



Manhood and the Burdens of Intimacy

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"I have no girlfriend, and it is solely for this reason that my life has collapsed" (*Kanojo ga inai, tada no itten de jinsei hōkai*). These were some of the final words—as posted on the Internet—of the now (in)famous Katō Tomohiro. On June 8, 2008, Katō drove a truck down the crowded main shopping street of Tokyo's famous electronics district, Akihabara, closed off at that time to vehicular traffic. After crashing into several pedestrians, he then left the vehicle and proceeded to stab wildly with a knife at the crowds. Though he was quickly subdued and arrested, the total cost of his actions was seven dead and ten injured. While the Japanese and Western media primarily focused on the uncommon violence of the incident and its probable causes in Japan's neoliberal reforms, several authors and activists have claimed this act and the man himself as a potent symbolic of the "love gap" (*ren'ai kakusa*) in contemporary Japan.

A little over two weeks after what is now termed the Akihabara Incident, the news weekly *AERA* published an article profiling the possible social dynamics behind Katō's action. Entitled "The Cruelty of the Supremacy of Desirability" (Fukuda and Katō 2008), this essay describes how many Japanese men are engaging with what I label the increasing burdens of love and intimacy in postindustrial Japan. In this, I am taking up Shibuya Tomomi's conceptualization of love as an act, a deed, and not merely as a goal in and of itself. While recognizing the diversity of the meaning of the concept "love" (*ren'ai*), Shibuya defines it as the "action of building an intimate relationship with another person" (*tasha to shinmitsu na kankei wo kizukō to suru kōi*) (2009, 75). Love and intimacy are not solely emotional states brought on by, and directed toward, another individual

(or several). When I have asked my male interviewees how they define love, the overwhelming response has been that it is a way of deepening feelings, creating an intimacy. Yet for many young men, even taking the first steps of love—specifically meeting women and dating—have proven to be difficult, with love experienced, and imagined, as an increasing impossibility.

Even those with only a passing familiarity with the Japanese mainstream media are cognizant of Japan's population woes. In reference to the declining birthrate (*shōshika*), the increasing number of non-working seniors (*kōreika*), or, most relevant for the purposes of my study, the swelling number of late-marrieds (*bankonka*) and even non-marrieds (*mikonka*), there is a prevailing sense of crisis within the media, the government, and among various academic specialists in Japan. A 2013 report by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare (MHLW 2013) on youth consciousness claims there is less pressure within society to get married and that marriage has become just one choice among many, though no other choices are mentioned. Nevertheless, marriage is still viewed by many as a necessary entry into adult society (Cook 2013). Heterosexual coupling, marriage, and the reproduction of children have been the ideological norm. Japan has been posited as a "marriage-based society," or *kaikon shakai* (Tokuhiko 2010), with heterosexual marriage viewed as "common sense" (Lunsing 2001).¹ As a cross-culturally recognized rite of passage, weddings, in Edwards's view, "touch on fundamental notions about society itself and the individual's place within it" (1989, 8–9). Marriage symbolizes and makes socially official one's entrance into the adult world. Within the "complementary incompetence" of Japan's gender system, heterosexual marriage is, as Edwards explains, "necessary because individuals—both men and women—are always incomplete; their deficiencies, moreover, are complementary" (1989, 123). Though Lebra claims that "marriage was a necessary way to provide proof of femininity" (1984, 91), it is equally important for men, as indicative of both their desirability and thus their (heterosexual) manhood. However, despite this prevailing view on marriage, a 2013 Ministry White Paper states that as of 2012, 19.3 percent of men fifty years of age and older were unmarried and thus considered to be life-long unmarrieds (*shōgai mikon*). The report claims that around 60 percent of unmarried men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-nine are neither dating a woman nor have any female friends. When asked why they did not want a partner, 52.6 percent of male respondents claimed that "love is burdensome" (*ren'ai ga mendō*). Moreover, 14.6 percent claimed that "engaging with the opposite sex is frightening" (*isei to kōsai suru no ga kowai*) (MHLW 2013, 76). These concerns are reflected in postwar marriage rates, which have exhibited gradual decline throughout this period, reaching a new postwar low in 2014

(approximately 640,000 couples, with 80 percent first marriages) (MHLW 2016, 66).

The shift in feelings toward both dating and marriage, as well as the statistical shifts in marriage rates, have prompted many in Japan to examine the changing nature of such intimate relationships throughout the postwar period. McLelland (2012), writing on the Occupation-era shift in norms around dating and couplehood, argues that the introduction of romance and “free choice” had profound effects on the interaction between the sexes. Yet it has been the demographic and ideological shift from so-called “arranged” (*omiai*) marriages to those based on love (*ren'ai*) that has prompted the most critical attention surrounding the marriage “woes” of young Japanese singles. In the 1930s, for instance, about 70 percent of marriages were “arranged”; in the 1960s this began to change (Katō 2004, 74). Today, approximately 90 percent of all marriages are “love marriages” (*ren'ai kekkon*) (MHLW 2013). Two of the most outspoken critics of this shift are Yamada Masahiro and Shirakawa Tōko. Writing about the “marriage hunting” (*konkatsu*) boom that began in the late 2000s, the authors claim that Japan has entered, for both men and women, “the age of wanting to get married but being unable to” (*kekkon shitakutemo dekinai jidai*) (2009, 24–25). Watanabe Shin, head of the All-Japan Virgin League (Nihon Zenkoku Dōtei Rengō) and self-proclaimed as the “most famous virgin in Japan,” has responded to “imaginary critics” who claim that “anyone can do love” by arguing that this is all ideology, a product of this shift from “arranged marriages”—what some saw as a lack of choice—to love matches (2007, 20). For Yamada, Shirakawa, and Watanabe, the ideology and practice of “love marriage,” while notable for its illusion of free choice and therefore greater potential intimacy, contributes both to the delay of marriage until later in life and the increase in the number of Japanese singles.² In his attempt to understand the issue, Miura Atsushi, a marketing analyst and author of *Unpopular Men! The Age of Male Suffering*, claims that “love today is a competitive free market” with social Darwinist implications for Japanese men and society as a whole (2009, 60). Despite various fundamental differences in their approach to the issue, these and other authors agree that being in love today is a competitive arena, wherein love is neither easily attained nor guaranteed. Such acknowledgements and criticisms point to larger discourses on how love in contemporary Japan functions not only as a form of work, but, moreover, as a form of social recognition comparable to one’s occupational and company status, that many see as unavailable to an increasing number of young women and, especially, men.

Through the following ethnographic vignettes, I present two contrasting depictions of how young men are engaging with, and often defying,

contemporary demands on men in the “marriage/love market.” While they may seem wildly disparate and therefore incommensurate, I argue that there are linkages among them and with broader society-wide discourses on “doing love” and intimacy—and their burdens—among single men. The burdens of intimacy, as I see them, are twofold. On the one hand, contemporary popular discourse describes finding a potential mate as now requiring constant effort on the part of men, a consistent polishing of the self and one’s attributes that many men find to be onerous and in contradistinction to their idealized versions of what love is and should be. Furthermore, many men find the pecuniary expectations of women—a high male income that translates into spending power—to be particularly onerous and untenable. On the other hand, love and marriage function as signs of desirability (*moteru*), and this desirability is, in turn, symbolic of one’s humanity (*ningenrashisa*). These burdens are part and parcel of what Itō, Kimura, and Kuninobu term the “age of love pressure (*gendai shakai ha, ren’ai kyōhaku*)” (*shō no jidai*) (2011, 116). In the following, I share two field-work encounters in order to illustrate the increasing burden on young men in today’s “marriage market” and how some are choosing to respond. The first is a series of demonstrations against the three major “love” holidays in Japan; the second, a dating event in Tokyo. Both encounters took place between the fall of 2013 and the spring of 2014 as part of my doctoral research on youth masculinity in contemporary Japan.

BURDEN AND RESISTANCE: KAKUHIDŌ AND THE POLITICS OF HIMOTE

One of the unharmed bystanders in Akihabara on the day of Katō’s attack was Furusawa Katsuhiro, the former head of the Kakumeiteki Himote Dōmei (Unpopular Men’s Alliance; Kakuhidō for short). Influenced by the student activism he saw on campus when he was a student at Hosei University, as well as by Marxism, Furusawa founded the group in 2006 (Furusawa and Sekiguchi 2009, 58). Now headed by Mark Water (this Japanese gentleman’s *nom de guerre*), Kakuhidō bills itself as trying to make “a bright future for himote” (*himote no akarui mirai o sōzō suru*). *Himote*, or unpopular man/men, derives from the Japanese terms *hi*, meaning negative or un-, and *mote* from *moteru*, meaning popular. In his *Otaku Encyclopedia*, Patrick Galbraith defines *himote* as follows:

Unpopular, especially with females. *Himote* guys believe that the status of women is built on the backs of men, who must slave to earn money and win female attention. In some cases, *himote* have a political bent and

gather to boycott Christmas, Valentine's, and White Day, when men are expected to make extravagant "offerings" in the name of romance. They spend a lot of time online, and it's a chicken-or-egg question as to whether they are unpopular because of the theory, or created the theory because they are unpopular. (2009, 100)

From my own research, I find this definition to be an exaggeration, but it also speaks to some "truths" about self-proclaimed *himote*. For instance, Furusawa seems to view *himote* as akin to other sexual minorities, and in an interview with the journal *Sexuality*, he explicitly compared the "love system" in Japan to that of capitalism, in which people are classified and hierarchized.

Having learned about this group, I emailed the head of the group, Mark Water, to request an interview. Perhaps questioning my interest, he instead invited me to the Christmas Smashing (*kurisumasu funsai*) demonstration in Shibuya.³ Consequently, in late December I met up with the group in Miyashita Park in central Shibuya about thirty minutes before the scheduled demonstration was to begin. I saw a group of about five men in the northern part of the park, some with bullhorns, some wearing masks. I shyly headed toward them, feeling out of place owing to my gender and my flashy sartorial choices. Wearing a pink net shopping bag over his face, topped with sunglasses and a helmet, Mark Water approached me, and we introduced ourselves. After he introduced me to Hatoya-san, a journalist and Communist, we exchanged business cards (*meishi*) and hung around, discussing the group and its aims. They explained some of the basic tenets of the protest; the most important point was that they saw a discriminatory structure (*sabetsu kōzō*) in the way single people are treated in comparison with those in couples. Water-san mentioned the pressure (*atsuryoku*) to be in a pair. At this point, other participants, mostly men but a few women, arrived; while about twenty-five people had gathered in total, only fifteen (thirteen men, two women) participated in the march. The new arrivals brought with them the group's flag, reading "Smash Christmas!" which was held up at the front of the protest line. We were led by police officers and orderly arranged ourselves into three lines. At this point, we made our way through one of the busiest sections of Shibuya, taking a tour around the park and through the major shopping area in front of the JR station. Water-san led us in shouting "Smash Christmas!" (*kurisumasu funsai!*). A young man wearing a blue Japan Aviation Association jacket was yelling into a bullhorn, urging couples to break up (*kappuru wakareyo!*). He was eventually told by police to calm down, but otherwise the protest proceeded peacefully. As we made our way back to the park, past large crowds

of shoppers, people were staring. At one point, two young men in their late teens or early twenties raised their hands and cheered in support. Most pedestrians stared and/or took pictures. In total, the protest took only about thirty minutes. When we returned to the park, Water-san declared the protest over and had people pose for final photographs.

After the Christmas demonstration, I attended the other two *funsai* (smashing, pulverizing) events for Valentine's Day and White Day. Neither of these holidays is strictly a celebration of "love," though that element exists as well. On Valentine's Day women are expected to give chocolates to the men in their lives—regardless of romantic intent—including their work colleagues. This custom is then repeated, with the genders reversed, a month later, on White Day, when men are expected to make a return offering of chocolates (see Ogasawara 1998). All three "smashing" events have as their aim, other than ultimately building that "bright future," of destroying the "love capital system" (*ren'ai shihon shugi*).

At the Valentine's demonstration, I felt an even greater sense of anger among those gathered, quite possibly because social norms surrounding this holiday allow for a highly gendered, and typically public, evaluation of a man's popularity. The demonstrators' anger was not directed at women in particular but at the love-capital system itself. Prior to the actual demonstration, approximately twelve minutes of speeches were made by those gathered. Many of the speeches focused on the giving of chocolates on Valentine's Day, when men are expected only to receive, not give, them as gifts. As vividly described by Ogasawara (1998), this practice means that a man who receives few or no gifts of chocolate is right to understand the message that he is disliked and unattractive. The speakers correctly assumed they were speaking to a group of men who were unlikely to receive chocolates and deeply felt the sting of that rejection. Water-san began with the impassioned claim that "This Valentine's day thing, every year we try to smash it, but it grows up like mushrooms after the rain." Referring specifically to the custom of giving chocolates, he claimed that it is a bad custom promoting and fostering inequality among people (*kakusa wo jochōsuru hidoi shūkan*) because some men are inevitably given more or fewer chocolates. Next, a man who appeared to be in his late thirties or early forties stepped up to the microphone and stated, "We are living in an age when men's value is determined by how many chocolates they receive. This must be ended!" He concluded his speech by telling the assembled crowd that even though they may not receive chocolates, they are still great (*Choko wo desu ne, mattaku morawaranai hito demo jinkaku ga sugureta desu ne*). He was followed by writer and consultant Tsunemi Yōhei, who declared that a society (such as Japan's) that evaluates one's humanity (*ningen*) based

on the number of chocolates received is not a good one (*chokorēto no maisū de ningen no kachi wo kimeru shakai ha yokunai*). The next speaker was a freshman at Keiō University in Tokyo who would be celebrating his first Valentine's Day as a college student. However, he lamented that he would be spending it working all day at his part-time job and did not expect to receive anything on the appointed day. The final speaker, who remained anonymous, closed out the speechmaking by declaring, "Love is a tool of exploitation of workers by capitalists" (*Ren'ai ha shihonshugi no shihonkatachi ga rōdōsha wo sakushu suru tame no dōgu de arimasu*). Earlier he compared the customs of Valentine's and White Day to prostitution, a comparison that was met with laughs and a rousing "Yes, indeed!" (*Sō da!*). Despite laying much of the blame at the feet of the government and capitalism, he ended with the claim that "There are women who expect a man to make more than ¥6 million per year.⁴ But according to statistics, no such men of marriageable age exist!" These claims, which may strike some as odd amid the overall critique of a chocolate-based evaluation of one's humanity, lie at the heart of much of what Shibuya Tomomi (2009) calls the "external" (*gaihatsu ha*) *himote* movement. As opposed to their "internal" (*naihatsu*) brethren, *gaihatsu ha* critique the "love capital system," which they see as the primary love system, as a whole.⁵

Kakuhidō is just one part of a larger "movement" seeking to publicize the increasing difficulties that men (in particular) face in an increasingly competitive, and burdensome, love/marriage market. One of the more outspoken critics of love in contemporary Japan is Denpa Otoko ("Radio-Wave Man"), Honda Tōru. Published in 2005, Honda's manifesto, *Denpa otoko*, is a critique of the "love-capital system" and a call for young people to embrace "two-dimensional love." The anonymous Kakuhidō protester's prostitution comparison implicitly draws on Honda's work and is a common refrain within the *himote* discourse. The primary critique is that men feel they are expected to make large cash outlays, in the form of presents, dinners, and travel, in order to both find and keep a girlfriend. Rather than being accepted ostensibly for who they are, regardless of clothing choices and career aspirations (and the attendant income), men are converted into another commodity owing to the linkages between love and capitalism in contemporary Japan (see Cook, this volume). These men are not necessarily rejecting love per se but rather its commodity-like fetishism. Like Furusawa, Kakuhidō, and others, Honda borrows from Marxist critiques of capitalism, questioning Japan's "new religion of love" and its firm entrenchment with capitalism. For Honda, this system divides men—and he is specifically talking about men—into "haves" (*moteru*) and "have

nots" (*motenai*).⁶ The latter are branded as "social losers" and in effect cast out of society, in what he also deems a system of "sexual apartheid." Calling for men to withdraw from this unfair system, Honda argues that it is only in the two-dimensional world—for instance, video games, figurines of characters and/or idols—that one can experience love free from capitalist exploitation and its attendant burdens.

However, love within the virtual world is not without its various burdens. Despite being held up by some as being free from the disappointments of "real love" (*jissai no ren'ai*),⁷ even "love simulation games" (*ren'ai shimmyurēshon gēmu*) are enmeshed in a dating culture that requires time and effort on the part of the player. Within the simulated reality world of the highly popular, and perhaps most well-known dating game for men, Konami's LovePlus, love and intimacy require work.⁸ The character ("you") changes his schedule in order to cultivate certain skills that then result in unlocking the heart of one of the three female characters.⁹ To increase one's "boyfriend power" (*kareshi no chikara*), you must increase your intelligence, charm, physical training, and sensitivity through various school and extracurricular activities. LovePlus tacitly acknowledges that love is not given freely but is a form of work. However, separating it from reality is the lack of both rivals for a young woman's affection and a relative lack of risk. Thus the game separates the player from the reality that a desired partner could find someone better.

Viewing themselves as having been denied access to love and intimacy, men such as Honda, Furusawa, and those in Kakuhidō, have chosen to drop out of the competitive arena. They experience the freedom of the love market not as the beginning of new opportunities—for love but also for the self—but as the foreclosure of intimate possibilities. Intimacy, for them, should be free from the demands of the market—that is, not dependent on one's income and spending power. But in the typical meat market, intimacy entails onerous burdens, both financial and emotional. While their critique is aimed particularly at the pecuniary expectations on potential (male) lovers, their palpable anger, coupled with moments of light-hearted comic bantering, speaks to the larger burdens felt by many young men in Japan who are attempting to find love. For those in Kakuhidō and others, the non-receipt of chocolates on Valentine's Day represents a lack in themselves, a sign of their non-desirability, which in turn signifies a certain social deficiency on their part. Securing love—as exemplified not just by having a girlfriend or wife, but also by being recognized as a potential mate—thus is a burden in and of itself, one that bears the weight of granting men access to the realm of social recognition and normality.

ON THE MEET (MEAT) MARKET

While the men of Kakuhidō and others choose to resist what they view as the increasingly burdensome norms of love in contemporary Japan, there are many others who endure. In particular, events self-consciously designed for people to find a marriage partner, clustered under the term “marriage hunting” (*konkatsu*), have become popular in recent decades. Taking part in *konkatsu* events, they still seek to find love and intimacy. One popular form of *konkatsu* is the *machikon*, which suggests a local setting or gathering for people looking for relationships, as opposed to a more Western “blind date.” Usually arranged by a commercial outfit, such as Machicon Japan, these events allow male and female participants to intermingle in a restaurant or bar. Food and drinks are included in the set price, with men typically paying twice as much as women.¹⁰ The usual setup for a *machikon* is that one is assigned to arrive at a restaurant or bar at the appointed time. When one checks in, he or she is given a map pointing out the other available restaurants nearby. Staff members encourage participants to remain at the first venue for about an hour, then recommend checking out the other spaces and meeting new potential mates. Such a procedure allows participants to meet more single persons than at a typical *gōkon* or group date.¹¹

Attending various *machikon*, I was able to observe firsthand the skills necessary for finding love. At my first *machikon*, in September 2013 in Ebisu, I was keenly aware of the palpable sense of nervousness among the attendees, as it was a mirror of my own. The first to arrive at the small Italian restaurant to which I was first assigned, I was given a map and instructions and told to sit at a table in the back of the room. I was soon followed in by a young man in a white button-down shirt and blue jeans. Surveying the room, he sat down at a table two tables down from mine; though we politely nodded at each other, no words were exchanged, and he, like I, was visibly nervous. By the appointed start time more attendees had arrived; the organizers announced the opening of the bar, and we toasted (*kampai!*) to the evening and the potential matches that could be made. I introduced myself to the young woman sitting to my left, complimenting her on her fashion. We exchanged simple conversation and were eventually drawn into a larger group discussion with the other men and women at our table. However, that initial young man spent most of the time sipping his tea and staring at the table, until he was asked to join our table.

This young man was certainly struggling. A full-time postal worker (a fact that he shared after much prompting), he was eventually aided in his attempts by two men in their early thirties who had made themselves his unofficial coaches. They urged him to ask questions of the women at

the table, but he was very hesitant to do so. When both men and women prompted him with questions, he never made any eye contact, choosing instead to look at the table and mumble his replies. At one point he refused to even sit at the table with us, choosing instead to skulk near the exit of the room. It is possible to imagine that this young man, had he come of age two decades earlier, would have married with relative ease. Because he possessed a stable (though not particularly glamorous) job, his parents would have engaged the services of marriage brokers or those of a coworker acting as a go-between (*nakōdo*) in order to find a bride for him. Yet here he struggled to even engage in the most basic of conversations with both the men and the women.

In this “new” marriage market, the ability to communicate has become both a necessity and a potential burden for young men. A publication from Men’s Center Japan tells (male) readers that “in regard to building a good relationship, it is necessary to have good communication with your female partner. You may think this is burdensome or problematic [*mendōkusai*], but it is very important” (2000, 16; see also Alexy, chapter 5 in this volume).¹² In response to what many see as the inability of today’s young men to communicate with women or to attract them by other means, there has been a growth in specialty services and *moteru* guides. As Yamada claims, finding love (via *konkatsu*) is not just about seeking a partner, but also entails improving oneself (2010, 27). Within the *moteru* boom, these guides advise young men to polish (*migaku*) themselves in order to find love. A recent comic, *Moteru manga* (Yū and Sō 2013) aims, through comedy, to instruct stereotypical “social losers” in how to navigate the contemporary dating scene. The protagonist, Tadano-san, laments his lack of a girlfriend; however, when confronted by the “lady killer” Onnada Kō (literally, “Many Women Luck”), who was brought in by his boss to help his male employees, he claims that if he is just himself, women will find him desirable, and therefore he is okay just as he is (*ibid.*, 19). Onnada intensely disagrees, telling him that being as he is now is like showing up to a job interview in pajamas or taking a university entrance exam without having studied—that is, wholly unacceptable and guaranteed to fail (*ibid.*, 21). Onnada and others urge their targets (presumably undesirable men) to think of love as a market and themselves in terms of goods to be sold. Fujita Satoshi (2009, 62), founder of the Cram School for Undesirable Men (Himote Nanpa Juku) and author of various dating guides, compares men to cars, with women being the customers, and urges the polishing of the self in order to be the best on the market.¹³

Like the ideas expressed by Honda Tōru, these works acknowledge how the means of, and the preferred attributes for, finding intimacy—the work of love—are shifting, comparing the process and the field of

competition itself to a capitalist market. However, while Honda urges readers to withdraw from the market in full, Fujita, Yamada, and others recognize the necessity of change—on the part of men. The young postal worker I met at the Ebisu *machikon* reminds me of one of Fujita's pupils as described in a 2008 *AERA* essay. Fujita recalls how his student ran up to a woman, asked her to marry him, and promptly ran away at the young woman's disgusted look (cited in Fukada and Katō 2008, 26). Lacking even the ability to look a woman in the face, such young men represent not only the potential failures in the new system, but also the new burdens on young men. Yamada claims, "When *omiai* marriages were still fairly common, men who thought that they weren't desirable could still hope that they could get married. But since the bursting of the bubble, there has been a widening of economic disparity, and women have increasingly entered society. Undesirable men now have no hope" (2010, 27).¹⁴ Works such as *Mote baiburu* and *Moteru manga* aim to give young men hope for finding love and intimacy; however, they also make clear the increasing burdens that love now entails.

To some, men such as the young postal worker and Fujita's pupils are pitiable or, even worse, symbolic of new forms of misogyny in contemporary Japan. Feminist scholar Ueno Chizuko (2010, 57) criticizes *himote* as merely angry young men who objectify (*mono suru*) women as a means toward fulfillment of their masculine identity. She goes on to claim that they hold a grudge (*ensa*) against the changing marriage market and thus are desirous for a return to the previous marriage system, wherein almost anyone could get married with little effort. In my work, building intimacy does not necessarily stem from a long-term relationship with an individual, developed over multiple meetings and deep discussions. Rather, intimacy can be a process of sharing stories of vulnerability and finding a connection, a potential common cause, even common humanity, with my informants, owing in part to the fact that their worldview is both challenging to and in agreement with my own. Watching young men attempt to meet women at *machikon* or laying bare their "undesirability" has made me (often painfully) aware of my own situation as a researcher in Japan. When I have talked about these young men, several of my interviewees and colleagues have scoffed at their protestations, seeing in them, as Ueno does, a nostalgia for the "good old days," a desire to return to a more masculinist system of matchmaking. However, through empathy, in their struggles I see my own reflected. The process of fieldwork bears striking similarities to a search for love in that it is often a fight to be perceived as desirable (or in my case, as respectable) on one's own terms, regardless of income, looks, status, and communication skills. Regardless of whether or not anyone

loves these men, they deserve to be recognized as fellow humans and citizens, not as social outcasts.



Reflecting on the goal of anthropology and the ethnographer, Nancy Rosenberger argues the following:

[The anthropologist's] main aim is to give voice to these people's stories and experiences through a process of listening closely and thinking about them in relation to almost everything else she reads and does. The final result is her tale of these stories, for in their retelling the anthropologist also recounts a tale of herself, of her encounter with these people, and of the meaning that she understands in these encounters. (2013, 1)

In this chapter I have demonstrated how intimacy in contemporary Japan is experienced, and responded to, as a burden for young Japanese men. Alone, my *konkatsu* and Kakuhiidō encounters might seem extraordinary; however, when placed within the wider discourse—on marriage hunting, *moteru*, and the “love gap”—such stories take on a recognizable cast and become symbolic of broader social issues in post-mainstream, postindustrial Japan. While the men of Kakuhiidō may embrace their undesirability—in the process questioning the very foundation of such a phenomenon—and men such as the postal worker continue to “compete” despite their undesirability, these two oppositional responses nevertheless highlight both the competitiveness of the love market and its work-like burdens on young men. Their reactions point to feelings of inadequacy and frustration at their inability not only to just get married (*kekkon dekinai*), but also to not “do” love. Love in Japan now comes with new risks, as well as a new sense of importance for the self and one's social standing. While Itō, Kimura, and Kuninobu (2011) claim that love is an issue of adulthood (*ichininmae*), I claim that being “desirable” (*mote*) goes beyond issues of adult norms to that of social recognition.

After months of fieldwork, I met with masculinity studies scholar Tanaka Toshiyuki to discuss varying issues regarding contemporary Japanese masculinity. Tanaka-san's most recent research focuses on men and the issue of “work-life balance”; as we discussed varying issues regarding contemporary Japanese masculinity, he recognized that though for young men work may be their primary concern, love and desirability were a close second. Both function as forms of social recognition (*shōmei*) and are thus a burden on the self. Following his theorization, I understand love and marriage to index a certain normalcy, but one to which

many young men feel they no longer have access owing to shifting partner norms. In a recent essay on the changing demands on men, anthropologist Gordon Mathews makes the claim that “Being a man in a changing Japan is harder than ever, it seems” (2014, 78). While the decline in career and work opportunities—the primary markers of Japanese masculinity in the postwar era—has garnered the most critical attention in the past decade, the burdens evoked by Mathews extend beyond this “traditional” sphere into what I see as the new arena of work: love and intimacy.

NOTES

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1. The persuasive force of this “common sense” extends to homosexual men and women as well. Describing marriage vis-à-vis gay men and women as “a system that does not fit their needs and on the other hand does not leave them untouched either,” Lunsing (2001, 120) highlights the tactic used by some (primarily) queer men of engaging in “camouflage marriages” (*gisō kekkon*). By entering into a heterosexual marriage, lesbians and gay men feel more able to ensure their adulthood and fulfill natal family obligations.

2. The idea that “love match marriages” allow for greater intimacy between spouses is predicated on the belief that the long(er)-term evolution of the relationship—from initial meeting to the confession of romantic feelings (*kokuhaiku*) and ultimately up to and through marriage—necessarily involves learning more about the respective partner, thus deepening interpersonal communication and understanding. Furthermore, it is also expected for couples to have experienced sexual intimacy prior to marriage, thus ensuring carnal compatibility.

3. Lest one think that demonstrating against Christmas marks these men as particularly grinchy, it is necessary to give a brief explanation of this holiday in twenty-first-century Japan. Writing in 1963 and 1982 respectively, David Plath and Walter Edwards described Christmas as a family holiday, marked off from more adult (that is, sake-filled) end-of-year celebrations. However, this unofficial holiday—it is not a day off from work, and from my own recent experience, life functions as normal—is now neither a celebration of the birth of Christ nor even a time for the family to gather; Christmas today is a couples’ holiday. Kawahara notes that this “domesticated” holiday offers “a ‘romantic’ stage for the young to develop their sexual relationships” (1996, 182). Beginning in late November, colorful imagery in the subways, department stores, and magazines across Japan advertises the love aspects—couples packages to hot springs (*onsen*), special dinners, romantic walks through one of Tokyo’s various illumination events. During one of my many jaunts throughout Tokyo I even came across a flier for a *machikon* aimed at finding a special someone in time for the Christmas holiday. In this way it is very much akin to Valentine’s Day celebrations and expectations in the United States. For example, Kawahara (this volume) narrates romantic expectations for Christmas in the case of Yoko.

4. Approximately US\$60,000.

5. The internal *himote*, per Shibuya, believe that their undesirability is an individual/personal problem. Unlike the external *himote*, they have few problems with the “love-capital system” (2009, 89–90).

6. This is actually a play on words, not uncommon in the Japanese language. *Moteru* (being desirable) and *motsu* (to have; *motteiru*) sound similar.

7. Dobashi, Katsuya, and Tsuji refer to this as *kitai hazurenonai anshin*, or “the sense of security that comes when one’s expectations are not thwarted” (2011, 72).

8. Not long after LovePlus’s initial release, an anonymous user posted a chart on Ni-channeru (Channel Two, a popular message board) outlining the difference between the game and “three-dimensional love.” With LovePlus the outcome is “heaven” (*tengoku*). However, love in the “real world” holds the potential for disappointment (one’s being denied love) or eventual marriage. Regardless, both outcomes are labeled as being “a living hell” (*ikijigoku*), as they leave men often feeling frustrated (Dobashi, Katsuya, and Tsuji 2011, 73).

9. The gender of the player, both in the real and simulated realities, is marked as male. While a player is not required to enter a gender (*seibetsu*) when creating a profile, the player’s character is male, as evinced by vocal cues, dress, etc. When I discussed such games (though not particularly LovePlus) with one informant, he conceded that women could play them but that they were designed for men.

10. For instance, at a *machikon* event I attended in Akihabara, the cost for a single female attendee was ¥3,200 (approximately \$34) and ¥6,800 yen (\$70) for a single male attendee. At the time of my reservation, about a week and a half prior to the event, all the men’s slots (single, couple, and group) had sold out. However, on the day of the event there seemed to be an equal ratio of men to women in attendance.

11. At a typical *gōkon* party, participants are usually selected from among one’s friends and acquaintances and limited in the number of participants, usually about ten individuals all together (five women, five men).

12. Men’s Center Japan is the first, and one of the few remaining, men’s rights organizations in Japan.

13. For the Cram School for Undesirable Men, see <http://www.fujitakikaku.com/nanpa/>.

14. Here, Yamada is referencing women’s increasing participation in long-term career track employment, which provides them with a high degree of economic independence. This financial independence has translated into what anthropologist Lynne Nakano views as “higher expectations of [the women’s] potential mates” (2014, 173). These include being able to communicate with a partner and his active engagement in household tasks.

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