

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

**ProQuest Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600**

UMI[®]

BECOMING IMAGINABLE

**Japanese Gay Male Identity
as Mediated Through Popular Culture**

By

Jeffrey Dobbins

Graduate Program in East Asian Studies

McGill University, Montreal.

August, 2000.

**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate
Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of Master
of Arts.**

© Jeffrey Dobbins, 2000.



**National Library
of Canada**

**Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services**

**395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada**

**Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada**

**Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques**

**395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada**

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-70589-7

Canada

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Sections	Page
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 Body Drag in Bishonen Manga	8
1.1 History	9
1.2 Gay Men Created for Teenage Girls	14
1.3 The Depiction of Gays	20
Chapter 2 Gay Themed Film	27
2.1 Synopsis	29
2.2 Authorship	41
2.3 Warning Women and Gay Men: Contagion	46
2.4 Stereotypes and Role Playing	48
2.5 Protecting the Interests of Straight Men	52
2.6 Liberal Ideals Versus the Ugly 'Truth'	54
Chapter 3 Gay Men's Magazines	60
3.1 Description of Magazines	62
3.2 The Personals	65
3.3 Gay Men and Marriage	66
3.4 Self-Acceptance over Activism	68
3.5 Depictions of Gays in Mass Media	72

3.6	Politics Cloaked in Fiction	73
3.7	A Change of Body	77
3.8	Regarding Pornography	80
3.9	Beyond Reactionary	87
Conclusion		93
Bibliography		96

ABSTRACT

This thesis will examine how gay men are depicted in mainstream Japanese pop culture. To be discussed are: gay-themed comics for girls, mainstream movies in which the protagonists are gay, and finally, gay men's magazines which are gay authored and consumed. In examining how fantasies in these texts respond to the needs of various readerships, it is possible to understand how important and challenging it is for gay Japanese men to create identities of their own, identities which will allow them more possibilities than the prevailing facade of compulsory heterosexuality, complete with marriage and children.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans cette thèse nous étudions comment les gais (homosexuels) japonais sont décrits dans la culture japonaise populaire. Nous allons nous concentrer sur les modes d'expression suivants: les manga pour filles dont les protagonistes sont gais, les films commerciaux avec des thèmes gaies et les revues gaies écrites et lues par des hommes gais. En examinant comment les fantasmes véhiculés dans la culture populaire répondent aux attentes des consommateurs, on saisit la difficulté que peuvent éprouver les gais à créer leur propre identité, mais aussi l'importance d'une telle démarche qui leur ouvrira d'autres possibilités au delà de la traditionnelle façade d'hétérosexualité reposant sur le mariage et les enfants.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the many individuals who have helped me to bring this thesis into being.

In particular, I thank my thesis supervisor, Professor Thomas LaMarre, whose guidance, flexibility and invaluable suggestions have been of tremendous assistance to me. Also, I must express my gratitude to Katherine Thomas and Tina Vuoreenmaa for their insights and comments regarding girl's comics. I also owe much to many gay Japanese men who shared with me their opinions on a wide array of issues. For helping me to procure audio-visual materials, I thank Yuki Yoshi, and Glenn for introducing him to me.

As a result of the patience, encouragement and support of my friends, family and fellow students, I have finally been able to achieve my goal. I must thank Lisa, Melissa and Hiromi for listening to my ideas and offering their thoughtful suggestions. For help with the french version of my abstract, I thank Sonia Dandaneau and Joanne McNair.

Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to Kouichi, who was a source of constant encouragement and concern, and who was always there when I needed him.

INTRODUCTION

Despite a long history of literature and art depicting love and sexual acts between men, the predominant attitude toward homosexuality in Japan is negative. Whether the appearance of homosexuality is attributed to nature, nurture or practise, there are social taboos against homosexuality in present day Japan. To avoid discrimination, gays are secretive. In fact, many heterosexuals in Japan see homosexuality as predominantly, a “foreign” problem. In May 1982, an eminent Japanese scientist, speaking to American researchers in Japan about Karposi’s sarcoma, is reported to have attributed the problem of AIDS in the United States to the presence of homosexuals there, saying, “Of course, we don’t have homosexuals here” (Shilts 1988, 156).

In her essay, “Marriage and Family: Past and Present,” Yoshizumi Kyoko writes,

Spiritual closeness between individuals of the same sex is accepted, but sexual relations between such individuals is repudiated, and homosexuals are viewed as perverts and treated in a discriminatory manner. It seems to be the case that, even among individuals who prefer to be with someone of the same sex and have a strong emotional attachment to that person, so long as no physical relationship exists between them, the fact of their homosexual tendency does not surface to the level of self-awareness. (Fujimara-Faneslow 1995, 191-192)

As a result of the invisibility of gays and lesbians in Japan, it was big news when Japan celebrated its first gay pride parade in Tokyo in 1994. Since that time, there have been gay pride parades in other Japanese cities, notably, Osaka and Sapporo. In 1995, in a two-part telecast on national TV, in the name of better understanding gay men, 50 gay Japanese men were interviewed. A large percentage of the men who took part wore veils to hide their faces. In 1999, the only Gay Pride Parade took place in Sapporo. Infighting and money problems were rumoured to have been responsible for the cancellation of the pride parades in Tokyo and Osaka. Despite the large number of clubs for gay men in Tokyo, it is evident from the relatively small number of Japanese participants in the gay pride parades and the desire of gay men to conceal their identity on TV, that there are few gays in Japan who are proud and open enough about their sexual orientation or "lifestyle" to be reckoned with as a social force.

This thesis will describe how gay men are depicted in main stream Japanese pop culture and how these representations feed the fantasies and shape the identities of gay Japanese men. An examination of how collective fantasies are mediated through popular films, *bishonen ai* manga and popular gay magazines that depict gay men and their relationships, makes it possible to understand some of the possibilities offered to gay Japanese men to create an identity of their own. In reviewing these depictions in pop culture, particular attention will be paid to the role models, objects of identification and objects of desire and their ability to destabilize the status quo. This thesis attempts to chart the identities of gay Japanese men, an assemblage of disparate and heterogeneous individuals whose mainstay of identity

often lies in their being Japanese rather than gay.

In *Virtually Normal*, a homosexual is defined as “someone who has found in his or her life that he or she is drawn emotionally and sexually to the same gender, someone who has had no fundamental choice in the matter” (Sullivan 1996, 18). According to Michel Foucault, homosexuals had no essential “identity” (based on sexual orientation) until very recently. David Halperin in his book, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, makes the same point, namely that gay identity as we know it is a modern construction. Following Foucault and Halperin, one might situate the emergence of a ‘gay,’ identity marked as it is by the articulation of a sexual truth or essence, with the formation of the modern nation and official nationalism. In his book, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson describes how the industrial revolution and the rise of print media help to create the conditions for the emergence of modern nationalism. In particular, Anderson sees the flowering of the novel and newspaper as important to the birth of the nation as an imagined community (Anderson 1991, 245). Similarly, in more recent years, TV and film have had great impact on the construction of communities and identities. Gays derive much of their sense of unity and community through print media and film.

On the contemporary scene, cultural icons, images and concepts, especially those of the culturally dominant nations, have come to play a central role in identity construction across the globe. The concept “gay,” whether a construction or not, has become rooted in the social imaginary of many nations, among them Japan. The concept of homosexuality, understood to be a natural and intrinsic difference, has gained new authenticity, in Japan as elsewhere, with studies which

show that there are structural brain differences between heterosexual and homosexual men (Levay 1994).

Usually, Japanese gay men do not adopt a totalizing stance toward gay identity. Gay identity does not override other identifications. Although this choice does nothing to help the nascent gay political/social movement, it does permit its members to enjoy the same privileges accorded heterosexual Japanese men. At the same time, gay men are free to “play” after hours and on their days off.

To better understand the consequences of gay men being (by most accounts) an invisible minority in Japan, I would like to briefly compare and contrast it with the situation of “resident Koreans” in Japan (*Zainichi Kankokujin*). Like Japanese gays, resident Koreans grow up in and are socialized in Japan. Today about 700,000 Koreans live in Japan. According to Fukuoka Yasunori, a professor at Saitama University, the vast majority are either second, third or fourth generation. In his paper, “Beyond Assimilation and Dissimilation: Diverse Resolutions to Identity Crisis among Younger Generation Koreans in Japan,” he describes how resident Koreans, are developing new identities that are unique from Koreans living in Korea or from Japanese. Fukuoka discovered that these individuals have no singular unifying identity but rather have many different identities and different coping strategies, such as denying their difference, retreating to a ghetto with resident Koreans only, or regarding their difference as a personal matter not to be shared with most others. Amazingly similar and varied are the coping strategies of Japanese gays.

Unlike Koreans and other minorities in Japan, however, gays do

not grow up in gay families. This tends to deprive these individuals of any unity of identification or solidarity based on communal or historical difference. Yet, gay men, through their familial and social connections, can potentially work within the dominant system reaping the benefits of the heterosexual Japanese male. The condition for their social belonging is a “normal” life, in which the gay man marries and devotes himself as tirelessly to his career as his straight colleagues. As long as he maintains the illusion of straightness, he may succeed. Japanese gay men are able to fit within Japanese society by marrying and having children in accordance with the norm. In large cities, they have access to casual sex at gay saunas or video boxes. If a gay man has a penchant for pornography, he can read it at a gay bar, which usually is only about two to three times larger than a walk-in closet. In this respect, the ‘gay’ aspects of their lives are subject to containment.

In this thesis, in order to explore the possibilities for gay identity in Japan, I focus on representations of gay men in Japanese popular culture. In particular, I look at three different kinds of texts, that involve very different kinds of production, authorship, and mediation: (1) *bishonen* manga, or comics about “beautiful youths” written by women for an audience of teenage girls; (2) gay-themed films, that is, mainstream films in Japan which centre on gay men, but written and produced largely by and for heterosexual audiences; and (3) gay men’s magazines, which include a range of materials written by and for gay men.

Bishonen manga have had a tremendous impact on the representation of gay men in Japan. Although, as we shall see, the goal of such gay representations constitutes an attempt to overcome certain

social constraints placed on young women in Japan (rather than a concern for gay men per se), these extremely-popular comics for girls have served to establish a kind of precedent for the representation of gay men in popular culture, influencing writers and artists in other media such as film, animation, television, and so forth. If it is true, as Richard Dyer writes, “how we are seen determines in part how we are treated; ... such seeing comes from representation” (Dyer 1993, 1), then *bishonen* manga are the point of departure for dealing with representations of gay men in Japan.

In the chapter on gay-themed film in Japan, I will discuss four major movies: *Kirakira Hikaru* (The Twinkling 1992), *Okoge* (Fag Hag 1992), *Hatachi no Binetsu* (Feverish Twenty Year Olds 1992), and *Nagisa no Shindobaddo* (Sinbad’s Beach 1995); as well as a television drama series, *Dousoukai* (Class Reunion 1995). These films are widely available at larger video rental outlets throughout Japan and have had an impact on a large audience, both gay and straight. I have opted not to discuss so-called pink movies (porno movies for gay men). Such films are typically written and acted by heterosexual men, and much like the allegedly lesbian scenes in straight pornography, are designed first and foremost to make money for their straight authors. Moreover, as John Champagne notes in “Stop Reading Films!, Film Studies, Close Analysis, and Gay Pornography,” few of the videos that show at video arcades are “watched,” so to speak. They serve as a stimulus for masturbation or other sexual activity. Champagne reminds us that “an insistent recourse to close analysis necessarily obscures some of the social functions of gay pornography in particular” (Champagne 1997, 77). For these reasons, because the goal is a close analysis of the social

functions of representation, with an emphasis on popular representations, I have decided to limit my analysis here to gay-themed films.

Finally, in order to look at how gay men in Japan currently image and imagine themselves, I examine magazines for gay men, among them *Badi*, *Barazoku*, *G-men*, *Sabu*, *Samson*, and *The Gay*. Such gay men's magazines, written for and by gay men, allow them to forge an identity of their own, one that contests the mainstream representations of them, which largely present them as ridiculous and deviant. Moreover, such publications can affect the politics of gay life in Japan. Once a gay man has experienced a time and space in which gayness may exist for itself, it becomes difficult for him to accept a time and space in which it may not. In Japan, however, such an affirmation of gay identity has yet to solidify, and gay identity is truly under construction, and under negotiation, in movies, manga, and gay magazines. It is this process of construction that this thesis will explore in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 1

BODY DRAG IN BISHONEN MANGA

As a multi-million dollar industry in Japan, the importance of manga and its ability to reach huge numbers of very different consumers is not to be underestimated. To maintain its high readership and to hook new readers, the manga industry has to be sharp and up to date. It must create a variety of new products often with creative innovations or gimmicks.

One innovation that has enjoyed prolonged success is the *shonen ai* (boy's love) manga. These magazines depict love between males and are marketed towards teenage girls. There are at least a dozen such publications sold, including such titles as *Comic June*, *Shy*, *Charade*, *BE x BOY*, *Reijin*, *Asuka Ciel*, *Beast*, *Boys' Pierce*, *Hanaoto*, and *Wings*. These magazines come in various sizes and, with the possible exception of a few pages of glossy colour, are printed on inexpensive low quality newsprint. They are of the 'read and chuck' variety. The larger issues are around 300 to 400 pages and contain a dozen or so serialized stories along with a few pages of advertisements, notably for back issues and fan paraphernalia such as posters. The most marketable of these stories are often compiled and sold in paperback novel format. Manga are widely consumed and greatly influence mainstream Japanese culture. At one extreme, the emphasis falls on love, with sex reserved for the final story

resolution. At the other, sex is the predominant feature with only the barest semblance of a story. There is everything in between as well, and readers seeking variety can find magazines with both the teasing (but I hardly know you!) variety story as well as the more explicit (you're so hot, let's talk later!) brand, such as is found in *Bi-Shonen Hard Core Sex*. *Bishonen ai* manga are with few exceptions authored by and consumed by women and there is considerable overlap in their storylines. Technically, there are different names for groupings within the genre of girls' manga, such as *Bishonen* (Beautiful boy), *Shonen no ai* (boy's love), and so forth, with distinct target audiences. *Shonen ai* manga, for example, are more narrowly marketed toward teenage girls and deal almost exclusively with male homosexual relationships. *Bishonen* (beautiful youth) manga, while still targeting the teenage girl market, are also read by women of different ages and do not deal exclusively with male homosexual relationships. In this section, I will look at those manga that have stories of boys who love other boys, labelled here as *bishonen ai* manga (beautiful boys' love). The *bishonen ai* manga are intended for teenage girls and can be found in a wide variety in large, general interest bookstores in urban areas. In rural areas, the paperback novels are more common than the manga proper.

1.1 History

The first modern comics for girls were authored by men and appeared around 1926. After WWII, one very prolific Japanese comic artist, who had been greatly influenced by Disney, rose to

prominence. His name was Tezuka Osamu, and one of his major contributions to manga was the introduction of cinematic techniques to the medium. This new sophistication, as well as the wide array of subjects depicted, boosted sales of manga to record levels. In 1953, Tezuka wrote *Ribon no Kishi* (Princess Knight), in which a foreign royal princess named Sapphire dons male attire, claims male identity and inherits the kingdom to which, as a daughter, she had no legal right. In fact, the story begins in heaven where, by accident, the unborn baby is fed a male heart (blue) by one little angel and then a female heart (red) by another angel. Raised as a Prince, Sapphire enjoys the power and privilege to which that male status entitles her. The story met with great success and paved the way for more cross-dressing fantasies that ostensibly empowered women.

For the creation of this tale, Tezuka may have found his inspiration in a number of materials: the late Heian Period (794-1185) tale *Torikaebaya monogatari* (The Changelings, tr. Willig, 1983); the infamous English novel by Radcliffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness*, in which an only child, a daughter, Stephen, is brought up as a boy; or by the all female revue Takarazuka. That Tezuka grew up in the city of Takarazuka and with his mother attended many of the troupe's performances increases the likelihood of its influence upon his work.

Takarazuka was founded in Japan in 1913 and staged its first production one year later. Women play all roles and the claim of the theatre company as well as its admirers is that it "offers audiences a chance to dream of other lives in other worlds" (Robertson 1998, 7). In that specific male and female roles are depicted, the theatre

perpetuates the idea that there are in fact only men and women and they are bound to rigid social and sexual positions. The women who play women's roles are referred to as *musumeyaku* and the women who perform males roles are known as *otokoyaku*. As Robertson writes, "both *musumeyaku* and *otokoyaku* are products of a dominant social ideology that privileges masculinity and men" (Robertson 1998, 12). Just as most audience members willingly suspend their own knowledge of the actor's 'real' gender in Mary Martin's or Sandy Duncan's portrayal of Peter Pan, so do Japanese audiences with women actors portraying men on the Takarazuka stage. The dominant reading of Takarazuka is that one uses one's imagination to read the female actors who play male characters as really male and the romance they act out as heterosexual. Yet, with the Takarazuka, it is also as Judith Butler has written "*Man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and women and feminine a male body as easily as a female one*" (Butler 1990, 6; original emphasis).

Takarazuka, in fantasy at least, offered women in drag a whole range of possibilities other than what the predominant culture suggested. As with *Princess Knight*, one major reason girls were so enthusiastic about the story of a bold cross-dressing princess was that there was growing discontent with the predictable Cinderella plots and the sappy 'good wife, wise mother' role models provided in male-authored girls' manga. Girls and young women were tired of the models of prescribed femininity with which they were presented. It was not just the drabness of being female but also the straight jacket of being a Japanese woman, which tempted women to

experiment with the trappings of the masculine and the foreign.

In a similar vein, a few decades later, in a girls' manga magazine, Ikeda Riyoko serialized *Berusaiyu no Bara* (The Rose of Versailles), a story about a girl, Oscar, who, raised as a boy, enjoys the benefits of being brought up and perceived as a man. Young Oscar, as a captain in the French army and head of the palace guards, leads an adventurous and exciting life as special aide to Marie Antoinette. *The Rose of Versailles*, with its exotic setting, achieved freedom from oppressive gender roles by relying on the conventions of the Takarazuka. It truly was a smashing success and, when performed by the Takarazuka, became their greatest post-war success.

Responding to their audience, manga artists had to choose between writing roles in which women could overcome gender barriers while still behaving and dressing as women, and writing roles in which their protagonists overcame these barriers through cross-dressing, in effect performing gender liberation. One of the problems of cross-dressing heroines was that, in the end, the heroine was expected to return to her “biological” destiny as a wife. This is indeed how *Princess Knight* concludes. The other option, death, was Ikeda's choice for Oscar who dies heroically in the French Revolution. Death is the only resolution which does not compromise the basic ideal of freedom from the entrapment of gender roles.

At a cultural crossroads, women in the manga industry found a way out of the dilemma; the creation of *bishonen ai* manga—works that no longer saw the need for the hero/ine to be a disguised female for the readers to find his/her exploits to be interesting. The *bishonen* manga took the cross-dressing of Takarazuka one step

further: the protagonists are still women on the inside but instead of simply putting male clothes on a women's body and having them behave as "male", their authors put their 'would be' women in male bodies as well, thus giving birth to body drag. In *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga*, Frederik Schodt describes the bi-monthly magazine *June* (Inverted Love). Once the most popular of the *bishonen* magazines, in 1995, *June* had a circulation between 80,000 and 100,000. The creator of *June*, Sagawa Toshihiko, attributes the popularity of *June* to the idyllic amalgamation of attributes that are construed to be masculine and feminine. To quote Sagawa:

Thus the heroes can be beautiful and gentle, like females, but without the jealousy and other negative qualities that women sometimes associate with themselves. The women readers are also attracted to the friendship and bonding that they assume takes place between males... On the surface these characters are gay males, but in reality they are a manifestation of females: they are like young women wearing cartoon-character costumes. (Schodt 1996, 122)

Matt Thorn, who is both an avid reader and translator of this genre, came to the same conclusion when he saw a movie production of a *bishonen* classic *Tooma no Shinzo*. He wrote, "when *Tooma no Shinzo* was made into a live-action movie, all the parts of the boys were played by girls. This made explicit what I had felt all along: that Thomas and Yuri and Eric and all their friends are actually girls in drag, exploring same-sex feelings without striking too close to home" (Thorn 1993). Despite these theories, for the most part, the readers of the *bishonen no ai* manga think of the protagonists as idealized males. According to Katherine Thomas, co-editor and writer for BRIX (1999-2000), a zine for gays and lesbians living in

Japan, *shonen ai* manga “erupted from the success of *yaoi* manga in the underground comic scene.” *Yaoi* is an acronym for *yama nashi, ochi nashi, imi nashi* or “no climax, no punchline, no meaning.” As if to confirm this, Sagawa himself says he came up with the concept of *JUNE* after the popularity of *yaoi* (Schodt 1996, 120).

Body drag is not merely a question of appearances, but rather a tacit acceptance of the idea that men and women’s social realities are determined by their biological differences. It is through such biological differences that socially some doors open, while other doors close.

1.2 Gay Men Created for Teenage Girls

In cinematic hard core we encounter a profoundly “escapist” genre that distracts audiences from the deeper social or political causes of the disturbed relations between the sexes; and yet paradoxically, if it is to distract effectively, a popular genre must address some of the real experiences and needs of its audience. (Williams 1989, 154)

There are many elements which combine to create the fantasy of the beautiful boys love stories. These elements include freedom, the foreign, voyeurism, naughtiness, and exoticism. Dyer suggests that the fantasy created is an antidote to the readers’ reality. In *bishonen ai* manga, the fantasies are freedom, equality and exoticism to counteract the restrictions, inequality and dreariness that are assumed to constitute the lives of its readers.

To counteract the perceived limitations of being Japanese and female, Japanese girls situate their freedom in male bodies, and

overseas. The fantasy is clearly not to be a Japanese male. Foreign settings often serve to infuse the stories with noble ideals, and racial differences often figure prominently as catalysts in achieving freedom from the drab trajectory of Ms. Everyman.

Often the characters are foreigners or have only one Japanese parent. "They have ideals and dreams that seem to surpass those held by their Japanese boyfriends as well as the burning desire to pursue them" (Thomas 1998, 31). Another of the freedoms indulged in fantasy is non-conformity. Following the American occupation of Japan after World War II, a mythology of an advanced "West," as an essentialized other, where individualism, non-conformism and freedom reigned supreme, became entrenched in the national psyche. As a result, Americans and other Westerners are often expected to live up to these ideals. The belief that the West is a site of freedom is echoed in the fantasies. Even in physical appearance, "halfs" naturally escape conformity. *Bishonen* manga heroes are drawn as long-legged, big-eyed, pretty boys. Unlike their readers, the boy protagonists, although adolescent, do not suffer from acne, menstruation, or the general awkwardness of their age. Although much has been written on the androgynous portrayal of boys in *bishonen* manga, in fact, the boy's bodies are often not so much androgynous as they are outright feminine. The women artists often display a wilful ignorance of male anatomy in placing anuses where vaginas should be. Another bizarre feature is that while the bodies have the straightest of waist lines and hips, they often have proto breasts which on such emaciated male bodies could only be possible with the prolonged use of hormones.

Often, of a couple, one will be blond and fair with blue or green eyes while the other will have darker features and a different stature. In disposition they are different as well, with one being more active, spontaneous and outgoing, while the other is more contemplative and passive. These contrasting characteristics mirror the perceived and imagined complementary gender differences between males and females.

A common situation in *bishonen ai* manga, is that one character is madly in love with another but cannot or will not verbalize it. Another situation which is not rare is the holding of an admirer at a distance because of doubt of the pursuer's attentions. Many of the boys are sexually ravaged and succumb to pleasure while not wanting to admit it. Matt Thorn describes the *bishonen ai* manga as follows:

It is a vehicle for a reader to define her individual identity; it is a vehicle for socializing that binds friends and family members; it provides a frame of reference, a repertoire of idioms through which a reader can interpret and model experience; it can be a source of inspiration and catharsis; and its nature has changed subtly over decades in response to broader historical changes. (Thorn 1997)

There are a number of theories which attempt to explain the popularity of this genre of entertainment. It seems clear that cultural forms do not simply reflect but rather shape desire. "Entertainment does not simply give people what they want; it also partly defines wants through its orientation of problems" (Williams 1989, 155). The manga express the reader's desire to be different and attractive, to love and be loved as equals, through its fictional narratives. Thus Richard Dyer (1981, 177) argues that mass

entertainment “is merely content to suggest what utopia would ‘feel like’ ” (Williams 1989, 155). Quite clearly, the gay relationships of the *bishonen* are used to understand relationships in general. One of the functions of mass-marketed entertainment in a capitalist society is distraction. In confronting the impossibility of certain social inequalities and inevitabilities, rather than strive for meaningful social change, readers willingly submit to the escapist panacea of entertainment. With many working class men it is *pachinko* (vertical pinball) or bars, and for teenage girls it comes in the form of manga. Simply put, entertainment tends to deactivate potential subversiveness within a society.

Bishonen manga, like Takaruzuka and Kabuki (in which all the actors are male) operate on the assumption that art (which is related to that which is created, therefore artifice) is best when something represents something that it is not. Men in Kabuki are believed to represent the perfect women (probably for men) and similarly, women in Takarazuka are touted to be the best men (probably for women).

One theory takes the view that teenage girls, through the vehicle of identification with one or more of the boy protagonists, escape into a more interesting world. Just as men can “experience lesbian love making voyeuristically” (Sheldon 1984, 9), teenage girls and young women in consuming gay-themed materials, can experience gay men making love. As Sheldon concludes, the onlooker feels “that [she] can take on the technical knowledge (and thus the power) of the [gay men] (Sheldon 1984, 9). The enviable power that gay men have is to be equal in a relationship with a man and yet at

the same time be free from the enslavement of marriage and children, something many young Japanese women have been avoiding in recent years. Another theory is that teenage girls while being fascinated by sex are terrified of it and so can indulge their desires through voyeurism, while keeping sex itself at bay.

To quote Katherine Thomas in the July issue of Brix:

The goal of shounen-ai manga is to get little school girls hitting puberty a little wet and happy under their skirts, not to promote queer/straight understanding. One plot convention is to keep characters distant from any queer identity. Though Kenji might be doing the nasty with Tsutomu one night, the next day, if he's asked, he'll thoroughly deny any question of his "heterosexuality." (Thomas 1999, 18)

According to Brix manga reviewer Tina Vuorenmaa, in *Kusatta Kyoushi no Houteishiki* (Equation of a Degenerate Teacher) by Kazuma Kodaka, are found, "all the fixings of a model *shoujo* manga: the BIG eyes, dwarf-characters for comedic effect, plot twists, and especially love triangles" (Vuorenmaa 1999, 14). In this story the four main characters are high school boys. In addition, a female high school student and a male teacher figure in the romantic twists of the plot. A likes both B and C thinking they are the same person. In fact, they are brothers. B has a crush on the math teacher, while C wants nothing more than to have sex with his brother B. The girl in the story pines after D who in turn desires A.

As previously mentioned, *bishonen* manga, like the Takarazuka, are voyeuristic with respect to the worlds and people they create. In seeking out stories about men loving men in exotic places (picture a Harlequin romance where the heroine is in body drag), Japanese

women are practising cultural tourism. For teenage girls, in general, reading about sex is quite naughty, therefore, exciting; and spying on “perverted” gay men then, is even more naughty and exciting.

Many of the magazines have fetishized the gay world and strive to give an impression of intimate knowledge of it by reviewing gay-themed foreign movies and books, and by including gay subject matter. (This is how gays live, this is how gays do it, this is where gays meet ...) In one 1989 issue of *June*, there is two-page section entitled, “Manhattan Keiko’s New York Gay Men Book.” In it, Keiko has copied illustrations from *The Joy of Gay Sex* and written her own captions for the readers. There are also illustrations from another source of a threesome where the penises have been replaced by models of the statue of Liberty—a conflation of sex, freedom and the foreign that teenage girls rarely experience outside their fantasy worlds. On the same page, a small Statue of Liberty exclaims, in English, “Made in U.S.A.” Other books, and their prices, are also mentioned, such as “MEN LOVING MEN; A gay sex guide and consciousness book,” available for ten US dollars. As is usually the case with cultural tourism, Keiko and her readers’ fascination with the lives of gay (foreign) men says more about their desires than those of gay men. Recently in such magazines, voyeurism has gone a step further, in the form of a couple of glossy pages with film clips from gay porn videos from Japan and abroad. These videos are reviewed in a regular column entitled, “Tasting Homo Video.”

1.3 The Depiction of Gays

Bishonen manga can be criticized in that they perpetuate the myth that gay relationships are based on male-female role playing. As Sheldon writes, "Taking on oppressing or oppressed role models is no way to change the balance of power" (Sheldon 1984, 7). As evidenced in *bishonen* manga, love stories don't necessarily preclude power relations. On one level, homosexuality as depicted in Japanese girls' comics glorifies youth and the ability to live beyond the realm of societal expectations. And yet, although the idealization of freedom is ever present in girls' comics, the heroes mimic heterosexual models of relationships. In other words, one, as the man, is usually older and wiser, and penetrates the other younger man, who, as the woman, is prettier and gets penetrated. In contrast to the noble intentions of the heroes, actual gay characters are often constructed as abnormal embodiments of evil living on the fringes. Thomas in her research found that in some manga, "gay gangs" of high school boys stalk and attempt to rape the "femme hero." Many teenage girls probably identify with the pretty feminine hero. As a male, however, he has considerably more options available to him than a girl would have, but still must be rescued from the lurches of evil by his 'straight' boyfriend who comforts, soothes and later penetrates him. In a cruel reversal of agency, those who are often the actual victims of violence (gay men), are portrayed as the aggressive and dangerous perpetrators, thus deserving of the contempt, condemnation and punishment that is heaped upon them in

the end.

Sometimes a gay character is introduced in order to further delineate our heroes from any "abnormal" identity. Of course, this character is shady, older and rather frightening; he comes onto the younger femme hero and his butch counterpart has to come and save him. (Thomas 1999, 18)

In the animation *Kizuna* (1994), which was first published in *shonen ai* manga form, the hero Ranmaru Samejima and his boyfriend Enjoji live together, make love and show a great deal of caring and affection for one another, yet at the same time they show revulsion at things gay. Enjoji works for an older man who has designs on him. After working late one night, his boss insists on taking him to a bar which turns out to be a gay host club, a bar where boys serve the customers' needs. (Host bars do exist in Japan, but mostly cater to women clients.) The place is depicted as unsavoury, and the young male hosts, although attractive, alternate between being stereotypically bitchy and girlishly coy. This is to contrast with our heroes, of course, who are pure and true. Just being in such a place, he feels sullied, and when he goes to the bathroom, he laments that this is by far the biggest mistake he has made in his life.

While he is in the bathroom, the lecherous villain, an older predator (who we are to understand as being what real gay men are like), slips something into his drink so that he can have his wicked way with him. Our young hero is rescued at the last minute, and his rescuer demolishes the club and beats up many of the hosts, as if they somehow deserved it. The older man temporarily escapes but later, when cornered outside, he is beaten up badly, his hand is stabbed, and there are hints of castration. Readers are to understand

that as a real gay, as a villain, he had it coming. Often *bishonen ai* manga understand their heroes' affairs to be based on love and therefore beautiful. The sex of gays on the other hand is thought to be motivated by lust and is therefore something dirty, usually initiated by "older boys" or gay men (Thorn 1993).

Another manga tale which has been made into an animated film is the story *FAKE* which first appeared in *BexBoy* magazine. The main characters are New York cops, Dee and Rio, who go to England on vacation together and find themselves at the scene of a murder. Rio looks after two little girls, a tomboy Vicky and her friend Carol, who somehow follow him to England. The arrival of the children help to frustrate the couple's attempt to consummate their relationship. This confirms the teenage girl's idea that men having sex is naughty, exciting and not appropriate for the eyes of children. Strangely enough, central to the plot is that all of the murder victims are of Japanese descent, as is Rio himself. Maybe that foreign freedom is dangerous after all, or is it that danger, in itself, is romantic?

Despite its subject matter, *shonen ai* manga doesn't really shed light on the identity of gay Japanese men who, for the most part, remain an invisible group of subjects unworthy of much attention.

The exotic settings of bishonen romances are in stark contrast to the stories in gay men's magazines that usually use Japan as the backdrop of drama where Japanese men act on other Japanese men. Stylistically as well, the long legged, lithe, enormous eyed characters of the girls comics are rarely found in gay men's magazines. If gay Japanese men seek freedom in romantic fantasy,

then they want to have it in Japan with another average (even with respect to cock size) Japanese man. Very well endowed men, whether drawn or photographed are the exception in Japanese gay men's magazines.

My research does not indicate that many gay men read girls' magazines. Indeed, these genres are not found in gay bars where gay men's magazines are commonly found. The reason gay men generally do not display much interest in these manga is that gay Japanese men do not see themselves as Japanese women imagine them to be. Sheldon notes, "the male homosexual may retain the confidence of the power men have, i.e. economically, socially and culturally, but may additionally derive confidence from relating sexually to other men with this power" (Sheldon 1984, 10). Therefore, the problems of the female readers and their resolutions often do not apply to gay men. Japanese males and females, in escaping from very different realities, are attracted to different fantasies. Naturally manga authored by gay men and produced for gay men are more likely to cater to and fulfil gay men's desires. However, gay boys who are not able to locate or purchase gay men's magazines may buy (or just stand and read) the much more widely available *bishonen ai* manga.

In Japan, *bishonen ai* manga are often available in smaller cities and towns where gay men's magazines can not be found. Some young protogays, who do not have access to gay magazines found in specialized stores, turn to their sister's or female friends' manga. In *bishonen no ai* manga, there are certain omissions and representations which could be useful to a gay teenager in forming his own identity. For example, the world of the *bishonen* is idealized

and in it only rarely is there a threat of sexual disease, AIDS, or self-hatred. As homosexuality is practically invisible in everyday life in Japan, these are not issues.

Bishonen ai manga could potentially help young gays to develop a positive self-identity through exposure to the idealization of gay love. These manga also help him to give a name to his feelings and fantasies. For individuals excited by cartoon sex, some *bishonen* magazines such as *Boys' Pierce* contain plenty of graphic depictions of one man penetrating another, as well as other sexual acts.

Interesting because of their exceptional nature, are *bishonen ai* manga where the protagonists admit they are gay or identify themselves as gay. According to Thorn, the manga story *Nemureru Mori no Binan* (Sleeping Male Beauty) deals with gay life in a more realistic way and with AIDS as well (Thorn 1989). Another series which deals with gay love and that the protagonists admit is *New York, New York* written by Ragawa Marimo. As is typical in *bishonen ai* manga, the characters as well as the setting are foreign. Atypical of the genre, however, and perhaps a sign that the author does not respect its conventions, is that the protagonists do identify themselves as gay and frequent gay establishments, such as gay bars. Adding to the foreign aura, is the synopsis of the story written in English on the front cover. It begins, "Kain Walker was a policeman in the New York City Police. He was 24-year-old guy from Newton, Mass. He was born on December 18, Blood type O. He was a gay." The story creates sympathy for the main characters, Kain and Mel, through the foil of Kain's mother. At the beginning of book two, she refuses to shake hands with Mel when he is brought home to be

introduced. To the readers, introducing one's same sex lover to parents becomes an eye opening possibility, at least for gay foreigners. Ragawa's ground breaking innovations in the genre include a quest for respectability and attempts to be accepted as "gay."

One teenage girl manga that exemplifies the confusion between gay male and other identities is the manga *Double House* by Nanae Huruno (Young You Comics). As a manga it is quite strange in that it insists that Maho, its main character, is a cross dressing gay male. Maho is drawn as extremely pretty and feminine, a dead ringer for pretty girl characters in girls' manga and very different from the boys that usually appear in bishonen manga. Her identity is presumed to be gay although it is not really discussed. (Sexual reassignment surgery is still not performed in Japan.) Superficially, Maho's life resembles real life celebrity Mikawa Kenichi who counsels people on and off TV. In the story, Maho successfully helps people to solve their problems to the point his life is completely given over to helping others. This is a common paradigm: In helping others, particularly straights, gay people redeem their lives and prove that they are not about to challenge heterosexual norms.

Without question *bishonen ai* manga have created interest in the lives of gay men, at least fantastical ones. Yet, Japanese consumers are credited with an ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality. Many readers, while passionate about their favourite gay protagonists in fiction, feel that 'real' male homosexuality is disgusting and it is something beyond their interest.

Bishonen no ai manga reached their peak of popularity in the 1980s, and although still popular, are now in decline (Thorn 1997). However, this genre played an instrumental role in creating an industry based on the consumption of “gay-themed” fiction. This encouraged greater cultural attention to gays and thus, to some extent, the gay boom, and the first pride parades in Japan. In this sense, the capitalist commodification of an imagined world, led to a sense of shamelessness among a small minority of gays in Japan who, begging to differ with the prevalent representations, chose this window of opportunity to represent themselves to the outside world.

CHAPTER 2

GAY THEMED FILM

In this section, gay-themed films, from the period known as the *gei bu-mu* or gay boom, will be discussed. Generally, the gay boom in Japan, falls between 1991 and 1995, when the representation of gay men became popular in mainstream cultural production. As outlined in the previous chapter, this phenomenon was largely brought about by teenage girls and young women who were hooked on stories about boys in love with each other. The financial success and the great popularity of foreign gay films, such as *Another Country* (1984) and *Maurice* (1987) spurred Japanese producers to jump on the band wagon and cash in on the popularity of gay stories. As a result of the gay boom, depictions of gay men temporarily became rather common. For many, these conditions enabled the recognition of a gay identity within themselves, and an acceptance of something which previously had been understood only as a perverse compulsion.

In the editor's preface to *Partings at Dawn, An Anthology of Japanese Gay Literature*, Stephen D. Miller writes that, despite having lived in Japan for almost 8 years in the 1980s, he saw no representations of gay men, aside from seeing the "occasional cross-dressing television personality." He continues to describe the prevalent reality of that time, "the popular attitude of

[heterosexual] Japanese people was that gay people [in Japan] did not exist." Miller then relates how he received a taped Japanese TV drama, *Dousoukai* (Class Reunion) that was both gay-themed and explicit, which he interpreted as, "From denial to acceptance in the course of a single television series" (Miller 1996, 8). Of course, visibility, especially when brought about for sensational voyeuristic pleasure, does not necessarily mean acceptance.

To be discussed are four major gay-themed Japanese films and one made for TV drama. They are *Kirakira Hikaru* (The Twinkling 1992), *Okoge* (Fag Hag 1992), *Hatachi no Binetsu* (Feverish Twenty Year Olds 1992), and *Nagisa no Shindobaddo* (Sinbad's Beach 1995), and the TV series *Dousoukai* (Class Reunion 1995). These films, unlike others of their genre that have been made in Japan, are widely available at larger video rental outlets nationwide and therefore, may be viewed by and directly influence large numbers of people, both gay and straight. These films should not be taken as expressions of gay men in Japan, for, as mentioned previously, they are heterosexually authored and created for the voyeuristic pleasure of heterosexual viewers. Nonetheless, they constitute an important point of departure for the representations that Japanese gays of and to themselves, the outside society and the world.

One aspect of these films is that they present homosexuality as a personal problem rather than a social or political issue. In so far as the "problem" is the "difference" of the individual, the protagonists inform us about the various ways to deal with such a reality. The understanding of these "realities" is conveyed to the viewer through the objects of identification and of desire as well as

the interplay between them. While other representations of gay men come from foreign films or cross-dressing celebrities on Japanese TV, the gay men depicted in these films are perhaps the first, not conspicuously queer, Japanese gay role models for gay men in Japan.

I will first describe the plots and characters of these films, before turning to a more detailed and focused analysis.

2.1 Synopsis

2.1a *Kirakira Hikaru* (The Twinkling 1992)

The trailer begins with brief biographies of the protagonists. The woman, Kayama Shoko, is introduced as an emotionally unstable alcoholic. The man, Kishida Mukki, is described as a homosexual doctor. There is thus a certain parallel drawn between her condition and his—as “disabilities.” Yet he is defined by his sexual orientation and his profession whereas she is defined only by her “problems.” (As her predestined role is wife and mother, her career plans are of little interest.) As misfits Shoko and Mukki are presented as somehow appropriate for each other. Adopting a heterosexual lifestyle is seen as a solution to all of their “problems” (her drinking and emotional instability and his deviant sexuality). The theme is not a new one. British film maker Tony Richardson made *A Taste of Honey* (1961) in which Jo, a single pregnant woman of working-class origins, teams up with Geoff, a young effeminate gay man. In such films, gay men are put together with sick or destitute women because as individuals they are portrayed (and therefore

understood) as weak and unable to survive in the harsh 'real world' by themselves.

With full knowledge of the other's secrets, Mukki and Shoko get married. At first, Shoko throws herself into being a housewife, going to such lengths as ironing her husbands sheets before he goes to bed and then tucking him in. She works translating Italian and drinks late into the night while listening to opera music. This is in contrast to Mukki, who sleeps in a bed in a closed private space, which connotes the shame of his sexuality, Shoko sleeps in an open room on a futon, being the purveyor of Japanese culture.

After they are married, Shoko is still no more stable or happy than before. To remedy her disgruntlement, her best friend as well as her mother suggest she have a child. Her drinking and emotional instability are never taken into consideration in the decision to have children. Having children, like marriage is compulsory in order to maintain and propagate the society. As she has no problem with her husband having a boyfriend, Shoko goes to the boyfriend's university and insists he come visit. She extends her friendship to Kon, and her husband Mukki resumes his relationship with his boyfriend.

Although Mukki is openly gay to his wife, when faced by his boyfriend Kon and his wife Shoko in his home, he becomes sullen and surly. Having your cake and eating it too has a liberating and empowering potential. Yet in this film, it turns out badly precisely because the film imagines it in heterosexual terms. In a heterosexual context, the equivalent would be the alliance of the mistress and the wife under the husband's roof. This is a scenario which one could imagine would cause considerable discomfort for a

heterosexual man. Thus Mukki accuses them of being up to something and then tells Kon to go home.

Mukki's mother advises him to make the effort to sleep with Shoko so that she can get the offspring that she deserves. Although, it is not overtly stated in the film, it is clear that marriage entitles women to children. His mother believes that even if Shoko's parents learn of their son-in-law's homosexuality, as long as he gives her children, they will not try to force them to divorce. His mother advises him to resort to artificial insemination if he cannot fulfil his duty the "natural" way.

Shoko asks her doctor about the possibility of artificial insemination, having her husband's and his lover's sperm combined. Once she has decided to have children, Shoko goes to the International House of Pancakes and orders coffee, instead of her usual beer, fulfilling the prophecy that having a child will be good for her. However, the unnaturalness of artificial insemination remains a metaphor for the unnaturalness of the protagonists and their relationships. It also highlights the unproductiveness of such relations.

In Japan, if marriage is between two families, then so too is divorce in this film. When Shoko's parents discover that their son-in-law is gay, the four parents meet with Mukki and Shoko. Shoko's parents condemn the union on the grounds that Shoko cannot get what she deserves from it. Mukki's father cannot help but agree. The heterosexual fathers, as stand-ins for the film makers, are the figures of social orthodoxy. Shoko's parents favour divorce. Voicing an unsolicited opinion, Shoko declares the arrangement is fine as it

is, but no one listens to what she says. It is above all, a problem for the parents to work out.

Mukki, Shoko and Kon get together to decide what to do. To appease the parents, Mukki appears willing to end his relationship with his boyfriend or give his wife a divorce. His sexuality like Shoko's drinking problem, is seen as no more than a bad habit. Angered by her husband's caving in to the wishes of others, Shoko yells at Mukki for being such a weakling, for not living what he feels. Ironically, in giving in to his wife, he will no longer be a puppet for others to manipulate. Thus, in the end, the movie indicates that the three will not succumb to social pressures but will continue their relationships.

2.1b *Okoge* (Fag Hag 1992)

Okoge is the story of a woman who befriends a gay couple; Goh a designer, and Toshi an older salary man. The conflict begins when Goh's mother, having had a fight with her daughter-in-law, decides to move in with Goh. When she arrives Goh and Toshi are making love yet she chooses to ignore the evidence that her son is gay. It is as Sayako's colleague says to her children at the beach, "even if you have seen it, you haven't seen it" which sums up the disavowal of gays in Japan. Goh, rather than come out to his mother, goes to great lengths to be a "good" son.

Coaxing Goh to do the right thing, his family arranges a meeting with a young woman whom they wish him to marry. As a result, Goh comes out to his family, yet they refuse to acknowledge

it. Once he leaves the house however, pandemonium breaks out. The scene ends with Goh's mother equating homosexuality with birth defects—screaming she did not give birth to a defective child. When Goh recounts what happened to Toshi and Sayako, his lover calls him a fool. To remedy the situation, Sayako, who is a voice-over animation actress, dresses like a tart and goes to the sweet and innocent young woman Goh is supposed to marry and tells her that Goh is already taken. Being a “good” son, however, Goh permits his mother to determine his lifestyle; while continuing to tryst with Toshi at Sayako's apartment.

As Goh is leaving Sayako's apartment one morning, Toshi's wife appears and demands to be let in. While Goh escapes, Toshi's wife trashes the apartment. Sayako does not rebuke Toshi's wife for the damage she causes. It is as if Sayako accepts her guilt in allowing the relationship to continue under her roof. As the wife leaves the apartment she employs sickeningly sweet polite Japanese and threatens to destroy her husband's career if he continues his romance, by informing his company that he is a homosexual.

One scene in the movie makes it clear that visible gays have problems in the public sphere. While shopping on Goh's birthday, Toshi and Goh run into a man from Toshi's office with his wife. The awkwardness of both couples is clear, and what is equally clear is that the straight couple picks up on the rather obvious clues that what they have before their eyes is not two friends out together. Clearly, gossip will circulate at the office as a result of the sighting.

Goh soon realizes that his own needs will always come second

to Toshi's facade of a marriage, thus he ends the relationship.

Goh's mother quickly loses her health, as she blames herself for Goh being gay. The film thus suggests that, in refusing to pretend to be heterosexual, Goh is literally killing his mother. That Goh was quite happy until his self-centred mother intruded on his life and tried to force him into marriage, illustrates the extent to which his happiness outside of familial and social obligation is unimaginable. Discovering that Shoko genuinely likes Goh, his mother demands that he marry her. In other words, as long as the correct socially-sanctioned form of the family is respected, his mother is willing to suspend her knowledge of Goh's sexuality.

In an attempt to find a man for Goh, Sayako arranges a meeting for him with a man he fancies. Sayako's innate innocence is shown through her belief that the man is gay because he once raped another man. Tragically, as Goh cannot be reached the man rapes Sayako. And incredibly, because she is pregnant by him, Sayako marries the rapist.

Goh's mother's condition deteriorates to the point where she enters an institution, where Goh tends to her until she dies. For some time Goh and Sayako lose track of each other. Then, Sayako appears at the gay bar with a large baby in her arms asking about Goh. She then goes to the gay cabaret, another of their old haunts, where she learns that Goh's mother has died. Goh resurfaces in the bar world, meets Toshi and his new boyfriend and learns of Sayako's situation. Also significant is the news that Toshi has been outed at work.

The denouement of the film is a scene where Sayako is saved from an attack by gangsters by Goh and a group of drag queens. While

they do manage to rescue her and her baby, the film shows how their exercise of power (a trapping of masculinity) has its limits, and how incompatible power is with femininity.

The camera closes in on Goh and Sayako framing them like lovers. At last, according to the film, they have found their “natural” complementary halves. He takes Sayako and the baby home where they are welcome to stay as long as they like. This way, he explains, repeating his dead mother’s words, he won’t grow lonely.

In the penultimate scene Toshi, in behaving as the proverbial nail sticking up, is hammered down. Toshi makes a fiasco of a young colleagues’s wedding by performing an obnoxious song with his boyfriend in drag and the bride is reduced to tears. Exiting, they run into Toshi’s wife who chides him mercilessly while Toshi is speechless.

In the final scene, Toshi meets Sayako and Goh in a park. Toshi is single again and now out of work as well. The plight of homosexuals is indeed tragic. He tells Goh and Sayako how lucky they are, to which Sayako replies that just being with Goh is enough for her. Toshi, seeing an older gay man with a younger boyfriend, declares that he will continue to try to find happiness.

As Goh and Sayako walk with the baby through 2-chome, she reassures him that it is okay for him to meet someone. In other words, he will be able to have his cake and eat it too.

2.1c *Hatachi no Binetsu* (Feverish Twenty Year Olds 1992)

***Feverish Twenty Year Olds* (which I will abbreviate as *Fever*)**

capitalized on the demand for gay-themed film created in the wake of the gay boom. The story deals with a withdrawn young gay man, a university student, Shimamori Tatsuru, whose part-time job is working as a prostitute in the bar "Pinnocchio."

In *Fever*, Tatsuru has two friends, Yuriko, a female upperclassman and Miyajima Shin, a high school student who has a crush on him and who also prostitutes himself.

We learn that Tatsuru's father has refused his wife a divorce, to prevent his family name from coming to an end. The pressure is thus on Tatsuru to get married, have children and continue the family line. These expectations are in marked contrast to Tatsuro's lifestyle and highlight the incompatibility of societal expectations and gay men.

In one scene, Tatsuru has sex with a middle aged man who seems intensely unhappy and reveals that he is married with a daughter. After confiding that he would rather have a son like Tatsuru, they have sex, which adds an aura of incest to their intergenerational sex.

Meanwhile Shin has a fight with his parents and moves in with Tatsuru. Much screen time is taken up with inconclusive dialogue on the nature of happiness. Their time together ends when Tatsuru becomes annoyed that Shin can see through him so he tells Shin to go home and study to become a designer. Then, having a rather limited repertoire of coping strategies, but again consistent with the belief that gay men are all about sex, he tries to initiate sex with Shin. This turn of events, shocks Shin who pushes him away trying to make a joke of the pass. Tatsuro is also confused and Shin leaves.

In his flight, Shin meets his female friend who reprimands him for always leaving things half finished. She tells him to go to Tatsuro and tell him how he feels.

The film ends with the following scene. Both Shin and Tatsuro are engaged as prostitutes to participate in a threesome. This does not work as both boys appear frightened and confused. In a moment of emotional catharsis, each tries to protect the other from the sexual advances of their client. Visibly upset, Shin sings while Tatsuro begins to cry, then Tatsuro sings too. It is unclear whether they will be able to continue to be prostitutes. They do, however, seem ready to have a relationship together. The open-ended resolution allows the viewer to imagine romance, friendship or perhaps just a parting.

2.1d *Nagisa no Shindobaddo* (Sinbad's Beach 1995)

Named after the hit song by the same name from the Japanese group "Pink Lady," Sinbad's Beach is another story of an unhappy young man. Yet what is refreshing about this movie is the young man's intelligence and cynicism, both which help him to navigate through high school.

The film is the story of a fastidious, pale, thin and weak boy named Ito. He is, in short, an amalgam of every gay cliché found in Japanese movies. Ito develops an attraction for a fellow classmate, Yoshida and is coupled with the sick/abnormal Aihara—yet another gay cliché. Ito makes advances to Yoshida who at first tentatively accepts them. Ultimately, Yoshida, in not wanting to be gay, rejects

Ito. Yoshida then transfers his maleable desires to Ito's friend Aihara, who rejects him.

The movie ends with a scene on the beach filled with cases of mistaken identity, questions on the role of gender in relationships and a melodramatic rescue, all attempting to convey the message that human relationships are complex and often do not work out.

2.1e *Dousoukai* (Class Reunion 1995)

As a television mini-series, *Dousoukai* is episodic in form, following the lives of a high school graduating class tens years after their graduation. As a melodrama it is like a soap opera, but its pace is very fast and its focus is on the sensational and outrageous. Strongly influenced by girl's manga, it is voyeuristic and full of intrigue, portraying the gay world as exotic and dangerous. It also makes use of the visual metaphors and techniques from *bishonen ai* manga. Directed by a gay man, it combines different forms of authorship. Its plot and characterization have the depth and believability of any soap-opera. Broadcast over several weeks on national TV, this series did much to influence the way in which gay men are perceived and understood.

The story begins with Fuma, a closeted gay man, deciding to marry, giving in to the social pressure around him. He does so as he yearns to be normal but also because he thinks Kosuke, the man he loves, is straight and therefore, could not return his love. Natsuki, the woman Fuma proposes to, had been Kosuke's girlfriend. Natsuki still loves Kosuke but for some reason or other they have broken up

and can't get back together. In this way, she and Fuma are linked by their impossible love for the same man. The same day he proposes, Fuma goes to Shinjuku 2-chome (the gay section of Tokyo) where he runs into Arashi, a juvenile delinquent and hustler. Arashi, in helping Fuma to explore his homosexuality, changes his life. (Arashi also just happens to be the younger brother of Kosuke's new girlfriend.) Believing that a homosexual life style could ruin his life, Fuma does not want to be gay and makes it clear he wishes to avoid further contact. Despite this, Arashi becomes obsessed with Fuma and tracks him down initiating a passionate affair.

In the course of the series, Kosuke and Natsuki go to a bar (which resembles an opium den) to consult a kind of wizard about Fuma's lack of interest in sex. The back wall of the bar opens to reveal a room of a love hotel where they see Fuma and Arashi have sex. As a result of her deep hurt and frustration, Natsuki decides to go to Shinjuku where she is denied entrance to a gay bar. Dejected, she has sex with Arashi only to find out afterward it wasn't free. To make matters worse she becomes pregnant as a result. Fuma goes to a "petting park," has sex with a foreigner and gets beaten with baseball bats by masked gay bashers, only to be rescued by Kosuke. (Gay bashing is very rare in Japan but is scary and makes the story more exciting) Fuma finally confesses his love for Kosuke and they become lovers for a time, after which Fuma concludes that his wife must come first. This unlikely outcome is consistent with external expectations. However, once awakened in Kosuke, homosexual desire is not something that is so easily suppressed. Then, he falls ill with a chest tumour. The parallel of his conversion and his becoming sick

is unfortunate and warns the viewer of the consequences of being gay. Kosuke, increasingly uncomfortable with his homosexual feeling, has to prove his heterosexuality. Quite by chance, he meets a classmate's exhibitionist girlfriend and decides to sleep with her. In fact, she is a preoperative transsexual and discovering she is a he, Kosuke slaps her around furious that his heterosexuality has turned out to be queer. (Apparently forgotten is the fact that he had no problem with Fuma's genitals, but then, that was love). In revenge "she" recruits a gay gang to rape him. Arashi, although one of its members, is absent.

Becoming aware of Kosuke's cruel fate, Fuma becomes enraged and arranges to fight the gang single handedly at an abandoned warehouse. Just as he defeats the final bad guy Arashi shows up to help the other gang members. After a gruelling fight they go home to Fuma's house where they have sex confirming their love for one another.

Once he becomes aware that Fuma is in love with Kosuke, Arashi tries to kill him. Ushiyo, Arashi's effeminate friend, intercedes and unwittingly Arashi stabs him instead. In pain, Ushiyo declares his love for Kosuke. Once healed, Ushiyo becomes Kosuke's boyfriend, and subsequently a gay foreigner marries them in a Christian ceremony, with Ushiyo in full bridal drag. On a few occasions Shinobu, a female classmate, will "pretend" to have sexual feelings for Natsuki but after a kiss, Natsuki recoils with fear and revulsion. Arashi and Fuma have sex in one twin bed while Natsuki tries to sleep in the next (All this in Fuma's parents house while they are home).

In the end, Arashi is murdered (shot in the back by a crossbow in a park in broad daylight) but Fuma discovers a construction worker who looks like Arashi and whom Natsuki encourages him to pursue.

Often the romances are interrupted by editorial descriptions of the essential nature and differences of gay love versus straight love. Also noted is Japan's homosexual samurai tradition which is described as a form of love, that was respected in Japan until the importation of American puritanism.

2.2 Authorship

As for viewer's position and interest, the differences between *bishonen* manga and gay-themed film are startling. In the girl's manga, the interest is in the boys' relationships, romance and adventures, as well as the liberating potential of just being male with the social status and privileges that allows. There is little interest in the lives of girls, and what little there is, exists as subplot.

In 1991, an article in *CREE* magazine showed how a maturing female readership was interested in real life gay men and their lives. The article describes the possibilities for women to engage in fulfilling platonic relationships with gay men whose company they discovered they enjoyed. As a result of certain trends, having gay friends became a fashionable commodity for the modern woman.

In the films described above, gay people are understood from a male heterosexual point of view, facilitating a cultural tourism or

voyeurism of the gay world. What is described is more revealing of its authorship than of gay men. When the film world awoke to the marketing potential of gay-themed movies, heterosexual directors shifted the object of interest from gay men (the object of interest in *bishonen* manga), to their favourite objects, heterosexual women. Therefore, the focus in *Kirakira Hikaru* is Shoko and in *Okoge* it is Sayako. Even in *Sinbad's Beach*, Aihara unwittingly becomes the third player in a doomed love triangle. In *Class Reunion*, Natsuki, as Fuma's wife and the mother of Arashi's baby, is central to the plot. At least in *Fever*, Shin's friend, although a catalyst for much of the plot, is still not the focus.

It is as if the presence of a woman is obligatory in order to accept or validate the gay couple. Indeed, women are often at the centre of shots that include the male couple on a date. In *Kirakira Hiraku* Shoko accompanies her husband and his boyfriend to the seaside and other places. When she is absent, they seem morose and quarrel. In *Okoge*, Sayako enjoys a picnic in a graveyard with Toshi and Goh and reclines on them when they begin to embrace. The camera thus employs the female as the site of romance. *Sinbad's Beach* and *Class Reunion* use this technique as well. In their stories and resolutions the films *Kirakira Hikaru*, *Okoge* and *Class Reunion* fit into the genre of romantic melodrama. That the locus of love in these three movies turns on the relationship between a gay man and a straight woman is indication enough of its heterosexual authorship. In these movies, gay men are presented with the 'choice' between leading a 'normal' life or continued deviance. This is especially true in movies where a woman falls in love with a gay

man, as in *Kirakira Hikaru*, *Okoge* and *Class Reunion*. In the resolution of each of these movies, although she may have to share him, the woman does get her gay man.

This type of “heterosexual address,” with its characteristic interest in gay men with straight women, is particularly evident in *Kirakira Hikaru*, *Okoge* and *Sinbad's Beach*. Rather than consider the possibility that gay men of themselves can constitute interesting subject material, the director’s “interest” lies in answering the questions, “What kind of woman would be interested in or entangled in relationships with gay men?” and to a lesser extent, “what kind of men are gay?” These questions are indicative of a shallow curiosity and preclude that there is something wrong with gay men and the women who seek their company. Similar to those male journalists who labelled Japanese women who preferred foreign men “yellow cabs,” the male film makers find that the women interested in gay men are not entirely normal or even fully Japanese. In fact, foreignness is one of the recurring themes in these films. In addition, the gay men are often typified as weak, over-sexed and unhappy.

2.2a Iconography

Probably because its norms are heterosexual, iconography for gay men is not subtle. Some of the keys to showing gayness are dressing him in sexually-revealing clothing (fundoshi at the beach in *Okoge*), presenting his confession (at the beginning of *Kirakira Hikaru*), depicting sex (*Feverish 20 year olds*), or emphasizing

paleness and frailty, such as with Ito, who faints from exposure to sunlight at the beginning of *Sinbad's Beach*. Goh and Toshi wear matching outfits which readily identify them as a couple. Dyer explains that we as the audience are almost always immediately informed that the character is gay so that we can understand the character's dilemma, the story, etc. In other words, being gay and its consequences is the focus of the movie and any confusion is avoided. Dyer explains that heterosexual hegemony is disturbed by the fluidity and invisibility of gayness and therefore essentializes it, and makes it visible from the beginning (Dyer 1984, 32).

One of the explanations given for women's interest and involvement with gay men is that they are themselves flawed. This is to say that if these women were 'normal,' they would be quite happy with their 'natural' counterpart, 'normal' Japanese men. These movies go out of their way to present these women as unusual. In *Kirakira Hikaru*, for example, Shoko, in addition to being childish, is emotionally unstable and an alcoholic. The doctor tells Shoko's mother (in Shoko's presence) that her daughter's mental health is okay. Then looking at Shoko, he adds, "now, all you have do is find someone to marry." Her mother manages her health and arranges her daughter's marriage. As for Sayako in *Okoge*, in addition to being tainted by the foreign, she was also sexually abused by her uncle. Aihara of *Sinbad's Beach* was raped. In *Fever*, Yuriko's friendship with Tatsuru is presented as a result of having a gay father. In *Class Reunion*, Natsuki has an invalid mother and comes from a broken home. In sum, all the women who become involved with gay men have had problems with straight men. And the emphasis on such

background stories makes clear that the movies wish to address relationships in terms of deviations from a heterosexual norm as imagined by straight men.

Unable to imagine that homosexuality is a natural phenomenon, these films also explain away the gayness of gay men. Tatsuru (*Fever*) and Ito (*Sinbad's Beach*) are both from broken families. Goh's mother tells Sayako that when she has pregnant, she cut her finger and probably a virus entered and made him gay. Goh explains that he was always a sissy and nicknamed Princess by the other boys. In *Fever*, Kawamoto is clearly marked as abnormal, and Mukki, the young doctor, is created as weak willed, unable to articulate his own desires. He struggles with trying to satisfy the conflicting demands put upon him by wife, mother and boyfriend, offering little resistance to the pressures exerted upon him.

2.2b The Foreign

To associate gays and the women with whom they are involved with the foreign is to state indirectly that to be gay or gay-friendly is somehow not to be Japanese. In *Kirakira Hikaru*, Shoko's work as a translator connects her to foreignness. While listening to opera and drinking too much foreign alcohol, she translates Italian into Japanese. When Shoko and her gay husband drink beer, it is Budweiser, and he sleeps in a bed. Their haunt is the "International House of Pancakes," and when out driving with Kon they encounter zebras.

In *Okoge*, Sayako's explains that her father was an American

journalist who left her to be raised by her Japanese aunt when her mother died, making her only half Japanese. Her work, doing voice overs for foreign animation, again connects her to the foreign and emphasizes her emotional immaturity. Likewise, she has a doll collection and fancies foreign art. In *Sinbad's Beach*, Aihara's house is large and full of foreign furniture. When she enters, she does not remove her shoes, betraying her lack of Japanese manners.

Of course, all these signs of otherness are familiar ones in Japan, and as such, they raise questions about internal otherness, that is, otherness within Japan. Clearly, at least with homosexuality, there is a marked disavowal of otherness as internal. It is externalized. When these films were made, in the media and popular imagination, homosexuality was closely linked to the foreign, as was the spread of AIDS. From the late 1980s, many gay saunas began to ban foreigners admission, and many still do. Their justification is that admitting foreigners is bad for business because their Japanese clients are afraid of contracting AIDS.

2.3 Warning Women and Gay Men: Contagion

In view of their heterosexual address, it is not altogether surprising that these films show little concern for the repression of gays or problems of social values. Gay people are shown to transmit the problems of their own lives to the lives of those with whom they interact. Particularly problematic is the suggestion that gay men wreak havoc on straight lives, particularly the lives of open-minded young men and women. Straight men, having power and social

sanction, are not seen as susceptible to the ills wrought by gay men. To be hurt by gay men is an admission of their power. As this power is denied by heterosexual men, it manifests itself as a power over women. Indeed, in these films, it is heterosexual women who are the real victims of homosexuality.

In *Kirakira Hikaru*, Shoko suffers from her unrequited love for her gay husband. The unhappy complicity of their lives evokes a condescending pity from the viewer. (Such a nice man, poor woman, what a waste!) Her fate, like that of Sayako in *Okoge* and Natsuki in *Class Reunion*, is to stand by her man and to forsake sex in the name of love; a cause for which Japanese women, as imagined by men at least, seem willing enough to become martyrs.

In *Okoge*, Sayako's association with Goh, leads to her rape and pregnancy. From her guilt over Goh's condition, his mother goes mad and dies. The woman Goh was supposed to marry likewise suffers. Once a sweet and flexible girl who sincerely wished to marry, she becomes a trash-mouthed slut who squarely blames her transition on Goh's being a "filthy faggot." For this reason she feels entitled to revenge. Toshi's wife is also portrayed as becoming a mad woman as a result of what her husband is "doing" to her. That she of her own volition chooses to stay married to him is not even brought up. Marriage is her right! The message for gays is: "You are troublemakers for both your families and society. If you must exist then do it in the ghetto or in the closet. Integration will only harm everyone involved." In *Okoge*, even the simple act of revenge is shown as problematic, for it creates new heterosexual victims in its wake: it is the bride who breaks down and cries (the spectacle has

spoiled her big day) and equally humiliated is Toshi's wife who arrives as her husband exits. One exception to the rule that gay men can't bring down straight men is found in Kosuke in *Class Reunion*. As a result of his conversion and association with Fuma, he develops a chest tumour, and later is gang raped. Despite this he does end up happily married, albeit with another man.

"Homosexuals have been shown on film as victims of their own twisted values and misunderstandings of the nature of human relationships. The responsibility of the dominant culture for instilling these values is never explored" (Russo 1981, 194). The films *Kirakira Hikaru* and *Okoge*, for example, take the view that marriage is not something that society forces upon gay men, but rather something gay men do to unsuspecting women. These films, say to women, "Oh, yes, from a distance, they may look interesting, but look at the suffering they inflict!"

2.4 Stereotypes and Role Playing

In order to understand gay men and their relationships, these films project heterosexual models onto them. In *Kirakira Hikaru* this occurs in the use of camera shots and dialogue to inform the viewer that the doctor's boyfriend is the equivalent of his wife. The impulse is homogenizing, normalizing, as if to say, "See, they are just the same as we are, only instead of girl wives, they have boy wives."

In *Kirakira Hikaru*, the doctor Mukki, as the able provider, is cast as male, and his young boyfriend Kon, despite being masculine, is shown as the "wife" equivalent. Although Mukki does not have sex

with Shoko, both she and Kon are framed by the camera in such a way as to suggest they are somehow identical in their relation to him. In one scene we see the wife Shoko and the boyfriend Kon in the kitchen from behind. This is the doctor's viewpoint. Several times in response to him, they turn and reply in unison, and their interchangeability is expressed through the mirroring play of images as well as the simultaneous delivery of their lines. Kon emerges from the bath with a blue and white striped towel around his neck, while Shoko wears a blue and white striped apron. Later, he wears a striped shirt. Mukki, the doctor-husband finds their redundancy vexing, and angrily orders Kon to go home. As the typical patriarchal figure, this is assumed to be his prerogative, and it goes unchallenged if not unjudged. Why Mukki finds their sameness so irritating is not clear. The director wants us to see that it is Mukki who refuses to accept Shoko and Kon as interchangeable. It is his personal problem that he does not desire Shoko as he desires Kon.

Similarly in *Okoge*, Toshi and Goh are understood as conform to male and female roles. Toshi, the married salary man, is coded as the masculine half of the couple. He initiates sex and penetrates Goh, who is coded as feminine through his dress, his demeanour and career (he makes women's accessories). Goh's clothing—harem pants, woman's shirts and the colour yellow—show that he is "artistic." Working with leather also serves to link Goh to other Japanese social outcasts, the *burakumin*.

Laura Mulvey points out that the spectator is curious and fascinated by "likeness and recognition", which enables him to enter into relations of identification. Not surprisingly then, films that

depict homosexuals for heterosexuals often strive to show that gays are the same as straights. However, in order for gays to be the same, among themselves they must be different. There must be a man and a woman, and this dichotomy creates a perceived inequality among gays, which becomes inflected with the sexual inequality of straight relationships. Films produced for mass audiences model homosexuality and homosexual relationships on heterosexual ones, which becomes an explicit or implicit demonstration of their lack of social equitability. In other words, the disparities of heterosexual romance are displaced onto gay relationships, and intensified.

The equation of gay male lover = wife, although facile and quite problematic, does allow one to ponder why certain social roles must be played by members of the opposite sex. Potentially the “husband” or “wife” role could be played by a man or a woman. And yet, these films make it perfectly clear that socially, same sex relationships are not equitable substitutes for heterosexual ones.

In many cases, the critiques of the portrayal of women in films made by heterosexual men can be extended to the depiction of gay men. In *Theorizing The Moving Image* (1996), Noël Carroll writes that men have “recurringly portrayed them (women) through a limited, constraining, and ultimately oppressive repertory of characterizations.”

It is in this way that gays and lesbians have come to be “classified as purely sexual creatures, people defined by their sexual urges” (Russo 1981, 23). Russo writes that “it is an old stereotype, that homosexuality has to do only with sex while heterosexuality is multifaceted and embraces love and romance

(Russo 1981, 132). The replication of the “natural” family by Shoko, Mukki, and Kon is depicted as impossible and unproductive. Thus, it is not a threat to the status quo. Similarly, Goh, Sayako and child reproduce the status quo and so are allowed a happy resolution.

As Mukki and Kon do not enjoy the homosocial intimacy so common in relationships among men in Japan, sexual interest in one another is the only reason given for their association. (Frightening, by extension, is the implication that Japanese men have relationships with women only because of their sexual interest in them.) While Mukki and Kon have sexual passion, it is with Shoko that they find complicity and happiness. When Mukki and Kon make love, their dark silhouettes contrast against a background of light. They keep their clothes on, and the camera does not acknowledge them as united entities but rather as a series of parts in a frenzy of passion. Such camera work and lighting is an attempt to treat the problem of gay sex as chastely as possible. Similarly, in *Okoge*, Goh finds refuge from shame with Sayako and her baby. Toshi could only offer him sex.

In this light, gay relationships are shown to be frail and fleeting as would any relationships based on such flimsy premise. At the end of *Okoge*, after yet another unsuccessful relationship, Toshi is offered hope in the form of a gay senior citizen involved with a very young man. No job, no love but searching for love eternally, what inspiration!

The most sexualized of all are the boys in *Fever* who work in the sex industry. Tatsuru admits he has never had sex with love, as if to say that gay sex and love are mutually exclusive. In addition, leading a gay life will make it impossible to fulfil his father's

expectations of continuing the family name. The threat to society seems to be in the emotional possibility of men being gratified by other men. Such a world raises fears about the future of the nuclear family, in other words, the destabilization of capitalist society from the smallest unit.

Because defined solely by sexuality, the possibilities of family and a worthwhile existence become nil for gay men. As Russo writes, "The necessity to leave behind family, tradition and comfort, to accept ostracism and disgrace, was devastatingly portrayed" (Russo 1981, 226). In all of these movies, there is a great deal of unhappiness over the prospect of being gay in a straight world, or as Babuscio states, "perceived as doomed to live their lives with "unsuitable" emotions in a world where such feelings are tacitly recognized but officially condemned" (Babuscio 1984, 48). Gay young men are understood as unhappy for the following reasons. They are destined to live without love, family, or societal respect; and to have any number of short unstable affairs which make them bitter, only to end their days as solitary bitchy old queens who drink too much (Dyer 1993, 84).

2.5 Protecting the Interests of Straight Men

The problem of gay representation stems from straight people's unwillingness to accept gays as commonplace, as familiar as the boy next door. In her essay, "Lesbians and film: some thoughts," Caroline Sheldon points out that modern capitalism relies on "the heterosexual family unit to produce workers already

alienated by the experience of lack of power and by a strictly defined sexuality" (Dyer 1984, 6). The individual's lack of personal power serves to stabilize a hierarchy of power. Men who cannot control their own lives can at least control the lives of their wives and children; and women too can exercise power over their children and pets.

Straight men, in viewing women as their own territory, are uncomfortable with the idea that some of "their" women may be leaving the flock to have intense, though platonic, relationships with gay men. More frightening and confusing is the idea that gay men can indeed have sex with women. This is because many straight men cannot imagine a man who could sleep with women, not wanting to, and also because sleeping with a woman remains for many, proof of being a "real" man. That Goh cannot screw a woman reassures the straight male viewer that gay men because unable to have sex with women, cannot encroach on their property. As if in response to this threat, the films protest against gays entering into marriage with (presumably heterosexual) women. Kon is against Mukki's marriage, and when the parents find out that Mukki is gay, they are against the marriage too (with the exception of Mukki's mother). The idea that one must get married is never really challenged overtly. In fact, many if not most gay Japanese men do get married, although many may only rarely have sex with their wives. (According to an NHK broadcasting survey conducted in 1999, 39% of men between 20-40 who either have wives or girlfriends, do not engage in sexual intercourse.) Many of these men probably have no sexual interest in women.

2.6 Liberal Ideals Versus the Ugly 'Truth'

Often to justify the lives of gay people in “liberal” film, we are shown how they are useful to the “real” (heterosexual) world, and shown that it is in the interests of straight people that gays continue to be allowed to exist. Regardless of his sexual orientation, as a doctor, Mukki makes a valuable contribution to society. He is also useful to Shoko who, as his wife, can leave her parent’s home. He is very much her care giver as well, putting her to bed, preparing her breakfast for her and so forth. In *Okoge*, Toshi (Goh’s lover) as a company man, while suffering abuse from his homophobic co-workers, keeps his part of Japan Inc. running smoothly. As a married man, he continues the compulsory facade of heterosexuality so highly valued in Japan. Goh designs and produces women’s handbags (the very objects that are later used to punish the wicked and defend the weak). He provides shelter for first his mother and later for Sayako and her child. Despite this, it is evident that as homosexuality is viewed as interfering with the family and social relations, it is depicted as morally indefensible and must of its own accord take a back seat to the socially prescribed norms of heterosexual society.

State, society and family work together to ensure the individual fulfils his or her obligations, which include re-producing the status quo. Whether the individual wants to marry, work or reproduce is not really important, since these have already been socially inscribed as the way to live. As Sheldon rightly notes,

“Engels points to the institutionalism of the family, with its division of labour according to gender, as basic to the establishment of private property and class differentiation.” She goes on to explain that “modern capitalism depends on the heterosexual family unit to produce workers already alienated by the experience of lack of power (in childhood) and by a strictly defined sexuality. For exploited men, the power of men over women and children substitutes for control over their own fates. Traditionally homosexuality operates in this system as the criminal element—both as a warning to those stepping out of line and a method of containment of anti-social (anti-heterosexual) tendencies” (Sheldon 1984, 6).

Although Shoko's father speaks roughly and rudely to Mukki, Mukki does not defend himself. His passivity is like an admission of guilt, as if he deserves this harsh treatment. Instead of defending himself, he takes the abuse. He stands chastised and defenceless before the perceived notions of family and society. In *Okoge*, when Toshi's wife shows up to confront him, Goh (who later attacks the gangsters) flees. He does not try to defend himself or his actions, because challenging the right of society to set moral dictates would politicize him too much. To “protect” Goh and Toshi from accusations that they are gay lovers, Sayako concocts a story that both men are her lovers, making it clear that being an adulterer is not as bad as being gay. The wife has the only socially-sanctioned moral position, and the others, when confronted, accept it. Crossing Toshi's path as he exits the wedding reception, she rebukes him and criticizes his lifestyle as a wrong done to her. Toshi's silence is a

tacit acceptance of his guilt. Cognizant of such difficulties, some gay men try to avoid the problems, either by refusing to identify as gay or by abstaining from sex with other men.

In *Class Reunion*, Fuma does not want to be gay so he marries Natsuki. His efforts to restrain himself from his love for and sexual interest in men torments him. Like many characters from the *bishonen ai* manga, Tatsuru (from *Fever*) refuses to admit he is gay, simply claiming that sex is just something he does. In addition, he states that he has never experienced sex with love. As long as he has sex for money and does not admit to his pleasure, he can reject a gay identity that, to him at least, is not something to embrace. He shows no qualms, however, about initiating sex with Shin whom he knows to be in love with him. When gays see movies in which gays are depicted as trying to abstain from 'practising' or are trying very hard to pass as straight and to conform to heterosexual society's expectations, they are in fact learning that they are not really okay as they are but had better pretend they are straight.

Both *Kirakira Hikaru* and *Okoge* shows a desire to satisfy both society and oneself, without having to live a lie or choosing between compulsory heterosexuality and cheating. Yet in these films, the message ultimately is that gay people should be allowed to exist, as long as they marry, have children and pretend to be straight. In addition, the women they marry should know they are gay. As quoted in *The Celluloid Closet*, Film critic Robin Wood wrote in the Jan.-Feb. issue of *Film Comment*, "The dominant ideological norms of the society in which we live are ... marriage and the nuclear family. ... between them they offer homosexuals the terms on which they might

be acceptable—the aping of heterosexual marriage and family, complete with poodles as children” (Russo 1981, 196).

In an article entitled “The Responsibilities of a Gay Film Critic,” Wood argued that asking for acceptance from society meant accepting heterosexual standards and validated the right of ‘society’ to decide on what is and is not appropriate for individuals.

To quote Russo again, “The only condition under which homosexuality has ever been socially acceptable has been on the occasion of its voluntary invisibility, when homosexuals were willing to pass for heterosexuals” (Russo 1981, 44).

(Parenthetically, on the topic of invisibility, the first gay Shinto Marriage ceremony was performed in Japan in 1999. Although it was covered in gay magazines, it was not mentioned in the mainstream Japanese media.) However negative depictions of gays are, many argue that any representation is better than invisibility. This seems especially true when considering the problems gays face in Japan are a result of the politics of ambiguity. As Sugihara suggests,

In Japan, heterodox elements are never directly excluded. They are handled in the most innocuous and ambiguous way possible in the interest of avoiding direct confrontation and maintaining a state of blissful societal ignorance. Although Japanese homosexuals are rarely the targets of overt violence, their very existence is denied by society (Summerhawk 1998, 4).

For Sugihara, Japanese gays hide in the shadows of their society’s denial. Since there is a disavowal of difference, there is no active persecution and as a result, no active resistance. The drag queens in *Okoge*, in daring to become visible outside the confines of

their club, become targets of abuse. Although gayness per se does not present itself as something which can be rallied around, being the victims of hoodlums does. Thus one often sees scenes of gays victimized in an effort to increase their visibility. In *Okoge*, the drag queens come to the defence of Goh. Empowered, they vanquish their enemies with handbags. Like the historic Stonewall drag queens who triumphed over police officers who were harassing them, the solidarity of the drag queens in righteous self-defence can be interpreted as a type of liberation. The key difference between the oppressors in the case of the Stonewall riots and those of *Okoge* is the status of their respective repressors. In the first case, police, clearly an agent of the State, were harassing its gay citizens. In the second case, fictional drag queens react to anonymous cartoon-like gangster style bad guys who clearly do not represent the Japanese State. In other words, there is no sense that the State through its institutions represses gay people. Because of the visible queerness of the drag queens, the audience is protected from identifying with them. However subtly political, they become memorable primarily as the moment of comic relief, their outfits ruined in the scuffle and the rain.

Learning that they are unrepresentable, gays repress themselves. In other words, their own successful socialization involves the internalization of the values of the heteronormative society at large.

In sum, the representations found in these gay-themed films are significant. They perpetuate engrained heterosexual patterns of thought and practice. Moreover, gays too learn from such films how

they are and how they should feel. In these films the gay characters try very hard to accommodate the heterosexuals, thereby simulating the norms and values of heterosexuals. As being gay is seen as a personal problem which should not become an inconvenience to others, none of the characters in these films are overtly political or interested in addressing injustice or seeking social change. In her essay, "Lesbians and Film: some thoughts", Caroline Sheldon writes, "films are often tools to maintain depolitization" (Dyer 1984, 5). Kosuke, although refusing a gay identity, is political in that he marries a man in drag. It is as if the authors cannot imagine the importance of such characters or how they could be interesting to a voyeuristic audience.

However disappointing these depictions appear, they do clear the path for more positive representations, those which allow gay men to live happily without having to replicate the nuclear family. Naturally, to achieve these ends, it is very important for gays and lesbians to appropriate the medium of film to tell their own stories. It is as Richard Dyer wrote in, *Now you see it*, "Indeed, the new lesbian and gay movements put a special emphasis on film, partly from the desire for high public visibility for gay people and partly as a consequence of identifying mass media film as a central aspect of lesbian/gay oppression (Dyer 1990, 215).

Whether gay men will gain access to the financial resources necessary to use film to tell their own stories is yet to be seen, however, with the creation of Japan's first gay film festivals in the 1990s, it seems to be only a matter of time.

CHAPTER 3

GAY MEN'S MAGAZINES

Japanese gay men's magazines shape the identities of their consumers in various ways. Though seldom gay-owned, these magazines are, in principal, gay-authored and gay-consumed and are, by far, the most influential medium for communication among gays. Gay men's magazines have the potential to inform, educate and promote awareness. Through their manga and stories, gay men's magazines can create gay role models (people who do not need to play the game of pretending to be heterosexual) who are happy, successful, satisfied and respect themselves. Myths about the "problems" of gay life can be challenged and the dreary life advocated by society and its institutions can be shown to be disappointing in these magazines. These magazines encourage gay men to lead more personally-gratifying lives as individuals. They assist gay men to forge an identity of their own, one that contests the mainstream construct of gay men as ridiculous and abnormal that they are brought up to believe.

As the novel and newspaper in 18th-century Europe represented nations to themselves and to others, gay magazines in Japan serve the function of informing gay men about themselves. Benedict Anderson notes in *Imagined Communities*, that readers are aware that elsewhere people like themselves are consuming the

same material. While the formation of a national community was criticized by Anderson, in the case of gay men a unifying identity is useful to contest and oppose the stifling national construct of homogeneity. Gay magazines enable the coalescence of a gay identity and instill in the reader the confidence that he is not alone. In *Bound and Gagged*, Laura Kipnis writes, "since the democratizing invention of print and the birth of print culture, pornography has been a favoured strategy of social criticism" (Kipnis 1996, 124), and in Japan, this form of protest is alive and well.

The American occupation of Japan lasted from 1945-1952 and under the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP) the moral life of Japanese people was very closely monitored. As a result, an imported idea of morality changed the way certain subjects were regarded, among them homosexuality. A brief history of Japanese gay men's magazines begins with the magazine *Adonis*, published from 1953 to 1954. It was forced to close down by the police (Karasawa 1992). *Barazoku* (Daini Shobo Publishing) began printing in 1971, *Sabu* (Sun Publishing) followed in 1974, and *The Ken* in 1978. As a result of a general growth in consumption in the 1980s, many new magazines emerged. *The Ken* was reincarnated as *The Gay* (Zatsumin no Kai) in 1980 and *Samson* (Kaimeikan Publishing) made its debut in 1982. With the gay boom, sales of gay magazines jumped to record levels, and two new titles appeared, *Badi* (TERRA Shupan) in 1994 and *G-Men* (Kuroda Shuppan Kobunsha) in 1995. Despite the boost in sales of gay men's magazines, *Adon*, a magazine with little pornographic content, that advocated personalizing the political and vice versa, went bankrupt in the

mid-1990s. As for fashion, a gay fashion magazine, entitled, ファビュラス(Fabulous) hit the gay newsstands in December 1999.

3.1 Description of Magazines

Presently, in Japan there are five major monthly gay magazines that compete for the market. *Badi*, *Barazoku*, *G-Men*, *Sabu* and *Samson*. A shorter magazine entitled *The Gay* is less widely available and thus has significantly lower sales. All these magazines are similar in that each issue contains articles, editorials, advertising, art, pornography, stories, letters to the editor, personal ads and manga. They also provide information about gay tourism, domestic and international, cruising locations with advice on interesting bars as well as notes on the locals. Whereas common manga are printed on low-quality recycled paper and can be sold cheaply because of the volume of their production, Japanese gay men's magazines are thick (often from 700-800 pages), slick and expensive at ¥1,200-1,500. They have roughly twice as many pages, and are twice as expensive as the large *bishonen ai* manga. They are also distinguished from other magazines by their size and the high quality of paper and ink colour used in producing them. They are meant to be kept and looked at several times, and probably, as Itou Bungaku (creator of *Barazoku*) has suggested, to be used for masturbation. Repeated readings, even of the most explicit of sexual fantasies, reveal a subtle subversive quality. Gay men's magazines walk a fine line in appealing to the sensibilities of their closeted readers (the vast majority of gay men in Japan) without alienating

them. For their part, the readers fear being rejected by the society at large, and so do not identify with those who would advocate an aggressive, conspicuous politics.

Gay men learn that their relationships are “outside the boundaries of permissible sexual relations and have always been viewed as exclusively sexual and nonproductive” (Russo 1985, 196). Robin Wood wrote in *Film Comment* (Jan. - Feb. 1978), “the dominant ideological norms of the society ... are ... marriage and the nuclear family ... between them they offer homosexuals the terms on which they might be acceptable—the aping of heterosexual marriage and family” (Russo 1985, 196). In mainstream Japanese media, gay men are portrayed as freaks to be mocked and are often confused with cross-dressers, who in turn are confused with transvestites, drag queens and transsexuals. That is to say there is no space describing gay men who in every (public) respect resemble heterosexual men (Summerhawk 1998). To look normal may seem to imply looking straight, however, it does not imply acting straight. While public displays of affection are generally absent between Japanese adults, regardless of sexual orientation, for the politically courageous, a gesture performed in public, such as holding hands or a kiss on the cheek, is one way to become visible without dressing as a woman or a clown. In Japanese media, Japanese gay men, cross-dressers, transvestites, drag queens and transsexuals are all called *homo* or *okama*. The opposite to this appellation is *futsuu* or *nomaru* (normal) which is commonly used even by gay men to denote heterosexuals. Recently, members of the Japanese gay community have started to use the term *gei* (gay) for themselves and *nonke* (non-gay) to denote

heterosexuals. *Okama*, which means large pot, is a vulgar and derogatory reference which likens anal sex between men to digging or scraping the rice out from the bottom of a large pot.

Gay men's magazines perform the function of delineating spaces where gay community exists. These spaces usually coalesce around sites of consumption such as bars, clubs, shops, restaurants and saunas. For first timers, maps are often included in advertisements for these establishments. By providing this information, gay magazines help readers meet other gay men, thereby facilitating the creation of support networks. Gay magazines excite, entertain and create imaginary spaces into which readers may escape. In these spaces, the images of gay men presented in the mainstream media are contested and new often problematic images are constructed. Such magazines help gay men to challenge ideas about themselves learned from family and society. In these ways, they serve a very valuable function in the determination of gay identity.

Conspicuous by their absence from these magazines are in-your-face politics. One activist suggested that Japanese gays seem allergic to activism (Summerhawk 1998, 14). Many gay men wish to remain anonymous in order to avoid social discrimination. These men resent being lectured to by those who have no shame or nothing to lose. However, gay magazines often report news on political advances or events. When the first gay Shinto marriage was performed, it was covered extensively in the gay press and even in the English-language newspapers. No mention was made of it in either large Japanese newspapers or by TV stations, however.

Gay magazines also report on such things as masturbation, sex, relationships and clubs in detail. As is common in other Japanese magazines, these often describe and prescribe the lifestyle of the reader. Which is to say, they describe social life and relationships, as well as how to perform various sexual acts. In some issues prospective drag queens are taught how to apply make up. In one issue of *Badi*, different tongue positions are illustrated in order to achieve maximum pleasure from kissing. In other magazines, masturbation with sex toys is explored in great detail. In this sense, rather than an ideology, they offer readers a lifestyle and identity based on correct behaviour and consumption practices. Because the magazines cover their topics in considerable detail, one is left with the impression that readers value correct information highly.

3.2 The Personals

Gay magazines include personals sections where men seek out other men for friendship, relationships and sex. Largely as a result of the increased visibility of gay men in recent years, the number of gay men who place ads in magazines has risen rapidly. This rise in advertising, in real terms, suggests that the number of gay men willing to taking limited risks in order to meet other gay men is rising. In one 1992 issue of *Barazoku*, there were 489 personal ads. In 1999, *Barazoku* printed over 600 ads per month, while the more popular *Badi* and *G-men* printed well over 1,000 ads each month. *Sabu*, at the lower end for number of ads, still publishes over 500 a month. The number of ads appears to be a selling point, for the figure

often appears on the front cover. *Badi's* January 1999 issue boasted over 1500 ads. These ads are sorted by region, with every region of Japan represented. Naturally, ads from those living in giant urban areas far outnumber those from rural areas, yet these rural areas are fairly well represented. Of the large number of personal ads placed in one issue of *Badi*, the overwhelming majority (86%) came from men listed as 36 years of age and younger. Men under age 40 accounted for 90% of the personal ads published.

Ads tell where the writer lives and often have eye-catching titles. There are three things that appear as standard information in each ad: the person's age, height and weight. To place an ad, the reader simply submits his information form and forwards it to the magazine. When published, the ad is assigned a number. Respondents write their letters care of the magazine which forwards them to the ad placer. Cell phone numbers, which are incredibly common in Japan and conceal a person's residence, are often the first contact medium.

3.3 Gay Men and Marriage

Many Japanese gay men marry women, and although this does not interfere with all gay proclivities, it does reduce the number of personal ads placed by men over 30. Statistically, as a result of the decline in the birth rate, there are more Japanese men over the age of 30 than under it, so it follows logically that there are also more Japanese gay men over the age of 30 than under it. As men reach their 30s, when they are expected to marry, they tend to give up on same sex relationships. At least, the ads submitted by this age group

declines radically.

According to Itou, marriage is compulsory for gay men who live in rural areas (Lunsing 1995, 77). In *Unwrapping Japan: Society and Culture in Anthropological Perspectives*, Valentine makes the point that single middle-aged and older men are socially marginalized (Valentine 1990, 43). And Summerhawk states bluntly, [In Japan,] "Great importance is attached to marriage, and even though these expectations are loosening, a person who remains single is at risk of being an outcast. Promotions in companies and status in a particular group are threatened by singles, whether gay or straight (Summerhawk 1998, 11). Gay men in wishing to avoid discrimination and being the subjects of gossip often give in to the social pressure and choose to get married.

According to government statistics, in 1984 the average age for men getting married was 28.1, and approximately 30% of the 739,991 marriages were arranged. In his paper "Japanese Gay Magazines and Marriage Advertisements" Wim Lunsing writes about *Kekkon Ko-na-* (Marriage Corner), a section of *Barazoku* in which gay men wishing to marry women submit ads, as do women who wish to marry gay men. Although *Barazoku* boasts the largest number of these types of ads, they are found in all gay magazines in Japan (Lunsing 1995, 76). Although it is usually men who advertise for wives, sometimes women advertise their willingness to marry a gay man. The gay men want to marry women who know and accept that they are gay. These marriages are known as camouflage marriages or *gisou kekkon*. (Lunsing 1995, 76).

3.4 Self-Acceptance over Activism

Magazines also indicate that many gay men seek the approval and attention of other men in order to feel good about themselves. In many cases, tacit approval is more important when received from a straight male. Indeed, the comments of supposedly straight males sometimes find their way into gay magazines. One article bore the caption "how are we seen by straight men?"

Of the magazine articles surveyed, very few contained any overt political message. In particular, I looked for messages that called for gay solidarity and the demand for increased rights and recognition within Japanese society. This was not found. Vim Lansing also found few politically-motivated articles. In fact, only 9.5% (40 of 418) of the pages in one issue of the popular magazine *G-men* were devoted to articles. It may well be that men don't buy the magazine for the articles. (The other magazines have similar percentages.) Manga, on the other hand, occupy about 20%, while pictorial pornography makes up about 13% (which figure includes pornographic images in advertising).

3.4a An Apologetic Attitude

There is an apologetic tone to some of the articles. This attitude is prevalent in a gay community which appeals for acceptance, in the manner of other minorities. In 1999, on the TV program *Koko ga Hen da yo Nihonjin!* (Here is how Japanese people are weird!), the topic was gays and lesbians in Japan. Repeatedly, gay

people adopted the tactic of excusing their homosexuality as a "natural" difference, something they could not help. In response to an African man who claimed that gays were sick, a gay man responded, "it's not our fault just as it is not your fault you are black." Of course, the program itself encourages such admissions. It presents to Japanese viewers the opinions of foreigners from a wide array of countries about Japanese culture or society. All opinions are welcome, the only requirement is that they are expressed in Japanese. As a result, all differences are reduced to their difference from a supposedly self-evident norm, Japan.

The same type of apologetic tone is found in an article in the August 1997 issue of *G-Men*, in which the author writes about the benefits received from paying taxes. He states that, while gays already have medical and unemployment insurance, they also could demand espousal benefits from companies. With regard to children, he argues that companies are justified in supporting families who have children for the future of society. Ultimately, the author seems to excuse companies for treating their married workers more favourably than their single (gay) counterparts. Although he comments that this issue is not really relevant to most gay people, he doesn't explain why. (Perhaps most gay men are married, have children and do benefit from the existing system, while few gay men live together as a family). He writes that through their taxes, gays contribute to the raising of (other people's) children who in turn will become the next labour force and generation of consumers and tax payers. Thus, he concludes, gays should not complain about injustice because gays are participating in society through supporting these

families. Indeed, for the author, it is these heterosexual society members who really seem to matter. He doesn't countenance the possibility of not wanting to participate. He writes that gays can work to define how society defines the family. While he does consider extending social benefits to gay couples, the author does not raise the possibility of gay couples having children. Identifying himself as gay, he feels that gays shouldn't complain about exclusion because they are already included in the existing social system. His commentary indirectly addresses those younger gays who feel it is unjust to pay taxes to perpetuate the heterosexual family.

In his paper, "Camp and the gay sensibility," Jack Babuscio explains the self-policing, apologetic attitude and frustration of gays in this way,

Society says to gays (and to all stigmatized groups) that we are members of the wider community; we are subject to the same laws as 'normals'; we must pay our taxes, etc.; we are, in short, 'just like everybody else.' On the other hand, we are not received into society on equal terms; indeed, we are told that we are unacceptably 'different' in ways that are absolutely fundamental to our sense of self and social identity. In other words, the message conveyed to us by society is highly contradictory: we are just like everyone else, and yet ... we are not. It is this basic contradiction, this joke, that has traditionally been our destiny (Babuscio 1984, 47).

Babuscio also asserts that "we" have a tendency to see ourselves as others do, to the views of the society around us (Babuscio 1984, 47).

In another article from *G-Men* (page 50), a heterosexual hairdresser talks about how he met the openly gay actor Miwa Akihiro who, much to his surprise, turned out to be very open and nice. Miwa, is not only gay but is also one of a handful of celebrity

cross-dressers who appear regularly on Japanese TV. Yet, because they are so unlike ordinary Japanese men, Japanese celebrity cross-dressers perpetuate the confusion that gay men are women wannabes, and that men of ordinary appearance cannot actually be gay. The author writes that he has had many gay friends since his youth, and many gay clients, but that it was his experience with this actor that truly made him more accepting of gay people. (What, one wonders, was the hairdresser's level of acceptance before this encounter? Was it merely polite tolerance or condescending pity and kindness?) His final point is that it makes no difference whether your choice of love object is male or female. The editor makes no comment on this letter, but rather uses it as exemplary of the proper attitude, one useful to readers.

Although unintentionally, the article condescends to its readers, informing them that, yes, they can be liked and approved of by heterosexuals. As such, the article poses some interesting questions. For example, for whom is it 'good news' that gays are sometimes successful and nice? Is this heterovalidation so important to Japanese gays and so rare that it becomes worthy of publication? Was this item printed because the hairdresser, being suitably impressed by the success of this model gay citizen, was heterosexual? These questions become more urgent insofar as the writer perpetuates stereotypes about gays. The writer feels that their heightened sense of aesthetic comes from 'all the energy they invest' in maintaining their image, etc. In brief, gay men are more invested in appearances. If the author is in fact gay, then perhaps he wrote the article hoping to influence straight readers who would

come across it. In pretending to be heterosexual, he may be making a bid for respectability, for an authority that a gay male would not have with a gay readership.

3.5 Depictions of Gays in Mass Media

If Japanese gays do not respect themselves or other gay people, they learn not to from the mass media. One male couple that lives openly as gay, has often been made the object of ridicule in the media. The couple in question, to inform people about the existence of gays in Japan, agreed to give interviews. Subsequently, articles about them appeared with tabloid titles, such as: "What a Laugh! A Gay Bride!" and "A Bizarre Married Life!" (Summerhawk 1998, 91). In another case, an elderly woman who came out as a lesbian was shocked when *Josei Seven*, the magazine that interviewed her, titled her story "Lesbian Granny!" and sexually inflected much of the fabricated dialogue (Summerhawk 1998, 1). The May 2000 issue of the magazine *Da Vichi*, was dedicated to homosexuality. On the cover is a young male actor (known to be bisexual) wearing what appears to be a suit jacket or an overcoat which is pushed up and open to reveal a pink and red dress with lots of feathers at the V-neckline underneath. Oh, so this is what gays look like!

In the book *Queer Japan* Summerhawk writes, "the media stereotype gay people as *okama* or cross-dressers, who are treated as clowns, something to laugh at, and certainly not to take seriously" (Summerhawk 1998, 12). For some it is not so simple. Richard Cleaver, who writes for *Barazoku*, writes that "here, [in

Japan] ... opinions [of celebrity cross-dressers'] on a range of topics are taken seriously. Miwa Akihiro, an actor and singer who is a frequent guest on Japanese TV, also writes advice-for-living books" (Barazoku, 3/99, 177). His point is that despite his cross-dressing, Miwa is taken seriously. Cross dressers who are gay tend to reassure the public that gay people do not exist in their midst invisibly as it were. Peter (who goes by the name Ikehara Shinosuke as an actor), is another Japanese cross-dressing singer/actor celebrity. When he appeared on a game show in 1999, he was the brunt of various "jokes"—such as having the master of ceremonies feel his chest and grope his crotch—to taped applause. Japanese viewers expect their celebrities to behave and dress eccentrically as much to show themselves as special as to reassure the viewer of his own normalcy.

3.6 Politics Cloaked in Fiction

In contrast to the articles and editorials which often appeal to readers' desire to be accepted by heterosexuals, works of fiction sometimes contain subversive messages. The works of fiction take the form of poetry, stories (often sent in by readers) and manga. Particularly in manga one can detect subversive challenges to the status quo. Stories, often in serial form, comprise 15.5% (65 pages) of the above-mentioned issue, while manga comprise 19.8% (83 pages).

According to Frederik Schodt, "manga represent an extremely unfiltered view of the inner workings of their creators' minds. ...

They [the manga] are where stressed-out modern urbanites daily work out their neuroses and their frustrations" (*Dreamland Japan* 1996, 31). If straight Japanese people need manga to deal with the frustrations in their lives, then manga play an even more significant role for gay men. In regards to depictions of gay men, manga found in gay men's magazines vary considerably from manga intended for heterosexual male readers. Manga intended for heterosexual male readers, like movies, show gays to be weak, depraved and foreign. Not unlike Hollywood movies, in which gay men often appear as villains, it only takes one hetero hero to defeat a gang of gays in straight manga. In volume two of *The Rapeman*, for instance, the Hell's Angels motorcycle gang has caught Rapeman, and with a twist of poetic justice, is about to rape him. Despite the fact that Rapeman is outnumbered by at least nine foreigners (some who have "made in USA" written on their penises), he overpowers his captors and escapes. So it is in a manga intended for the general public that does not have any agenda other than increasing readership. In contrast, gay manga sometimes depict gays as strong and straight men as weak, thus undermining the idea that heterosexuals are superior to gays.

3.6a Fiction in Gay Magazines

Gay men's manga also convey a self-awareness of their own fantasies and provide reality checks for the reader. In some stories, the protagonist's fantasy is shown alternately with his "reality." Often, the protagonists' desires are not fulfilled. It is almost as if

the idea was to deny the fantasy figure what the reader is denied. In one story, a student masturbates while imagining a sexual encounter with an older boy. He imagines the other boy telling him, as he removes his towel, to go ahead and do what he really wants. He encourages the younger guy to perform fellatio on him. The reader is transported back and forth between the sexual fantasy and the boy masturbating on his bed.

In another story, an attractive young man goes to a beach where he sees another attractive young man with whom he would like to have sex. Due to shyness, awkwardness or self-doubt, or possibly uncertainty of the other man's sexual orientation, however, he does not act. Along come two gay *erojiji* (dirty old men) one of whom is quite chubby. They tie up his object of desire with their own *fundoshi* (Japanese loin cloths). As the first young man looks on, they force the other to submit to and perform various sexual acts. The first young man watches excitedly, and his pleasure is purely voyeuristic. While he wishes they would stop, he is sexually aroused and wants the attractive young man's body for himself. Thus at once he experiences anger, excitement, frustration and envy. Finally, he gets up his nerve and scares off the older men. He unties his object of desire and embraces him—at which point the reader is abruptly brought back to reality. Nothing has really happened. The two young men haven't even spoken, they do not speak, and each goes his own way, alone.

There is an editorial exchange at the end of this story, which, while not specified, seems to be between the story's creator and the editor. The first commentator writes that he doesn't see the point of

this ending, which seems more appropriate for a girl's magazine. The writer responds that he thinks there are many possible endings other than just the typical sadomasochistic fantasy resolution; certainly many men can relate to the young man who goes to the beach but has nothing happen. In order to avoid punishment, gay men have to control their own desires and appetites. The fantasy shows that it is this internalized control that prevents the young man from living fully. Through his self-policing he has rendered himself harmless, incapable of acting to create the reality he longs for. The dirty old men, in contrast, especially the chubby one, indulge their appetites and assume control. They are subversive figures in being sexually assertive and rather unattractive. They show that their appearance and desires are not problems for them! They are liberated from social ideas about restraint, proper human relations and bourgeois ideas of aesthetics. The voyeur's projected anger (for it is, in fact, himself he is angry with) exposes his sense that the other boy should by rights (also young, also attractive) be his. Being a coward, he resents courage in others and the possibility for pleasure that it affords them. The fat man opposes the thin boy's attempt to control his passions and appetite. In so far as the crusader for self-actualization is the older and heavier man, the young reader is shielded from identification with him. In so far as the alternate reality is presented in the form of a fantasy at a distance, it is readily and wholly digestible.

Voyeurism is common in sexual fantasies. Especially common in sadomasochistic fantasies are depictions of several men acting upon their bound sexual prey while several others look on. In one

story from the pages of *G-men* (November 1998), a straight man spies on his gay neighbours through a hole in his closet wall (quite literally from his unenlightened position “in the closet”) and masturbates to their sex, while he learns of such possibilities as anal sex. Ironically, it is in fact the gay reader who spies on the heterosexual man who masturbates while spying on the gay couple. All three viewing positions involve a secret voyeuristic pleasure of gazing at and objectifying the other.

In some serialized stories, at first glance, the point of the author or the interest for the reader is not obvious. Often the story is just a simple representation of two men getting to know each other as they pursue their professional lives. Such simple pleasures such as a kiss good bye on a train platform are touching and remind the reader that these magic unguarded moments are few, outside a private or gay context. Ironical too, because more than likely the site of consumption for this fantasy is a private or a gay space.

3.7 A Change of Body

In the fantastic manga “*Henshin*” by Takeshima Ryuzou, (*Sabu*, April 1999) a straight man, Satoshi, wakes up next to his girlfriend, Hiromi, one day to discover she has metamorphosed into a man. This upsets him to the point that he utterly rejects her. Hiromi’s identity (woman inside/man outside) functions to show physical appearance does not always match the expected desire. Before her transformation, Hiromi’s identity is simply assumed to be female. Once in possession of a male body it becomes clear that the interior

female “heart” has not changed, even though Hiromi’s gender is now masculine. Hiromi’s rejection by a straight man resonates with the experience of gay readers. One day Hiromi sees Satoshi with a new girlfriend. Hiromi exacts his revenge by casually letting the new girlfriend know that he and Satoshi had been lovers. After this the new girlfriend takes flight. In this fantasy it is Satoshi, the straight male, who is speechless when confronted by Hiromi. The story is resolved neatly when Hiromi finds love and happiness in the arms of a gay man.

On one level, this story is a critique of men who can not look beyond the physical in their relationships. In many instances, after sex, all interest in the other person wanes. For many gay men, it is more difficult to pass as straight when in a relationship. As a result, relationships can be seen as an unnecessary complication, especially when one or both of the men are married (which is often the case). Many gay men are “weekend gays” who return to their “normal” lives the morning after. Often gay men meet in bars where they consume alcohol. The alcohol lowers their inhibitions and facilitates the exchange which follows. When they awake sober, like Satoshi in the story, they want to put as much distance between them and the other man, who they now perceive as a poor excuse of a woman, in their eagerness to disavow their sexual orientation.

Interestingly, once in a man’s body, Hiromi doesn’t make any attempt to dress or behave as a woman. Hiromi is instantly masculine and attractive. The seemingly lack of residual “femininity” is surprising for gendered attributes are often understood as natural, as an extension of one’s sex. Yet, after the

transformation, Hiromi has a good cry, cuts her hair, dons men's clothing and buys gay men's magazines. Unlike some of the heroes of Japanese pop culture whose sexual appetites change along with their physical sex, Hiromi is not presumed to have sexual impulses based on his sex. He is liberated from the heterosexual equation by virtue of the fact that he has a female interior. Thus, like openly gay men, Hiromi does not have to chase or feel or feign interest in women just on the basis of his male body. In one sense, Hiromi's transformation represents one of achieving freedom, for as a man, he/she is now free to ogle men's genitals at the public bath, a voyeuristic pleasure not commonly available to heterosexual women. The process of identification is two-fold in that the reader may identify with Hiromi as a woman in a man's body or as a gay man. It is a foregone conclusion in a gay manga, that Hiromi will become a homosexual. This manga allows for, even normalizes, the idea that body does not dictate the individual's inner life. It still suggests, however, that one's interior reality is coded as male or female. Yet, it also shows that gays need not be feminine just because they may have female "hearts." In effect, Hiromi's straight female interior is used to normalize the gay male identity. As a result, the manga tends to conflate the inner lives of straight women and gay men. Ultimately, however, because it insists on sustaining a certain kind of masculine appearance, this manga naturalizes, and even justifies, the behaviour of straight-acting, straight-looking gay men, in other words the very behaviour that is expected of gay men by society at large, a society which prefers gay men to be invisible.

Equally interesting is the imagined identity of the gay man who falls in love with Hiromi and those readers who identify with him. It could be that although he desires the bodies of men, emotionally he may be unfulfilled by them because of the “unnatural” sameness of their hearts. This is why a man like Hiromi is a perfect match for him. In any case, the possibilities of identification in this story are myriad. Of course, such a tale is both apologetic and justificatory in that it is clearly not Hiromi’s fault that she one day wakes up transformed into a man. Therefore, as a woman (on the inside) Hiromi has every right to pursue his “normal” female desires. This fantasy betrays a wish to be normal. The conviction behind this work of fiction is that some gay men are (normal) women trapped in men’s bodies. Therefore, their desires for men are justified. Likewise, the gay man who has a relationship with a woman (despite her male body) is normalized, thereby making him a heterosexual at heart.

3.8 Regarding Pornography

Although pornography in a variety of formats is available to straight men everywhere in Japan, the same cannot be said for the magazines and videos intended for consumption by gay men. These things can be found only in larger cities and then only at stores that have a section devoted to sex magazines. In addition to gay magazines, these bookstores often carry magazines depicting heterosexual anal sex and other non-mainstream practices. In Japan, magazines are often considered pornographic only when depictions of sex are the dominant feature of the magazine.

Many heterosexual men's magazines and manga contain graphic depictions of sex yet these magazines are not considered pornographic because sexual depictions do not make up a large percentage of the magazine, and because male/female sexual relations are not seen to be subversive to the social order. Girl's *bishonen ai* manga also are left alone because they are (correctly) seen as directed to girls. What is strange, however, is that they are not considered a serious threat to the hegemony of heterosexuality, simply on the basis of the intended audience.

In Japan, a wide array of magazines intended for heterosexual men include pornographic images of women. Indeed, it is easier to consume pornographic images when they are placed strategically within the pages of a magazine otherwise devoted to sports or hobbies. Just as one sexually-explicit scene in a movie does not suffice to label it as pornography, neither does a sexual episode in a golf magazine. And, after all, sex is both a part of life and sells magazines.

In his book, *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture*, Walter Kendrick proposes a definition for pornography as "simply whatever representations a particular dominant class or group does not want in the hands of another, less dominant class or group" (Kendrick 1987). Therefore, it is ultimately up to those in power to determine what constitutes pornography. The newer definitions of pornography make no claims to protect the moral sensibility of the majority. Rather as Linda Williams states in her book *Hard Core*, "Even though the definition and history of pornography are elusive, then, there is remarkable consensus concerning the need to include

“power” as the significant new term in their formulation” (Williams 1989, 15).

Alan Soble in his book *Pornography: Marxism, Feminism, and the Future of Sexuality* equates the loss of male power with the increase of pornography consumption. He argues that men who give up the struggle for power in reality develop a dependence on pornography. Soble, a Marxist philosopher, suggests that “contemporary pornography offers compensatory fantasies designed to make up in the domain of sexuality the power that is denied men in their work and political lives” (Williams 1989, 163). In his view then, men who develop a dependence on pornography have, in reality, given up the struggle for power. He “characterizes male consumers of pornography as already defeated in their economic, political, and sexual lives” (Williams 1989, 163).

The pornographic aspect of gay magazines could feasibly provide the antidote for the rarity of actual encounters. The reader’s powerlessness in public life is compensated by the power he exercises in fantasy. These power dynamics are almost always present in photos depicting sexual acts between men. One man appears to be revelling in his power to conquer and penetrate the other who looks to be in pain. In the marked delineation between top and bottom, the readers are divided along the lines of power commonly assumed to be a remnant of internalized heterosexual models. This type of scene (between men and women) is very common in Japanese heterosexual pornography as well, suggesting that many straight men have also given up on real power in their everyday lives.

The male victim, often bound, does not have to admit he consents to and enjoys sex, and neither do the readers who identify with him. For the perpetrator/penetrator, the power to seize, force and objectify, serve to protect him from even more unrealistic fantasies, those of love, caring and partnership. In a society where there is almost no possibility of living a gay life past 30, sporadic sexual encounters are the most common.

Pornography in gay men's magazines also functions to bring men into gay establishments where they consume alcohol, snacks and ultimately each other. Lunsing writes that, compared to other countries (presumably European and North American), pornography plays a greater role in Japanese gay men's lives. Person offers the following comments on power in the sexual psyche, "Male sexuality is often driven by the need to express dominance symbolically. While it may be difficult to "liberate" sexuality from power contaminants, it will represent an advance when dominance is not automatically linked with male sexuality, submission with female sexuality" (Person 1980, 630).

It is not surprising that one finds fantasies and depictions of domination in men's pornography. With respect to gay men's pornography, few people get upset over depictions of one man dominating another. The gay male reader is assumed to be free to identify with both the perpetrator and the victim in accordance with his mood. Therefore, he is not likely to fall into the same trap of powerlessness that befalls heterosexual women who 'read' pornography designed by straight men with the pleasure of the heterosexual male in mind.

3.8a Rape Fantasies

Unfortunately, one of the ways gays are given power vicariously is through identification with protagonists who rape their victims. The rape of a presumably straight boy or man is quite common in Japanese gay men's comics.

The fantasy of self-abandon appears as an antidote to the hyper-control in everyday life. The unsuccessful attempts to thwart the assault may be interpreted as the victim really meaning yes while he's saying no. Another interpretation for the rape fantasy is that it is extremely liberating to fantasize about having power over the very people from whom one fears rejection and retribution should one's sexual orientation be revealed. In many gay manga, symbols of authority (teachers, upperclassmen, and heterosexuals in general) are sexually objectified, subjugated and ravaged. The power of the straight majority to reject and judge is neutralized. Indeed, the social positions of "moral" and "natural" heterosexuals and "perverted deviants" are reversed. The oppressors become the powerless victims of triumphant gays. In the July 1994 issue of *Sabu*, a manga entitled, "Final Exit" appeared. At first, the reader is introduced to the straight boy, who is a scrapper. He challenges other boys to fight. Later, he receives a blackmail note along with a snapshot of himself masturbating. He then meets the gay boy, his junior in school, who took the photo. The older boy talks down to the junior. The junior speaks respectfully to his upperclassman even while drugging, molesting and raping him. The fantasy entertains by

pretending to respect the rules regarding correct speech between the senior and the junior yet at the same time plays havoc with the relationship of social status between the two. This is a fantasy of defiance in view of the fact that the gay young man takes control and gets what he wants. After sex, the junior whispers in his upperclassman's ear, "Maeda-sempai, I've loved you since the very first time we met. I have cancer, and unfortunately, I probably do not even have a month left (to live), which is why I did this..." and with this explanation/apology, he kisses his senior and says, "Good bye, I love you."

The justification is ironic. Because he is mortally ill (an unintentional metaphor for his sexual orientation), he can rape him. In this story, the gay boy transgresses social norms to indulge in his forbidden desires. Because he is going to die anyway, he decides that the consequences do not outweigh gratification. Again, the presumably healthy reader is excused from acting on his forbidden impulses, as he would have to live with the consequences.

Many stories are printed as text only or with an occasional illustration. The following story appeared in the July 1994 Issue of *Sabu*. It is entitled "High School Teacher." (Teachers are a fairly common choice of fantasy object in manga in general.) The story begins with a young, handsome teacher adjudicating exams. He notices a student in violation of the rules, who has more than the allowed materials on his desk. As he goes to get a better look, he notices that the student has a photograph of a man giving another man a blow job. He is shocked, especially when he comes to realize that the man performing fellatio is, in fact, himself.

At first, he is utterly confused, but then he starts remembering the circumstances of the situation. He had been walking with his fiancée (in the past, at least, he was straight) and becoming aroused by her physical attractions, her scent and so forth. (The gay reader cannot doubt the virility of this hetero specimen.) Of course, his fiancée, being virtuous, giggles and enjoys his attentions while keeping him at bay. (At this point the reader is probably looking at the cover to make sure he picked up the right magazine!) The teacher finds a cave where he can be more intimate with his fiancée. After some initial petting, protests and mutual pleasure, three masked, knife-wielding men arrive on the scene.

Although they threaten the woman, their object of abuse and humiliation is the straight teacher. He is forced to perform fellatio on a penis which is described as smelly, grotesque and dripping. The teacher is later left alone by the perpetrators but as a result of his ordeal, he becomes an exhibitionist. He is found exposing himself by some high school students who help him to explore his new “interest” in exhibitionism, and encourage him to fool around with men in various settings. In fact, the teacher in submitting his personal story to *Sabu*, is exploring yet another of his fantasies. One of the fantastical assumptions of the story is that a heterosexual man can be converted to homosexuality by a single sexual act—against his will.

Initially in the story, the reader has only two objects of identification, a straight man and a straight woman. Sexual coercion and violence facilitate sex between men, which results in the teacher becoming gay, an exhibitionist and prone to sexual excess.

(But in a sense, none of it is his fault.) Homosexuality, mental disorder and perversion are conflated in our sexy hero. It is as if he has become contaminated through contact with the masked men in the cave. Gay men are shown to be depraved and obsessed with sex and power expressed through violence. In addition, as in the two previous fantasies, sex between men is often associated with crime, in this instance, blackmail and sexual assault. Sexual coercion that results in pleasure is a very popular theme in Japanese manga, both straight and gay. By having a gay man rape a straight man, a world is created where gay men enjoy “privileges” like those that straight men enjoy over women. It also strategically places the gay man on top of the hierarchical order, being on top of heterosexual men who are on top of women. The “outlaws” of the fantasy prove that sexuality is malleable. Significantly, it is the straight man’s limited sexuality which is cured and freed from the narrow confines of “heterosexuality.”

“Rape is rape only if the victim does not consent to the sexual act performed on her or him” (Ferguson 1987, 91). Rape is not always presented to be a bad thing in Japanese magazines. In the once highly popular manga *The Rapeman*, for example, the hero rapes women. The women are portrayed as upstarts and villains who need to be reminded of the “natural scheme of things” through their sexual subjugation to Rapeman.

3.9 Beyond Reactionary

Sometimes fantasies simply allow people from different

classes or social groups to meet for sex, thereby destabilizing the social norm of people relating only to their peers, either from school or work. In *G-men* (November, 1998) the following story entitled "*Ase to Tsunagi no Nioi*" (The Smell of Sweat and Overalls) appeared in photo sequence format. In a warehouse, the workman wearing only his white overalls pulled down to his waist returns from his break to find a man in a suit, presumably a businessman, inhaling the smell of his discarded undershirt. The while-collar man is startled to have been caught, but when the worker grabs him and forces a kiss, the business man falls quickly to his knees to service the blue-collar guy, reversing the regular scheme of things. The fantasy continues with both men alternating in active and passive roles in fellatio and anal sex. What is refreshing about this fantasy is the ease at which both men are sexually versatile even though assigned specific social positions. It is rare in allowing mutual exchanges that flatten hierarchies. In a typical "reactionary" fantasy, the worker would force the businessman to perform fellatio on him, and once the worker had forced submission, he would penetrate the white-collar man. Yet, surprisingly, this fantasy does not simply react to the assumed imbalance of power, but rather sees the potential for both men to please one another beyond the constraints of social or sexual roles.

The prevalence of escapist fantasies, as well as the weakness of the gay movement in Japan, could be taken as a sign that most gay men have already rejected a political space or position that would alienate them from their society, family and/or company. For those who wish to avoid such alienation, coming out is not an option. So

far as other identifications would only separate them from other individuals, many gay men find them undesirable. Gay identity threatens to destabilize the construction of national identity. Not surprisingly, gay men in Japan negotiate this problem by reaffirming their identity as “Japanese”—but often in ways that potentially destabilize that identity. For instance, they take articles of clothing that are coded as Japanese and reinscribe them erotically.

In adapting certain overdetermined modes of dress or undress, such as *hinomaru hachimaki* (rising sun head bands) and *fundoshi* (traditional loincloths), gay men represent themselves in a Mishimaesque way, as patriotic and as keepers of traditional culture (usually a role assigned to women). Thus, gay Japanese men refute any accusation, real or perceived, that they are somehow less than good citizens. Perhaps in some cases, much to the consternation of proponents of social progress, gay men show a predilection for the traditional position of Japanese women. This is primarily because such women are seen as those who get and hold their men, in many cases, until death. In short, absolutist qualities associated with the traditional are construed in terms of purity, loyalty, and so forth. Another way Japanese gay men reassure themselves of their “purity,” is by refusing to associate with foreign gay men. Indeed, even in the year 2000, certain establishments advertise “Japanese only” to keep foreigners away and to reassure their xenophobic clientele. Other establishments post no public ban yet, refuse foreigners entry at the door.

As regards image, in Japanese gay men’s magazines, Japanese men of average build and looks are commonly the objects of desire.

Youth and slenderness are not major considerations in determining a model's attractiveness for photo layouts in gay magazines. The men depicted in manga are often overweight. In fact, *Samson* specializes in depictions of chubby middle-aged men. It is often said that conformity is highly valued in Japanese society. It could be that everyone just desires to be average or normal rather than exceptional. Looking average prevents one from suffering the consequences of visible difference. In any event, whether consumed privately or in gay spaces, gay magazines, by informing readers about correct knowledge and behaviour do contribute to a certain homogeneity.

Some of the themes and representations in Japanese gay magazines clearly follow negative conventions for coding. For example, to be penetrated is construed as painful; as it illustrates power differences between individuals. Although such codes and conventions remain unconscious, they have significant impact on readers. One such convention is the repression of the passive male.

Sadomasochistic depictions are extremely prevalent in gay men's magazines. The only person who seems to derive any pleasure from the act is the penetrator. Penetrator subjectivity thus dominates. There is little interest in the pleasure of the one who is played with, penetrated, etc. There does, however, seem to be interest in his pain at being hurt and subjugated by the powerful penetrator/perpetrator. In *The Rapeman* manga, for instance, the victim often succumbs to pleasure involuntarily, as much to say that normally no one would admit enjoying such a thing. Similarly, in gay magazines, the unwilling admission of pleasure following much pain

is quite prevalent. In Hiroshima in the late '80's at a gay bar, none of the patrons would publicly admit they enjoyed sex. "It's just something I have to do as a release," one man explained. By the late 1990s, public admission of sexual pleasure was more acceptable, especially with younger gays, but far from being matter of fact.

In Japanese gay magazines, naked men are often displayed as apathetic and passive objects of desire. Presumably these men are there to stimulate the imaginations of more active men. This might be taken as evidence of the social disempowerment of gay men in Japan, that they can only imagine control over the weak and powerless.

Yet it is also common to transform heterosexual men into passive objects of lust, for instance in heterosexual centrefolds. In 1999 Barazoku introduced a new photo section, purporting to be of a heterosexual man. In the March issue, the title read, "Original Series *Nonke* 3," and included five pages of photos of a naked young man. In a later issue, yet another heterosexual model is photographed having sex with another man. The magazine not only supports the idea that heterosexual men are desirable, it promotes it. That the model, by virtue of his sexual orientation, would not be interested in reciprocating the reader's desire, does not seem to be a concern. Rather it seems more gratifying in some sense, for the reader to have the heterosexual naked before him, to situate him in his fantasy.

Williams outlines a progression in pornographic films from simple nudity to exposure of genitals and finally the filming of the male's orgasm. In manga to prevent the viewer from losing track of

the cock once it disappears into an orifice, the action on the inside is depicted as well, the outline of the probing fingers or penetrating cock as seen against the yielding flesh is often depicted with greater clarity than the external censored flesh drawings. This is the ultimate expression of a penetrator attitude—where the penetrated body is given less tangibility than the penetrating organ.

Writers, artists and editors must appeal to their readers who wish to be distracted and entertained rather than politicized. To do this gay magazines soothe the reader and cater to his need to be accepted by the society at large. While it may be a matter of fact that gay men in Japan have much in common with their heterosexual peers, it is not politically expedient or desirable to stress this within the pages of gay magazines. Such magazines potentially offer their readers, a valid sense of self, by challenging the prevailing norms. Yet, inasmuch as gay magazines present gay men as violent sex obsessed men who take heterosexuals as their objects of desire, they unwittingly tend to nullify a positive gay identity.

As discussed, in pornography as well as other fiction, taking control is a prevalent theme. Gay men must work with what they have at hand. In “Final Exit,” despite being stricken with cancer, the lowerclassman, albeit through blackmail and the use of drugs, achieves his goal of having sex with the man he “loves.” In *Henshin* too, Hiromi overcomes the bizarre fate of waking up one day as a man and gets on with his life. Ultimately, the magazines seem to say, “so you are gay, go out and make the most of yourself”—a message that resonates deeply to all who recognize its importance.

CONCLUSION

As previously noted, the majority of gay men do not consume *bishonen ai* manga, nonetheless these manga seem to provide solace to the protogays and lesbians who happen across them. Also, in spying on the gay world, they provide a link, informing the reader where sites of community and/or consumption may exist for real gay men.

Most importantly, this genre established the profitability of stories with gay-themes. As a result, the film and television industries capitalized on this phenomenon. Despite being depicted as unhappy, the gay protagonists in the films discussed in this paper have increased the visibility of gays and have had a quasi-normalizing effect in that, most of the time, they look just like other people.

While the protagonists in gay-themed films are found to be somewhat lacking, they are neither cross-dressers nor criminals. Indeed, sometimes they are likable and even hold respectable positions within Japanese society. So even while they are shown to be flawed, there is a trend to normalize them. However, no matter how sympathetic gay men are shown to be as individuals, to become involved with them is demonstrated to be hazardous, especially for women. Gay men are thus given a certain social responsibility not to harm their families or those with whom they come into contact.

On a positive note, through greater visibility in the media, gay men have become more certain that they are not alone and that more possibilities exist than ever before. Many of these 'realities' are being negotiated in the pages of gay men's magazines in the form of editorials and fiction.

Although gay men's magazines have the potential to address homophobia and voice progressive ideas, more often than not, they indulge men in their desire to gain approval and acceptance from, or alternately—to have power over heterosexual men.

In sum, rather than convince the reader that he belongs to a valid subset of society, the stories and articles reassure the reader of his likeness to heterosexual Japanese men. In effect, by demonizing gay men and relegating their difference to the sexual realm, they make it easier for gay men to choose the socially-sanctioned roles of good son, husband and father. Robertson claims that the "dominant Japanese national cultural identity" was based on its "protean ability to assimilate difference and absorb otherness" (Robertson 1998, 137). This tendency to assimilate Japanese individuals into the social collective and deny the differences of its individuals is such an integral part of Japanese society that it defies challenge. In other words, it refuses to admit the existence of "others" while at the same time reserving "special treatment" for them.

Although, by and large, Japanese gay men's magazines reinforce political and social prudence in readers, they do provide some openings and challenges. The articles are informative, providing information about the legal and social status of gay people

elsewhere, which allows many gay men to identify the sources of their discontentment.

While many sexual fantasies focus on forcing the admission of pleasure, this can be understood to be token compensation for the lack of real power and the alienation of everyday life that gay men experience in general. Many of the stories and sexual fantasies include a subtle subversiveness which readers often absorb through rereading the same magazine.

Raising consciousness in a group that fears confrontation and exposure is a tricky business, and magazines that are not subtle run the risk of losing readers and profits. For the gay movement in Japan however, it is in the insistence on the right to be different, and the acceptance of the consequences of being different, that the future of gay men depends.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anderson, Benedict (1991) *Imagined Communities*, London, Verso Books

Babuscio, Jack (1984) 'Camp and the Gay Sensibility', in *Gays And Film*, New York Zoetrope

Benshoff, Harry (1997) *Monsters in the Closet*, Manchester University Press

Butler, Judith (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge

----- (1993) 'Critically Queer' in *Bodies That Matter*, New York, Routledge

Carroll, Noel (1996) 'The Image of Women in Film: A Defence of a Paradigm', in *Theorizing The Moving Image*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press

Champagne, John (1997) 'Stop Reading Films!: Film Studies, Close Analysis, and Gay Pornography', *Cinema Journal* 36, No. 4, Summer 1997

Coleman, Eli (1981) 'Developmental Stages of the Coming Out Process' in *Journal of Homosexuality* (1981-2, Volume 7)

De Queiroz, Jean-Manuel (1993) *Foucault: The Imaginary Sex, Gay Studies from the French Cultures*, The Haworth Press

Dyer, Richard (1984) 'Stereotyping' in *Gays & Film*, New York Zoetrope

----- (1990) *Now You See It*, London, Routledge

----- (1993) *The Matter of Images*, London, Routledge

- Fukuoka, Yasunori (1996) 'Beyond Assimilation and Dissimilation: Diverse Resolutions to Identity Crisis among Younger Generation Koreans in Japan', *Saitama University Review*, Vol. 31, No. 2
- Hall, Radcliffe (1990) *The Well of Loneliness*, New York, Doubleday
- Jagose, Annamarie (1996) *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, New York, New York University Press
- Kazuma, Kodaka (1992) *Kizuna*, Tokyo, Biblos
- Kendrick, Walter (1987) *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture*, Berkeley, University of California Press
- Kipnis, Laura (1996) *Bound and Gagged*, New York, Grove Press
- LeVay, Simon (1994) *The Sexual Brain*, Cambridge, The MIT Press
- Lunsing, Vim (1995) 'Japanese Gay Magazines and Marriage Advertisements' in *Gays and Lesbians in Asia and the Pacific*, *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Studies*, Volume 3, Number 3, 1995, The Haworth Press
- Matoh, Sanami (1994) *Fake*, Tokyo, Biblos
- Medhurst, Andy (1984) 'Notes on Recent Gay Film Criticism' in *Gays And Film*, New York Zoetrope
- Miller, Stephen (1996) *Partings at Dawn, An Anthology of Japanese Gay Literature*, San Francisco, Gay Sunshine Press
- Mulvey, Laura (1975) 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *Screen* 16, no. 3
- Person, Ethel Spector (1980) 'Sexuality as the Mainstay of Identity: Psychoanalytic Perspectives', in *Signs* (1979-1980)
- Ragawa, Marimo (1998) *New York, New York*, Tokyo, Hakusensha

- Rich, Adrienne (1980) 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' in *Signs* (Summer 1980)
- Robertson, Jennifer (1998) *Takarazuka, Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan*, Berkeley, University of California Press
- Russo, Vito (1985) *The Celluloid Closet*, New York, Harper & Rowe
- Sandell, Jillian (1993) 'The Cultural Necessity of Queer Families' in *Bad Subjects* (Issue #12, March 1994)
- Sartelle, Joe (1992) 'As If We Were a Community', in *Bad Subjects*, Issue #1, September 1992
- Schodt, Frederik (1996) 'Enter the ID' in *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga*, Berkeley, Stone Bridge Press
- Sheldon, Caroline (1984) 'Lesbians and film: some thoughts' in *Gays and Film*, New York, New York Zoetrope
- Shilts, Randy (1988) *And the Band Played On*, New York, St. Martin's Press
- Soble, Alan (1986) *Pornography: Marxism, Feminism, and the Future of Sexuality*, New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press
- Sullivan, Andrew (1996) *Virtually Normal*, New York, Vintage Books
- Summerhawk, Barbara (1998) *Queer Japan*, Norwich, VT, New Victoria Publishers
- Tezuka, Osamu (1954) *Ribon no Kishi*, Tokyo, Kodansha
- Thomas, Katherine (1998) 'Shounen ai and yaoi manga', (unpublished)
- Thorn, Matt (1989) 'Adolescent Liminality in the Manga of HAGIO Moto'*
- (1993) 'Unlikely Explorers: Alternative Narratives of Love, Sex, Gender, and Friendship in Japanese "Girls'" Comics*

-----(1997) 'What Japanese Girls Do With Manga, and Why'*

-----(1997) 'Girls and Women Getting Out of Hand: The Pleasure and Politics of Japan's Amateur Comics Community'*

Valentine (1990) *Unwrapping Japan: Society and Culture in Anthropological Perspectives*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press

Vuoreenmaa, Tina (1999) from BRIX (unpublished zine)

Warner, Michael (1994) *Fear of a queer planet*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press

Weiss, Andrea (1992) *Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in Film*, New York, Penguin Books

Williams, Linda (1989) *Hard Core*, Berkeley, University of California Press

Yoshizumi, Kyoko (1995), 'Marriage and Family: Past and Present in *Japanese Women*', New York, Feminist Press at the City of New York

* = accessed on line from the website of the author