to treat women. At an event run by the school I attended in November 2012 I watched as around twenty professionally dressed people aged between 20-60 sat in an event space in Shibuya and politely listened as Pilcon's Someya Asuka, writer Kanda Tsubaki, and relationships counselor Ushioda Eiko explained how women desire more "flexible" and varied sex than the typical phallogentric pattern of penetration and focus on piston-like thrusting (*pisuton*).³⁷ In addition to education sessions the School of Play also holds an annual erotic fiction competition and conducts excursions around Tokyo—most recently to Shibuya's Wildone Vibrator Bar—all with the aim of better educating male members on female sexuality while encouraging female participation in a group whose success hinges on the ability to get women involved.³⁸

SSU and the School of Play do not see themselves explicitly as providing sex education, however their activities offer spaces in which to explore what it means to be sexual for women today, and provide messages that sharply contrast with the focus on reproduction and disease seen in the official sex education curriculum. Their activities also reveal the great divide between male and female discourses of pleasure, with women believing that they cannot openly express an interest in sex lest they be judged by men and men—superficially at least—discouraged by a perceived lack of desire on the part of women.

to Japanese swinging communities. See Daniel Stern's 2013 book *Swingland* for an explanation of the role of single men in the US swinging lifestyle.

³⁷ The event was posted on the event space bulletin board as "SOP Manner Course" (*SOP manā kōza*) so as to avoid unwanted attention and protect participant's privacy. For a discussion of the significance of pseudonyms at events and the pleasure product market see Chapter 4.

³⁸ For a discussion of phallogentrism and its impacts on female sexuality in Japan today, see Chapter 4.

Conclusion

Female sexuality is still very much regarded as an “inconvenient truth” (*futsugō na shinjitsu*) as official sex education attempts to socialize women into viewing their sexuality for reproduction, rather than pleasure. Foucauldian notions of bio-power permeate the pro-growth ideology of contemporary Japan. The government views the populace as an essential means to ensure the future of a strong nation in an era in which the country’s economic and international standing is waning. Examining the role of the nation state in providing health education Denise Gastaldo draws upon Foucault to argue that “health education represents a singular contribution to the exercise of bio-power” (1997, 113-114). With the expansion of access to contraception and abortion and the advancement of women’s liberation the Japanese government is no longer able to employ overtly coercive means to encourage population growth.³⁹ Instead, the national sex education curriculum is a site which illuminates the practice of bio-power, a place where “issues of individual sexual and reproductive conduct interconnect with issues of national policy and power” (Gordon 1991, 4-5). This results in sex education that overlooks the diversity of sexual desires and experiences in lieu of a focus on “the importance of life” and traditional sex roles. Such education has been wholly unsuccessful in raising the birth rate and ensuring students remain “pure” until marriage. Nevertheless, it has had other effects. The high school boys interviewed by Castro-Vázquez (2007; with Kishi 2002, 2007) and boyfriends of women seen by OBGYN Dr. Kamimura appear to have internalized the message that their sexual desires are natural, and that they have a right to sex. In contrast the women I spoke to throughout my fieldwork cited the sex education they received at school as one

³⁹ This is not to say that coercion no longer occurs. One startling example is the denial of access to prenatal screening to most pregnant women in Japan today, a complex debate that combines issues of disability rights, the rights of individual women and families, and the desire of the state to encourage reproduction at all costs. See Stevens (2013).

factor that led them to believe that female sexual desire was unnatural, and that they were somehow perverted for masturbating and enjoying sex. Reproduction-centric sex education has the impact of creating unequal relationships between men and women, resulting in women suffering at both the hands of men, and their own consciences.

Official sex education relies on very specific, yet outmoded models of citizenship. Vera Mackie makes the observation that in contemporary Japan, “models of citizenship implicitly privilege the male, white-collar ‘citizen in a suit’” (2005, 246). Sex education is controlled by those who view the male, white-collar citizen and a nuclear family in which the wife’s primary role is that of housewife and mother as the norm, and fear the spread of broadened definitions of sex. Groups such as Pilcon, JASH, School of Play, SSU, Jex, and doctors Song and Kamimura may not view themselves as activists, but their work is a form of activism in a Japan in which formal sexual education remains limited and many struggle to find a space in which to discuss outside of the boundaries of reproduction. Their work subverts the expectation that (female) sexuality must be linked to reproduction, and broadens the discussion beyond the dominant discourse of biology and disease. Nevertheless, the vast majority of those involved in the alternative sex education community find themselves trapped between their desire to take their messages to a wider audience, and being unable to do so lest they be seen as “extreme” and denied access to schools and funding.

Despite their place on the margins of society the participants in the alternative sex education community are clearly choosing to position themselves as subjects, rather than objects, within a system which they perceive as failing to provide the education, policy, and assistance to citizens necessary to enjoy fulfilling sexual and reproductive lives. As Evans argues, female sexual citizenship “depends upon the effective mystification of a different set of contradictory ideologies” as women are called upon to participate publicly

as sexual consumers, yet also “reify the absolute primacy of their innately fecund, private domesticity” (1993, 240). As the following chapters will demonstrate, this contradiction runs throughout the entire discourse of sex education for women in Japan today. My informants were usually loath to discuss official government policy, rather seeing the problems around them as something which they have the responsibility to change on a local level, not the national political stage. In recent years Dr. Song has been involved in politics, serving as an advisor on the government panel charged with investigating the reasons behind Japan’s low birth rate. As this chapter has argued, the issues even a well-educated medical expert like Dr. Song is able to bring to the mainstream are severely limited and focus solely on the reproductive element of sex. Dr. Song does her best to subvert the status quo in scathing blog posts, at events, and in online interviews about the government’s beliefs about the role of women, however her messages are never truly allowed to filter into the mainstream media.⁴⁰ Efforts to counter the conservative messages provided in the mainstream media are ultimately left to individuals, those who are willing to do the necessary footwork to find or create alternative discourse. Having given up on support from the state, these individuals then adopt the prevalent neoliberal discourse of self-responsibility (*jiko sekinin*) and work to create their own solutions, and disseminate alternative visions of female sexuality. No matter how much effort they put into their activities however, their work is ultimately shaped by a conservative social environment that does not allow them to break into the mainstream.

When they do find alternative spaces of sex education, women are informed that they are in charge of taking control of their own sexuality and that hard work on their own can change the relationships they find themselves in. Simonds questions whether self-help

⁴⁰ Wotopi. 2015. “*Shōshika wa dare no sei na no ka? Sanfujinka son mihiyon to kangaeru, genin to kaiketsusaku.*” Accessed March 23, 2016. <http://wotopi.jp/archives/25086>.

books are nothing more than “drivel designed to pacify readers” (1992, 3), and asks whether such literature is politically conservative, liberating, feminist, or even antifeminist. Simonds concludes that the genre problematically focuses on the individual over social change, but also creates a sense of community amongst the women who read them. In Japan today, sexual self-help books, and education events may not explicitly serve to reinforce traditional ideas of gender roles and sexual behavior, however they do commodify sexual pleasure as something which can be achieved by spending enough time and money. Enjoyment of sex is also portrayed as something which is mostly the responsibility of the individual, not of social systems which neglect to discuss and negate female pleasure. Pilcon and The School of Play’s work to educate men point to growing understanding that both male and female partners must be responsible for changing sexual relationships, however the majority of the discourse surrounding informal sexual education nonetheless focuses on women, and the change they can make within themselves. Women are never told that they deserve pleasure, instead they still suffer from what Asayama Shinichi termed “men’s egoism” in 1948. This “egoism” is apparent not only on an individual level—such as the women in abusive relationships seen by Dr. Kamimura—but also on a national level as a parliament composed primarily of men denies female sexual subjectivity and insists on an education curriculum that recognizes male experience and desire over that of women. As the following two chapters will explore, this environment has given birth to a number of industries both capitalizing on the dearth of sex-positive messages for women, and offering products and services to women wishing to further explore their sexuality.

Two months after our curious karaoke box meeting I saw JASH members Yamaguchi and Kato again, this time at the NPO’s annual Christmas party. As Dr. Kamimura sat on stage dressed like Santa Claus and children ran around picking sweets

out of baskets filled with snacks and condoms, I had my nails done by former sex worker and alternative sex education provider Haru, who has dubbed herself the “womb committee chairperson” (*shikyū iinchō*). She spent the time trying to convince me that wearing *fundoshi*—traditional Japanese underwear—was much better for my uterus than western style underpants. Midwives, doctors, childrearing experts, children, youth workers, sex workers, sex toy importers, and lube manufacturers all enjoying the festive atmosphere of Tokyo’s Kita ward’s event space may have been a sight to behold, but the party left me with the feeling that, despite being very far removed from mainstream society, the participants in Japan’s alternative sex education groups at the very least had the power to bring various actors together and provide alternative visions of healthy sex lives to those who actively seek them out. Whether wider society will ever be able to fully accept them however, is a different issue.

4. The Marketing of Liberation: The Selling of Sex-Positive Discourses and Sex Toys

On a Tuesday night in central Tokyo, a group of Japanese women in their 20s and 30s sit around a table in a small, underground bar, inspecting a range of bright pink vibrators on display. The women touch the toys, turn them on and off (occasionally struggling to figure out the futuristic controls), and remark at the shape, color, quality, vibration patterns, and strength. The young female owner of the bar stands behind the counter, backlit by a full wall display of brightly colored vibrators. They are pink, purple, silver, or black, some have specially made diamante cases, and none look very much like male anatomy. There are collections of smaller products, shaped like animals and bath toys, and even a lollypop series that comes with the helpful warning of “do not eat”. The photographer hovering around announces each time he wishes to take a photograph, giving the women in attendance time to reach into their laps and don the Venetian carnival masks that have been provided to protect their privacy.

The walls of the bar are decorated with cream-colored fabric and the black sofas, a shiny black bar counter, and red velvet bar stools lend the establishment a sense of elegance, serving to highlight the pop colors of the sex toys on display. Dressed in a flowing white dress, owner of the bar—20-something Meg—begins unboxing new vibrators and plugging them into their chargers. As we share cocktails the women in attendance start opening up about their sex lives, their desires, their curiosity regarding some of the more unusual toys on display, and the difficulties they have speaking about sex with their boyfriends and husbands. The general consensus is that Japanese men understand very little about what women desire sexually, and that they learn too much from the mainstream media and pornography. The women express happiness that vibrator bar Love Diamond has opened, and gratitude to Meg for giving them a place in which to discuss sex and pleasure. The first of its kind (and one of only two “vibrator bars” to have

existed in Japan), Love Diamond was a sex-positive bar in Shibuya, a place at which women could congregate and discuss sex, masturbation, and pleasure while looking at sex toys displayed on tables and behind the counter.¹ In the midst of the discussion Ai, a 30-something graduate student and married mother of one, turns to me and exclaims that she is envious that I, as an Australian woman, was able to grow up in a country in which feminism has been successful in improving the status of women. I laugh, say that things in Australia are far from perfect, and tell her I am inspired by women like herself and the other women in the bar who are disillusioned with the expectations placed upon them as women in Japanese society and searching for a different path. Towards the end of the night the CEO of online sex toy shop Love Japon and representatives from sex toy manufacturer and importer Galaku ask the women in attendance if they may post pictures and details of the event on the Love Japon blog. All agree on the condition that they are given pseudonyms and that only masked pictures appear. Vibrators may be the latest fashion item, but few want to have their public image associated with the purchase and use of sex toys. Instead, event participants stay masked and their faces and names are hidden, much in the manner in which their sexual desires remain hidden from society at large.

After several hours of sex and vibrator talk we prepare to leave and are handed party favors which include the latest Canadian-made hot pink Swan vibrator, condoms, and lubricant samples on our way out. Love Japon CEO Sayuri declares the event a great success and in the following week dedicates two separate blog posts to it—including links to Love Japon’s site where readers can buy their own Swan vibrators. In the months to come I spend many nights at Love Diamond and talk to dozens of women as we peruse the latest imported sex toys. The women range in backgrounds, ages, marital status, and

¹ “Love Diamond” and “Meg” are pseudonyms to protect the proprietor of the bar who has since left the sex-positive industry and wishes to remain anonymous.

professions but the one thing they all have in common is a deep sense of dissatisfaction with their current sex lives, and a curiosity to find a different way of doing things.



Figure 14. A European vibrator (left) and a Japanese vibrator (right) on display at an event in 2012.

Masturbation and the Marketplace

In 2014, *anan*'s annual sex special issue surveyed 500 women about masturbation, reporting that 95 percent of women have masturbated with the average age of first experience 21.9 years old. The article expressed surprise at the number of women who had first masturbated when in elementary school, and reported that 70 percent of women orgasm every time they masturbate—more than the number who orgasm during penetrative sex. Of the 500 women surveyed 380 reported using their hands, 197 using *pinku rōtā* (small clitoral stimulators), 163 using vibrators, and 343 women reported having watched pornography during masturbation. When asked how they orgasm, 89 percent of women replied clitorally, with only 11 percent reporting that they experienced vaginal orgasms when masturbating. In reporting these results, the author(s) of the *anan* article expressed surprise at the sheer number of women masturbating, but affirmed that female masturbation is natural, healthy, and fun.² Similar surveys by magazine *News Post Seven* (2010) and Jex and the Japan Family Planning Association (2013) report numbers ranging from approximately 70 to 90 percent, but all agree that the majority of women of childbearing age in Japan today masturbate. Whether women are able to openly discuss the issue however, is another matter.³

This chapter focuses on discourses of self-pleasure, and in particular female pleasure as interpreted by the sex toy industry. I seek to uncover the complex and interwoven discourses surrounding the representations, marketing, and sale of

² “*Joshi 500 Nin No Sekirara Dēta O Kōkai! Hitori Ecchi,honto No Jittai Chōsa.*” *anan*, 2014.

³ Differing survey methods and questions may account for this difference. *anan* and *News Post Seven* asked whether respondents had ever masturbated (with *News Post Seven* possibly covering a wider range of ages), whereas Jex and the Japan Family Planning Association asked respondents whether they had masturbated in the previous month. *News Post Seven*. 2010. “75% no josei ga onanī taikensha 26sai ol ‘sex chokugo ni mo yaru.’” Accessed July 14, 2015. http://www.news-postseven.com/archives/20101216_8118.html.

euphemistically titled “love goods” (*rabu guzzu*) to women in Japan today. I discuss the gap between images of female pleasure produced by male-dominated media and corporations, and the counter-discourses increasingly being created by women themselves. With the advent of the internet and increasing global commerce, Japanese women have been able to not only source products that differ vastly from the Japanese norm, but also create business and education opportunities surrounding pleasure and sexuality. This in turn has allowed for the creation of opposing discourses in which pleasure is no longer in the hands of a male partner, but something that can lead to self-fulfillment and individualization. With the opening of not one but two vibrator bars—spaces in which women can congregate to drink while viewing a range of sex toys and discussing sex and sexuality—in the Shibuya area in 2012 and 2013, increasing use of the internet to market products once deemed too taboo to purchase in bricks and mortar shops, now more than ever it is possible for Japanese women to access products that were once inaccessible to all but the most curious shopper (figure 14). Female sexual pleasure has long been absent from discourses of sexuality, denied or subordinated to male pleasure. However, through creative marketing female masturbation can be safely demarcated as a “useful” practice in terms of consumption, consumer culture, and refocused as a health and physical well-being practice. Finally, this chapter questions whether all avenues for sexual enjoyment and pleasure must ultimately be colored by marketing and consumption—where even pleasure and individualization become products.

As shown in the previous chapters, due to the marginalization of feminist voices in Japan, depictions of women’s sexuality have, to a large extent, been commercial or neoliberal conceptions. Discourse has been dominated by commercial interests which aim to create new problems, and provide the solutions to them in the form of goods and services. However, just as Gayle Rubin (1984) argues against seeing all commercialism of

sexuality in a wholly negative light, I contend that there are both positives and negatives to the proliferation of “love goods” with potential benefits for both the women who seek them and for wider discourses of feminism in contemporary Japan. While commercial interests may be creating artificial “problems” that can only be “solved” by the products they offer, they are also creating new spaces which break down barriers, permit discussions of taboos, and create a new and increasingly permissive discourse around female sexuality and pleasure. Debra Curtis (2004, 101) poses the question “[w]hat are the positive effects of the market economy in terms of sexuality?” The female-friendly sex shops, vibrator bars, and sex-positive events described in this chapter are majority female owned and run and may provide a channel through which feminist ideas of pleasure can proliferate. Due to the marginalization of feminist voices in Japan today it is commercial interests, rather than academia, that may provide better spaces for feminist discussion. This chapter seeks to understand the topic through a broader lens than the simplistic criticism of commercialization that so often overlooks women as the subjects of their own sexuality and instead views them only as consumers.

Pleasures with a Long History

The history of Japanese sex toys did not begin with the infamous “Rabbit”. Intricately carved dildos (*harigata*) featured heavily in *shunga* erotic artworks (Suzuki 2012), along with all manner of erotic writings from Edo period Japan (1603-1868). As the historian Anne Walthall writes, “[t]alk about sex dominated popular culture in early modern Japan” (2009, 1). These writings were not without depictions of female pleasure as they taught techniques to enhance the mutual pleasure of couples (Moretti 2013) and featured depictions of sexually adventurous and forward “lively women” (Hayakawa and Gerstle 2013). As Walthall writes however, “with one or two exceptions, men produced the texts that constructed sex, their assumptions and preoccupations filter almost everything said

about women” (2009, 1). Walthall’s analysis of sex manuals from early modern Japan suggest that there was some talk of female pleasure and that masturbation and the use of dildos was encouraged, but warns that these manuals would not have been widely circulated. Walthall argues that “texts that discuss female sexual practice operated at the margin of discourse in early modern Japan: by offering perspectives that supplement without supplanting the dominant discourse” (ibid., 15-16). She also notes that the vast majority of the masturbation depicted relied heavily on dildos, further perpetuating the idea that “a penis substitute would lead naturally to orgasm” (ibid., 15).⁴ Timon Screech criticizes assumptions that mutual sexual pleasure depicted in *shunga* means that mutual sexual pleasure was valued in Edo Japan. Instead, he argues that “mutuality is stressed in the pictures because it was *likely to be absent* in the real sexual encounter—a premise which the historical record amply supports” (2011, loc 4154, italics in original). We cannot know the precise details of the sex lives of Edo period women, but the evidence suggests that women from all levels of society were not in a position to lend their own voices to the discussion, and overwhelmingly remained bound by strict social mores that required them to use their sexuality “as purposeful fertility” (as wives perpetuating the family line), or to provide pleasure to men as sex workers or courtesans (Lindsey 2007, 10). Some women may have found pleasure in *shunga* and *harigata* (Tanaka 2013; Screech 2011), but the depictions themselves came from male artists, and from male perspectives.

With the formation of the Japanese nation state in the 1870s new censorship legislation was introduced and the production of *shunga* and *harigata* became increasingly difficult. These pleasure products were seen as a potential embarrassment to a Japan attempting to rapidly modernize and be viewed as “civilized” by western nations, requiring

⁴ The 2011 documentary film *Suicchin* begins by arguing that dildos have undergone an evolution from objects that women used in the Edo period, to objects that are used on women by men today, but provides no references for this statement.

“conformity with western standards of morality and censorship” (Buckland 2013, 268).

Key provisions of censorship law enacted at this time remained in place until the end of the Pacific War in 1945 (Mitchell 1983; Buckland 2013, 268) and gave the state the power to regulate what aspects of sexuality could be discussed openly and what was deemed obscene. This censorship meant the end of open production of erotica and sex toys, but the introduction of compulsory education accompanied by rising literacy rates, and the expansion of the print media meant that the government had a new way in which to shape attitudes towards sexuality on a wide scale.⁵ Women’s magazines from the early 20th century began to discuss sex, but it was from a particularly medical or hygienic perspective, and focused on maintaining health and raising the next generation of citizens for the wartime Japanese state. Women’s sexuality was linked to the “good wife, wise mother” (*ryōsai kenbō*) ideology and once again was restricted to “purposeful fertility”. The health of citizens, and with them the nation was foremost to any discussions of sexuality, as evidenced by the way in which masturbation came to be problematized.

The concept of masturbation as harmful behavior was not common in Japan until the 19th century when, as Akagawa Manabu argues, it was able to gain a foothold in part due to the widespread introduction of the sexual hygiene movement (1999, 123). The hygiene paradigm, which impressed upon the population ideas about “correct” sexuality, provided a foundation for the spread of “scientific” discourses of sexuality, many of which were imported from Europe and provided inspiration for Japanese researchers, educators, and a new generation of sexologists who were inspired to search for the “truth about sex” in rapidly changing Meiji era Japan. Once the idea of masturbation as harmful took hold it was seized upon by sexologists who saw the perceived lack of masturbation in Europe as

⁵ This is not to say that *shunga* disappeared, rather they shifted from being openly available to being produced for soldiers during the Sino-Japanese war before all but dying out with the proliferation of photography in the early part of the 20th century. See Buckland (2013).

an example of enlightenment and social development.⁶ Thomas Laqueur (2003, 51) explains how “masturbation was of primary concern... to the reformers and modernizers who brought sex education and eugenics to Japan”, so much so that in 1909 the founding director of Japan’s first medical school for women described it as “the most terrible ailment related to the sexual instincts”, believing that instead it was citizens’ true purpose to produce healthy children. As Laqueur argues, it was thought that “self abuse had fatal consequences not only for every individual’s reproductive capacity but for society at large” (2003, 51). Private vice was treated as having major implications for public policy as Japan headed towards war, and reproduction became central to building a strong, modern nation-state. Masturbation was considered as something that would “interfere with the pursuit of more pleasurable sex defined as robust heterosexual intercourse” (Driscoll 2005, 193). Reproduction was seen as central to empire building (Frühstück 2003, loc 75; Mackie 2003, 109-111), and pleasure—whether through sex or masturbation—was absent from discussions of female sexuality as women were encouraged instead to maintain peak physical health in order to be able to produce healthy offspring to serve as future citizens and soldiers for the Japanese state. As 19th century western scientific ideas about the body spread, ideas about the psychological and physiological disorders that could result from “unnatural’ practices such as anal and interfemoral intercourse or masturbation” grew

⁶ In his extensive history of masturbation Laqueur asks how it came to be problematized in western society. He questions the widely held Foucauldian view that “modern subjectivities were created through the incitement of desire then its domination by new technologies of power” (Laqueur 2003, 274), instead arguing that masturbation was problematized in the eighteenth century, a century before the widespread creation of discourses about sex, and “before ‘sexuality’ existed” (ibid., 275). He writes that “[a]nxiety about masturbation was an expression of anxiety about a new political economic order writ on the body” (ibid., 280). Within a new economy that valued the consumption of luxury to encourage further production, masturbation was “a practice that seems to have virtually no supply constraints, a satisfaction of endless desire by endless gratification” (ibid., 278), yet could not yet be monetized or made “useful” to society. Solitary sex in early 1800s Europe was viewed as an evil because of its links to luxury, excess, and vice, and feared in the early 1900s lest sexual instinct become “uncontrollable and unserviceable later on” (Freud in Laqueur 2003, 391).

(Pflugfelder 1999, 246). As Gregory Pflugfelder explains, “[s]ince ‘nature’ had supposedly designed these organs for the purpose of procreation, it stood to reason that other uses should have a deleterious impact on human health” (ibid., 246).⁷ Similarly, Frühstück outlines debates in 1908 in the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, in which, among comprehensive debates about many aspects of sexuality, the experts contributing agreed that “sex education was necessary primarily to avoid the horrible consequences of masturbation” (2003, loc 809). Masturbation became not only taboo, but was also considered a danger to the health of a generation of youth charged with progressing the empire of Japan.⁸

Within Meiji and Taisho era medical discourse the focus was primarily on male sexual desire. Pflugfelder’s book barely mentions female masturbation, and Frühstück explains that “[i]t was not always made clear in the sex education debate whether the focus was on boys, girls, or both” (2003, loc 876) but also makes reference to educators who believed boys needed to be taught to avoid “impure women” (ibid., 876) so they could keep themselves healthy for procreation. Some references to female masturbation can be found in the debates conducted in the *Yomiuri Shimbun* in the early 1900s as participants wrote of how they somehow “‘knew’ that masturbation was also rampant among girls” and even argued that if girls could avoid being harassed by men and would refrain from reading

⁷ Researchers evoked a call to “nature” and “natural” sexuality and argued that “no bird or beast, not an insect or fish practices masturbation” (vice-director of the Japanese Philanthropic Hospital in Shanghai Watanuki Yosaburō in 1905, quoted in Pflugfelder 1999, 241). Watanuki, called humans “the most lofty of all creatures”, and implored that when men’s sexual passions arise they must seek out women and copulate to reproduce, rather than engage in masturbation or male-male sex.

⁸ Frühstück explains that Mukō Gunji, a professor at Keio University, even went so far as to state that “sexual desire should serve the purpose of reproduction alone, and any other use should be considered a ‘sex crime’” (2003, loc 819). Masturbation and prostitution were considered to be a misdirection of strength and vigor, manifestations of an excessive sex life, for both those in the military and civilians. The military categorized nervous illnesses in its annual health reports for the army and navy stationed throughout the Japanese empire, and included “neurasthenia” (*shinkeisuijaku*) and “hysteria” (*hisuteri*) as categories of such disease (ibid., loc 837).

“obscene novels” they would know nothing about sex and everything would follow its natural course (ibid., loc 895). Male sexual desire is taken as normal, a natural occurrence, yet female desire is something that does not occur organically in women but is instead sparked and encouraged by men. Add this to the pervasive idea that “women’s sexual desire was inseparably pervaded and guided by their desire to have children” and “weaker than men’s” (ibid., loc 905), and it can be concluded that while female desire and subsequent masturbation was not invisible, it was not seen through the same problematizing lens as male sexual desire due to the fact that it was not perceived as having the same carnal, instinctual strength as that of men.⁹ Male desire was seen as “aggressive, destructive, and, above all, potentially uncontrollable”, in contrast to the “weak, harmless, or even absent sexual desire attributed to girls” (ibid., 925).¹⁰ Around this time the idea that women were to be educated, and were to take primary control of household management and the education of children proliferated (Takeda 2004, 37), and publications for women reflected these new ideals. Sexological publications—which dealt with desire, women’s liberation, and critiques of marriage as an institution—were heavily censored as they were seen as a “threat to social order and the educated middle and upper classes’ willingness to reproduce” (Frühstück 2003, loc 231), but women were “capable of receiving education as far as menstruation, childbirth and child-rearing, namely women’s

⁹ Even prominent feminist Hiratsuka Raichō was a proponent of the view that “‘a deep wish to have children’ was at the root of women’s sexual desire” (Frühstück 2003, loc 1633), a view that informed her beliefs about contraception, eugenics, and the moral role of women in civil society. See Chapter 3 for a discussion of the discourse of uncontrollable male desire in contemporary sex education.

¹⁰ These beliefs about male sexuality as “biologically grounded in physical needs” (Soh 2008, 40) led to the establishment of military “comfort stations” during the Pacific War so as to provide an outlet (also described as a “hygienic public toilet”, with the women forced to work there described as “public toilets” or *kyōdō benjo*) for men’s uncontrollable sexual desire, lest they attempt to foist themselves upon the “good” women (wives, mothers, and future wives and mothers) of the Japanese empire. Masturbation was clearly not seen to be enough of an outlet for male sexual desire. See Driscoll (2005) and (Garon) 2005.

biological functions” (Takeda 2004, 38). Women came to define their sexuality within the marital relationship (ibid., 42), a shift which “generated the concept of the ‘deviant’ who was not able to procreate healthy children or form a health family, as, for instance, in the case of prostitutes” (Narita 1990, 122-4, translation from Takeda 2004, 42). This focus on biological functions in sexuality discourse continued throughout the war, the early postwar period, and arguably remains in sex education policy in Japan today.¹¹

The postwar period saw a liberalization of sex, but one that “largely encouraged male heterosexual agency and pleasure” (Shigematsu 2015, 176), and which overlooked women’s desire until the rise of the women’s liberation movement in the 1970s. As the market for male desire became more socially acceptable, the manufacturing and sale of adult toys increased. Legal restrictions were put in place that meant sex toy manufacturers were required to obtain permission from the Ministry of Health in order to sell their products. Even today the law remains somewhat ambiguous when it comes to the regulation of sex toys, listing them as “medical devices” (*iryō yōgu*) alongside tampons, condoms and contraceptive devices under the Pharmaceutical Affairs Act (1960) which bans the manufacture and sale of products that have not been approved by authorities. This impacts not only the marketing and sale of products, but also adherence to safety regulations as both the difficulty and financial expense involved means that most sex toys do not undergo stringent testing for safety. Since they cannot be explicitly sold as sex toys, vibrators are labelled as “toys” (*omocha*) or “joke goods” (*jōku guzzu*) in order to circumvent government requirements.¹² Through this process, women’s desire remains

¹¹ See Chapter 3 for further details.

¹² It can be tempting to view this as a phenomenon unique to Japan. However, such censorship still appears around the world, with one particular example seen in the state of Texas which until 2008 banned the sale of devices that stimulate the genitals, only permitting the sale of sex toys if they were labeled as a “cake decorations”, “novelty items” or “gag gifts” (Omori 2007). In 2004 elementary school teacher Joanne Webb was arrested for selling a vibrator to two undercover police at a passion party. She was later acquitted and laws were

“masked” from view. In the 1970s it was common for vibrators to be referred to as “electric dolls” (*dendō kokeshi*), with a classic example being the 1972 *kumanko* vibrator which was made to resemble an Ainu bear carving and labelled as a “local traditional craft doll” (*mingei kyōdo ningyō*). *Kumanko* was the first vibrator designed to provide simultaneous vaginal and clitoral stimulation, went on to sell over a million units (Matsuzawa 2003), and became the impetus for the documentary *Suicchin*. Manufacturers were often subjected to police investigations and worked to keep their products underground and available only to “sex toy fetishists” (*maniakku*) in order to avoid trouble. In subsequent years, rabbit, dolphin, and even Hello Kitty vibrators have appeared on the market, sold under the label of “toys” or “joke goods”. In examining the phenomenon of Japanese sex toys, Breanne Fahs and Eric Swank argue that toys like the “Rabbit” (popularized by the infamous *Sex and the City* episode “The Turtle and the Hare”) and Hello Kitty vibrators that mimic children’s toys “may serve a role in infantilizing women” (2013, 672). Nonetheless, this statement overlooks the complexity of the Japanese market and cute culture (Kinsella 1995; Miller 2011), as well as the history of sex toys and their regulation. The following sections of this chapter will elucidate this complexity. If Japanese women’s sexuality has been positioned as one of two distinct options—to provide pleasure to men or to reproduce in the context of heterosexual marriage—then masturbation becomes something “external” to these expectations, a behavior which may not necessarily hinge on male desires and state goals, subversive but also able to be leveraged within consumer culture. The transformation of female pleasure into purposeful and useful beyond reproduction and male pleasure has both influenced and been influenced by the sex toy industry, and is also serving to alter the way in which women view their

changed in 2008 to allow the sale of sex toys in Texas, but a few US states, as well as many countries around the world, still ban the sale of sex toys. See Glover (2010) for further information on the US.

bodies, their sexuality, and their own pleasure itself.

Sex Shops for Women, the Love Piece Club, and Feminist Sex Toys

Thinking back to that night in Love Diamond surrounded by vibrators of all shapes and sizes, I found myself wondering about the women I met and their reasons for attending a vibrator bar. An overwhelming sense of dissatisfaction with the status quo was shared by all, however it was their approach to solving their problems—through the consumption of sex toys (and alcohol)—that was most curious. Takeyama argues that “womanhood has long been conceptualized as a mere transition period from sexually sealed girlhood to desexualized motherhood” (2016, 132). Capturing this “transition period” and leveraging it to encourage greater economic participation by women as consumers has long been the goal of many sectors of the Japanese economy, beginning in the 1970s and reaching maturation during the bubble era of the 1980s. The sex toy industry is another example of how consumer culture, coupled with the proliferation of online media and shopping and emboldened by discourses of female sexual empowerment, is targeting the once untapped female market. The sex toys of the 1970s-1990s such as the *dendō kokeshi* and *harigata* were made by men, for men to use *on* (rather than with) women, a perception that remains even today. At an “introduction to vibrators” event held at female-friendly sex shop the Love Piece Club in July 2015 one participant—a woman in her 40s who professed to never having used sex toys before—held up a vibrator and asked if she was supposed to move it in and out herself, expressing surprise at the enthusiastic “yes!” she received from more experienced participants. The around 20-30 different vibrators available in Japan until the 1990s (today there are over 500 models) were often sold in dingy sex shops or at love hotels. These vibrators were often featured in Japanese porn films wherein the male porn star(s) would prod the female star(s) with a selection of toys ranging from *pinku rotā* (smaller, cheaply made, battery operated clitoral stimulators), to the heavy duty Hitachi

Magic Wand, all the while rhetorically asking “[d]oes it feel good? Does it?” Still a common trope in Japanese pornography today, women begin the scene acting as though they are not enjoying having a sex toy (or sex itself) foisted upon them and appear to give in and enjoy themselves after repeated pressure from the male partner.¹³ Described as “male sex culture” (*otoko no sei bunka*), convincing a woman to stop resisting and enjoy herself leaves men with a “sense of achievement” (*tasseikan*) according to vibrator manufacturer World Industrial Arts managing director Sakai Yasuo (Sasatani 2011). If appeal to women was somewhat lacking in pornographic depictions of vibrators, then it was positively invisible in sex toy sales. Many women felt uncomfortable or even unsafe stepping into dark sex shops, and the market was dominated by a limited number of Japanese companies headed and staffed by men who knew their market and continued to churn out large toys in colors like black and flesh colored, resplendent with realistic foreskins and popping veins. Names like “Cornered” (*zettai zetsumei*) and “Dynamite Boy” (*dainamaito boi*) only serve to further strengthen the image of vibrators as unappealing to women. The (usually male) manufacturers today continue to demonstrate a lack of understanding of the desires of female customers. This is perhaps best exemplified by Nakanishi Takao, supervisory manager at World Industrial Arts in the documentary *Suicchin* in a scene in which he wanders about the company warehouse holding two extraordinarily large flesh colored dildos, and explains that “compared to toy colored items—pink ones for example—women must surely be more excited by (flesh colored) ones like this (Sasatani 2011). I’ve used them myself and women are far more excited by old-style things like these (he waves the giant flesh colored dildos about) than by modern, cute, toy-like vibrators”. At the screening of *Suicchin* I attended in 2012 this line drew snorts of laughter and calls of “*nai, nai!*” (no way!) from the mostly female audience. For a

¹³ See Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion of porn tropes in contemporary Japan.

product that one would assume would be designed with female pleasure in mind, much of the production and marketing was created with the male consumer at the forefront. In the 1990s a shift began to occur when a number of new players entered the market, the most significant of whom was female-friendly sex shop proprietor Kitahara Minori.

As late as the 1990s information about masturbation for women was scarce. Founder of Japan's first sex shop for women Curious, Tanaka Masaaki, explained that just twenty years ago it was common for men's magazines to claim that women had no sex drive, that women's magazines and even sex education books avoided the topic of female masturbation, and that women were expected to leave their pleasure in the hands of men (Sasatani 2011). Tanaka attempted to change this by opening Curious in the heart of Shibuya, a place where he hoped that women would feel safe to come and browse the products on offer and learn about their own pleasure. Kitahara visited Curious but felt that the products they stocked were the same as those seen in traditional male-oriented sex shops and was disappointed to see that most of the clients were male. As a result, Kitahara began to consider what exactly "female-friendly" meant, designing her own vibrator and founding the Love Piece Club—Japan's first female run sex shop—in 1996. Propelled by the development of online commerce, the Love Piece Club has both a show room for female customers tucked away on the second floor of a non-descript building in east Tokyo and an online shopping site where 90% of sales are made.¹⁴ Men may visit the Love Piece Club showroom, but only when accompanied by a woman. At events Kitahara often tells humorous stories about elderly men showing up at the showroom, desperate to purchase something for their wives after seeing the shop in magazines. Kitahara's staff have been

¹⁴ The Love Piece Club showroom has moved several times since 1996 and has been located around the corner from the University of Tokyo in Hongo-san-chōme since 2005. The shop is not immune to protests and Kitahara protects herself by working under a pseudonym as she has also been the target of vicious criticism online.

known to serve the occasional male customer in the foyer as a compromise but strictly forbid lone men from entering the showroom. The physical and online shops are supported by an active event presence, with the shop's staff often providing information and sales booths at events such as annual World Sexual Health Day events, sponsoring the Tokyo Pride Parade, and numerous women only events such as the Women's Festival (*onna matsuri*) and education workshops.¹⁵ The Love Piece website explains that the shop was created to provide information and adult products from a feminist perspective, and Kitahara explains that she was inspired by her discovery of "online women-centered adult goods shops overseas" which were run by women connected to the 1970s women's liberation movement. This led Kitahara to design a "woman-friendly vibrator" and establish the Love Piece Club in 1996. The company paved the way for a new generation of women to obtain information about sexual pleasure and discover products that unlike those made in Japan, were specifically created with female users in mind. Kitahara has been at the forefront of Japan's female-friendly pleasure product world for close to two decades, responsible for inspiring the current generation of pleasure product retailers.

As much as Kitahara desires to bring female pleasure into the mainstream, the Love Piece Club often caters to a very specific market, and there is a strong lesbian and fetish theme to many of the products sold. In a discussion with a Love Piece Club staff member in July 2015 it was explained to me that Silk Labo DVDs and other domestic products are not sold at the Love Piece Club because they are not popular with the clientele who are often looking for something different or less mainstream. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the shop's fifteenth anniversary party held in 2012 featured workshops such as "how to choose, wear, use, and care for strap-on dildos and harnesses" in which participants were

¹⁵ See Shigematsu (2015) for the significance of the use of the word *onna* for "women" (over *josei* or *fujin*) in the Japanese second wave feminist movement.

encouraged to try on harnesses over their underwear and experience on how “strong and in control” wearing a dildo made them feel. The event also featured a Rokudenashiko *decoman* (decoration *manko*) workshop in which participants took plaster casts of their genitals and decorated them in accordance with how they felt about their sexuality and sex organs. These fairly unusual events suggest an approach to sexuality inspired by second wave feminist conceptualizations of ownership of the body and sexuality. Kitahara came of age in this period, and this is reflected in her business practices and the shop’s particular focus. At an event held to celebrate the release of her book *Did anan Sex Make Us Beautiful?* (*anan no sekkusu de kirei ni nareta?*) in December 2011, Kitahara spoke of the affinity she had felt for the publication—both she and *anan* were “born” in 1970—and how inspired she had been throughout her teen years to see issue after issue celebrate women’s bodies, sexuality, and the future freedoms she thought would come as social attitudes to women shifted during the 1980s. In line with recent social trends however, Kitahara was forced to conclude that *anan* is no longer an agent for change, but rather just another example of mainstream media that encourages women to seek pleasure in shopping, dating, beauty, and ultimately marriage—the very ideology Kitahara saw *anan* as an escape from when she was a teen. Kitahara herself does her best to straddle the difficult balance between selling out to the mainstream in order to keep her business running, and providing a space for feminist (and anti-commercial) critique and thought. Dales (2008) has described The Love Piece Club as a space which operates “parallel to the mainstream” while also “traversing the mainstream” as its online publications in particular compete for readers with more mainstream publications such as *Nikkei Ūman* and *Elle Japon*. Dales argues that the Love Piece Club promotes women’s agency, defining agency more broadly than a socio-culturally mediated capacity to act, (Ahearn 2001, 112). Dales expands her concept of agency to “encompass pragmatic acts of unintentional resistance” (2008).

Kitahara's feminism is one in which the female body, menstruation, and sexuality, is to be celebrated in all its permutations as she provides a space "explicitly designed to encourage questioning" (ibid.), particularly of hegemonic gender ideals. According to Dales "the Love Piece Club contributes to a broader discourse of sexuality that problematizes heterosexist norms, connecting sex to the myriad gender (in)equalities of everyday life. In so doing, the Love Piece Club presents sex and sexuality as sites for the negotiation of gender inequalities, and active critical sexuality as a source of agency for women and others marginalized by sexism and heterosexism" (ibid.). The Love Piece Club's printed materials and blog often echo *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, as they encourage exploration and dissemination of information about the female body (ibid.). Similarly, the company sells natural sponge tampons, cloth sanitary pads, menstrual cups, and other products aimed at women who are interested in sustainable approaches to feminine hygiene, and barbells (much like those advocated by Betty Dodson) and Ben Wa balls (popular at the Love Piece Club long before they were made famous by *Fifty Shades of Grey*) for pelvic floor training. The vast majority of the Love Piece Club's products are imported from overseas, particularly from Europe, and are very different to the traditional black or flesh, veiny, intimidating sex toys seen in most sex shops in Japan. The Love Piece Club's top selling vibrators are all sleek, beautifully packaged ("like lingerie or jewelry" describes Kitahara in *Suicchin*, 2011) and often look nothing like penises. Instead stylized rabbit vibrators by Swedish company Lelo and Canadian company Swan, as well as external stimulators shaped like apples, rubber ducks, feathers, and flowers are most popular—the kind of vibrators that Japanese manufacturer World Industrial Arts' Sakai Yasuo refuse to make as he believes that they lack "eros".

The Love Piece Club and Kitahara Minori's particular brand of third wave, sex-positive feminism is inspiring to customers who have had very little exposure to feminist

messages, but also deeply problematic as it is intertwined with commercializing tendencies which subtract from the overall message of empowerment. In 2011 waxing and beauty salon Olive opened in the same building as, and in cooperation with, the Love Piece Club. Used as the set of the 2012 Silk Labo film *Melty Touch* (see Chapter 5) the salon offers cellulite treatment, facials, and Brazilian waxing—stating that it’s recommended for those who want “comfortable pubic beauty” (*watashi jishin ga kokochi yoi pyūbikku byūti*), women who feel the skin of their genitals is dry and rough, darkening with age, or women who are worried about the appearance of grey hairs “down there”.¹⁶ The Love Piece Club’s connection to a beauty salon that purports to offer solutions for perceived physical problems further muddies its position as a feminist space and reiterates the complexities of an industry that relies both on feminist discourses of empowerment and commercial interests. Kitahara can often be found writing for the mainstream print media, on her Nikoniko Douga show discussing female sexuality, and in other online media commenting on a multitude of aspects of women’s lives in Japan today. Despite the contradictory nature of her positions as both modern feminist icon in the circles in which she moves, and purveyor of sex toys, Kitahara continues to walk the fine line between commercial exploitation of female desires and feminist activism.

The New Generation of Vibrator Fashion

Kitahara Minori has found success combining feminist consciousness-raising with the sale of sex toys, sanitary products, strap-ons and feminist sex-positive literature. In contrast the new generation of pleasure product purveyors have approached the problem of how to

¹⁶ There are a number of products on the Japanese market—from creams to packs—purporting to lighten the nipple and genital areas. Many women in Japan feel that the darkening of these areas is a sign of age, and rumors even speculate that darker nipples signify that a woman has a lot of sexual experience. See Laura Miller (2006, 115) for further information.

reach a wider market of female consumers in very different ways, moving away from explicitly feminist discourse. These women may have been inspired by Kitahara's rhetoric of female empowerment and sex-positive feminism, but nevertheless have moved away from the strong feminist roots of the Love Piece Club and have sought to bring sex toys into the mainstream by painting them as fashionable—yet everyday—objects for the empowered, individualized female consumer of contemporary Japan. Companies such as Galaku, a former toy manufacturer which imports high quality adult toys from overseas as well as making its own line of products, and Love Japon, a company which has shifted from catalogue sales of costumes and sex toys for men to focus on woman-friendly products sold through a fashionable web site, are highly aware of the changing demographics and attitudes towards sexuality in contemporary Japan and are making great efforts to maintain and expand their markets.

Galaku began as a children's toy manufacturer but realized that the safety and quality of manufacturing techniques developed to make toys that adhere to strict safety standards could be put to a more profitable use in the creation of vibrators and other sex toys. Aware of the impact the low birth rate and resulting declining number of children would have on their business, the company believes that expansion into other markets is their only hope for survival. Similarly, owner and CEO of online pleasure product retailer Love Japon, Sayuri, could see little future in the mail order lingerie and "love goods" business she inherited from her parents. After years of feeling embarrassed at her parents' company, Sayuri saw Love Japon as a wonderful business opportunity and decided to bring it into the 21st century by no longer focusing on catalog sales to men, but instead aiming for a stronger online presence and positioning Love Japon as a "Sexy Lingerie and Love Goods" company with a fashion forward attitude toward sexuality and pleasure.

Sayuri plays off her image as an ordinary fashionable young woman on the Love

Japon website. Unlike most involved in the pleasure products industry, she's more than happy to put a celebrity face to the company (similar to Kitahara Minori) in order to boost its perceived legitimacy and to draw upon personal confessional style to connect with potential buyers. Just as Kitahara Minori claims to have found herself enamored with the adult goods she saw overseas, Sayuri writes that she went from having a dislike of the vibrators and rotors she had come across in Japan (due to their unappealing design and strange movements) to working in the industry after visiting Europe and seeing what she terms "fashionable eros"—that is, sex toys for women presented in a non-threatening manner at a "sexy shop" that, rather than being hidden from view in a back alley, was one of many shops along a regular high street. She saw women going in and out of the shop freely, some even accompanied by their children, and when she laid eyes on the types of vibrators sold she felt for the first time that they were actually something she wanted to use. Just as Sayuri is the face of Love Japon, Galaku (whose male CEO made the deliberate choice to remain out of the public eye) employs a number of young women to act as its public face who often team with Sayuri to hold women-friendly events, often teaming with vibrator bar Love Diamond.

Love Diamond proprietor Meg explained her motivation for opening such an unusual establishment, explaining that her customers were able to enjoy a pleasant place in which they could openly discuss masturbation. She argued that most people view female masturbation as something of a mystery or taboo—not a topic to be discussed at bars. Meg made a pertinent point—female masturbation does remain particularly taboo in Japan today—but three years on her bar has folded and is survived only by copycat bar Wild One which opened in a former "happening bar"¹⁷ around the corner from Love Diamond in

¹⁷ "Happening bars" are quasi-legal spaces where people meet to partner swap and have casual sex with strangers. Located around Japan, entrance is often free or very inexpensive for single women, moderately priced for couples, and most expensive for single men.

early 2013. The two bars as spaces reflected the gaping divide between older, traditional, male-led sex toy manufacturers and the new generation spearheaded by Kitahara Minori and furthered by Love Japon and Galaku (amongst others). I first met Meg at an event celebrating the Love Piece Club's 15th birthday in 2012 where she was handing out business cards for the soon to open Love Diamond—a concept she explained was inspired by Kitahara Minori and the Love Piece Club.

As detailed at the beginning of this chapter, the bar was decorated with tasteful black and cream décor and the vibrators were displayed in a glass showcase behind the bar, their smooth lines and aesthetically pleasing design used to enhance Meg's subdued choice of interior. In contrast, Wild One serves as a visual reminder of the different approach of the old guard of sex toy manufacturing and retail. Wild One left the former happening bar's décor intact—meaning that the walls were decorated with pictures of entwined couples, the padded chairs were shaped like giant vulvas, and the door handles like giant phalluses. The bar was covered in hundreds of vibrators; most from Japanese manufacturers and reflecting a traditional choice of sex toy aesthetic. During its short life Love Diamond received cooperation from Love Japon and Galaku to stock the bar with hundreds of fashionable sex toys, held events for Pilcon, and was featured on late night commercial television as well as NHK's *Heart-Net TV* program. If Meg's aim was to bring female masturbation into the mainstream, it could be argued that she succeeded for the brief lifetime of the bar. Meg referred to the conversations she had with customers as “love talk” (*rabu tōku*), and explained that she spoke to over 600 customers about their masturbatory and sexual habits. Love Diamond and Wild One offer(ed) dedicated spaces in which to consider issues of female sexuality usually only discussed at workshops and events run by the Love Piece Club, other female-friendly sex shops, and Pilcon events. The women at the events I attended had been invited by friends, found out about events on blogs they followed, or

through Facebook and Twitter. Due to the nature of the events however, many explained that they had had difficulty encouraging friends to come along with them.



The poster features a dark blue background with a glowing blue arc and a green high-heeled shoe icon. The main title 'FASCI NIGHT' is in large, stylized, glowing red letters, with '#01' below it. Text indicates it is produced by LOVEJAPON & GALAKU. Event details include the date 2013.2.1, location @Le Baron de Paris, time Friday Night Open 21:00, and ticket price 3000yen (tax.in).

Guest Music Selectors

PELI
 横浜生まれ・横浜育ち。音楽家の両親のもと、幼少の頃からオールディーズやフレンチポップなどを愛聴。19代という大先輩もセクシーなパフォーマンスには、スガワトをまっぴりけに魅了したモデル業を満ちたことなしつづも、選抜知恵をモットーとする独自のミックスDJスタイル、そして誰にも真似ない・独特のファッションスタイルを確立。VOGUE JAPAN/PINKO/JAPANをはじめ、ファッションアイコンとして数多くのメディアに登場している。

NOEMI (Performer / Pole Dance / Director)
 ポールダンスをはじめとするショーでトップカー・ルン・ルンでのショー、FINGでのパーティ、PVなど様々なジャンルに活動するパフォーマンス者。2009年の映画バンド「TUTOR」のオリジナルメンバーmonokomatonとのコラボレーション企画「INT RESERVE」を結成。オリジナルティ満点のパフォーマンスで、FUR ROCK Vegas in MIA内や、レセプションパーティ、都内某所にて活動中!!!
 また、2011アクセサリーブランド「MARBLE LAB」を立ち上げ、音楽やファッションの世界で活躍中。

DIEGO
 2002年、Mr High Fashion誌のWomen/Westwoodの特集にてモデルデビューを果たす。その後多くの雑誌、ファッションショーに出演し、今なおモデルとして第一線で活躍中。2006年、パーティーイベント「Young Love」を開催し、大きな成功を収めたことがきっかけとなり、多くのファッション・パーティにDJとして出演。その後、モデルDJユニット「Van Girls DJ」を結成。Electro, Rock, New Wave, さらにBlack Musicまで幅広いジャンルで活躍中。

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Map showing location: AOTYAMA CENTER BLDG. B1F, 3-8-40, AOTYAMA, HINOKI-KU, TOKYO.

Figure 15. Fascinight promotional poster.

Hoping to bring sex toys out of sex shop workshops and vibrator bars and further into the mainstream, Galaku and Love Japon devised Fascinight (playing on the words “fashion”, “fascinating”, and “night”) in 2013, an event held at exclusive Tokyo nightclub Le Baron de Paris that encouraged young female patrons to celebrate their sexuality by dressing sexily, drinking, dancing, and becoming familiar with (and ultimately purchasing) the sex toys, lubricants, and condoms displayed in glass cases around the club (figure 15). Fascinight recalled images of celebrity as participants took photos holding sex toys at an area modeled on Japanese PR events in front of a Galaku/Love Japon promotional board. The event continued into the early hours of the morning with pole dancing and Japanese bondage (*shibari*) demonstrations, and wholehearted celebration of sexuality. Linking sex toy consumption to an image of young, fashionable, self-actualized, women was the key purpose of the event. In contrast to the Love Piece Club’s feminism inspired workshops, Fascinight encouraged men and women to celebrate sex toys as fashion items and to openly demonstrate an enjoyment of their sexuality. The event also served to highlight the vast gap between the old guard of vibrator manufacturers who focus on men as their primary market, and the newer generation of female and female-friendly entrepreneurs attempting to change the image of sex toys for a new market of women.

Galaku, Love Japon, and Love Diamond may have taken inspiration from Kitahara Minori’s rhetoric of sex-positive feminism and female empowerment, but they move away from explicitly discussing feminism or feminist issues beyond sexual pleasure. What the women running these businesses do have in common with Kitahara, however, is their subscription to the neoliberal ideology of self-responsibility (*jiko sekinin*) and a willingness to engage in labor in order to achieve success for their business endeavors. The women draw from their own life experiences and tell personal stories of overcoming sexual dissatisfaction to attract customers who believe they may be able to do the same

given the right products. This move to turn unpaid emotional labor into profitable affective labor (Lukács 2015) is emblematic of the neoliberal turn of contemporary Japan, and the co-option of all elements of life into consumer capitalism. Customers are encouraged to consume vibrators as a way of demonstrating that they are fashionable, individualized women and despite offering a place to discuss female masturbation and pleasure, even vibrator bar Love Diamond declines to link the taboo of female pleasure to wider feminist issues. Instead, vibrators and masturbation are seen as just another lifestyle choice, and consumer culture becomes the only arena in which female pleasure can be explored.

Iroha: Vibrators for Beginners or Vibrator Nationalism?

Throughout all my dealings with the Love Piece Club, Love Diamond, Galaku, Love Japan and Fascinight it was rare to see a Japanese-made sex toy. Instead the approachable packaging, colors, designs, and overall aesthetic of non-Japanese vibrators and sex toys was preferred. When Japanese-made products did make an appearance they were heavily influenced by European design. Many attendants of Fascinight remarked with surprise at how beautiful the sex toys on display were, and were more than happy to pick them up and take a closer look. Similarly, at an event held at the Love Piece Club in July 2015 participants mentioned how much they loved the aesthetic of European vibrators, including a new model designed by Frédéric Gooris, industrial designer for fashionable Italian homeware company Alessi (famous for its household gadgets which also double as interior design pieces). As two of the event participants giggled about how they would be happy to display the vibrators in their cases openly in their homes, one gleefully exclaimed that “people wouldn’t know they were sex toys, and even if they did then it would mean they were one of us (women who use sex toys) so it wouldn’t be a problem anyway!” The pleasing aesthetic of imported vibrators compared to the phallic design of Japanese made products meant that they have remained central in the Japanese female-friendly market

until very recently. However, this began to shift with masturbation aid manufacturer Tenga's foray into the female pleasure market in 2013.

Established in 2005, Tenga is a Tokyo-based company well known for its range of male masturbation aids which have become commonplace at sex shops both in Japan and throughout Europe and the United States. Launched with the goal of moving beyond flesh-colored vagina shaped masturbation sleeves, Tenga—meaning “grace” or “refinement”—brought the European vibrator design aesthetic to masturbation cups for men and has been the recipient of numerous design awards, as well as great financial success, as a result. Tenga has gone from sales of 3.7 billion yen in 2007 to over 21 billion yen in 2014. This success stems from the company's ability to bring masturbation aids into the mainstream by way of avoiding a seedy sex shop image and making a product both fashionable and non-confrontational enough to be sold in pharmacies and even airports. On the age verification check box that precedes entrance to its international site, Tenga describes itself as a company “bringing sexual wellness to the mainstream for everyone to enjoy”. The brand has worked to build buzz surrounding its products with events, media appearances, magazine articles, giveaways, and special limited packaging. Comedian and television personality Yoshida Takashi is well known as a fan and has even sung the praises of Tenga products on primetime variety television programs.¹⁸

Somewhat surprising for a brand whose aesthetic is clearly influenced by European sex toys, Tenga remained a company committed to producing masturbation aids for men until 2013 when it launched its first range of products for women in 2013—iroha.¹⁹ Inspired by the aesthetic of Japanese sweets, the iroha range included three vibrators for

¹⁸ It is difficult to imagine a female television personality discussing masturbation at all, let alone singing the praises of her rabbit vibrator on primetime television.

¹⁹ Iroha is the name of a Heian era (794-1179) poem which inspired a way of ordering Japanese syllabary. “Iroha” then refers then to the beginning of something or learning something new, much like “A B C” in English.

external use—the *hanamidori* (green leaf), *yukidaruma* (snow man), and *hinazakura* (cherry blossom petal), each housed in their own clear plastic case with a smooth black base containing a hidden USB charger. *Hanamidori* was developed first with the intention being to produce a true vibrator for beginners; *hinazakura* for clitoral use with an indented edge, and *yukidaruma* for (shallow) penetration with the head of the snowman shape. Vibrator reviewer and blogger Vibrator OL Momoco described the iroha range of toys as having a particular “Japanese beauty” about them (*nihon rashī utsukushisa no aru omocha desu*). She also insists that it is not just the cuteness of the range, but the fact that they feel good that is important, remarking that if “love goods” do not feel good, there is no point to them (*rabu guzzu, kimochi yokunakereba, imi ga nai!!*).²⁰ Tenga has since expanded their range to include iroha mini (small external use vibrators), iroha FIT (longer vibrators for insertion), and the lower priced vi-bo range for couples.



Figure 16. Promotional article from magazine *ageha* about an iroha event.

²⁰ Momoco. 2013. “*Kappuru de tameshimashita. No. 104 iroha ‘YUKIDARUMA’ 2,*” *Momoco no omocha DIARY—konya, kore o tameshimasu— Blog*, May 3. Accessed May 27, 2013. http://blog.livedoor.jp/momoco_omocha/archives/4392505.html.

All iroha products are sold in high quality cardboard boxes that give them a luxury feel, much like vibrators from German manufacturer Fun Factory or Swedish Lelo. The iroha development team—three women in their twenties hired for their product design expertise rather than experience in the sex toy industry—explained to me in an interview conducted in May 2013 that the packaging design was an important consideration when developing the iroha range. While the clear plastic case with the vibrator nestled on the black charging bed was designed with the aim of making the toys into objects of beauty that could be displayed in a woman's room as interior decoration, the external packaging was intentionally non-descript, easily foldable, and easy to dispose of in such a way that any nosy neighbors putting their garbage bags out in the public garbage disposal areas common to most apartment buildings in Japan would not come across them and be horrified (or excited) to discover their neighbors were using adult toys. As the design team explained, they wished to remove as many barriers to women using their products as possible. From the easily disposable packaging to the non-threatening design Tenga hoped to draw in what they saw as an untapped market of female customers, women who were new to adult toys or perhaps even to masturbation. Around the time the iroha line was released Tenga advertised for female staff to assist in the company's goal of increasing sales to women and the company's current goal is to expand into the female market (or expand the female market?) as much as possible (figure 16). The iroha website is beautifully designed with elegant jazz music that plays as visitors peruse pages with an aesthetic reminiscent of the interior of Love Diamond. Black backgrounds, Japanese prints, and absolutely no reference to Tenga masturbation aids or links to the parent company combine to create the image of a space for women, all the while aiming to create a market of women. The advertising video created by Tenga to sell the original iroha range was a cute, whimsical cartoon, and the product displays for shops and at events resembled

department store makeup counters.

In the first few months after its release the iroha range was so popular that demand outpaced production.²¹ Tenga worked hard to ensure the products featured in many weekly magazines in the lead-up to their release, provided samples for reviewers and ran giveaways. However, criticism was leveled at the products by other Japanese vibrator producers for being too expensive (at around the 6000 yen mark each they remain less than half the price of many imported vibrators but are considerably more expensive than smaller Japanese-made clitoral stimulators), overhyped, and lacking features. One even exclaimed that they were nothing more than “overpriced pink rotors”. These critics however were missing the central appeal of the iroha range—their aesthetic allure. *Hanamidori*, *hinazakura*, and *yukidaruma* are more than vibrators, they are *obuje* (from the French *objet*—objects of art or beauty), interior decoration items that signal their owner is a fashionable, sexy, individualized woman.

Woven throughout the marketing rhetoric of all pleasure product purveyors are discourses of nationalism and gender, and the iroha range is no different. The development team spoke of creating a vibrator that was safe, well made, and for the Japanese body. The notion that products need to be designed or altered specifically to fit the Japanese physique is widely held, as evidenced by comments made to a visiting sales representative from a major European sex toy manufacturer at an event held at the Love Piece Club in July 2015. Participants (women aged between 20 and 60) asked the representative if his company had any plans to make smaller vibrators specifically for Japanese bodies and expressed surprise that the company’s bestselling product in China was also its largest. The event also

²¹ Tenga. 2013. “*Tenga tenshoku, kyūjin jōhō.*” Accessed July 4, 2015. http://employment.en-japan.com/desc_502440. Whether the company started production at modest levels in order to first gauge demand and to benefit from being able to say that they were not able to keep up with demand is something that the company refused to discuss in the interview I conducted with them in May 2013.

featured a detailed discussion from the Love Piece Club staff about rabbit-style vibrators and a comparison of the angle between the clitoral stimulator and shaft of the vibrator, with the conclusion being that some are better suited to “Japanese bodies” than others. The iroha design team stressed the suitability of their product for Japanese users, as well as the quality of the Japanese materials and manufacturing process, ensuring that each iroha vibrator was sold with a fully charged battery—ready for immediate use. While emphasizing the Japanese quality of their vibrators, iroha has worked hard to move beyond the traditional image of Japanese sex toy manufacturing.

It is unsurprising that the first vibrators were penis shaped when you consider that they were modelled on *harigata* dildos. However, with increased understanding of female physiology and the mechanization of sex toys it was vibration, rather than penetration, that became key. Shapes designed for insertion were no longer necessary.²² Nevertheless, the stubbornness with which old-school Japanese vibrator manufacturers have clung to phallic designs indicates an unwillingness to move beyond the image of vibrators as an extension of men, and an inability to imagine sex toys as objects of independent pleasure for women. It is only in recent years, as they have realized the potential of a female market and discovered the threat of imported sex toys and iroha, that Japanese sex toy manufacturers have begun researching and developing toys with female users in mind. As adult goods designer for Toys Heart Onnaya Kanpachi explains, the company now conducts market research (similar to the market research done by mobile phone companies) and has found that the most popular color is pink (Sasatani 2011). They also incorporate IC chips in their products to expand the number of vibrating patterns, have moved away from large, veiny

²² The pleasurable potential of external stimulation was central in the design of many of the original vibrators created to treat hysteria (see Maines 2001) and yet on the consumer market male visual pleasure has remained fairly central until recent decades when a shift to vibrators which stimulate the clitoris occurred.

designs, and have given their toys cuter, less-threatening names like “Sophia”. However, ongoing demand from male customers for vibrators that are “hard and thick” (*katakute futoi densetsu*) continue, indicating that there are men who enjoy the pornography trope of wielding vibrators to penetrate less-than-enthusiastic female partners. These misunderstandings about what constitutes pleasure for female partners, deep-rooted beliefs encouraged by the porn industry, are important issues for the industry to consider. Vibrator *shokunin* (craftsman or artisan) Mekki describes the idea that women will be happy with a thick, hard penis or vibrator as a myth that remains even today. Mekki makes vibrators by carving wax models and casting molds from them, believing that beginning from wax carving lends his products a hand-made feeling that will make them more appealing to women. In contrast, iroha, Galaku, Love Japon and the Love Piece Club all report that cute colors, non-phallic shapes, and non-confronting designs are key to the successful selling of sex toys to women. However, as I will discuss in the next section, making the products aesthetically appealing is only one part of the marketing process.

Masturbation and Health: Becoming Beautiful Through Sex Toys?

Throughout my two years of fieldwork, almost every woman I spoke to expressed dismay that women in Japan are not able to be open about sex and pleasure. Many explained that for most of their lives they thought that they were unusual for having a libido and strange because they masturbated. As mentioned above, in 2014 *anan* found that 95 percent of women have masturbated, yet few women speak about it openly. At both Love Diamond and the many sex shop events I attended, customers were thrilled at finally being able to speak about female pleasure frankly. Unlike male masturbation which is painted as a normal part of boys’ sexual development, female masturbation is still not widely discussed and women still feel that at best it’s a difficult topic to broach, and at worst embarrassing or shameful. Tenga’s aim is to create a world in which the “naturalness

of male masturbation” is something that women can share in, healthily enjoying sexual pleasure without feeling embarrassed. The Tenga recruiting site argues that one of the company’s aims is to help women see that solo sex is not embarrassing but healthy—much like how men view masturbation.²³ The iroha pre-release site also spoke of masturbation as a form of “self-care” (*serufu kea*), something that women could enjoy as part of a routine—like a facial mask or treatment after their nightly bath. It also implored women to get to know their bodies better and to enjoy looking after themselves.²⁴

As part of its attempts to naturalize masturbation the iroha website includes a series of eight question and answer style interviews about female sexual health with four female gynecologists, purporting to offer a “doctor’s view on self-pleasure”.²⁵ Outside of *anan*’s yearly sex special issue such frankness about female sexuality is marginalized in the mainstream media to such an extent that even the voices of medical experts can only find a forum on the website of a vibrator manufacturer. The series, entitled “Dr’s Voice” covers issues from masturbation and its relationship to health, beauty, “female hormones”, pelvic floor training, masturbation during pregnancy, and contraception. The questions covered in volume one of “Dr’s Voice” reflect many questions and concerns I heard from women at sex toy sales and information events, as well as at bars Love Diamond and Wild One.²⁶ In response to the question “[i]s it normal for women to want to masturbate?”, OBGYN Dr. Matsumura Keiko explains that “it used to be believed that women had no sexual desires, and that pursuing sexual pleasure was embarrassing and improper for women”.²⁷ She

²³ Tenga. 2013. “*Tenga tenshoku, kyūjin jōhō*.” Accessed January 24, 2013.

http://employment.en-japan.com/desc_389702.

²⁴ Tenga. 2013. “Tenga iroha Official Site.” Accessed January 24, 2014.

<http://iroha-tenga.com>.

²⁵ Tenga. 2014. “iroha News.” Accessed April 4, 2014.

<http://iroha-tenga.com/en/news>.

²⁶ These questions also reflect to a great extent the topics covered in *anan*’s sex special issues.

²⁷ Tenga. 2014. “Dr’s Voice.” Accessed July 7, 2015.

<http://iroha-tenga.com/voice/vol01.php>.

explains that times have changed, and that women are becoming more proactive when it comes to sex, reminding readers that sex is “not only for procreation but also a type of communication” and that “sexual desire is natural in both men and women and a natural thing”. In response to the question “[a]re there any benefits to masturbation?” the doctor explains that self-pleasure helps women relax, aids sleep, and can help balance hormones, and argues that toys like the iroha range can be a great way to experience different types of masturbation. Dr. Matsumura also responds to a common concern of the women I spoke with—whether the use of sex toys will make it harder for them to experience sexual pleasure with a partner. She argues that sex and masturbation are different, and although there is the possibility that too much strenuous masturbation with strong stimulation may be problematic, it is unlikely. Rather, using vibrators may allow women to discover different pathways to pleasure instead.²⁸

The doctors’ perspectives give iroha something even more valuable than the fashionable image provided by Fascinight and editorial spreads in magazines such as *anan*—they also provide the iroha product range with an air of legitimacy as their authority as medical professionals aids in distancing the sex toys from the unsavory image of seedy sex shops and instead positions them as health and beauty products.²⁹ As discussed above, the use of medical professionals to legitimize open discussions of sexuality has been employed for centuries and open discussion of sexuality can, to some extent, be forgiven if it moderated by medical professionals.³⁰ iroha’s featuring of comments from OBGYNs is a

²⁸ Tenga. 2014. “Dr’s Voice.” Accessed July 7, 2015.

<http://iroha-tenga.com/voice/vol01.php>.

²⁹ This “aura of respectability” (Maines 2001, 113) recalls an era at the turn of the 20th century when doctors provided orgasms under the guise of treatments for hysteria and acts as a reminder that almost anything can be made palatable and socially acceptable if dressed in the respectability of a white coat.

³⁰ Frühstück reminds us that “[i]n Japan, scholarly interest in sexual difference and in sexual practice and its connection to health and a long life has a history that reaches back at least to the beginning of the Tokugawa era” (2003, loc 2392). Female sexual satisfaction may have

further extension of the move to categorize sexuality and pleasure medically, and afford it a place in open public discourse.³¹ With the progression of scientific research, the pseudo-medical discourses surrounding masturbation and sex toy use have become more abstract, but nonetheless remain powerful when selling pleasure products to women backed by medical professionals. For it to be successful in the open marketing of sex toys today however this medical discourse must also be merged with other arguments in favor of female masturbation.

Throughout my fieldwork I discovered that a constant running through every event, every blog post, every article and every interview was a discourse of (female) sexual pleasure for not only improved health, but also for purpose of becoming more feminine and beautiful. Just as *anan* sought to bring female sexuality into the mainstream by making the tactical decision to link female sexuality with more palatable discourses of beauty and encouraging women to become more beautiful through sex, the pleasure industry similarly seeks to legitimize discourses of female masturbation by linking them to beauty.³²

Pseudoscientific knowledge about sex, and the media dissemination of information about sex more closely tied with commercial than scientific interests are phenomena with histories as long as the media itself. In the 1930s the rise of pharmaceutical companies and their enthusiasm for advertising hormonal extracts to aid potency at a time when male virulence and female fertility were viewed as essential to the war effort, and the way in which these products were celebrated in the media (Frühstück 2003, loc 2233)

been thought essential for conception in the west until the early 1880s (Laqueur 1990), and was believed important to women's physical and mental health in early modern Japan (Walthall 2009).

³¹ In the 1950s obscenity case that resulted from the publication of a full Japanese translation of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1950) the defense (ultimately unsuccessfully) employed the argument that the novel should be considered similar to medical sexology texts such as the Kinsey report as a way of downplaying the lascivious nature of the text (Cather 2012, 52).

³² It could be argued that *anan* was responsible for widely disseminating this discourse in the mass media. See Chapter 2.

demonstrates a long connection between the popular media, the commodification of sex, and pseudo-scientific discourse. As Laura Miller writes in her 2006 investigation of the beauty industry in Japan, it seemed unthinkable to the women she spoke to in the *esute* (beauty) industry that any woman would not have a burning desire to change her body (2006, 58), and many of the beauty methods offered were “clothed in the guise of science and technology” (ibid., 56). Similarly, as discussed above discourses of female masturbation often contained references to “female hormones” (*josei horumon*)—most likely referencing estrogen and progesterone—and the way in which masturbation and orgasm may increase the secretion and balance of such hormones in the body. This in turn is said to lead to glowing skin, eyes, firmer breasts, and an all-round improvement in appearance.

In the postwar period the commodity of beauty—once reserved for upper class women, actresses, and sex workers—has democratized as makeup, beauty treatments, and plastic surgery have become widely available and women from all social strata are compelled to do their very best to become as beautiful as possible (see Miller 2006, 2008; Kyo 2012; Takeyama 2016). As Laura Miller outlines in her essay on Cinderella in the contemporary Japanese context, “any woman may become Cinderella if she works hard enough, has self-discipline, and pays for salon treatments” (2008, 398). Miller argues that the Japanese Cinderella story links external transformation with internal transformation as women achieve inner beauty alongside physical change. Similarly, in the pleasure product industry any woman can become beautiful if she purchases sex toys, learns to masturbate, and through this behavior becomes sexier and more feminine. Linking self-pleasure to beauty draws upon discourses with which women are already very familiar and ties a transgressive act to a commodity that is not only fully accepted in contemporary Japan—beauty—but one that women are also morally compelled to achieve through almost any

means possible. This physical transformation is tied to an internal one, propelling women to become (beautiful) individualized, adult subjects through masturbation and sex toy consumption.

Masking the Liberated Woman

Freud may have believed masturbation (especially for women) to be primitive, the antithesis of the process of civilization (Laqueur 2003, 360), but in contemporary Japanese consumer culture female masturbation is being repositioned as modern and sexy.

Fashionable women masturbate, and they masturbate with beautiful vibrators. Women at workshops, Love Diamond, Wild One, the Love Piece Club and Fascinight were encouraged to show off their sexy side, to indulge, to pamper themselves, and to demonstrate a maturity and self-actualization through the discussion, use, and purchase of vibrators. However, even if small steps to normalize female masturbation and sex toy use have been taken, the reluctance of most event participants and staff to use their real names reveals a perceived need to maintain privacy.³³

Almost everyone involved in the adult toy industry I met, including Kitahara Minori, had at least two names—their real name reserved for use with friends and very close colleagues, and a pseudonym which allowed them to maintain a public face without the risk of repercussions. The use of masks was also commonplace as the desire to create a public media persona for publicity purposes meant that many staff and participants were constantly struggling to balance the fear of being discovered with their desire to work

³³ The need to maintain privacy is not limited to women-only events. At a sex education event held by swingers group the School of Play (*asobi no gakkō*) in November 2012 the rental conference room in central Shibuya was booked under the name “SOP Manner Course” (*SOP manā kōza*) so as to avoid calling attention to the true nature of the event, and to ensure the booking was accepted. According to my informants, the stakes for women are higher as they are subjected to greater judgement and backlash for their participation in the sex-positive industries. See Chapter 3.

towards a more open society—one in which women’s sexuality is accepted without question. Vibrator bar Love Diamond’s 2012 Halloween party theme was “Hide your face, Open your Heart”, an event that took the opportunity of a holiday usually associated with dressing up and masquerade to encourage participants to use the privacy afforded by costumes to overcome the fear and embarrassment normally felt when discussing sex and talk about sexual health while “surrounded by “love goods””.³⁴

An attendee of the Halloween party, Vibrator OL Momoco is one such character who constantly struggles to balance her public persona as a vibrator collector, author, and minor media personality with her day job as an office worker at a Japanese company. Momoco possesses not only an extensive collection of vibrators and sex toys, but also of masquerade-style masks which she brings to each event she attends, never showing her full face to participants, and under no conditions ever allowing herself to be photographed or filmed without the protection the masks afford.³⁵ When questioned about the necessity of her masquerade masks, Momoco remarked that the consequences for her work and career, as well as for her boyfriend and relationship were not something she could accept at the present time. Although Momoco was more than willing to discuss her various preferences and experiences when it came to sex toys in her “Momoco’s Toy Diary” (*Momoko no omocha DIARY*)³⁶ blog, her 2010 book *Tonight I’ll Try This (Konya, kore o tameshimasu)*

³⁴JASH. 2012. “*Sei no kenkō o kataru harouinpātī.*” *JASH Tumbler*. Accessed October 30, 2015.

<http://idksmax.tumblr.com/post/34386147956/%E6%80%A7%E3%81%AE%E5%81%A5%E5%BA%B7%E3%82%92%E8%AA%9E%E3%82%8B%E3%83%8F%E3%83%AD%E3%82%A6%E3%82%A3%E3%83%B3%E3%83%91%E3%83%BC%E3%83%86%E3%82%A3%E3%83%BC>.

³⁵ I became so accustomed to seeing Momoco masked that when I eventually did see her without a mask at a private event I did not recognize her until she began speaking in her distinctive voice.

³⁶ Momoco. 2013. *Momoko no omocha DIARY—konya, kore o tameshimasu— Blog*. Accessed May 27, 2013. http://blog.livedoor.jp/momoco_omocha.

in which she reviews 69 different sex toys, in various weekly magazine articles, and as “boss for a day” at vibrator bar Wild One once a month, she would not speak about her private life, and kept a strong division between her sex toy reviews and her other work outside of the industry.³⁷ It is also telling that the place in which Momoco’s writing gets the greatest public exposure is in weekly magazines aimed mostly at male readers.

As with the press surrounding the release of Tenga’s iroha range for women, most discussions of female sexuality in the mainstream press appear for the titillation of male readers, rather than to inform a wider female readership. These contradictions suggest that it is necessary to question how liberated women like Momoco, as well as the women attending Love Diamond, Fascinight, and other events feel if they believe it is necessary to cover their faces for any photographs and cannot work under their own names. There is a certain irony in this fact as within female-friendly sex-positive circles, women such as Kitahara, Love Diamond’s Meg and Momoco are called upon to play the role of “image characters” (*imēji kyarakutā*) for masturbation. Their image as fashionable, modern women is essential to their work promoting sex-positivity, and they are idolized by followers who view the women as important leaders in their struggle to navigate a society critical of female sexuality.³⁸ Yet despite support from loyal fans, the vast majority of women involved in the sex-positive sector I met throughout my fieldwork felt that they had to hide their true identities for fear of sanction. Up to 95 percent of women may admit to masturbating in *anan*’s anonymous survey, but very few are willing to have their name and

³⁷ Momoco remains critical of many aspects of the industry and has expressed her desire to have more “normal” women represented in discussions of sex, rather than porn actresses who are often brought in to act as “female representatives” in men’s magazines. Messy. 2015. “*GQ no sekkusu tokushū ga katatsukashi! Fuku ga oshare demo hinin o shiranai no wa dasai.*” Accessed July 7, 2015. <http://mess-y.com/archives/19243/2>.

³⁸ See Karlin (2012) for a discussion of the role the “image character” in Japanese media culture.

face connected to the issue in a public forum.

Masturbation for Her? Or for Him?

In their 1990 book *the More Report* (Moa ripōto NOW) sociologists Imamura Naomi, Unno Yūki, and Ishimaru Kumiko found that of the nearly 2,000 women they interviewed only nine percent reported having orgasms every time they had sexual intercourse, yet almost half orgasmed every time they masturbated (Imamura, et. al. 1990). The authors argue that most women know what satisfies them sexually but find sexual intercourse unsatisfying, and conclude that “contemporary Japanese women are afraid of being considered ‘unfeminine’ if they explicitly show interest in sexual satisfaction” (Frühstück 2003, loc 2535). *anan*’s 2014 survey of masturbation revealed that many women felt that the most positive impact masturbating had on them was that they were better able to enjoy penetrative partner sex as women learned how to orgasm more easily. Traditional male expectations of female sexuality remain powerful even in discussions of female masturbation and pleasure. Fahs and Swank (2013) and Fahs and Frank (2014), in their studies of sex toy use by women in the United States, found that many women felt ashamed at using phallic shaped sex toys to stimulate their clitorises, rather than for self-penetration. Only a small number of the women they spoke to enjoyed penetrative masturbation, the rest instead preferred external stimulation but believed this behavior to be deviant as it diverged from traditional scripts of how women should derive sexual pleasure (Fahs and Swank 2013, 674).

At the workshops I attended one of the greatest problems women spoke of was their inability to orgasm through penetrative sex alone. At one workshop run by the Love Piece Club in 2012 attendees divided themselves into the “clitoris group” (*kuri ha*) and “internal group” (*naka ha*), yet great pains were taken to ensure that no use of the word “normal” or discussion of normative sexual behavior occurred. Instead all forms of sexual enjoyment

were welcomed and women were told that they should enjoy orgasms, however they were achieved. Despite the proliferation of vibrators designed for clitoral use, many workshop participants still wished they were able to experience the kind of pleasure they found in masturbating with their male partners during penetrative sex, and despite ensuring that all types of orgasms were fine, staff were more than willing to recommend products to help women achieve this goal. As Galaku staff member Aimi explains of many of her customers in the documentary *Suicchin*, “they want to learn how to orgasm with their boyfriends, so they masturbate as a type of ‘training’” (Sasatani 2011; personal communications with Galaku staff Aimi 2012-2013). The iroha development team further exemplified this obsession with phallic penetration when they explained that original range of Japanese sweets-style vibrators were designed for external use, but also described as “vibrators for beginners”, with the idea being that women would start with a “beginner” product and progress up to penetration with the iroha FIT range later.

Curious proprietor Tanaka Masaaki sings the praises of vibrators designed to “force women to have vaginal orgasms” (what he terms *okuyuki*), gleefully demonstrating the relentless piston motion of a vibrator he developed himself while arguing that “Japan would become an amazing place if one in a hundred, or even one in a thousand women experienced this type of orgasm” (Sasatani 2011). At a 2012 screening of the film this scene elicited squeals and laughter from the (mostly female) audience. In contrast “masturbation maestro” Endo Yūsa explains that she believes that vaginal orgasms are in part a male fantasy as men need to believe that the penis is essential, but that she does not see a big difference in orgasm types or their significance (Sasatani 2011). Sasatani argues that men are wedded to the illusion that the phallus is key (*dankon no gensō ni shibarareteiru*), but the work of Fahs and Swank (2013) and Fahs and Frank (2014) and my own fieldwork reveals that women too are influenced by phallogocentric ideas of sexual

pleasure.³⁹ The widespread marketing and sale of sex toys designed by women for women may appear on the surface as a departure from female sexuality existing for the benefit of male pleasure or the reproductive needs of the state. Instead, many women have internalized a phallogentric view of sexual pleasure in which the penis is essential—even when masturbating alone. Participants in the Love Piece Club’s strap-on workshop spoke of feeling powerful when wearing a harnesses and dildos under their clothes, and despite efforts to move beyond phallogentric designs many women still believe that vaginal orgasm is the ultimate goal. Cute vibrators may be popular, but the penis remains central to discussions of female sexuality.

The focus on penetrative orgasm as the ultimate goal suggests a particularly Freudian view of female sexuality and demonstrates that even when female pleasure is said to be the ultimate goal, male sexual pleasure (or the way in which it is derived) remains the central focus. Despite finding it the most reliable method in terms of achieving orgasm, many of the women I spoke to throughout my fieldwork believed that experiencing clitoral orgasms was all well and good, but that they lacked a particular skill that men believed they should have, or even that they were defective in some way due to the difficulty they experienced having orgasms during penetrative sex. This meant that many believed that their, as Freud would describe, “immature” clitoral orgasms with a vibrator should progress to vaginal orgasms with a vibrator, finally graduating to the ultimate goal of being able to orgasm with a partner during penetrative sex.⁴⁰ This in turn allows female sexual pleasure

³⁹ This discourse is also apparent in mainstream media. In examining the role of women’s magazines in encouraging women to increase their sexual skills and knowledge—thereby becoming more attractive to men—Fahs notes the centrality of the phallus to the discourse, arguing that magazines “construct woman as necessarily grateful for, and aware of the power of the phallus” (2011, 192). See Chapter 2 for further discussion of the role of women’s magazines in women’s sex education.

⁴⁰ The idea that there are “correct” and “incorrect” ways to masturbate is not limited to women. Men are often warned not to masturbate too ferociously, lest they become too used to a strong grip and be unable to orgasm when with a female partner. Panic also surrounds

to function as an affirmation of male virility. As Fahs outlines, “orgasm (as an extension of the woman) becomes a commodity in and of itself. . . . The male partner, in essence, searches for her orgasm as the confirmation of his own masculinized, sexualized power” (2011, 185). In writing for men on why they should encourage women to masturbate, former adult video star Komuro Yuri explains that exploration and masturbation help women to become more orgasmic during sex with their partners, and may even assist them in learning to orgasm through penetration.⁴¹ Here we see Freud’s view of masturbation as “training ground for heterosexuality” (Lacquer 2003, 392) alive and well in 21st century Japan as both men and women see the role of female masturbation as practice for—rather than a separate pleasure to—heterosexual sex, with the ultimate goal being mutual orgasm through penetration, an act which simultaneously serves to confirm female maturity and male virility.

Conclusion

This chapter has critiqued the commodification of female desire by the Japanese adult toy industry. It is important however to bear in mind such interrogation is difficult for women who do not possess a language—other than that provided to them in workshops and sex shops—to discuss their own pleasure (what Michelle Fine calls “the missing discourse of desire”, 1988; with McClelland 2006), let alone participate in feminist critiques of androcentric models of pleasure. Herein lies the great contradiction apparent in the pleasure product industry—without workshops and events run by the adult toy industry

men who spend too much time in virtual worlds only experiencing arousal in relation to two dimensional characters rather than real women and human connections. While more widely tolerated than female masturbation this approach to male masturbation nevertheless indicates that it too is imbued with value judgements that ultimate goal should be to enjoy (eventually) reproductive sex with a female partner. See Kitamura (2011) and Dan (2013).

⁴¹ Orette.jp. 2015. “*Josei no hitori ecchi ga dansei ni motarasu merito to wa.*” Accessed August 4, 2015. <http://orette.jp/other/specialcontents/8071/>.

there are few places where Japanese women can gather to discuss sexual desire and pleasure. Love Diamond proprietor Meg opened the bar with the desire to create a space in which discussion of female masturbation is natural and normal, in which customers could speak openly without fear of judgment, and also plays a role in the normalization of consumptive forms of sexual expression. As I mentioned above, at almost of the events I attended over a two-year period participants spoke about how they had never felt there was a place in which they could discuss their sexual desires, and that they did not have friends with whom they could openly speak about sex, spaces which could be described as feminist in that they allow the creation of places and language in which women can examine their desires.

In her discussion of *Sex and the City*, Arthurs describes the appearance of sexually explicit and critical feminist discourse on television as “a welcome innovation in women’s representation on television in that it assumes and promotes women’s right to sexual pleasure and validates women’s friendship and culture” (2003, 95) but is also critical of postfeminist consumer culture, encouraging the “interrogation of our own complicity in the processes of commodification” (ibid., 95). Despite being strongly centered on the female audience contemporary Japanese mainstream media has not provided a space for similar critical feminist discourse. Rather it is vibrator manufacturers and similar commercial interests who have provided spaces in which women’s right to sexual pleasure can be promoted. In these spaces however they are strongly encouraged to participate in consumer culture by purchasing products that are billed as the solution to their problems and key to achieving sexual pleasure. The Love Piece Club may be inspired by third wave feminist approaches to female sexuality and promotes active sexuality and sex-positive feminism as a way of empowering women (Dales 2008; Wilkins 2004), but it also participates in the strategies of the wider female-friendly pleasure product industry (Galaku, Love Japon) as it

seeks to normalize female masturbation by employing discourses of beauty, health, empowerment, and education—all of which can lead to greater consumption of the products sold. These discourses also remain distinctly phallogentric as women feel compelled to masturbate in order to learn how to orgasm through penetrative sex, not in spite of it. The discussion may be about female masturbation, but normative notions of sex from the male perspective still remain central.

Here I feel it is pertinent to return to Dales' definition of agency as encompassing "pragmatic acts of unintentional resistance" (2008) in order to consider the position of the women involved in both sides of the pleasure industry—buyers and sellers. Discussing feminism in 1970s America, Victoria Hersford (2013) argues that political movements—especially those in the West—were not driven by policy or legislative agendas but driven by something else—"an attempt to name and define a way of living that was felt to be limiting, restrictive, depressing". Second wave feminism in the Japanese context was very different, with few successful attempts to alter consciousness about women, their bodies and their desires. As a result, it is the adult toy industry that instead has brought messages of sexual pleasure and female liberation to the forefront in an environment in which these issues have long been overlooked or treated as taboo. Debra Curtis also makes the important point that not all sexual practice is driven by sexual desire and that desires may also "exceed an individual's sexual practice" (2004, 96).⁴² She reminds us that the cultural context in which the intersection of sexuality, sexual practice, and sexual desire occur is essential in understanding the interplay between these complex issues. In turn, this allows

⁴² In her examination of pleasure parties—in-home Tupperware style parties at which sex toys are sold—Curtis begins from the position that "the marketplace produces desires, thus encouraging sexual innovation" (2004, 95). She argues that sexuality is "produced and mediated by culture" (ibid.) and explains that several of the participants she spoke to during her research into passion parties were pleasantly surprised and ultimately compelled to purchase products as a result of the ordinariness of the demonstration provided, and the "wholesome and natural" demeanor of party operator (ibid., 101).

us to “attend to the ways individuals attempt to construct their sexual lives within dynamic and particular social structures” (ibid.). In the contemporary Japanese context the market for female desire is to some extent created by vibrator manufacturers who position their products as allowing purchasers to achieve health, beauty, and individualization through their use. The marketing may be problematic from a feminist standpoint, but is also an example of Dale’s “pragmatic acts of unintentional resistance” in that it brings feminist perspectives about the right to pleasure into the open in a manner that feminist activism has not been able to achieve previously. Ideas about female sexual pleasure filter in from overseas, are mediated by sex shops such as the Love Piece Club, and then are appropriated and modified by Japanese manufacturers like Tenga.

The interweaving of neoliberal capitalist discourses of the construction of the individualized self through the female-friendly adult toy marketing process does not mean that female masturbation is rendered entirely unproblematic. Anxiety regarding men’s shifting social roles and the falling birthrate are apparent in media such as *Shūkan Post*’s *Seven* September 2014 article which discusses the recent increase in sex toy sales and argues that the number of unmarried and women not in sexual relationships is behind the trend.⁴³ The magazine blames women who are too focused on their careers to make time for love and explains that they find satisfaction in adult toys rather than men. The widespread media panic over “herbivore men” (men who are disinterested in relationships and sex) and “carnivore women” (sexually forward women) demonstrates that when discussing sexuality, the expectation remains that men are to remain the subject, and women the objects of male desires. In her history of the vibrator, Rachel Maines describes this androcentric paradigm of sexuality and the way in which it persisted until the 1970s,

⁴³ News Post Seven. 2014. “*Mikeiken no 30 dai josei zōka ‘haikei ni guzzu no kyūsoku shinka ari’ to shikisha.*” Accessed August 7, 2015. http://www.news-postseven.com/archives/20140913_274332.html?PAGE=1#container.

arguing that the “cultural emphasis on intercourse is so deeply entrenched that physicians simply do not perceive it in themselves and their patients” (2001, 112). The older generation of Japanese sex toy manufacturers’ attitudes towards the type of toys they design reveals that even today the phallogocentric model of sexuality remains central. This chapter has demonstrated that female masturbation has the potential to upset this pronatalist, androcentric model, but is also deeply influenced by the culture in which it appears—a culture that even today prioritizes penetration and the central role of the phallus (male pleasure).

Women are the new frontier when it comes to marketing sex toys, lubricants, condoms, erotica, and the multitude of sex-related products and paraphernalia in Japan today. Sex toy manufacturers and marketers create an image of fashion forwardness for the modern woman in order to appeal to women well-versed in contemporary consumer culture. If masturbation was refashioned during the enlightenment into a moral-medical horror because it constituted behavior that “clearly stood outside the social realm” (Laqueur 2003, 280) upon which Adam Smith’s “invisible hand” could not act, then masturbation in Japan today has been refashioned into consumptive behavior, a neoliberal capitalist act which benefits both the individual partaking (as she gains pleasure, beauty, and can see herself as a fully individualized adult member of society), the women who operate sex-positive companies, and the nation’s economy. Women who become involved in the female-friendly sex toy industry provide affective labor as they paint masturbation as the latest must-have accessory in order to make their businesses successful. However, unlike the United States and Europe (see Curtis 2004; Fahs and Swank 2013), sellers in Japan do not wish to link their products with “naughty” or “illicit” feelings of excitement, as this may scare off potential customers. Instead, vibrators are positioned as fashionable and cute, and lent legitimacy through discourses of health and beauty. However, the

difficulty that many event participants and staff of sex toy importers and manufacturers experience trying to maintain public and private personas demonstrates that as much as the normalization of sex related products may be a desirable outcome from a business perspective, it remains very difficult in contemporary Japanese society to speak about such topics openly. Nevertheless, celebrating pleasure is an act of resistance. Despite the commercial co-option of female pleasure, the female-friendly adult toy market is a place in which some women at least are finding subjectivity, celebrating sense of sexual power and agency.

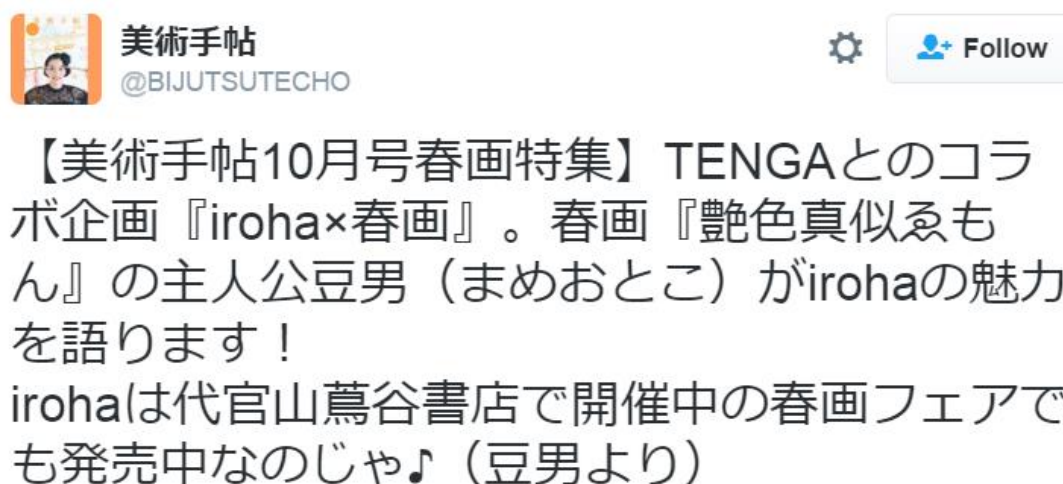


Figure 17. A promotional tweet from magazine *bijutsutecho* featuring the *iroha* and *shunga* book display at Tsutaya Daikanyama.

In September 2015 the Eisei-Bunko Museum in Tokyo opened an exhibition of *shunga*, marking the first time the erotic prints have been exhibited in postwar Japan. The catch copy on promotional materials announced “the world was surprised first” (*sekai ga, saki ni odoraita*), in reference to the British Museum’s wildly successful “Shunga: sex and pleasure in Japanese art” exhibition held in 2013-2014. In celebration of Japan’s first major *shunga* exhibition video and book store giant Tsutaya’s flagship store in Daikanyama put together a display of books on the subject, augmented with iroha vibrators in their attractive black cases (figure 17). *Shunga*, with their explicit portrayal of sex and pleasure for both men and women, have been overlooked by the Japanese art world for over a century. However, just as with ideas of sex toys, pleasure, and sex-positive feminism, these pictures have found a place in Japan through being imported or, as in the case of *shunga*, “reimported” (*gyakuyunyū*) from overseas. In light of the current dearth of sex-positive feminist activism in contemporary Japan the ideas filtering in from overseas—advanced by domestic commercial interests—just may provide women with the opportunity to encounter ideas of sexual pleasure for at least a while to come.

5. Subversive Pleasures: The Feminist Potential of Female-Friendly Pornography

As rain pours down outside and the city is overwhelmed with humidity, 130 women gather in a basement event space in central Tokyo. Excitement builds; the women order drinks, share stories, and discuss the stars they are there to see. When the MC for the evening, a young woman in her late-20s, announces that the stars are about to arrive, the excitement reaches fever pitch. Three men, dressed in fashionably preppy clothes, come down the stairs and onto the main stage, and the audience cheer with an enthusiasm usually seen only at boy band concerts and airport arrivals of major Hollywood stars. The slim but toned men fix their gel-coiffed hair, adjust their clothes, wave to their fans, and the event begins (figure 18).¹

As the evening progresses, the three stars are invited back into the kitchen area of the event space and asked to cook their own original recipe of fried rice. Fans taste the three dishes and vote for the most delicious in a process that is no doubt colored by their loyalty to one of the three stars. Mirroring familiar tropes from Japanese variety television programs, the segment is relayed on camera to large projection screens at the front of the hall as the MC narrates the event. As the competition progresses, fans begin to implore the increasingly hot and sweaty men to take off their shirts and reveal their slender, hairless, and well-toned bodies. Sweat drips off the men's brows into the rice, eliciting shrieks of excitement from the audience, and with this the showcase begins to resemble a bachelorette night visit to a strip club. As alcohol flows and prizes, including signed photos and a minute-long full body hug with the star of the winner's choice, are given to lucky lottery winners, enthusiasm for the three sweaty men erases any remaining notions of the

¹ The bodies of the three men are best described as *hoso-macho* (slim macho), a term used in women's magazines and on television to describe well-toned but not overly muscled male physiques popular with women in Japan in recent years.

quiet, well-behaved, stereotype of Japanese women that I may have previously held. The three well-groomed men appearing on stage are, after all, pornography actors, and the women attending the event are there to meet their erotic idols, known as “eromen” (a portmanteau created by combining the words “erotic” and “men”). Open and shameless enjoyment of alcohol, men, and most importantly sex is the order of the night. Whilst in traditional Japanese pornography women are most often considered the objects of male sexual desires, rather than the subjects of their own sexuality and pleasure, the screaming fans of male pornography stars are clearly upending social convention as they openly demonstrate their enjoyment of a product traditionally created by men for male consumption.



Figure 18. Eromen Suzuki Ittetsu, Kurahashi Taiga, Tsukino Taito at a Silk Labo fan event in May 2013. Reproduced with permission from Silk Labo.

Changing Conditions, New Markets, and the Birth of Silk Labo

Within the array of toys, lingerie, condoms, lubrication and other female-friendly pleasure products, there are also an increasing number of pornographic and erotic film production companies who are attempting to make the purchase and consumption of pornography appealing and acceptable to young women. This chapter examines one such example—female-friendly pornography production label Silk Labo—a small, niche production house under the umbrella of larger mainstream pornography production company Soft On Demand. Silk Labo’s history is deeply intertwined with other producers of pleasure products for women, but it is also a story that reveals greater trends in the erotica and pornography industry around the world. Pornography studios globally are, like many media companies built on traditional models of production and distribution, struggling to turn a profit. With an estimated 25 million pornographic sites available online, a number that is growing every day, the world’s largest pornography production industry in the United States has seen revenues decline between 30 to 50 percent since 2008.² Pornography production in Japan, the fifth largest porn industry in the world, is also struggling as free, uncensored content has become easily available online, offering direct competition to domestic products which not only charge viewers to purchase or access, but are also legally required to censor all genitals with digital mosaics before distribution.³ Within this environment one niche area is subverting expectations and increasing sales to an untapped demographic—female-friendly pornography. In an industry where a DVD that

² Arbitrage Magazine. 2010. “Going Deep Inside the Adult Entertainment Industry.” Accessed October 9, 2013. <http://www.arbitragemagazine.com/features/going-deep-inside-the-adult-entertainment-industry>.

³ Spiked Nation. 2011. “Why the Mosaic? — The Origins of Censorship in Japanese Pornography.” Accessed November 14, 2013. <http://www.spikednation.com/news/why-mosaic-%E2%80%94-origins-censorship-japanese-pornography>. This article also argues that the revenues from the pornography industry in Japan in 2010 equaled revenues from the video game industry.

sells 3,000 copies is considered a hit, female-friendly pornography company Silk Labo has been able to not only produce DVDs which sell over 10,000 copies, but also expand the marketplace to a new community of fans

Silk Labo was the brainchild of pornography production house Soft On Demand (SOD) and young female director Makino Eri. Located in Tokyo, SOD was founded in 1995 and operates as an umbrella company for companies SOD, SOD Create (founded in 1999), and SOD Art Works (founded in 1999) which combined employ approximately 200 full time staff. SOD also hosts and promotes content for over 30 other labels known as “group creators” on its website.⁴ As a result, SOD and its subsidiaries release hundreds of new titles each year. The company has become one of Japan’s largest pornography production houses, and is known for its unorthodox approach to the production of adult movies and willingness to experiment with new ideas.⁵ Content is usually very explicit and as is common in mainstream Japanese pornography film titles are usually graphic and indicate what type of sexual fantasies and fetishes they cater to. Popular SOD titles include *Cabin Attendant Perverts, Volumes 1, 2 and 3 (CA hikōki chikan)*, *2015 SOD Female Prospective Employee Sexual Response Examination (2015 nen SOD joshi shain naiteisha seikando kenshin*, part of an ongoing series), and *Are You Sure You Want a Middle-Aged Woman? Young Men with Youthful, Hard 150 degree Erections, Volumes 1 to 4 (Obasan de hontō de ī no? wakakute katai bokkido 150 do no shōnen chi-po ni)*. Visitors to the SOD

⁴ Despite being part of the SOD group, Silk Labo is not listed on the main SOD site as a group creator, instead the Silk Labo official site is hosted separately and contains no mention of the label’s parent company.

⁵ Tenga is part of the SOD group, selling their range of masturbation aids for men through the company website. The female-friendly iroha vibrator range and couple friendly VI-BO range are conspicuously absent from SOD’s website however, clearly positioning SOD as a company which provides pornography and masturbation related products to male, not female, consumers. For more on Tenga see Chapter 4.

website can search by actress, series, or categories which include idols, housewives, rape, school uniforms, virgins, squirting, and amateurs.

Although the *SOD Female Prospective Employee Sexual Response Examination* series may appear to indicate otherwise, the company actively recruits female production staff and does not compel them to appear in films. SOD does however require all new employees to obtain permission from their parents before they are hired, believing that if employees are able to openly talk about pornography with their parents they will be able to discuss the issue with almost anyone. Unlike many other members of the industry, SOD is very open about the company's activities, maintaining an office in central Tokyo and decorating the building lobby with hundreds of boxes of branded SOD tissues, piled three stories high. Signs for the well-known company are visible from the street, and visitors are given a box of the distinctive red tissues to take home as a souvenir after visiting. Further inside the building, the elevators are lined with newspaper and magazine clippings, showing various media in which SOD, its products, and its performers have appeared, and there is no sense that the company or its workers have any misgivings about the industry in which they are involved. Despite its name, Soft On Demand is unabashedly a hardcore pornography production company, experiencing all the highs and lows of making a product that is now readily available for free on the internet, one that around the world is increasingly sustained only by groups of loyal fans willing to pay for specific content (Roberts 2012).

It was these recent market conditions that lead the CEO to consider creating a line for female consumers—previously a niche market catered to only by smaller production houses away from the mainstream pornography industry.⁶ In 2009 the CEO decided SOD

⁶ It must be noted that SOD is still experiencing falling profits overall. Whether Silk Labo's small success will mitigate against such losses is yet to be seen.

needed to produce new and creative content that would enable the company to survive recent downturns, and gave Makino—then a relatively inexperienced producer and director in her mid-20s who had dreamed of making television dramas since studying film and television production at university—five million yen to produce original content for a female market. With this Silk Labo was born.

Makino began by gathering as many of SOD's female staff together as possible and conducting what she termed "porn complaint conventions" (*av no monku taikai*) and "men complaint conventions" (*otoko no monku taikai*) at which female participants discussed how much they hated sex with men influenced by pornography, perhaps ironic considering the industry in which they work. In her book *Pornland* (2010) Gail Dines outlines the rough sex and injuries women are increasingly experiencing as a generation who grew up with pornography widely available online enters university and begins engaging in sexual conduct. The rise of "gonzo" pornography, defined as "hard-core, body-punishing sex in which women are demeaned and debased" (*ibid.*, xi) is a trend that Dines claims is particularly at fault. Though Japanese pornography bans the depiction of genitals, it allows depictions of rape, sexual violence, and forms of rough sex, and Japan could be described as having a well-developed market for pornography similar to the western gonzo genre. The comments made at Makino's "porn complaint conventions" revealed that many young women felt that men are not educated about or interested in female sexuality, but instead believe that mimicking sexual acts seen in pornography will result in pleasure for both parties. Overenthusiastic fingering, rough penetration, insufficient time and care put into foreplay, and lack of bodily contact (influenced by pornography's choice of sexual positions, necessitated by the medium's requirement to "show" penetration) were common complaints.⁷ The comments made in Makino's "porn complaint conventions" mirrored

⁷ See Cross (2008), Kimmel (2008), and Dines (2010) for discussions of porn as a form of

many of the complaints I have also heard throughout my fieldwork from women who feel that men are not educated about, or interested in female sexuality.

Makino's team also conducted research at female-friendly sex shops the Love Piece Club and Lovely Pop and concluded that women enjoy pornography and purchase pornographic DVDs, but that they often ask for movies with better looking actors and less depiction of bodily fluids. Whilst shoppers may not have possessed the language to describe their feelings directly, they were likely searching for pornography that produces images from the perspective of female viewers, images that prioritize the male body as an object of female desire.⁸ This is in great contrast to the majority of Japanese pornography which often utilizes point-of-view or *hamedori* techniques, in which the male protagonist uses a handheld camera to film the action from his perspective, gazing at the female body. In recent years *hamedori* has been expanded to include more detailed camerawork, with the director or camera operator filming the action from the point of view of the actor, leaving him free to perform. In this way, the male body is rendered invisible and the focus is solely on the female performer(s), who are literally and figuratively gazed upon by the camera lens, and subsequently by viewers. When male performers do appear, they are usually employed for their ability to perform on cue, meaning that most mainstream male pornography stars are not traditionally good looking, not particularly well built, and most definitely not featured for their aesthetic appeal to women. *Hamedori* and even the occasional literal use of masks are common ways in which pornography marginalizes or hides male performers and prioritizes the male gaze. By asking for better looking actors and less bodily fluids, shoppers at Lovely Pop and the Love Piece Club were

sexual education for men and the impact on their female partners in a US context. Silk Labo's research and the fieldwork I conducted for this dissertation indicate that similar problems occur to some extent in Japan. See Chapter 4.

⁸ Ironically Silk Labo DVDs were not popular with Love Piece Club customers and are no longer sold at the shop.

demonstrating their discontent with typical Japanese pornography and demanding something more—pornography that takes into account the female desires and gaze.

Makino and her team considered the advice received at the complaint conventions and female-friendly sex shops and produced two trial DVDs, *Body Talk Lesson* (advertised as a “how to” video based on surveys conducted with 400 men and women) and *Faindā no Mukō ni Kimi ga Ita* (On the Other Side of the Lens), a 120-minute full length “erotic drama” (*kannō dorama*) which has sold over 10,000 copies and become one of Silk Labo’s long running hits. Around the same period, popular women’s fashion and lifestyle magazine *anan* was looking to produce a DVD for its annual special issue on sex and asked the company to make a short erotic film to be distributed with the magazine.⁹ Silk Labo collaborated with *anan* and created a short soft-core erotic DVD which was attached to the 2009 sex special issue of the magazine. Buoyed by letters from fans after the release of its first two films, and supported by the connection with *anan*, Silk Labo found itself in a position to continue creating female-oriented erotic content. Since 2009, Makino has been charged with creating films which she describes as “trendy dramas with sex scenes”, with the hope that they will be both titillating for the women who watch them, and provide an alternative “textbook” to male viewers who regularly consume pornography.

Contemporary Japanese commercial television is mostly devoid of explicit sexual content. Popular “trendy dramas” (*torendī dorama*) rarely depict sex or even passionate kissing. Instead, the main characters often seal their love with a hug, a chaste pressing of their lips together, or a wedding. Unlike popular American programs like *Sex and the City* and *Girls* which have brought female sexual desire into the (English-speaking) mainstream, sex is rarely even discussed in Japanese television dramas, even those from the love and romance genre. Makino takes common tropes from trendy dramas—stressed

⁹ See Chapter 2.

career women, lonely women who have given up on men, university students looking for love, young couples dating in fashionable or exotic locations—and builds storylines around their journey from unsatisfactory lonely lives, to becoming fully actualized sexual beings who enjoy (explicitly depicted) sex with handsome men. The protagonists spend time getting to know each other, and plenty of time is dedicated to kissing, foreplay, and cunnilingus, before moving on to penetration. Point-of-view filming is avoided in favor of depicting sex as an extension of the story. The couples communicate throughout sex, avoid the forceful or disrespectful language common to much Japanese pornography, and both parties are always shown as willing participants.¹⁰

Most startlingly different in Silk Labo's pornography is the way in which the attractive male stars are there to be gazed upon by female viewers, their bodies depicted as objects of sexual desire and eroticism. Instead of close-ups of breasts and genitals, long, lingering shots of the men's shoulders, chests, backs, buttocks, and faces characterize Silk Labo's sex scenes, and women are invited to indulge and enjoy as sex progresses to (apparently) mutually satisfying conclusions. If current television standards mean that in Japan trendy dramas cannot depict sex explicitly and leave viewers hanging, in contrast mainstream pornography does little but depict sex, without any back story as a lead up to the act. Silk Labo films fill this void—combining the romance of trendy dramas with steamy sex scenes. Depicting explicit sex is the ultimate goal of Silk Labo films, but it is sex in which the physical and emotional intimacy of the protagonists is central (figure 19). Even the final moment of climax features the protagonists facing each other, looking into each other's eyes, physically connected and experiencing a moment of closeness.

¹⁰ See Jacobs (2014) for an explanation of *kotoba-zeme* (speech-scolding) and its role in Japanese pornography.



Figure 19. Suzuki Ittetsu and Higashio Mako share a romantic moment in *From the Palm of Your Hand* (*Tsunaida te no hira kara tsutawaru koto*) (2014). Reproduced with permission from Silk Labo.

The DVDs produced by Silk Labo have now evolved into three main series—Cocoon (soft-core erotica featuring simulated sex; similar to the DVD produced for *anan*), Silk (pornography, but with romantic storylines centered on couples), and the newest series Undress (a hardcore range featuring more adventurous sex scenes and occasional threesomes; developed, as explained by Makino, for women who are no longer satisfied with the offerings of Cocoon and Silk). Silk Labo is under no pretenses—they unapologetically produce pornography—but they are also working to capture a larger market of female viewers by providing content with varying levels of explicitness. Moving beyond producing only “trendy dramas with sex scenes”, Silk Labo’s foray into increasingly hardcore content (although still somewhat tame in comparison to SOD’s

mainstream offerings) has allowed fans to mature with the brand and kept them from seeking raunchier content somewhere else.

One area in which all three Silk Labo series remain the same is how much can be seen of the performers' bodies. Due to Japanese censorship laws which prevent the showing of genitalia, even in hardcore pornography, the genitals of the performers are covered by digital mosaics, known as *bokashi*, meaning that only a vague outline of genital shape and some pubic hair can be seen.¹¹ What this means is that there is little difference in the level of explicitness between the Cocoon series (in which sex scenes are simulated) the Silk and Undress series, or even in mainstream pornography itself. Rather the difference is in the storylines, content, and types of sex depicted. Producers have pushed the boundaries of *bokashi* in recent years and mosaics have become so fine and carefully positioned as to leave very little to the imagination.¹² Nevertheless, this aspect of Japan's censorship laws has done far more than prevent the depiction of genitalia in Japanese pornography, animation, manga, and magazines. Instead, producers have substituted objects such as vibrators, cameras, medical instruments, and even octopi tentacles.¹³ The inability of producers to show the penis—necessitated in pornography by what Williams

¹¹ See da Silva (2006), Dobbins (2009), and McLelland (2014) for further discussion of censorship issues in Japan. As a subsidiary of SOD, Silk Labo adheres strictly to guidelines provided by Japan's major ethics organization, the Video Ethics Association (Eizō Rinri Kikō). All Silk Labo DVDs are sold with a Video Ethics Association holographic sticker attesting that they have been checked and passed ethics screening.

¹² Workers whose job it is to create the mosaics or *bokashi* for porn are sometimes described as "mosaic artists" or "craftsmen" (*mozaikku shokunin*) as their role is to make the mosaics so finely tuned that they may show as much as possible within the legal restrictions in place, a job that requires considerable skill. In the days before *bokashi*-free porn from overseas became widely available on the internet and porn was mostly sold on video tapes, machines which attached to the VCR and promised to "un-mosaic" videos were available for sale. Whether or not they were effective is a matter of debate.

¹³ Notorious as an example of the Japanese pornography market's preferences for extreme fetishism, "tentacle porn", as it is commonly known, was inspired by the famous Edo period *shunga* "The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife" by the artist Hokusai and has been reinterpreted not only by the Japanese pornography industry, but also in B-grade films and erotica around the world.

calls the “erotic organization of visibility” (1990, 271)—has led to the proliferation of pornography that is often viewed as fetish, bizarre, or deviant in the West.¹⁴ For a genre in which seeing is central, being unable to depict genitals in detail has altered the way in which Japanese pornography producers approach the creation of images to elicit sexual excitement in viewers. However, by removing the focus from the phallus and placing it on the dynamic between the actors, romance, and variety within the sex act itself, Silk Labo is able to work around both the censorship laws and create pornography that does not require the substitution of fetish objects.

From Erotica to Hardcore, Beyond the Aesthetic of Porn and the Celebrity of Erotic Idols

Central to the company’s popularity are Silk Labo’s greatest strength—its eromen idols. At the time of writing, Silk Labo had seven regulars in its stable of exclusively contracted male performers. The most popular is 35-year-old veteran porn actor Suzuki Ittetsu, known for his boyishly sweet face and slender, well-maintained physique.¹⁵ Silk Labo’s eromen are coached to adhere to the aesthetic conventions of the Japanese idol industry—clean cut, wide-eyed, and dressed in a preppy manner. Headshots and details of each actor’s height, date of birth, hobbies, and film appearances are posted on the Silk Labo website. The headshots resemble the boy band photos sold to fans at concerts and

¹⁴ See McLelland for a critique of western media’s portrayal of Japan as an “unrestricted pornucopia” (2014, 411).

¹⁵ Suzuki Ittetsu, better known as Ittetsu to his fans, is a ten-year veteran of the Japanese pornography industry, appearing in over 3,000 films to date. Despite his unconventional career as a pornography star he is married with a child, a fact that Silk Labo does not discuss openly, but also does not hide from fans. In a 2013 interview Ittetsu stated that his everyday life outside of work involves spending time with his child and wife, a woman he describes as “emotionally stable” (*jōsho shiteiru josei*) and ideal for him. Tokyo Reporter. 2013. “Japan’s First Male Porn Star for Females Discusses the Industry’s Ins and Outs.” Accessed November 13, 2013.

<http://www.tokyoreporter.com/2013/05/13/japans-first-male-porn-star-for-women-discusses-industrys-ins-and-outs>.

featured in magazines. The positioning of Silk Labo's stable of male performers as idols, rather than as might be expected considering the industry in which they work, hosts or porn stars, is both intentional, and carefully executed.

Silk Labo's Twitter account tweets regularly that the company is looking for new actors to work as "male performers and models" (*dansei enshutsu moderu*), specifying that applicants must be over 165 centimeters tall, not too thin, not too fat, "normal" looking and able to act. They must not have tattoos, or be too macho or too tanned, which rules out many Japanese porn actors. My informants—women who attended Silk Labo events and workshops at which they were encouraged to talk about their sexuality and desires—often described the traditional aesthetic of Japanese pornography stars such as Kato Taka and the tellingly named Hiroshi "Chocoball" Mukai as overweight, overly muscular, tanned, and very unattractive. Similarly, Silk Labo's specifications rule out the vast majority of men from the host industry. Hosts are employed by host clubs to pour drinks, entertain female customers with conversation, and provide a "boyfriend experience". They usually have a "seductive masculine image—slim bodies, salon-tanned skin, trendy hairstyles, and expensive brand suits and accessories", an image that upholds a fantasy where women can escape their everyday lives or explore "the potential for romance or sex" (Takeyama 2005, 203). While both hosts and the eromen are in the business of selling fantasies, they do it in a very different manner. Silk Labo's performers are required to maintain a non-threatening, sexually innocent image inspired by the aesthetic of Japanese pop idols, far removed from the primped, primed, and seductive image hosts cultivate. Many of the shots of eromen featured on the Silk Labo website show them in white shirts, sweaters, and tailored trousers, maintaining the appearance of clean cut, well-dressed, and approachable "regular guys", indistinguishable from some of the most popular boy bands in Japan.

Applicants to Silk Labo have unsurprisingly been known to conflate the three jobs—that of traditional porn star, host, and eromen—something Makino and her team have had to find ways to work around. Despite the job application specifications requiring a boy next door look, the two new applicants—men in their late teens and early twenties—to Silk Labo’s stable of erotic male stars I witnessed arrive on set in 2013 looked more like the young hosts seen on the streets of Tokyo scouting for new clients to attend their clubs, rather than boys auditioning to join Johnny & Associates. Dressed in skinny jeans, tight sweaters, and large silver accessories, they capped off their look with hair teased into high coifs and tanned skin—closely resembling hosts on their day off. As Takeyama has argued, young working-class men are often attracted to hosting as a way of earning fast money and achieving upward social mobility (2016). Takeyama explains that “for working-class hosts, who lack social, economic, and cultural capital, transforming their bodies into commodities is a self-investment to attain high monetary returns, success, and fame” (2010, 236). Silk Labo similarly offers men who have deviated (whether intentionally or unintentionally) from the traditional salaryman track of Japanese masculinity the potential to make something of themselves. Unlike hosts however, the men are not required to invest their own time and money into expensive suits, tanning, learning to be seductive and communicate well. Instead Silk Labo provides them with clothing, style advice, makeup, and even encourages them to develop specific personas that will become their “brand”. After spending an hour in hair and makeup the two nervous new applicants were transformed from rural area host wannabes to handsome young boy next door types, worthy of a place on stage performing with the latest Johnny’s group. Silk Labo knows its audience, and it is women who find the pornography actor and host aesthetic unattractive and intimidating. Instead, the actors are required to maintain a non-threatening, sexually innocent appeal that is far removed from the usual aesthetic adopted by traditional porn

stars or hosts in Japan today, even if, like hosts, their ultimate goal is the selling of dreams of romance, sex, and pleasure. The “seductive masculine image” of the host (Takeyama 2010, 235) is modified by Silk Labo into a type of masculinity that preferences kindness, gentleness, caring, and approachability—in other words boy band members with a hidden, sexy underside.

Silk Labo’s eromen’s similarities to idol culture do not end with the aesthetic. As detailed above, “meet the eromen” events are an important aspect of Silk Labo’s business model, and the company works hard to provide events not only in Tokyo, but also in various regional areas around the country so that fans may meet their erotic idols in person. Inspired by the massive popularity of idol group AKB48, marketed as the “idol group you can meet” (*ai ni ikeru aidoru*), and gravure model handshake events at which fans (usually men) can meet and shake hands with their favorite models, Silk Labo holds its own events, such as that detailed in the introduction of this chapter, at which women from around Japan are encouraged to come along and to build a shared fandom of Silk Labo and the eromen. Fans share their love of the eromen both in person at events and online, and Makino has even known several pairs of mothers and daughters who have become Silk Labo fans together. Many Silk Labo followers experience a form of “sisterhood” as they enjoy being in the company of other women and building a connection through fandom (see Williams 2001; Jones 2005).

There exist however inherent contradictions in a large pornography company such as SOD drawing upon the sexually innocent image of pop idols in order to market a version of their product to women. Makino is clear about the impact that early pornographic consumption has had on the men she interviews for positions as eromen at Silk Labo, seeing it as something that cannot be helped. When conducting interviews with hopeful actors from around Japan via Skype, she asks detailed questions about their sex

lives, sexual practices, and what they believe women desire, often discovering that much of their knowledge has been gained through, or at least colored by, their consumption of mainstream pornography. Makino explained during an interview I conducted with her in April 2013 that many of the men she interviews have adopted practices seen in traditional adult videos marketed to men—the very same practices complained about at the company’s “porn complaint conventions” and by female customers at Tokyo’s women-friendly sex shops. Silk Labo’s films are influenced by the media saturated environment of contemporary Japan. Trendy dramas inspire the storylines and the eromen are modelled off the clean-cut and approachable “everyman” aesthetic that is central to Japan’s boy band industry and the affective relationships in its fan cultures. Yet despite Makino’s best efforts to maintain a clean, approachable image, Silk Labo continues to struggle with the influence of mainstream Japanese pornography. Many of its top performers—including Ittetsu, Tsukino Taito, and Kurahashi Taiga—had long careers in the industry before being contracted exclusively to Silk Labo.¹⁶ The pornography that Silk Labo produces is heavily influenced—albeit perhaps unintentionally—by the Japanese pornography industry at large. The company remains aware of these tensions and, as I will discuss in the following section, strives to address problems common to the genre and create something new.

Dramatic Romance and the Teaching of Pleasure

Silk Labo’s longest running hit has been its first drama production *On the Other Side of the Lens* (*Faindā no mukō ni kimi ga ita silk 002*) released in 2009, but the company has built its brand on two separate genres—trendy drama style productions and sex lesson DVDs.

¹⁶ Silk Labo performers Tsukino Taito and Kurahashi Taiga have both had careers in gay porn, as well as mainstream porn. Fans have found these older films and blogged about them—often through the lens of “boys love” (BL). See as an example website Dokidokipinku. Accessed September 15, 2015. <http://dokidokipink.com>.

First, the dramas are beautifully shot with high production values and place a strong emphasis on romantic storylines, beautiful visuals for outdoor locations, and fashionable interior design for the scenes shot indoors. Differing from much traditional pornography in Japan, rather than filming on a set which often features nothing more than a mattress in the middle of a large room, Silk Labo uses rental apartments and shops usually made available to television drama production crews to create a romantic (and somewhat aspirational) environment. The 2013 Silk series release *Melty Touch* was partially filmed in waxing and beauty treatment salon Olive, itself an offshoot of the Love Piece Club, and utilized the salon's luxurious interior as part of a storyline in which an overworked career woman and a young woman lacking in confidence are (re)awakened to sexual pleasure as they visit the salon to escape from their stressful lives. The DVD contains the nearly two-hour long feature film (of which more than half is dedicated to sex scenes) and a promotion video for the real salon Olive, produced by and located in the same building as female-friendly sex shop the Love Piece Club.

Melty Touch opens with masseurs Ittetsu, Tsukino, Taiga, and Moomin at “relaxation salon” Olive, dressed in matching white shirts and preparing for a full day of appointments. We are then introduced to stressed “around forty” (*arafō*) career woman Komiyama Emi.¹⁷ Emi has just been dumped by her boyfriend, and when she relays the news to her friend Natsuki on the phone late one night Natsuki tells her that she works too hard, and needs to find time to take care of herself. Natsuki recommends going to Olive and Emi makes an appointment for the next day. At the salon Emi is surprised to find the staff are all male and is nervous at first but slowly comes to enjoy the relaxation massage provided by Ittetsu, describing it to Natsuki later as “like really good sex”. Natsuki laughs

¹⁷ *Arafō*, an abbreviation of the English “around forty” first appeared in women's magazines the mid-2000s to describe women at a particular stage in life. *Arasā* (around thirty) is also in popular use but any decade of life can be shortened in the same way.

and tells her she is clearly in need of release, recommending that she masturbate. As Emi continues to visit Olive she and Ittetsu develop feelings for each other and after a chance meeting on the street one night after work Ittetsu invites her back to his stylish apartment for a special massage. Surrounded by soft lighting and aroma oils the two take their time in taking their relationship to the next level in a slow, romantic sex scene. Ittetsu begins by giving Emi a massage before kissing her face, hands, neck, breasts, and back, gently stroking her throughout. He explains that he almost never does “this kind of thing” and continues to tell Emi that she’s beautiful, reassuring her that everything’s alright as he manually stimulates her and performs cunnilingus until she orgasms. Ittetsu then puts on a condom and the two have slow, gentle sex in variations of the missionary position that concludes with the performers facing each other, limbs entwined, kissing and as physically close as possible.¹⁸ *Melty Touch* also follows the story of trainee masseur Moomin and shy, socially awkward Takeda Hiroko who stumbles upon the salon in her search for treatments that will make her more beautiful and, in turn, less shy. After she confesses to Moomin that she has feelings for him they begin dating and the film concludes with the two in a sex scene similar to the one outlined above. Moomin tells Hiroko not to be shy or embarrassed, encourages her to see herself as beautiful, and finally reminds her that he and only he is allowed to touch her.

Melty Touch and Silk Labo’s other drama-style films differ markedly from contemporary pornography in that they dedicate a long time to setting the scene, showing the featured couple dating, hanging out at home, and interacting outside of the bedroom. Much time is dedicated to kissing, touching, and foreplay in sex scenes which resonate

¹⁸ When writing this chapter and this section in particular I consulted Alan McKee’s 2009 article “Social Scientists Don’t Say Titwank” many times in an attempt to reconcile my desire to describe the action accurately, yet appropriately. McKee argues that there is no longer an issue with language deemed “vulgar” and “unscholarly” in the humanities, but that it can become problematic when crossing over into other disciplines.

with viewers. In one review on the Amazon Japan website viewer Kaoru gave *Melty Touch* five stars, describing the film as romantic “like *shōjo* manga”, with simple sex scenes. Kaoru lauds the lack of fellatio, explaining that it is one aspect of the film that might make women happy as it teaches viewers that oral sex, while something that men find pleasurable, is not obligatory. The only thing Kaoru believes needs improvement is the wooden performances of the actors. Reviewer Norisuke similarly praised the film, writing that the calm, tender male performers left the viewer feeling relaxed and refreshed (*iyasareta*), and that perhaps it was these qualities of the male performers that meant the female performers also seemed relaxed in the film.¹⁹ *Melty Touch* and Silk Labo’s other drama-style productions closely resemble trendy television dramas as romance and successful relationships are the protagonists’ goals. Sex scenes are expected but they are not out of place, rather they propel the narrative.

The second genre Silk Labo has become well known for is its sex “how to” DVDs. These focus on communication first, followed by sex in which both participants are actively involved. This is considerably different from other kinds of “sex lesson” Japanese porn, such as the infamous 1999-2009 *Higi Denju (Lessons in Secret Technique)* DVD and book series in which veteran porn actor Kato Taka (also known as “Gold Finger”) demonstrates how to do things to women in order to provide pleasure. In our April 2013 interview Makino referred to *teman* (a word made up of the Japanese for “hand”, *te*, and “cunt”, *manko*, used to refer to a type of overenthusiastic hand job popularized by Kato and now commonly performed by men on women in Japanese pornography with the aim of inducing female ejaculation) as problematic to female viewers. Silk Labo specifically

¹⁹ Amazon Japan. “*Melty Touch* DVD Reviews.” Accessed September 16, 2015. http://www.amazon.co.jp/Melty-touch-DVD-%E4%B8%80%E5%BE%B9/dp/B00AA540JW/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1442367631&sr=8-1&keywords=melty+touch+silk+labo.

references *teman* in the 2014 “how to” DVD Body Talk Lesson for Couples, explaining in the section of the DVD reserved for men that “most women think of *teman* as painful”. A number of Silk Labo’s “how to” videos provide very specific instructions and use a hand-sewn pillow with lace vulva and cloth clitoris to demonstrate techniques which could otherwise not be shown due to legal restrictions on showing genitalia (figure 20). The ongoing *Silk Face to Face* series takes a less direct approach—two performers appear in a studio and have a conversation about their thoughts on sex and pleasure, before putting into practice the ideas they shared in an explicit (scripted) sex scene. The original *Face to Face* (2012a) features three conversation/sex scene segments—Ando Taichi and Hina, Tsukino Taito and Araki Arisa and Ittetsu and Aina Nozomi. In the final segment Ittetsu and Aina discuss how unappealing it can be when men copy features of Japanese mainstream pornography and take care to avoid this in the sex scene they perform together, instead aiming for mutual pleasure and connection. Reviews of *Face to Face* on Amazon are mixed, with viewers enjoying the segments with Tsukino and Ando Taichi but being very critical of Aina Nozomi. One reviewer criticizes Aina’s voice as being like an anime character while another complains that she is too loud and over the top. In contrast the Tsukino and Ando scenes were described as very natural by both reviewers. In both Silk Labo’s drama-style and education productions women are seen enjoying sex and participating enthusiastically. When asked what behavior he dislikes when having sex Ando explains to partner Hina that he does not enjoy it when women are not enthusiastic in bed—known as “*maguro*” (tuna)—explaining that even if a woman is not used to having sex and does not move much he still wants to know that at the very least she wants to be there with him. Rather than—as is common in manga, anime, and mainstream pornography—sex being something that is “done” to women (Allison 2000, 62), in Silk

Labo movies great care is taken to show sex as an act in which women participate willingly.²⁰



Figure 20. The pleasure-teaching pillow featured in *Body Talk Lesson for Couples* (2014). Reproduced with permission from Silk Labo.

According to Silk Labo films women desire love, security, communication, and safety, as well as sex and pleasure. One element that appears in every Silk Labo sex scene is what I term the “condom moment”. After including a scene in which the male performer very deliberately takes out a condom and unambiguously puts it on in Silk Labo’s first film, Makino was surprised by the enthusiastic response she received from fans. Women felt that it demonstrated love and respect for the female character, allowing her to enjoy

²⁰ This is not to say that Silk Labo fans have completely overcome hang-ups about their bodies and sexuality. The DVD Silk Labo created for *anan* in 2009 contained educational information on how best to care for and wash female genitalia so that women could feel “comfortable” and “clean” before engaging in sex with their partners. Silk Labo also sells grapefruit fragranced “silky body soap” specifically designed to be used on what it terms the “delicate zone”, developed in part due to the number of letters and comments it received from female viewers expressing concern at the look and smell of their genitalia, preventing them from fully enjoying sex.

sex without having to negotiate condom use or feel worried about the risk of pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections. The fact that condoms—the primary mode of contraception used by Japanese couples—are conspicuously absent from most pornography (when used they are hidden by mosaics and removed off camera before the money shot to maintain the illusion of condom-free sex) meant that the condom scene was at once familiar and revolutionary. All subsequent Silk Labo productions have featured the “condom moment” and through their enthusiasm for condom use, Silk Labo viewers demonstrate that they respond to the themes of love, support, and care.

This does not mean that Silk Labo fans do not also enthusiastically enjoy double entendre, dirty jokes, or the strip show aesthetic as described in the introduction of this chapter. Notable at the “meet the eromen” night were the cocktails created especially for the event. Named after the three actors appearing—Ittetsu, Tsukino, and Kurahashi Taiga—the offerings of “Ittetsu juice” (*ittetsu jiru*), “Tsukino sweat” (*tsukino suetto*), and “Taiga (tiger) balm” (*taiga bāmu*) had the all-female audience scrambling to order from the waiting staff. Similarly bawdy humor continued throughout the night, with Makino making dirty jokes and laughing about being covered in “Ittetsu juice” in reference to Ittetsu’s increasingly sweaty appearance.²¹ Despite desiring pornography that focuses less on bodily fluids, event participants were more than happy to join in making fun of traditional pornography tropes and laugh at aspects of the genre they ordinarily find distasteful or off-putting.

²¹ The word “juice” (*jiru*) in Japanese pornographic convention is used to refer to various types of bodily fluids. I shall leave it up to the reader to imagine what “Ittetsu jiru” might possibly mean.

Media Culture, Technology, and Community

In its early days the internet appeared to be a boon for the pornography industry. However, as outlined above, in recent years the industry has experienced difficulty as a result of increasing free (both amateur and pirated) content online, as well as greater regulation of professional productions as a result of health and safety scandals. DVD distribution is declining rapidly and very few people are able to make money in an industry that was estimated to be worth 97 billion US dollars globally in 2006, but is now most likely worth much less (McKee 2014; Rosen 2013). Silk Labo has been successful in this difficult environment due to three main factors—product tie-ups, appeals to consumers familiar with contemporary Japanese media culture, and (somewhat ironically) the internet.

Without *anan*, it is doubtful Silk Labo would have been as successful in gaining the loyal audience it has today and Makino's efforts may have come to a premature end. Appearing in the mainstream publication—which presents itself as sex-positive and encourages readers to purchase products that demonstrate they are young, fashionable, self-actualized women—provided the previously unknown Silk Labo with an air of legitimacy and exposed it to a much wider market than would have been possible otherwise. Similarly, without the expertise of the Love Piece Club and Lovely Pop, Makino and her team may have struggled to create a product that fulfills the desires of female consumers who often find traditional pornography distasteful or unappealing. Taking inspiration from tropes common to Japanese media culture such as trendy dramas and boy-next-door idols has also been central to Silk Labo's success in expanding its market to include women who would otherwise be hesitant to purchase pornography.

In order to reinforce their position as purveyors of romance and erotica, rather than straight pornography, Silk Labo's film titles mirror those of romantic novels, television dramas, and films usually popular with younger female viewers. English language titles

such as *Face to Face*, *Melty Touch*, and *Love Switch and Other Stories* could have come straight from the mainstream media. These titles are far removed from the explicit titles of mainstream pornography which are usually in Japanese and reference the particular genre to which a film belongs and the sexual fetishes involved. Silk Labo titles instead recall television trendy dramas as promotional material, DVD covers, and websites bear a close resemblance to similar promotional material for mainstream dramas. This has the effect of both providing a gateway to new fans by providing a product similar to those with which are already familiar as a result of a lifetime of media consumption in media-saturated contemporary Japan, and also reminding viewers that what they are watching goes beyond pornography and caters to romantic fantasies and desires.

Silk Labo's success would also not have been possible if not for the proliferation of online media and accompanying ability to connect directly with fans. Each new production is advertised on YouTube and the company provides special previews and behind-the-scenes videos before the release of each title. Similarly, Twitter has become an essential part of the company's marketing model. Not only does the Silk Labo production team tweet behind-the-scenes pictures and information from the set of each new film, but fans also use Twitter to connect with each other and share thoughts on the latest DVDs. Fans even hold virtual release parties for films, pressing play on their DVD players at a predetermined date and time and gathering online to share their thoughts via Twitter as they watch each new release. For those unable to attend "meet the idol" events, Silk Labo's Twitter account maintains a steady flow of tweets describing proceedings and pictures, and Makino has been instrumental in building the Ittetsu brand as she tweets not only his appearances at Silk Labo events, but also offers detailed commentary each time he appears on cable television or in magazines. Silk Labo has utilized Twitter to build a community of fans and followers who have, as a result of events and meet-ups, gone on to build a strong

community who share their thoughts and ideas on each new release from areas all around Japan. Makino acts as a go-between, mediating Ittetsu's (and other eromen's) contact with the outside world and building a social media image of the eromen as legitimate idols. When Ittetsu makes an appearance in media external to Silk Labo, Makino accompanies him as his manager.²² Silk Labo has also established ties with other "erotic" businesses from around Japan. The 2012 film *Melty Touch* being set in (and featuring a short promotion video for) beauty spa Olive, a Brazilian waxing and beauty salon run by the Love Piece Club is just one example. "Meet the eromen" events in Osaka have been held at second hand DVD store Kaitori Makkusu, which was also the sponsor of 2003-2007 late night regional television panel discussion show *Night Beauties (Yoru bijo)*, dedicated to discussions of female pleasure and sexuality. Ittetsu even appeared in the 2013 sex special issue of magazine *anan* discussing the benefits of masturbation as part of a promotion for Tenga's iroha vibrator range (see Chapter 4), and the 2009 *anan* Silk Labo DVD was a central feature at an event held in 2012 Group to Consider Love and Sex for Married Couples (*Fūfu no Sei to Ai o Kangaeru Kai*).²³ The event organizers hired a karaoke box in central Tokyo and invited participants to view, touch, and learn about various sex toys and adult products while viewing the Silk Labo *anan* DVD and discussing how to improve their sex lives. The wider pleasure products community (both volunteer groups and businesses) are profoundly linked, and despite having a relatively short history, Silk Labo and Makino have become major players.

Silk Labo honors the pornography industry's long history of utilizing new technology, and the company has increased its reach by making its films available via

²² Actor Ittetsu has been a regular on smart phone content producer NOTTV's live Saturday night program *Bidanshikai* (known as *Naked Boys* in English) and every comment he makes during the panel show is tweeted in great detail by Makino through the official Silk Labo Twitter account, complete with photographs of the screen and close-ups of Ittetsu attached.

²³ See Chapter 3.

online streaming, both for desktop and mobile/tablet devices. Before the introduction of mobile device streaming services in 2014 half of all the production house's sales were through Amazon Japan. As referenced above, purchasers write detailed reviews of the DVDs on the site, commenting on the acting, stories, sex scenes, eromen, and reserving particularly pointed comments for the female performers. Most attempts in the past to produce and market female-friendly erotic content have been unsuccessful. In examining why pornographic manga for women found a market in Japan where pornographic films had not, Mori Naoko (2010) argues that until the development of the internet it was difficult for women to access pornography without feeling embarrassed, particularly as the major means of consumption was renting videos and DVDs from neighborhood stores which curtained off adult content and created a "space for men". This meant that when women did consume pornography it was more commonly in the form of manga, rather than film (ibid., 197).²⁴ Makino believes that Silk Labo has been lucky as it entered the market just as online shopping and social media were taking off—two factors that enabled a previously socially unpalatable product to find a market. Anonymous online shopping removes any embarrassment felt by consumers and allows women all over Japan to purchase and consume pornography without fear of social sanction. The QR code accessible surveys included with each DVD allow viewers to provide feedback on the latest Silk Labo offerings to the company in return for limited edition photographs of eromen, and the company is thus better able to adjust its product to further appeal to

²⁴ Unlike the pornographic manga that Mori Naoko writes of in which boys love is popular, Silk Labo's films remain staunchly heterosexual. Even in threesome scenes the two male protagonists are not shown as having any interest in one another, rather they share friendship and an attraction to the female protagonist. Similarly, Silk Labo has, to date, not released any films in which two female protagonists appear in a sex scene together. Heteronormative sexual relationships in the Cocoon and Silk range, and creative yet still ultimately heteronormative sexual behavior in the Undress range demark Silk Labo as unquestioningly heterosexual.

consumers.²⁵ Similarly, by providing events and online spaces for fans to come together, Silk Labo has created both a loyal fan community and spaces in which women are able to express their thoughts about sex and pleasure. As I argued in Chapter 4, female consumers of pleasure products often speak of a desire to find a safe space to discuss sex and sexuality. Silk Labo, like many contemporary sex toy importers and manufacturers, has aided in the creation of such a space.

Silk Labo's ability to weave together various aspects of popular media culture in such a way as to appeal to customers raised in the media saturated consumer culture of contemporary Japan has been central to its survival in a difficult market. Both Janice Radway in her work on women reading romance novels (1984) and Jane Juffer in her examination of female-friendly erotica (1998) argued that the creation of space for fantasy within domestic everyday routines is central to female pleasure. In a similar vein, it is the sharing of fantasy within the domestic space—made possible by the development of the internet and social media—that makes Silk Labo successful where others have failed in the past. Linking content with familiar genres such as television dramas and pop idols removes barriers and creates a safe space in which the consumption of pornography is no longer taboo, but something to be shared and celebrated with other likeminded fans. This in turn allows the company to increase sales and appeal to a wider audience as it simultaneously aids in normalizing the discussion of previously taboo topics such as female sexuality and pleasure.

The Construction of a Female Gaze

Throughout the production process, Silk Labo aims to create what I term an “imagined

²⁵ Surveys are common a common feature in magazines and books and are used similarly by the publishers of ladies comics (pornographic comics written by women for a female readership) to gauge readers' tastes, sexual preferences, and even to ask about readers' sexual histories. See Jones (2005).

female gaze”.²⁶ Films echo the themes seen in the documentary *What if Female University Students Were to Film a Porno* (*Moshi joshi daisei ga av o tottara*), the 2011 winner of the 2nd Tokyo Girls Sexy Movie Collection, an amateur alternative art and film competition held in Tokyo. In the 30-minute long film, three students go in search of a man to appear in a porno they hope to film themselves. After considerable difficulty they find a man who is not only handsome but willing to appear, and the rest of the film centers on the process of producing a film that will be deemed erotic by the three women. What this means is a film that is much less focused on the woman involved, involves no penetrative sex, and few (mosaicked) shots of the penis and eventual orgasm of the male star. Instead close up shots of body parts, movement, and erotic responses form the bulk of the content. The man chosen by the three women after an exhaustive and difficult search is remarkably similar to Ittetsu; young, slim, clean cut, well groomed, and handsome by current idol standards (figure 21).²⁷ The film focuses on the unconscious movements made as part of his sexual response and depicts that in itself as erotic. His face, expressions, and even the way in which his toes curl during moments of pleasure are foregrounded. On the set of a 2013 Silk Labo production I witnessed a similar approach to directing from Makino. The cameraman was instructed to shoot Ittetsu’s back, neck, face, buttocks, and legs, and his hair and makeup received far more attention between cuts than that of the female performer. The camera’s gaze was squarely on the male form as the object of desire.

Winner of the 3rd Tokyo Girls Sexy Movie Collection erotic art and film

²⁶ This is in great contrast to pornographic manga written for women in which the female body remains central to the action the vast majority of the time. See Mori Naoko’s *Onna wa porno o yomu* (2010) for further discussion of the specifics of pornographic manga.

²⁷ The three women find that, contrary to popular belief, very few men are willing to take up the offer to star in a porn film. The dearth of male adult film performers is something that has been covered in the mainstream media also. See Japan Times. 2015. “Japan’s ‘Pornaldo’ Keeps Scoring as Male Actors Fizzle.” Accessed September 18, 2015. <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2015/05/14/entertainment-news/japans-pornaldo-keeps-scoring-male-actors-fizzle/#.Vfq9HN-qqkr>.

competition in 2013, *Adult Video and Us* (*Watashi tachi to av*) played with porn conventions in a similarly creative manner, as two young women filmed themselves and their responses to watching a traditional pornographic film featuring Chocoball Mukai. Instead of focusing on the performers' sexual responses in the film, the camera shows only the women's faces and their reactions to some of the more explicit content. Rather than pleasure, their responses are humorous and at times horrified as they question why the female performer describes her left nipple as an erogenous zone (neglecting the right), take pictures of the action with their mobile phones at key points, and squint to try and "see through" the mosaics. The two describe one scene of the porno as "like watching a guy masturbate using a girl", but also squeal with excitement when Chocoball Mukai (whom they affectionately refer to as "Choco-san") appears on screen, observing that the infamous porn star is "built like a refrigerator" and much more handsome than they had been led to believe. One even laughs that perhaps this was the first time she has been more excited by watching a male performer in porn than a female one, but they both conclude that they cannot quite figure out why men find the kind of sex they are watching on screen exciting. In *Adult Video and Us* the two young filmmakers turned the camera's gaze back on themselves, once again echoing Silk Labo's findings that many women are able to laugh at, but are ultimately turned off by explicit mainstream pornography.

Until 2013, indie pornography production company Juicy Diner also made explicit female-friendly pornographic films, but with some notable differences. In many Juicy Diner films the female performers remain dressed throughout each sex scene, acting as the main agents to advance the flow of action. The male performers are undressed by the women, and penetration does not occur. Instead, scenes show the female protagonists "playing" with the men's bodies, enjoying seeing the men in positions of passivity, and ultimately teasing the men to orgasm. Very different to BDSM that alternates between

top/dominant and bottom/submissive roles, Juicy Diner places women in complete control, but without masochistic tendencies. Although Tsukino and Moomin have appeared in Juicy Diner films, in most cases the male stars of each film are less clean cut, less idol cute, and are depicted as blue collar workers—hyper-masculine and rough around the edges but ultimately powerless in the face of a strong, sexual woman. In contrast, Silk Labo occasionally features stronger female characters, but more often than not it is the male actors who lead in the bedroom.



Figure 21. A scene from *What if Female University Students Were to Film a Porno* (*Moshi joshi daisei ga av o tottara*) (2011).

In examining pornography for women it must be asked where in all this is the female orgasm? In her work on Japanese ladies comics Deborah Shamoan (2004) argues that the medium allows depiction of female pleasure and orgasm in a way that is not possible on film, and reduces men to a few abstract lines in scenes of penetration due to

censorship that bans the depiction of the phallus. Making depictions of the female body central, however, “does not serve to make the woman into an object to be viewed and possessed” (ibid., 99), but rather, according to Shamoan, encourages female readers’ sexual experimentation. One might think that, in providing a similarly adult product for a female audience, pornography for women would ensure that the female orgasm remains central. Rather, it is notably subtle or even absent in Silk Labo’s films. Although the female performers are always willing participants in sex, their bodies are depicted as attractive but not central to the action. In investigating the regulation of softcore pornography in the US context, Arthurs (2004, 52) argues that “even where soft-core narratives emphasize female pleasure the visual focus usually remains on the (conventionally attractive) female body”. Silk Labo attempts to distance itself from this tradition. The company also aims to subvert the ladies comic style of reducing men to penetrating phalluses. Instead it makes men central to the image and narrative. Viewers are encouraged to revel in the male form, with some limitations. In a manner reminiscent of Juffer’s discussion of US erotica, due to censorship restrictions erect penises are never shown (1998, 203), and instead the visual focus is on the male protagonists’ “muscled torsos and nicely shaped buttocks”. The men are undoubtedly the stars of Silk Labo’s films and the (wholly interchangeable) “everywoman” female performers are selected solely to act as foils to the eromen.

This is not to say that women are not encouraged to consume or enjoy female bodies. The beauty of the female actresses is not necessarily shown for the viewer’s sexual pleasure, rather it is used to enhance the overall quality and image of Silk Labo’s films. The women who appear are “everyday women”, in antithesis to the mainstream image of female porn stars as big breasted and overtly sexual. Susan Bordo links hyper-thin bodies and hyper-consumption to advanced capitalist economies that depend upon commodity

excess (1990).²⁸ The bodies of the women who appear in Silk Labo films however do not adhere to social conventions of idol-thinness. Instead, they are closer to the Gravure idol aesthetics of curvy, out-of-control (in the sense that Bordo writes of), lusty, bodies. Perhaps these bodies excuse the behavior of the women appearing as “out-of-control”, or they may instead offer solace to female viewers, allowing women to fantasize that they, rather than the actresses, are in bed with Ittetsu or Tsukino.

By placing the male form at the center of the image Silk Labo films attempt to imagine a female gaze that is attentive to the desires of women. Silk Labo’s efforts are restricted by the medium of film, pornographic conventions, the imaginations of the production staff and the women from whom they draw ideas. Turning the image around to focus on the eromen provides an opportunity for women to become possessors of the gaze and works towards subverting the tradition of an active male and passive female. Nevertheless, despite being positioned as objects for female consumption and pleasure, the eromen must also remain active in order to drive the sex scenes. Silk Labo films encourage female audiences to explore new ways of seeing, but as I will discuss further in the following section, this remains limited.

Is Silk Labo Feminist or Subversive?

Feminist porn producer Tristan Taormino (2013) reminds us that feminist porn is not synonymous with porn for women. Despite the participants in Makino’s “porn complaint conventions” and “meet the idol events” demonstrating great sexual awareness and openness, the actresses of Silk Labo’s films most often ultimately fall into familiar

²⁸ The types of women seen in Japanese pornographic films are very different to those who appear in similar films from the United States and Europe. The Brazilian wax craze is yet to take off in Japan, bodies and faces are less obviously plastically enhanced, and piercings and tattoos are rare. Notably however, Japanese porn stars are often more voluptuous than their mainstream media *tarento* counterparts, although the performers Silk Labo hires are slimmer—a happy medium between *tarento* and mainstream porn stars.

pornography patterns, behaving passively during sex and portraying an image of weakness and vulnerability. *Melty Touch*'s heroines Emi and Hiroko both find validation and happiness after being told they are beautiful and enjoying romantic sex with (and instigated by) eromen Ittetsu and Moomin. In *Melty Touch* and most other Silk Labo films the eromen almost exclusively lead the sex scenes, even when female characters propel the storyline outside of the bedroom. Takeyama (2005, 209) references Miller (2003) to argue that "Japanese women are thinking in increasingly instrumental terms about their own sexual pleasure and it is common for women to expect their sexual partners to have the so-called '3Cs,' that is, be 'comfortable', 'communicative', and 'cooperative'". Silk Labo provides erotic content featuring men who are comfortable, communicative, and cooperative, but they do not depict women in full control of their own sexual pleasure on screen. The very fact that Silk Labo has been successful however, demonstrates that women are increasingly seeking pleasure rather than relying upon men to provide it for them. Visiting host clubs, purchasing sex toys, and watching pornography are all examples of the ways in which women are using their increased financial and social capital to seek out lives which are very different to those prescribed in mainstream media. *anan* may advertise vibrators, but it counters discourses of freedom with articles on being a good girlfriend, and learning to give the perfect blowjob.²⁹ Silk Labo films play into fantasies of the perfect relationship, but increasingly fans are demanding progressively more hardcore content, informing the directors that they would prefer steamy sex scenes over romantic story lines.

Due to the problematic positioning of feminist discourse (and the multiple meanings of the word feminism itself) within Japanese society it is difficult to ask

²⁹ See Chapter 2.

pornography producers if the product they are creating is a feminist one.³⁰ Lynn Comella has argued that we must look beyond the pornographic text as the primary site of analysis to examine the “broader cultural matrix in which porn texts circulate” (2013, 80), explaining that “feminist cultural production, including pornography, involves much more than just making texts; it also involves making sex-positive *contexts* and creating favorable conditions of reception” (ibid., 86). She concludes that it was a large, interconnected network of sex-positive and female-friendly sex shops, toy producers, and consumers looking for education and information that led to a “sex-positive synergy” and enabled the creation of quality feminist and queer-oriented porn in the US (ibid., 90). Comella’s reading is positive, but I would caution against drawing the same conclusions in the case of Silk Labo and Japan. Instead I suggest that while Silk Labo is an example of a feminist producer, it is one that has only appeared due to economic pressures and is compromised by its commercial tendencies. It was not a successful second wave feminist movement in Japan that encouraged the creation of female-friendly pornography, but the desperation of an industry facing a saturated market and competing with online content, coupled with shifts in the role of women as consumers in contemporary Japan.

Allison argues that “the Foucauldian use of ‘technologies’ to investigate historically and culturally specific institutions of looking has particular value for societies such as Japan that share in the late capitalist proliferation of visual apparatuses for producing and consuming images” (2000, 38), but reminds us that the extent to which late capitalism breeds “an economy of images and gazes that is transcultural” is yet to be fully understood. The cultural, sexual, and gender structures in which images are created vary throughout cultures, and as Allison stresses, cannot be assumed. This is not to say that

³⁰ See Uno (1993) and Mackie (2003) and Chapter 1 of this thesis for a discussion of the particularities and limitations of the feminist movement in Japan.

female-friendly pornography in a Japanese context does not take inspiration from erotica from non-Japanese contexts, but also that it must be understood in the primary environment in which it is produced. As Juffer (1998, loc 58) reminds us, we must move beyond viewing pornography through the dichotomous lens of “hapless victims or transgressive agents” and instead consider the “material and discursive conditions in which *different kinds* of pornography are produced, distributed, obtained, and consumed” (italics in original). The environment in which Silk Labo appeared could be considered postfeminist in that it encourages choice and self-determination through consumption. As Sonnet (1999, 167) explains, “within current modalities of postfeminist identity... sexual pleasure and commodity forms are inextricably tied to notions of ‘entitlement’ and consumerist ‘self-determination’”.

Unlike the female only events of the sex toy industry discussed in Chapter 4, Silk Labo does not explicitly attempt to position itself in a postfeminist framework of empowerment and self-improvement through consumptive practice. Instead, Silk Labo benefits from the social circumstances which encourage consumption by women. Sonnet (1999, 169) questions the “*woman-defined* space for the enjoyment of sexually explicit material” (italics in original) in an era of postfeminism, agreeing that a “feminist analysis of women’s relationship to sexually explicit materials must make women’s consumption of erotica at least problematic”. Sonnet argues that explicitly pornographic literary erotica is “better understood within contemporary ‘postfeminist’ constructions of female heterosexuality in which the pleasure offered to the female readership embody contradictions around sexual pleasure and female desire that refuse to be easily positioned against pro or anti-pornography politics” (ibid., 170). Instead, Sonnet offers a solution: rather than positioning feminist discourse (which problematizes female pleasure within patriarchal structures) and postfeminist discourse against each other, we need to “re-

conceptualize the terms upon which a feminist-informed reading of commercial pornography for women might be made” (ibid., 171). Current shifts in discourses around female sexuality and feminism mean—for Sonnet—that erotic fiction demonstrates a “re-positioning of commodified pornography to align with current notions of postfeminist women’s ‘personal empowerment’ and of sexual pleasure as a form of capitalist consumer ‘entitlement’” (ibid.). This shift may be historically unprecedented, but it is also understandable when examining how the contemporary market for mainstream pornography is saturated. As Anita Harris reminds us, “young women have become a very important resource in the new economy” (2005, 40). In order to open up new markets in an era of increasing globalization and competition, women are essential.

If pornography has traditionally been “produced and consumed in order to represent a political position” (Juffer 1998), in Japan the boom in pornography for women has been portrayed in a decidedly apolitical manner by mainstream media. Much like sex toys for women (see the previous chapter), female-friendly porn is usually depicted as titillating (for men) when it appears in the mainstream media. The weekly magazine *Joshi Spa* wrote in September 2013 of the increasing number of women attending what it termed “good looking idol events” (*ikemen aidoru ibento*) (Oki 2013). In May 2013 *Asahi Shūkan* described “pornography for women” as a “quiet boom” (*shizuka na būmu*), and likened the experience of consumers to the fans of Korean dramas. The article outlines that fans enjoy Silk Labo’s pornographic films because they create a romantic story that gets viewers in the mood before the sex scenes. Interestingly, *Asahi Shūkan* also reported that approximately 10 percent of purchasers are male, perhaps offering hope to Makino that her films may provide an alternative mode of sex education for a generation of men raised on traditional pornography. Finally, the article concludes that women’s desire is both fickle, and deep (*onna no ganbō wa kimagure na ue ni, sokoshirezu*). Makino has appeared on

various late night television programs discussing female sexuality, and in June 2015 TBS's morning program *Bibitto* even ran a special on Silk Labo and the eromen, calling the company's films "female-friendly sexy videos" (*josei muke sekushī bideo*) and framing the segment as "research into the desires of housewives". Much like NHK's morning program *Asaichi* (see Chapter 3), *Bibitto* was subject to strong criticism online by viewers who said that they did not want to think about sex first thing in the morning, or who felt that they could not "safely" watch the program with their children around.

Having spoken to many in the media about women's sexuality in Japan today, the dominant discourse appears to be one in which women are not expected to enjoy sex in the same ways, or for the same reasons, as men. A television producer for NHK reported that he believed that the desires of male and female pornography viewers were very different, something that he confirmed by speaking with staff at Silk Labo. Sex worker and educator Mizushima Kaorin often mentions at education workshops that "men like doing, women like feeling". An editor at *anan* explained that being assigned to help create the erotic video that came with the sex special issue in 2009 allowed her insight into how the desires of women are understood by erotica producers. Similarly, Makino believes women's sexuality is a strange thing (*fushigi-na mono*), and that women desire to obtain emotional connection through sex. The DVD provided with the 2011 sex special issue of *anan* highlights this shared belief, containing an explanation at the beginning which states that, "[f]or women, sex is one way of communicating love... We hope that through sex overflowing with love you will become more beautiful, enjoy a more fulfilling life, and that this DVD will help you to do so" (*onna ni totte, sekkusu wa aijō o hyōgen suru komyunikēshon no hitotsu... ai afureru michitarita sekkusu de, motto kireini, motto jūjitsu shita mainichi o sugosu tame ni, kono DVD ga yakudachimasu yō ni*).

The recent popularity of the erotica series *Fifty Shades of Grey* indicates that there

exists, in the West at least, a large market for what Juffer (1998, 136) refers to as “identity erotica” and “domesticated porn”, that is, erotica and pornography which is mainstream and sold through reputable retailers. The growth of online shopping and ebooks has also been heralded as one reason why *Fifty Shades of Grey* was able to capture an audience broader than earlier works of the same genre, echoing Silk Labo’s digital media usage and its impact on sales. From this perspective, the appearance of Silk Labo at this particular point in history points less to a feminist rediscovery of pleasure on the part of female consumers, and more to a change in technology use. Juffer questions the biological argument that women are more attracted to print and men to visual materials, suggesting that instead it is the historical reality that women have had “a greater access to the means of production and consumption” of printed materials, rather than visual ones (1998, 134). As this historical reality is gradually overturned with the development of the internet, female-friendly visual pornographic material has become easier to create and access.

Silk Labo may be a surprising success story in an increasingly difficult market, but does the consumption of pornography by a female Japanese audience constitute a shift in women’s attitudes towards sexuality? Many pro-sexuality feminists have argued that the appropriation and consumption of patriarchal pornography by women is a subversive act (see Juffer 1998, 96). The content of Silk Labo’s films however points to a more complicated relationship between transgressive behavior, feminist pro-pleasure protest, and the complex social systems in which the films are produced. Silk Labo’s work may be considered part of the depoliticization and domestication of female pleasure, reinterpreted to benefit the pornography industry by using female pleasure to sustain profits in a saturated market. Juffer refers to women’s literary erotica, pornography, cyberspace, sex toys for women, and sexual self-help books amongst others as representing “various ways sex is domesticated, brought in from the wild... and controlled by women for their

pleasures within a particular constantly redefined space called the ‘home’” (1998, 87). The products Juffer analyzes strike a balance between the mundane and the profane, preserving “a potential realm of fantasy”, and the “reconciliation of the everyday with the erotic” (ibid.). Pornography for women functions as insurrectionary speech to unsettle norms (Schauer 2005, 59), but it also “plays a role in determining what is pleasure” (ibid., 46). In the case of Silk Labo this means that pleasure for female viewers is defined in terms of heterosexual encounters in which the male participants lead the action, blending the everyday and the erotic. The company’s products serve to contest the belief that women do not enjoy visual erotica, whilst reinforcing ideas of normative female desires and sexual behavior. Silk Labo specializes in walking the fine line between fantasy and pornography, and blends the everyday with the erotic in a romantic and pornographic medium.

Conclusion

Silk Labo’s fans are also not what Wim Lunsing (2001) would describe as non-conformist. Many are married, looking to marry, or involved in heterosexual relationships. Instead, it could be speculated that they participate in non-conformist behavior as one way to express their dissatisfaction, or avoid feeling dissatisfied with the everyday lives they lead. Much as fandom and following idols acts as an escape from mundane life for many fans (see Galbraith and Karlin 2012), participating in a Silk Labo fan event allows fans of the company’s eromen idols an escape into a fantasy world in which sex is always with an attractive, caring man and is always satisfying. Silk Labo also draws upon the AKB48 idea of the “idols you can go and meet” (*ai ni ikeru aidoru*) and provides events and opportunities to meet their stable of eromen on a regular basis. The cultural and popular cultural knowledge, intertextuality, and in-jokes relied upon by Silk Labo are all indicative of the medium’s ability to act as an alternative mode of fandom for viewers. I consider Silk

Labo consumption to be an alternative yet increasingly mainstream sexual practice within Japan today, as well as an alternative mode of fandom.

Tsukino and Ittetsu, in a behind the scenes video on YouTube to promote *Suddenly Triangular* (2013) act like best friends, playing, teasing each other the manner seen on stage at idol concerts and during television appearances. Mackie reminds us that within any one cultural and social system there are competing masculinities (2005, 131). The masculinity that is performed at Silk Labo's events is closer to the non-threatening boyish charm of boy band members than to the aggressive, tanned, and waxed pornography stars seen in many Japanese adult videos today. The men play with common tropes from mainstream popular culture, and are acutely aware of what their fans expect of them. The fans in turn adhere to strict rules about when they may photograph the men at events, when they may hand over gifts, and how to behave. What they do not adhere to however is social convention when it comes to expectations of women in Japan today.

It is possible to argue that Silk Labo is one example of attempts to control female desires, redirected in such a way as to allow limited freedom (within clearly demarcated heteronormative lines) whilst preventing transgression on a larger scale. In the case of host clubs, male sexuality is commodified and Japanese women deploy men as "resources" to create a more woman-friendly lifestyle (Takeyama 2005, 200). What happens then if these resources can be replaced by products, ones without feelings and desires of their own? As Takeyama argues, the commodification of romantic love through host clubs "serves as an effective stimulus for women's greater consumption, while also reinscribing gendered characteristics and hierarchical relations" (ibid.). Silk Labo, despite providing a more clean cut aesthetic and affordable option encourages greater consumption on the part of women, but it also creates what Bette Gordon (1992, 194) terms "the other place", an arena in which female desire can be manipulated and controlled, and prevented from bleeding into

surrounding arenas. According to Gordon, erotica created specifically for women problematizes female desire and removes it from the mainstream. Cinema may “produce and construct certain prescribed sexualities and marginalize others”, but for Gordon it could also offer alternative possibilities as a medium in which women’s sexuality is not tied to reproduction, domesticated couples, or exclusively to men (*ibid.*, 192). These alternatives however are removed from the mainstream, and further serve to problematize female sexuality as something “unusual” or “unorthodox”, and not deserving of place within mainstream culture.

Whilst I acknowledge that, for Gordon at least, creating a second space for female-friendly erotica and pornography further serves to remove it from the mainstream, I believe that it is an important starting point. While Silk Labo’s films may be problematic in many ways, they also offer a chance to move beyond traditional ideas of pornography as a male genre, and create the opportunity for further discussion about what it means to enjoy sex and one’s own sexuality for women in Japan today. As this chapter has shown, despite the failure of many other attempts to create pornography for women Silk Labo has been successful due to its ability to draw upon familiar popular culture, use online media effectively, and create a space for fans to share their enthusiasm. It is no doubt impossible to make inroads into the mainstream without first creating a genre or space in which to explore previously unpalatable or taboo ideas.

A year after my fieldwork I returned to the Silk Labo set in April 2014 and spent the day watching the cast and crew at work. Makino was still running the show but with a number of younger female crew learning to write, produce, and direct under her tutelage—women who often pour their own sexual fantasies into their productions. Since introducing mobile phone streaming services earlier in the year the company had been able to expand its reach, but was also under threat from new management at SOD who believed they could

attract more female customers by dumping cheaply produced content onto their Girl's Channel website linked to the SOD main page and hoping audiences would graduate to purchasing full length mainstream SOD movies. SOD has even provided clips from Ittetsu and Tsukino's mainstream pornography movies from earlier in their careers available for free viewing on Girl's Channel as they attempt to draw in Silk Labo fans. Having spent many years developing the Silk Labo brand, Makino was frustrated with this somewhat cynical approach. However, as Silk Labo's newest staff rushed to provide the cast with bathrobes after each scene and the crew munched on doughnuts as they revised the script, I realized that despite constantly facing new challenges, for now at least Silk Labo may be responding to a new generation of women willing to try something different within the pornography industry, and that the quiet boom in female-friendly porn for women might yet spur a quiet revolution.

6. Sex on the Market: Postfeminism in Neoliberal Japan

Throughout my more than two years of fieldwork, I found myself swinging between two extremes: horror at the pure commercialism of the female-friendly pleasure product sector and joy at the alternative views of sexuality that it provided the women who chose to participate. The industry and the type of feminism it represents are complex, particularly because they appear in an environment in which the feminist message has been sidelined for so long. In much of the west, postfeminism is characterized by the co-option of feminist discourses of the right to pleasure by consumer capitalism. This so-called “marketplace feminism” positions women as consumers and feminism as “a cool, fun, accessible identity that anyone can adopt” (Zeisler 2016, loc 103), but it also occurs in an atmosphere in which second wave feminism was arguably at least somewhat successful in changing cultural perceptions of women and women’s bodies. In Japan, due to an education system and mainstream media that denies women active sexualities as well as the limited success of second wave feminism, the rhetoric of women’s right to sexual pleasure never gained a strong foothold. Second wave feminism made great inroads into legislation, but widespread cultural change has remained elusive—particularly in regards to female sexuality. Today feminist discourses of pleasure filter in from overseas, disconnected from the complex social circumstances in which they developed, and mediated by Japanese women who have developed an interest in female sexuality via the media, particularly the magazine *anan*, and participation in sex-positive commerce. These ideas are ultimately presented to women in Japan through the lens of consumer capitalism—producing a small-scale form of Zeisler’s marketplace feminism in a Japanese context.

The commercialization of female desire is a central theme that runs throughout this dissertation. In Chapter 1, I examined how second wave feminism failed to address

women's sexuality, and argued that the female-friendly pleasure product industry is working to address this failure. Chapter 2 traced the history of women's magazine *anan* and its yearly "sex special issue", arguing that the potential for the magazine to perpetuate a feminist agenda was there in its early years, only to be lost as commercialization and celebrity culture took over. In Chapter 3, I analyzed sex education in Japan and the raft of sex self-help literature, medical specialists, and non-government organizations working to educate the public about sex beyond the basics of biology. Chapter 4 examined the contemporary sex toy industry, concluding that it both offers spaces for the exploration of notions of pleasure, while commercializing female desire and encouraging women to subscribe to phallogocentric notions of sex. In Chapter 5, I considered the female-friendly pornography industry and the way in which the consumption of pornography can be considered transgressive, whilst it simultaneously commercially co-opts women's sexual desires. Throughout each of these chapters, sex, pleasure, and information are demonstrated to be commercial products. Sex for pleasure's sake, for *women's* pleasure's sake, is almost nonexistent. Instead, it is viewed through a neoliberal lens in which everything can be packaged, marketed, and sold.

As Zeisler reminds us, "marketplace feminism prioritizes individuals" (2016, loc 4202). Throughout *anan*, sex self-help literature, events, and workshops, the individual is painted as having the power to change themselves, and change their sex lives. Individual women are told they are responsible for learning how to be more orgasmic, how to experience more pleasure from sex, and how to make men (and by extension, perhaps even themselves) happy. Similarly, individual women who take up work in the sex-positive industries become, as Nikolas Rose describes "active individuals seeking to 'enterprise themselves,' to maximize their quality of life through acts of choice, according to their life meaning and value" (1996, 57). As Rose elaborates, "[w]ithin this new regime of the

actively responsible self, individuals are to fulfil their national obligations not through their relations of dependency and obligation to one another, but through seeking to *fulfil themselves*” (1996, 57, italics in original). The seeking of sexual fulfilment on the part of event participants, and emotionally fulfilling yet often precarious work on the part of organizers, demonstrates the extent to which discourses of individualism have prospered in today’s Japan.¹ The “self-searching” (*jibun sagashi*) of the 1980s has become “self-responsibility” (*jiko sekinin*) today. Problems become the responsibility of the individual, and can best be solved by turning to the marketplace.

Within this environment, even knowledge about sex has been turned into a commodity. The most well-researched or most useful information is not the most valued. Rather, the knowledge that will lead to the greatest profits for those involved in the industry dominates the discourse. In the female-friendly sex-positive industry the “casting of systematic issues as personal ones and cheerily dispensing commercial fixes for them” (Zeisler 2016, loc 4202) is ubiquitous, thereby ensuring that consumer culture reigns. When female sexual desire cannot be fully co-opted into the service of the state in the form of reproduction, it can instead be deemed productive in other ways as women are encouraged to consume sex-positive products and support the faltering national economy. This form of co-option is increasingly necessary as Japan enters a post-growth era. Not only is the economy struggling, but population decline has begun in earnest. Ayako Kano argues that throughout the postwar period “Japanese social policy has treated all Japanese women as potential mothers” (2016, 102). In contemporary Japan, however, too few

¹ It is important to remember that women in the precarious sex-positive industries may not be engaging in a form of labor that is particularly new. The 1960s to the end of the 1980s may have seen a Japan “emblematic of a culture of security” (Brinton 2011, 18), yet this security most often did not extend to women. Instead, female labor force participation has to a large extent always been characterized by participation in precarious and non-stable work.

women are choosing motherhood and the future of the nation is in doubt. Accordingly, the refusal of women to follow the biological mandate to reproduce and raise children, as demanded of them by patriarchal society, is a deeply subversive act.² Acting as an antidote to this subversion is the incitement to be productive in new ways as provided by the sex-positive industries. Through the provision of the possibility of emotionally fulfilling work, these sectors co-opt women into a system that renders not only their labor, but also their desire, productive, despite their failure to reproduce.

Nevertheless, I do not see the phenomenon as wholly negative. Instead, throughout this dissertation I have presented a nuanced examination of the female-friendly sex-positive industries and the women involved.³ As Kano reminds us, “the rise and fall of particular debates certainly offer insight into what is going on in society. But perhaps most importantly, they offer glimpses into imagined possibilities that have not been realized in Japan or elsewhere” (2016, 3). Much is yet to be realized in the feminist project of contemporary Japan and yet, as addressed in Chapter 4, the fact that those in the sex-positive industry feel that they must hide for fear of social sanction points to the fact that their work has a particular transgressive power. The women involved in the industry have the power to disrupt patriarchal conceptualizations of the “perfect” Japanese woman living to serve the patriarchal state. That the female-friendly sex-positive industries exist at all indicates that there are many women involved in such transgressive behavior. Breanne Fahs reminds us that “individual acts of resistance are always subject to interpretation in the terms of the dominant economy” (2011, 182), yet the ongoing backlash against “gender free” and sex education since the mid-2000s suggests that the dominant forces of

² See Ireland (2003) and Morell (1994, 2000) on the social sanctions faced by women who are childless by choice.

³ I do not believe it is my position to criticize those in the industry, nor is it my role to offer recommendations to them. Instead, the goal of this dissertation is to offer a comprehensive explanation of the phenomena investigated and to consider their significance in context.

contemporary Japan legitimately fear the subversive potential feminist sex-positive discourses, and feel they must remain engaged in an ongoing battle to suppress them.

The women in this thesis are engaging in transgressive acts in that they are not quietly putting their sexuality to use in the service of men and the state, but are instead seeking to find new and creative ways to be sexual beings in an environment that does not welcome, or even tolerate, such behavior.⁴ It is difficult to imagine that these acts of subversion will have a long-term impact on perceptions of female sexuality in mainstream society, although it is worth bearing in mind that every revolution must start somewhere. As Judith Butler reminds us, “subversive performances always run the risk of becoming deadening clichés through their repetition and, most importantly, through their repetition within commodity culture where ‘subversion’ carries market value” (1999, xxi).

Neoliberalism finds ways to “inoculate itself against dissent” (Penny 2016) through the careful introduction of small elements of dissenting ideologies and the incorporation of activist movements into consumer culture. McRobbie argues that “[t]he production of girlhood now comprises a constant stream of incitements and incitements to engage in a range of specified practices which are understood to be both progressive but also consummately and reassuringly feminine” (2008, 57). Within neoliberal Japan, small spaces for the exploration of female sexuality may serve as a form of “vaccination” against more active forms of feminist engagement as women are compelled to demonstrate their progressive stance on sex, whilst reiterating their desire to be beautiful and attractive to men. The subversive behavior of the women outlined in this dissertation is thereby simultaneously made possible by the commodification of female desire and commodified

⁴ The state’s coercive actions have been successful in suppressing alternative visions of female sexuality and ensuring they remain in the margins, yet remarkably unsuccessful at raising the birth rate which now hovers around the below replacement-level of approximately 1.4. See Chapter 3.

by the market in which it appears.

Nonetheless, the participation of women in a sector that has until recently failed to cater to them, in an environment in which their subjective sexuality is denied, can also be considered feminist and subversive. When feminist discourse is overtly referenced in the female-friendly pleasure product industry, it is commonly in the form of ideas imported from the west. Women with an interest in sexuality, women who have travelled widely, or women who have always felt that there was something “missing” in the way in which Japanese society conceptualized female sexuality often seek answers beyond Japan’s borders. The answers they find, more often than not, are in the form of third wave, sex-positive discourses of consumption and “raunch culture”. In this way third wave feminist ideas are entering Japan through consumer culture, far removed from the robust academic debates in which they first developed and transliterated into their new environment. Unlike the feminism that entered Japan via academics, activists, and grass-roots organizations in the *ūman ribu* era, a new period of feminism, mediated through consumer culture and the neoliberal marketplace, has begun.

Despite the unholy alliance of feminism and neoliberalism, small-scale marketplace feminism in the Japanese context is not a wholly negative phenomenon. I do not intend for this dissertation to serve as an indictment of the Japanese feminist movement as the sex-positive industries may actually offer a space for everyday, inadvertent feminist resistance. As Miyako Inoue reminds us, “none of the fundamental critical strategies in feminist theory—identity, agency, difference, resistance—or in liberal democracy more generally—diversity, individual sovereignty, self-autonomy, freedom, citizenship—come with guarantees that they are essentially critical, liberating, or progressive in determinate contexts. Context is, in fact, everything” (2007, 82). Turning this statement on its head, in Japan today the marketplace is the *only* context in which feminist discourse can flourish.

Nancy Fraser is scathing of the way in which “feminism has entered a dangerous liaison with neoliberalism” (2013, 14) in the wake of the global rise of neoliberal ideology, and urges a reimagining of what feminism could be. This reimagining in Japan must take into consideration the lack of inroads feminist discourse made into mainstream culture, as well as the decades-long backlash against feminist ideas. Post-backlash, the marketplace offers the only space in which sex-positive discourse can flourish in contemporary Japan. By drawing upon the modes of the neoliberal market, the pleasure product industry is able to infiltrate the mainstream, one event at a time.

Purveyors of female-friendly pleasure products focus on the creation and expansion of a market for female-friendly pleasure products out of necessity for survival. Nonetheless, these companies also provide room in which to discuss issues of female sexuality that have previously been overlooked. These serve as spaces for education and feminist consciousness-raising as women discuss not only sexual pleasure, but also birth control, work, family, and child-rearing, recreating the women’s spaces of the 1970s and 1980s in a new way (see Maree, 2014). Inadvertent feminism, rather than explicitly activist feminist engagement is the result. There is no doubt an element of sexual essentialism reminiscent of cultural feminism running through the sex-positive sector as women are compelled to celebrate their innate feminine qualities, yet this does not prevent the interrogation of gender stereotyping as women engage in respectful discussions with other workshop organizers and participants. “Small victories”—in the form of women questioning the housewife and mother as the “archetypal figure of womanhood” (Mackie 2003, 123), discovering that they have the right to pleasure, discussing the injustices they experience in the workforce, or realizing that perhaps they do not need men—abound. The victories that occur within the spaces provided by female-friendly pleasure product purveyors however remain a long way from acceptance in the mainstream media,

education system, and Japanese society at large.

Finally, I must address the role that the market plays in producing and shaping female sexuality. Gayle Rubin warns against seeing the commercialization of sexuality as wholly negative (1984). As Thomas Laqueur notes, the market economy depends on desire since desire is both “generated and deployed by social practices” (1992, 185). Similarly, Anne Allison argues that “sexuality in advanced capitalism is not only borrowed to sell things but also constructed and constrained to the shape of a commodity itself” (2000, 154). As “consumption has become so central to cultural production in capitalist societies” (Curtis 2004, 99), it is not possible to dismiss the market as just a place where women are manipulated into consumptive behavior. In light of the dearth of sex-positive discourses for women in Japanese society, the market has an important role to play. Yet, desire is not born of the market, nor does it occur naturally. Instead, we must consider the issue of “[h]ow might the desire produced in the market be intricately linked to the formation and negotiation of sexual subjectivity?” (ibid., 95). For Debra Curtis, the marketplace is a place which is capable of encouraging sexual innovation (ibid.), whilst for women, “commodity consumption becomes one of the primary means for demonstrating their sexuality” (ibid., 196). In other words, women’s sexuality may very well be shaped by their consumptive practices, but this also allows for the exploration of desires women may never have had access to otherwise. The female-friendly sex-positive sector adds a new layer of innovation and potential for sexual exploration that would otherwise be impossible to access in a Japan which denies women active sexualities or the open expression of feminist ideas.

Many in the female-friendly pleasure product sector clearly believe that the market has an important role to play in disseminating sex-positive messages the likes of which they have been unable to access in other social arenas. These women blend their forms of sex-positive feminism—both overt and inadvertent—with businesses and see no

contradiction within this reality. Fahs asks, “[i]f women learn to internalize, and be complicit in, their own commodification, how can we conceptualize *noncomplicity*, *noncompliance*, *anticapitalistic* impulses, *antipatriarchal* practices?” (2011, 197, italics in original). It is this question that remains central to future feminist activism, and in further research. My interlocutors were all financially independent women using their own earnings to seek pleasure at the various workshops and events they attended. In neoliberal Japan those with sufficient financial means are afforded the opportunity to consume sexual fulfilment. The reality for many working women however is that precarity is very much the norm, particularly for organizers and entrepreneurs within the female-friendly sex-positive sector itself. Nevertheless, the women involved in the industry have learned how to achieve sexual pleasure alone (albeit with ¥20,000 vibrators), experienced the pleasure of finding other like-minded women, and tasted the pleasure that came with having their sexual desires recognized and normalized. Phallogocentric discourses may flow throughout the sex toy industry, yet fashionable vibrators are still very much objects that women can use to experience pleasure *without* men. My interlocutors did not need men for financial support and were learning to not need men for sexual satisfaction. The independence of these women is a truly feminist phenomenon, even when situated within marketplace feminism. Accordingly, within the limited spaces addressed by this dissertation, women are once again becoming, “the subjects of their own struggle” (Mackie 2005, 149).

In March 2016, I once again found myself squeezed into an event space in west Tokyo, listening to female-friendly pornography production staff discuss what it means to be a “carnivore woman” (*nikushoku joshi*) as an audience of around 20 women downed cheap wine and dined on a “specially prepared meat-filled menu”. The company—la Coviluna—is a recent addition to the female-friendly pleasure product world, and its methodology and core values are remarkably consistent with its competition. Catching up

with interlocutors during a break in the proceedings I was surprised to discover that over the past few years many female-friendly pleasure product companies have folded, been bought out, or have shifted their focus from sex. Similarly, many staff have left the industry after finding it difficult to build sustainable careers. Save for a few stalwarts such as the Love Piece Club and Silk Labo, many in the industry struggle to survive. The market for female-friendly pleasure products remains immature, and companies specializing in them find it difficult to move beyond the fringe. As I watched la Coviluna staff at the event hug company mascot Penisuke—a large fuzzy penis doll complete with manga-esque eyes, demented grin, and straw hat—I realized that this was, in fact, no surprise (figure 22). Nevertheless, the continued efforts of those in the female-friendly pleasure industry ensure that sex-positive discourses can be found by those who search, providing places in which to contest hegemonic notions of female sexuality that were previously almost entirely absent.



Figure 22. la Coviluna mascot Penisuke.

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