

## *Masculinities and Sexuality: the case of a Japanese top ranking senior high school*

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**ABSTRACT** *In order to formulate an educational intervention into the sexuality education courses at a Japanese senior high school, we interviewed a group of 51, 15–18-year-old, male Japanese senior high school students. We used a set of three interviews that allowed us to depict the ways these young men enact their masculine identity in relation to sexuality as an index of subjectivity. At this particular school, meritocracy, credentialism and social class are relevant axes around which to grasp the reality of schooling. The analysis of our accounts reflects a range of verbal displays of heterosexism and sexism that often serves in the policing of ‘appropriate’ forms of masculinity. Finally, we identified the school as an institution actively disciplining and producing heterosexuality as the norm of gender relations and identities.*

### **Subjectivities, Regimes and Schooling**

The current study is the second part of our research project on masculinity and condom use among Japanese youth. We interviewed a group of young men in order to investigate masculine identity and sexual behaviour among them and to provide the fundamentals for intervening in the educational process. Okazaki (Asahi Shinbun, 1998, p. 29) recognises that in Japan the responsibility of preventing pregnancy has tacitly rested with men rather than women. We found at least two studies on Japanese females negotiating condom use (Hyōdō, 1996; Wright, 1999). However, we could not find any reference to illustrate the ways males regard the issue, that is why we turned our attention to the male perspective.

Regarding the ‘pervasiveness and regularity of patriarchy’ (Jackson, 1998, p. 26), we aimed at showing the multiple and often contradictory ways in which our sample has constructed and policed their sexual identity as heterosexual males. Having constructed their heterosexual identity as ‘coherent, natural and stable’ (Richardson, 1998, p. 2), these young men create specific ‘truths’ to define the hierarchical order of heterosexual relations as *atarimae* (natural). We emphasised how the conditions at the school enable teenagers to get into a particular normalising relation with themselves and others.

In order to present our data we positioned ourselves within the framework of a feminist social theory (Holland *et al.*, 1998, p. 15), on the assumption that in Japanese

society, contemporary gender relations are hierarchically constructed as power relations. We questioned how and why such relations have been constructed through history, within and between cultures and in entanglements with other forms of power, particularly social class position.

Studies dealing with masculinity and Japanese youth appear to be inconsistent and sometimes contradictory. Discrepancies in methodological approach are evident, but more than this, we considered them as a symptom of the difficulties in grasping the 'variety of potentially contradictory identities, which battle within us for allegiance' (Weeks, 1990, p. 88). In trying to understand how young males are shifting their identities and describing the many problems affecting males' lives, Itō (1996) discusses how the mass media have been representing issues concerning Japanese younger generations. In his opinion, all these issues are indicative of the different ways Japanese young males are transforming their identities (Itō, 1996, p. 34). Ōhira Ken a psychiatrist at St. Luke's International Hospital claims 'that male high school students today have entirely lost the idea of "masculinity"' (Robertson, 1998, p. 57). However, results of at least two behavioural researches show a completely different point of view. Trommsdorff and Iwawaki (1989) in a comparative study found Japanese students having more traditional gender-role orientations than Germans. In addition, Ehara (1999) acknowledges in her research on 'the perceptions of male senior high school students concerning sexual differences,' that the perceptions of girls concerning sexual differences and division of labour based on sexual differences have been changing, but the perceptions of young men have not changed in parallel.

In order to deconstruct the academic representations of these young Japanese men in relation to schooling, we focused upon their accounts as heterosexual males. Specifically, we examined the ways in which they develop certain modes of masculinity in relation to the social structure of a top ranking senior high school. In illustrating the limits of the models that explain the identity of senior high school students, we challenged the perceptions of uniformity which refer to the elite school students as 'single-minded' students focusing on academic achievement (Rohlen, 1983; Kawahara, 1996; Erwin, 1998; Yoneyama, 1999).

### **Rethinking Meritocracy and Schooling**

Under the influence of the framework of *Nihonjinron* (Japanese theory) the successful modernisation of Japan, economic prosperity and relative social stability have often been attributed to the educational system (Mourer and Sugimoto, 1986, p. 21). Schools have been regarded as the institutions where children are socialised into 'Japanese values' and norms, in particular gregariousness and self-discipline. The increase and diversification of educational opportunities and the results of international tests of mathematics and science have been regarded as a proof of success of this socialisation. These proofs enhance the belief in a seamless society irrespective of socio-economic background, where there is no other means to success in life than academic credentials (Ogata, 1999, p. 1).

The meritocratic system grounded on the idea of the 'ancient Imperial University' seems to be still in use, and even the salaries of deans and teachers are based on the rank attached to the university (Nakajima, 2000, p. 2). The ranking system has been organised in accordance with the civil servants' examination system, and each educational institution is positioned in a rank depending on the number of graduates who pass the exam and enrol as civil servants. In 1999, statistics from *Jinjin* (National Personal

Authority) still place the University of Tokyo, the University of Kyoto and Waseda University as being at the top of the ranking during 1998 and 1999 (Hitotsubashi Shoten, 1999). Nowadays, not only governmental institutions, but also the large firms are providing important records for classifying the universities, with graduates from the University of Tokyo being highly valued. The ranking of junior and senior high schools follows the same standards. In fact, the *Sandē Mainichi*, a publication of the Mainichi newspaper, offers the school's ranking based on the number of graduates who were accepted at the University of Tokyo. The socialisation and organisation of knowledge, reflected in the examination system, are supported by three major components of Japanese society: consumerism (of the people), corporatism (of large firms), and nationalism (of the state) (Yoneyama, 1999, p. 150).

### **Our Sample**

The site for the current study is a senior high school, a co-educational institution attached to the University of Tsukuba, in Tokyo. This is an experimental public school classified as a *futsūka* (a school that provides general education courses). The *Sandē mainichi* records for 1999 put the Senior High School attached to the University of Tsukuba at 14th in the national ranking of senior high schools (*Sandē Mainichi*, 1999, p. 36). Furthermore, statistics from the 1999 school handbook (Tsukuba Daigaku Fuzoku Kōtōgakkō, 1999, p. 13) show that 147 out of 251 students went to university, and amongst those, 29 out of 62 males, and 20 out of 85 females were enrolled in either the University of Tokyo or Waseda University, both having the highest ranks in the national ranking.

Fifty-one Japanese male senior high school students, aged 15–18 years, participated in this study. Initially, the students were contacted during the health education course and practices at the basketball club. However, this did not generate a sufficiently large sample. So, a process of snowballing was used to find further participants. This resulted in a sample of 51 young men, who were told that the study was attempting to record their thoughts and opinions about their family, peers, school and sex education courses. The period of investigation was from September 1998 to May 1999.

We used a set of three individual semi-structured interviews to cover three areas: individual/home, school and sexual life. The three topics were randomly explored to facilitate communication, to promote an atmosphere of reliance and trust, and to delve into any unclear aspects of these issues. We used certain questions to prompt the young men to talk about personal matters, dynamics at home, their friends and friendship groups at school and in their home locality, as well as their relations with teachers and the production of their sexual cultures.

As for the social class background of these young males, most of the Japanese research on gender has not taken into consideration differences based on social class or social stratification (Kimura, 1990, p. 44). However, we recognised that most of them belong to the upper-middle class, a kind of 'white collar culture' (Kondo, 1990, p. 44).

### **Displaying Masculinities**

Based on our accounts of the interviews and observations, we proposed four categories to deconstruct the ways our informants live their identity as males. The two main factors that we considered in dividing our participants into groups are: their relationships to schooling, and their perceptions of sexual behaviour in relation to their identity as males.

The four categories are: *garibens* (grinders), *lifestylers*, *sporting boys* and *confident heterosexuals*. With the exception of the *garibens*, we created these categories, which our informants did not use about themselves.

The use of models and typologies constrains and often hides the composite meanings that are reductively symbolised in the selected types, however, we used these categories as a 'heuristic device to highlight the range of masculinities' (Mac An Ghail, 1994, p. 54) produced in our research. Realising that 'masculinity as an object of knowledge is always masculinity-in-relation' (Connell, 1995, p. 44), these categories are neither rigid nor unitary. We are not offering 'static typologies' (Aggleton, 1987, pp. 120–23) to be always found in pure form. In fact, we could not place about ten percent of the informants, who straddled the categories. Students were not simplistically assigned to one or other of the categories because 'social reality is more complex' (Mac An Ghail, 1994, p. 18). We present these categories in an attempt to grasp the ways our interviewees develop their self-awareness and are viewed by others. 'We are speaking of forms of relationship, not kinds of individuals' (Connell *et al.*, 1982, p. 92).

Our first category refers to the *garibens* (grinders). A group of students who firmly believe in credentialism and meritocracy locate masculinity in relation to cramming at school, social class and restrained sexual activity. We recognise that *lifestylers* have personal goals in life that may, or may not, be realised through academic achievement. Criticising schooling, teaching methods and curriculum, *lifestylers* look for a symbol to express personal lifestyle. The *sporting boys* and their construction of masculinity on the grounds of physical performance clearly show the cultural techniques that enact certain gender regimes through the disciplinary space of the school. Our last category refers to *confident heterosexuals* who proceed to an 'appropriate' masculinity in relation to their heterosexual relations. For them confidence, decision-making, and assertiveness are *sine qua non* for manliness.

Quite confident of their academic abilities and the social appreciation of their effort, *garibens* (grinders) show a strong conviction that *ganbaru* (trying hard) will lead to a successful life, and that social mobility depends on the number of credentials one acquires. Most of them attend a *juku* (cramming school), barely go to parties or hang around with friends, and some of them neglect to do any physical activities. Their notions of social class were clearly indicated too. They recognise notions of merit, limitless human potential, hard work and self-restraint to legitimise supremacy in relation to a supposed working-class and to students who prefer physical activities or any others that distract their attention from studying.

Q: Are you saying that having sex and academic achievement contradict one another?

A: ... For example my friends, whom I attended kindergarten with, they have many girls, they are always causing problems and they are having a lot of sex. It sounds a little bit biased, but their academic abilities, and abilities in general are different. The schools, the schools they attend are not that good. They don't restrain themselves. They do mainly sports. They play around. They have sex when they feel like ... The environment where they live is just different. (Masashi, 18 years old)

For *garibens*, social class, academic achievement and sexuality invoke distinctions with which to describe schooling, to interpret people's actions and to construct one aspect of their identities. Their idea of working-class identity is attached to lack of ability, low ranking school, sexual activity and maybe unwanted pregnancies. Imbalances of power

appear in the ways *garibens* interlink sexuality, social class and femininity. Girls in the process of academic achievement are supposed to have restricted sexual lives. *Garibens* take the rate of unwanted pregnancies and abortions as evidence of school ranking, social class and female sexual behaviour.

Q: Why do you think this school is different from others?

A: Here you don't hear about pregnancies ...

Q: Do you think that if you don't hear about it, it is because there are no unwanted pregnancies?

A: I don't think so, but maybe in comparison to other schools unwanted pregnancies are fewer. (Shingo, 16 years old)

Some of the *garibens* clearly contest the association 'manliness-big-body', used by those boys concerned with sports and physical activity, to emphasise mind or intellectual ability in the construction of their version of masculinity.

Q: Any other manly characteristics?

A: Well, it is commonly assumed that males are stronger ... that a guy has to be muscular. A sturdy man is what everybody understands as manly, isn't it? Females are softer. I think this is *atarimae* (natural) way of thinking.

Q: Then, what do you think about this?

A: I think this is wrong. Just only because you don't have a big body it doesn't mean that you are girlish, isn't it kind of discrimination? ...

Q: Then, do you think you are manly?

A: The ideal of being manly lives inside myself. If I can be manly before dying, to me it is okay. I hope I can be manly before dying. In any case, I am not talking about physical appearance. ... I am talking about the inside. Being manly, to me involves the capacity to make immediate decisions ... (Akiteru, 17 years old)

Close to the *garibens* but with a different viewpoint on studying and learning, we found the *lifestylers*. They do not cram to pass an exam and would like to study only those things they need. In looking for 'their own style in life', they try to contest meritocracy and credentialism by articulating a critical view of schooling, teaching methods, and curriculum. They tend to have contempt for *garibens*.

Q: Who do you talk to about your personal issues?

A: With my elder brother ...

Q: What kind of things do you talk about?

A: About life, the meaning of studying, those difficult issues ...

Q: Why did you talk about them?

A: I didn't like studying ...

Q: Do you still dislike studying?

A: I do, but I have to. Even though I don't like it, I have to, and this is my personal conclusion. The way I understand 'studying' and the way it has been understood a long time ago are different. I don't agree with *garibens*. I just want to study architecture; I don't want to study anything else ... (Kenta, 17 years old)

Because of their ambivalent perception of the academic curriculum and refusing to cram, many teachers regard the *lifestylers* as problematic. They are close to the ‘rebels without a cause’ (Aggleton, 1987) or the ‘real Englishmen’ (Mac An Ghail, 1994). *Lifestylers* have an obsession for living in a distinct manner. Motorcycles, playing musical instruments, singing and stylish clothing are the most common obsessions for these young men.

Q: What is the relationship between having fun and studying?

A: Well, studying? Studying ... This is a meritocratic oriented society, and a lot of people just cram. I think I don’t like it but I know that for the time being, I have to do what I have to do. I’d like to spend all my time playing in the band ... Anyway, it’d be nice if I could do both ... I am not the kind of guy who likes studying ... mmm ... but even a little, even a little I have to study. That is what the world is ... We are in this world and we have to do the things we have to do ... (Daisuke, 16 years old)

*Lifestylers* are sure that the differences in standards of lifestyle they communicate respond to differences in ‘cultural capital’ (Bourdieu, 1986). Indeed, they appraise classmates and teachers based on the cultural capital they possess. They mock *garibens* and *sporting boys*. Most of them refuse to talk about banal issues and try to accentuate personal autonomy and communicative skills. *Lifestylers* picture maleness as an unstable category that is socially and historically constructed, multi-symbolic and having close reference to patriarchy. Allusions to *daikoku bashira* (literally it refers to the central pillar used to support a house, metaphorically it refers to the supporter of a family) as the epitome of fatherhood and masculinity were noticeable.

Q: What does being manly mean?

A: Being manly is, I think, represented by the father’s strength, the *daikoku bashira*. I think this is a fantasy, though. I think this strength is a kind of vision, the fantasy of being manly. I think, as humans, being manly is something that doesn’t exist at all. If we talk about sexual differences, you can be manly. Having a penis, muscular body ... Of course being manly is a social category. I think, in the case of Japan it is represented by the *daikoku bashira* ... protecting one’s family, be decisive, having a full spirit. (Masahide, 17 years old)

Some of them have a critical view of the heteronormative regime of practices and male supremacy. However, we found most of the *lifestylers* guarding the masculine way of acting as different from a supposedly effeminate way of acting. No matter how, a man has to be manly and observe certain regimes of practice different from those attributed to *okama* (a slang word having the same connotation as ‘poofster’).

Q: Do you think you are manly?

A: I think nowadays the image of being manly is disappearing ... Differences between males and females are not clear any more. I think this is not well established in our society anymore. Females and males are becoming one ... There are a lot of guys looking like *okama*. I want to be manly ... (Masaki, 17 years old)

Different from the *garibens* (grinders), we found some *lifestylers* having already initiated their sexual life. For those who had not, it was an issue to be faced soon. In addition, both for those who have already had sex and those who have not, having sex means heterosexual sex. Heterosexual sex is an act closely associated to reproduction and lead

by males. Heterosexual intercourse is vaginal penetration and variations on the act are defined as part of the realm of abnormality.

Q: Are you saying that anal sex is a kind of abnormal sex?

A: Yes. I think so. I am thinking of sex as an act to have children ... First the males has to have an erection, and then he inserts his penis into the vagina. I think this is the right way to do it. They have to move, by friction the penis gets stimulated and the act finishes with the ejaculation ... (Masaru, 17 years old)

Consistent with LeTendre (1998), we recognised that the *sporting boys* are well appreciated among teachers because most of them learn through the activities in the *bukatsudō* (school sport circle) how to get into a regime of self-discipline, strength, *ganbaru* (trying hard), and hierarchy. Indeed, the *bukatsudō* is a regime that allows them to display and validate their progress as males. They police themselves and the others in terms of the commitment level to the *bukatsudō* and to developing their physical constitution.

Q: Do you think that you are manly?

A: No, not yet.

Q: Why not yet?

A: Well, my body is not big enough ... If I look at seniors, I can see that I am not big enough ... I am neither hard, nor well-shaped ... (Masakazu, 15 years old).

The role assigned to girls as the ones who have to serve is also relevant to this version of masculinity. At least in the basketball circle, all the members are males except the so-called *manējā* (manager). The *manējā* is a girl who provides fresh tea during the training and who has the responsibility to have the used glasses and thermos flasks cleaned. For them, a male who does not practice sports might be unmanly, in the way that *garibens* (grinders) are seen to be. Sporting girls, on the other hand, are unfeminine.

Q: Are you saying that being beautiful and manly are completely different things?

A: No, I am not saying that. It is difficult to state what being manly means. I think it is someone not womanly. Someone manly is someone strong, hard ... Girls are weak, I mean physically. In spirit, boys are stronger ... Someone manly has a nice appearance. Someone womanly rather than having a nice appearance is warmer, more emotional.

Q: What do you mean if you say, 'someone manly has a nice appearance'?

A: If I have to say it in detail, the difference between being manly and womanly is related to performance in sports. I think someone good at sports is manlier, someone who does not cram, as *garibens* do.

Q: What about a woman being good at sports?

A: I think she is not womanly. I think a woman who doesn't do sports is womanlier. That's close to my ideal of womanly women. (Ai, 17 years old)

For the *sporting boys* physical power prompts inequalities and imbalances in gender. In terms of power relations, someone physically strong is seen as having the obligation to protect the weak. They associate weakness with femininity and demand the masculine sense of protection. Someone always cramming cannot be strong enough to offer protection. Moreover, *sporting boys* apply gender differences to the sexual division of

labour, as ‘allocations of particular types of work to particular categories of people’ (Connell, 1987, p. 99). Housework is a symbol of femininity.

A: ... They say that a manly guy is gentle with girls.

Q: What else?

A: I think there is also physical appearance ... Muscles ...

Q: How can a guy be gentle with girls?

A: Well, I think ... in danger he has to keep them safe ...

Q: What about being womanly?

A: I think a womanly woman can do chores, prepare food, and do laundry. I think a womanly woman is good at this stuff. (Sumito, 15 years old)

*Confident heterosexuals* are close to the so-called ‘dominant heterosexuals’ identified by Haywood (1993). Highlighting heterosexual relations, they put an emphasis on their sexual and social performance in the company of girls to legitimate their identities as male. Confidence is particularly reflected in the way personal desires, convictions and opinions are expressed. Having the ability or quality necessary to make a decision, a masculine man has to be assertive.

Q: Do you feel like being masculine?

A: Myself? ... At a certain level I think I am, I want to be manly.

Q: What are the characteristics that you can recognise as manly in yourself?

A: Concretely, mmm, I have my own opinion, even if I am not good at studying or sports. I have the capacity to decide ... That’s it more or less ...

Q: Someone womanly does not have such a capacity?

A: Well, it is not necessarily like this, not necessarily like this, but for a masculine male the capacity to decide is required. If a female does not have it she is not unfeminine. (Takashi, 16 years old)

The *confident heterosexuals* take also the normative meanings of manliness to the terrain of physical appearance. Different from the muscular big body required by the *sporting boys*, the *confident heterosexuals* represent masculinity as close to handsomeness: faces, clothing, styles, which are an exhibition of paraphernalia directed to attract girls. A masculine boy is heterosexual: he has to like girls.

A: ... Someone manly is someone handsome, cute, nice clothes, stylish ...

Q: Do you think you are manly?

A: Manliness is a process; it is like being perfect. A man has a girl.

Q: What do you mean by ‘a man has a girl?’

A: It means that you like girls. (Kento, 17 years old)

Although they acknowledge the relevance of physical characteristics in appearing handsome, they established very clearly the borderlines between looking masculine and feminine. Shifts in hairstyle and ways of dressing can be taken as symptoms of change. However, as Hemmings (1995, p. 48) argues ‘shifting boundaries does not necessarily denote new territories, or new discourses. Transgression of the *status quo* can, in fact, consolidate the dominant discourse, rather than undermining it.’ For the *confident heterosexuals* certain changes in physical appearance are accepted, but always keeping in mind the other: the womanly or effeminate guy.

Q: What does being manly mean?

A: I think it is not an idea perfectly defined. I think it depends on how the individual understands it. I think the way I understand manliness is different. At first someone manly has to take the responsibility of things he has done ... Then, from a male point of view, not from a female point of view, someone masculine has a good appearance ...

Q: What do you mean?

A: ... In Japan the old idea of maleness has been changing ... Nowadays there are many guys who look like a female, with long hair ... However, to me someone manly looks manly, he considers his projects and ... in the future he tries hard to fulfill them ... (Mizubo, 17 years old)

The *confident heterosexuals* establish the meaning of masculinity in accordance with the deployment of sexuality, as a means of policing the boundaries of acceptable masculinity. Young men who do not feel attracted to girls are regarded as 'sexual others' (Richardson, 1998, p. 13), as outsiders to the normative frames of reference.

Q: What does being manly mean?

A: I think a manly guy likes girls.

Q: What do you mean?

A: ... I think nowadays there are queer guys who like boys. I don't think they are manly at all. (Kazuhiro, 17 years old)

For *confident heterosexuals* installed in a 'heteronormative' (Richardson, 1998) regime having sex means heterosexual sex. Losing virginity is associated with adulthood; a boy might have engaged in some sexual activity but never 'real' sex, whereas a male adult has sex with a female. A boy is in the process of becoming a male, and having sex enhances his manliness.

Q: Are you concerned about still being a virgin?

A: No, I am not. I think I am still young. If I were a university student I would be concerned.

Q: Why?

A: In general it is said that when you are at senior high school you have your first experience ... I think the difference between an adult and a child is sexual experience ... (Junsuke, 16 years old)

Although the act of sexual intercourse is identified as important, what may be considered even more important for the *confident heterosexuals* is telling others about it. Language is a means young men use to regulate and actively police their behaviour. Imbued with imbalances of power, sex talk operates through the peer group networks to construct and guard young men's sexual reputations. Consistent with the work of Nayak and Kehily our research shows that 'only certain males may get away with using sex talk to enhance their reputations' (Nayak & Kehily, 1997, p. 145). Talking about sexuality can be a means of confirming masculine power. However for some of our informants, a boy talking about sex might be considered as *karui* (a sexually unrestrained person), which is undesirable.

Q: Are you playing around?

A: I am not but I would really want to ... But I don't want to be considered as *karui*.

Q: Really?

A: Well, anyway males are just like *karui*.

Q: What do you mean?

A: I think males don't say the things they want to do; they don't say they want to have sex, even if they know they want ...

Q: What about girls?

A: I think, only few girls are *karui*. Girls do not think about having sex. Girls don't talk about sex.

Q: Are you saying that boys tend to be more *karui*?

A: I think so. (Jinsuke, 18 years old)

## Conclusions

Based on our findings, it is pertinent to challenge the notions of rigidity and uniformity in the construction of the identity of young Japanese people. In a supposedly classless society, some of our informants express very clearly how their notions of class impinge on their views of masculinity, academic achievement and sexual behaviour. By emphasising intellectuality, *garibens* (grinders) legitimate their philosophy based on the idea of disembodied masculinity, social class ascendancy and postponed sexual activity. They assume that working-class young men are people 'playing around' and, they expect working-class girls to exhibit higher rates of unwanted pregnancies and abortions rates.

Due to their perspective on life and attitude towards schooling, teachers consider *Lifestylers* problematic. *Lifestylers* contradict the ideology that the school adopts: that young people should be 'obedient subjects' with a deep understanding of social hierarchy. *Lifestylers'* references to gender regimes make visible the inconsistencies and contradictions in the construction of masculine identities. Intellectually, they challenge notions of patriarchy and heteronormativity, but in practice, they appear to be promoting heteronormativity.

In validating and displaying their masculinities through peer networks in the *bukatsudō* (school sport circle), most teachers consider *sporting boys* as an example of self-discipline and hard work. Moreover, students are encouraged to enrol themselves in a *bukatsudō* to enforce their learning of hierarchical social relations. Indeed, the *bukatsudō* hints at gender differences in the sexual division of labour.

Although most of our informants live their gender identity constrained by a heteronormative regime of practices, we wanted to highlight the way some of our informants put an emphasis on their performance as heterosexual males. Rather than schooling, personal projects in life or sports, *confident heterosexuals* tend to emphasise sexual behaviour to establish their identity as males. For *confident heterosexuals*, confidence is built up on sex appeal and having had heterosexual intercourse. In particular, they interpreted and described heterosexual inexperience as childlike behaviour to mediate their position in the school. Sexually inexperienced students represent underdeveloped and inferior masculinities.

For all our informants, heterosexuality is the natural way of life, or even the only way of life. In terms of cathexis (see Connell, 1987), all our informants recognised that 'a heterosexual woman is sexualised as an object in way that a heterosexual man is not' (Connell, 1987, p. 113). Heteronormativity is inevitable even for the *garibens* (grinders) who postpone their sexual activity. For them also, it is just a matter of time to find a girl.

This set of norms, which organise gender relations and the sexualisation of the female body include the representation of a standardised feminine body. The *sporting boys* represent the standardised feminine body as feeble, vulnerable and unable to do any physical activity. This idea of a standardised feminine body is implied also in the *daikokubashira* ideology. A male has to act as a protector and a female as a protégée. Moreover, this process of sexualisation results in the instrumental use of the female body, as the recounts of sexual intercourse from most of our informants suggest. This heteronormative regime of practices applied to the sexual division of labour denotes sexist and unequal labour relations. Inequalities are openly articulated by the *sporting boys* and are embedded also in the *daikokubashira* ideology, referred to by the *lifestylers*. Our observations of the activities at the *bukatsudō* (school sport circle) also showed the ways the school appears to be enhancing unequal gender relations based on heterosexuality as an ideology. Unmistakably, girls have to serve boys.

Lastly, the legitimisation of heterosexual desire implies a binary system of desire, ‘boys like girls, girls like boys’, that most of our informants use to negotiate a coherent identity as males. In the case of *lifestylers* references to *okama* (a slang word having the same connotation as ‘poofster’) help in determining the ‘suitable’ forms of masculinity that contain a dominant discourse based on a binary system where feminine and masculine are in opposition.

The use of language, through the intricate world of sexual reputations, is also relevant to understand the ways our informants construct a regime to normalise certain practices. Consistent with Holland *et al.* (1993), we found that the instrumental use of a female’s body confers on our informants the power ‘to attribute a negative reputation to the sexually knowing woman,’ as in the case of a *karui* (a sexually unrestrained person) girl. For most of our informants the construction of a hegemonic masculinity grants the right to speak up about sex, however, we found that for some of our informants being considered *karui* is problematic. Imbued with imbalances of power, sex talk also operates through the peer group networks to construct and guard young men’s sexual reputations.

Relevant to our analysis and methodology are our findings in relation to a rigidity in the construction of categories that refer to the construction of identity among young Japanese. Contradictions and inconsistencies in the statements of our informants showed the difficulties in constructing categories as ‘ideal types’ to depict their identity as males. Most of our informants agreed with a hegemonic model of masculinity and objectification of women that feeds into a competitive and limited conception of male sexuality (Holland *et al.*, 1993, p. 32). We expected *lifestylers* to offer a more flexible appreciation of gender relations and sexual behaviour. However, it was among the *confident heterosexuals* where we found a certain level of critical awareness in relation to equality in the construction of gender relations. Some of the *confident heterosexuals* allowed an open discussion of their virginity. By talking about his lack of sexual experience, a young boy exposes himself as being vulnerable in relation to his capacity to make decisions and in the assessment of his skills.

Finally, concerning our original goal of providing the fundamentals for an educational intervention, we feel our findings can be used to show students how their masculine identity is affecting their sexual behaviour and gender relations in general. In particular, we show how students’ conceptions of heterosexuality prompt an ideology that constrains their sexuality and enhances inequalities, while their process of sexualisation results in the instrumental use of women’s bodies. Intervention could help senior high school students in developing certain abilities to interrogate the validity of a heterosexual regime of

practices that has been taken as *atarimae* (natural). By acquiring these abilities, it is possible that gender relations will begin to change.

Our ethnographic studies depict schooling as a regime of normalisation of practices in which ideas of self-discipline, strength, *ganbaru* (trying hard), hierarchical relations and inequalities of gender are entangled. We are calling for educators to create opportunities for discussing the impact of their teachings, in order to determine the ways a school constructs a philosophy in relation to schooling and gender.

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