

HYPER-GENDERED DISCOURSE: HOW JAPANESE FASHION MAGAZINES CONSTRUCT GENDER IDENTITY

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RESUMEN

A través de una amplia gama de estrategias de comunicación intencionales, las revistas de moda (ya sea de hombre o mujer) reducen el género (en particular las mujeres) a tipos capaces de encajar en cualquier medio. La moda no es una entidad estática. Existe no sólo en las páginas de las revistas, sino también en el mundo: en las calles, en las oficinas, los escaparates, en el transporte público. Se trata de un tema de la vida cotidiana que es influenciado por muchos factores más allá de palabras e imágenes en los medios de comunicación comerciales. En Japón hay pocos medios de comunicación robustos y la comunicación llena las revistas de moda. Los medios son textos ricos llenos de una gran variedad de contenido profundo y social extremadamente complicado.

ABSTRACT

Through a large array of intentional communication strategies, fashion magazines (whether male or female) reduce gender classes (but women, in particular) to types capable of fitting into or bridging cohorts. Fashion is not a static entity. It exists not only on pages of magazines, but also out in the world: on the streets, in offices, shop windows, on public transportation. It is a living topic that is shaped and influenced by so many factors beyond words and images in commercial media. This serves as a caveat mitigating wholesale acceptance of the conclusions presented on these pages. In Japan, there are few media more robust and communication-full than fashion magazines. They are rich texts brimming with an assortment of profound, extremely complicated social content.

INTRODUCTION

THE IMPORTANCE OF FASHION IN JAPAN

Since May 2009, Japanese television has been the site of *Himitsu no Arashi-chan* (Arashi's Secrets), featuring the boy band "Arashi".¹ The show, which currently appears Thursdays at 22:00, has a number of segments, but one, entitled "Mannequin Five", involves the five boys being tasked with putting together a well-coordinated, attractive clothing ensemble. Themes of the segment may vary –for instance, viewers might be asked to call in and vote on the best ensemble or various female "talent"² may choose which ensemble they most like and/or would most wish to be seen on a date with.



Figure 1: four of five members of Arashi, awaiting the decision of which "mannequin" is best "coordinated".

Throughout the segment, the boys are shown in the store making their clothing selection, as well as explaining their rationale for the pick. Of course, when the votes are tabulated, explanations for why a particular ensemble is favored (or not) is also explained, as well as evaluated by various judges.

This is not the only example of fashion being highlighted on Japanese television – similar segments on daytime television can also be found in which, for instance, two *talento* might be tasked with putting an ensemble together for dates on a fixed budget

¹ See the promotional webpage: <http://www.tbs.co.jp/arashi-chan/> for details on the group, as well as their television show.

² "*Talento*" in Japanese, a category of entertainer who generally appear on television with little actual talent other than a particular "look", mannerism, or way of thinking or speaking. Generally distinguished from celebrities –legitimate film, television, music or sport stars– or idols ("*aidoru*") –popular icons in TV, music, stage, and magazine (most often "*guravia*" models).

(say, 10,000 yen), which is then critiqued by a renowned designer. Above all, what these vignettes serve to demonstrate is the fact that fashion is front and center in Japanese consciousness –it is not only an element of everyday life, but a topic possessing entertainment value, and worthy of popular discussion.

As this paper will argue, Japanese fashion is an area worthy of academic attention –if for no other reason that it is a major mediator of gender. Vital though this topic is, it is underexplored. In this paper I take a first step toward redressing the imbalance, if only imperfectly. On the pages that follow, I offer a brief introduction to some of the concrete ways that Japanese fashion magazines negotiate gender discourse.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FASHION MAGAZINES IN JAPAN

Japan has one of the most highly developed media systems in the world, with extremely elevated levels of media-use.³ A 2006 assessment indicates that the average time engaging with media exceeds fifteen hours per week, ranging from nearly one hour for magazines to three for television.⁴ Despite the fact that, as compared to other media, magazines are relatively less preferred, its consumption is sufficient to rank Japan first worldwide in periodical circulation.⁵ Recent statistics revealed that a total of 92,255,549

³ For instance, it ranks 2nd in daily newspapers per capita, 9th in the presence of televisions in the household (at 99%), 12th in cable penetration, first in the number of PCs owned (although per capita, the figure slips to 14th, at 5,431 per 10,000 people) and 2nd (to the US) in the number of personal computers (in 2004) at 69,200,000. It is 21st in number of mobile phones. Source: Nationmaster.com. Date last accessed: May 25, 2010.

⁴ Specifically, the breakdown on media consumption by times was:

(unspecified) "mass media": 3 hours 12 minutes;
TV: 2 hours and 50 minutes;
Internet: 2 hours and 21 minutes (males average 46 minutes more on-line than women);
DVD watching: 1 hour and 46 minutes;
radio: 1 hour and 27 minutes;
recordings: 1 hour and 20 minutes;
books: 1 hour and 18 minutes;
newspapers or magazines: 51 minutes.

Men reported slightly higher figures for every category except radio listening.

⁵ This assessment is based on the following calculation: Japan's newspaper circulation per capita doesn't even rank in the top fifty in the world, yet when periodicals are included along with newspapers, daily circulation figures rank second (to China) with 71,896,000. Scaled to reflect per capita consumption, Japan checks in first, at 566.69 per 1,000 people. Further scrutiny of the data indicates that other than Japan and Macau [5th], all countries through number 13 were European. Singapore [14th], Hong Kong [15th] and Thailand [17th] were the other Asian entries. The United States checked in at 18th,-with 196.3 per 1000 people. Source: Nationmaster.com, http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/med_dai_new_per_1000_peo-newspapers-per-1-000-people, date last accessed, May 24, 2010).

magazines were published in fifteen substantive categories;⁶ reflective of the importance of this medium, advertising revenues were third most among all types of media.⁷

Closer study of circulation figures reveals that the relative importance of fashion; for, magazines devoted to fashion garner sales figures of 13.3 per cent for women and 5.8 per cent for men.⁸ By this measure, women's fashion magazines, alone, qualify as Japan's third-most consumed periodicals (behind men's comics, at 19.3 per cent, and Specialty Comprehensive magazines [such as sports, travel, entertainment, game, audio, camera, crossword puzzle and the like], at 17.7%). By themselves, Men's fashion magazines are the eighth-most consumed magazine type. If the categories are collapsed, fashion magazines as a singular entity remain third (at 19.1%), behind Comprehensive magazines (at 30.2%) and Comics (at 25.4%). No matter how one parses it, fashion magazines are a major element in Japan's magazine market –itself, a major aspect of Japanese popular, mediated and commercial culture.

Further evidence of the popularity of fashion magazines comes from Sakamoto, who, in her 2008 survey of men and women aged 20-49 in the greater Tokyo metropolitan area, found that nearly 62.1 per cent of respondents were regular consumers of fashion magazines.⁹ Most significant, a correlation between frequency of fashion magazine consumption and fashion consciousness for both men and women was uncovered. Japanese, it can be inferred, possess high interest in fashion, as well as extensive fashion consciousness. Such a conclusion is supported, in part, by data showing

⁶ Data collected by the *Nihon Zasshi Kyoukai* (Japanese Magazine Publishers Association), between October 1, 2008 and September 30, 2009. The fifteen top categories and their percentages included: Comics-Men (19.3%), Specialty-Comprehensive (17.7%), Life design-Women (13.3%), Men's Comprehensive (9.1%), Life Culture-Women (8.6%), Information-Non-specific (7.4%), Comics-Women (6.1%), Life Design-Men (5.8%), Men's Specialty (3.9%), Money-Business (2.8%), Kids (2.7%), Women's Comprehensive (1.4%), Information-Men (0.9%), Information-Women (0.6%), Life Design-General (0.3%).

⁷ Ad revenues, of course, serve as an indirect measure of perceived medium salience, as advertisers are seeking those communication forms with the largest reach. A 2005 report prepared by Dentsu, the world's largest advertising agency, indicates the following important points: traditional media command 61.2 per cent of all ad expenditures, and magazines rank third (at 6.6%), behind TV (at 34%) and newspapers (at 17.4%). Source: "2005 Advertising Expenditures in Japan," Data Room, <http://www.dentsu.com/books/index.html>, Date last accessed: November 25, 2011. More recent figures, from 2008, by the Japanese Magazine Advertising Association, reveal that, of all traditional media, ad expenditures for magazines has dropped least. For instance, while television figures slipped from 34 per cent to 28 per cent (or 6%), those for newspapers fell from 17 to 12 per cent (or 5%), and those for radio from 3 to 2 per cent (or 1%); expenditures for magazines, by contrast, only dropped from 6.6 to 6 per cent (or .6%). For whatever reason (but likely having to do with ad rates within each medium), advertising was being retained in magazines more than other traditional media. This bears on fashion, for, cosmetics place first, at 9.9 per cent, with apparel an additional 2.7 per cent (or 14th-most out of 20 categories). Taken together, the two categories amount to 12.6 per cent of all advertising in Japan –or \463,689,700,000 (\$4,985,910,700). A more recent Japanese Magazine Advertising Association survey parses these numbers differently, showing that, of all four major media groups, advertising expenditures in magazines is greatest for Apparel/Fashion/Accessories (at 19.7%), and second-greatest for cosmetics/toiletries (at 13.6%). The next highest is Hobbies/Sporting goods (at 7.0%). And while cosmetics tallies the highest ad expenditures in television (at 11.0%), Apparel is well near the bottom (at only 1.2%). Source: <http://www.zakko.or.jp/eng/qa/01/03.html>. Date last accessed: May 25, 2010.

⁸ Fashion is included within the category "Life Design".

⁹ See Kazue Sakamoto, "Women's and Men's Magazines & Gender Norms as Seen in Questionnaire Results," *Proceedings* 09 (March 2010), pp.87-92. Some caution is required with this data, however. Sakamoto's survey did not distinguish between weekly and monthly fashion magazine consumption. Thus, the 62.1 per cent includes those who read a fashion magazine every day (4.3%), 2-3 times a week (11.5%), once a week (12.7%), 2-3 times a month (21%) and once a month (12.6%). Moreover, as noted, this survey was conducted in only a single metropolitan area, albeit the largest, most important one in the country.

a steady increase in the amount of time devoted to grooming activities –with an average increase of fifteen minutes for both sexes in every age group over the last two decades, and an additional two minutes since the previous survey in 2001.¹⁰ Overall, Japanese currently spend an hour and fifteen minutes per day on personal care –with females devoting, on average, nineteen more minutes than men (1.25 to 1.06).¹¹

WHY FASHION IN MAGAZINES MATTERS

If fashion is a high-profile dimension of Japanese life, and, concomitantly, a major element of the media milieu, what, specifically, is the content in fashion media? It turns out to be quite variegated and thoroughgoing. In fact, as I have outlined in other work,¹² fashion magazines include at least four areas worthy of academic attention:

1. Japanese Fashion magazines are the omnibus repositories for cultural reproduction. They are not only sites for information about clothes, accessories, and make-up, but also health, cooking, travel, popular culture such as music and movies, lifestyle activities, and social/political opinion. Some magazines feature celebrity profiles and interviews and even offer beef- and cheesecake. In fact, with so many different approaches and interests constrained within the “fashion” orbit that actually fall outside that orbit, it is almost misleading to consider these magazines as belonging to a unified literature. Yet, what they do, above all, is communicate about the socio-cultural panoply and train readers in the logics and means of participating in it. In a word, we might characterize them as Complex, Comprehensive and Continuous and, as such, socially re/productive.
2. Japanese fashion magazines serve as extended advertisements. Whether one considers cover photos, articles, photo spreads, how-to, recommended styles or current trends, or the ads themselves, Japanese fashion magazines create commercial environments for information consumers. Magazine content is chock-full of tie-ins to goods for sale, companies and/or spokespersons associated with fashion and style, or other industries (such as music, television or film entertainment) who, through their popularity outside the fashion sector, will engage magazine readers/fashion consumers. As such, fashion magazines play an important unifying, integrative role in contemporary consumer-capitalism society, and should be recognized as possessing this strong ontological power.

¹⁰ Source: “2006 Survey on Time Use and Leisure Activities,” Statistics Bureau and the Director-General for Policy Planning (Statistical Standards), Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications;

¹¹ This far exceeds the amount of time devoted to hygiene by Americans, who spend, on average, forty-one minutes on grooming per day. A study of time use in ten European countries is less definitive, as grooming is combined with eating, making the average that two hours per day impossible to accurately interpret. For American statistics, see: Bureau of Labor Statistics, <http://www.bls.gov/tus/current/personal.htm>; date last accessed: June 2, 2010; for European data, see: “Comparable time use statistics: National tables from 10 European countries, Luxembourg; Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, February 2005.

¹² See T.J.M. Holden, “The Medium is the Advertisement (and other decodings of Japanese fashion magazines),” Communication Approaches to the Study of Consumer Culture (Roundtable), presentation made at *International Communication Association* (ICA), annual meeting, Singapore, June 24th, 2010. Available on his website: <http://www.intcul.tohoku.ac.jp/~holden/Presentations-titles.html>.

3. Fashion magazines serve as points of intercept between paired oppositions that have consistently defined and shaped Japanese society; these include: inside/outside, traditional/renegade, and national/international. It is because of fashion and via fashion-related that congress between such dualities –historical (political, economic, social, and cultural) opposites– are achieved, negotiated, preferred and/or reconciled.
4. Fashion magazines also operate as a major mediator of gender, both within and between gender classes. This includes various strategies and tropes of constructing gender. Collectively, this might be called “genderizing” –a form of identity re/production predicated on gender. Specifically, genderizing can occur in a large number of ways– from constructing cohorts to creating types to blurring boundaries between cohorts. Moreover, part and parcel of such identity re/production is a constant emphasis on gender role, ontological possibility, and sexuality.

It is this last area that this paper will address. However, because the terrain that gender touches in Japanese fashion magazines is so large, it cannot all be addressed in a single article. Moreover, because this tends to be an under-explored area of academic research, on the following pages, I will spend most energy on identifying areas of potential investigation, rather than thoroughly treating each element in detail. The ultimate aim, which I will leave for further work, is to flesh through the critical area that underlies many of these other areas of investigation: what can be called “hyper-gendered discourse”. By this I mean a discourse that presents men and women in ways that over-accentuate aspects of gender, with extensive ramifications.

To begin, though, a brief word about the data employed.

A WORD ABOUT METHODOLOGY

THE DATA

Appendix 1 lists the magazine categories listed by the JPMA, along with the number of magazines per category and the circulation figures, both for men and women.¹³ This constitutes the data pool from which materials in this study were drawn. Briefly, what can be taken from these figures is this:

For women:

1. Overtly international magazines comprise a very small group among the many. Seventeen, *Elle Japon*, *Figaro Japon*, and *Numero Tokyo* fall within this class and

¹³ These categories are informative, rather than definitive. For instance, the fashion website MEKAS lists its own categories and only 11 (rather than 32), including: (for women) *Gyaru*, *Post-Gyaru Glam*, *Oneeki* (big sisterly), *Girly*, *Street*, *Working Conservative*, *Modest*, *High Fashion*, *Gorgeous*; and (for men): *Young Men* and *Older Men*.

total a mere 546,082 (or 4.4% of the market). Clearly, exogenous international magazines have a smaller pull in the local market.

2. Of the 22 listed categories, there are five unequivocal groupings: Teens, Young, Young Adult, Middle Aged, and Seniors. Of these, the greatest circulation numbers are skewed toward the lower end of the age spectrum, with Young and Young Adult comprising 59 per cent of the market. Teens, at 15 per cent, add an extra strong tilt toward the younger side, rendering (at least perceptually) nearly three quarters of the fashion magazine market for women age thirty and below. That said, and reflective of an ageing society, consumers of Middle Aged and Seniors fashion magazines command a combined quarter (22.8% and 3.3%, respectively) of the market.¹⁴
3. The total number of magazines in these groups also reflect these demographic differences, with Teens and Senior on the periphery having 10 and 5 magazines, respectively, and then, in the vast middle, Young with 17, Young Adult 25, and Middle Aged 20.
4. Finally, of note are the sub-divisions within each of the categories, which serve to underscore the great diversity of interests and emphases within the fashion market. By the JPMA's reckoning, genres or thematic areas, irrespective of age, include: Entertainment Information, Comprehensive, Casual, Lifestyle, and Way of Life. Within specific groups additional categories embrace: Elegance/High Quality, Mode/High End, Foreign Ties, Career Women, and "Adult Girl".

For men:

1. When the categories are collapsed (from 10 to a unique, irreducible 5), the results differ from that of women, with a nearly bell-shaped curve prevailing; Young Adult commands an amazing 63.2 per cent of consumers, with the categories immediately above (Middle Aged) and below (Young) equally tallying about 14.5 per cent, and the two outermost categories (Teens and Seniors) culling nearly equal numbers (3.4% and 4.5%, respectively). Again, though, as with women, the skew is toward the 30 and below set, with 81.2 per cent falling within that range.
2. There are as more Young Adult magazines for men than there are for women (27 against 25), but far less in other categories (2 versus 10 for Teens, 2 versus 5 for Seniors, 7 versus 17 for Young, and 9 versus 20 for Middle Age 20).
3. While the categories of Lifestyle and Fashion overlap for the two sexes, male fashion magazines also include genres of *Gravia* (or sexually-suggestive photos of women), Street, Opinion and Family –in some ways reflecting (at least in title) a more inclusive (though individually diverse) concept of fashion.
4. Of greatest note is the fact that, by comparison, female magazines account for 69.8 per cent of the fashion market, whereas male magazines stand at a mere 30.2 per cent.

¹⁴ The aggregate breakdown is as follows: Teens check in with 1,834,428, Young with 3,583,492, Young Adult with 3,659,914, Middle Age with 2,796,069, and Senior with 406,851.

TREATMENT

As for the research that follows, the work was conducted between April 2010 and July 2011. No effort was made to sample every category detailed above –although, reflective of the figures mentioned above: (1) more female than male magazines were sampled, and (2) those sampled tended to fall into the categories of Young Adult and Middle Aged. As a consequence, the findings here cannot be said to be systematic, exhaustive or definitive. Rather, they are informative and suggestive, and replication is strongly encouraged.

At the same time, the data is presented with a high level of confidence. It is presented due to preponderance. The appearance of the elements detailed on the pages to follow is due to their widespread and/or repetitious occurrence in Japanese fashion magazines across category. In a word, what is emphasized in this study is reflective of the norm.

The data is derived from both visual and written content, coded and placed into discursive categories that emerged inductively, and that can be compared between magazine genres, gender groups and age cohorts. The implicit claim here is that any researcher operating with any sampling methodology –random or theoretically selective– of fashion magazines would encounter the phenomena reported below.

GENDER CONSTRUCTION IN JAPANESE FASHION MAGAZINES

The work of any Japanese fashion magazine is multiple and, though more extensive in women's than in men's magazines, is similar. Above all, it involves the construction of gendered identity (a process I would refer to as "genderizing").¹⁵ This, in turn, is often achieved by a certain conscious "branding", by which: (1) *classes* and (2) *cohorts* (generally groups defined by age and/or consumption community) are constructed and/or distinguished, and/or (3) *types* are created. *Classes* are (at this point in time) cleaved male from female; *cohorts* are often denoted by age and/or consumer group; and *types* can be distinguished by "look" (clothing) as well as practice (preferences and behaviors). The work of sending such cues of distinction is achieved via codes, situations, behaviors, words and discursive threads emphasized in any given magazine. And before considering the global strategies of branding, some attention must be given to the more micro-level techniques of symbolization that is the foundation of gender construction. That is, analysts must bear in mind that representation begins with address, and meaning is often delivered in signification. In the following section, let's briefly consider a few of these techniques.

¹⁵ What is not addressed here is a baseline consonance, shared between gender groups and across all gender cohorts. That consonance is national and/or cultural identity. In a word, aspects of life that contribute to the formation of such identity will appear in all magazines; they are larger and more extensive than gender, itself. The most obvious in Japanese society is discourse regarding "inside/outside" (us/them; local/global; indigenous versus exogenous values and practices), and which often is re/produced via discourse about language and food. Thus is it that food will appear in all these magazines—as it does repeatedly in other media such as television and newspapers. For Japanese, food is a lowest common denominator component of daily life that underscores "Japaneseness", that forget Japanese identity.

STRATEGIES OF REPRESENTATION

An entire paper could be devoted to the construction of cohorts and/or types, but here we will only briefly summarize the strategies and highlight a few. They include: address, visual presentation/treatment, and framing. Address, in turn, can be decoded in terms of pose, expression, camera angles/views. It is certainly true, although not an aim of the current paper, that gender classes, cohorts and types can be evaluated and distinguished by the manner of address (figure 2).

The effect of such difference is to send messages to members of these groups about themselves (or at least their potential selves).

Pose can be broken down into a large number of elements, including: position of the legs, the set of the feet (by width and angle), the shape of the toes, the bend and angle of the knees, the position of the hands –especially in relation to the face, their use, the attitude of the head– especially in relation to the body, the direction of the body to the camera, and the angle of the picture taken (figure 3).



Figure 2: divergent styles of address, between gender classes. Note the delimiting position of the female’s appendages (feet, arms) relative to the man’s, as well as the differing forms of facial address (mouth, eyes).



Figure 3A: typical poses in *S-Cawaii* (for young women 18-26)



Figure 3B: typical poses in *Ane-Can* (for women ages mid- to late-twenties)

A survey of the data suggests quite clearly that address is a major means by which cohorts are differentiated. In particular, young women manifest far more variations in facial expressions than older women. And, when it comes to evaluating facial expression, among the common tendencies are presentations of the mouth (open or covered – usually by a hand); if open, then whether the teeth exposed (but closed) or separated; eyes–wide open (as if in surprise or expectation), closed (fully or partially), or in the process of winking (figure 4).



Figure 4: forms of address (wink, pouting lips, open mouth), among young adults

In the main, the emphasis in young cohorts is on mouth and eyes, with more attention to expressions (and poses) that are provocative, sexually suggestive, and/or “innocent”. By contrast, in the case of older models, the expressions are generally limited to smiles and the poses are far more modest and less open to suggestion (figure 5).



Figure 5: forms of address among women in their forties. (Note the exposed, but closed, teeth; eyes not fully wide-open; and the delimited stances—feet and hands)

Throughout, however, poses in female magazines across the board all work to delimit the models presented in some way –whether by leg position, hands in front of the body, twist of the frame away from the camera, or tilt of the head (figure 6).



Figure 6A: poses from JJ.



Figure 6B: poses from S-Cawaii.

That said, as a class, women are consistently posed in less “open”, direct, or “undefended” ways than men (figure 7). Generally, they are posed in ways that turn them from the camera, fold into themselves, or diminish themselves through gesture. And yet, with men (regardless of age) the address is generally more direct. Emotionally and expressively, their presentation is far more circumscribed: there is generally less smiling, little use of hands to the face, and limited play with the eyes.¹⁶

¹⁶ The only caveat to this claim is what could be called “the foreign exception”. Much like advertising in Japan, there is room for outside others to act in ways and strike poses that Japanese generally don’t. This has other untoward perceptual effects—connotations of freedom, morality, and difference. And although this is an empirical claim, my sense is that such an exception has diminished in advertising over the past two decades. On this exception, see T.J.M. Holden, “The Commercialized Body: A Comparative Study of Culture and Values,” *Interdisciplinary Information Sciences*. Vol. 2, No. 2 (November 1996):199-215.



Figure 7: competing forms of address, by class.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FRAMING

The representation strategies, identified above, work to construct gender identity by framing models (and vicariously, their reader/consumers) by class, cohort and type. To recapitulate (and working from micro to macro), types generally reside within any particular cohort, all of which belong inside of two gross gender classes.

On occasion, types are transplanted from one cohort to another, thereby causing a certain blurring of boundaries between cohorts. This phenomenon, which we shall explore a bit later, works to engineer a certain merging of consumption communities. Thus, while magazines work hard to distinguish between cohorts, they also seek to expand their reach, at times, by using types to skip over or bridge group boundaries. In all cases, though, gendered identities are clearly constructed: the normative and behavioral possibilities, as well as the expectations for those within that cohort are clearly communicated. On the following pages, we shall look at evidence of class differentiation (i.e. between men and women), cohort construction (within age groups), type formation (often within age groups), and boundary blurring (between cohorts).

MODES OF COMMUNICATION

Three more dimensions bearing on construction –the way in which a communication is: (a) complex, (b) comprehensive, and (c) continuous.

By the first, it is meant communications that can be either (or both): static and dynamic.

COMPLEX COMMUNICATIONS

By *static*, I intend a communication that, in one representation, is capable of constructing gender identity. This is depicted in figure 8 (next page), from *S-Cawaii*, a magazine for 18 to 26 year-olds. On this page, "Miwa" is featured, via a "self-introduction", an interview and profile. The page is identified as a "feature for the way to live for passionate girls", as well as "thoughts of what is necessary for people who lack confidence".

By *dynamic*, it is intended a more extensive communication –as for instance, a multi-page spread, in which numerous people, their activities, interests, and abilities may work to construct the identity of the cohort (type, consumption community). Importantly, while a unified identity might be constructed, the messages may not be uniform, as reflected in figure 9 (page 247).

COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNICATIONS

Dynamic communications bear relationship to comprehensive communications, but especially continuous ones. The former means a discourse created by addressing many facets of that cohort's gender identity. This includes, though is not limited exclusively to: clothes featured, accessories worn, hair styles emphasized, poses struck, settings depicted, activities engaged in, beauty secrets touted, lifestyles recommended, events highlighted, foods presented, philosophies touted, and keywords used. In the main, this transpires through dynamic means –i.e. not in a single (static) photo or even a sole spread. Thus, for instance, sections devoted to clothes, diet, activities, books, music and movies work to actively construct gender. Sexuality, particularly, in the younger cohorts, is widespread, if implied, and often plays a large role: both referencing the model's "views" about the sexuality (and, by association, presumably, the reader's), but also how to approach sexual and emotional situations. Here, it must be emphasized that the discourse is almost entirely hetero-normative, no matter the magazine class or cohort.¹⁷

¹⁷ Sexuality is such a large dimension of these periodicals that it merits an article of its own. In terms of hetero-normativity, the only exception is what I call "sisterly sexuality", a sharing of moments, activities, physical space and non-sexual intimacy between women. Again, this is such a pervasive element of fashion magazine discourse that it warrants independent scholarly treatment.



Figure 9: "Supportive Words"



5 pages that introduce various people, their favorite expressions, ages, and occupations



Some examples:
 "Believe in yourself"
 "The best is yet to come"
 "It's better to burn out than fade away"



Some examples:
 "Even if something happens, you'll be okay!"
 "Never give up"
 "Try your best"

COMPOUND DISTINGUISHED FROM COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNICATIONS.

While the act of comprehensive communication generally requires extended and/or continuous acts of communication, as figure 10 makes clear, gender identity can be forged through a communication that integrates numerous elements in one or only a few pages –something that, if not comprehensive, might be called “compound”.



In this “advertorial”, sponsored by Peugeot, an SUV is presented to men as a means of “weakening a woman’s guard”. The text on the opposite page refers to the space inside the car as “erotic jewelry” . . .

Here, the ad viewer regards a headless woman, her legs, tantalizingly bare. The text tells the reader “the woman is urging him (presumably, the car owner) to invite her”.

Figure 10: a compound communication, assisting in the construction of gendered (male) identity.

In the case of this advertisement, such elements include: the car, the woman, the urban location –all elements that help define the man who covets that car. So, too, inferentially, the man encountering the ad in this fashion magazine (which he may be reading in part to reinforce or refine aspects of this gender identity). Interestingly, both the clothes and jewelry worn by the woman in the car ad are also advertised. Their price and store location are listed as insets in the car ad, helping to build a profile of the economic world in which such a man (i.e. owner of this SUV) lives. It is more information to add to the compounding portrait.

Compound (if not something closer to comprehensive) communication is at work in the spread in figure 11. Here we encounter two stylistic/cultural archetypes, from the young mature cohort. In this spread, they are contrasted (top and bottom) through clothing and description of daily activities over the course of one month.



Figure 11: competing Types, Comprehensive Communications within the Young Mature Adult Cohort.

A careful reading reveals a discourse of difference: from food to dating to work situation to lifestyle choices (and, of course, clothes), the two women live and respond differently –presumably due to the dictates of the worldview associated with their social type.

The first view, featured in the upper band, reflects the ideas and practices of a younger “OL” (office lady), while the latter worldview is found in the guise of an older worker. The signification is quite complex –not the least reason being

that the designation “OL”, itself, is a historically-rooted, reification of gender.¹⁸ Beyond that, though, these types are personified in women whose names, readers are told, are “Tomoe” and “Reiko”. Here cultural construction takes flight, with the former being rendered in hiragana (a script associated with adolescents) and the latter in *kanji* (a script associated with older people –and possibly those of more conservative values, who have pursued a more traditional path). Moreover, the names, themselves, are associated with distinct generations –with “Tomoe” carrying a scent of a more recent age cohort, and “Reiko” (due, in large part to the use of *kanji* to designate the sound “ko”) preponderant in an older age cohort. Finally, “Tomoe” is shortened to “Moe” (mo-ae) in the anchored text. This is significant insofar as, in contemporary popular culture (especially in video games, *anime*, and *manga*), “moe” denotes “budding”. By contrast, “Reiko”, being rooted in an earlier generation, conveys a scent of greater maturity; indeed, this particular *kanji*¹⁹ is rendered as “lovely; beautiful; graceful; resplendent”.

Contrasting names aside, it is the dicta accompanying the comparative pictorials that underscore the comprehensive nature of these communications and which, through their publication work to construct gender identity. For it is in the explanation of daily activities of these purported office worker’s lives that readers gain an image of the larger worlds these models circulate within. For instance, the younger one speaks of: attending English class after work (a common pursuit for women looking either better prepare themselves for international travel or else improve their chances of being able to interact with foreign men), and preparing vegetable soup from scratch to facilitate her diet. By contrast, the older one confesses to participating in a group dating event (known as *gokon* in Japan) where she ended up sitting opposite the man who is just her type (a heart icon is attached to this statement). Nonetheless, she also has another man (Kenichi) who she is keeping on hold, with whom, two days later, she ends up planning to go to a movie with (an observation that, again, is attended by a heart icon). Unfortunately for this woman, Reiko, her boss doesn’t return to work when he was supposed to, thereby interfering with her date.

The larger point is that, in this way, fashion magazines work via various means – pictorial, verbal, situation, pose—as well as clothes, themselves—to create entire worlds, comprehensive environments that both define and shape gender identity of the person depicted and, just possibly, the consumers reading the magazine, themselves.

CONTINUOUS COMMUNICATIONS

Continuous communications differ from compound/comprehensive communications insofar as they refer to the panoply of life within which a gender/cohort identity is

¹⁸ “OL” is a post-war construction, denoting (via its English appellation) a “newer” approach to labor. OL perform “pink collar” tasks such as serving tea and clerical work; they are generally full-time permanent staff, of a particular age-slice, who labor under a glass ceiling, and the expectation that they will leave their position in time (usually upon marriage), but in all cases, will never advance beyond a certain unspoken barrier of position and authority.

¹⁹ *Kanji* are Chinese logographs. There are well over fifty characters that could be used as the base for “Rei”, all meaning something different, thus, it is not untoward to presume intentionality was associated with the choice of the particular logograph printed in this fashion spread.

intercalated and also by which it is mediated. Thus, not only shops and activity centers, but also the kinds of events and media consumed, the nature and subject of advertisements, events and places, the role models employed (not only anonymous models, but particular cohort-favored celebrities), restaurants, sports, books, and horoscope.

Even more so than the comprehensive communication, continuous communications tend to operate over the course of a periodical as a totality. Of themselves, each may be static, yet they work serially, systematically, cumulatively through the publication to forge a meaningful whole. It is by viewing such a totality that the cohort's identity is constructed.

CONSTRUCTING GENDER IDENTITY

In the previous section, examples of complex, compound and comprehensive communications were presented. Continuous communications, clearly, are far less easy to demonstrate in the space of a short paper. In lieu of a definitive exposition, examples will be presented below that can provide some sense of the large number of contexts, activities, interests and styles addressed in Japanese fashion magazines. Nonetheless, one would do well to bear in mind that, given the enormous swath cut by this particular medium in such a rich media ecology, the instances presented are but a limited taste of the larger phenomenological set. And, as indicated above, the continuous, cumulative nature of gender construction can only be inferred.

With that caveat in mind, though, let's consider some distinct way in which gender identity is constructed. The first concerns gender class.

CONSTRUCTING GENDER IDENTITY 1: DISTINGUISHING MALE AND FEMALE

Two decades ago, Inoue et al. showed that a gender-based division of labor was discernable in fashion magazines.²⁰ To wit, women's magazines tended to emphasize domestic chores such as cooking and housework, while men's magazines focused on leisure. Twenty-one years later, the same sort of gendered DoL can be discerned, and this takes on greater signifiatory power when comparing magazines between gender classes. For instance, looking at how food is presented in men's magazines, it is almost always *not* discourse about how to prepare it; rather, it is discourse about what to eat, where to buy it, and how much it costs. In short, in men's fashion magazines, one is apt to read about store locations for particular meals, as well as recommended dishes that are, implicitly, appropriate for men (figure 12, next page).

²⁰ See: T. Inoue and The Society for the Research on Women's Magazines, (1989), *Deciphering Women's Magazines: Compareopolitan –A comparative study of Japan, America, and Mexico*. Tokyo: Kakiuchi Publishing (originally in Japanese).



Figure 12: Rudo (a magazine for men) features an extended spread on “don” (a rice-bowl with meat or fish topping). The emphasis is on actual places to stop and eat (with maps, descriptions and prices).



Figure 13: Glow, a publication for women in their forties, introduces readers to all aspects of a meal: description, recommendation, location, ambiance, and recipe.

By contrast, women’s magazines have a much more extensive amount of food discourse: from recipes to locations to menus to reviews. It is not uncommon to read about actual restaurants, as well as celebrity recommendations, interviews with the chef, recipes and tips for preparation (figure 13).

In addition, where meal plans are listed for women, it is often in the context of dieting (figure 14) or juggling a career (figure 15, next page).



Figure 14: Glow also offers readers recipes from 2 women in the midst of a dieting. Ingredients, directions for preparation, a sample week of meals, comments by the chefs, and evaluation by a nutritionist are featured.



Figure 15A: *JJ*, a magazine for women aged 17-26, offers 4 pages (and 6 recipes) for step-by-step preparation of the “bento” (lunch box), introduced by “everyday workers”.



Figure 15B: *AneCan*, the largest selling magazine in the “Young Adult: Career” category (mid- to late-20s), features recipes from working women, along with their names, occupations, and brief bio.

Of course, the casual reader – a member of any one gender class or age/lifestyle cohort – will likely not be aware of the way in which classes are constructed via the selective presentation of, in this case, food. That does not change the fact that these distinctions exist and that, when placed side by side, reveal the differences in between, in this case, male and female, or, as we shall see below, particular groups within a given class.²¹

CONSTRUCTING GENDER IDENTITY 2: COHORTS

One invisible element in the previous example is the distinction that exists between age cohorts. For younger women, still in the midst of a career, the emphasis is on meals that can be prepared and carried to work; for older women, whose lives have often moved beyond career, the focus is on meals that can be prepared either to complement a diet, or else to simulate a gourmet experience – meals, in short, more appropriate for a life of leisure, with time to spend.

²¹ It should not escape recognition that, while food was the lifestyle element that served as a means of comparative evaluation, other aspects of life—from movies to words used to clothing preferences—can serve as ways of measuring distinctions between class, cohort, and type.

Cohorts do not simply exist because they fall into a certain demographic –say, age, occupation, or clothing preference; they have to be consciously appealed to and constructed. In the section on representation, earlier, it was observed that women of a certain age bore certain expressions and posed a certain way, while those of a different age, carried expressions and struck poses in another way. And, clearly, when scanning fashion magazines, such differences between age cohorts are patent; they jump immediately off the page. In many ways, they *are* what helps signify and determine a cohort (figure 16).



Figure 16A: poses for women in their 40s are demure, expression-least



Figure 16B: poses for women in their mid 20s are active, attention-seeking



Figure 16C: women in their 40s are described as “adult”



Figure 16D: women 18-26 are described as “girls”

Put another way, a woman of a certain age, does not sprawl on the floor in a dress (as an 18 to 26 year-old does), nor squat (as a late 20 year-old does) –even if her body is averted from the camera (i.e. society’s gaze). Similarly, she is unlikely to wear leather boots that wrap around the ankle, stick her tongue out and wink, part her lips in expectation, or wear allow her hair to drop in a mussed fashion over her eyes –although, according to a sample of these fashion magazines, women of younger age and lifestyle cohorts apparently would (figure 17).



Figure 17: contrasting poses of three distinct age/lifestyle cohorts.

CONSTRUCTING GENDER IDENTITY 3: TYPES

While cohorts separate groups within a class, there are cases in which those groups are further subdivided. So, too, are there (some) cases where groups are bridged, rather than made distinct. In both cases, that is the role of types.

To gain a sense of how this operates, consider the examples in figure 18 (next page). Here, a large number of “looks” are suggested in the course of a single spread in a single magazine. Presumably only a particular cohort is consuming this magazine and, yet, that group is being counseled in any number of looks that they might consider adopting.

The appeal here may have something to do with the fact that youth aim to distinguish themselves more than others in older cohorts. It may also have to do with the lifestyle, which is less fixed and more open to mutability. It may also be a reflection of the amount of money different groups are willing to invest in switching styles/looks. And, it may also serve as a commentary on the degrees of freedom among relative age cohorts.

It would be tempting to say that this process of distinction via typification occurs most often at the lower end of the age spectrum, yet that may not be completely true. Consider the following cases.



Type A: the "Mischievous Kids" look



Type B: the "Ms. Sailor Suit" look



Type C: the "Lolita" look



Type D: the "Sir Prince" look

Figure 18: from JJ (for young female adults): Highlighting so-called "Cosplay"

INVENTING TYPES 1: THE CASE OF “GIRL”



Figure 19A: “Girly One-Piece”



Figure 19B: “Street Girl”



Figure 19C: “Girlful”

The examples in figures 19 and 20 all come from magazines aimed at the 18 to 26 year-old audience, and yet their common invocation of “Girl” is made in a variety of settings, with a large number of connotations, attended and modified by a diverse range of words, situations, attitudes and clothing styles. For instance, there is the stylish, somewhat conservative “Girly One-Piece” modeled by a Korean celebrity, the denim and t-shirt of the “Street Girl”, and the more idiosyncratic look –complete with gloves and hat– that is labeled “Girlful”.



Figure 20: the invention of the “Girly Bohemian” look

In figure 20, with images taken from a different magazine aimed at the same general cohort, the spread emphasizes that summer is the time for adopting the so-called “Girly Bohemian” look. A large number of visual examples, descriptions of the material and cut, as well as details on price and purchase point are provided.

As a totality, what these examples underscore is the strategies that magazines employ to expand a consumer base. The invisible work performed here is the support given to designers, manufacturers, and shops (which are all advertised in the spread) by “creating” and communicating types. Ideally, consumers will become convinced to adopt a style (and, hence, make purchases). Beyond this invisible economic function, however, is how identity is constructed (and, of course, *which* identity is constructed). In this case, via constant repetition, a “little female” –a girl, rather than woman– is the result. This generization is abetted not only via persuasive techniques of repetition; rather via the emotional impact of words presented English, as well as *katakana* (words designated as coming from outside Japan). In both cases, these renderings are used as a substitute for the indigenous *kanji* and, hence, strike the Japanese reader at a visceral level.

INVENTING TYPES 2: THE CASE OF “CUTE ADULT”

Although youth is invented as a strategy of cultivating distinction among the “young mature” cohort, it also turns out to be a strategy of gender construction among more “mature adults”, as well. It is not, in short, not the exclusive province of the young.

As implied in the previous section, mutability in identity may be less possible for those in an older cohort: wholesale change is difficult for those who have already sunk time into a career, a family life, built a home in a fixed place with a defined circle of acquaintances and friends, etc. For this reason, mutability may only be possible at the edges, by modifying trivial details. If this is true, this would explain the phenomenon of the “Cute Adult” –where magazines for women in the “young and mid-career” cohort (figure 21) and then also in their forties (figure 22, next page) are encouraged to dip back toward the youthful end of the age scale.



Figure 21: “Cute Adult is fun” the title in AneCan reads. (for mid- to late-20s)

The economic model is similar to that described for the younger cohort: after nailing down the base audience, convince these core consumers to try a new trend. By working at the edges, try to expand either the community of consumers, or else get those already in your community to venture out into a different stylistic sensibility. In effect, to try on the clothes of a new, different fashion type, without abandoning one's cohort; without taking any ontological risk. Hence, we can see magazines, such as one aimed at 18 to 26 year olds saying: "yes, it is great to be young and mature, but it's also okay to be more adult" (figure 21), while the magazine for 40 year-olds is telling its readers: "yes, it's great to be mature, but it's also okay to be girlish or cute" (figure 22).



A spread that emphasizes "5 key words to make a Cute Adult"



Encouraging older readers how: "to make a Cute Adult Body Line"

Figure 22: messages encouraging 40+ year-old readers to aim for "cute"

In short, an intentional blurring of boundaries between cohorts is achieved in magazines by inventing a type out of, pardon the pun, whole cloth, and then introducing a type. In this case it is a type that can transcend a cohort and easily operate in more than one group. In a word, construction of gender identity is facilitated by messages about a desirable type: cute.²²

²² Importantly, this practice of blurring boundaries extends beyond the case of cute. For instance, in a magazine aimed at mid-career women, a spread details how women can engage in "adult dates", and looks like this: (See *apendix III*) A careful viewer of these images will note the expected behaviors, poses, expressions, and dress—all part of the identity construction for any woman in her mid to late twenties seeking to become more "adult".

3. CUTE: A UNIVERSAL GENDER IDENTITY

Cute, in Japanese is "*kawaii*" and, more than a simple word, it is an attitude, a style, a set of socially-sanctioned actions, a character, and a trope that has been ubiquitous in the society for generations. And, reflective of that predilection, *kawaii* far and away dominates Japanese fashion (figure 23).



Figure 23: the ubiquitous *kawaii*

Resident in all corners of Japanese popular culture –from television to music to *manga*,²³ cute is a ubiquitous, class-specific identity that is actively constructed and cultivated. It is a pervasive frame in which women are posed as cuddly, carefree, uncomplicated, innocent, yet sexual, and, above all, non-threatening. In fashion magazine after fashion magazine “cute girls” place their fingers to the side of their heads, leave their mouths agape, as if in confusion or surprise, play with their hair and stare off into space, turn their feet and/or knees inward, in a sign of unsteady gait, or raise a heel or bend a knee as evidence of oblivious sexual appeal. In short, they are posed in many of the representational strategies alluded to, above.

While the innocent vamping tends to be cohort-specific (i.e. it tends to appear less frequently in magazines for women in their forties), the *kawaii* look is still a staple of magazines for the mid-career woman, down to the “young mature” and post-adolescent consumer. Cute, it could be argued, is the most common representational mode of women in Japanese society.

We see this in figure 24 (next page), where cute is employed to distinguish two types within the mid-career cohort. The types distinguished are “*kawaii*” (identified in the spread as “cute, feminine, sweet”) and “*kakkoi*” (described as “cool, mode, and elegance”), with *kawaii* (cute) on the top left and two middle panels, and *kakkoi* (stylish) depicted on the top right and in the bottom-most panels. As seen earlier, such a discourse of

²³ Japanese comics, widely consumed by people of all ages, in a large variety of genres.

competing types is a favored communication trope in fashion magazines, especially when trying to expand the boundaries of any particular cohort.



Figure 24: kawaii (cute) versus kakkoi (stylish) in the mid-career magazine.

Viewing the panels it is easy to ascertain that the comportment, as well as the clothing of the women in the two groups are quite different –so much so that in the articles, they are identified as “friend villages”– basically safe havens or refuges... presumably from the world of other (hostile!) gender cohorts. Nonetheless, what this comparative typification suggests is that fashion magazines seek to create distinction (through appearance, behavior, situation) and even a rough sort of plurality among any given age cohort.

CONCLUSIONS

Above all, as we have seen, through a large array of intentional communication strategies, fashion magazines (whether male or female) reduce gender classes (but women, in particular) to types capable of fitting into or bridging cohorts. As between classes, it can be said that there are far less cohorts among men and even less types within any one cohort or working to span cohorts.

Regardless of class, cohort or type, though, overall, it can be said that Japanese fashion magazines work to build, shape and sustain gender identity –and they do so in specific, identifiable ways. Using intentional, palpable, repeatable representational strategies, involving words, pictures, situations, poses and behaviors, they frame gender appearance, activity and possibility. Part and parcel of this is what could be called an agenda-setting function: where role, expectation, appearance, world-view, and behavior are communicated about gender. Fashion magazines, in short, tell message consumers how people of a particular gender class, cohort or type should look and behave, what they do and should think about, and what is most salient in the world of their interest. Because such discourse is sustained, narrowly-focused and over-emphasized, it can be called “hyper-gendered discourse”. And because such discourse is socially sanctioned and often excludes rival interpretations and possibilities of identity, it has the effect, I would argue, of reifying gender identity in specifiable, select ways.



Figure 25: hyper-sexualized content

What this paper has not addressed is another, extensive aspect of gender identity formation; what can be called “hyper-sexualized discourse”. Such visual and verbal material is pervasive and works to define class, cohort and type, each in its own ways (figure 25). It involves things such as “everyday pornography” (the quotidian presentation of stripped bodies), “sisterly sexuality” (the continual posing of women in moments of sexualized, though non-sexual, physical exchange), advice on diet, tips for dating, and messages about the opposing gender class. Discounting the sisterly sexuality, hyper-sexualized discourse is hetero-normative and it is extensive. So much so, that it exceeds our ability to adequately address it here, and, hence, warrants its own independent treatment. That, I leave for a subsequent paper.

In concluding this paper, I wish to observe that fashion is not a static entity. It exists not only on pages of magazines, but also out in the world: on the streets, in offices, shop windows, on public transportation. It is a living topic that is shaped and influenced by so many factors beyond words and images in commercial media. This serves as a caveat mitigating wholesale acceptance of the conclusions presented on these pages.

It is important to bear in mind that the materials employed in this analysis were not exhaustive; that the universe of fashion magazines is enormous and, more, that the fora in which communication about fashion transcends the medium of fashion magazines, alone. Moreover, as a phenomenon –an entity that influences social life– fashion engages matters of time: they exist in particular “time slices” but also operate over the course over extended periods that are, somehow, connected –the “longue durees” of human existence. There are, in short, enduring cultural values and practices implicated in any singular observation of a particular time/place touching and touched by fashion.

Having said all that, it is safe to conclude that: in Japan, there are few media more robust and communication-full than fashion magazines. They are rich texts brimming with an assortment of profound, extremely complicated social content. In part because of their ubiquity and their taken-for-granted everydayness, they can easily escape observation, but clearly merit academic attention –not the least reason being their on-going communication about and mediation of gender identity. Whether this is true for similar communications in other societies is an open question, worthy of further research. 

APPENDIX 1**Some figures on Japanese Fashion Magazines**

Category (by age group)	Quantity	Circulation
Women's Fashion Magazines		
Low Teens	5	716,334
Teens: Comprehensive	1	327,334
Teens: Entertainment information	3	760, 933
Teens: Other type	1	30, 667
Young: Comprehensive fashion	4	1,230,401
Young: Casual	10	1,979,199
Young: Lifestyle	2	190,492
Young: Entertainment information	1	183,400
Young Adult: Comprehensive fashion	3	1,078,309
Young Adult: Elegance/High quality	1	70,667
Young Adult: Mode/High end	3	249,610
Young Adult: Mode/Foreign ties	3	218,748
Young Adult: Career women	7	1,125,568
Young Adult: "Adult girl"	1	119,250
Young Adult: Way of life	2	227,559
Young Adult: Comprehensive lifestyle	5	570,203
Middle Aged: Fashion for those in 30s	6	997,976
Middle Aged: Fashion for those in 40s	4	493,051
Middle Aged: Comprehensive lifestyle	9	1,109,894
Middle Aged: Way of life	1	195,148
Seniors: Lifestyle	2	203,517
Seniors: Fashion	3	203,334

Men's Fashion Magazines		
Teens: Street	2	180,000
Young: Fashion/oshyare	6	717,304
Young: Gravia	1	46,659
Young Adult: Fashion	2	167,043
Young Adult: Lifestyle-universal	10	1,039,653
Young Adult: Gravia	13	1,822,043
Young Adult: Opinion	2	321,572
Middle Aged: Lifestyle	8	677,088
Middle Aged: Family	1	95,434
Seniors: Lifestyle	2	237,500

APPENDIX 2

