

"REAL OTAKU DON'T GET HOT FOR THE THREE-DIMENSIONAL,"

AN EXAMINATION OF OTAKU MASCULINITY IN JAPAN

A THESIS

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Bachelor of Arts

By

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On my honor, I, Benjamin Kieklak, have not received any unauthorized assistance on this thesis. I have fully upheld the HONOR CODE of Colorado College.



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READER APPROVAL

This thesis project, written by Benjamin Kieklak, meets the required guidelines for partial fulfillment of the Bachelor of the Arts Degree in Asian Studies at Colorado College.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Honor Code.....	2
Reader's Approval.....	3
Table of Contents	5
Tables.....	6
Introduction.....	7
Chapter 1: Historical Context.....	12
Chapter 2: Otaku in the Present Day.....	22
Chapter 3: Masculinity in Japan: Otaku and Salarymen.....	31
Conclusion.....	40
Appendix I: Images.....	42
Appendix II: Survey.....	49
Bibliography.....	52

TABLES

Table 1. Cross-tabulation of group status and the purchase of an optional game in a maid café

Key
<i>Frequency</i>
<i>Row Percentage</i>

GROUP STATUS	GAME PURCHASED	NO PURCHASE	TOTAL
YES	8	108	116
	6.90	93.10	100.0
NO	35	61	96
	36.46	63.54	100.0
TOTAL	43	169	212
	20.28	79.72	100.0

Pr= 0.000

Pearson's Chi2 (1)= 28.39

Cramér's V= -.037

Table 2. Descriptive Percentages (*n*s) of perceptions of reputation of maid cafés on a scale of 1-10 according to University Students

Respectability	Maid Café	Manga Café	Starbucks	Coffeehouse
1-2	3.60 (4)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)
3-4	28.80 (32)	3.60 (4)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)
5-6	28.80 (32)	13.50 (15)	.90 (1)	2.70 (3)
7-8	28.80 (32)	45.0 (50)	9.0 (10)	12.60 (14)
9-10	9.90 (11)	37.80 (42)	90.0 (100)	84.70 (94)
Total	100 (111)	100 (111)	100 (111)	100 (111)

INTRODUCTION

One of the defining aspects of Japanese culture is the country's homogeneity.¹ This has been a significant element of discourse on Japan both from a nativist point of view that wants to promote Japanese identity, as well as from an orientalist perspective.² By "orientalism" I refer to any discourse that essentializes Asian cultures by either patronizing them or putting them on a pedestal as inherently better than other societies. To be "orientalist" almost always hinges on speaking or writing from a western perspective. Both Japanese nativist and Western orientalist writers emphasize Japan's relatively small racial diversity and low immigration rate. Additionally, Japan is communalistic with people historically considering the needs of family or the larger society over their own desires.³ Without a distinct sense of individualism, many people have a high respect for rules and are averse to drawing attention to themselves. A common phrase in Japan is "the nail that sticks up gets hammered down." While these are indeed common traits of the culture, they are not universal rules. With this in mind, I prepared for my first trip to Japan by familiarizing myself with the aforementioned traits in order to integrate as smoothly as possible. I learned that most people avoid physical touch, are quiet when on trains and in public, take a bath every night, and so on. In numerous YouTube videos and cultural blogs, people highlighted Japanese people's conservative public demeanor. Imagine my surprise when I arrived at Kansai

¹ Yoshio Sugimoto, "Making Sense of Nihonjinron," *Thesis Eleven* 57, no. 1: 81 (1999): 81-83, accessed March 13, 2018, <http://0-journals.sagepub.com.tiger.coloradocolleg e.edu/doi/pdf/10.1177/0725513699057000007>.

² Ibid.

³ Jeff Kingston, "Transformations After World War II," *Contemporary Japan: History, Politics, and Social Change Since the 1980s*, ed. Robbins, Keith, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, 18.

Gaidai University in Osaka prefecture only to see two Japanese university students greet each other after the summer holidays with shrieks and a leaping hug.

After just a few weeks living with a host family (where each family member did not take a bath every night), I began to realize that Japan is just as diverse as any other country in terms of behavior, dress, and political opinion. I was disappointed in myself for having thought that I could distill Japanese culture down to a series of simple rules and I wondered how I might counteract this pervasive way of thinking. I decided that I wanted to highlight Japan's rich diversity and cultural nuance through my thesis, and I became interested in the concept of deviance in general after my first sociology course, Deviance and Social Control. With this in mind, I found myself enticed by the *otaku* community in Japan. *Otaku* is a word with significant cultural baggage, and I will discuss its definition at length later in this paper. Essentially, *otaku* are people who are particularly interested in *manga* (Japanese comics), *anime* (Japanese animation), and video games. The researcher Kam Thiam Huat points out, through a series of interviews of university students, that many Japanese people believe being an *otaku* means one is obsessed with these forms of media and that many *otaku* are socially isolated and unable to function in every day society.⁴ The first book I read that discussed *otaku* was *The Moé Manifesto* by Duke University Professor, Patrick Galbraith. The Japanese word *moé* comes from the verb *moeru* meaning "to burn" or "to burst into bloom," but it eventually came to be associated with a burning passion for the cuteness of an

⁴ Thiam Huat Kam, "The Anxieties that make the 'Otaku': Capital and the Common Sense of Consumption in Contemporary Japan," *Japanese Studies* 33, (2013).

animated character.⁵ It is also notable for its use in describing a relationship in which a living person is committed to an animated character, a concept on which I will also expand later. These relationships have been sensationalized by the news media as a symbol of *otaku* perversion and Galbraith focuses on the dynamics of these relationships in his book, however; I am more interested in the ways *otaku* relate to society economically, socially, and so on. I am most interested, though, in how *otaku* relate to their gender, defined here as the "sociocultural and historical and historical conventions... ascribed to females and males."⁶ In order to thoroughly examine this relationship between *otaku* and gender, I studied examples of orientalism, the trends of *otaku* communities in Japan and in the United States, and sociological theories of deviance and gender. Additionally, I travelled to Tokyo and Osaka to observe popular destinations for *otaku* and to survey university students at Kansai Gaidai about these spaces. I developed the argument I will present later in the introduction through a combination of what I learned from these research topics.

The preparations I made before beginning this project involved re-reading sections of Edward Said's book *Orientalism*. When discussing any topic in Asian studies, it is always necessary to keep one's perspective in mind throughout the writing process in order to avoid orientalist generalizations. Within Asian studies, the discussion of *otaku* presents several potential problems. Though I and other scholars discuss *otaku* as a group, they are dynamic people with individual identities and must be treated with

⁵ Patrick Galbraith, *The Moé Manifesto: An Insider's Look at the Worlds of Manga, Anime, and Gaming*, Vermont: Tuttle Publishing, 2014, 5.

⁶ Jennifer Robertson, *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, 17.

respect and dignity. The field of "otakuology" is thus very hazardous as it is easy to lose sight of each *otaku's* individuality and make gross generalizations when researching and writing. There is a "tendency toward typology,"⁷ which leads to oversimplification and the reinforcement of *otaku* stereotypes. Said's book was a helpful reminder of the mistakes scholars of Asian studies have made in the past and served as a guide to study this group and discuss its role in society with respect, nuance, and care.

In this paper, I will examine the historic roles of *anime*, *manga*, and *otaku* in Japanese society and discuss their relationship to hegemonic gender norms. Specifically, I will argue that Japanese *otaku* subvert the narrative of hegemonic masculinity by resisting the typical masculine responsibilities of working to procreate and support a family. Though many *otaku* are women and there has been growth in the discussion of female *otaku* in recent years, there is an overwhelming perception that most who identify as *otaku* are men, and there is far more written about their relationship to masculinity.

On a linguistic note, in Japanese, names are written with the surname coming before the first name. I have elected to use this format for Japanese names throughout the paper. I will also italicize Japanese words except for those I use repeatedly such as *otaku*. Finally, the macron used over certain vowels in Japanese words is to signify an elongation of that vowel's pronunciation.

⁷ Patrick Galbraith and Thomas Lamarre, "Otakuology: A Dialogue," in *Mechademia 5: Fanthropologies*, ed. Lunning, Frenchy, Vol. 5, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010, 362.

CHAPTER 1: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In order to understand the current climate for otaku, it is important to know the context for the development of Japanese media on which, as I have stated earlier, otaku are understood to be fixated. Many people in Japan enjoy reading manga and I will show that it has become a distinct aspect of the Japanese identity, but the above average consumption of manga in the otaku community is one of the traits for which they are most notable.

Otaku are known for developing organized fan groups or "fandoms," but Japan has long displayed a markedly well-organized group devotion to popular media. Going as far back as the Edo period (1603-1868), there existed a massive network of fan clubs for Kabuki theater and famous Kabuki actors.⁸ The clubs often attended performances as a group and cheered using prepared phrases of encouragement (*home-kotoba*) and highly orchestrated "cadences of applause."⁹ Clubs developed throughout "every city ward"¹⁰ in Edo despite the fact that the government did not support the art and theaters existed only on the fringes of the city. Members of these clubs often traded in paraphernalia such as woodblock prints (*ukiyo-e*), an art form in which pictures are carved onto blocks of wood then inked onto paper (See figure 1).¹¹ They also exchanged critical review pamphlets, and even booklets akin to modern manga related to their

⁸ Gunji Masakatsu, "Kabuki and its Social Background," *Tokugawa Japan: The Social and Economic Antecedents of Modern Japan*, trans. Conrad Totman, ed., Nakane Chie, Oishi Shinzaburo, and Conrad Totman, Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1991, 199.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ "The Ukiyo-e (Woodblock) Printing Process," *Asian Art Museum | Education*, Accessed December 04, 2017. <http://education.asianart.org/explore-resources/background-information/ukiyo-e-woodblock-printing-process>.

favorite actors and plays. As I stated earlier, otaku today carry on these traditional organizational structures to disseminate original art and works of fiction both in local communities and in national conventions.¹² Furthermore, the internet provided the avenue for profoundly larger fan networks than those that existed around the kabuki theater in the Edo period. Similar to the Edo period, however, fan-made manga remains the most widely disseminated product in the otaku community both on and off the internet. The popularity of manga is not restricted to the otaku community in Japan with manga making up 40% of all literature sold in 1995.¹³ After a long history, manga has come to be a symbol of the Japanese identity, but this identity has been crystallized in an extreme form by the otaku. Therefore, to better understand this social pattern, it is important to know how manga assumed such a dominant role in Japanese culture.

The earliest forms of what we now call manga appeared as caricatures of daily life around the eighth century.¹⁴ These caricatures were later joined by highly illustrated "picture scrolls,"¹⁵ which were used mostly for moral and religious education, and were consumed almost exclusively by the upper classes as literacy was rarer among the general population at the time. As the techniques for woodblock printing were developed and became more widespread in the Edo era, these picture stories became more available to a wider population. Woodblock prints were extremely popular and

¹² Lawrence Eng, "Anime and Manga Fandom as Networked Culture," in *Fandom Unbound: Otaku Culture in a Connected World*, ed. Ito, Mizuko, Daisuke Okabe, and Izumi Tsuji, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012, 166-167.

¹³ Frederick Schodt, *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga*. 3rd ed., Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2002, 19.

¹⁴ Kinko Ito, "Manga in Japanese History," In *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime*, ed. MacWilliams, Mark W., 26-47, New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 26.

¹⁵ Ibid.

reached a "golden age" in the mid 18th century when Suzuki Harunobu (1724-1770) pioneered the use of multiple colors on a single block.¹⁶ His method was expanded by Hokusai Katsushika (1760-1849), who was the first to employ the term "manga" (a combination of the character for *man* meaning morally corrupt and *ga* meaning picture¹⁷) in his volume, *Hokusai Manga*, which was a caricature of contemporary life in the mid 19th century.¹⁸ Early forms of manga remained mostly in the realm of woodblock serials from artists such as Harunobu¹⁹ and Hokusai until Japan was reopened to the rest of the world, at which time manga saw a significant shift.

Before Commodore Matthew Perry's invasion of Japan in 1853 and subsequent reintroduction of Western influence, early forms of manga were characterized by a single image with text written vertically along the side. After the introduction of publications such as the British cartoon magazine *Punch*, techniques shifted with the advent of linear narratives such as "The Adventures of Little Shō." This new type of manga could span over several publications whereas previous manga was mostly devoted to satirizing modern life and politics for just a few panels.²⁰ The medium was stunted during World War II when the Japanese government forced manga artists to focus only on propaganda, but it flourished again in the post-war climate with artists

¹⁶ Ibid 28.

¹⁷ Paul Gravett, *Manga: Sixty Years of Japanese Comics*, New York, HarperCollins Publishers, 2004, 9.

¹⁸ Ito, 29.

¹⁹ Due to the commonality of the name Suzuki in Japan, Suzuki Harunobu was often called by his first name.

²⁰ Ibid 30.

such as Tezuka Osamu whose many works brought manga to the forefront of Japanese attention again.²¹

Tezuka is known today as the "god of manga" and is perhaps the single most influential figure in the development of the medium, making him an icon in the otaku community.²² Tezuka's earliest and most notable works were titles such as *Treasure Island* and *Lost World* (both titles were written in English to appear more exotic) and later *Tetsuwan Atom* and *Jungle Taitei* (dubbed *Astro Boy* and *Kimba, the White Lion* for their English releases). Tezuka's prolific writing came during the desperate climate after the war when people were starved for both food and entertainment, and his affordable volumes provided the latter. Tezuka's early works were serialized, but once each series was compiled, they were collectively hundreds and sometimes thousands of pages long. Tezuka's manga typically centered on themes of peace and innocence, subjects especially palatable after the destruction Japan faced during World War II.²³ He often included complex heroes and villains focusing on realistic portrayals of humanity, which also helped to spur his unprecedented success. This success in turn gave Tezuka the necessary support to pioneer animation, and he produced Japan's first black and white and later color animations, now called anime.²⁴ Although there are many significant individuals and works that have helped Japan's media culture flourish, none was so

²¹ Frederick L. Schodt, "Osamu Tezuka: A Tribute to the God of Comics," in *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga*, California: Stone Bridge Press, 2002, 235.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid 236.

²⁴ Ibid 237.

influential as Tezuka, and the now ubiquitous nature of manga characters in Japan can largely be attributed to his success.

To reiterate, in contemporary Japan the imagery of manga and anime appears everywhere from train stations to local Buddhist temples,²⁵ but the truly passionate consumption of these forms of media (at least on a distinctly visible scale) is relegated to relatively small pockets of the country such as Tokyo's electronics district, Akihabara. Today, Akihabara is a series of large buildings decorated with advertisements for anime and arcades and is a central gathering space for otaku in Japan (see figure 2). Despite its presence as an otaku space now, Akihabara initially sprouted in post-war Tokyo as a reliable black market source for the best electronic devices.²⁶ The most attractive devices at the end of the war were radios, but it was not long before washing machines and refrigerators became popular as well. Highly publicized and anticipated events, namely the Tokyo Olympics of 1964, later earned the television a place in the list of essential gadgets in every home. As electronics became more and more important, so too did Akihabara become solidified as the one-stop shop for a modern, technological household.²⁷

The centralization of technology in one place eventually led to the shift from an area meant purely for electronics sales, to a reflection of Japan's Edo-era fan club style

²⁵ Galbraith, *The Moé Manifesto: An Insider's Look at the Worlds of Manga, Anime, and Gaming*, 88; Mizuko Ito, *The Gender Dynamics of the Japanese Media Mix*, Los Angeles, 2006.

²⁶ Patrick Galbraith, "Akihabara: Conditioning a Public Otaku Image," in *Mechademia 5: Fanthropologies*, ed. Frenchy Lunning, Minnesota: Minnesota Press, 2010. 213

²⁷ Ibid.

devotion to media.²⁸ The conversion of Akihabara from a general electronic area to the hub of modern manga and anime did not happen overnight, and no singular entity brought these forms of entertainment to the forefront of the area. Early technology enthusiasts (the word otaku was not yet being used) were gradually drawn to Akihabara by the electronics, especially VCRs and personal computers, which allowed them to reproduce and trade in anime.²⁹ Brought to the same place by their interest in technology, otaku carried with them their other interests in anime and manga. Regular household appliances like televisions and refrigerators slowly moved to stores in suburban areas and the consumer culture of Akihabara began to focus on computers and game consoles. Dating simulator games in the late 1980s, along with massively popular anime such as *Neon Genesis: Evangelion* in the mid 1990s also helped to grow the anime industry there as well.³⁰ Otaku developed a sort of "information fetishism,"³¹ devoting themselves to their shared obsession with these popular anime with a special regard to science fiction series like the aforementioned *Neon Genesis* and *Mobile Suit Gundam*. These two series also led to the rise in popularity of figurines (see figure 3) which became another commodity to collect and trade.³² While it is possible to question whether Akihabara inspired a love of anime in otaku or otaku brought anime to Akihabara, I would highlight that many who would later identify as otaku were already

²⁸ Kaichiro Morikawa, "Otaku and the City: the Rebirth of Akihabara" in *Fandom Unbound: Otaku Culture in a Connected World* [Shuto no Tanjo- Moeru Toshi Akihabara], trans. Morikawa, Kaichiro, ed. Ito, Mizuko, Daisuke Okabe and Izumi Tsuji, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012, 147.

²⁹ Galbraith, 215.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid 214.

³² Morikawa, 137.

individually consuming anime and manga with a fervor. The centralization of anime, manga, and games in Akihabara inspired by the electronics boom merely gave them a space to become a community.

The earliest uses of the word "otaku" on a local scale arose in the convention setting. Otaku would periodically gather at massive conventions for manga artists and enthusiasts to share their work, and the word "otaku" appeared as a way for them to address each other when they had not made formal introductions and learned each other's names.³³ Japanese does not have a general, second-person "you" the way English does, and the closest translation of "you," *anata*, is typically reserved for intimate relationships. They adapted "otaku," which initially was a formal way to say "your house," to solve this conundrum.³⁴ It was first used in mass media in the anime *Super Dimensional Fortress Macross*, which was created "by and for anime fans."³⁵ Unfortunately for those who fall under the label of otaku, though, it quickly developed a more sinister and negative connotation within popular culture.

In 1989, the Japanese populace, who took pride in the relatively low nationwide crime-rates, was shaken by the murder and molestation of four young girls by a serial killer named Miyazaki Tsutomu.³⁶ In the investigation following Miyazaki's arrest, the Japanese authorities found his small apartment full of thousands of video taped recordings of anime along with numerous stacks of manga and newspapers. It is worth

³³ Frederick Schodt, "Otaku," in *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga*, 3rd ed., Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2002, 43.

³⁴ Ibid 44.

³⁵ Galbraith, 215.

³⁶ Galbraith, *The Moé Manifesto: An Insider's Look at the Worlds of Manga, Anime, and Gaming*, 42-43; Schodt, 45.

noting that he also had thousands of other video recordings suggesting that he "was not attached to a particular genre,"³⁷ unlike most of those who identify as otaku.

Nonetheless such a gruesome crime was alarming to the national polity and the news media needed a way to help people grasp how something of this nature was possible.

The popular narrative became that otaku could not distinguish between fiction and reality due to their high consumption of fictional materials. They were branded as perverts and the otaku community became stigmatized by the public.³⁸ Many otaku tried to distance themselves from Miyazaki's reputation as they too felt that his inability to keep his interests "within the boundaries of aesthetic performance" was a perversion of their values.³⁹ This was, unfortunately, not the last time that the otaku label would be synonymous with criminal activity.

While the so-called Miyazaki incident was indeed shocking, it did not garner nearly the same amount of media attention as the sarin gas attack by the cult *aum shinrikyō* (sublime truth) in 1995. Members of the cult sought to bring about armageddon and released gas into a Tokyo subway station.⁴⁰ While the death toll was relatively low compared to what it could have been, the fact that there had been a terrorist attack on Japanese soil was devastating. The event sparked more discomfort surrounding otaku when it was revealed that the leader of *aum shinrikyō*, Asahara Shōkō, was an avid fan of the apocalyptic genre of manga and anime and even used

³⁷ Galbraith, 42

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Saitō Tamaki, "The Psychopathology of the Otaku," In *Beautiful Fighting Girl* [Sentō bishōjō no seishin bunseki], trans. Vincent, J. Keith and Dawn Lawson, 2nd ed., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011, 30.

⁴⁰ Schodt, 46.

manga to recruit members. Additionally, many members of the cult were well-educated "academics and scientists," suggesting that even the well-adjusted members of society were in danger of being warped by the power of manga.⁴¹ Though the picture was bleak for Japanese otaku, they slowly left the spotlight, largely due to efforts by the national government.

Not long after the *aum shinrikyō* attack, the Japanese government embarked on a soft power campaign in an effort to boost the declining economy.⁴² The movement was labeled "Cool Japan" and attempted to promote anime, manga, and otaku as part of the Japanese mainstream to the rest of the world.⁴³ The government created and propagated a narrative that, in Japan, manga was considered high culture and otaku were experts on the subject. Not only did this venture prove successful regarding an increased popularity and regard for manga and anime overseas, it also helped to further establish a unique sense of "Japanese-ness" through popular culture. Though the movement was forced and many in Japan do not actually feel that manga is in any way sophisticated, it did succeed in making otaku seem less dangerous.⁴⁴ That being said, the "Cool Japan" movement was not intended to help otaku seem more mainstream, but rather to increase soft power and bolster the economy by increasing the

⁴¹ Ibid, 47.

⁴² Mark MacWilliams, introduction to *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime*, ed. MacWilliams, Mark W., New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 15.

⁴³ Galbraith, *The Moé Manifesto: An Insider's Look at the Worlds of Manga, Anime, and Gaming*, 43; Mizuko Ito, introduction to *Fandom Unbound: Otaku Culture in a Connected World*, ed. Ito, Mizuko, Daisuke Okabe and Izumi Tsuji, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012, xiii-xv.

⁴⁴ Galbraith, 43.

consumption of manga and anime overseas. The decline of the stigmatization against otaku was merely a byproduct of the government's political and economic intentions.

The mainstream acceptance of otaku was also brought about by the release of the extremely popular film *Train Man (Densha otoko)*. In the film, a young otaku saves a woman on a train from a man who is harassing her and they subsequently fall in love.⁴⁵ *Train Man* is a lighthearted romantic comedy that, for a short time, again brought otaku to the forefront of media discourse. Unlike in the cases of Miyazaki Tsutomu and *aum shinrikyō*, however, the discussion around otaku was largely positive. The movie has wider implications for the gender roles of otaku and how they relate to the hegemonic narrative of masculinity, but I will elaborate on this later.

In this chapter, I have explained the origins of the popular media, manga and anime, that many otaku typically consume. This account is by no means comprehensive and many of the writers I have cited have devoted their careers to analyzing the relationships between popular media and Japanese society. I also detailed the rise of the Akihabara district in Tokyo, where many otaku gather year round at arcades and hobby shops. Finally, I explained the background of the otaku community. In the next chapter, I will examine the ways otaku relate to the aforementioned forms of media in the present day before discussing how this relates to the gender narrative in Japan.

⁴⁵ Alisa Freedman, "Train Man and the Gender Politics of Japanese 'Otaku' Culture: The Rise of New Media, Nerd Heroes and Consumer Communities," *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, 20 (2009): Print.

CHAPTER 2: OTAKU IN THE PRESENT DAY

In order to discuss more deeply the present-day characteristics of the most prevalent otaku stereotypes, which I want to reaffirm are not representative of every individual otaku identity, I feel it is relevant to offer a review of the existing literature on the subject. Firstly, almost all available academic literature regarding otaku is written after the turn of the century. Before 2000, there were many non-academic news articles in Japan regarding a dangerous and perverted youth culture, most notably one by the essayist Nakamori Akio, whose article in the magazine *Manga Burikko* is credited with the first use of the word otaku in a published work in 1983, though it is important to note he did not actually coin the term and it had also been used in the anime, *The Super Dimensional Fortress Macross* in 1982 as discussed in chapter 1.⁴⁶ Not long after, there was a "mockumentary anime" released in English as *Otaku no Video* (*otaku no bideo* in Japanese; the title roughly translates to *The Otaku's Movie*) along with a 1992 lecture series on "Otakuology" by Okada Toshio, the so-called "Otaku King" (*otakingu* is a name he gave himself while lecturing at the University of Tokyo). Okada was also the founder of the anime production studio Gainax, which further developed a cult of personality around him in the general Otaku community of the 90s.⁴⁷ There was also news media buzz about the aforementioned "Otaku Killer," Miyazaki Tsutomu, in 1995, but it was not until 2002 with Frederick Shodt's work *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern*

⁴⁶ Akio Nakamori, "おたくの研究 (1) 街にはおたくがいっぱい [otaku no kenkyū, machi ni wa otaku ga ippai, Otaku Study, This City is Full of Otaku]," *Manga Burikko*, June 1983. <http://www.burikko.net/people/otaku01.html>; Matthew Alt, "What Kind of Otaku are You?" Neojapanisme, accessed December 7th, 2017, <http://neojapanisme.com/2008/04/02/what-kind-of-otaku-are-you/>.

⁴⁷ Galbraith and Lamarre, "Otakuology: A Dialogue," in *Mechademia 5: Fanthropologies*, 363.

Manga that we begin to see an academic treatment of Japanese otaku. This volume is something of a sequel to his earlier work *Manga Manga! The World of Japanese Comics*, which came out in 1983, but despite his earlier book's proximity to Nakamori's article in *Manga Burikko*, it contains no mention of otaku. Even *Dreamland Japan* offers only a cursory overview of the chronology of otaku over the course of a few pages. That being said, Schodt is one of the first to offer the theory that otaku are a product of the Japanese economic environment from the 1960s to the 1980s. Schodt posits that because of the Japanese post-war economic bubble, many youths in the 1980s had a confusing series of formative experiences between the government stressing leisure time while their fathers were still subscribing to the typical salaryman (*sarariiman*) lifestyle, which I will discuss in the following chapter, and were thus absent from the home. Furthermore, despite the expectation to lead a fun and leisurely life, young people were still pressured into studying for the exceedingly taxing examination based education system.⁴⁸ In response to their frustration with reality, Schodt asserts that many youths turned to the fantasy offered by manga, anime, and video games.

Schodt's timeline has not been directly echoed by other writers in the discussion of otaku, but this could very well be because many others who focus on otaku culture offer only the origin story of Nakamori's article and the explanation of the linguistic use of the word "otaku" as a substitute for the second-person "you." In this respect, every author who discusses the otaku origin story is in agreement about the chronology of

⁴⁸ Frederick L. Schodt, "Otaku," In *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga*, 3rd ed., 43-49, Berkely: Stone Bridge Press, 2002, 48.

how their identity came to exist. In fact, the leading voices in "otaku studies" seem to agree on nearly everything. For example, Patrick Galbraith, who writes both popular and academic works on otaku, anime, and manga, frequently cites Frederick Schodt, Alisa Freedman, a professor of Japanese studies at the University of Oregon who has also written on otaku, and Thiam Huat Kam, a Ph.D. candidate at Rutgers who has written and edited several works on otaku. Kam and Professor Freedman in turn cite Galbraith, and so on. The same sources from Japan, the cultural critic Otsuka Eiji, the aforementioned King Okada, the psychiatrist Saito Tamaki, and Japanese Studies Professor Morikawa Kaichiro of Meiji University, are also repeated often, and though the Japanese authors do not cite those from the West, they do frequently reference each other. The small number of leading voices is understandable as this is still a relatively new field for academic research, with almost every major work being produced after 2000.

The fact that the body of literature is small when compared to other facets of Japanese studies at least partially accounts for the consistent agreement and similar focuses among most of these scholars. As each began their respective study of otaku culture, they had to start from the beginning, crafting an origin story and a definition of what it means to be an otaku without a significant body of existing academic research on which to lean. The amount of literature available is a distinct limitation for my own research and the field in general. With so little existing discussion and without much disagreement, those who typically write rarely challenge each other to go deeper in their thinking on the complex relationship between otaku and Japanese society as a

whole. One subtle difference between writers is their definitions of what it means to be an otaku. They all agree that otaku are most commonly dedicated fans of either anime, manga, games, or all three, and that they consume and produce these media with a fervor. Some, such as Freedman and Schodt, leave the definition there and move on, while others such as Galbraith and Tamaki try to be more comprehensive with their definitions offering more details and working to avoid any sort of value judgement.

Almost all of them, however, spend some time trying to differentiate between what it means to be an otaku and a "maniac" (*mania* in Japanese).⁴⁹ Though otaku has become a frequently used word in both English and Japanese, it is still often confused with *mania*, and understandably so. Put most simply, otaku are focused mostly on products and activities that relate to the *virtual* world such as games and anime. They do both buy and make physical representations of that world such as fan art and figurines, but these are still representations of something virtual. *Mania*, on the other hand, are more akin to extremely enthusiastic hobbyists and they focus on the physical world. The most frequent examples are train or plane *mania* and bird watchers.⁵⁰ *Mania* are often collectors like otaku, but when they collect models, the models are representations of things in the real world. This is not to say that otaku cannot be enthusiastic about trains and *mania* cannot watch anime. Indeed, there is often overlap, but for the most part, they are distinctly different identities.

⁴⁹ Tamaki, "The Psychopathology of the Otaku," in *Beautiful Fighting Girl*, 16-17.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

In the introduction of this paper, I elected to define otaku simply, but Tamaki's explanation of what it means to be an otaku is more specific and I feel that it is the most apt out of the definitions I have found in the literature. He states that an otaku is a "person with a strong affinity for fictional contexts, a person who makes use of fictionalization as a way to 'possess' the object of his or her love, a person who inhabits not just two but multiple orientations, [and] a person capable of finding sexual objects in fiction itself."⁵¹ Before breaking down the individual parts of Tamaki's claim, the strongest part of his definition is that it passes no value judgement, which many scholars in the field have done when constructing definitions. Other authors have used phrases such as "obsession," or clearly state that otaku are deviant in Japanese society.

While claims about otaku being obsessive may be possible in some cases, Tamaki takes a more nuanced approach in his description. He uses "strong affinity for fictional contexts" rather than specifically stating that otaku are anime, manga and games, which are considered by many to be childish. When he asserts that otaku "make use of fictionalization as a way to 'possess' the object of his or her love," Tamaki is referencing the way many otaku produce and collect representations of the fiction for which they have an affinity. Production and consumption can take the form of anything from an original piece of fanfiction to a "garage kit" (an often expensive, custom-made representation of a character that the buyer acquires in several pieces and assembles at home, see figure 4). This extends into Tamaki's idea of "orientations," a term used in psychiatry to define the "understanding of one's own position," which essentially means

⁵¹ Tamaki, "The Psychopathology of the Otaku," In *Beautiful Fighting Girl*, 16.

that a person knows who they are and has only a single identity.⁵² Otaku have multiple orientations because they can move between "multiple fictional contexts" where they are the consumer of a fictional work while also being a creator within the same universe. This concept of multiple orientations can be further explained using Tamaki's final descriptor about sexuality, a topic into which nearly every academic who studies otaku delves.

For many otaku, sex remains almost entirely in the realm of fantasy. Though otaku can and do enter more typical relationships involving another human, it is more common for them to use and even prefer fictional characters as masturbatory aids. This preference for virtual relationships is shown in a case study by Galbraith and interviews by Tamaki and Okada.⁵³ Though Tamaki weights sexuality equally against the other relevant characteristics of the typical otaku, other scholars portray this as perhaps the single most defining otaku trait. In Tamaki's discussion of otaku sexuality, he again compares otaku to *mania*. Tamaki claims that otaku maintain their sex lives almost wholly in the "aesthetic realm"⁵⁴ while *mania* prefer to have sex in the physical realm. The different ways in which otaku and *mania* practice their respective sexualities is a significant part of why *mania* seem more socially acceptable than otaku. In news media and popular opinion, it is their sexual behavior that leads people to believe that otaku

⁵² Ibid, 26.

⁵³ Tamaki Saitō, "Otaku," in *Beautiful Fighting Girl* [Sentō bishōjo no seishin bunseki], trans. Vincent, J. Keith and Dawn Lawson. 2nd ed., 33-44. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011; Okada Toshio and Morikawa Kaichirō, "Otaku Talk" [otaku tōku] in *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture*, trans. Reiko Tomi, ed. Takashi Murakami, 164-186, New York, Yale University Press, 2005.

⁵⁴ Tamaki, "The Psychopathology of the Otaku," 28.

are mal-adjusted deviants who do not know the difference between what is real and fake.

For example, Lisa Katayama wrote an article for the New York Times in 2009 detailing "moe relationships,"⁵⁵ which, as I mentioned in the introduction to this paper, are when a person in the real world considers him or herself to be in a relationship with a fictional character. In her article, Katayama portrays this sort of relationship as perverse, highlighting the "fetishistic love" of prepubescent characters in Japan. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Patrick Galbraith tries to offer a more nuanced depiction of these relationships in *The Moé Manifesto* in which he interviews a number of Japanese intellectuals and artists from the manga and otaku community. Galbraith argues that these relationships should not be demeaned simply because they do not fit into most people's conception of a "real" relationship. Though Galbraith sought to increase the social acceptance of moé relationships, he is in the minority among scholars on this subject. This discomfort with an otaku's understanding of reality harkens back to the fear surrounding Miyazaki Tsutomu and his confusion of what was real and fake, but most otaku do not have this confusion. Several scholars conclude that otaku are aware of what exists in the real world and what exists in fantasy, but they do not generally see the two as worlds in conflict. Instead, many otaku gain *equal* satisfaction from fantasy as they do from reality, but may prefer fantasy due to their ability to control it.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Katayama, Lia. "Love in 2-D." *The New York Times*, 2009, 2.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/26/magazine/26FOB-2DLove-t.htm>

⁵⁶ Tamaki, 20.

This is evidenced by the preference for sexual release using virtual characters, but also by the existence of maid cafés. Maid cafés are popular establishments where the servers dress as French maids, and they are primarily concentrated in Akihabara (see figures 5 and 6). My research in Japan focused primarily on these cafés and the role they play in the otaku community. Patrons have a range of optional purchases to facilitate interaction with the maids such as a polaroid photo or a short board game in addition to food and drink services. Maid cafés serve as a medium in which the world of fantasy is brought into conjunction with reality. Otaku are able to enter these cafés and engage in a hyper realistic role play in which they control the variables like in a video game while at the same time conducting conversation with a physical person. I saw evidence of this emphasis on control when I observed differences between those who came to the café in a group and those who came alone. In a sample size of 212 people, 36.5% of those who came alone purchased a game compared to just 6.9% of those who came in a group (see table 1). I theorize that this is because the purpose of the visit for those who come alone is to develop a controlled relationship with established parameters with a maid while those who come in a group already have a social connection with their partner in the café and thus do not need a controlled, fantasy connection with a maid. Patrick Galbraith observes a similar dynamic in his case study of maid cafés in which he notes that otaku who spend time in maid cafés seek to develop a role play with controlled parameters.⁵⁷ He adds that despite this limited role play, otaku can still develop long-

⁵⁷ Patrick Galbraith, "Maid Cafés: The Affect of Fictional Characters in Akihabara, Japan," *Asian Anthropology* 12, no. 2, 2013, 16.

term and affectionate relationships with specific maids many of the otaku who visit maid cafés become regular customers.⁵⁸

Though some may perceive maid cafés as sexual spaces, this is largely inaccurate. Each café has a strict set of rules prohibiting physical touch, the exchange of personal information, and any sexually explicit comments. The prohibitions on sex sets maid cafés apart from hostess clubs, a different type of establishment in which female servers entertain men with sexual undertones, though the interactions never result in penetrative sex.⁵⁹ According to Galbraith, the sexual nature of the hostess club serves to reaffirm the patron's masculinity as a reward for working hard (trips to hostess clubs are often sponsored by one's workplace as a way to facilitate male bonding).⁶⁰ In the maid café on the other hand, the lack of overt sexuality along with the limited nature of the role play in general serves to remove the otaku from the dominant narrative of masculinity as he is not being commended for working hard. In fact, by spending time in a maid café, it is assumed that the otaku is forsaking responsibility elsewhere.⁶¹ This view of maid cafés as irresponsible corresponds with the surveys I conducted of 111 university students, who largely thought that maid cafés were not as respectable as other social establishments like Starbucks (see table 2). That being said, most students did not *disrespect* maid cafés, which is part of what leads me to believe that otaku have established a new way to practice their masculinity in society.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 111.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid, 112.

CHAPTER 3: MASCULINITY IN JAPAN: OTAKU AND SALARYMEN

For many Japanese, the term "salaryman" (*sarariiman*) comes with as much if not more baggage and expectation than the word otaku. The salaryman was and continues to be the representation of the hegemonic ideal of masculinity in Japan.⁶² Throughout this chapter, I will use the words "hegemonic masculinity" and "hegemony" frequently, which R.W. Connell defines as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of the patriarchy."⁶³ Connell's definition refers to the system of prescribed roles for men as well as to the relationship between men in women, though I will focus primarily on the first aspect of her definition regarding men's roles in society. In my discussion of otaku and their relationships with masculinity, I will compare them to salarymen both to explain the nature of ideal Japanese masculinity and to show how otaku resist these parameters. To understand the significance of otaku resistance, it is relevant to know how the salaryman narrative became a staple of Japanese society, a subject on which dozens of books and articles have been written.

Salarymen get up early and crowd the commuter trains wearing pressed white dress shirts beneath dark suits. They carry briefcases, have professional haircuts, work extremely long hours, and are known to often drink heavily with their colleagues at the end of the work day. They are the providers who, due to their dedication at work, can

⁶² Romit Dasgupta, "Creating Corporate Warriors: The 'Salaryman' and Masculinity in Japan," In *Asian Masculinities: The Meaning and Practice of Manhood in China and Japan*, ed. Louie, Kam and Morris Low, New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, 118.

⁶³ Fidelma Ashe, "Raewyn Connell: Masculinities, power and alliance politics," in *The New Politics of Masculinity: Men, power, and resistance*, New York: Routledge, 2007, 146.

claim significant responsibility for the Japanese post-war economic bubble.⁶⁴ In return for their hard work, they were historically guaranteed life-time employment, promotions based on the amount of time spent at a company, and other attractive benefits. The government, news media, and popular culture outlets such as talk shows and magazines all propagated the culture of "Japan Inc.," which emphasized the idea of a homogenous Japan in which the salaryman was the ideal man. As Japan's peaceful identity was cemented in post-war years, the image of masculinity shifted from a soldier of war to the "corporate warrior."⁶⁵

Though the actual title of salaryman did not begin to take hold until the post-war era, the ideals that form the foundation of the stereotype — duty, loyalty, self-sacrifice, and endurance— find their origins in the samurai code of *bushidō*.⁶⁶ At the advent of the Meiji era (1868-1912), the new regime began a process of rapid modernization tinged with selective westernization. In order for this process to be successful, the Meiji regime needed its male citizens to be compliant and productive workers and workers,⁶⁷ and thus began to propagate the ideal man as one who embodied these *bushidō* principals. They did so through educational curricula as well as the military and legal system. The heterosexual, monogamous family structure also subsequently became a pillar of society further establishing the relationship between one's manhood and his ability to produce for the greater good of society.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 122.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 118.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 120.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

As the modern image of the salaryman became more prevalent in the Taishō and early Showa period (1912-1945), popular media began to reinforce this notion of masculinity even more so than did the government. Companies published numerous magazines and even manga about the importance of salarymen as well as guides to being the best possible man.⁶⁸ Guides included information such as dress code, workplace etiquette, advice for drinking, and even ideal places to engage in intercourse outside of the home when one is returning late.⁶⁹ Despite the government's and popular media's encouragement of this masculine ideal, there was never a time when the salaryman was the only type of man in existence. Conflicting ideas surrounding masculinity existed even at the inception of the corporate warrior identity before the *sarariiman* title was in use. The "modern boy" or *mobo*, for example, competed with businessmen in the popular discourse of the early 20th century.⁷⁰ The modern boy was more effeminate and caused outrage by being materialistic and lacking the drive that made corporate warriors so prized. Furthermore, the masculinity of the white collar businessman did not apply to those who labored outside of urban settings either in rural agricultural communities or in the military. That being said, these latter groups were hailed, unlike the modern boy, for their dedication to their respective labors in service of the nation. That did not stop many blue-collar workers of from seeking out the benefits of white collar work either for themselves or their children thus enforcing the hegemony of what would become the salaryman ideal. As decades passed, though, this

⁶⁸ Ibid, 123-126.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 121.

idea of masculinity centered on production and hard work has begun to falter in the face of pressure from changing societal structures.

One of the major causes of the decline in the attraction to the salaryman lifestyle was the end of the Japanese post-war economic miracle. By the 1990s, the Japanese economy was entering into a period of recession, and salarymen began to lose many of the benefits that had afforded them stability and prestige for the past 30 years.⁷¹ Whereas promotions based on seniority and guarantees of lifetime employment had previously been common, hundreds of thousands of men found themselves unable to advance past middle management and many others were simply laid off. Aside from the decreased job security and high unemployment rate, the loss of the role as a producer and protector for the family also shook the very notions of masculinity for those who had depended on the company structure.⁷² These roles were so deeply intertwined with manhood that without them, men's gender identities were compromised.

Additionally, the hegemonic narrative was further disrupted by the children of both the successful and the disenfranchised salarymen. In Karl Greenfeld's book, *Speed Tribes: Days and Nights with Japan's Next Generation*, Greenfeld describes a new generation born in the 80s that was more individualistic, creative, and in general antithetical to the dark-suited salaryman.⁷³ Members of this generation made up various subcultures of motorcycle gangs, gamblers, and the earliest otaku. Greenfeld's

⁷¹ Romit Dasgupta, *Re-Reading the Salaryman in Japan: Crafting Masculinities*, New York: Routledge, 2013, 38.

⁷² Romit Dasgupta, "Cybermasculinities: Masculinities and the Internet in Japan," in *Japanese Cybercultures*, ed. Gottlieb, Nanette and Mark McLelland, New York: Routledge, 2003, 112.

⁷³ Karl Taro Greenfeld, *Speed Tribes: Days and Nights with Japan's Next Generation*, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994, XIV.

description of otaku is essentializing as he paints a bleak image of children who were raised on "ultraviolent slasher comic books or equally violent computer games"⁷⁴ and he repeatedly refers to the blurring of fiction and reality on which many have been so fixated since the Miyazaki incident. Yet even if his description demeans the otaku identity, Greenfeld is one of the first to highlight in an academic work the ways in which otaku resist societal norms. Given that Greenfeld published *Speed Tribes* 1994 when there was very little academic literature discussing otaku, it is understandable that he focused more on the sensational, deviant aspects of the otaku community. Researchers today, however, are able to look more critically at the role that otaku and the discourse surrounding their community have played in society.

Otaku have been called "failed men" due to their inability or refusal to subscribe to the mainstream narrative of how men in modern Japanese society should behave.⁷⁵ According to Professor Taga Futoshi, the criteria for "becoming a man" are taking a job, marrying, and procreating.⁷⁶ Otaku do not follow these criteria in their search for gender identity, which Taga defines as a "subjective sense of self with regard to one's gender-how one answers questions such as 'What type of man am I?' or 'What should I do as a man?'"⁷⁷ Most otaku do work, however, in order to sustain themselves, but it is more common for otaku to work in fields related to technology, gaming, retail, and so on as

⁷⁴ Ibid, 274.

⁷⁵ Patrick Galbraith, "Maid Cafés: The Affect of Fictional Characters in Akihabara, Japan," *Asian Anthropology* 12, no. 2, 2013, 4.

⁷⁶ Futoshi Taga, "Rethinking Male Socialisation: Life Histories of Japanese Male Youth," chap. 8, in *Asian Masculinities: The Meaning and Practice of Manhood in China and Japan*, ed. Louie, Kam and Morris Low, New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, 138.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

opposed to seeking out the traditional salaryman lifestyle.⁷⁸ By seeking non-traditional forms of employment, otaku, as a highly publicized and discussed group, challenge the legitimacy of the salaryman hegemony. Again, otaku are not the only men in Japan who do not seek white collar work, but their significant presence in both popular and academic discourse gives them a distinct role in the shift away from the constructed masculinity narrative.

To further elaborate on what I discussed in chapter 2, otaku sexuality also has an important role in the reconstruction of the narrative of masculinity. By not openly taking part in the heterosexual structure of getting married and having children, otaku are avoiding the narrative that Taga presented of becoming a man. Yet, according to Taga, nearly all who identify as men must at some point answer the questions I listed earlier about manhood and gender identity.⁷⁹ By engaging in fantasy role play at maid cafés and having moé relationships (having an intimate relationship with a fictional character), otaku have "unproductive" (in the sense that they do not reproduce) romantic relationships.⁸⁰ In doing so, they resist the parameters of manhood established by society. This resistance was one of the reasons that many otaku criticized the film *Train Man (otoko densha)*.⁸¹ While the film served to make otaku seem more endearing by portraying them as innocent and quirky, those of the otaku community were frustrated by the film's underlying themes of graduation from "otakuhood."⁸² By

⁷⁸ Greenfeld, 281; Takeshi Mori, dir, *Otaku no Video (オタクのビデオ)*, 1991; Tokyo: Gainax, VHS.

⁷⁹ Taga, 137.

⁸⁰ Galbraith, *Maid Cafés: The Affect of Fictional Characters in Akihabara, Japan*, 4.

⁸¹ Freedman, "Train Man and the Gender Politics of Japanese 'Otaku' Culture: The Rise of New Media, Nerd Heroes and Consumer Communities."

⁸² *Ibid.*

portraying success as getting married and leaving typical otaku sexuality behind, many felt that the film was belittling their identity. A number of otaku even protested in Akihabara spray painting the phrase "real otaku don't get hot for the three-dimensional" (somo somo shinjitsu no hota wa 3D ni yokujo shimasen),⁸³ referencing that, in their eyes, a moé relationship was superior to a relationship in the real world.

I would claim that the publicity of this rebellion revealed a distinct disconnect between the national narrative of masculinity and the actual practices of men in Japan. When otaku so publically revealed that they did not aspire to leave "otaku-hood" like the main character in *Train Man*, they asserted that it was possible to exist as a man and not fit into the dominant narrative of masculinity. By their example of resistance, otaku also show that it is possible for all men, including those who do not identify as otaku, to more freely relate to their masculinity.

It is possible to disagree with my claim about the otaku role in the subversion of the dominant masculinity narrative. For example, Romit Dasgupta holds the opinion that the "socio-cultural impact" of otaku is "disproportionately magnified as a result of "media commodification" and "cultural industry packaging," which he asserts was a primary goal of the Cool Japan movement.⁸⁴ Dasgupta's critique is understandable and I agree that it is important to avoid inflating the role of a subgroup in society.

Nonetheless, the claim that the emphasis on otaku culture was an intentional move by both the media and the government does not diminish the effects of these movements.

⁸³ Galbraith, *The Moé Manifesto: An Insider's Look at the Worlds of Manga, Anime, and Gaming*, 19.

⁸⁴ Dasgupta, *Re-Reading the Salaryman in Japan*, 159.

Thiam Huat Kam, among many sociologists, points out that labels are not inherently real, but rather ascribed by those who have power in society. Kam asserts that "otaku" is a constructed label like any other, but then demonstrates the many ways that otaku are affected by this label.⁸⁵ In the same vein, the otaku label being a social construct does not remove it from the real and measurable effects on the otaku community. When Nakamori Akio published his article to insult otaku, and when Tsutomu Miyazaki was dubbed the "otaku killer," these were instances of the otaku label being ascribed by media personalities. Nonetheless, otaku faced ridicule and fear because of the connotations developed by news media. In this way, media helps to create reality, and therefore I still hold that my view on the ways in which otaku subvert the dominant narrative is tenable.

Returning to Professor Dasgupta, he also claims that the salaryman lifestyle has actually become more popular because, for those who can become a part of it, the benefits of white collar work offer a great deal of stability.⁸⁶ While I would not go so far as to claim that salarymen have become or are becoming irrelevant in Japan, my research has led me to disagree with Dasgupta's claim that the position of salarymen, and thus the salaryman masculinity narrative, has been enhanced. As I described earlier in this chapter, other scholars such as Taga, Greenfeld, and even Dasgupta himself,⁸⁷ all highlighted the ways in which declining corporate stability stripped away some of the attraction to the salaryman hegemony. I would take this argument a step further and

⁸⁵ Kam, 41.

⁸⁶ Dasgupta, 159.

⁸⁷ Dasgupta, *Cybermasculinities: Masculinities and the Internet in Japan*, 112.

insist that not only is the salaryman narrative disrupted by economic changes, but also by the activities of otaku. By publically resisting structures of heterosexual reproduction, engaging in forms of entertainment assumed to be childish such as manga and anime, and due to their central roles in the Cool Japan campaign and in *Train Man*, otaku serve to show that there are many ways to practice the male gender identity.

CONCLUSION

The goal of my paper was to argue that otaku in Japan resist both passively and actively the hegemonic narrative of Japanese masculinity constructed on the foundations of employment and a reproductive monogamous relationship. By their resistance, otaku weaken the dominance of that narrative in Japanese society. Think back to the archetype of the modern boy or *mobo* in the early 20th century. The modern boy's individuality angered much of the Japanese populace. Otaku, on the other hand, while they are still stigmatized in Japanese society, do not face nearly the same level of scorn as the modern boy did. Furthermore, by showing how otaku do not fit into the masculinity narrative, I intended to use otaku as a distinct example of the fact that the myth of Japanese homogeneity is just that: a myth. To make my claim about otaku, I had to offer a great deal of context in order explain exactly where otaku fit in Japanese society. As I wrote this paper for a Western audience, I assumed that most readers would not have background knowledge on popular media, otaku, salaryman, and how these elements relate to one another.

This project was limited by several factors, chief among them being the field of otaku studies itself. This study of otaku is limited with very few Western authors discussing the otaku community and an even smaller body of Japanese literature translated into English. Additionally, most scholars focus primarily on the ways in which otaku relate to sex. This is relevant to the study of the otaku community, but because so many scholars write exclusively about sex, only a small subset of the literature offers a holistic view of the role sex plays in the relationship between otaku and their gender

identities. My research was also limited by my inability to fluently speak and read Japanese, which barred me from reading more Japanese literature and also from conducting interviews with those who identify as otaku. Finally, though otaku are dynamic individuals who do not all share a single, unifying identity, I discussed them in general terms in this paper as it was impossible to characterize all of the various nuances that make up each person.

In the future, the research on how otaku identify with their gender could be expanded by including studies of female otaku. As I explained in the introduction to this paper, there is very little written on female otaku and while I did find brief discussions of female cosplay⁸⁸ and gaming, these analyses are not involved enough to draw many significant conclusions about how the female otaku relates to her femininity. Once there is an established body of literature about otaku and femininity, it would be useful to otaku studies to examine the relationships and power dynamics between male and female otaku. In the same way that male otaku reflect a shift in the hegemonic narrative of Japanese masculinity, a discussion of the dynamics between male and female otaku could shed light on the changing narrative of Japanese relationships. Otaku are just one out of many subcultures in Japan who are opting out of the salaryman model, and each has just as much character and nuance as the otaku. As a community, though, otaku have carved out new ways to be male in society and demonstrate that the path of the corporate warrior is not the only way to practice masculinity.

⁸⁸ Cosplay is short for "costume play" and involves dressing up as characters from anime, video games, and movies. See figure 7.

APPENDIX: IMAGES

FIGURE 1



http://japan-brand.jnto.go.jp/crafts/other_craft/53/

FIGURE 2



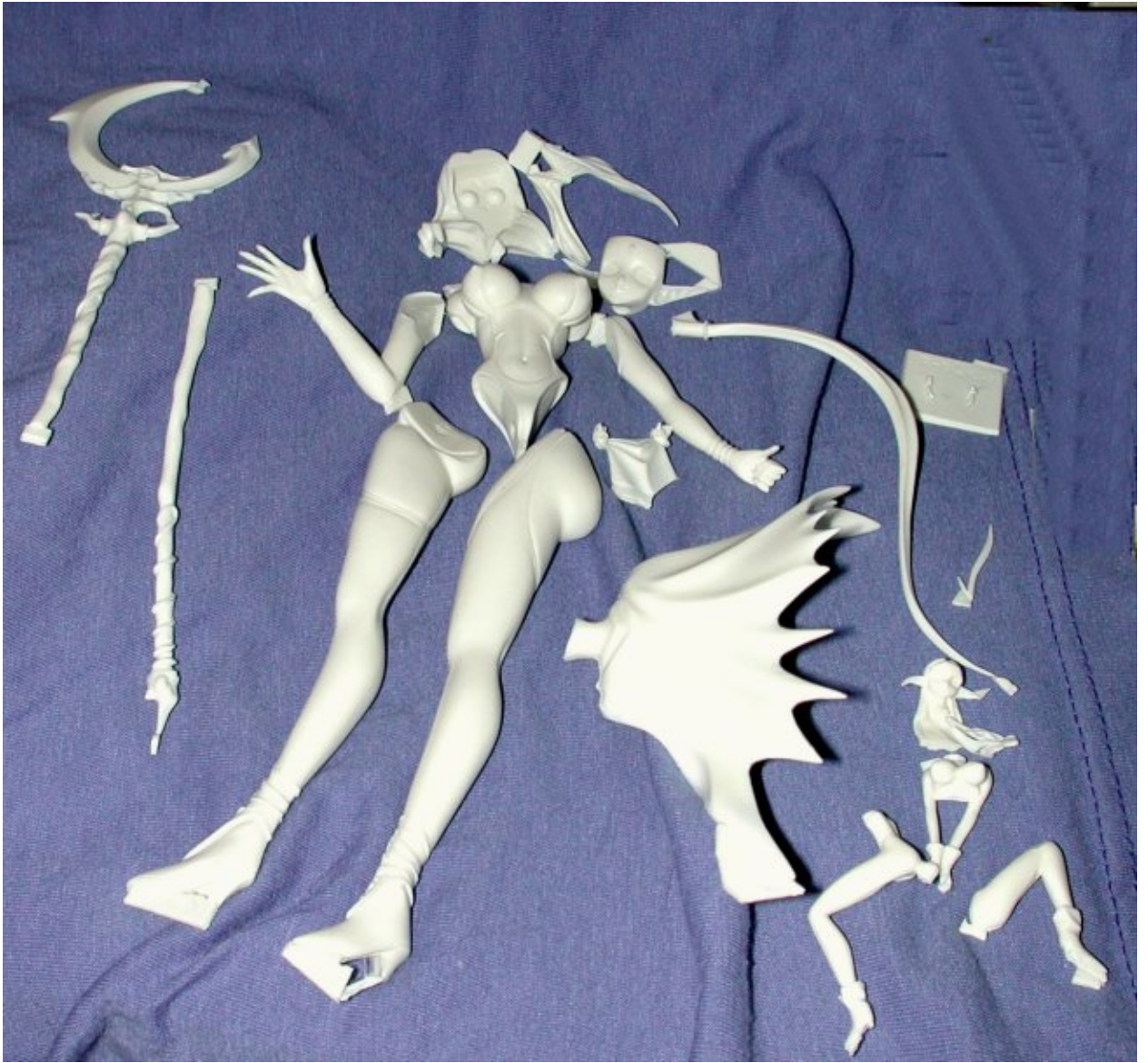
<http://internetotaku.com/akihabara-otaku-paradise>

FIGURE 3



<http://www.ebay.com/cln/amchur3/haikyuu-things/132469989015>

FIGURE 4



<https://modelingmadness.com/scott/misc/figures/marju&feepreview.htm>

FIGURE 5



<http://www.cafe-at-home.com/en/>

FIGURE 6



Personal photo

FIGURE 7



<http://www.dorkly.com/post/75975/t>

APPENDIX II: SURVEY

What is your age?

何歳ですか。

What is your gender?

性は何ですか。

- Male男
- Female女
- Other他

Have you been to a maid cafe?

メイドカフェに行ったことがありますか。

- Yes はい
- No いいえ

If you answered yes, how many times have you been to a maid café?

もし『はい』ならば、何回行きましたか。

If you answered yes, did you make what you consider to be a connection (friendly relationship) with a maid?

もし『はい』ならば、あなたが好ましいと思う関係（友達関係など）をメイドとの間に作りましたか。

- Yes はい
- No いいえ

Are you a member of any of the following?

あなたは以下のメンバーですか。適用するすべてに丸をして下さい。

- Club クラブ
- Circle サークル
- Sports team スポーツのチーム
- Part-time job アルバイト
- Other他

How many close friends do you have?

親しい友達が何人いますか。

- 0-2
- 3-5
- 6-8
- 9+

What age group do you think goes maid cafes? Check all that apply

どの年齢層がメイドカフェに行くと思いますか。適用するすべてに丸をして下さい。

- 14-17
- 18-21
- 22-25
- 26-29
- 30-32
- 33+

Which gender is most likely to go to maid cafés? Check all that apply

どの性別の人がメイドカフェに行くと思いますか。適用するすべてに丸をして下さい。

- Male 男
- Female 女
- Other 他

Out of these groups, who is likely to go to a maid café? Check all that apply

以下の集団の中で、誰がメイドカフェに行くと思いますか。適用するすべてに丸をして下さい。

- Students 学生
- Athletes アスリート
- Company workers サラリーマン
- Housewives 主婦
- Unemployed people NEET
- Tourists 観光客
- Otaku オタク
- Other 他

On a scale of 1 to 10, how respectable do you think maid cafés are?

1から10の段階で、メイドカフェはどの程度社会的に認められていると思いますか。

(Least respectable

全く認められていない)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

(Most

respectable

高く認められている)

On a scale of 1 to 10, how respectable do you think manga cafés are?

1から10の段階で、漫画カフェはどの程度社会的に認められていると思いますか。

(Least respectable

全く認められていない)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

(Most

respectable

高く認められている)

On a scale of 1 to 10, how respectable do you think Starbucks is?

1から10の段階で、スターバックスはどの程度社会的に認められていると思いますか。

(Least respectable

全く認められていない)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

(Most

respectable

高く認められている)

On a scale of 1 to 10, how respectable do you think coffee houses are?

1から10の段階で、喫茶店はどの程度社会的に認められていると思いますか。

(Least respectable

全く認められていない)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

(Most

respectable

高く認められている)

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