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Masculinities in Japan

Discovering the shifting gender boundaries of contemporary Japan

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Abstrakt

Cieľom tejto práce je opísať meniace sa ideály maskulinity za posledných približne tridsať rokov. Za túto dobu sa v Japonsku udialo niekoľko ekonomických ako aj spoločenských zmien, ktoré so sebou priniesli nový pohľad na postavenie mužov v spoločnosti a otvorili priestor pre vznik a šírenie nových foriem maskulinity - predstavovateľmi ktorých sú predovšetkým mladí Japonci vo vekovej skupine 18 az 26 rokov. V rámci práce sa preto zameriam na starší ideál maskulinity, dominantný predovšetkým po Druhej svetovej vojne, ale významný dodnes. V ďalších kapitolách opíšem meniace sa ideály, ktoré predstavujú mladšie generácie Japoncov, ako aj reakciu starších kritikov a masmédií na niektoré z týchto fenoménov.

Ďakujem vedúcej práci Mgr. Ivone Barešovej Ph.D., za jej trpezlivosť, ochotu a pomoc pri stanovovaní témy práce. Taktiež ďakujem svojej rodine a priateľom za ich podporu, bez ktorej by táto práca nemohla existovať.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	7
1.1. The emergence of men’s studies	10
2. Defining the masculine ideal of the salaryman.....	14
2.1. The Lost Decade.....	16
2.2. The salaryman and his family	19
3. The shifting boundaries of masculinity – aesthetics.....	21
3.1. Men’s fashion magazines in Japan.....	22
3.1.1. A brief history of men’s fashion periodicals	22
3.1.2. Men’s fashion magazines – style and content	24
3.1.3. Men’s narcissism versus the female glance	28
3.1.4. The concepts of individuality and conformity	35
3.1.5. Men’s fashion magazines and masculinity.....	36
3.2. Establishing men’s cosmetics market of Japan	41
3.3. Selling new male aesthetics through cosmetics	44
4. The herbivorous men of Japan.....	49
4.1. The origins of the <i>sōshokukei danshi</i> phenomenon.....	49
4.2. Crafting the <i>sōshokukei danshi</i> identity	54
4.3. The self-definition of the <i>sōshokukei danshi</i>	60
4.4. Salaryman masculinity - an unachievable ideal?	63
4.5. The <i>sōshokukei danshi</i> as fathers.....	66
5. Conclusion.....	69
Works Cited	71
Zhrnutie.....	75
Appendix.....	76

Notes on the Text

For the transcriptions of Japanese in this thesis, the modified Hepburn romanization system is used.

Unless stated otherwise, the translations of any Japanese language text are of the author of this thesis.

Throughout the text, Japanese names are given in their native order, that is, family name first, given name last. This does not apply to footnotes, where the names of all authors appear in the western order, in accordance with the MLA style of referencing.

Culture-specific expressions or denominations will be transcribed but left in Japanese, with the exception of the word "salaryman," which will be used in its English form to maintain the flow of the text.

1. Introduction

The beginnings of this thesis go back to the years 2009-2010, when I was allowed to spend six months in Japan as an exchange student. I took many preconceptions with myself, many of them concerning the Japanese people and society. Most of them were shattered during my stay, but one of the most fascinating facets of Japanese culture, to me, were the gender expressions of young Japanese men. In stark contrast with both the stereotypical middle-aged businessmen and their own peers back in Central Europe, these young men utilised traditionally feminine practices, moved around in distinctly stylish clothes, carried handbags, placed an unusual emphasis on looks and hairstyles and, in general, emitted an air of self-assurance with their new and colourful masculinity. Furthermore, most of these men did not seem to belong to any of the better-known subcultures that are recognizable by their distinct stylistics. What piqued my curiosity was, how such young men could possibly become the grey, overworked "salarymen" that all the big cities were still full of; if and when this transition will happen for the young man of today.

My interest then shifted to ideals of masculinity in Japan, and whether or how they have changed over the course of history. This was partly because of the television commercials for male beauty products that I saw at the time, and the interesting new gender models they promoted. It was also because of the *sōshokukei danshi* ("herbivorous men") "boom" that both foreign and Japanese media were still reporting on. I decided to try and describe the transformation of the hegemonic masculine model in Japan over the course of years. From this topic then, I finally chose to focus on the recent developments in terms of emerging new masculinities and the opposing "salaryman" one.

Although the title of this thesis mentions "masculinities" in plural, this denomination comes from the relation of hegemonic masculinity, as the one in power, to all other masculinities, which are being measured against it. However, it would be impossible within the limits of this work, to describe all marginalised masculinities in Japan. For this reason, this thesis will stay within the boundaries of "mainstream" heterosexual masculinity.

With respect to the newly emerging masculinities, no gender performance is created in a vacuum; in any culture there have to be changes in the social structure for new ideals to

become necessary. In the case of Japan, the emergence of new masculinities was made necessary by various socio-economical changes that shone a light on the inadequacies of the dominant masculine ideal, the "salaryman." It is therefore necessary to first look at the hegemonic masculinity that these men represent. The first part of this thesis is devoted to the definition of the salaryman, describing the historical background of this particular masculinity, as well as the changes that brought on its fall from grace. The typical features of the Japanese salaryman-headed family will also be explored, to shine a light on the domestic conditions that could further encourage the rise of new, marginalised youth masculinities in recent years.

The central part of the thesis discusses the various ways in which contemporary young Japanese men manage to negotiate their own masculinity in the light of traditional gender ideals. For this purpose, Japanese fashion magazines for young men will be looked at in greater detail, examining their content and the different ways in which they manage to merge the stereotypically feminine act of fashion consumption with masculine performance. Fashion as a form of self-definition will also be looked at.

Closely related to fashion consumption is the heightened interest in beauty procedures and products aimed at men, which has gained great popularity in Japan in the recent years. As with fashion, the use of beauty products challenges the boundaries of traditional masculinity and shapes the modern "manly" ideals of Japanese youth. After an introduction to men's cosmetics market and its beginnings, the most popular salons and products are described, followed by select commercials for beauty products that have been immensely popular in Japan in the recent years. These commercials are then inspected to reveal the masculine ideals that they promote.

Finally, the thesis looks at the phenomenon known as the *sōshokukei danshi*. This concept has stood in the centre of attention of both the media and the general public for the past years, after it was popularised in a women's fashion magazine. The term was originally coined to describe the changing lifestyle of contemporary young Japanese men, whose gender practices are an answer to the values of their fathers or grandfathers, and therefore stand in stark contrast to their salaryman masculinity. It has later shifted in meaning, however, and is today widely used in various contexts to describe, and often criticise, young men in Japan. The chapter devoted to this concept therefore describes the original idea behind the concept, as

well as the additional connotations the media has attached to it over time. In connection to this, a part of this chapter is devoted to the power of branding and the use of language as a means of both legitimisation and marginalisation. The possible reasons behind the vocal criticism towards *sōshokukei danshi* are also pointed out, exposing the underlying weaknesses of the salaryman masculinity, and hegemonic masculinity in general.

1.1. The emergence of men's studies

The 1970s and the 1980s saw a wave of feminist theory and activism in Japan. “Women’s issues” became widely discussed not only by academics, but also by the mass media and general public. The power relations between the sexes began shifting, with women gaining the freedom to choose between a career and marriage, to decide when they want to get married and who their spouses should be. Scholarly works dealing with gender were biased towards the feminist perspective at the time. This was partly because gender studies as such were still a novelty in the 1980s; the few academics that addressed gender problems were influenced by the feminist approach of the time. Because of this, such academics did not separate “men’s issues,” since the point of women’s studies was to separate women from the society ruled by hegemonic masculinity. In this sense, women were the oppressed “others,” in contrast to men, who represented society in general.

It is not surprising, in this context, that some of the first important academic works dealing with masculinity in Japan were written by women. By the end of the 1980s the issues of Japanese men struggling with the image of hegemonic masculinity came to be recognized. Sekii, for example, conducted a research in 1989, that revealed that the personalities of individual men often did not match the social norms they were supposed to adhere to, and this gap could result in a sense of oppression for these men.¹ Even later, when men’s studies were beginning to gain wider recognition in Japan, feminist scholars helped to propagate issues related to men by dedicating a volume of the series *Nihon no feminizumu* (Feminism in Japan) to men’s studies (published in 1995).² One could conclude that men’s studies in Japan were a product of the feminist movement, an answer to the preoccupation with “women’s issues” of the 1970s and 1980s. The issues linked to masculinity were becoming widely recognized in the 1990s; this was due to the combination of various social and economical factors and the works of a few pioneers in men’s studies, which we will introduce in the following sections.

The first person to describe men’s studies (*danseigaku*, 男性学) in Japan was the psychologist Watanabe Tsuneo in his book *Datsudansei no jidai: andoroginasu wo mezasu*

¹ Tomoko Sekii, "Danseisei ni kansuru jisshōteki kenkyū." *Kazoku Kenkyū Ninpō* 15 (1989) 65-83.

² T. Inoue, C. Ueno and Y. Ehara, *Danseigaku* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1995)

bunmeigaku (The Age of abandoning masculinity: studies towards an androgynous civilization; 1986). In his book Watanabe studied men engaging in transvestism and came to the conclusion, that men were oppressed by ideas of *otokorashisa*, or manliness, in society.³ Watanabe also advocated “men’s liberation” in Japan and became a great influence for academics who decided to devote themselves to men’s studies.

Probably the most famous and influential academic in the field of *danseigaku* in the 1990s was Itō Kimio (b. 1951). His first book on the topic of masculinity was “*Otokorashisa*” *no yukue* (The course of masculinity, 1993). In this book, Itō seeks to describe the ideals that came to be known as “masculine” and also to describe what he calls an “age of crisis for masculinity.”⁴ According to Ito, the idea of “manliness” was based on ideals of dominance, ownership and authority, and, on the other hand, the lack of such aims came to be considered “unmanly.”⁵ With the changing circumstances of Japan’s gender roles, however, Itō comes to question these ideals and advocates new approaches to human relationships.

In 1989, Itō had made a prediction about the 1990s becoming the period of men’s problems. He refers to this in the foreword to his second book, *Danseigaku nyūmon* (An introduction to men’s studies; 1996), stating that:

Towards the end of 1989 I made a certain prediction. It was as follows: “The decades of the 1970s and 1880s were the period of ‘women’s issues,’ issues which are likely to gain increasing significance in the future. Following on from this trend, the 1990s will see the beginning of the age of ‘men’s issues’.” This prediction has certainly come true.⁶

Itō’s observation is based on his own experience as a lecturer; during the 1990s he gave lectures on men’s studies at various universities in Japan, and the number of attendants greatly exceeded his expectations. It was also during this decade that the topic of Japanese men overstepped the boundaries of academic discourse and was picked up by mass media. Itō himself was asked to give a few short lectures on NHK’s educational television program

³ See Yoko Tokuhiko, *Marriage in Contemporary Japan* (Taylor & Francis e-library, 2009) 64.

⁴ Kimio Itō, “*Otokorashisa*” *no yukue* (Tokyo: Shin’yōsha, 1993)

⁵ „Itō Kimio,” *Wikipedia Japan* (2012), accessed 16. July 2012

⁶ Kimio Itō, “Foreword,” in *Genders, Transgenders and Sexualities in Japan*, ed. Mark J. McLelland, Romit Dasgupta (Oxon: Routledge, 2005) 147.

“NHK ningenkōza” (Lectures on humanity) in 2003. Starting from the 1990s, men have gradually become a topic of discussion both on an academic and level and the level of everyday communication, enforced by the media’s new-found preoccupation with the changing status of men in Japan. Since the changes that went on at the time (and their results) will be described in following chapters, what follows is a brief summary of the influencing factors of the 1990s related to Japanese masculinity.

The last decade of the 20th century was a time of economic recession in Japan. With the bursting of the Japanese asset price bubble in 1991, the period of economic growth that started after the World War II came to a halt. The recession brought with itself worsening employment conditions, undermining the system of lifelong employment and men’s status of breadwinners in general. The unemployment rate was rising, and although it never reached crisis levels, men could no longer feel safe in their salaryman status. Their situation was further complicated by the rising number of (married) women entering the workforce. By the end of the century, the seemingly unshakeable image of the “corporate warrior” was slowly beginning to crumble.

Demographic changes were another factor, and they brought with them an interesting, albeit bittersweet, phenomenon called *daini no jinsei* (second life). Life expectancy in Japan was constantly increasing since after the war, and reached 76 years for men and 82 years for women by 1990 (compared to 1955, this was a 6 and 14 year increase respectively).⁷ This meant that many men who retired from work (usually at the age of 60 to 65) found themselves completely inept to function in their own home and were thus fully dependent on their wives. Due to them fully devoting their life to their careers, these men had no idea about housework and had little to no contact with the people in their neighbourhood. Their wives, on the other hand, have devoted their lives to running the household and were active members of various communities (through their neighbourhood or their children’s school). By the time their husbands retired, they were free to pursue various interests, devote themselves to hobbies and enjoy the company of friends, since they no longer had the duty to raise children. Their retired spouses became a sort of a nuisance, which led to these men being called *nureochiba* (“wet

⁷ Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, “Abridged Life Tables for Japan 2006,” *Webpage of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare* (2012), accessed 14. July 2012.

fallen leaves”, describing the way they clung to their wives) or *sodaigomi* (“oversized garbage”). The work-oriented masculinity of Japanese men that began to lose its appeal during the 1990’s was thus further diminished with old age, and the sight of such “wet leaves” as the product of life-long devotion to the ideal of a working man gave strength to the voices calling for reevaluation of the gender practices of the time.

The 1980s and 1990s were ground-breaking in making visible the issues of Japanese men and establishing the topic of men and masculinities as an autonomous field of academic discourse. In addition, with the social and economic changes that occurred towards the end of the century, the image of the salaryman as the representation of hegemonic masculinity began to be questioned, which presented the younger generations with a chance to re-evaluate their conception of masculinity. The following chapters will deal with the shifting boundaries of what is considered “masculine” and the manifestation of these changes in the past three decades.

2. Defining the masculine ideal of the salaryman

Any type of discourse on masculinity in Japan has for decades been dominated by the concept of the salaryman. The image of these white-collar workers has become a Japanese icon over the years, recognized by both the Japanese public and foreign observers as an inherent characteristic of Japanese culture. This was undoubtedly possible thanks to the fascination with the salaryman during the years of high economic growth in Japan (from the 1960s to 1980s; see e.g. Vogel 1971). As an idol, the salaryman has served as a masculine ideal for generations of young men to strive for. However in recent years this ideal has been losing ground and has been brought into contrast with the new generation of men epitomised by the so-called *sōshokukei danshi*.

The roots of the salaryman can be traced back as far as the Tokugawa period (1603-1867). As Vogel writes, “after 1600 when Japan achieved internal stability, the military functions of the samurai withered away and many samurai became, in effect, administrators working for the clan government. With the abolition of samurai class distinctions in early Meiji [period], many ex-samurai became white-collar workers in government offices and government-sponsored industry.”⁸ The term itself comes from the Taishō period (1912-26), when it was coined to describe white collar workers with university education (excluding specialised professions such as doctors, lawyers or civil servants. However, it gained larger popularity only after the Second World War, when the number of white-collar workers began to rise rapidly. According to Roberson and Suzuki, before the war, salarymen constituted only 10% of Japan’s workforce, but in 1955, half of the households were headed by salarymen, and this number climbed to 75% by 1970.⁹ Although there are problems here with the definition of salaryman (which includes every full-time employee receiving a monthly salary), these numbers show how the salaryman model has become a widespread phenomenon and an important part of masculine identity.

As the aforementioned numbers show, it is not easy to give a clear definition of the Japanese salaryman. At its narrowest, as Dasgupta writes, “the term refers to salaried

⁸ Ezra Vogel, *Japan's New Middle Class* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971) 5.

⁹ See James E. Roberson and Nobue Suzuki, Introduction, *Men and Masculinities in Japan* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003) 7.

white-collar male employees of private-sector organisations, typically characterised by such features as life-time employment, seniority-based salary indexing and promotions, and a generally paternalistic concern for the employee on the part of the company in return for steady, diligent loyalty to the organisation.”¹⁰ Such a description is then joined by other generalised characteristics of salarymen, like the typical white shirt, grey suit and briefcase, unhealthy lifestyle (smoking, drinking beer and short lunch breaks) and constant exhaustion.

Despite this stereotypical and often ridiculed image, the salarymen represented a great socio-economical force in post-war Japan. They are generally considered to be the driving force behind Japan's rapid economical growth after World War II, which was possible thanks to the devotion and work-oriented lifestyle of these men, who, in many cases, sacrificed their own health and free time for the sake of the company they worked for. Because of their hard-working nature, the salarymen have become an ideal of diligence and self-sacrifice - an ideal for all men to strive for. Indeed, in the years of Japan's "economical miracle," the salaryman became the embodiment of the newly emerging consumption-oriented middle-class and was elevated to hegemonic status in gender discourse.

The term hegemony is, in general, used to describe "the relatively dominant position of a particular set of ideas and their associated tendency to become commonsensical and intuitive, thereby inhibiting the dissemination or even the articulation of alternative ideas."¹¹ In the context of gender discourse, hegemonic masculinity has been described as a gender practice used to ensure men's dominance over women, but also a dominant form of masculinity that is prescriptive in nature and restrictive towards any other, alternative masculine practices. Salaryman masculinity has thus become a norm, an ideal for all Japanese men to strive for, even if it was virtually impossible for many of them to perform it. However, the important characteristic of hegemonic masculinity is that it is normative; it remains in dominant position regardless of how many men actively enact it. As Connell and Messerschmidt summarise:

Hegemonic masculinity was distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in

¹⁰ Romit Dasgupta, "Creating Corporate Warriors" in *Asian Masculinities: The Meaning and Practice of Manhood in China and Japan*, ed. Kam Louie, Morris Low (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003) 118.

¹¹ "Hegemony," *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2013), accessed 28. April 2014

the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man [and] it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it.¹²

Because of this, the exact number of salarymen in relation to other masculinities (farmers, blue-collar workers or other marginalised performances) is irrelevant; salaryman masculinity is a surviving ideal that is continuously enforced on men in Japanese culture. Hegemonic masculinity, however, is not constant and is open to historical change, should circumstances allow. In Japan, the circumstances that allowed the salaryman masculinity its rise to hegemony have largely diminished by the late 1990s, creating a new space the rethinking of dominant masculine ideals and for alternative masculinities to emerge into the foreground, most prominent of which came to be known as the *sōshokukei danshi*.

2.1. The Lost Decade

In order to understand the background of the newly-emerging *sōshokukei danshi* masculinity in Japan, we need to look at some of the more recent developments in the history of salaryman masculinity - namely, the years that have been retrospectively labelled the Lost Decade. The various changes during this period, albeit not necessarily positive in the context of Japanese economy, helped fuel the reconstruction of gender identities, especially that of salaryman masculinity.

The Lost Decade (失われた10年, *ushinawareta jūnen*), spanning from 1991 to the beginning of 2002, has been described as a “period of economic slowdown, corporate restructurings, and rising unemployment rates, coupled with a growing sense of collective socio-cultural insecurity and anxiety.”¹³ Up until this time, Japan has been experiencing a steady economical growth, which allowed for the rise of the “new middle class” of salaryman

¹² R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept" in *Gender & Society*, Vol. 19 No. 6, (2005) 832.

¹³ Kōichi Shimokawa, '*Ushinawareta jūnen' wa norikoerareta ka* (Tokyo: Chūkō Shinsho, 2006) 3-11; qtd. in Romit Dasgupta, "The 'Lost Decade' of the 1990s and Shifting Masculinities in Japan," *Culture, Society and Masculinities*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2009)

families, accompanied by a sense of social security and a growing emphasis on consumerism. The bursting of the largely speculation-driven Japanese asset price bubble, however, brought on years of economic stagnation, which brought with itself changes concerning the employment system of many salarymen.

The recession of the 1990s took away from the salarymen three of their treasured benefits: lifetime employment, a seniority-based system of promotion and company unionism. With numerous bankruptcies following the burst of the price bubble, many salarymen had to be laid-off. From 1992 to 2001, unemployment in Japan rose from 2.1% to 5%.¹⁴ This problem pertained to both young and middle-aged men, for both groups suddenly became unprofitable for many companies that were trying to cut expenses. In the case of young university graduates, the promise of easily attainable full-time employment became unavailable. Up until 1991, it had been a well-established practice for companies to hire graduates right out of university. With the changed economical circumstances however, corporations had to cut back on hiring and training new employees. The salaryman model has become, for many young men, either unattainable or simply impractical to subscribe to, as they chose different types of employment (such as part-time jobs or temporary employment in the tertiary sector).

With regard to the middle-aged, white-collar employees of private organizations that came to embody the salaryman model, many of them found themselves in a position of “a costly layer of ‘excess fat,’” as Dasgupta labels them.¹⁵ Many of these men had entered the workforce in the 1960s and 1970s, when economic growth peaked in Japan. The expectation was that this growth will last and companies will be able to sustain the large number of employees, who will slowly crawl their way up the corporate ladder, while the corporation would keep growing and creating enough middle-management positions for to sustain this generation of employees. Unfortunately, at about the time these men had made the transition into mid-career, the economic slowdown hit Japan, leaving organisations with a large number

¹⁴ Japan Institute of Labor, *Japanese working life profile 2003* (Tokyo: Japan Institute of Labor, 2003) qtd. in Dasgupta, "Lost Decade"

¹⁵ Romit Dasgupta, "The 'Lost Decade' of the 1990s and Shifting Masculinities in Japan," *Culture, Society and Masculinities*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2009) 85.

of extra employees.¹⁶ Since these men were mostly on mid-management level, they had a higher salary than regular entry level employees, thus “blocking” the way for new staff; because of the lack of new employees however, these men had become needless. This resulted either in being sent away to outlying branch offices of the company (resulting in the so called *tanshin funin* phenomenon of a father leaving his family behind and moving to his new workplace), being asked to work only part-time or, ultimately, being laid-off.

The loss of employment hit these men especially hard - both on a practical and ideological level. On one hand, their family lost most, if not all, of their income, since it was a well-established practice for men to be the sole breadwinner of the household. On the other hand, being dismissed from one’s workplace went against the system of lifetime employment that Japanese corporations were well-known for. The middle-aged men discussed here have, by the time they were laid-off, invested years of their lives into a system that promised to take care of their well-being, and that of their families, for years to come. It is therefore understandable that many men were feeling deeply disappointed.

Disappointment was not the only underlying emotion of the Lost Decade, however. For the newly unemployed salarymen, the loss of a job came with the bitter aftertaste of failure as a man. This is because the idea of a man’s worth was closely related to his success at work. Japan has a long history of separating the social spheres of men and women, especially in the context of a family. Women have therefore been associated with the “inside” sphere of taking care of the home and children, while men were linked to the “outside,” devoting themselves to work and providing for their family. After the war, many men therefore came to associate their *ikigai*, or motivation in life, with work. As Dasgupta relates, “for middle-aged men, the implications of being retrenched were particularly acute. Not only did they have to contend with the economic strain posed on them and their families, but given the centrality of work in defining their identity up until that point, their very masculinity was compromised.”¹⁷ The crisis of masculinity, that Itō Kimio described in 1993, dealt a strong blow to the seemingly unshakable image of the salaryman.

¹⁶ Ibid, 84-85.

¹⁷ Ibid, 85.

2.2. The salaryman and his family

The socio-economical changes of the Lost Decade revealed the various aspects and inadequacies of the Japanese family model. Although the setup may have worked well during the affluent years of post-war economy, this was no more the case in the 1990s. What was brought to light was, in many families, a glaring lack of effective communication accompanied by the non-existence of the father figure.

Kumagai aptly sums up the problems of modern Japanese family dynamics as follows:

[Analyses] reveal two important patterns of family interaction: unintegrated conjugal relationships and the psychological absence of the father in the family. The continued lack of spousal integration, or real companionship between husband and wife, is symptomatic of traditional family life in Japan, and it leads to unbalanced relations within the family. [...]

The status of Japanese fathers has deteriorated significantly since World War II; they are no longer the authoritarian figure in the home. Mothers compensate for frustrations with their spouses by intensifying the already close-knit ties with their children. [...]

Thus, nuclearization of the Japanese family has reconfirmed the strong vertical ties found in the traditional *ie* system, rather than building the strong horizontal husband-wife relationships that are found in Western societies.¹⁸

The roots of the lack of husband-wife communication go far back in Japanese history. Even in the modern family one can find traces of the old feudal *ie* system, based on Confucian ideas of filial piety as well as a clear-cut distinction between the spheres of everyday life for both sexes. Although the *ie* system was officially abolished after World War II, it did not automatically disappear from family structures. Men continued to associate their lives with the “outside” world of corporate life, while women would take care of everything related to the household. This kind of arrangement created a gap between husband and wife, especially because of the underlying assumption that burdening one’s spouse with problems outside of their “sphere”

¹⁸ Fumie Kumagai, *Families in Japan* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2008) 18-19.

was inadvisable. Generally, men were discouraged from taking the stresses of the workplace back home, which often resulted in them spending the night out drinking with colleagues or spending time playing games like *pachinko*. On the other hand, women were expected to keep the household running and make sure of the children's academic success - once again, without bothering their already stressed husbands with related problems. Even though after the war love marriages became increasingly popular in Japan, a kind of emotional reliance and interchangeability of responsibilities was still lacking in many Japanese families.

It was in this environment that many of the *sōshokukei danshi* of today were raised. Because of the gender division of work between their parents, these young men were raised primarily by their mothers. This would, on one hand, account for the very strong and good relation with their mothers that the *sōshokukei danshi* are said to exhibit even in their adult lives. This may also tie in to the generally positive attitude of these men towards their (extended) families, as opposed to romantic relationships. In the course of their upbringing, they lacked a model of a functional marital relationship that could be translated into the changing conditions of the “post-bubble” society. It is no wonder then, that the *sōshokukei danshi* display certain reluctance in initiating a romantic relationship, for the model that they saw growing up ended up being disappointing.

The Lost Decade brought with itself unexpected social and economical changes and laid down the groundwork for the rethinking of the ideal of hegemonic masculinity in Japan. The salaryman, previously the personalisation of financial security and responsibility, was quickly losing its appeal as an ideal. Young men who grew up with overly attached mothers and absentee fathers witnessed the lack of communication and inadequacy of such a household structure and started looking for alternate gender identities, even if it means taking on traditionally female roles.

3. The shifting boundaries of masculinity – aesthetics

As it was mentioned previously, by the end of the 20th century, the image of masculinity in Japan reached a stage that some came to refer to as a “crisis.” This crisis described the weakened position of the work-oriented man as the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity. The image of the salaryman was slowly slipping from the position of an ideal to being rejected and even ridiculed by the younger generations. The boundaries of what was perceived as masculine were beginning to move, and the change rested on the shoulders of the young men of the 1980s and 1990s, aided by well-timed influences from the magazine and cosmetic industries, both of which will be the topic of separate chapters.

With the heightened interest in Japanese (popular) culture overseas in the past two decades, young Japanese men suddenly became the centre of attention and – to certain extent – admiration. Nevertheless, from the point of view of a person unacquainted with modern Japanese culture, these men may seem effeminate or even “girly.” The phenomenon of young beauty conscious Japanese men registered also on an academic level, being described as the “feminization of masculinity.”¹⁹ Whether this designation is really adequate will be discussed later on; to understand the way Japanese masculinity has been changing for the past decades, we will first look at the different influencing factors and their materialization within the boundaries of heterosexual masculinity. This definition is important, because although some realizations of the masculinity of contemporary young Japanese men might seem extremely different from the everyday image of a male, they manage to wilfully stay in the realm of heterosexuality, constituting a part of the “mainstream” masculinity instead of some marginalized group.

With respect to contemporary young Japanese men, the following chapters will describe the changes in male aesthetics. Firstly, the emergence of men’s fashion magazines will be described, emphasizing their importance in creating a new type of masculinity. The content of select magazines will also be examined. Secondly, the new-found stress on male

¹⁹ See Yumiko Iida, "Beyond the 'Feminization of Culture and Masculinity'", in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 6, no. 1 (March 2005) 64.

aesthetics will be described, where men are compelled to care for their outward appearance to the same extent women do, with the use of cosmetic products and beauty services.

3.1. Men's fashion magazines in Japan

Fashion magazines for male readership emerged in Japan during the 1980s, a time that saw the rising popularity of men's magazines in general. Magazines for men were not a complete novelty, but what the 1980s brought was an emphasis on "the supposed originality of the men's magazine format."²⁰ This means that, similarly to the emergence of men's studies, magazines now acknowledged and specified their target readers as men. Magazines for men were up to this point "unmarked," without receiving official recognition as a separate category, while women's magazines were the "marked" ones.²¹ Women's magazines needed to be distinguished, while magazines for men were more general, dealing with topics that might mostly interest men, like cars, sports, technology or economics and politics. Nevertheless, since the 1980s, men's magazines became recognised as an independent category.

"Men's magazines" in Japan is now quite a broad concept, and in order to deal with the emerging "feminised" masculinity of Japanese youth, it needs to be narrowed down. What is described as "men's fashion magazines" is a group of publications targeting a young male readership, usually high-school and university students up to their late twenties. Arguably, these magazines have more in common with women's magazines than with the ones targeting older men, highlighting the blurring boundaries between genders in contemporary youth culture.

3.1.1. A brief history of men's fashion periodicals

Many of the leading fashion magazines for men in Japan started as counterparts to popular women's magazines. It was a way for publishers to address a new readership by creating magazines that young men could read without embarrassment. By the 1980s, fashion

²⁰ Frank Mort, *Cultures of Consumption: Masculinities and Social Space in Late Twentieth-Century Britain* (London: Routledge, 1996) 19.

²¹ See Keiko Tanaka, "The Language of Japanese Men's Magazines: young men who don't want to get hurt," in *Masculinity and Men's Lifestyle Magazines*, ed. Bethan Benwell (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003) 223.

was not just the concern of women anymore; men were quickly becoming consumers too, and publishers and advertisers were ready to cater to their needs. The trend for men's fashion magazines was set by the launch of magazines for young women, such as *an.an*, *non-no* and *JJ*, all of which are still popular today. *An.an* was the first of these women's magazines, launched in 1970. It targeted a younger audience than usual women's magazines, and put great stress on the visual aspect and advertisements rather than text. It was a major medium for advertising, and it also had a foreign sounding title (a trend that later magazines copied).²² It was followed by *non-no* (1971) and *JJ* (1975), *non-no* having maintained the spot of the number one selling magazine for young women ever since.²³

In 1976, *an.an*'s publisher launched the magazine's male counterpart called *Popeye*, which became the first magazine for young men that followed the trend of women's fashion magazines. *Popeye* relied heavily on advertising and featured sections on fashion, which were unprecedented in men's magazines of the time. The subtitle of the magazine is "Magazine for City Boys," and thus the subculture consisting of followers of *Popeye* became known as the "city boys."

After the launch of *Popeye* (and its great success), other fashion magazines for men followed, such as *DonDon* (1977) and *Hot-Dog Press* (1979). Both of them were launched as a kind of opposition to *Popeye*, but have since been discontinued. Nevertheless three of the magazines started after *Popeye* are still being published – *Brutus* (1980), *Fine Boys* (1986) and *Men's non-no* (1987). *Brutus* is published by the same company as *Popeye*, and at the time of its launch, was "regarded as the first lifestyle magazine for men."²⁴ *Men's non-no* is the male counterpart of *non-no* and is the best-selling fashion magazine for young men.²⁵ *Men's non-no* and *Popeye* are similar in both their target group (university students and men in their late 20s) and content. Although the sales of *Fine Boys* are considerably lower than those of *Men's non-no*, it is still one of the most popular fashion magazines for men on the Japanese market,

²² See Tanaka, 224.

²³ Based on data from the Japan Magazine Advertising Association and the Japan Magazine Publishers Association

²⁴ Tanaka, 226.

²⁵ Based on data from the JMPA

ranging from second best-selling (2006) to fourth best-selling (2010-2011).²⁶ Its popularity could be attributed to its use of famous Japanese idols on its cover, as well as to the magazine's "user-friendly" approach to style, emphasizing clothes for everyday wear and offering advice to newcomers to fashion.²⁷ Because of their history and impact, *Fine Boys*, *Men's non-no* and *Popeye* have been chosen as the topic for further research on Japanese men's fashion magazines and their representation of contemporary masculinity.

3.1.2. *Men's fashion magazines – style and content*

To understand the image of masculinity the above-mentioned titles are conveying, they have to be placed in a wider historical context of men's magazines. The most effective way of analysing these magazines is to compare them to their British counterparts. In the 1980s and 1990s, magazines aimed at a male readership were on the rise also in the United Kingdom, conforming to two very contrasting ideals of masculinity, which came to be referred to as the "new man" and "new lad". As it will be discussed further, the readership of all three chosen Japanese periodicals could be said to fall into the category of the "new man".

The new masculine identity known as the "new man" emerged in the 1980s, possibly as an answer to the intensifying women's movement in Britain. As a concept it was popularized by magazines such as *Arena* and *GQ*, the former being associated with the creation of the concept. In general, the "new man" was a contrasting idea to the traditionally masculine and misogynist "laddish" masculinity. These "lads" are depicted as being:

[...] hedonistic, post (if not anti) feminist, and preeminently concerned with beer, football and 'shagging' women. [Their] outlook on life could be characterized as anti-aspirational and owes a lot to a particular classed articulation of masculinity.²⁸

While not all of the implications of the "laddish" hegemonic masculinity were lost on the "new man", it was a movement that in large answered the needs of the new, liberated woman whose expectations have been shaped by the wave of feminism in the 1970s.

²⁶ Based on data from the Japan Audit Bureau of Circulations and the JMPA

²⁷ See „FINEBOYS”, *Wikipedia Japan* (2012), accessed 20. July 2012

²⁸ Rosalind Gill, "Power and the Production of Subjects: A Genealogy of the New Man and New Lad," in *Masculinity and Men's Lifestyle Magazines*, ed. Bethan Benwell (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003) 37.

Shaped by new ideals and expectations, the “new man” came to incorporate both traditionally feminine and masculine traits. He “had come to terms with his traditionally neglected emotional dimension, and now showed greater attention to and respect for women’s requirements and demands, and an unusual concern with his personal appearance”.²⁹ The last point is especially important, since the preoccupation with one’s appearance was a new trend not only in Britain, but also among Japanese men. It is also noteworthy that while in the United Kingdom the “new man” magazines were quickly replaced by the emerging “new lad” movement (that gained popularity in the 1990s), Japan has not seen such a trend. None of the Japanese magazines described in this chapter fall into the category of the “new lad” and yet they remain immensely popular.

What distinguishes Japanese men’s fashion magazines from their Western counterparts (such as *Men’s Health*, *GQ* or *Loaded*) is both their general content and the approach to gender performance in connection to women. As their designation implies, the Japanese magazines discussed here are mainly concerned with fashion. Depending on the specific magazine, this can mean the promotion of high-fashion brands (such as Louis Vuitton or Giorgio Armani) or more affordable clothing for everyday wear, catering mostly to the readership made up of university students living on a budget. In all three magazines discussed in this chapter, fashion related content takes up more than 60 per cent of the analysed volumes. Combined with fashion related advertisement, this number rose to 84.9 per cent in *Fineboys*, 76.2 per cent in *Men’s non-no* and 73.8 per cent in the case of *Popeye*. The remaining fifteen to twenty-five per cent of content is then divided between features about sports, entertainment, grooming tips and interviews. (see Graphs 1-3)

In contrast to fashion, such topics as sports, cars, and alcohol are scarcely featured in *Popeye*, *Men’s non-no*, and *Fine Boys*. Based on a comparison of select issues of the three periodicals, *Men’s non-no* had two pages dedicated to electronics and four pages to sports. In contrast, *Popeye* had eight pages of sports and two pages featuring cars and electronics (see Graphs 1-3). The selected issue of *Popeye* was also the only one to feature a tobacco advertisement, albeit only one page. It is notable, therefore, that the portions these features

²⁹ Eduardo de Gregorio Godeo, “Exploring Identity Issues in British Men’s Magazines’ Problem Pages: A Cultural Studies Perspective,” *Miscelánea: A Journal of English and American Studies* Vol. 34 (2006) 47.

take up from the whole magazine are low, almost inconsequential. Contrary to their Western counterparts, these Japanese magazines do not rely on traditional images when promoting masculinity; they manage to maintain a distinctly male-oriented tone without enforcing ideas of archetypal hegemonic masculinity.

As for the representation of women, each magazine has regular features introducing a young female model, singer or actress, accompanied by an interview. However, as Monden states:

[T]hese women tend to be presented as pseudo-girlfriends of the reader, and are interviewed in such a friendly manner that they might be objectified but are seldom eroticised. Their pictures accentuate their sweet and lovely qualities rather than their sensuality, thus reinforcing this idea.³⁰

The women interviewed in these magazines are presented as a possible object of romantic interest for the reader, but never sexually objectified or photographed in ways that could be sexually provocative. [see Figure 1] This lack of eroticism is further accentuated by the fact that the policies of *Popeye*, at the time of its launch in 1976, included that the magazine would not include nude images.³¹



³⁰ Masafumi Monden, "Refashioning the Romantics," thesis, University of Technology, Sydney, 2011, 64.

³¹ Shiine Yamato. *Popeye monogatari* (Tokyo: Shincho-sha, 2008) 46.

Figure 1 Actress Arimura Kasumi photographed in a date-like setting in *Men's non-no* (March 2013)

This of course does not mean that there are no men's magazines in Japan that feature nude or otherwise sexualized images of women. Nevertheless, the popularity of fashion magazines described here proves that there is a substantial interest among young Japanese men in a kind of masculinity that does not derive itself from the objectification and subjugation of women and is more focused on a sense of self-reliance through style and aesthetics. This is in stark contrast with magazines such as *Loaded* and *GQ*, where, even today, there is a large gap between the representation of men and women. For example, the vast majority of men on the cover of *GQ* are photographed wearing a suit and tie, standing or sitting down. Occasionally some of these men would wear a t-shirt to accentuate their muscular physique. On the other hand, female celebrities are photographed in revealing outfits (mostly in underwear, but occasionally without) and suggestive poses (see Figure 2). There is a clear distinction between the sexes, which involves reducing women to objects of sexual desire (accompanied by an implication of willingness on the women's part).



Figure 2 Sample covers of *GQ* magazine

When explored from this perspective, it is clear that men's fashion magazines in Japan have come to represent a different kind of masculine ideal. While expensive alcohol, cars and highly sexualized women still define "manliness" in Western magazines, the Japanese titles have managed to almost completely diminish these from between their pages, creating ideal conditions for young men in which they can express their individuality and dress fashionably for their own benefit first, and that of women second.

3.1.3. *Men's narcissism versus the female glance*

As it has been mentioned earlier, women as an object of desire have been to the most part absent for men's fashion magazines in Japan. It could therefore be argued, that these magazines support an unprecedented fashion-consciousness in young Japanese men, where the wish to feel good and be stylish for one's own benefit became equally (if not more) important to the urge to become the object of female desire. Such narcissistic impulses do not, however, undermine the masculinity of the readers; indeed, they have become a part of it instead.

The reason why the new, fashion-conscious generation of Japanese men tends to be perceived as feminine by the general public (and often ridiculed by foreign observers) lies in the general idea that is consumerism aimed at women. Shopping for clothes or shoes and using a variety of beauty products are stereotypically the activities of women, as opposed to men, who assume the position of a passive spectator. In this context, men starting to actively engage in consumerism tend to be frowned upon and dismissed, in many cases, as being too "girly" or "unmanly". The fact that men's fashion magazines in Japan were in many cases a spinoff of popular women's magazines may also serve to support this notion. Nevertheless, contemporary men's fashion magazines have always managed to meticulously guarantee the masculinity of their content, thus not compromising that of their readers. We will now look at this balance in greater detail.

The first and most apparent method of asserting heterosexual masculinity in a magazine is to involve the possibility of romance with the opposite sex. Even though there is a very limited space in men's fashion magazines for topics concerning women, they are not completely devoid of the female voice. These magazines do include features with women commenting on select male fashion trends or dismissing some sartorial styles as "NG" (the Japanese initialism for "no good"). Occasionally, they would ask these women for relationship-related advice, such as good date spots or ideas for presents (the January issue of *Men's non-no* featured a twelve-page-long article about Christmas gifts that women would prefer, under the title "Everything that girls want"³² – see Figure 3). Still, most of the topics concerning being popular with girls are connected to fashion features.

³² "Onna no ko ga hoshii mono, zenbu," *Men's non-no*, Jan. 2013: 111-122.



Figure 3 One page of a fashion spread featuring women deciding on "non-NG" colour combinations for men to wear (left) and advice about presents to get for girls (right)

These articles support the idea that young men can be popular and “get the girl” simply by dressing tastefully and stylishly. The booklet in the April issue of *Fineboys* brings a hundred fully illustrated pages full of different style tips for young men. One of the main categories in the booklet is preoccupied with styles that will help the reader to “get the girls” (*joseiuke*). The title text describes the importance of fashion-consciousness when approaching women:

There are a lot of girls who attach greater importance to mysteriousness than to facial features!

They are immensely popular with girls although they look plain.³³ Actually, these guys know very well, what makes girls’ hearts skip a beat. In other words, the reason they are so popular is not in their features, but their mysteriousness! The fastest way to creating such a unique aura is to heighten one’s fashion sense. If you learn the innermost secrets of getting girls and put these secrets into practice, your esteem will without a doubt rise.³⁴

The booklet then continues on to describe what different types of women look for in their

³³ The word used is *futsumen*, an abbreviation of *futsuu no dansei*, meaning an average/plain looking man.
³⁴ “Muteki no kōde-jutsu irasuto kanzen BOOK!” *Fineboys* April 2013: 57.

partners and offers a range of outfits to fit these expectations, warning the reader not to go overboard with their efforts.

The fear of being criticized by women for their clothing is often used as an underlying theme of features in *Fineboys*. In the June 2012 issue of the magazine, young attractive women were commenting on different sartorial styles. One article was dedicated to the length and style of pants, with comments such as “You are not a woman, so don’t get such short ones!”³⁵ The article featured many items, arranged next to each other based on a scale of what is good and what is not acceptable. (see Figure 4)



Figure 4 A page from the *Fineboys* booklet, summarizing what different types of women want in a man (left) and young women commenting on styles of pants (right)

Although some of the criticism from young women may sound harsh, features like these help young men decide on their individual style and gain self-confidence in approaching women. The preoccupation with one’s looks is therefore not shunned, but encouraged by representatives of the opposite sex. It is noteworthy, that while such criticism may serve as guidance for self-conscious young men, it also shifts the traditional gender roles. This means, that women are placed in the position of the observer who is allowed to freely choose her

³⁵ *Fineboys* June 2012: 65.

partner based on personal preferences and impressions. On the other hand, men become the object of the female gaze, having to invest energy into looking pleasing and being desired.

Even though the next examples are not from the printed press, they illustrate this point very well. In one of their television shows, in a special slot called *Mannequin 5*, the five members of the popular boy band Arashi would have to put together outfits on their own (they would usually be given one specific item to incorporate) and then present these outfits to a group of Japanese female celebrities. These women would comment on the outfits one-by-one, much like their counterparts in magazines, and would then proceed to each choose their favourite outfit. The one member whose outfit was not “sold” would become the loser, a mannequin left at the shop (*urinokori*). This member would then be playfully scolded into doing his best (*ganbaru*) in the next episode. The comedic effect of the show comes from the harsh comments from the female guests, who give a detailed description of what they do or do not like about the outfits, while the band members pose silently and unmoving, like mannequins in a shop window.

This segment of the show gained such popularity in Japan, that five special episodes were aired. In these, the outfits of the band members would be posted anonymously on the show’s homepage and women from the whole country could vote on their favourite one (in later episodes, votes from other countries as well as men were accepted). In the last part of the special episode, the members appear in their chosen ensembles and the moderators announce the number of votes each of them got, accompanied by both the good and bad comments the voters left for them. These special episodes accentuate the above-mentioned shift in traditional gender roles, since it allowed everyday women all over Japan to admonish their favourite male idols, who would normally be the subject of zealous adoration.

In a noteworthy occurrence on the show, Aiba Masaki (a member of the band) goes into a store looking for a “flashy” pair of pants, when he suddenly realizes, that the ladies’ department might hold more striking items. He even tries on a colourful skirt, before settling for a pair of black trousers. In the end, he gets a lot of positive feedback from both the other members and studio guests, while he recounts how he is actually wearing women’s clothing.

³⁶ (see Figure 5) Nobody in the studio seems taken aback by this fact; a piece of women's clothing does not seem to undercut Aiba's masculinity in any way. As this example shows, fashion, it would seem, has overcome gender boundaries and has instead become something to be equally enjoyed by both sexes, blurring the boundaries but still maintaining a tangible distinction of masculinity and femininity.



Figure 5 A still from *Mannequin 5*, Aiba Masaki being second from the left

By showing famous idols (popular not only with women in Japan) consciously and purposefully putting together stylish outfits, the show supports the idea of fashion-consciousness in young Japanese men. In the special episodes, the members spend hours in some of the biggest shopping malls in Japan, searching through shops to find the perfect outfit, while also introducing their favourite brands and styles of clothing, so that people can easily get inspiration from their favourite members. The rising number of stores specializing in male fashion also goes to show how important consumerism has become for both sexes in Japan. In October 2011, Hankyu Men's Tokyo, a new nine-storey shopping mall was opened in Tokyo's prestigious Chiyoda ward, containing exclusively stores for men, with one floor dedicated solely to accessories and another to bags and leather goods (it has also become the setting for one of the *Mannequin 5* specials).³⁷ In the same year, the famous shopping mall near Shibuya Station in Tokyo, called 109-2 (the second building of the iconic Shibuya 109), was converted into 109MEN'S. This change was important, because up until

³⁶ "Manekin faibu tokubetsuhen," *Himitsu no Arashi-chan*, TBS, Tokyo, 15 Apr. 2010.

³⁷ "Hankyu hyakkaten," *Wikipedia Japan* (2012), 25. May 2013. The official webpage of the mall, including the floor plan, can be found at: <<http://www.hankyu-dept.co.jp/mens-tokyo/english/>>

then, the “109” franchise was a famous symbol of women’s fashion concentrated around the *gyaru* subculture. With this change, men’s fashion has symbolically become equal to that of women, with both a female- and a male-oriented 109 building now defining Shibuya’s famous panorama.

As the above examples have shown, fashion-consciousness in Japanese men is supported both by fashion magazines and television programmes. The introduction of evaluation by women puts some pressure on young men to do their best to look good, which takes away the position of power from men and hands it to women. On the other hand, no matter who is in the position of the spectator, Japanese fashion magazines manage to retain a masculine tone in their articles, by implying that the reader will get to be romantically involved with a young, good-looking girl if they follow the instructions.

Pleasing the opposite sex is an important part of young Japanese men’s endeavours to dress fashionably, but it is not the only reason for men’s fashion magazines’ popularity. A significant portion of these magazines is devoid of female presence. Therefore, it will further be argued that amongst young Japanese men, being well-dressed and feeling good for one’s own benefit is just as important as looking aesthetically pleasing to women.

Dressing in fashionable clothes is without doubt an effective way of catching women’s attention, but there is a trend in Japanese men’s fashion magazines to leave out this implication and instead focus on stylish clothing solely for the sake of the reader. Based on his own reading of men’s fashion magazines, Monden argues that:

[...] Japanese young men dress not only to attract admirers but also for their own desire and pleasure. This not only indicates that these Japanese young men’s magazines persuade their readers to dress to make themselves feel attractive, along with presenting a good impression on other individuals, and that taking pleasure in clothes enhances their self-assurance.³⁸

In a similar vein, in her book about the new wave of “herbivorous men” in Japan, Ushikubo suggests that the main objective of male pursuit of style and beauty is actually gaining self-confidence. She recalls a conversation with a twenty-four-year-old bicycle shop employee.

³⁸ Monden, 127-128.

He is one of the many men in Japan, who want to express their manly side by growing a beard, but are unable to do so because of their employers. Therefore, on weekends, they buy and wear special fashionable stick-on beards.

'On workdays, I get scolded by my superior, who tells me that I'm being disobedient for growing a beard. But Saturdays are different. When I apply my fake beard, in that moment I can become the "me" I really like and I feel a wave of self-confidence washing over me.' Confidence is born by concentrating on being beautiful.³⁹

This short section shows us two things: firstly, the restraints and expectations of Japanese gender performance – this, however, will be discussed in later chapters, so this implication will be left without a comment for now. The second topic that Ushikubo comments on, however, is the one that Monden suggests – that Japanese men are finding a new kind of satisfaction in nurturing good looks that is not dependent on a yearning for outside appreciation.

From a structural perspective, men's fashion magazines can be said to be promoting the idea, that fashion should be a part of everyday life, instead of something to be thought about on special occasions. *Fineboys*, *Popeye* and *Men's non-no* all come with countless pictures of models in each issue, depicted in everyday situations. These young men are most commonly seen coming out of a café or bookshop, sitting down for a coffee or a snack and walking around the city. Mostly they are photographed alone, but occasionally in groups of two or three, enjoying a meal together or having fun on the streets, while being dressed in fashionable clothes. The implication is that one can (and should) look good in every situation and that enjoying some free time activities is directly connected to being fashionable and feeling good.

This notion is further supported by the numerous features that offer fashion advice for every possible situation – a hiking tour, a vacation abroad, going to school or going shopping in the city. Instead of undermining the masculinity of the readers, these magazines imply that dressing in stylish garments will make the wearer feel better, and thus gain self-confidence. There is another interesting implication in this narcissistic form of fashion-consciousness;

³⁹ Megumi Ushikubo, *Sōshoku-kei danshi "ojōman" ga nihon wo kaeru* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2008) 126-127.

Japanese men have, for the past few years, been incorporating fashion into their lives while managing to keep it between the boundaries of masculinity. While in many other cultures such a level of male preoccupation with fashion is non-existent, frowned upon or reserved for special occasions (like dates), Japanese men have not only learned to implement fashion-consciousness in dealing with romantic relationships, but they also came to find enjoyment in it for their own benefit. The secret to implementing such changes in young Japanese men's interest in fashion lies within the sense of affinity that magazines create between their content and the readers.

3.1.4. The concepts of individuality and conformity

An important feature in Japanese fashion magazines (and this does not apply only to those aimed at men) is the introduction of street fashion – snapshots of young people, found on the streets of Tokyo or other big cities, that appear to have a keen fashion-sense. Next to their photos, their names, age and employment status are listed with a short interview, where they describe the style of clothing they were aiming for. As Monden writes:

The significance of these Japanese magazines' attention to comparatively more "ordinary" male images stands in contrast to the ideas of rather "unordinary" male beauty prevalent in the Euro-American high-fashion culture. [...] While these "ordinary" Japanese male figures featured in magazines may reflect the interventions, selections, and even manipulation of editors, they may well also reflect the magazines' intention to maintain extreme sensitivity to social changes and trends, and to create a social affinity between the target reader, the models, and the contents of the magazines.⁴⁰

We will, for the sake of argument, assume that these models were in fact wearing their own clothes and chosen randomly on the street, since these features create a bridge between the fashion trends introduced in magazines and the everyday reality of their implementation. They show the range of fashion-consciousness amongst Japanese men in real life. Moreover, they implicate both the men's striving for individual expression and that they are "not alone," so to speak, in pursuing one style or the other. This idea goes back to two concepts of fashion

⁴⁰ Monden, 69-70.

theory: individuality and uniformity.

The interplay of these two contrasting ideas has been described by sociologist Georg Simmel back in 1904. According to him, fashion is a means of imitation and differentiation at once; it is a combination of individual needs and public expectations:

Fashion is a form of imitation and so of social equalization, but, paradoxically, in changing incessantly, it differentiates one time from another and one social stratum from another. It unites those of a social class and segregates them from others.

Two social tendencies are essential to the establishment of fashion, namely, the need of union on the one hand and the need of isolation on the other. Should one of these be absent, fashion will not be formed – its sway will abruptly end.⁴¹

Thus, to sum up, fashion has always been based on balancing both conformity and individuality. This is especially perceptible in the case of Japanese fashion magazines, that have been, for the past two years, a significant part of social change in the context of gender performance.

3.1.5. *Men's fashion magazines and masculinity*

As it has been described earlier, by the end of the 1980, masculinity and the perception of manliness came to the forefront of sociological study in Japan. After the collapse of the Japanese asset price bubble, the salaryman ideal of masculinity was starting to lose its appeal amongst younger men. In this period of social change, men's fashion magazines were in the perfect situation to aid these young men in their endeavours of breaking out of the shadow of rigid gender-dictated bounds. Tanaka describes this period as follows:

The background to the launch of *Popeye* was [...] the age when boys' dreams had vanished. The high economic growth of Japan had peaked, then came the oil crisis in 1973, followed by high unemployment. Traditional masculinities were losing their appeal, and the father figure his respect. [...] 'The city boy' epitomised by *Popeye* was a reaction to the student movement in the mid 60's to early 70s and anti-establishment

⁴¹ George Simmel, "Fashion," *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 62, No. 6 (1957) 541-546.

‘punk’ movement. [...] Young men who felt out of tune with those movements became ‘city boys’ who were of any ideology, and wanted to be cheerful and have fun in the company of girls.⁴²

Men’s fashion magazines have always targeted a very age-restricted readership; in the case of *Popeye* and *Men’s non-no* it is teenagers and young men in their early twenties, while *Fineboys* focuses on university students. This has enabled these magazines to be finely attuned to social changes and subtly influence them. This is possible since teenagers and young adults have always been the ones actively engaging in any form of rebellion. According to Merry White, teenagers are defined by “institutions (educational and occupational) preparing them for economic and social participation as ‘appropriate’ adults, and [...] their own negotiations with their environment, themselves creating new cultural models and goals.”⁴³ Other than being a great consumer group, Japanese teenagers and university students represent the age group most likely to rebel against dated ideas of hegemonic masculinity. Young men are now encouraged to express their individuality in a colourful and playful manner, which is in stark contrast with the clichéd grey-and-white image of an ageing salaryman.

By creating a fashion-conscious youth, Japanese fashion magazines allowed their readers to escape the traditionalised expectations that masculinity posed. Dressing up for one’s own enjoyment and experimenting with different styles is a new-found way of escapism for young men. All of the discussed fashion magazines share a youthful, boyish elegance that they try to sell to their readers. Nevertheless, even in their undertaking to allow free expression and rebellion through sartorial variations, mainstream fashion magazines in Japan have never gone overboard and continue to balance out individuality with conformity.

The notion of conformity can be observed in the different situations and narratives in which the magazines put their models. The most frequent topics are going to school for the first time, campus life, going away to study abroad, graduating and finding a job. These topics conform to the events all the readers are expected to experience in their lives. As Monden puts it:

⁴² Tanaka, 229-230.

⁴³ Merry White, “The Marketing of Adolescence in Japan: Buying and Dreaming,” in L. Skov and B. Moeran, ed. *Women, Media, and Consumption in Japan* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1995) 225.

These magazines instruct the readership to dress stylistically and impressively, and hence to stand out among their peers. At the same time, the readership is integrated into society by conforming to “acceptable” coordination of sartorial items on the market.⁴⁴

Instead of showing their models wildly partying or picking up women, which would enforce a more subversive, “laddish” type of masculinity, these magazines show their readers that it is all right to continue on their socially accepted life path – they should just be having more fun with fashion than previous generations.

The paradox between individuality and conformity becomes even more tangible, when we look at special features in fashion magazines, dealing with their readers becoming *shakaijin*, a working member of society. Being a *shakaijin* in Japan basically overlaps with becoming a salaryman; although in the case of fashion magazines this is never explicitly mentioned, the implications are omnipresent. An important part of the process of becoming a *shakaijin* is ridding oneself of their student mentality (*gakuseikibun*) and taking on serious responsibilities in society. In the process of *shūshokukatsudō*, or job hunting, university students begin their transformation to fit the salaryman model of a “white shirt, dark business suit and general lack of anything flashy, such as accessories.”⁴⁵ Young men, in order to get ready for job interviews, dye their hair back to its natural colour, get a haircut, get rid of earrings and other accessories and put on a white shirt with a dark suit and tie. Becoming a *shakaijin* is generally associated with parting with such superficial expressions of individuality, that represent – like in the case of growing a beard in Ushikubo’s book – the individual’s irresponsibility and immature attitude.

Men’s fashion magazines do not dismiss the *shakaijin* idea entirely; instead they give their readers advice on how to make their everyday work life more colourful and varied. They offer numerous sartorial variations of the business suit look, accompanied by the newest trends in suitcases, wallets and card holders for business cards. It could be argued, that such magazine features do not explicitly propagate the salaryman lifestyle to their readers, but rather offers guidance to those who want to take this career path but still want to look as

⁴⁴ Monden, 72.

⁴⁵ Dasgupta, "Corporate Warriors," 193-194.

stylish as possible while doing so. Nevertheless, the fact that every year such significance is attached to young *shinshakaijin* (fresh members of society) means that, voluntarily or not, fashion magazines imply that the most clear-cut path for young men is that of a white-collar worker.



Figure 6 Pages from a special feature for *shinshakaijin* in *Men's non-no* (March 2013); the text on the left page says “From tomorrow on, a gentleman! A book about suits and etiquette for new recruits.”

The reason why this registers so well with the readership of young men’s fashion magazines is to be found in the innocent ways they propagate this lifestyle. Indeed, magazine features accentuate the “fun” part of becoming a self-reliant adult. They only show young male models, dressed in stylish business suits, on their way to work or returning home. These men are stylised as fresh out of college *shinshakaijin* that have only recently entered the workforce, live on their own, can dedicate their weekends to their hobbies or friends and have no responsibilities outside of their workplace. Other social implications of salaryman masculinity are not touched upon, suggesting to the reader that getting a white-collar job does not necessarily mean that they cannot continue on with their fun and stylish lifestyle. Thus, the magazines manage to incorporate fashion into multiple facets of the lives of their readers, offering a chance to modify conventional masculine models.

When it comes to the perception of the changes in the gender performance of young Japanese men, the most common implication is that the preoccupation with fashion has a negative impact on masculinity. This idea stems from the strongly gendered perception of fashion consumption being an attribute of women, and therefore applying any kind of “feminine” descriptive terms to men becomes inherently degrading. This relates back to the idea that femininity, both in the context of social studies and consumption, was “marked,” as opposed to masculinity being the generalised, “unmarked” territory. Therefore venturing into an area traditionally marked as feminine might be perceived as a threat to heterosexual masculine identity. This idea also applies to fashion.

What is notable is that these restrictions do not apply to men’s fashion magazines in Japan. Monden argues that “a degree of visual ‘androgyny’ among Japanese young men [...] does not necessarily undermine or contradict their heterosexual appeal. Consequently, it implies that for the male readership of these magazines, the necessity to ‘other’ what is assumed to be not traditionally ‘masculine’ is considerably lower than their Anglophone counterparts.”⁴⁶ This further indicates that the boundaries between “feminine” and “masculine” are placed differently amongst contemporary Japanese youth, with fashion serving as a connection between the gender constructs of masculinity and femininity.

In conclusion, the masculine ideal represented in men’s fashion magazines in Japan corresponds greatly with the “new man” ideal popularised by British men’s magazines. They represent the new wave of youthful masculinity in Japan; men that are fashion-conscious, care for their appearance and do not want to follow a rigidly prescribed performance of gender anymore. As Miller writes, “an emphasis on male appearance counters the salaryman reification of men as workers, while women appreciate these new styles because they are aesthetically pleasing and erotically charged.”⁴⁷ Caring about one’s appearance has become important for young men both in order to appear attractive to women and gain self-confidence from being able to express their individuality. Although the magazines do not completely

⁴⁶ Monden, 132.

⁴⁷ Laura Miller, “Male beauty work in Japan,” in *Men and Masculinities in Japan*, ed. James E. Roberson and Nobue Suzuki (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003) 38.

break away from the hegemonic masculine ideal, they offer variations and an opportunity for young men to reconstruct the boundaries of gender.

3.2. Establishing men's cosmetics market of Japan

When it comes to blurring the boundaries of masculinity, closely related to fashion consumption is the newly-discovered interest in body aesthetics and cosmetics consumption by men in Japan. The various efforts at beautification suggest that the ideological scope of masculinity has come to encompass a wider variety of physical styles. In connection to this, this chapter will outline the emergence of beauty services and products aimed at men, describing the establishment of the industry as well as a number of male idols as embodiment of a new type of masculinity.

Much of what has been said about young Japanese men's fashion consciousness can be applied to the subject of beauty work. Just like the fashion magazines described in the previous chapter, the male-oriented beauty industry in Japan originated from something that was seen as strictly for women. Like fashion consumption, the use of cosmetics and beauty procedures was marked as "feminine." Such activities were associated with women under the assumption that women needed to be aesthetically pleasing in order to arouse the interest of men, while men were evaluated primarily on the basis of social standing, income or family lineage. With the social changes of the Lost Decade, however, more and more women were entering the workforce and men were finding themselves in the position of the object of the female gaze, placing a new emphasis on their external qualities.

One of the driving forces of the beautification of men in Japan might be what Miller calls the "*oyaji* rejection."⁴⁸ The *oyaji* ("old men") represent the older generation of salarymen, branded as such with a hint of contempt from the side of younger generations. The *oyaji* embody the worn-out, de-eroticized middle aged salaryman, who is often seen sleeping on trains on his way home or drinking out all night with colleagues and has a stereotypically unappealing look (grey coat, a black suitcase, greying greased back hair). There is even a term for the distinct smell of these men - *oyaji kusai* (old man stink). In this context, new male

⁴⁸ Ibid, 38.

aesthetics are a way of breaking away from the asexual image of the salarymen, pleasing both men and women.

Male beauty industry in Japan has begun developing back in the 1980s. With the emergence of so called *esute* salons (from the word “aesthetic”), some beauty treatments became available for men too. Although the salons were originally targeted at women, some of them quickly realised the business potential of targeting both sexes. According to Miller, the first salon to offer services to male customers was Men’s Joli Canaille Salon in Tokyo in 1984; and by 1989 men-only salons could already be found in large cities.⁴⁹ Some of the more successful salons managed to grow into franchises: two of the largest are Dandy House (established in 1986) and Men’s TBC (an offshoot of the Tokyo Beauty Center chain, aimed at women). These salons usually offer skin treatments, eyebrow and beard trimming, massages, body hair removal or treatments for weight loss. They also offer special packages for their customers, most commonly the “men’s bridal” *esute* (the bridal package of Dandy House contains a three-month course including counselling, diet help and skincare treatments).⁵⁰

Just like in the case of men’s fashion magazines, there is a tangible difference between the targeted groups of men with each salon. Dandy House usually uses older (understand: around forty years old) celebrities for its campaigns and uses a sophisticated, elegant look in its commercials, targeting older professional males who can afford the “five star quality” care that the salon’s homepage offers. On the other hand, Men’s TBC has always used young Japanese actors or singers in its ad campaigns, appealing to the younger age group of college students or young *shakaijin*. The best example to demonstrate the difference would be the Japanese star Kimura Takuya (or Kimutaku, as he is called by his fans; b. 1972), the member of the popular male vocal group SMAP. In 1999, Kimura was the face and spokesperson for Men’s TBC. Twenty-seven years old at the time, Kimura is seen frolicking on the beach or enjoying a picnic in the park with his girlfriend. In 2011 however, he became the face of Dandy House’s new campaign - he is seen slowly walking down a luxurious hotel’s lobby with an air of confidence, in a dark suit and slicked-back hair (see Figure 7). Although the same person is seen in both advertisements, the distinction between the young and carefree

⁴⁹ Ibid, 38.

⁵⁰ see the home page of Dandy House, <<http://www.dandy-house.co.jp/index.html>>; the term “bridal” comes from Dandy House’s name for the product; it is, however, aimed at bridegrooms.

Kimura and the mature, sensual one is clear.



Figure 7 Kimura Takuya in the advertisements of Men's TBC and Dandy House

Although it was the *esute* salons that started the male beautification trend, such treatments have always been expensive and so young men needed a range of more accessible products. At about the same time as the male-only salons started to open in Tokyo, large department stores started to sell lines of cosmetic products for men. In the year 1989, Japanese cosmetics company Shiseido introduced a line of cosmetics for men called Zephyr, with the English tag-line “Cleanliness is next to manliness” (an allusion to the proverb “Cleanliness is next to godliness”), and has been putting out new lines of products for men since then. Currently, one of the greatest producers of men's beauty products in Japan is the Mandom company, which started selling men's cosmetics as early as the 1970s (under the brand name Mandom). Nowadays, the company's flagship brand is Gatsby, aimed at the younger market, but the company also has another brand called Lucido which has a line of fragrance-free products for men in their forties. According to the company's annual business report, sales from men's grooming products have made up more than 75% of Mandom's income in 2011 and 2012. The whole scale of the men's cosmetics market in Japan, according to the report, stood at some 120 billion yen by March 2012.⁵¹ The sales of male cosmetics have been steadily on the rise in Japan, establishing the market in its own right.

⁵¹ Mandom corp., "Annual Report 2012," *Mandom homepage* (2012), accessed 23 Nov. 2014

3.3. Selling new male aesthetics through cosmetics

With such a rapidly growing market of men's beauty products, one needs to take a closer look at *what* the cosmetics companies are selling, for products would be irrelevant without good marketing. One of the secrets behind sustaining consumerism has always been the implication behind the commodity - that is, the belief that by purchasing a product, consumers are also buying into a better life. This tactic worked well in the years of post-war economical miracle, when television sets, cars or air conditioning were sold as a part of the new model middle-class life. With cosmetics and *esute* treatments, what is being promoted is a new kind of masculine ideal. This chapter will therefore look at some of the most popular product lines and their commercials, in order to describe the new male ideal they depict.

The topic of the female gaze, which has been discussed with respect to men's fashion magazines, is relevant in this case too. Men who are dressing fashionably for their own benefit can choose to indulge in cosmetic products and treatments for the same reason. Although the pursuit of female appreciation is no doubt important, the female gaze remains subdued in the marketing of beauty products (in the case of *esute* salons this is has not always been the case).

A good example is the immensely popular ad campaign for Shiseido's Uno Fog Bar, a hair wax in spray form. The product launched in 2010, with six versions of the advertisement created, starring four young Japanese actors: Miura Haruma (b.1990), Oguri Shun (b.1982), Eita (b.1982) and Tsumabuki Satoshi (b.1980). In the commercials, the four of them are seen wandering around London's famous landmarks dressed in matching grey suits, white shirts and black leather shoes in an obvious reference to the Beatles. The four men are enjoying each other's company, but also express a certain level of vanity by constantly fixing their hairstyles. In fact, in one of the versions Eita remains standing in front of a shop window, checking and fixing his hair while the others wait impatiently for him. Oguri even remarks: "You only think about your hair, don't you?" (see Figure 8) The commercials connect being well groomed to having fun, subtly suggesting that the two are correlated. Moreover, the style of the four actors promotes a boyish elegance that corresponds with the style of magazines such as *Popeye* and *Fineboys*.



Figure 8 Uno Fog Bar commercials

After the initial success of Uno Fog Bar, more series of ads were made - all of them with the same actors. Originally, the commercials emphasised boyish elegance and subdued, easy-to-make hairstyles (the tag-line being *Katamazu, matomeru.*, which could roughly be translated as “Arranging without stiffness”). The commercial even shows a spiked-up hairstyle subdued into a soft but fashionable hairstyle in the course of a few seconds. In the latest campaign, the style has changed, and the four men can now be seen in colourful jackets and different hairstyles, with the motto of the product changed to *Kakkotsukeyōze*, or “Let’s act cool!” The four actors now have a more mature look in contrast to the first series of advertisements and project an air of confidence that was missing from the first commercials that were mainly played for laughs. Nevertheless, the message remains the same: get the product and gain confidence through creating a fashionable hairstyle.

When it comes to Gatsby products, up until recently, the face of the brand was Kimura Takuya. Kimura’s popularity clearly suggests a shift in the masculine model towards a more androgynous look; “Kimutaku” is described by Darling-Wolf as one of the two most clearly androgynous members of SMAP⁵². Nonetheless, he has been immensely popular in Japan ever since the 1990s, to the extent that a so-called “Kimutaku Syndrome” has been observed in the

⁵² see Fabienne Darling-Wolf, "SMAP, Sex, and Masculinity", *Popular Music and Society*, Vol. 27, Issue 3 (2004) 357-370.

mid 90s, when young men were excessively copying Kimura's trademark long hairstyle. Kimura has been ranked number one in a survey on "Favourite male celebrities" in *Fine Boys* in 1998 and has consistently been voted number one by readers of *An An*, as the men they like most or would most like to have sex with.⁵³ This goes to show, that Kimura is popular both with women and men in Japan - choosing him as the selling point for Gatsby products would mean that the products would be bought both by men wanting to look like him and women wanting the same of their boyfriends or husbands. In fact, the commercial for the Gatsby Facial Wash says just that - if you wash your face with this product, you will look like Kimura Takuya. In the commercial, a man who uses the product turns into Kimura after washing his face; Kimura then proceeds to check his reflection in the imaginary mirror of the camera lens with a cheeky smile (see Figure 9). With his long hair, slender body, cheeky attitude and self-confidence, Kimura has become an embodiment of a new masculine ideal for young men to strive for.



Figure 9 Gatsby commercial featuring Kimura Takuya

In order to appeal to younger men (presumably in their twenties), in 2012 Mandom has chosen a new face for its Gatsby ad campaigns, and Kimura Takuya was replaced by the younger actor Matsuda Shota (b. 1985). In the newest campaign, Matsuda plays an alien, who is constantly being interrupted while trying to talk to the viewers about the products. The character constantly breaks the fourth wall by complaining about his job of doing commercials or talking about being scolded by Mandom's representatives. Although he does not say almost anything noteworthy about the products, the commercials are witty and memorable. It might also be interesting to note that, despite the exchange of Kimura for his younger colleague, Matsuda looks near identical to him in the commercials (mostly because of the "Kimutaku hair," see Figure 10). It is almost as if the company was looking for a younger actor to appeal

⁵³ see Miller, 37.

to the target customers, but was unwilling to let go of the masculine ideal represented by Kimura.

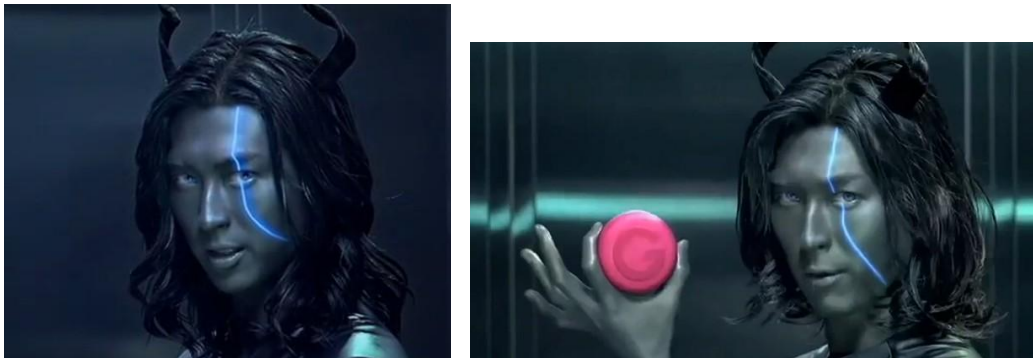


Figure 10 Gatsby commercials featuring Matsuda Shota

The last advertising campaign to be mentioned is that of Men’s Bioré, another popular product line in Japan, aimed at young men. Men’s Bioré has begun a new campaign in Japan in 2011, concentrating on making skincare a daily routine for Japanese men. For this purpose, the concept of a “man who is particular about his skin” was created (in Japanese shortened as *hadaō*, from the characters for “skin” and “man”). Starring in the advertisements is actor Mukai Osamu (b. 1982). Mukai, although twenty-nine years old at the time the commercials were shot, has a young, fresh appearance - to the extent that he could easily be mistaken for a high-school boy in the advertisements. Mukai plays a self-proclaimed *hadaō*, who finds enjoyment in his daily skincare routine. The atmosphere of the commercials is quite different from that of Gatsby, since it is devoid of the sexuality of both Kimura and Matsuda. Mukai manages to channel a youthful cheerfulness that also translates into his skincare routine; he convinces the viewer that using the given products can be fun. Although Kimura’s advertisements have always balanced between the ideas of using beauty products solely to feel good about oneself and of gaining the approval of women, in the case of the Men’s Bioré commercials, the goal is clearly the first one.



Figure 11 Men's Bioré commercials featuring Mukai Osamu

The commercials introduced in this chapter are merely a sample from the growing market of men's cosmetics in Japan, but they manage to give an idea of the masculine ideal that is being promoted. Just like in the case of the fashion magazines, young Japanese men are allowed more freedom in self-expression through the accessibility of beauty products. These can be used to achieve a desired fashionable look that would give the user self-confidence, both with friends and women. Moreover, the young, lean, androgynous men cast in the commercials go to show that the ideal of Japanese masculinity is moving away from hegemonic ideas. Embracing inherently "feminine" practices like body hair removal, skin treatments and increased attention to one's looks are becoming a part of masculine identity in Japan, especially with younger generations. The consumption of cosmetics can therefore be seen as another proof of the gender blurring in Japan and a small step towards gender equality.

4. The herbivorous men of Japan

4.1. The origins of the *sōshokukei danshi* phenomenon

Over the course of the last few years, one particular buzzword stood out in the context of changing Japanese gender roles: the *sōshokukei danshi*, the “herbivore men” of contemporary Japan. The phenomenon, that could be briefly described as the emergence of a generation of effeminate and dispassionate young men, has been widely discussed both by Japanese and foreign media and has recently started to attract the interest of foreign scholars too. Nevertheless, the number of such academic works is, as of date, very low and the concept of *sōshokukei danshi* is being constantly manipulated by the mass-media. Because of this, for the purpose of creating a better understanding of this particular social group, it becomes necessary to both describe and debunk the *sōshokukei danshi* phenomenon at once. One has to distinguish between what the *sōshokukei danshi* came to represent and what they *really* are - although the latter will undoubtedly prove difficult to formulate.

The difficulty of defining the *sōshokukei danshi* as a group stems from the fact, that the concept itself has undergone several changes through the course of only seven years, from the time it was first recorded. The term has been used by commentators of different professions, the mass media and the general public and has thus warped into a vaguely defined idea that is now generally used to define a whole generation of Japanese men who are struggling to redefine the masculine values of their fathers and find their own voice amongst the onslaught of criticism in their direction.

The term - originally only as *sōshoku danshi*⁵⁴ - was created by columnist Fukasawa Maki. She coined the phrase in 2006, when she wrote an article for *Nikkei Business* magazine. In this article she describes a new type of Japanese men, that are not proactive in relationships (although they do care about romance and sex) and are not aggressive in their romantic conquest (which does not mean that they are unpopular with women). They also have no problem with developing friendly relations with women and would not try to seduce their

⁵⁴ A variation of the term, *sōshokukei danshi*, is now used more widely; it has been popularised by philosopher Morioka Masahiro.

friend or partner even when sleeping in the same room.⁵⁵ The men described in the article were different from the generally established ideal of masculinity, in which men were required to take the “active” role both in romantic relationships and professional life.

The article was prompted by a previous research project, during which Fukasawa visited various host clubs⁵⁶ across the country. She found that, contrary to popular belief, many of the young men working in these clubs were mild-mannered and respectful towards their rural roots. She later found these traits in other men in completely different spheres of work and found these common traits interesting. On the other hand, people of her own age group around her seemed all but to complain about young people, which led her to write an article about this new "post-bubble" generation of Japanese men to show them in a positive light. To Fukasawa, the fact that these men had a positive relationship to their hometowns and rural upbringing, as well as respect for their own parents and grandparents, was the real key factor. This is because it was a welcome change to the attitude of the "bubble generation", of which she was part of. Fukasawa describes her own contemporaries as being highly Tokyo-oriented in their youth, condemning rural culture and having cold relationships with their own families after moving to the capital.⁵⁷ Therefore, her main focus was on such positive changes to young people's lifestyle, as opposed to their alleged disinterest in romantic relationships, which the *sōshoku danshi* came to be recognised for later.

It was probably because of Fukasawa's early focus that the term *sōshoku danshi* did not gain any widespread attention. This however changed in 2008, when women's magazine *non-no* published an article about men turning "herbivores" called “Deai ‘shigatsu kakumei’ ni shōri seyo! Danshi no ‘sōshokuka’ de mote kijun ga kawatta!” (Let’s be victorious in the “April Revolution” of dating! Boys turning into herbivores changed the standards of popularity). Because of the magazine's popularity, the expression *sōshoku danshi* suddenly became a household term. Not only did it become widely known, however, its meaning underwent a dramatic change. It was because of said article that the preoccupation with the

⁵⁵ See Maki Fukasawa, "Sōshoku danshi," *Nikkei Business* 13. Oct. 2006, accessed 10 Apr. 2013.

⁵⁶ Host clubs, from the Japanese *hosuto kurabu*, are clubs where good looking young men are paid to entertain and serve drinks to female guests. Women pay for the company and attention of the "hosts", not for sexual services.

⁵⁷ Maki Fukasawa, Interview, "Imadoki no wakamono wa uchimuki de sōshoku nanoka? 01," *Business Breakthrough Ch.*, Business Breakthrough Inc., 12 Sep. 2012, accessed 11 Apr. 2013

sōshokukei danshi's alleged disinterest in romantic relationships started, pushing young women to the newly-created category of carnivores, or *nikushokukei joshi*.

As Morioka Masahiro points out, the article in *non-no* was responsible for many of the features attributed to *sōshokukei danshi* later on. He also explains how the article brought a paradigm shift in the way women's magazines in Japan wrote about romantic relationships. Up until that point, the intention was to teach their readers how to become a "loveable" woman; that means, dressing nicely, being dependent on men and their protection and generally being the passive half of the couple, letting the man be the one to "attack" and actively pursue a relationship with them. This approach has changed, however, with the introduction of the passive *sōshokukei danshi*. As Morioka writes:

According to the article, this premise [of passive women] has begun to crumble. Up until now, if women provided them with an opportunity, men automatically took it and approached these women. However, with young men beginning to turn herbivorous, they have stopped actively pursuing romantic relationships or sex. This led to a new situation, in which no matter how many chances women offer them, the men do not approach them at all.

Before the major media started running reports on the *sōshoku danshi*, numerous women's magazines and fashion magazines had picked up the phrase. Therefore, it can be said that up until the winter of 2008, the central force of shaping the image of the *sōshoku danshi* was women's magazines.⁵⁸

The response to the *non-no* article goes to show one of the two main topics of criticism towards *sōshokukei danshi*. The first one is their seeming lack of interest in romantic relationships and sex. The second one is their lack of enthusiasm for full-time employment and a career, as well as their lack of "manly" interests such as drinking alcohol with colleagues or buying a car. The origin of the second category is difficult to pinpoint, but in time it roughly corresponds to the wider media attention the *sōshokukei danshi* were getting in 2008.

⁵⁸ Masahiro Morioka, "'Sōshokukei danshi' no genshōgakuteki kōsatsu," *The Review of Life Studies* Vol.1(2011) 14-15, accessed 20 Apr. 2013

Not being interested in owning a car is one of the things the *sōshokukei danshi* are being criticised for. This is in stark contrast with the values of their fathers' generation, who, in the years of Japan's economic miracle, lived in the age of the "my-mindset." Japanese families (and especially the men as the breadwinners) were supposed to adhere to the new "my-home-ism" (*maihōmushugi*), which meant having a single-family residence inhabited by a nuclear family, completed by the *maikā*, or "my car." This mindset was of course just another media construct, made up to support the rising consumerism built around the newly-emerging middle class of salaryman families. Nevertheless, owning a car became an important part in the status quo of many Japanese men. In contrast, for the modern *sōshokukei danshi*, owning a car is not a priority anymore. Cars are costly to buy and upkeep and young men today do not have the luxury of a high income anymore. As one of them explained on television, when one of his friends drove up in a new car, he had no idea what to say to him or how to admire the vehicle. He simply did not understand the appeal of owning a car.⁵⁹ The changed values of young Japanese men, however, played right into the hands of the automotive industry: as Fukasawa explains, in 2008 the sales of cars dropped in Japan, and both the media and industry representatives were in the need of a scapegoat. They blamed the new generation of *sōshokukei danshi* for the low sales; and shortly after that, the decreasing sales of alcohol and other goods became their fault too, as a result of their frugal lifestyle.⁶⁰

Fukasawa calls the way young men nowadays spend their money "practical buying," which is the polar opposite of what men did during the years of economical miracle, which she names "show-off buying" (*mie shōhi*). As she explains:

I often ask [young men] what they would buy if they had 100,000 yen. Rather than answering that they'd buy an expensive watch, they would answer that they'd buy a rice cooker. Such a response would have been unimaginable a decade ago, but they have a clear logic to their answer, which is that they want something that makes the time with friends and family an even happier one. To judge them by saying that young people shouldn't be wanting rice cookers at their stage in life is to negate them without understanding their values. Today's young men don't buy things to show off, so some

⁵⁹ "Sōshokukei de nani ga warui - wakamono to kataru Nippon no mirai," *Nippon no, korekara*, NHK, 06 May 2010.

⁶⁰ See Fukasawa, "Imadoki"

people worry about the effect that will have on consumption, but I think spending money on something that will improve the quality of everyday meals with the family is a much smarter way to consume than buying a watch that's beyond your means just to show off. For the older generation of adults, the behavior and values of today's young men may seem odd and strange. But truly directing our gaze to their down-to-earth, prudent lifestyle and listening to their voices is the only way to get along with them and to gain insight for producing a hit product that will sell in an age where people are tightening their belts. There are still many things we can learn from the Heisei-Era men.⁶¹

Fukasawa's example shows the difference between the affluence of the "bubble era" and the frugality of most of today's young men. With the economical slowdown of the 1990s and the growing number of men working outside the corporate world of their fathers, the priorities in spending money have shifted and have become more reasonable. Unfortunately, critics from the ranks of the "bubble generation" find it hard to understand these new values of the *sōshokukei danshi*.

A large proportion of what we now understand as the *sōshokukei danshi* is no more than a media construct, formulated by a range of newspapers, magazines and television shows. The concept has become devoid of the original ideas that Fukasawa described and is now used as a term of censure for all young Japanese men. The next chapter will describe into more detail the stereotypical attributes of the *sōshokukei danshi* and the way these new values contradict those of the adherents of salaryman masculinity.

⁶¹ Maki Fukasawa, "Father's Interview", *Real Fathers* 05 Oct 2012, accessed 9 Nov. 2013

4.2. Crafting the *sōshokukei danshi* identity

Towards the end of the year 2008, the Japanese magazine DIME ran a report on *sōshokukei danshi*, interviewing both Ushikubo Megumi and Morioka Masahiro. At the beginning of this article, the readers could check their own “herbivore level” with the help of a simple test that enumerated some of the typical features of *sōshokukei danshi* (anybody with a score of six or higher would be considered a “herbivore”).⁶² A few months later, the same test was presented in an episode of the television talk show *Kume Hiroshi no Terebitte yatsu wa!?*⁶³ The panel of the show was comprised of three women and three men from various areas of public life. The three men present took the mentioned test, but scored a low score and safely remained outside of the *sōshokukei danshi* category.

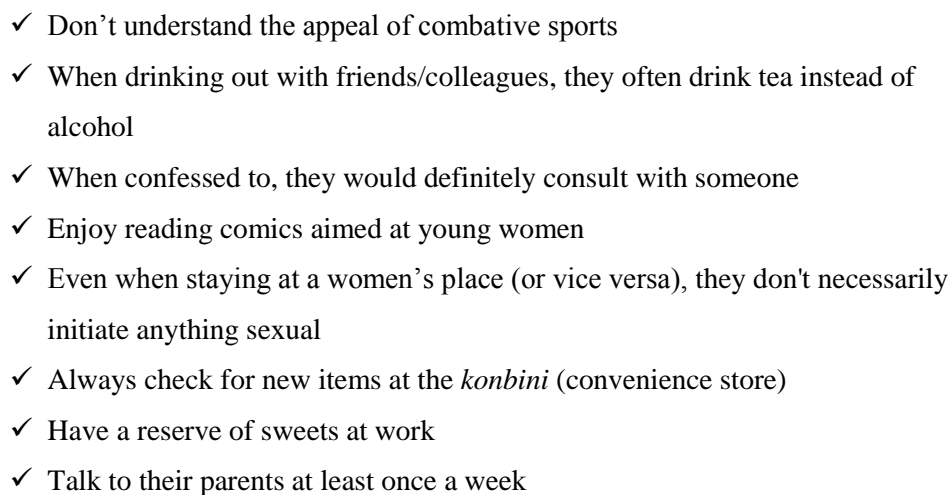
- 
- ✓ Don't understand the appeal of combative sports
 - ✓ When drinking out with friends/colleagues, they often drink tea instead of alcohol
 - ✓ When confessed to, they would definitely consult with someone
 - ✓ Enjoy reading comics aimed at young women
 - ✓ Even when staying at a women's place (or vice versa), they don't necessarily initiate anything sexual
 - ✓ Always check for new items at the *konbini* (convenience store)
 - ✓ Have a reserve of sweets at work
 - ✓ Talk to their parents at least once a week

Figure 12 The "herbivore test" from DIME magazine

In February 2009, *Yomiuri Shinbun* ran a sort report on *sōshokukei danshi*, enumerating a few characteristics of the generalised “herbivore.”

⁶² "Hyottoshite anata mo!?! Chūmoku sareru shinjinshu 'sōshokukei danshi' ga fueterutte honto!?" *DIME* 23 (2008), accessed 8 Feb. 2014

⁶³ *Kume Hiroshi no Terebitte yatsu wa!?*, TBS, 18 Feb. 2009

◎「草食系男子」のイメージ

- 「ビールで乾杯」より好きな飲み物優先
- スリムで小食
- スイーツ大好き
- おしゃれに関心
- エコに熱心
- 親と仲良し
- ケータイを手放さず
- ホテル代もワリカンに



※「草食系男子」[お達マン]が日本を変える」(講談社)を基に作成

- prefers his own drinks over toasting with beer
- slim and doesn't eat much
- loves sweets
- concerned about fashion
- enthusiastic about ecology
- good relationship with parents
- inseparable from his mobile phone
- splits expenses even for [love] hotels

Figure 13 "The image of *sōshokukei danshi*"

Both of these lists mention very particular traits, compared to Fukasawa's idea that tried to explain the lifestyle and values of a new generation of young Japanese men. As the concept gained popularity, so did the media try to explain and categorise the *sōshokukei danshi*. Their image came to encompass their approach to love and relationships, money and ecology, their looks and taste in food, drink and literature.

When it comes to further depictions of the *sōshokukei danshi* in the media, it is unsurprising that newspapers and television programmes would focus on the sensational aspects of this group. Both Japanese and foreign media have reported on such new "trends" as men's bras⁶⁴, men's skirts⁶⁵, young men's new-found fondness for desserts⁶⁶ or Japanese men sitting down on the toilet to urinate⁶⁷. While the importance of such news is blown out of proportion, it shows the underlying trend to focus on things that would make the *sōshokukei danshi* look "unmanly" by associating their behaviour with typically feminine traits, while also comparing them to the more traditional masculinity of the salaryman.

Young men's preoccupation with fashion and good looks (that is often one of the key features in the description of the *sōshokukei danshi*) has been already discussed in previous

⁶⁴ Toshi Maeda, "Bra for the boys an online bestseller in Japan," *Reuters*, 24 Nov. 2008, accessed 29 May 2014

⁶⁵ Maya Kaneko, "Some men swapping pants for dresses," *The Japan Times*, 24 May 2010, accessed 29 May 2014

⁶⁶ Louisa Lim, "In Japan, 'Herbivore' Boys Subvert Ideas Of Manhood," *NPR* (2009), accessed 25. Apr. 2014

⁶⁷ Justin McCurry, "Wayward aiming Japanese men take a seat in smallest room," *The Guardian* 13 Dec. 2007, accessed 25 Apr. 2014

chapters and therefore will not be lengthily commented on here. The implication that the usage of beauty products is a feminine practice has already been made clear; it is not the only “womanly” interest, however, associated with the *sōshokukei danshi*. As both lists show, these men are said to have a great interest in sweets, while they are shunning excessive consumption of alcohol. Enjoying (and especially making) desserts have long been considered a stereotypically female trait. As one interviewee said: “Back [in my father’s days], lots of men liked desserts, but it was considered uncool. Cool men had to like alcohol or spicy food. I’ve discovered my father likes eating dessert, but he never showed it in the past.”⁶⁸ Nonetheless, an increasing number of young Japanese men have in recent years taken open interest in enjoying desserts, despite the gender implications.

This phenomenon of young men openly acknowledging their love for sweets has become so popular in Japan, that these men got their own designation: *amatō danshi* (men with a sweet tooth) or *amadan* for short. There are several online groups for *amadan*, the most popular having more than three thousand followers. The point of these groups is to share information and recipes, recommend restaurants with tasty desserts and also to organise various events and cooking lessons. Instead of drinking beer or whiskey with their co-workers until late in the evening, many young men now choose to devote their free time to their own interests and hobbies. Perhaps the rising popularity of these “sweets clubs” may be taken as a further sign of the young men of Japan moving away from the ingrained gender stereotypes of their fathers’ and grandfathers’ generations.

Perhaps the most discussed characteristic of the *sōshokukei danshi* in the media is their disinterest in sex, romantic relationships and marriage. Many of these men have expressed a lack of enthusiasm when it comes to approaching women or initiating anything sexual. In a survey in 2009, 73.8% of the respondents (who identified themselves as *sōshokukei danshi*) said, that they are not “active” when it comes to romance.⁶⁹ In the aforementioned episode of *Terebitte yatsu wa!?*, young men are said to be reluctant to initiate anything sexual with the

⁶⁸ Lim, "In Japan, 'Herbivore' Boys Subvert Ideas Of Manhood"

⁶⁹ M1F1 Research Institute, "Shigoto mo ren'ai mo shōkyokuteki 'sōshokukei danshi' no kōryakuhō," *Topic* vol. 19 (Apr. 2009), accessed 25 Apr 2014, 1.

opposite sex, even when given the chance (women, whether girlfriends or friends, are apparently safe to sleep in the same room with these men without being kissed or touched). They apparently also insist on splitting the costs at dates. Such behaviour stands in contrast to the older, long-established gender ideals, in which men are supposed to be aggressively pursuing romantic relationships, while women are generally the passive receivers of their affections (or other advances). Men are also expected to be financially secure and pay all the expenses on dates. With the loss of the promise of lifetime employment and a general disillusionment with corporate culture, young Japanese men have adapted a frugal lifestyle, in which paying for dates and other entertainment does not fit in.

It is interesting to note that the notion of splitting expenses was met with disapproval from the side of young women (who were interviewed in a separate segment of the television show). It seems that the break-away from traditional gender roles of the *sōshokukei danshi* is not necessarily met with approval from the opposite sex, who enjoy — and perhaps enforce — the traditional ideas from which they benefit. One could argue that such an attitude would further alienate the already shy *sōshokukei danshi* from seeking romantic relationships; after all, many of these young men do not have a regular salary and prefer to use their money have on useful things that they benefit from on a daily level. Spending large sums on dates may just seem like an unnecessary gamble for these men. When asked if they think that spending large sums of money to become acquainted with members of the opposite sex is silly, 51.7% of the “herbivorous” respondents answered “yes”.⁷⁰ The amount of time and money the *sōshokukei danshi* would have to invest in a romantic relationship probably urges many of them to reconsider taking such a step; moreover, the blurring of gender boundaries that these young men have initiated might need assistance from their female counterparts, many of whom are reluctant to let go of some of the advantageous aspects of gender stereotypes.

The topic of sex and marriage is mentioned in nearly every article concerning the *sōshokukei danshi*; nevertheless, there is no real evidence of them being exceptional in their disinterest in these matters. According to a study conducted by the Japanese Family Planning Association in 2010, 36% of males aged 16 to 19 surveyed described themselves as

⁷⁰ Ibid., 1.

“indifferent or averse” towards having sex, while 59% of the female respondents of the same age answered the same.⁷¹ Although the increase was greater with men than it was with women (18% and 12% respectively, compared to 2008), it does not confirm the idea that young men are somehow responsible for the falling marriage rate and subsequent declining birth-rate, that has plagued Japan for nearly forty years. With their hesitant approach to romance, these young men have inevitably become the latest scapegoat for both the country’s economical and social problems.

Another aspect of the image of *sōshokukei danshi* is their disinterest in the company culture their fathers’ generation held in high regard — a great point of concern for older generation critics. A good example of the different values can be found in NHK’s special episode of their show *Nippon no, korekara* (The Future of Japan), that aired in 2010. The episode discussed the emergence of *sōshokukei danshi* and changing attitudes of young people in Japan, with commentators from various age groups and professions. Panelists from the older age group expressed mostly worry over younger generations’ lack of enthusiasm, which they interpreted as laziness and self-love. Work and company interests as one’s *ikigai* have been one of the central features of salaryman masculinity; young people’s inability to find fulfilment in devotion to a company therefore creates anxiety in these men. Young men who subscribe to the *sōshokukei danshi* masculinity, however, know how instable and time-consuming a salaried job can be and try to avoid the life of their fathers, who sacrificed their time and health for a system that ultimately betrayed them. As a young interviewee relates, he left his white-collar job and took up a freelancer job online because of his lack of faith in the promotion system at his previous employer. He explains how he lost his faith in the corporate system when he saw his own father lose his job when the company he worked for went bankrupt.⁷² It is understandable, therefore, that many of the *sōshokukei danshi* reject the life of salarymen and try to find fulfilment in other aspects of life.

This fulfilment comes principally from spending time alone and investing in one’s hobbies, but also from cultivating personal relationships with friends and family. In *Nippon no,*

⁷¹ see Yuri Tomikawa, "No Sex, Please, We're Young Japanese Men," *The Wall Street Journal* 13. Jan. 2011

⁷² See *Nippon no, korekara*

korekara, young people in the audience were asked what they considered to be the most important thing in their life. The most popular answers were “time for myself,” “time for my friends and family,” “my own individuality and values,” “friends,” “freedom” and “contact with people.”⁷³ As one member of the audience relates, instead of finding their own usefulness at a workplace, they rather devote themselves to interpersonal relationships, and communication is an important factor in this. Therefore, although young people may seem to be leading a solitary life, in reality they are always communicating with someone, connected to each other through their mobile phones or the internet.

The same attention to relationships can be seen in the *sōshokukei danshi*'s connection to their birthplace. Instead of moving to a crowded city, more and more young people choose to live close to their parents, in the area they were born in. Such thinking combines several aspects of the *sōshokukei danshi* mentality: maintaining a good relationship with their parents, enthusiasm about ecology and investing in existing relationships rather than facing the risks of new ones. Instead of leaving their family and birthplace behind, young men (and women) seem to want to show their gratitude towards them.

To sum up, what we now know as the "herbivore men" has become a concept that encompasses a wide range of characteristics attributed, sometimes carelessly, to young men in Japan. The designation itself has become a term of censure, used both by older generation critics and contemporaries of the *sōshokukei danshi*, to marginalise the masculinity these men represent and write them off as inferior in comparison to the more "macho" ways of traditional hegemonic masculinity. What was originally meant to be a description of changes in values and lifestyle, is now widely used to sensationalise changing gender practices in Japan. Both the foreign and Japanese media have tried over the years to define the *sōshokukei danshi*, painting an image of young men that are dispassionate about romantic relationships and marriage, frugal, disinterested in full-time employment and corporate culture and, in many ways, have more feminine interests than their fathers' generation. The *sōshokukei danshi* have also been connected to the phenomenon of declining birth-rate in Japan and the stagnating economy, effectively turning them into scapegoats for the very conditions that

⁷³ Ibid

prompted their appearance. It is in such conditions that these men have to continue to shape and enact their own new form of masculinity and challenge the outmoded gender practices of their forebears.

4.3. The self-definition of the *sōshokukei danshi*

As seen in previous chapters, the concept of *sōshokukei danshi* has been carefully crafted during the years both by the media and the general public. Observers both from Japan and overseas have been trying to use this concept to their advantage, either to show the bizarre side of Japan or to use the *sōshokukei danshi* as scapegoats for the various socio-economical problems of the country. These men have been blamed for the dropping sales of cars and alcohol, for the declining birth-rate in Japan and their general lack of aggressiveness (both in romantic relationships and professional life), which is considered “unmanly” by older generations. But exactly because of the ever-changing boundaries of what the *sōshokukei danshi* actually encompass, the whole category is quantitatively indefinable. The side-effect of the *sōshokukei danshi* phenomenon’s widespread acknowledgement is that young men, who had not even heard about this category, are suddenly labelled as “herbivores”, making them question their own masculine identity.

As Morioka explains, when writing about the naming of his first book on *sōshokukei danshi* called *Sōshokukei danshi no ren'aigaku* (Lessons in Love for Herbivore Boys, transl. by the author), he originally intended the book to serve as a guideline for kind-hearted young men who are shy when it comes to romantic relationships.⁷⁴ When he wrote the manuscript in 2007, Fukasawa’s term *sōshoku danshi* was not yet popularised by the media, but by the next year, the concept gained wider recognition in Japan and Morioka decided to use the term *sōshokukei danshi* in the title of the book, taking the advice of his editor. Nevertheless, the manuscript remained unchanged and the term only comes up in the title and afterword of the book. Although the book went on to be a huge success, and is still regarded as one of the most important writings on *sōshokukei danshi*, this story goes to show a deep-rooted problem with the naming of certain groups of people (or just labels in society general). In this case, kind-hearted, nice young men are completely interchangeable with the *sōshokukei danshi*. One

⁷⁴ Morioka, 16.

can even go as far as to speculate that, had the term *sōshokukei danshi* not been coined, most of the young men now confined into this group could live without being labelled by society. Such theories are, of course, irrelevant to the current situation. However, the problem of “othering” people by confining them between boundaries of labels remains relevant.

A good example for this process is the story of the creator of an online blog called *Sōshokukei danshi no jittai* (The True Condition of Herbivorous Men). The creator of the site, a self-proclaimed *sōshokukei danshi*, seeks to demystify his social group and help other young men with everyday problems (mostly pertaining to relationships and marriage). In the introductory part of his blog, he explains his first encounter with the *sōshokukei danshi* phenomenon:

I used to think about myself as an ordinary (everyday) man, but ever since the term *sōshokukei danshi* became popular, I came to think “Huh? Maybe I am herbivorous too?”

“Say, you are one of those *sōshokukei danshi* that I hear a lot about nowadays, aren’t you?” - I hear this a lot, both from my female co-workers and friends. [...]

When I decided to create a homepage on the topic of *sōshokukei danshi*, I felt that even though there have always been many men like this, there has not been a decided name for them.⁷⁵”

The creator of the homepage (who chose to remain anonymous) embraced his identity as a “herbivorous man” and decided to help other men to see the positive side of this phenomenon; nevertheless, his story well illustrates the problem that many young men in Japan might be facing - being automatically labelled a *sōshokukei danshi* for the sole reason of displaying one or more of the characteristics associated with this group. Although the term was originally meant to explain the positive changes in the lifestyles of modern young men, it has now become a stigma - it is a convenient category to throw young Japanese men into, based on whatever characteristics that might not fit the imagined hegemonic masculine frame, or even one’s personal tastes.

Language has a great role in separating the “mainstream” and the “other.” Labelling is

⁷⁵ “Tō-saito ni tsuite kanrinin yori,” *Sōshokukei danshi no jittai*, 2012, accessed 10 Nov. 2013

a natural reaction of society to anything “different,” in an attempt to qualify and understand any kind of social group that is in the minority. Naturally, such names can also be self-imposed by the members of the group, but more often than not, the label is freely attached to them, whether they subscribe to the given group or not. The name is then gradually internalised into social consciousness with each mention, repetition being the process of legitimisation for the naming process and for the underlying evaluation of the subject. On the importance of language in creating a sexual identity, Judith Butler wrote:

The capacity of language to fix such [sexual] positions, that is, to enact its symbolic effects, depends upon the permanence and fixity of the symbolic domain itself, the domain of signifiability or intelligibility. If, for Lacan, the [N]ame [of the Father] secures the bodily ego in time, renders it identical through time, and this ‘conferring’ power of the name is derived from the conferring power of the symbolic more generally, then it follows that a crisis in the symbolic will entail a crisis in this identity-conferring function of the name, and in the stabilizing of bodily contours according to sex allegedly performed by the symbolic. *The crisis in the symbolic, understood as a crisis over what constitutes the limits of intelligibility, will register as a crisis in the name and in the morphological stability that the name is said to confer.*⁷⁶

What Butler describes is an identity-conferring mechanism involved in the formation of gendered ideas, using the naming process to bestow symbolic importance upon a concept. The concept of *sōshokukei danshi* has, over the past few years, become near indefinable because it has been made into a symbolic concept that encompasses everything that is unsatisfactory and divergent about contemporary young men in Japan. This concept then, being branded into the social consciousness of the Japanese, is associated with young men all over the country, branding them as inferior or simply “different” against their will. As Butler writes, a crisis in the symbolic will register as a crisis in the name, and *sōshokukei danshi* as a name is in itself the embodiment of crisis. Thus, young men in Japan are assembled under the label of “herbivores”, creating a convenient target for criticism in the light of the waning of hegemonic

⁷⁶ Judith Butler, "Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion", in *Feminist Film Theory, a Reader*, Thornham, S, ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 461.

masculine ideals.

The act of labelling, then, also implies that what is deemed standard or expected does not need a name. As seen with the term “feminisation of masculinity”, discourse concerning men has a long history of marking anything female as “other” while leaving matters pertaining masculinity unmarked. When any kind of deviation from the hegemonic ideal emerges, feminine attributes are automatically assigned to it. As Tamaru asserts:

“The act of externally ascribing a particular name to this specific group of males is an extremely powerful means of perpetually branding what has been given a name as *not* part of the self, and therefore, not correct. What is “correct” is rarely given a name, much less a name that would serve to isolate and pass judgment on its existence.”⁷⁷

The branding of *sōshokukei danshi* can therefore be seen as way of vocalising criticism by adherents of the dominant salaryman masculinity in an attempt to regain their status of hegemony and a sense of authority.

The naming process in any society is a way to distinguish between the hegemonic and marginalised, to create a sense of “self” and “other”. It is a powerful tool in asserting dominance over certain groups. In this case, it can be seen as a desperate attempt from the side of the self-professed members of dominant masculinity to stigmatise a newly-emerging form of masculinity and thus promote their own gender norms. This process has brought to light the underlying current of lack of self-confidence in these men, who use criticism as a form of self-legitimation.

4.4. Salaryman masculinity - an unachievable ideal?

As it has been described in previous chapters, a great deal of criticism towards the *sōshokukei danshi* comes from older generations, who represent the predominate salaryman masculinity and are seemingly unable to understand (or at least accept) the new values that these young men bring into Japan's gender discourse. Such a conflict brings into light the mechanism by which hegemonic masculinity is constructed and sustained in a society. As

⁷⁷ Tamaru, 56.

Connell and Messerschmidt explain:

But in other respects, ambiguity in gender processes may be important to recognise as a mechanism of hegemony. Consider how an idealized definition of masculinity is constituted in social process. At a society-wide level [...] there is a circulation of models of admired masculine conduct, which may be exalted by churches, narrated by mass media, or celebrated by the state. [...] Thus, hegemonic masculinities can be constructed that do not correspond closely to the lives of any actual men. Yet these models do, in various ways, express widespread ideals, fantasies, and desires.⁷⁸

The last sentence is especially important, since it describes the essence of the problem of salaryman masculinity. The whole idea of gender hegemony relies on its relentless promotion, and the participants of this particular masculinity seem to be aware of this. Ishii-Kuntz states that, in social interaction, “a man needs constantly to construct a masculine image that will be accepted by others.”⁷⁹ In this context, the salaryman’s everyday life is a constant battle to validate himself as a part of the social construct of hegemonic masculinity. Nevertheless, the core problem of salaryman masculinity is that it is no more than a model. Thus, it is impossible for anyone to exist completely within its bounds; such a masculine ideal is in itself elusive and unattainable.

In this regard, performers of hegemonic masculinity are stuck in a position where, on the one hand, they are urged to conform to the salaryman model, and on the other hand are striving for an ideal that is unachievable. The constant onslaught of salaryman imagery from the media - television programmes, commercials or magazines - gives one the impression that the salaryman model is still the normative and predominant form of masculinity in Japan. Nevertheless, as Tamaru assesses, the idolised paragons of masculinity that many men in Japan try to reproduce in their own everyday lives, do not, and never have, existed in the flesh.⁸⁰ Even the older generations, who are usually the voices of disdain towards the new

⁷⁸ Connell and Messerschmidt, 838.

⁷⁹ Masako Ishii-Kuntz, “Balancing fatherhood and work: emergence of diverse masculinities in contemporary Japan,” in *Men and masculinities in contemporary Japan: dislocating the salaryman doxa*, ed. James E. Roberson and Nobue Suzuki (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 198.

⁸⁰ see Tamaru, 54.

generation of men in Japan, fall into this trap of “false consciousness” by asserting their masculinity even in retrospect, justifying their own life choices both by emphasising their involvement in Japan’s post-war economic miracle and criticising young men for their different values. In the end however, these men have spent their lives chasing after an ideal of power and stability - and ideal that has by now lost most of its appeal.

Other than the inherent elusiveness of the salaryman ideal, there is another interesting aspect to hegemonic masculinity. The rigidity of gender practices enforced by the salaryman model, and the fact that this it needs excessive promotion does, ironically, expose the vulnerability of this model. “The very fact that such aggressively idealized portrayals are necessary - this necessity to *instruct* correct performance - serves to highlight the instability of the seemingly all-powerful and pervasive dominant discourse.”⁸¹ In a similar vein, Iida describes the criticism and the naming of young men’s gender practices “feminine” an identity crisis of the hegemonic subject itself: “perhaps, those who strongly react against unconventional gender practices have their own good reason to be fearful of the dissidents, for their gender identities are immediately dependent upon the undisrupted operation of phallogocentric discourse.”⁸² In other words, the condemnation of masculinities different from the perceived hegemonic image can be interpreted as a loss of self-confidence.

In relation to this problem, Fukasawa in an interview illustrates how criticism towards young people has always been present in human history. She relates that when she was young, she heard many different (derogatory) names for her own generation too. Nevertheless, seeing how that was a time of economic growth and affluence in Japan, young people could afford to react to criticism in a carefree manner. In recent years however, Japan's economy has not been doing well, and young people are given the fault for this (some of them going so far as believing the criticism and taking the blame on themselves). She concludes, that instead of blaming young people, representatives of her generation (that means, above the age of forty) should think about how it was possibly them who made Japan the way it is today.⁸³ Perhaps

⁸¹ Romit Dasgupta, "Performing Masculinities? The 'Salaryman' at Work and Play," *Japanese Studies* 20, no. 2 (September 2000) 199.

⁸² Iida, 62.

⁸³ see Fukasawa, "Imadoki"

the harsh criticism towards *sōshokukei danshi* is only a desperate attempt by the adherents of salaryman masculinity to protect their own image of hegemony and persuade both themselves and the rest of society of their own infallibility.

In the end, older generations' criticism towards the *sōshokukei danshi* can be interpreted as a struggle to legitimise their own gender practices. These men have lived their whole life under pressure, chasing after an ideal that is inherently elusive, only to live to see the ideals they held in such high regard disappearing and being replaced by contradicting values. Because of the socio-economical changes of the past twenty years, most of the values that the "bubble generation" adhered to are no longer relevant; admitting this, however, would mean admitting to failure for many of these men. Vocally criticising a newly-emerging masculinity that threatens the hegemony of their own gender performance is the only weapon older men have at their disposal. Such promotion of outdated ideals, however, may cause a further delay in the already reluctant acceptance of the *sōshokukei danshi* masculinity as a dominant gender practice. To what extent the *sōshokukei danshi* will be able to transform hegemonic masculinity in Japan remains yet to be seen.

4.5. The *sōshokukei danshi* as fathers

Despite their alleged aversion to romantic relationships and marriage, within the boundaries of modern-day masculinities, the *sōshokukei danshi* can be said to fall on the side of the new family-oriented men, or *ikumen*, for short. The *iku* here stands for *ikuji*, meaning "child rearing;" as the name suggests, these men have chosen to prioritise child-rearing duties over their work or other (typically masculine) activities. Although most of the men that are considered to be *sōshokukei danshi* are younger than the fathers in the *ikumen* group, their strong opposition to the traditional masculine culture and their experience of a fatherless upbringing connects the two groups closely.

The term *ikumen* was coined by the Hakuhodo advertising agency and popularised by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in Japan, when they launched their "Ikumen Project" in 2010. The goal of the project, together with various legislative changes, is to popularise the idea of fathers' involvement in their children's upbringing and to help fathers

who choose to take parenting leave. The latter proves to be especially problematic for men in Japan; although, based on information from the Ministry, more than 30% of men would like to use child-care leave, in reality only 2.6% of men took this opportunity in 2011.⁸⁴ The government, meanwhile, has set the goal of raising this percentage to 13% by 2020.

The problem with men taking child-care leave (or simply prioritise family time over work) lies with the deeply entrenched values of hegemonic masculinity, dictating that a man should live for his work. Therefore, *ikumen* who try to balance family life with work often face criticism and disapproval at their workplace. Based on a survey released by the Japanese Trade Union Confederation in early 2014, one in ten working men have experienced "paternity harassment" at their workplace as reaction to their application for child-care leave, while the requests of half of these men got rejected.⁸⁵ This goes to show that despite the government's efforts to create family friendly workplaces, in reality many companies have problems to lose the salaryman working mentality, that questions the masculinity of men that choose to actively participate in the lives of their children.

The long-time success of the nation-wide Ikumen Project remains to be seen; nonetheless, such awareness is a step forward in terms of the shifting gender boundaries in Japan. It allows for wider recognition of alternative gender practices, that both the *ikumen* and the *sōshokukei danshi* represent. The *ikumen*, who mostly fall between the age groups of the middle-aged salarymen and the current *sōshokukei danshi*, actively choose to oppose the conventional gender roles and related family structure, and thus represent a deviant form of masculinity.⁸⁶ The *sōshokukei danshi* mostly come from the same family background as the *ikumen*, and have gone through the same process of disillusionment with corporate culture and the wastefulness of the "bubble generation." Many of today's *ikumen* have chosen to devote themselves to childrearing as an answer to their own experiences with their fathers being uninvolved in everyday family life. It can therefore be hypothesised that the *sōshokukei danshi*,

⁸⁴ The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in Japan, *Promotion to Support the Balance Between Work and Family Life*, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in Japan Website, 2013, accessed 29 Apr. 2014

⁸⁵ Tomoko Otake, "Over 1 in 10 men have experienced 'paternity harassment': survey," *Japan Times* 24 Jan. 2014, accessed 30 Apr 2014

⁸⁶ See Tamaru, 42.

whose alternative masculine practices stem largely from the same source, will try to adhere to the same principles within their own families. In this way, today's *ikumen* might turn out to be the pioneers of fatherhood that the *sōshokukei danshi* will eventually follow.

5. Conclusion

Gender is a fluid and changeable concept, based on constant negotiation between contrasting ideals of femininity and masculinity, but also between hegemonic and marginalised performances. In this thesis, I have sought to describe such dynamics in the context of Japanese (heterosexual) masculinity, to outline the hegemonic masculine ideal of the post-war era and the subordinate "intruders" in the form of the new gender practices of young Japanese men.

The personification of the hegemonic masculine ideal is the salaryman, the product of post-war industrialisation and consumerism, embodying the new middle class ideal of a nuclear family. Diligent, self-sacrificing and work-oriented, the salaryman was also domineering and largely absent from the family sphere. By relating the economical and societal changes of the last decade of the 20th century, I endeavoured to show the "crisis" in salaryman masculinity, as this ideal was quickly becoming untimely. It was also at this time, that new gender practices were allowed to enter and challenge the hegemonic ideal.

In recent years, the alternative masculine practices of Japanese men have come to be epitomised by the *sōshokukei danshi*; nevertheless, this group, however influential, is only a part of modern Japanese youth. Therefore, in this thesis I have endeavoured to describe the *sōshokukei danshi* in a wider context of alternate gender practices. First, the heightened fashion-consciousness and beauty consumption amongst young Japanese men was described, relating the masculine ideals that fashion magazines and different commercials promoted. By drawing upon stereotypically feminine practices, young men have contributed to the shifting and merging of gender boundaries, while creating space for self-realisation. Another group, the *ikumen* have also been addressed, drawing parallels between their upbringing and values concerning child-rearing, and the *sōshokukei danshi*'s own family background. Both the fashion-conscious group of young men and the *ikumen* share many traits with the *sōshokukei danshi*; although they do not conform to the same, narrow description of the contemporary "herbivore men," these categories are all interlinked and overlapping, creating a new generation of men challenging the hegemonic masculine ideals of their forefathers. Furthermore, the *ikumen* of today might serve as an example to the younger *sōshokukei danshi*, as they move towards marriage and fatherhood.

The effect the *sōshokukei danshi* and their peers will have on family structure and masculinity as a whole in Japan still remains to be seen; however, it can be safely said, that the ideals that new generations of Japanese men represent have already begun their work towards a more accommodating masculinity and blurring boundaries of gender.

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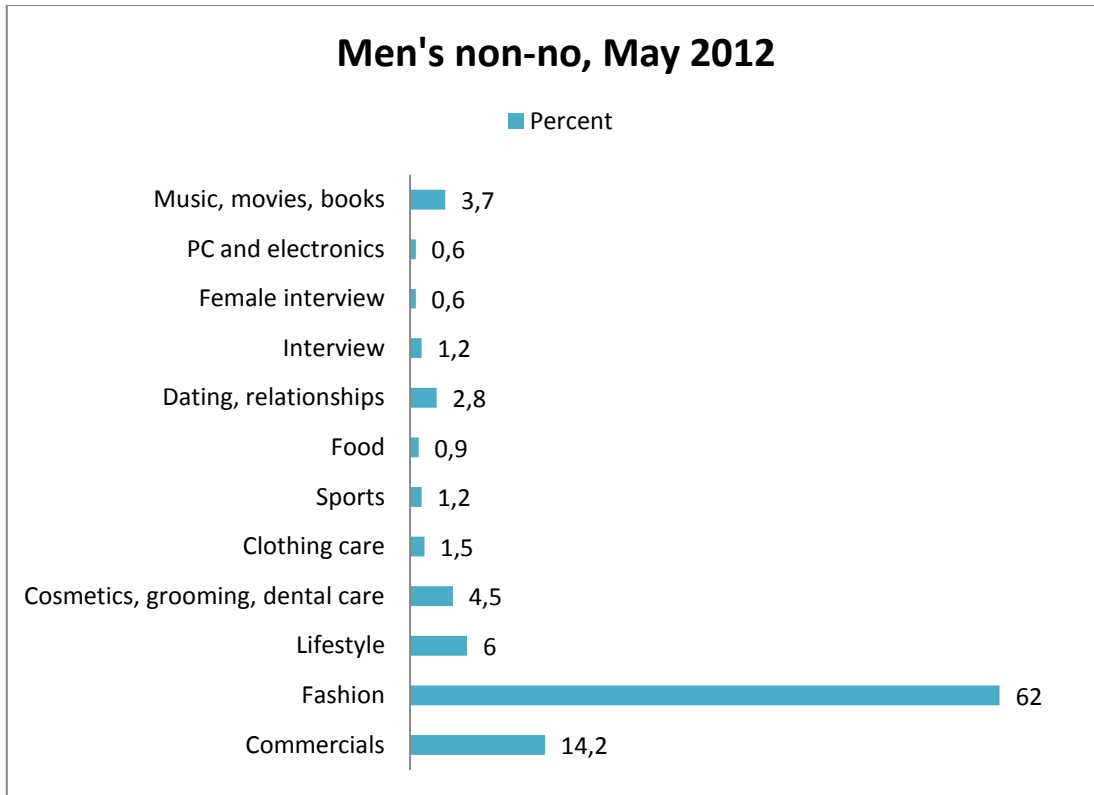
Zhrnutie

Táto diplomová práca sa zaoberá meniacimi sa genderovými rolami mužov v Japonsku za posledných približne tridsať rokov. Porovnáva ideály z doby po Druhej svetovej vojne, stelesnené tzv. "salaryman," úradníkmi ktorí sa stali idolom pre novú vznikajúcu strednú triedu Japonska. Opisuje dobu tzv. "Lost Decade," stratené desaťročie ekonomickej stagnácie a spoločenských zmien, vďaka ktorým sa starý ideál mužnosti stal nevhodným a zastaralým. Taktiež poukazuje na vzťahy v rámci "salaryman" rodín a vplyv ktorý takéto rodiny mohli mať na rozmýšľanie ďalších generácií.

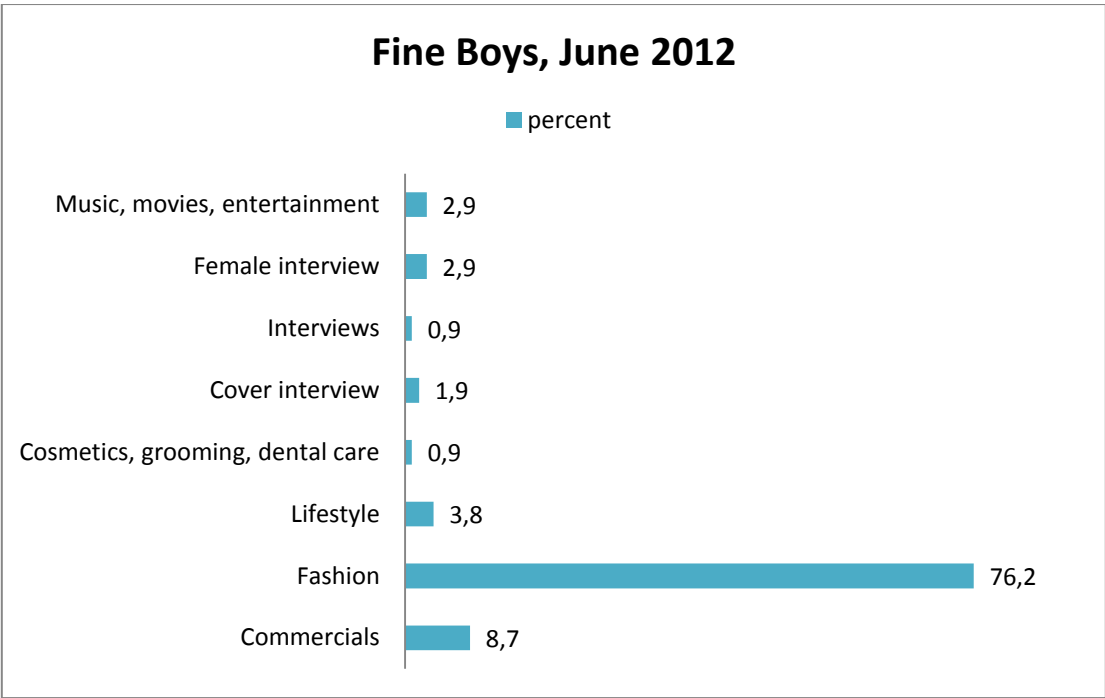
Značná časť práce je venovaná meniacim sa gendrovým prejavom mladej generácie Japoncov. Tretia kapitola sa venuje súčasným módnym magazínom, ktoré sa špecializujú na mladých Japonských mužov. Opisujú sa tu nové ideály a spôsoby, akými dnešní mladí Japonci dokážu premeniť svoju maskulinitu, dokonca aj použitím tradične ženských postupov, predovšetkým módy. Časť kapitoly je venovaná trhu s kozmetikou pre mužov, tieto výrobky si za posledné roky získali veľkú obľubu a ďalej poukazujú na to, že sa hranice mužnosti v Japonsku menia a prelínajú sa na územie ženskosti. Japonskí muži si však, aj napriek novým ideálom, dokážu zachovať jednoznačne heterosexuálnu maskulinitu.

Posledná časť diplomovej práce opisuje fenomén zvaný *sóšokukei danši* (tzv. "bylinožravých mužov"). Toto pomenovanie sa za posledných pár rokov dostalo do podvedomia mnoho Japoncov ale aj zahraničných komentátorov; *sóšokukei danši* predstavujú novú maskulinitu v Japonsku, ktorá vznikla ako odpoveď na zastaralé ideály predošlých generácií, a preto sa táto skupina stretla aj s negatívnym ohlasom. Napriek tomu však môžu priniesť dôležité, dlho očakávané zmeny do genderových vzťahov v Japonsku a predstavovať tak krok ku zmazaniu gendrových stereotypov.

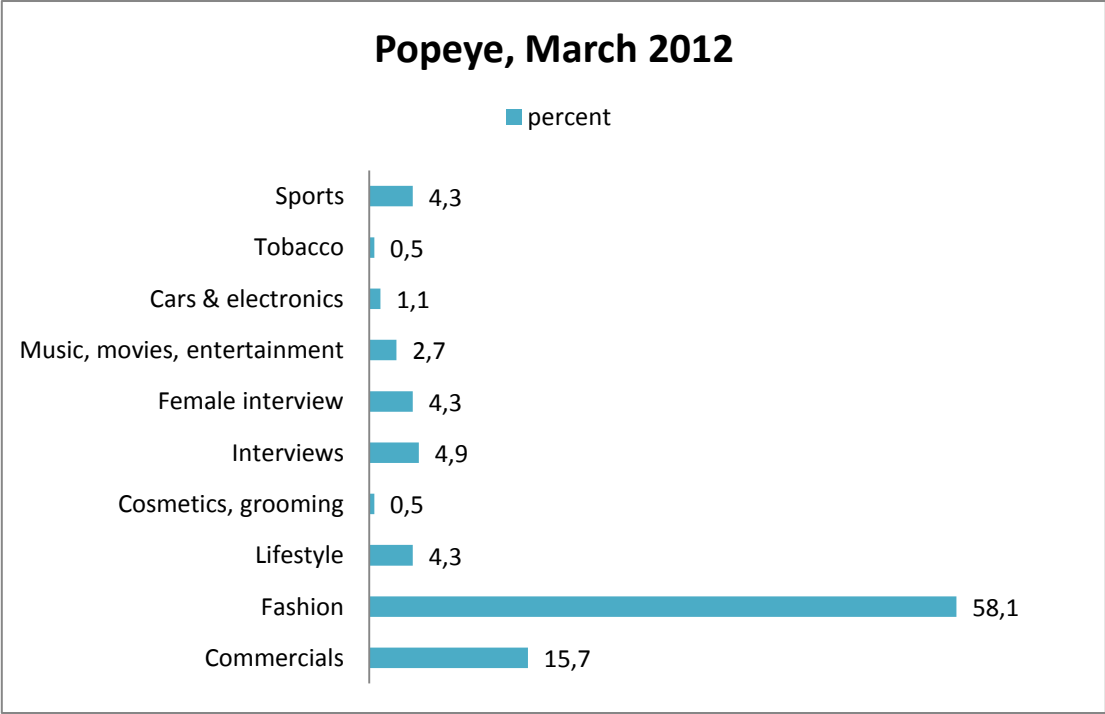
Appendix



Graph 1



Graph 2



Graph 3

