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Enjo Kosai: Brand Name Marketing

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Enjo Kosai: Brand Name Marketing

Media is a contributing factor in creating a market for the prostitution of minors in Japan today. Media creates an image to which the girls aspire by placing the trendiest items in the hands of music and movie idols who the girls look up to. The drive to then own these trendy, and expensive, products forces the girls into marketing their bodies to strangers. Though in many ways media can be seen as the root of all evil through print and film advertisements, there are some forms of media which work as a caution instead of an encouragement to the viewing public. Many forms of Japanese anime and manga depict violent rapes and abuses performed on teenage girls, whether willing or not. However, there is one show about the kogals of Shibuya called Super-Gals, that demeans the institution of enjo kosai, “compensated dating”, and advocates its obliteration from Japanese society. Thus, I would argue that even though compensated dating is a flourishing industry in Japan today as I will describe by numerous examples, there is some backlash against it in popular media.

In Japan enjo kosai creates a market economy for junior and high school girls: “In a sense, they are so brand-aware that they have come to understand that for a brief time during their later school years, they become a brand themselves, a saleable and recognizable brand within an established market,” (Weston, 2004). These girls are not only selling their bodies for a quick couple hundred bucks, they are also fashioning society to create a place for the commodity they have for sale. There is an argument that

1 “Companies are increasingly cashing in on the purchasing power of the teenager, unleashing slick advertising campaigns aimed at drawing younger and younger women within consumerism,” (Smyth, 1998). See also Fujiwara, 1998.
teenagers are displaced within the current economic social system which has developed from the bursting of the bubble. Parents must work longer and harder to make money, thus leaving their offspring to care for themselves—“The growing independence and self-reliance developed causes the young people to become more distanced from their parents and other adults,” (Nguyen, 1999). The girls have parents who work too hard and with too long of hours to care what their daughters are getting up to. In addition, they have fathers who previously were able to afford brand-name products and who can no longer shower their baby girls with the gifts the girls have come to expect. Thus in some cases, the girls can be seen as acting out of a desire to revenge themselves on paternal figures who can’t supply their wants by using middle-aged men who can. As a reaction to economic pressures, societal prejudices to fit in with their peers, and the dissolution of traditional family values, some girls turn to prostitution in order to make enough money to live in the style they see as ideal.

Shintaro Ishihara said, “The Japanese are just beginning to wake up to the darker aspects of the economic success,” (Kakuchi, B, 1997), and one of the darker sides of this success appears to be the fact that teenage girls now come with their own “price tag,” (Liddy, 2002). One girl puts it like this, “My pussy is worth $600. Now that’s pretty flattering,” (Yamada, 1997). The amazing thing about the capitalistic solution the girls create is that they recognize their “youth as a currency with a time limit, so they need to spend it before it expires,” (Nguyen, 1999). One schoolgirl prostitute in Shibuya says, “Now’s the only time we can do this. You can only sell while you’re a high school girl.

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2 Mamoru Fukutomi, a sociologist with Tokyo Gaugei University who counsels teenagers, called one runaway’s parents to come pick her up after she had been gone for a period of several days, “Not only had the parents not bothered to file a police report,…, but they didn’t even seem to care that their daughter was gone as long as she was reachable on her mobile phone,” (Magnier, 2003). See also Yamada, 1997.
3 Herbert, 2004.
Join university and the bottom falls out of the market,” (Connell, B, 2002). Another says, “I graduate at the end of the current school year, which means my price will plummet. But that won’t stop me from putting on my school uniform and selling sex for another couple of years. It’s not worth doing any other sort of part-time work when selling sex can get you 40,000 to 50,000 yen a pop,” (Connell, B, 2002). Even though your price might drop, you can still keep up the pretense of being young for a couple more years before you really lose your school girl appeal.

It is tempting to look into how the rising junior high school market will affect the high school girls. If the rampant pedophilia pushes the male consumer into desiring younger and younger girls, eventually high school girls are going to lose their corner on the market to their up and coming younger sisters. One junior high school girl commented that, “If you’re a junior high school girl, you can say you’re a virgin and sell your virginity for a high price. I got 350,000 yen for my virginity once. The guy was some sicko of about 40 who said he ran his own company. I’ve sold my virginity three times so far,” (Connell, B, 2002). The ability of the seriously pubescent girl to advertise her virginity as a consumer fantasy ups her market value to the n\textsuperscript{th} degree, as you can see by her price being 7 times more than the high school girl.

An increasing percentage of teenage girls in Japan have either experienced enjo kosai (5-13\%) or been solicited by older men interested in it (75\%) in 1996.\footnote{Cruey, 2004.} But these statistics don’t even begin to cover the deteriorating sexual scruples of the teenage population of Japan. In 2004 a Tokyo Metropolitan Government biennial survey revealed that “10 percent of third-year junior high school pupils—all of whom would be 15 or under—had sexual experience, an incredible increase over the mere 2 percent
recorded a decade ago.” (Connell, A, 2004) and “According to a survey by a study group consisting of Tokyo teachers, the percentage of third year senior high school girls who have had sexual intercourse nearly doubled from 18.5% in 1987 to 34 percent in 1996, compared with their male counterparts at 28.6 percent in 1996.” (Yoshida, 1997). This figure did more than double in 1999 when girls polled at 39% (3,500 students polled in Tokyo public schools)⁵ and then again in 2002 when it inched up to 45.6% out of a 3064 student survey with a 90% response rate administered by a teacher’s union.⁶ Kids in Japan are growing up progressively faster than the generation before them. This is due in part to physiognomy, Japanese girls today “start to menstruate at between 10 and 12 years old, at least two years earlier than their mothers,” (Kakuchi, A, 2002). Official reported abortions in women under 20 years old are also on the rise, 50,000 in 2002 up from 27,838 in 1994, (Kakuchi, A, 2002). The social problem of increased sexual activity in the underage set, is a huge one in Japan that is compounded by the social stigma against even discussing it.

One forum which does manage to discuss this invasive societal concern is anime. In Super-Gals!, the main character, Ran Kotobuki, discovers that a girl named Aya in her high school is about to embark on a career of enjo kosai due to a dissatisfaction with her stressful life of being the good little girl and always attending cram schools at her parents insistence. Ran goes after Aya and convinces her to abandon her middle-aged date and subsequently teaches her other ways to make money and where to shop for deals in Shibuya in order to obtain the brand-name goods without having sex with strangers. This cartoon showcases many classic examples of a consumer driven teenage girl societal

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⁶ Curtin, 2002.
strata, but it also provides some illuminating examples of proper social behavior: stick up for your friends, don’t prostitute your body, study hard in school (but not to the exclusion of having fun), and help out others when you can. As a mirror on society it displays a problem and then provides a valid solution which, hopefully, will influence the girls who see it into accepting the moral lessons it is trying to impart.
List of Works Cited


