

Grinnell College

Sexpectations vs. Reality:

The Circuitous Relationship Between Media Portrayal and Lived Experience
of Sexuality for Japanese Women

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Gender in Post WWII East Asia

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Introduction

Media consumption has become integral to contemporary living, so its impact – especially on a facet of identity as influential as sexuality – must be examined. This portfolio explores the relationship between media portrayal of Japanese women and girls' sexuality and their lived experiences. We will argue the cyclical nature of this relationship on the premise that women's experiences inform media representation and media informs lived experience. The media in question includes pornography, manga and anime, social media and the news, and popular music. The aforementioned types of media are responsible for establishing and

ingraining normative behavior and by extension informing the lived experience of those who consume it. To prove this, we will consider the print, electronic, and internet forms of these medias and present research on how they uniquely perpetuate behavioral expectations, while exploring how women can be complicit in legitimating said expectations. Our research spans the past five decades with attention given to the historical context of Japan and the development of widespread internet use, and includes academic articles and monographs from Japanese and non-Japanese scholars.

It is crucial to explore this issue because a harmful relationship between the lived experience of Japanese women and girls and the standards set by popular media result in violence, discrimination, adverse effects to women's health, and a fractured sense of self. While women and girls can also seize power through their participation in media consumption and production, media is ultimately responsible for reproducing gendered patterns of dominance and submission and legitimizing sex-gender hierarchy.¹

Pornography

Using our framework for evaluating the relationship between Japanese women and the media, the relationship between pornography and female consumers is cyclical because both women's individual sexual desires and public sexual expectations are molded by pornography, but women can also be complicit in pornography production and establishing pornographic acts as normative sexual behavior. The pornography centered in this analysis may include fetish content – particularly racial fetish content – BDSM, and kink, but also encompasses content that

¹ Kellner, Douglas. "Cultural Studies , Multiculturalism , and Media Culture Douglas Kellner." (2014).

does not cater to particular sexual proclivities. For the purpose of this paper, the subject matter of the adult videos in question is less important than the Japanese public's reactions to and engagement with pornography.

Women's Participation in Pornography Production

Expectations set in pornography warp people's – namely women's – experiences of sexual desire. While sexuality is natural, Japanese women's sexuality is naturalized by a culture that teaches them to crave their own objectification. In their book, *The Japanese Adult Video Industry*, Heung Wah Wong and Hoi-yan Yau explore social implications of genre tropes across popular adult videos.² Their research demonstrates that Japanese pornography is characterized by the disempowerment and infantilization of the female players in its production. The authors concentrate on what they call 'salvage ideology,' or according to Jamie Coates in her review of the book, "... the cluster of cultural scripts that shape the pornographic reality of Japan, one where men are seen as naturally dominant figures who coax sexual sentiment and orgasms out of women. The carry-on effects of this dynamic are that men are framed in pornographic texts as sexual saviors who understand women's needs more so than women themselves."³

Wong and Yau emphasize that a core tenet of Japanese pornography is the notion that women need the help of a sexually experienced man to experience sexual pleasure and agency. The authors conduct an ethnographic study of a *kikaku* film where a woman is elaborately sexually gratified in order to make her orgasm repeatedly and question the implications of the female actresses' participation in the film. While she appeared to be receiving some gratification

² Wong, Heung-wah, and Hoi-yan Yau. *The Japanese Adult Video Industry*. Routledge Culture, Society, Business in East Asia Series. London ; New York: Routledge, 2018.

³ Coates, Jamie. "The Japanese Adult Video Industry." *Contemporary Japan* 31, no. 2 (July 3, 2019): 268–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18692729.2018.1553753>.

in exchange for her involvement, she was still acting within the confines of male fantasy. One cannot suggest the actresses' performance was a reclamation of agency if female pleasure was only centered to demonstrate the sexual skill of man.

A journal article by Saburo Iwawaki that examines the sexual fantasies of Japanese adults demonstrates that these pornographic tropes are enacted by people outside of the environment of an adult film set. The research paper uses data from a survey of men and women aged eighteen to twenty. The study collected data on the prevalence of various sexual fantasies and proclivities including voyeurism, exhibitionism, sadomasochism, and fantasies involving queer sex and group sex. The main conclusion of the study was that fantasies about young women and girls (schoolgirls) with older men as well as fantasies about domination and submission are incredibly common with both men and women. Regardless of who is actively consuming pornography and who is not, heterosexual men talking about and projecting the sexual fantasies they have learned from pornography onto their partners affects women as a social group when those women consent to and normalize the fantasy.⁴

Violence Against Women

Outside of influencing women's private experiences of sexuality, pornography threatens the safety of sexual experiences when women's safety and selfhood is publicly jeopardized because of the violence that is normalized in pornography. Violence in this context will encompass physical, emotional, psychological, and sexual harm against women. Studies conducted on the correlation between rates of sexual violence and pornography consumption suggested that consumption of print and electronic porn increased the rates of gang rape in Japan.

⁴ Iwawaki, Saburo, and Glenn D. Wilson. "Sex Fantasies in Japan." *Personality and Individual Differences* 4, no. 5 (January 1983): 543–45. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0191-8869\(83\)90086-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0191-8869(83)90086-7).

The evidence also suggested that the rates of other forms of sexual crimes including individually perpetrated rape and groping decreased as pornography consumption increased. These studies were, however, conducted in the mid 1970s, and only focused attention on print and electronic porn.⁵ This is important to consider for the purpose of laying the groundwork for the pornography that would be developed and produced in decades to come, as it demonstrates that pornography consumption made ripples in the rates of violence against women. However, it is not an accurate reflection of the impacts of contemporary – especially internet – pornography.

Kikuko Omori's work on Japanese college students' perceptions of women after consuming sexually explicit materials suggested that the content desensitized young people to sex acts where women were demeaned and diminished.⁶ This poses a risk significant of harm for young women because the rise of the internet has made adult content all the more accessible. When people consume explicit content at young ages – even as children – they are more likely to have difficulty distinguishing the performance of pornography from sex, and the fictionalized degradation of women from the abuse of women. The dawn of the internet and internet pornography has introduced a multitude of violent sexual scenarios to the public consciousness on a greater scale than when the previous sex crimes study was published. If the extremity of pornographic content has to increase over the course of time to keep up with the market and maintain relevance, the sexual violence it inspires will escalate in severity accordingly.⁷

⁵ Diamond, Milton, and Ayako Uchiyama. "Pornography, Rape, and Sex Crimes in Japan." *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 22, no. 1 (January 1999): 1–22.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-2527\(98\)00035-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-2527(98)00035-1).

⁶ Omori, Kikuko, Yan Bing Zhang, Mike Allen, Hiroshi Ota, and Makiko Imamura. "Japanese College Students' Media Exposure to Sexually Explicit Materials, Perceptions of Women, and Sexually Permissive Attitudes." *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research* 40, no. 2 (June 2011): 93–110.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2011.581031>.

⁷ Picker, Miguel and Chyng Sun. *The Price of Pleasure: Pornography, Sexuality, and Relationships*, 2008. 55 min.
<https://www.justwatch.com/us/movie/the-price-of-pleasure-pornography-sexuality-and-relationships>.

Non-Visual Pornographic Content

The essay, “Perverse Sexualities, Pervasive Desires: Representations of Female Fantasies and ‘Yaoi Manga’ as Pornography Directed at Women,” examines the common female sexual fantasy of men-loving-men in popular manga. Author Kazumi Nagaike studies a specific kind of manga called *yaoi* that prominently features relationships between men. She explores the social implications of women’s desire to fetishize gay male characters and relationships, comparing them to parodies of the characters featured in boy’s *shonen* manga. In her treatment of *yaoi* as a form of “narrative pornography” or erotica, Nagaike demonstrates that this genre of adult content provides an alternative to oppressive heteronormativity for women to explore their sexuality. This writing provides a window into the sexual fantasies of Japanese women to help us better understand how and why they defy restrictive expectations of female sexuality and desire.⁸

Erotica can bypass the flaws of male-gaze oriented visual pornography, and does not put real actors in immediate physical harm. As Nagaike suggests, erotica may also encourage sexual fantasy in potentially productive ways, but because Japanese erotic fiction is often fetish content about gay men written by women, it has the potential to be harmful to gay men as an already marginalized group. The empowerment women may experience in participating in pornography consumption that is inconsistent with a cis-hetero male model of sex, is no more than the power they feel in asserting dominance over other marginalized people. In this way Japanese women subject fellow othered groups to the objectification and fetishization they also have to endure, and the cycle of domination and submission continues.⁹

⁸ Nagaike, Kazumi. “Perverse Sexualities, Pervasive Desires: Representations of Female Fantasies and ‘Yaoi Manga’ as Pornography Directed at Women.” *U.S.-Japan Women’s Journal*, no. 25 (2003): 76–103. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42771904>.

⁹ Nagaike. “Perverse Sexualities, Pervasive Desires: Representations of Female Fantasies and ‘Yaoi Manga’ as Pornography Directed at Women.” 76–103.

Manga & Anime

Introduction

Manga and anime are some of the most influential media in Japan and are especially important to examine because of their Japanese origin. Manga and anime are illustrated, Japanese-style comics and cartoons, usually with specific audiences in mind. Similar to pornography, the relationship between content in manga and anime and women and girls' lived experiences is cyclical. Manga and anime shape Japanese culture and showcase expectations for how women and girls should behave in both sexual and nonsexual contexts – many times over-sexualizing women. However, unlike pornography, manga and anime content are illustrated, meaning that some content is even more unrealistic than pornography. Characters are made to do things that are not humanly possible. Additionally, the creators of certain manga and anime base their stories on “what girls want,”¹⁰ revealing the impact that real-life girls have on these medias.

In this section, we focus on two specific types of manga: shojo (cute comics aimed at teenage girls) and *redikomi* (more sexual and advanced topics aimed at young 18+ women). The anime examined in this section is hentai (sexually explicit anime). Both manga and anime are widely watched in Japan and extremely accessible, with 30% of people, “normally often read[ing] manga or watch[ing] anime.”¹¹ In addition, these kinds of media are quite accessible to children as well as adults, giving manga and anime a large influence over a wide variety of

¹⁰ Prough, Jennifer Sally. *Straight from the Heart: Gender, Intimacy, and the Cultural Production of Shōjo Manga*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011.

¹¹ Statista. “Japan: Share of People Who Often Consume Manga or Anime.” Accessed April 11, 2023. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1100388/japan-share-of-people-who-often-consume-manga-or-anime/>.

people and shaping Japanese culture.¹² Women and girls also often read or watch manga and anime to purposefully or unknowingly explore their sexuality and sex: “Sex in manga teaches the beauty of deep relationships, and how sex can enhance that connection.”¹³ The influence that manga and anime have over culture as well as women’s idea of sex is extremely important to study because they are shaping how Japanese people view women and girls.

Manga and Anime’s Impact on Women

Manga and anime provide examples and guidelines of how women and girls should be and behave in sexual situations. This can be dangerous because, as mentioned with pornography, women tend to be oversexualized and submissive to men - especially in hentai manga and anime.¹⁴ One of the main ways that women are oversexualized is the depiction of their bodies. Since both anime and manga are animated and not real-life people, unrealistic physical expectations are common. Noriko Hiraishi, from the University of Tsukuba states, “in Japanese manga, women with normative “feminine” bodies tend to take the lead, while the realities of female bodies are often overlooked, sometimes through over-sexualization and at other times through the concealment of sexuality.”¹⁵ This is seen throughout the features such as “baby-face[s] and big-breast[s],” which can be seen as the epitome of cuteness and sex respectively.¹⁶ Since manga and anime are ‘often’ watched by 30% of the Japanese population,

¹² Toku, Masami. *International Perspectives on Shojo and Shojo Manga: The Influence of Girl Culture*. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018.

¹³ Kincaid, Chris. “Sex in Anime and Manga.” Japan Powered, November 10, 2017. <https://www.japanpowered.com/anime-articles/sex-in-anime-and-manga>.

¹⁴ Prough. *Straight from the Heart: Gender, Intimacy, and the Cultural Production of Shōjo Manga*, 3.

¹⁵ Hiraishi, Noriko. “Female Bodies in Graphic Narratives: On Sexuality and Pregnancy.” *Re-Imagining Literatures of The World: Global and Local, Mainstreams and Margins* 23 (2022).

¹⁶ Kaoru, Nagayama, Patrick W. Galbraith, and Jessica Bauwens-Sugimoto. “Big Breasts and Manga.” In *Erotic Comics in Japan: An Introduction to Eromanga*, 137–50. Amsterdam University Press, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1zqdc3.10>.

these standards are widely spread.¹⁷ This can be harmful to women and girls because they are being taught that this is what they should look like and what men are attracted to.

Cuteness is a very prevalent theme in anime and manga, especially in shojo manga, that can create harm for real-life women and girls due to the continued expectation of pureness. According to Sharalyn Orbaugh, in her chapter called “Busty Battlin’ Babes: The Evolution of the Shojo in 1990s Visual Culture,” manga and anime characters are expected to be “sexually mature, as seen from the full breasts, but “pure” and somehow still childish, underscored by the lack of pubic hair and imperforate genitalia.”¹⁸ A specific example of this is Lolicon manga and the “Lolita complex.” The Lolita complex is a phenomenon where older men are sexually attracted to younger girls. Lolicon manga, while not always intended to be sexual and is sometimes only seen as the attraction to cuteness, can still perpetuate the alarming attraction that people can have to younger “cute” girls by showing young girls in a sexual, attractive light. Due to this sexualized cuteness, women often internalize the idea that being younger is more desirable. When women play into this idea, it is harmful, in that it forces women to change their appearance for the validation of men, and at the same time they are perpetuating the idea and making it true by participating in it.

Women’s Impact on Manga and Anime

The producers of shojo manga publish “what girls want,”¹⁹ which has turned more openly to sex as consumers get older, making shojo manga increasingly erotic. The impacts of

¹⁷ Statista. “Japan: Share of People Who Often Consume Manga or Anime.” Accessed April 11, 2023. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1100388/japan-share-of-people-who-often-consume-manga-or-anime/>.

¹⁸ Orbaugh, Sharalyn. “11. Busty Battlin’ Babes: The Evolution of the Shōjo in 1990s Visual Culture” In *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field* edited by Joshua S. Mostow, Norman Bryson and Maribeth Graybill, 201-228. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824841577-013>

¹⁹ Prough. *Straight from the Heart: Gender, Intimacy, and the Cultural Production of Shōjo Manga*.

production and consumption of shojo manga are cyclical in nature: shojo manga is based on real-life girls but, at the same time, real-life girls are heavily influenced by shojo manga. Many shojo manga artists and authors have been teenage girls, writing to appeal to girls around their age. Gretchen Jones, in the U.S.-Japan Women's Journal, explains how, “as the young girls who had grown up on shojo manga became adults, they began looking for content that more closely matched their concerns: relations with men, marriage, and sex. At the same time, the authors of shojo manga matured.”²⁰ They began to produce *redikomi*, manga with more sexual content meant for older audiences. The influence that women have over manga specifically is seen here as these authors write what girls (now women) want. For example, many *redikomi* manga magazines “... include a reader survey in every issue offering prizes (which range from jewelry to dildos) for completing and returning it. In their responses, readers include detailed sexual fantasies, narratives of sexual encounters, suggestions for new storylines, and requests for particular imagery.”²¹ Surveys and reader interactions such as these have allowed women to explicitly influence what content should appear in *redikomi* manga.

Through examining anime, manga, expectations in sexuality and cuteness, and how manga content is chosen, we can clearly see that the relationship between anime and manga and women and girls is cyclical. Anime and manga influence women and girls by giving expectations for how they should be and behave; women and girls influence certain anime and manga by controlling, producing, and requesting the content within them.

²⁰ Jones, Gretchen. “‘Ladies’ Comics’: Japan’s Not-So-Underground Market in Pornography for Women.” *U.S.-Japan Women’s Journal. English Supplement*, no. 22 (2002): 3–31. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42772180>.

²¹ Jones. “‘Ladies’ Comics’: Japan’s Not-So-Underground Market in Pornography for Women,” 3-31.

Social Media & The News

Introduction of Japanese social media

The popularization of computers, phones, and the internet increases the exposure of Japanese people to social media, which is the most frequent media that influences women's sexuality. But women being part of social media as program developers and content creators with high involvement makes the relationship more intertwined than cyclical or non-cyclical. For social media in Japan, the mainstream ones are Twitter and Instagram, which negatively influence women through content that might cause misperceptions of body image and biased and distorted portrayals of women and beauty ideals.²² As social media receivers, women would be affected by toxic and unreal content. Still, at the same time, women could be social media creators, influencing the community positively and negatively.

Social media influences women's sexuality

According to the study investigating the body images among young women in Japan through a quantitative method, the influence on the portrayals of body image in Japan is mainly the body appearance pressures and the downside effect on body positivity.²³ Other than that, social media also offers beauty companies on Instagram opportunities to use language to create beauty anxiety.²⁴ One study examined this using Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques,

²² Ando, Kanako, Francesca E. Giorgianni, Elisa S. Danthinne, and Rachel F. Rodgers. "Beauty Ideals, Social Media, and Body Positivity: A Qualitative Investigation of Influences on Body Image among Young Women in Japan." *Body Image* 38 (2021): 358–69. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2021.05.001>.

²³ Ando, Kanako, Francesca E. Giorgianni, Elisa S. Danthinne, and Rachel F. Rodgers. "Beauty Ideals, Social Media, and Body Positivity: A Qualitative Investigation of Influences on Body Image among Young Women in Japan." *Body Image* 38 (2021): 358–69. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2021.05.001>.

²⁴ Beauty anxiety refers to the emotional distress people feel about meeting beauty standards.

analyzing the adjectives on Japanese social media.²⁵ In the study, researchers suggest that there is a higher frequency of adjectives related to skin problems and wellness culture in beauty companies, which would create beauty anxiety and further give the image to women that they should aim for the perfect skin with unrealistically high beauty standards. Most often mentioned words are smooth, fluffy, and glowy. Plus, the NLP in this research suggests that compared to women to men, there is a higher use of words describing body parts than depicting the body as a whole in terms of person, which perpetuates that women are often sexualized as the collection of body parts.

Furthermore, the influence of social media on Japanese women's sexuality is also shown by the negative ideas on contraceptive pills on news. The fact that social media and media press have so many voices talking about the downside of contraceptive pills would discourage women from taking it tremendously, which bans women's body agency from controlling their reproductive rights.²⁶ Without the proper sex education conducted in Japan, it could lead to a severe stigmatization of sex; in a sense, women have less sex because of the negative voices on contraceptive pills, which would lead to them being unwilling to take pills. Moreover, there is a hidden gender inequality issue behind this, where pregnancy shouldn't be the responsibility of women but both males and females in a heterosexual context. Given that the male contraceptive pills are not yet ready to be used, males should also take action on birth control instead of making it like the responsibility of females and spreading out the negative voices of female contraceptive pills.

²⁵ Öhman, Emily, and Amy Gracy Metcalfe. "[PDF] Japanese Beauty Marketing on Social Media: Critical Discourse Analysis Meets NLP: Semantic Scholar." NLP4DH, January 1, 1970. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Japanese-Beauty-Marketing-on-Social-Media%3A-Critical-%C3%96hman-Metcalfe/3dd119c72ef52cb030eccd8c2d92fcfb81e4504e>.

²⁶ Colliton, William F. "Birth Control Pill: Abortifacient and Contraceptive." *The Linacre Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (1999): 26–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20508549.1999.11877553>.

Women's impact on social media

On the other hand, women are part of the social media community. Many female content creators, social influencers, and celebrities could influence women's sexuality in Japan through many lenses. In the study about cyber postfeminism, the author analyzes the use of the internet and cyber-culture as a movement that seeks to use technology to promote gender equality and challenge patriarchal power structures. The authors argue that cyber postfeminism offers a new and innovative approach to feminist politics that has the potential to transcend the limitations of traditional feminist activism. For example, the #MeToo movement started online and spread out rapidly across the globe. Having the discourse power on media, along with the traditional campaign approaches, could lead into a more effective way of fighting for the rights of women.

In a more general sense, the active involvement of women on social media as content creators and influencers could lead to a positive outcome of women being inspired and motivated by the girls' talk and feminist point of view and assuaging the negative impacts on women about body and appearance anxiety. However, the involvement of women could also lead to internalized misogyny and female competition either on purpose or unconsciously, which are bad for the perception of women's sexuality.

Although most of the social media is in a cyclical relationship with Japanese women's sexuality, the relationship between two is not as direct and mutual, in comparison with other media forms, on women's sexuality in Japan. Japanese women on social media are the content itself at the same time that they are consumers, and they often internalize the social value of femininity that is shown on social media.

Japanese Music

Explanation of Japanese Music: What is Jpop?

Japanese popular music has shaped the construction of Japanese women's sexuality, and Japanese women's lived experience has influenced the way Japanese music is produced as well. After World War II, Japanese contemporary popular music developed with influences from Western music and a traditional style of Japanese music. Japanese post-war popular music, with various external or internal cultures that interacted with Japanese music, branched into unique subgenres.

Enka – a traditional, “pure-Japanese” music – idol, and dance music are three extremely different genres in Japanese pop music. Exploration of those genres, however, is essential to figuring out what causality is present in the cyclical relationship between Japanese women's sexuality and production and consumption of Japanese pop music. Japanese female idols – idol music being a comparatively new and one of the most popular subgenres of Japanese pop music – have also shaped women's sexuality. Idol music and its culture have shaped women's sexuality in a way that they stimulate mainly the male audience's sexual or romantic desire. Japanese idols at present are described as either men or women in their 20s who attract the audience with their relatable and approachable personality by showcasing their progress as a performer and taking physically close contacts with their fans.²⁷ Club music is one of the genres that gain popularity among young women. Csaba Toth, in their book *J-Pop and Performances of Young Female Identity*, notes that club-cultural scenes in Japan involve female pop stars such as Ayumi

²⁷ Patrick W. Galbraith, “‘Idols’ in Japan, Asia and the World,” *Routledge Handbook of Celebrity Studies*, 2018, 202–214, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315776774-13>.

Hamasaki and Shina Ringo, who are reproducing gender roles and sexual expectation and providing a sense of solidarity to redefine young femininity.²⁸

J-pop Shaping Japanese Women's sexuality

Japanese women, not only as consumers but also creators and producers of music, have reproduced the image of femininity that has been romantically depicted in music. The construction of sexuality through pop music seems to have already started in the 1960s, when Fuji Keiko, one of the most famous female Enka stars in Japan had made a huge boom. Wajima notes that Itsuki Hiroyuki, a male fiction writer, define Enka as popular music that romanticizes “sentimental, gloomy, and miserable” sides of lives and Fuji was a perfect fit for that: Fuji was a teenage singer with a beautiful appearance—almost like a forerunner of female idols these days—who dressed and acted like a sad widow.²⁹

Wajima also states that Keiko's promotion strongly highlighted how “misery” her life was with a large number of “hardships:” the promotion team emphasized her exaggeratedly tragic life history.³⁰ The lyrics of one of her hit songs, “Yume-wa-Yoru-Hiraku,” contains the implication of her life being depressing and engaging in prostitution: “Jūgo, jūroku, jūshichi-to watashi-no jinsei kurakatta” (When I was 15, 16 and 17 years old, my life was dark) and “Kinō Mā-bō, Kyō Tommy, asu-wa George-ka Ken-bō-ka” (Ma-bo for yesterday, Tommy for today, and maybe George or Ken-bō for tomorrow?). The first line exhibits how tragic a life has been for the protagonist of the song, which the audience projects to Fuji herself, and the second line implies that she engages in sex for money as a poor, vagabond girl. Those lyrics indicate that the

²⁸ Csaba Toth, “J-Pop and Performances of Young Female Identity,” *YOUNG* 16, no. 2 (2008): 111–29, <https://doi.org/10.1177/110330880801600201>.

²⁹ Yusuke Wajima, “The Birth of *Enka*,” *Made in Japan: Studies in Popular Music*, 2014, 72-83, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203384121>.

³⁰ Wajima, “The Birth of *Enka*,” 2014.

view on Japanese women's explicit engagement in sex, which is often seen in lyrics, was tied with being miserable in the early J-pop industry, which constructed a fundamental expectation for Japanese female artists in later periods.

A Japanese female idol is a prominent example of female representation that projects men's desire and stimulates women's urge to fit in male-dominant beauty standards. Japanese top-star female idols such as Momoe Yamaguchi and Akina Nakamori were featured for commercials, which increased the popularity of the products and idols themselves. One of the most significant characteristics of Japanese Idol is that they appear younger than their ages and look "cute" rather than "glamorous" or "sexy." As we mentioned in the previous section, kawaii culture has a tremendous influence on media portrayal of Japanese women. Patrick Galbraith also notes that the idol producers and promoters prohibit idols from having relationships with other people because the main product idols sell is a fantasy romance with them because it stimulates the audience's desire and promotes their will of buying their music.³¹

Although the contents of lyrics presents their "purenness" and "cuteness" that is associated with their potential as a fantastic girlfriend, their Music Videos often show a very explicit image of sex, which is in line with what we argue in the Manga/Anime section. *Heavy Rotation* from AKB48, which is a famous female idol group, members intimately interact with each other in lingerie in a sexually suggestive way.³² Combined with social media, mainly Bulletin Board Systems, Twitter, and Instagram for the Japanese Idol fanbase, this style of promotion causes judgment on female idol's appearances and bodies. As users on those online platforms continuously elicit misogyny and actively exclude female users, the community that judges idols and their opinions tend to reflect homosocial standards.

³¹ Galbraith, "Idols' in Japan, Asia and the World," 202-214.

³² AKB48, *Heavy Rotation*, *YouTube*, 2011, Accessed on May 10, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IkHlnWFnA0c>.

Japanese pop female stars often internalize social standards on gender norms and sex expectation for women and project it onto their works, which has an indisputable impact on the construction of Japanese women's sexuality. Unlike Japanese idols, female J-pop artists often highlight sexual images both through visual production and their lyrics. Ayumi Hamasaki and Ringo Shina are two of the most famous singers in Japan, and each represents Japanese women's sexuality in a different way. Ayumi Hamasaki, as Toth notes, has gained popularity among Japanese young women by selling the image of *Shibuya-kei*, which refers to expensive and in-between sexy and feminine styles that emphasize the white color in the clothes and makeup.³³ Her style has been adopted by many young women at the club, which led to an objective male gaze at the place. This aesthetic ties well with Japanese Kawaii culture that pursue feminine "pureness" with a suggestive sexual attraction.

Toth also mentions that Shina Ringo represents a more directly sexual style, which is called *Shinjuku-kei*, through her lyrics and visual images such as Music Videos. *Kabukicho-no-jouou* is her song about a 15 years old girl who was left alone by her mother, a queen of prostitution. Along with traditional style of Enka, this song ties engagement in sex work with a misery of being left by a mother. *Honnou* is another hit song from her, and this song is characterized by its strikingly sexual lyrics and Music Video. In the video, Shina aggressively participates in intimate interaction with another woman and presents herself in a nurse costume, which is sexualized in the Japanese media industry.³⁴ The lyrics, in contrast, metaphorically imply the girl's desire for sexual penetration: Toth translates the lyrics as "Forgive my whims. Don't think it's too late, just rush me. Enter me deep, put my instincts into motion." This contrast reflects expectation from promoters and producers for female singers to hint heteronormative

³³ Toth, "J-Pop and Performances of Young Female Identity," 111-29.

³⁴ Ringo Sheena, *Honnou*, *YouTube*, 2013, Accessed on May 10, 2023, <https://youtu.be/ECxBHhMc7oI>.

sexual activities but not in a direct nor heterosexual way, and the parallel can be seen in the idol culture as well.³⁵

Japanese Women's Sexuality Influencing J-pop

Music has been shaping Japanese women's sexuality, tying with media appearance, and performance, and club. Japanese women, as bodies that physically enjoy music in public, have shaped the way music is produced.³⁶ Ayumi's music style and fashion style are both in a close relationship with Electronic Dance Music in a Japanese club scene, and Toth claims that Ayumi's style has been constructed through adopting a trend of clubbing among young girls in the 80s. Toth mentioned that an outfit trend among women at a club in 80s Japan included body-hugging micro-skirts, Good Up bras, and gogo shoes. Ayumi often appears on media with tight, exposing, short-length clothes, and it motivates young fan girls of Ayumi to dress in a similar style.³⁷

Fueiho, a law to regulate sex-related business in Japan, was reformed in 1998, and the law began to distinguish actual sex businesses from assumed sex business in effect of the reformation. Night clubs are categorized as assumed sex business, and because of that, some night clubs were raised in 2010, even after the law reformation in 1998. This regulation associate with a objectifying women as their body parts, which was mentioned in the previous chapter about social media as well, because regulation on night clubs as assumed sex business is based on the presence of women who dance in a tight-fit costume that they copied by their muses such as Ayumi Hamasaki. Despite those regulations, the style that has developed from the clubs

³⁵ Toth, "J-Pop and Performances of Young Female Identity," 111-29.

³⁶ Ryan Hartley, "Nightclubs, Dancing, and Reforms to Japan's Sex-Industry Laws (*Fueihō*): Lessons in Shifting Global Politico-Economic Trends from the 'No Dancing' Country," *Japan Forum* 32, no. 1 (2019): 126–55, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09555803.2018.1504110>.

³⁷ Toth, "J-Pop and Performances of Young Female Identity," 111-29.

became popular among Japanese young girls to the extent it built a new trend, which emphasizes its sexiness and cuteness even more, and finally the artists adjusted to the new trend.

Conclusion

Our four sources of media in Japan, which are Pornography, Manga and Anime, Social Media and News, and music, all have a general form of cyclical relationship. Especially pornography, and manga/anime have a mutual relationship with Japanese women's sexuality. However, the relationship seems more complicated and intertwined for social media, news, and music; in a sense, it is no longer simply cyclical or non-cyclical. Pornography can influence women's sexual desires and expectations, and women can participate in and reproduce these expectations. Japanese culture, mainly manga and anime, can set unrealistic physical and attraction expectations for women, while social media perpetuates unrealistic beauty standards and negative ideas about birth control. Japanese popular music, such as enka, idol, and dance music, also shapes women's sexuality through the consumption and production of dramatized femininity. This cyclical relationship between media and women's sexuality can have positive and negative impacts.

Unfortunately, due to the scope of our question, we had to focus on a heterosexual view of sex and sexuality. A deeper analysis of sexuality and media in Japan would include an analysis of queerness in media and how the relationship between media and queer people has changed over time. Queer considerations could be BL and GL (boys love and girls love), manga, queer porn, music from queer artists, and queer representation on social media. Additionally, the

examination should include how queerness is viewed in Japan with accounts from lived experiences of queer people and their peers.

Examining the relationship between sources of media and Japanese women's sexuality in our paper is relatively easy to understand, however other unseen variables may be present in these relationships. With more field research and interviews, a more systematic analysis of the relationship may be applied in future research. We suggest further research on the cyclical relationships over time and into the future; we are curious if these expectations are narrowing and if they will continue to do so.

Furthermore, the relationship between media and women's sexuality in Japan is not limited to the four sources of media discussed in our article. Other forms of media, such as advertising, literature, and film, also shape women's sexuality. For instance, advertisements often use language to create beauty anxiety and promote unrealistic beauty standards, which can affect women's body image and self-esteem. Literature and film also contribute to constructing gender roles and stereotypes, which can influence women's behavior and expectations.

In conclusion, the relationship between media and women's sexuality in Japan is complex and multifaceted. While the four media sources discussed in this paper - pornography, manga and anime, social media and news, and music - can influence women's desires and expectations, women also have agency in their consumption and production of media. Future research should investigate the relationship between media and women's sexuality in Japan, including the role of queerness in media and the impact of other forms of media on women's sexuality.

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