

Breaching *Mizu Shobai*: The Geisha Spirit on the High School Playground

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Introduction

Teenagers involved in compensated dating with older men (*enjo kosai*) have revelled in the shock value that their choices have triggered, and invoked panic in Japanese society since 1992. However, the construct and historical sanctioning of the “floating world” of adult entertainment (*mizu shobai*) has laid a framework for this inevitable niche. From the beginning of *mizu shobai*, the commoditisation of women’s company (and, at times, but not always, her sex), was sustained in a way that worked in the Japanese cultural context. *Enjo kosai*, though shocking due to the under-age of those involved, is literally translated as the commoditisation of dating, and emulates the socially accepted relationships that are based on a financial transaction, and which are found within the institution of *mizu shobai*. Teenagers are not permitted in the socially sanctioned bounds of *mizu shobai* (a region demarcated for the purpose of adult night-life), but their commodity is comparable to what their “elder sisters” trade. Society is targeting blame at the girls for transgressing these bounds and selling what is only permissible for sale in the legitimated arena, restricted to those over 18. I argue that the institution of *mizu shobai* should be critiqued, and held at least partially accountable for this phenomenon. *Enjo kosai* represents a consequential outcome of *mizu shobai*, an industry which has thrived for centuries. The industry has created a niche for the teenagers, and a potentially detrimental male dependence on paid women. In essence, the supply and demand sides of the industry which have been carefully groomed for sustainability have resulted in some undesirable repercussions.

This paper focuses on the contexts of *mizu shobai* where the sale of sex is ambiguous, and not a given

service (it may be accessible, but not from all *mizu shobai* women, and not in all cases). There are many other establishments in *mizu shobai* that sell more overt expressions of sex, but this extends the reach of this paper. Additionally, host clubs which target a female clientele are increasing in popularity, but this paper limits its scope to the establishments where men are clients, and women are commodifying some aspect of themselves.

This paper will first review the literature on *mizu shobai*, and the contested discussions within. I will then outline the historical trajectory of *mizu shobai* as a demarcated region in Japanese society and as a place sanctioned and even constructed as necessary. Its longevity and evolution explain how this new phenomenon of teenagers commodifying their sexuality was ripe for emergence. I then demonstrate how *enjo kosai* is related to the institution of *mizu shobai* and how the commoditisation of female companionship is a lineage of a trade which has been emulated and adapted throughout history, pioneered by the geisha, the “traditional elder sisters” of the contemporary hostesses. I conclude with analyzing how the demand side of the transaction has also been detrimentally affected – thereby producing clientele for *enjo kosai*.

Literature Review

Mizu shobai is a broad and elusive component of Japanese culture which has been constructed around the work and play “needs” of men; a social space set apart and designated for temporary escape from the pressures and decorum of the day-to-day. The literal translation is the “water business”, elsewhere euphemistically referred to as the “floating world” (Dalby, 1983) and defined as “the broadly based service and entertainment industry within which the

more specifically male-oriented establishments of the nightlife are set" (Allison, 1994, p. 33). Securing a steady supply of women to meet the demands of this industry relies upon occupational glorification - a glamorous work-image especially propagated by the media and supplemented by proportionally higher wages than other female labour (Tabuto, 2009; Kamise, 2013). Intertwined with this glorification is a certain level of occupational stigma (Kamise, 2013) which serves to maintain the confined parameters of *mizu shobai*, as prescribed by Japanese societal norms. Women who work in *mizu shobai* are delineated as *mizu shobai* women (Dalby, 1983; Allison, 1994), and confined to this role in society, whereas their customers freely go between *mizu shobai* and their daily life. While the literature uses various terms to discuss *mizu shobai* in English, I prefer to use the Japanese term, because it encompasses what would be evoked through both English terms of "nightlife" and the "sex industry".

Once a topic considered unworthy of academic perusal (Allison, 1994, p. xi), it is increasingly being written about by Japanese and international scholars alike. It is framed and critiqued in varying ways. Most scholars have focused their research and analysis on the various sections of the very broad "floating world" of *mizu shobai*, rather than on the institution as a whole. Cited by nearly all of this literature is Anne Allison's ethnography and analysis of a hostess club in Tokyo in the mid-1990s. Her work laid a ground-breaking framework which utilized a structural functionalist perspective of the company-entertaining in the hostess clubs, and asked the question, "Who does it fix, for whom, and to what end?" (p.5). Through this guiding question, Allison critiqued this historically tolerated societal norm, analyzed the parts of the system, and proposed some outcomes of long-term patronage.

Anne Allison focuses on the intentional sexlessness of the hostess club environment, and how this specifically meets the company's agenda. The pricier the club, the pricier the hostess, and thus the more "sexually desirable" (meaning, essentially unavailable). Keeping her "sexually interesting" and not "possessed by any one member" maintains "collective bonding" (1994, p. 20). Caroline Norma

heavily criticizes Allison's portrayal of the hostess club, arguing that where Allison claims hostessing is "mere sexual titillation" (p. 509), Norma's position states that the work in hostess clubs is prostitution, and she uses contested imagery of victim and perpetrator throughout her work. Yumiko Kamise does not liberally use the term *prostitution* and rather distinguishes categories of sexual services as "light" and "indirect" (sexual conversation) or "heavy" and "direct" (sexual gratification) (p. 43). Authors such as Norma are liberal with their use of the word *prostitution* whereas others will speak of prostitution as a minimal aspect of *mizu shobai* - stressing that prostitution is not necessarily included in *mizu shobai*, but rather that *mizu shobai* provides an atmosphere of sexual titillation (Wakabayashi, 2003, p. 151-2). According to the current Anti-Prostitution Law established in 1956, forced and street prostitution are illegal. While prostitution is prohibited, if it does occur, it is assumed to be "conducted by prostitutes privately, not under a shop owner's supervision" (Wakabayashi, 2003, p. 152) and generally sexual services purchased from women over 18 years are not punished (Kamise, 2013, p. 43).

Indeed, all countries have histories of prostitution, but as Donald Richie says, the Japanese have been able to capitalize on it in unique ways. In discussing *mizu shobai*, he argues:

It should not be seen as finding the Japanese phenomenon in any way unique. Rather, as always, Japan's way is the common one - but made more efficient, more effective, and much more visible...No one has better than Japan shown how a natural instinct may be turned into a well-run business. (Richie, 2001, p. 193)

In taking a broad conception of prostitution, Norma included hostesses as prostitutes and in her work, consistently described them as victims of sexual abuse. There are cases of hostesses being tricked and being forced to perform fellatio, but the dominant narrative relayed of the hostess industry remains one of appeal, glamour, fame, and wealth. Certainly there is still stigma experienced. It has been argued that part of the agenda behind the

glamorization (that is, the focus on the glamour of the job and not some of the unpleasant realities) has been to secure a supply of women for the industry. Overall there is consensus that geisha, hostesses, and "women of pleasure" comprise the *mizu shobai* women. Riikka Matala (2010) drew a connection between geisha and contemporary jobs (focusing on coffee girls or "maids" who work in café establishments where role-play is a primary allure for customers). However, Matala also divides geisha from *mizu shobai*, relegating them to a subculture and entity of their own (2010, p. 48). That may be so, but I argue that their conversational skills were borrowed and transferred into the modern day *mizu shobai*. The liminal space that Matala describes where the customers came to meet geisha is echoed in the no-man's land description of *mizu shobai* (p. 48) - set apart from society. Yumiko Kamise's analysis of the research showed that although the media portrays hostess work as favourable, there is societal disdain for it (2013, p. 42). This is contradictory to Allison's study (1994) which argued that hostess work was not overtly stigmatized. The title of an article about hostessing in the New York Times (Tabuchi, 2009): "young Japanese women vie for a once-scorned job", explicates this change in attitude. Hiroko Tabuchi cites a survey of 1,154 high school girls, where of the 40 most popular professions, hostessing occupied the twelfth spot.¹

Several scholars argue that the companies benefited most from the company-play in the hostess clubs. The environment in which workers relax and business relations are strengthened serves the interests of the companies, ultimately bonding the worker to his work and thus away from other aspects of his life, making the most efficient, loyal employee possible. A female executive notes that "it is not for fun or because [those who finance the evening] enjoy the company of the individuals involved. It's deliberate and carefully designed, with its own form and process" (Lafayette De Mente, 2003, p. 52). Scholars argue that the relationship between the company and *mizu shobai* was not serendipitous but

¹ This survey was carried out in 2009 by the Culture Studies Institute in Tokyo.

rather strategically arranged to benefit both, but most of all, the company and those at the top of the *mizu shobai* hierarchy, whom the revenues ultimately trickle towards. That is the only way to explain the massive revenues spent by companies at the height of the trend, which in the 1990s, was estimated to be 5 percent of company expenditures, or up to \$6000 per employee per year (Allison, 1994, pp. 9-10). Greg Naito has described three objectives of after-hours company entertaining: the socialization of bonding between workers (2008, p. 17), the masculinization of the office workplace (by purposefully excluding women from this extension of the work day), and bonding the worker to his company (p. 18). *Mizu shobai* is said to be a "control mechanism for male employees that are skilfully utilized by the corporate world in Japan which appears to serve the interests of no-one yet is perpetuated by everyone" (pp. 18-19). Naito predicts that the "connection between hostess clubs and business will continue to be a strong one" (p. 19). As one hostess comments, "clubs are necessary for conducting business in Japan. Even with the trend toward developing business connections on the golf course instead of in bars, the club business will never die" (Louis, 1992, p. 35). In her chapter *Family and Home* (1994), Allison argues that active participation in club life tends to alienate a man from his wife, and reinforces her role and necessity in the context of the home and childrearing.

Hostess clubs have been noted as a place for the recreational release from work. In Allison's interviews regarding societal views of the clubs, her informants said that "a man can't relax at home." He cannot "remove the spirit of tiredness" as it is perceived that the home is the same place as the source of his responsibilities. At home, *sarariman* (literally "salary man", or company workers) cannot "reveal themselves and be frank" (Allison, 1994, p. 117). A 2005 report by the Gender Equality Centre of the Fukushima Prefectural Government revealed that two-thirds of Japanese men between the ages of 30 and 40 "think they need the sex industry to do business" in Japan (as cited in Norma, 2011, p. 509). The survey of the Research Committee of Men on Prostitution (1998) found men in their 30s

to be the “most active in prostitution” (defining prostitution as “any sexual experience with money”), and that this age group is also the most frequent customers of *enjo kosai* (literally translated as compensated dating, usually involving underage girls) (Ueno, 2003, p. 322). Chizuko Ueno hypothesizes that this is related to the current propensity to stay single; nearly 40% of men in their 30s are unmarried. There is a legitimated “need” to buy female care.

Since 1997, when the media exploded with news of *enjo kosai*, most of the literature has either focused on the travesty of teen prostitution, or critiqued the “moral panic” that was society’s response. There is little literature that links *enjo kosai* as an unfortunate, albeit unsurprising progression of the institutionalized practice of commercializing female companionship. Chizuko Ueno (2003) and Laura Miller (2004) have linked *enjo kosai* teens as younger sisters of these other *mizu shobai* women.

The surveys from the late 1990s revealed that 3.3-6.9% of female high school students had engaged with *enjo kosai* (Moffett, 1996, p. 1; Cullinane, 2007, p. 275). A national survey conducted by the Japanese Association for Sex Education in 1999 found, however, that 15.6% of high school girls had used telephone clubs (Cullinane, 2007, p. 275), where women join for free and men pay a fee, to connect with women via telephone and then meet in person for a compensated date (Morrison, 1998, p. 478).

Several factors are proposed as having led to the emergence of *enjo kosai*. Among these were the open attitudes toward sex in Japan (Morrison, 1998, p. 472), prostitution as an “accepted reality” in Japan (Morrison, 1998, p. 474), and the emergence of telephone clubs as an accessible venue for teenagers (Ueno, 2003, p. 319; Morrison, 1998, p. 478). Other proposed factors include teenagers’ earlier age of sexual experiences (Ueno, 2003, p. 319) and curiosity and resistance to taboos surrounding the topic of sex in the middle-class family (Ueno, p. 320). Ueno labels the phenomenon of *enjo kosai* as an act of rebellion and agency against parents’ efforts to control teenagers’ bodies under the structure of

the “patriarchal modern family” and “hypocritical sexual norms” (p. 321). Where many have focused on the materialistic reasons behind the involvement with *enjo kosai*, Ueno focuses also on the strategic transgression of societal norms through sexual agency. A 1996 survey classifies the push-factors of teenagers’ involvement in *enjo kosai* into “two categories: one for the traumatic reasons, the other for pleasure and utilitarian purposes” (Ueno, 2003, p. 320). I propose two additional push-factors: the institutionalized stability of the commodity of female companionship itself, and *mizu shobai* as both a thriving industry (not lacking in supply or demand) and an institution constructed as necessary in the Japanese context.

While the media was furious and shocked about *enjo kosai* because of the significant age gap between teenager and client, the fury was unleashed on the girls and not the men “because of the assumption of naturalized male desire” (Ueno, 2003, p. 320). Teenagers’ “unbridled sexuality (individualism, consumption, and promiscuity) is viewed as a symptom of the ailing Japanese family” said to be brought on by the “breakdown of the extended family and traditional Japanese gender roles” (Cullinane, 2007, pp. 264-5). Some scholars such as Riikka Matala (2010) argue that women make a choice for *mizu shobai*-type work, thereby expressing agency while pushing against gendered norms. This argument requires an acrobatic reconciliation of the inherent conflict between the idea of agency and the fact that *mizu shobai* women are still expected to act as subservient and demure, their necessity constructed in relation to men’s desires. Certainly choice is involved, and they are earning more than they could elsewhere – up to five times more than the average female part-time wage (Kamise, 2013, p.44). As Matala remarks, “they are actively making choices about their lives by behaving and not behaving according to the gender expectations” (p. 47). But are they rather just emulating another gender expectation that was constructed in the notion of the historical *mizu shobai* woman, thus recreating gender norms, and contributing to the sustenance of a mega-institution which ultimately benefits those at the top (Ueno, 2003)?

Historical Background

Mizu shobai began as a necessitated entity in history, with the division (at times a loose one) between women of pleasure and geisha, and has evolved into a vast array of commodities to be purchased within the delineated areas where the expression of sexual desires is sanctioned. Geisha were the pioneers who forged a way into the parties of the “women of pleasure” or “sex professionals” (*yujo*) and their customers in the 1660s, introducing a new kind of entertainment, one that required a broader skill set than the *yujo* relied upon (Dalby, 1983, p. 55). In the 1600s, male entertainers entered the scene as the first geisha. In the 1700s, female geisha outnumbered the male geisha, until the male counterparts disappeared from the business. Geisha were increasingly requested at parties because their skills of singing, dancing, *shamisen* (a traditional stringed instrument), articulate conversation, and worldly knowledge overshadowed the singular speciality of the *yujo* (Dalby, 1983, pp. 12, 56). There were many different types of geisha, and some would sleep with their customers, while others would not. “The question of geisha and prostitution has always been complicated. Considerable administrative effort was expended on trying to preserve a distinction between the two groups of women” (Dalby, 1983, pp. 55-57).

The establishment of the geisha as a specialized profession (subculture or lifestyle) commodified a type of specialized female company, initially marketed to elite men. This specialized company was something that a wife could not provide, specifically because of her constructed and necessary role. Both categories of women were constructed as equally necessary to the needs of men. A man’s home and children were cared for by his wife, while his business relations, relaxation and un-winding were facilitated by the *mizu shobai* woman:

The role of wife in Japan places a woman in the center of the home. She is not expected to socialize with her husband’s colleagues, and indeed, she leaves that vitally important activity completely to her spouse. In the social sphere, the geisha (or their modern

counterparts, the bar hostesses) take over. (Dalby, 1983, p. 169)

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly where this began; however, 1585 brought the first pleasure quarter (Oharazeki, 2010, p. 24) which was seen on one hand as a place for expressing sexual desire (which was as “natural as eating or needing shelter”) and on the other hand, it was a “necessary evil” to cater to the “natural desires” of men (Iga, 1968, p. 129), a necessary lubricant for society. In general, acting on sexual desires was not taboo, but men had more freedom than women (Wakabayashi, 2003, p. 152).

The 1960s was a period of rapid economic growth, during which the practice of company entertaining increased in popularity (Norma, 2011, p. 515). The numbers of geisha began to dwindle as hostesses became more popular for the role of facilitating the evening – the hostess industry was less expensive for the clients, and less of a life-style commitment for the women. The realm of *mizu shobai* and the *mizu shobai* women who relieved the clients of any pressures of hosting became closely interrelated with company entertaining, and considered necessary to the conducting of business: business relations and relaxing.

Liza Dalby describes the activities found in this space designated for pleasure in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries:

Of the numerous hours men spent in the Yoshiwara pleasure quarters, however, relatively few were devoted to sex. Most of the time was engaged in partying – sociable banter, poetry, preening, singing, dancing, eating, drinking. The lure...was the romance, elegance, and excitement of that one place in feudal society where money, charm, and wit made more of an impression than rigidly defined social class. (Dalby 1983, pp. 55-6)

This description still holds relatively accurate to today’s *mizu shobai*. In Allison’s 1994 account of the hostess club, instead of the rigidity of class, the *sarariman* are given reprieve from the rigidity of their work world and ranking – where the formality between those superior and inferior dissipates for the

night, and things said in drunkenness are “forgotten and no obligations remain” (Naito, 2008, p. 16). It is an escape from the mundane and rigid, into the relaxing and exciting nightlife where one can let loose (be *sukebei*) (Allison, 1994, p. 117).

Legal history

Brothels were closed during the U.S. Occupation, effective in 1948, abolishing the legal framework that had permitted licensed prostitution in Japan. 1956 marked the Japanese government’s switch from the acknowledgment of prostitution as a business to its prohibition (Wakabayashi, 2003, p. 150). However, while under this new law, “prostitution was pronounced as evil, [it was] yet still in practice at *kafue* (bars), *machiai* (meetings places), and *ryoriya* (restaurants)” (Iga, 1968, p. 127). Japanese prostitution developed “from legal brothels to disguised forms of operation” and was relegated to a “respectable place” in society (Iga, 1968, p. 127). “The government justified...prostitution as a tool to alleviate stress in society” (Wakabayashi, 2003, p. 149) - thus *mizu shobai* was sanctioned and necessitated from the top echelon of society. A 1949 survey reported that 70 percent of all respondents (80 percent of the males and 60 percent of the females) expressed their opinion that “licensed houses are necessary to provide satisfaction to the single man, to prevent sex crimes, and to provide variety for the married male” (Iga, 1968, p.132).

Teenage Prostitution

Buying sex from a teenager is illegal under the Child Prostitution Law and Juvenile Protection and Development Ordinance (enacted in 1999). However, under the Penal Code (enacted in 1907), the age of consent is thirteen (Wakabayashi, 2003, p. 168-9), thus inadvertently creating a legal loophole, especially for willing teenagers seeking an opportunity. Tsubasa Wakabayashi suggested that if the law were amended to consider teenagers as agents of choice rather than as victims, it might actually be successful in restricting *enjo kosai*. Those under eighteen are thought to be “lacking autonomy and needing protection”, and the Child Prostitution

Law seeks to protect these youth in accordance, yet their volition is apparent in their choice to arrange these compensated dates. Under the Prostitution Prevention Law (enacted in 1956), both client and sex worker are protected if their agreement is based upon “their own sexual freedom” (2003, pp. 172-173). As consenting youth, these teens seem to fall into a gap between both laws.

The industry has been sturdily constructed, and strongly sanctioned. The geisha parties derived from the *yujo* parties. Geisha entertaining was democratized in the 1960s, resulting in a larger demand, and thus hostesses entered the scene, hostesses being the cheaper ‘younger sisters’ of the geisha. The industry thrived, and new “products” came onto the market. *Mizu shobai* is a massive industry. This paper does not discuss at length the main profiteers of the industry (most notably the *yakuza*, Japan’s mafia), other than the companies who had a mutually profitable relationship with the industry in the 1990s. It is clear, because of the expenditure of the companies, that *mizu shobai* contributes greatly to the company’s priorities. That it has been sustained over the centuries demonstrates that it must be benefitting powerful people. Protected by law, sustained throughout history, and endorsed by society, it enjoys a place of privilege. Today, the current clientele appear to be from all walks of society. The focus is more on relaxing, having a good time – an emphasis on the entertainment of adult entertainment. I argue that there are two unintended products of this socially necessitated and sanctioned sex industry. Firstly, the broad and accepted availability of companionship-for-sale has created a realm of fantasy and pretend-intimacy, void of emotional risk and responsibility, which is appealing to some men, and can play out in harmful ways. Secondly, I argue that *enjo kosai* filled a niche that was inadvertently created by *mizu shobai*. *Enjo kosai* has emerged in part because its commodity was pre-constructed. Although it is not being allowed within the bounds of *mizu shobai*, it has become a by-product of the institution. *Mizu shobai* should thus be held partially responsible for this phenomenon.

There are obvious ways in which *enjo kosai* is derived from the other categories in *mizu shobai*. Proven as a stable industry, new forms of commodity have a tried and true market in which to launch. *Enjo kosai* is one of the newer commodities in the expansive and varied sex market of Japan. Many consider it a transgressive emergence, outside of the sanctioned types of commodity in *mizu shobai*; I consider it an unintended progression of the trans-centennial industry. While *enjo kosai* is not officially included as *mizu shobai*, patterns of commodification are evident, similar to how hostesses have emulated aspects of their ‘elder sisters’ who have gone before, copying them and making cheaper, more accessible versions as circumstances have changed. Matala (2010) attributes two of the differences between geisha and hostesses to the cost of services, and the level of commitment to the career – being a geisha was a lifestyle, a choice that would be made to devote her life to this work, whereas hostesses would experience more division between personal and work life. Scholars have linked the various types of women in the industry using analogies of sisterhood. Geisha are called the “traditional sisters” of the hostesses. This fits with the kin relations that the geisha world was built on, where a geisha fit in the world in relation to her *okaasan* (literally, mother, but referred to the mother of the geisha house) and her older and younger ‘sister’, where the elder sister would mentor the younger. Matala also refers to geisha culture being the “mother culture” of hostesses and coffee girls (2010, p. 50). Each of these types of *mizu shobai* women “sell fantasy” (Matala, 2010, p. 48), and “fulfill sexual desires and fantasies...through providing sexual communication” (Kamise, 2013, p. 44). Hostesses’ younger sisters, *enjo kosai*, are “now being roped into the same paid-sex game” (Fitzpatrick, n.d., p. 1). Teenagers who do *enjo kosai* “essentially replace the much more expensive bar hostess, who likewise puts up with fumbled grapes and juvenile utterances but for a much higher price” (Miller, 2004, p. 239).

These teenagers are aware that their youth is desirable; “a currency with a time limit – they need to spend it before it expires” (Moffett, 1996, p. 1).

Their sexual attractiveness is affirmed “by setting a price for their bodies” (Wakabayashi, 2003, p. 160). The very ploy of the media to conjure up public alarm has highlighted the phenomenon: attaching a sexualized person to high school girls, thereby increasing the fetishization of the school girl uniform, appealing to a certain sector of men, and resulting in the assumption that a uniformed school girl is likely to engaged in *enjo kosai* (Fitzpatrick, n.d., p. 1; Ueno, 2003, p. 322).

The hostessing industry has demonstrated that self-commodification can be glamorous and profitable. The findings of a 2008 internet survey showed that 20% of women rated hostessing as a most desirable job (Kamise, 2013, p. 44). The media portray the hostess club as an “attractive workplace” (Kamise, p. 42). A New York Times’ exposé about hostesses (Tabuchi, 2009) emphasized the glamour. *Enjo kosai* as a lucrative endeavour is relatively similar to being a self-employed hostess; however, there is an inherent tension, as Dalby referred to hostesses as “a commodity in the bar”, the “opposite of an independent businesswoman” (Dalby, p. 187).

Another structural-functional factor; a systemic pull-factor of *mizu shobai* work, is that the average gendered pay-grade of women to men (in 2002) was 66.4% (Wakabayashi, 2003, p. 152). Hostessing pays up to five times more than the average female part-time wage (Kamise, 2013, p. 44) – securing the supply for the demand, advertising it as “a good way for young women to earn money” (Kamise, p. 44). The glamorizing advertising strategies are accessible to teenagers (Morrison, 1998, p. 479). What has been presented and advertised as an appealing place to work has inevitably attracted “unwanted” young entrepreneurs.

In many ways, *enjo kosai* transgresses the constructed order of *mizu shobai* and thus is disallowed from the legitimated status of being within the bounds of *mizu shobai*. The most glaring transgression, of course, is the age factor. Under the Juvenile Protection and Development Ordinance, it is illegal to “buy a body” (*kaishun*) of a person under 18 years of age (Wakabayashi, 2003, p. 168). The other disallowing factors are less legal in nature, and

more socially transgressive of the norms inherent and integral to the institution. For one, their work is not “fixed in a certain place nor controlled by anybody” (Wakabayashi, p. 155). One of the key facets of *mizu shobai* is that it is fixed in a location, separated from society. Technological establishments such as the telephone clubs have created a way for both parties to glide between “worlds”. *Enjo kosai* teenagers are entrepreneurial: “self-determined, independent women with no pimps nor managers” (Ueno, 2003, p. 323). Andrew Morrison defines the traditional *mizu shobai* transactions as occurring between the man and the *mizu shobai* establishment, bypassing the woman, where the woman is a vehicle (1998, p. 492). However, *enjo kosai* is a transaction occurring between the man and the teenager. Miller further states that these teenagers “usurp male privilege” (2004, p. 236) in conducting their own business, while traditionally, the woman would wait passively until the transaction was formalized.

In their interactions with the clientele, the teenagers use honest (and at times denigrating) communication. This stands in total contrast to the unconditional ego-stroking and pretence experienced in the hostess clubs (Miller, 2004, p. 237). In the teenagers’ perspectives, they feel that they are exploiting the men (Miller, p. 239). Perhaps the public’s discomfort with *enjo kosai* partially lies within the teens’ major transgression of the proscription to live for themselves, snubbing the prescription to, as young women, live for their parents. Many of the *mizu shobai* women serve as a function for the men, even in their pretending to be dutiful, and in this way the teenagers’ expression of personal agency is more evident. Ueno hypothesizes that “one reason why *enjo kosai* caused such deep embarrassment and anger among Japanese men was because they could not allow their women to use their own bodies at their disposal” (2003, p. 319), or make their own sexual choices. Said in another way:

Ignoring the diversity of sexual experience that marked rural women in the prewar era, observers in the 1990s expressed dismay at the overt manner in which school girls flouted supposedly timeless gender norms by donning provocative clothing and adopting postures

and mannerisms usually reserved for men. (Cullinane, 2007, p. 269)

While the commodities are similar, *enjo kosai* transgresses social norms and is thus disallowed from being inside the formal bounds of *mizu shobai*.

Harry Schaumburg writes of pretend-intimacy that “fantasy seems to be much safer than risking emotions in unpredictable relationships and suffering the pain that real intimacy can cause...Acceptance is unconditional. Rejection is not possible” (1997, p. 30). Relationships in *mizu shobai* reflect this: in hostess scenarios, as a company expense, the man is able to have a risk- and responsibility-free encounter, because a paid woman would never threaten his insecurities. The wives interviewed in Allison’s ethnography speak of the *sarariman*’s life with compassion (p. 104): that his life is full of responsibility and he needs time for himself where his self-esteem is replenished, without taking anything emotionally from him. Moreover, for *sarariman* who have been groomed by their companies and have become accustomed to relating to paid women, it makes it difficult to be able to relate sexually to women outside of that contractual relationship. They have become accustomed to having their masculinity reassured through compliments. If played out long-term, this may result in the difficulty of putting themselves into risky (albeit real-life) relationships, because of the familiarity and comfort with there being no risk of rejection. This dependence can create a perpetuated clientele for the *mizu shobai* industry, and, in extreme cases, potential clients for the younger versions of the *mizu shobai* women. Ueno describes how men in their 30s comprise the primary demographic of *enjo kosai* clientele because these contractual relationships are risk-free and conducive to a “fragile sense of masculinity” (2003, p. 322). The institution of *mizu shobai* can eventually lead to problematic products of false intimacy. Allison writes that “what men are given, get used to, and eventually come to expect are women who massage their ego and assure them of their masculine worth”. The hostess satisfies *jikokenjiyoku* (the desire to expose oneself and have this self-exposure well-received) (Allison, 1994, pp. 24-25). By paying, he is

guaranteed that she will “project an image” of him that is “pleasing and potent” – where every word he says will be “listened to, accepted, and praised”. This service “replaces something in the man that becomes depleted in the other spheres of his life – mainly home and work, where the weight and obligations of his various roles (husband, father, worker) take their toll” (Yoda, 1981 as cited in Allison, 1994, p. 22).

While this is not explicitly mentioned as part of the geisha skill-set, the most important roles of a geisha actually involve the skill to talk to a man as if he were “a big leader and to be a so-called mother confessor, who has the ability to understand and hold any secrets that are shared with her” (Versterinen, 2001, p. 76, as cited in Matala, 2010, p. 48.). There is an aspect of emotional stroking and ego-feeding. Dalby writes that “whether she sleeps with a man or not, [a geisha] has a certain sexual allure and can be an object of fantasy” (1983, p. 171). Matala describes coffee girls as an “updated version of the work” of hostesses and geisha. In these cafés, coffee girls often dressed as maids sell fantasy by “mak[ing] their customers feel like a leader, calling them master, and they are ready to offer motherly care, even feeding them their meal” (2010, p. 48).

The role of the hostess is to “fulfill sexual desires and fantasies” through providing “sexual communication” (Kamise, 2013, p.44) with the added perk of there being no lingering obligations beyond what was prearranged. The realm of *mizu shobai* has been referred to as a “Japanese-constructed fantasy world” (Morrison, 1998, p. 475), and “a scene of desire and fantasy... a site for a desired and imagined subjectivity as men come to recognize themselves in the images created for them by paid hostesses” (Allison, p. 1994, pp. 25-6). The fetishization of uniformed schoolgirls is another form of fantasy. A study showed that two of the most common fantasies *enjo kosai* customers are role-playing “as a lover involved in fictitious love” and non-sexual role-playing “as a father in order to simulate the relationship between a father and daughter” (Wakabayashi, 2003, p. 161).

In discussions of Japanese youth subcultures, teenagers are said to want to avoid adulthood and responsibility. One way that youth avoid all of this are by employing themselves in “cute” jobs such as the coffee girls in Homeworld (which simultaneously reinforce the patriarchal relationship norms of the *mizu shobai*)² and another is by taking their future into their own hands, living for the moment, making money for themselves, expressing their sexuality, and taking a new dominant stance over men. *Enjo kosai* is one consequential outcome of *mizu shobai* and their clients are produced through the second outcome: men whose masculinity is perceived to be fragile and requiring companionship that would not threaten his fragile masculinity. For future study, delving further into the notion of “false intimacy” introduced by Schaumburg and how it relates to Ueno’s term “fragile masculinity” would be beneficial, as the scope of this paper was able to only briefly connect his work in the context of *mizu shobai*. Furthermore, there is a barrage of Japanese literature on the topic, and I was only able to access the English articles. Much more could be accomplished in a bilingual study.

Conclusion

The male need for sex has been constructed and reified as necessary and unquestioned. Historically, “sex with wives was for procreation, while sex with women of pleasure was for recreation” (Dalby, 1983, p. 55). Society has acknowledged *mizu shobai* as a necessary evil – necessary to the workings of Japanese society. *Mizu shobai* has been established as one of the “proper contexts” for the natural sexual desires to be expressed. The clientele was once confined to the elite, then was democratized to include the *sarariman*, now is even further democratized as adult night-time play-time: a “fantasy world”. Both Allison and Ueno critique the paid relationships as having the propensity to develop a “fragile sense of masculinity” – a masculinity that becomes only capable of expressing

² The Homeworld website is found at <http://www.cafe-at-home.com>. Accessed June 19, 2014.

itself within the confines of a paid framework – where ego-stroking is risk-free.

Enjo kosai teens represent a derivative of their predecessors, where the opportunity was created for them by the evolving, fluid, *mizu shobai* which was maintained by sanction; highly adaptive with the changing times, norms, economy, trends and tastes of its patrons. The hostess life, on the surface, appears glamorous. Money can be made here. The coffee girls appear *kawaii* (innocent, playful, and cute). However, as the effect of being accustomed to relating to paid women has played out in the image of the *sarariman*, the effect of establishing commoditized companionship as a norm has played out in a socially undesirable mode: underage dates with older men, where sex is at times also sold. It is a two-sided coin. It can be harmful to form a dependence on relating to women who are paid to be adoring (as it can make it harder for the man to relate to un-paid women in dating or marriage contexts outside of *mizu shobai*). Likewise, it can be harmful to have an industry where women's companionship is sold as a glamorized and lucrative commodity, as there will always be new niches of all sorts of clientele with all sorts of tastes, and there will also be a steady supply of women. Unfortunately, some will be underage and will find a way to capitalize on the industry as we see with the case of *enjo kosai*. *Mizu shobai* should be accountable for accepting some of the blame – we can't completely blame the girls.

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