The Normal Shōbai
A Recreation of the Housewife and Salaryman in the Deviant World of Hosts and Hostesses

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Abstract

My thesis examines the recent phenomenon of host and hostess work and the portrayal of thesis men and women in popular media. The sources I will be using are newspapers articles, blogs, documentary films, and anime/manga which feature either hosts or hostesses as subjects. Using common tropes found in each source, I analyze in separate chapters their appearance, construction of gender and the use of emotional labor. Each section will build upon a parallel structure between hosts and salarymen, and hostesses and housewives which became increasingly apparent throughout this research. I will argue that the socially and economically constructed salaryman/housewife paradigm is internalized in hosts and hostesses leading to its reproduction in the club’s social scene and economic interactions. Additionally, these interactions lead to the creation of the fantasy world hosts and hostesses are meant to build for their clients. However, I argue that this fantasy world is not as displaced from conventional Japanese society as it has been implied to be because of the connection hosts and hostesses have with their traditional counterparts, salarymen and housewives. As I observed thus far, scholars have yet to examine hosts and hostesses together. By doing so, I am able to observe the Japanese perception of gender as well as the significance of this profession in the Japanese imagination.
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Introduction

Sex work in Japan has been an area of interest for many years, especially on the topics of prostitution and geisha. However, the post-1960s era caused scholars to shift their focus due to the development of hostess work. Although they originated from geisha, hostessing received negative backlash in academia as a type of work that exploits and denigrates women. Geisha were generally viewed more favorably. Host work also emerged in the 60s, but received significantly less notoriety. Therefore, academic research on hosts is severely lacking. Over the years, Japanese hosts and hostesses have been increasingly featured in popular media that is accessible to adults and children, both Japanese and foreign. When this form of media is citing in relation to hostesses, it is often denounced as a tool to promote the glamorization of hostessing. For this paper, I will analyze popular media and identify patterns to determine the common perception of hostesses and hosts. Then I will examine their use of emotional labor as a tool to facilitate their work. Emotional labor describes the effort to create a separation between emotions felt from those that are displayed and is often used work situations. Finally, the information I gather will be used to interpret how these professions connected to the “normal” or typical Japanese society.

To begin my research, it is necessary to gain an understanding of Japanese society through existing scholarship. I will explore the social and economic historical contexts to determine what factors influenced the emergence of these professions. Because hostess/host work was a result of geisha entertainment, I compare them in order to see what concepts remained throughout the transition. This comparison will then progress into a detailed explanation of what constitutes hostess/host work.
Afterwards, I will move into the analysis of various popular media sources. One type of primary sources I will be using are online newspaper articles and blogs as those are commonly accessible to a diverse audience around the world. Of all the sources used, the primary function of newspapers and blogs is to keep people informed because they are often produced daily to cover current events. I obtained fifteen of these sources which are approximately evenly distributed between hostesses and hosts as subjects. In addition, I use three documentaries which only feature hosts: *The Great Happiness Space*, *Justin Lee Collins: Turning Japanese*, and *Shinjuku Boys*. The first film shadows Issei, the owner of Café Rakkyo, and other hosts during their daily routines mostly at the club. *Turning Japanese* is a TV documentary that follows Justin Lee Collins on his first adventure to Japan. When the hosts transform him into one of them for a night, the audience is able to view his difficult transition as well as his thoughts about the profession. The last film, *Shinjuku Boys*, interestingly covers female-to-male hosts called *onnabe* who work at Club Marilyn. This movie also shadows the various hosts, but mostly focuses on their personal lives and feelings towards their customers given their unique circumstances. Using documentaries as an additional source is a useful way to visualize the various interactions and themes identified in written sources. Finally, I analyze *Ouran High School Host Club* and *Bloodhound* as two fictional sources depicting a particular perception of hosts and host work. *Ouran* is both an anime and manga series; *Bloodhound* is only a manga series, but has also been made into a live drama. Anime and manga, which originate from one another, have long separate histories in Japan and have carved out a permanent position within society. Therefore, it is important to understand how deeply they have been integrated into Japanese society and should be treated equally as important as the other sources based in reality.
Susan Napier outlined the social background of anime in her novel *Anime: From Akira to Howl’s Moving Castle* (2001). She first set up the contrast between anime in Japan and America by stating that anime is popular culture in Japan while a sub-culture in America. Unlike in America, anime is an omnipresent concept used throughout Japan, such as in educational learning, apparel, and commercial enterprise. Anime gained market importance in Japan after the declining rates of Japanese film production due to the competition of Hollywood. Unlike films, anime can fully offer the experience of having an alternate universe and alternative social norms. The ability of anime to freely break social and gender norms is a significant quality about anime. Additionally, the freedom given to anime provides a suitable medium to reflect on contemporary Japanese society and to display wishful ideas.

Manga has a longer history than anime in Japan beginning with woodblock prints. Sharon Kinsella takes us through the history and genres of manga in *Adult Manga* (2000). By 1990, the manga market was making three times the revenue of the domestic film industry and accounted for 22% of all publishing revenue in 1997. This simply shows its magnitude with the boundaries of Japan. However, manga had also served as the official representation of Japan to other nations abroad because many times it was the only exposure to Japan others have had. Therefore, accepting manga as a part of national culture became important to Japanese government agencies and institutions. Manga even attained its own academic field thus establishing manga as a separate cultural form from other types of media.

My analysis of these three types of sources led me to base the sections following the background of Japan’s society on themes that continued to appear. First, I describe the appearance of hosts and hostess, specifically focusing on fashion and hair. Next, I interpret the construction and manifestation of gender and gender relations among hosts/hostesses, then
between them and their customers. The last section will begin to connect the previous sections and position hosts/hostess as service workers that provide emotional labor. Each section will build upon a parallel structure between hosts and salarymen, and hostesses and housewives, which will lead to my main argument: the socially and economically constructed salaryman/housewife paradigm is internalized in hosts and hostesses leading to its reproduction in the club’s social scene and economic interactions. In the end, this work can contribute to the larger discussion of gendered studies, especially men and masculinity studies because it is not as established as women’s studies.

**Cultural and Historical Background: What is Host/Hostess Work?**

After World War II, hostess work emerged as a modernized version of traditional geisha entertainment with host work functioning as its male counterpart. Geisha sell the fantasy of Japanese authenticity to men and rigorously train in traditional Japanese music, dance and etiquette to substantiate the fantasy. Hostesses (and hosts) are modern geisha-like figures because they also aim to sell a fantasy. However, the fantasy sold transitioned from authenticity to escapism; provided is an escape from the strict rules of Japanese society (Jacobson 2008; Dalby 2008). The emergence of hostessing and hosting was facilitated by the flourishing economy after WWII, which resulted in the alteration and production of gendered roles. Japan experienced a significant economic boom due to its investment in technologies, such as automobiles and steel to consumer electronics and watches. Japanese companies created a long-standing competitive foundation that easily overshadowed competition from American and European companies (Christensen et al. 2001). Therefore, Mariko Tamanoi (1990) summarizes the 1960s can be defined as a period of rapid economic growth, which led to the expansion of capitalism.
In her article “Women’s Voices: Their Critique of the Anthropology of Japan” (1990), Tamanoi examined how the 1960s economy transformed gender roles through the analysis of various authors’ sociological and anthropological research on urban middle-class housewives. Generally, Tamanoi states that the sociological studies she references discuss the changing sex roles that accompanied the growth in the American and Japanese economies. The primary argument was that Japanese society, unlike American society, did not experience a “homogenization of sex roles”. Essentially, American women became a known entity within the public sphere while Japanese women did not. Similarly, American men’s participation in the domestic sphere increased, but the same did not occur for Japanese men. Mikiko Ashikari (2003) outlines this division of labor and space using interview she conducted with Japanese women. Ashikari argued that manifestations of gendered divisions are apparent in simple occurrences, such as the use of the Japanese terms for men (soto) and women (uchi) which mean outside of home and inside home, respectively. Derived from the dominant model of “superior men” and “subordinate women”, the women interviewed attempted to construct themselves as the “subordinate woman” in alignment with ideal gender relations despite personality deviations. Furthermore, gender stereotypes of the hardworking salaryman husband and the lazy shufu (housewife) are fostered by this gender relation ideology. Thus a hierarchal order is created and reinforced where the husband (man) is superior to the housewife (woman).

Tamanoi continues the discussion of the sexual division of labor, as well as the term *ikigai*, as justifications for the difference in the changing sex roles in Japan compared to America. Japan’s sexual division of labor effectively allots women almost complete autonomy within the domestic sphere (the family domain). *Ikigai* is a concept that encompasses the act of a woman finding self-fulfillment in marrying. A significant social difference between American
and Japanese societies is the pre-requisite of love and romance for marriage. Whereas American women tend to view romance as the primary factor in a union between a man and a woman, many women in Japan view marriage as a social necessity equivalent to a man’s career; marriage is not a romantic union. Therefore, women who either did not marry or lost their husbands were labeled as social anomalies (Tamanoi 1990). This common Japanese ideology on romance and marriage are directly relevant to the general acceptance of salarymen husbands attending hostess clubs, while housewives are subject to more scrutiny. More significance is placed on urban middle-class housewives because this group is the symbol of the “Japanese woman”. Ashikari argues that the symbolic nature of middle-class women began to emerge much earlier than the 1960s, but in the 1800s to the early 1900s. At his time, the Meiji Restoration was underway and Meiji nationalists began to assign specific domains to middle-class men and women because of the threat and simultaneous economic potential of modernization and Westernization. The women were to remain at home and protect traditional Japanese culture from Western influences. Thus, middle-class women became the symbol of “good wives and wise mothers” that all Japanese women, especially lower-class women, should emulate. According to Tamanoi, the economic growth caused the urban section of middle-class housewives to become representative “largely because urban wage earners and their families…constituted the majority by the 1960s”. However, her critique is that these women cannot be considered the “prototypical Japanese woman” from the Meiji period because the economy forced many women to also become wage-earners to help support her family’s middle-class lifestyle. Urban middle-class women’s navigation of the private and public spheres in the 1960s emerged from a historical process that was particular to that time and is not in alignment with the idea in which women maneuver solely through the domestic realm. Therefore, many middle-class Japanese women today also
navigate the public sphere by acquiring jobs. Women taking temporary positions are categorized as Office Ladies and are juxtaposed to the less ideal career woman. However, Office Ladies usually become housewives so are positioned more in the domestic realm while career women are closely tied to the public sphere. Unsurprisingly, Office Ladies are viewed more favorably than career women, leading to a perpetuation of the sexual division of labor. Tamanoi’s background illustration of the economy’s effect on the social realm begins to create a picture for the development of a social desire to escape providing the business for hostess/host professions. In summation, added stress on males to support the thriving economy and exclusivity of women in the domestic sphere generated an environment for hostess and host work to arise and cater to the needs of each gender.

As a continuation of Tamanoi’s framework, Caroline Norma (2011) argued that a market for hostesses was created by the response of middle-class men (salarymen) to the 1960s economic growth. Salarymen experienced an increasing desire for upper-class male privileges, which was made more accessible by corporate entertaining. Corporate entertaining is the company funding of workers to do after work activities, which often included visiting hostess clubs (Allison 1994). One of the amenities that became generally available was geisha entertainment, which was once only accessible to elite men (Norma 2011). However, Japan experienced an economic decline in the 1990s only larger, financially stable or growing companies that were able to provide this service, thus rendering geisha entertainment an exclusive activity once again for the elite (Allison 1994). Yet, the ever increasing desire for geisha led to what Norma described as salarymen’s perversion of the traditional practice thus leading to hostesses.

Although hostess work diverged from geisha entertainment, Ian Buruma (1984) argued that hostessing retained fundamental elements of used by geisha. He began by describing geisha
as the “ultimate human work of art” because they were playful and represented the Japanese ideal sense of beauty in all their actions. Geisha successfully did so by projecting their professional persona of the “ultimate human work of art” while simultaneously suppressing her “real-self”. Similar to Norma, Buruma states that the mentality which created traditional geisha entertainment still persisted in the salarymen, but was more vulgar than before. This transition in mentality directed the metamorphosis of the “floating world” consisting of geisha and courtesans to the nightclub hostess and bar ladies in the world of the *mizu shōbai*—the “water business” world. Nevertheless, Buruma continued to place artistic entertainment value on this new brand of women as living fantasies which is within the same categorization as geisha.

Geisha, hostesses and hosts all utilize the art of “play” and the display of a theatrical performance to entice men or women to become patrons. “Play” with geisha involved elegant flirtation and the romance was considered high art, according to Buruma. Comparatively, hostesses and hosts continue this practice, but Buruma would consider their art to not fall within the category of “high art” because their profession is not based on the portrayal of Japanese authenticity. Therefore, elegant flirtation simply became flirtation and their romance is only art as opposed to high art. Furthermore, love was considered unacceptable particularly in the upper-class and must especially be kept separate from “play” with *geisha* for multiple reasons. First, there were immense worries about rupturing the class system. Women who became *geisha* often came from the lower-class and were sold in to it as young girls to provide money for their family. The men they entertain are from the upper-class and love between these two people threatens the strict class distinction. The second, which I find to be the most relevant to work as a hostess or host, is that the geisha as a fantastical work of art can only stay so by not sustaining a real personal identity (Buruma 1984). Working as a hostess and host also necessitates the
displacement of love from “play” because of its foundational similarity to geisha. It is necessary to understand this difference between “play” and love because “play” naturally includes romance. Love is often inherently connected to romance, but that cannot be the case regarding geisha, hostesses and hosts. Their job is based on the selling of romance, which gives the appearance of love. Involving true feelings of love disrupts the achievement of success for the men and women in these professions. However, Buruma states that geisha experienced difficulty maintaining this distinction and were not always successful; similarly, hosts and hostess had the same dilemma.

According to Buruma, the action of “play” is garners more importance than sex within the Japanese society. In order to fully outline the concept of “play”, he explains the historical understanding about men, sex and love and in order to understand contemporary interpretations of this relationship in Japan. In congruence with Tamanoi, Buruma showed that the lack of love and romance in marriages of the 1960s also applied to marriages in the 17th century. Men were allowed a separation between the family life and love life, which limited their responsibilities to providing for their families and doing their duty while not shaming their ancestors. Furthermore, separating family from love consequently excludes love from the sex between a wife and husband. Marital sex becomes one out of duty and necessity. It is a wife’s duty to produce children and provide their husband with sexual satisfaction. For husbands, sex becomes necessary to pass on their lineage. Marital sex can therefore be equated to work. On the other hand, the distinction of sex within the family life and love life results in the inclusion of love only in extra-marital affairs. Contrasted to marital sex, extra-marital sex is based on desire. Women in these affairs do not have a legitimizing title to held to the same standards as wives. Being mindful of the historical role of sex in each sphere of a man’s life brings understanding as
to why it is acceptable to create professions directed at men’s desire. These types of professions are commercialized extra-marital “play” based on a man’s right to have passionate affairs not dictated by societal needs and have virtually no impact on the family life.

Because men were historically allowed a separation between family life and love life, men were not socially stigmatized for going to hostess clubs and other establishments selling sexual services to them. The ideology allowing that distinction transcended into contemporary times (Buruma 1984) and became institutionalized through the emergence of corporate entertaining. However, women were not given the same luxury in the past and or in the present. Women were confined to the subordinate housewife and continue to do so by accepting or actively ignore their husbands’ after-work play. In the mid-1960s, host work emerged in response to their repressed need to escape. Hosts aimed to create a space where women can escape social constraints by assuming an alternative life during their free time. Host club hours range from the afternoon to early morning (Takeyama 2008). The basis of hosting is no different than hostessing in that the concepts of “play” and selling of romance are all used similarly. By 2008 there were at least 200 host clubs all throughout Japan that were located in cities, such as Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya. Today, Tokyo alone has hundreds of host clubs that compete to attract customers and maintain their patronage (Takeyama 2008).

Although the concept behind host work stems from hostesses and therefore, geisha, the first host club opened as a dance hall where the male dancers were called hosts. Clients were primarily upper-class wives and wealthy widows (Takeyama 2008). Over the years, the profession evolved into what it is known as today. The clientele continued to be wealthy women, but they are now middle-class housewives and daughters, and sex industry workers, which includes hostesses (Sachiko Chung 2009). Hosting became a possibility due to the increase in
disposable income for women mainly during the 1980s bubble economy. During this time period, financial, service, and leisure industries were being created in which the numerous open positions were filled by women. Of the many uses for this income, women could use it to attain greater self-fulfillment in romance and sexual satisfaction, which was channeled through hosts. Still, women faced more criticism and shame when it became known they visited host clubs (Takeyama 2008) in contrast to men who are able to freely patron hostess clubs without shame.

Hosts and hostesses use romance and flirtation—characteristics of “play”—as tools to facilitate their ability to provide royalty treatment to their customers. They are at the service of their client and must listen to their every word, maintain conversation flow, serve drinks, light cigarettes, and pamper their egos. Such care is intended to relax the customer by allowing the possibility to forget reality as well as the problems associated with it (Allison 1994; Jackson 1976). Lea Jacobson further substantiates the importance of “play”, specifically in hostess work, in her memoir Bar Flower (2008) through her depiction of salarymen—the primary customers at hostess clubs. Typical salarymen aspire to work at successful corporations once graduated from university. A career path is created which leads to a sixty hour work week at a stable job position until retirement. The salaryman track is regarded as a noble and selfless pursuit where he will be simultaneously providing for his family and serving his country’s economy. The praise and duties dedicated to these men are identical to those given to the 17th century men Buruma described. As I mentioned previously, hostesses and geisha cater to each of these men but focus on different aspects. Hostesses come in to the lives of salarymen to sell the fantasy of escape from the rigid rules of Japanese society, while geisha sell the fantasy of Japanese authenticity through entertainment using traditional Japanese music and dance (Jacobson 2008).
The value of fantasy over sex in this industry is further substantiated by Jacobson’s observations of the manifestation of “play”, or the power of suggestion, in the market value of particular establishments in the *mizu shōbai*. Venues that provide the most sexual services tend to be cheaper than those with the least. The most profitable clubs are simplistic, stylish and elegant, exclusive, authentic and sell a degree of romance. Furthermore, suggestion can be expressed through speech/language and actions of hostessing, such as the simple task of serving a drink in which, with practice, it can become an erotic spectacle. Other venues selling sex in the *mizu shōbai* are pink salons where men are given oral sex and soaplands where women give men a “bath” and perform sexual acts on them (Allison 1994). According to an article in *The Tokyo Reporter*, pink salon prices have dropped to less than $150 for 40 minutes. Maggie McNeill in her news article “A Visit to Soapland”, states that average prices for soaplands are around $135. In comparison, prices for services per client an hour at a hostess club can range from $300 to $500 in the high rank clubs and $80 to $120 in the lower ranked.

In the beginning of Jacobson’s memoir, she described hostess work as a game that “many men spend obscene amounts of money on in order to play” (2008:2). A vital feature in the maintenance of the game is the persistent mysteriousness of the hostess or host. The job is dependent on mystery because a customer has no motivation to return once all is known about a host or hostess. A push-and-pull relationship develops between host/hostess and customer where the customer attempts to demystify while host/hostess strives to maintain a barrier. The idea of hostess work being a game can also be applied to host work because there is no difference in the implementation of the game. Another required skill to successfully participate in the game is acting. Rhacel Salazar Parrenas (2011) only discusses the significance and intricacies of acting in regards to hostesses; however, it should not be viewed as a skill confined to hostesses, but as a
quality also employed by hosts. To be a successful actor, hosts and hostesses participate in body, aesthetic and emotional labor to increase their marketability. Parrenas continues on to explain that in addition to language skills, it is necessary to be familiar with social norms that guide the relations in the club. Combined, these skills can effectively de-commercialize their flirtation resulting in customers believing they are being desired for more than their money. Hostess/host and customer then fall into what Parrenas calls the game of courtship, which involves a play on the power dynamics within the relationship. For hostesses and hosts, the objective is to receive gifts from their customers without having sex in order to prove their sexual desirability, power and skills. Sex with customers is often explicitly prohibited by club owners and managers, yet the possibility is still very real. If sex occurs without material gain, then the customer is dominating the relationship. Parrenas argued that for a hostess/host to win the game, they must increase the emotional attachment customers have towards them while secretly maintaining an emotional distance. This feature is addressed by a host in *The Great Happiness Space*. He describes the ease of customers tossing hosts aside when the customer gets sex from him. She has achieved her goal so no longer has a need to return to the host club because he cannot give her anything else. In summation, Saori Matsuda says that hosts and hostesses provide a type of customer service “different from that of sex venues; it is not a sexual service but a service largely centering on conversation” (Norma 2011:3). Therefore, sex does not provide hosts or hostesses with any benefits once it is given to customers.

Hostesses in particular can work in many different venues including supper clubs, nightclubs, cabarets, and bars. Beyond the generic obligation to pamper customers, hostesses’ work requirements vary dependent on the type of venue and the ranking. In general, venues are ranked based on the social and economic status of the customers, appearance and atmosphere of
the venue, prices of food and drinks, and the type of hostesses and hosts working there (Jackson 1976). In Nightwork (1994), Anne Allison outlines the structure of hostess clubs as well as the character traits of hostesses relative to the club ranking. From what she observed during her ethnographic research, high-ranking clubs tended to have smaller rooms and limited seating availability. The hostesses employed are usually under the age of twenty-three, are beautiful, educated, and fashionable. These hostesses must be charming, witty, worldly, flirtatious and sexually suggestive; however, their comments and actions must still be indirect and guarded. This returns to the idea that mysteriousness is a necessity. In contrast, lower-ranking hostess clubs are sub-divided based on their size. Larger clubs generally lack an intimate environment and the services provided are more systemized. Smaller-sized clubs tend to be cozier especially because hostesses and clients are often more acquainted with each other. Hostesses at lower-ranking clubs, in comparison to the higher-ranking clubs, are more likely to be demographically diverse. This means that older, plumper, brash, and less educated, sophisticated, fashionable, and conventionally beautiful hostesses will be employed at these clubs. Nevertheless, all hostesses (and hosts) must effectively multi-task in order to be a successful hostess which is based on the customer’s happiness.

In addition to the entrance fee, customers are also charged an hourly fee. Despite the expensive entrance fees, hosts’ and hostesses’ salaries are independent of this cash flow. Instead, payments are based on the amount of drinks sold regardless of the length of time working at that venue (Allison 1994). Because their money is dependent on bar tabs, hosts tend to go out on the streets and actively persuade customers to the host club (Spacey 2012). On the other hand, it is not always considered proper for women to do street recruitments. It is often men working within the club, possibly as a manager, that would do that type of work. Still, it is not unknown for
hostesses to take on this job. The blog *Being a Hostess in Japan* described that the action of a hostess going to the streets to bring in customers is “newbie duty” at some clubs. Lea Jacobson describes a similar experience, but not within the context of her being a new hostess to the club. The club she worked at lied within *yakuza* territory and the owner essentially rented a portion of the street where they can do street recruitments. Jacobson was made to stand at that spot and not move from it while on duty. Customers must go to her and take a flyer, but she cannot pursue the customer.

Another was in which hosts compensate for their method of payment is by featuring extravagant champagne calls. When a woman buys an expensive bottle of champagne, all the hosts in the club gather around her and sing, dance, or clap while she chugs a cup of the champagne. A champagne call guarantees a woman being the main focus for all the male hosts in the club for five or six minutes. For this luxury, women pay from $200 to $1500. The competition to make customers pay more fosters a high turnover rate so that clubs only keep the popular workers. This is especially true for hostesses (“Japan for the Uninvited” 2006; John).

Hostess work in particular has been so deeply glamourized in popular media that many girls and women have the false perception that they are guaranteed wealth and possibly fame. Kumiko Fujimura-Fanselow (2009) frames this as an illusion for young girls derived from television sitcoms featuring hostesses building successful careers, best-selling novels written by hostesses on money management and the art of conversation, and of course, the fashion magazines (Tabuchi 2009). Eri Momoka who receives fan mail regularly explained that “to a little girl, a hostess is like a modern-day princess”. Still, hostesses receiving fame and high-salaries, similar to Momoka, work in the elite establishments which are often located in the
Ginza district. The majority of hostesses work in the non-elite areas, therefore, only a few individuals are fortunate (Ezawa 2009; Suzuki 2009).

**The Look**

*Host Boys*

A major theme media representations of hosts presented was their “look”. In the following section, I will examine hair and fashion as particular aspects of a look which constitutes a “host”. The following photos are used as a visual aid to compare fictional and real representations of hosts to determine what the manga/anime creators viewed as defining qualities of a host that should be translated into their work. I use images featuring hosts from my two fictional sources, *Bloodhound* and *Ouran High School Host Club*, while the portrait is taken from an article written by W. David Marx. Then I will further the comparison by examining descriptions of hosts’ look in various news and blog articles, as well as the three documentaries I obtained for this research. I aim to decipher what are commonly understood to be particular aspects of a Japanese host.

*Figure 1: Hosts from Ouran High School Host Club (2010 Website: http://devoutlaziness.blogspot.com)*
Among the media analyzed, the physical appearance of host boys was the most frequently mentioned topic. Social factors, such as their customers’ attire, an idol chosen to model, or styles consistent with a certain musical genre, have a large influence on how hosts style themselves.
Fashion is an important feature of host work because female customers are first visually drawn to hosts before they enter the club and fall for their personalities. In her article, Laura Miller (2003) explains the increasing consumption of beauty products by Japanese males as a way to channel the desires of women. In the world of hosts, the Japanese male host body is transformed into an object that undergoes alterations using “aesthetic communication”—men acquiring female sensibilities and bodily sensualities as a form of self-expression. Hosts’ bodies function to fuel the club’s economy. Of the hosts’ appearance, hair and fashion are the principle factors taken in to consideration by the various media outlets.

Between hair and fashion, hair is the principal distinguishing factor for hosts. The most media attention was situated on hair being dyed and extremely styled. The process of creating the perfect hair was documented in Jake Clennell’s film *The Great Happiness Space*. Clennell shadows the owner of Cafè Rakkyo, Issei, who also works as a host, through his everyday life and his job at the club. The documentary begins by showing the quiet scenery of Osaka at dusk where people are settling down in their homes for the night. Clennell cuts to Issei’s apartment where he just wakes up and proceeds to dress for his night at work. However, the only portion of the routine filmed in detail is Issei sitting on the floor in front of mirror blow-drying his blonde-dyed hair and using his fingers as a comb. A few minutes later, the setting shifts to Cafè Rakkyo where a different set of hosts styling their hair have become the subjects. Each host is individually observed as they are acutely attentive to the appearance of their hair. All stare in to the mirror to perfect the way their hair falls in their face, how much volume it has, and how straight it is.

*Turning Japanese* and *Shinjuku Boys* are particularly important because both feature untraditional hosts. The subject of the first film is a British man while the latter is *onnabe* or
female-to-male hosts. Analyzing people not traditionally bound within the group that typically characterizes hosts—male sex, Japanese, straight—provides an insight as to what aspects of hosts are deemed important through the replication of these traits. For these situations, the trait being replicated is the notorious host hair. When Collins appeared in front of the camera to show off his new host-look, the most dramatic change was his hair. Naturally, he has wavy, shoulder-length hair, which was straightened for his first day of work. He also donned a black suit, but his new hair style became the center of attention. On the other hand, *Shinjuku Boys* established the necessity of hair styling perfection through the club rules in which the first is a list of prohibited hair styles: no bleach, no blonde dye, and no crew-cuts because the hair must be able to have a few inches of volume. When the manager was interviewing a potential host, the first thing noticed and extensively discussed was the need for him to change his hair because it was short. The manager explained in detail what the routine should be in order for the hair to grow out and still appear neat. Therefore, not only was it important to the shows the significance of hair. Because of these few prominent scenes, the significance of hair was fully translated in to their host work when they became imitations of traditional hosts.

News articles and blogs often associated hosts with anime and manga characters. John in “Mr. Right Could be Waiting Just Around the Corner. Every Corner”, went as far as to say that hosts look like “rejected Final Fantasy protagonists”; essentially, live action anime characters. However, host boys who are being defined by anime-like (hair) styles also influence creators to make anime characters resemble hosts. Two anime/manga series featuring hosts are *Ouran High School Host Club* (Figure 1) and *Bloodhound* (Figure 2). Although both use hosts and host work as the main subjects, their plots and portrayal of the characters differ. *Ouran* is a satirical anime
that positions the hosts as wealthy private school boys who created the host club to pass the time. The anime solidifies this point by opening each episode with a slightly sarcastic narration:

*The Ouran host club is where the school’s handsomest boys with too much time on their hands entertain young ladies who also have way too much time on their hands.*

On the other hand, *Bloodhound* presents the hosts as vampires wrongly accused of kidnapping by Rion, the main female character who happens to be a high school student. During their adventures together, the host boys continue to prove their innocence to Rion and even gain her affection. Among the differences, there are many similarities between the two anime as well as between real hosts. In relation to appearance, the color of the hosts’ hair is always an identifiable feature and is used more often to describe the host than personality traits. However, it is necessary to highlight that only the No.1 hosts are detailed in this descriptive manner. The other hosts are generally called by their names. Therefore, in *Ouran*, Tamaki Suou or the “prince” is distinguished by his blonde hair and Suou of *Bloodhound* is known for his red hair. *Ouran* goes further in its portrayal of hosts through the female character Haruhi Fujioka. Because of a debt she must pay to the host club, the hosts take her in and transform her into a male host so she can earn the necessary money. The most significant transformation was done to her which, at first, appeared shaggy and looked unkept. After her makeover, her hair was cut and neatly combed in place.

In addition to hair, hosts’ fashion choices are another characteristic element of the profession. Among the pictures, the style chosen by the hosts’ are fairly identical to each other, which functions to maintain a sense of uniformity. One news article touched upon an issue with
having such similar appearances: the inability to view hosts as individuals as opposed to a collective. Although they superficially appear to lack individual characteristics, a closer examination reveals distinctions among host boys. Hair is used to emulate their personalities or personalities they wish to project through the way they choose to style it. Furthermore, individuality is established by hierarchies in the club, which are formed on two levels. First, there is the divide between hosts with the most sales and those with fewer sales. After each month, sales are calculated and the top selling host for that month is determined. Outside, all the hosts’ pictures are put on display for the public to view and are numbered according to the amount of sales. Divisions also occur between older hosts and younger hosts. Such categorizations manifest themselves in the hosts’ appearance to distinguish position in the club. In group photographs, the highest ranked host will always be placed in the front-middle and will wear an outfit different from other hosts (Marx 2010). Figure 3 illustrates this arrangement by the top host wearing a shiny black suit and no tie or bow tie to differentiate himself from other hosts. Additionally, the other hosts have their shirts buttoned up to their collars, but he has a few buttons undone to show off his chest. Even though his status allows him to make these deviations in his appearance to accentuate himself, his overall style still falls within the collective appearance of the group. In this case, all but one is wearing black dress pants and jacket and a white shirt. The one outlier in this picture is that of the cross-dressing man in white. He represents the outcome of the second hierarchical classification between older and younger hosts. It was explained in a news article that many times, younger hosts are made by older hosts to appear “odd” in group photos.

Within the club, these differences in styles to accentuate rank are not visible. In both *Turning Japanese* and *The Great Happiness Space*, the hosts wear black suits with a white
button down shirt. In addition, all the hosts in *Shinjuku Boys* are also wearing suits. The only difference is that they are wearing various colors, such as white, red, light blue and brown. However, these color variations do not distinguish one host from another based on ranking. Instead, these hosts are simply choosing a suit to wear for that day. Among all the sources on hosts, *Shinjuku Boys* is the only one that exhibits personal variety in fashion that clearly separates the hosts into individuals, yet maintains the group dynamic by wearing the same type of outfit: a suit.

*Ouran High School Host Club* and *Bloodhound* both depict the collectivity of hosts’ fashion, but also incorporate the top host’s ability to be an individual. Figure 1 shows all the hosts in *Ouran* are wearing matching school uniforms, but to create the hierarchy, Tamaki Suou is posed differently by sitting in a plush chair. Suou of *Bloodhound* is illustrated more distinctly by his fully unbuttoned white shirt and blood-red cape. Additionally, the *Ouran* anime delves further into host differentiation using appearances to match personalities. In the sixth episode, the host club’s vice president and accountant Kyouya Ootori explained how the host club consisted of a variety of personalities to satisfy all the women they entertain. Each host has been designated a type: the cool, little-devil, princely, strong silent, boy Lolita and natural types. A child apprentice joins the club and is given the naughty type, a rendition of the boy Lolita type. Although the boy’s attitude fits the category, his appearance did not. Therefore, Band-Aids, bumps and bruises, and drawn on scars officially created his naughty type look.

The concept of a group look hosts abide by is a model equally accepted by salarymen (white-collar office worker) who are defined by their suits and briefcases. However, not all men that inhabit each world—the *mizu shōbai* and the “normal” society—fully adhere to a collective identity. As a result, a tension is created between “the whole” and the “individual”; a tension
commonly demonstrated in the Japanese collectivist society. In the conventional society, the
typical Japanese male would normally become a salaryman who are symbols of economic
success (Condry). Deviation from this path can be considered a threat to Japan as a society and
its economic prosperity. Comparatively, hosts provide services that contribute to the economic
success of the host club. Therefore, hosts can essentially be viewed as the bastardized salarymen
of the mizu shōbai. Because it is the Japanese male that takes on the task of supporting the
country, it is logical that within the mizu shōbai sub-world, male hosts would embody the
nationalist symbol. This could explain why hosts experience the collectivist/individualist tension
more acutely than hostesses.

**Hostesses**

Similar to hosts, media tended to place acute focus on the appearance of hostesses.
Therefore, this section will examine what features of their appearance warranted the most
attention and host they were discussed. In their portrayal in media, hostesses exhibit a sense of
uniformity among their fashion choices, yet more variation is apparent in comparison to hosts.
Lisa from the blog “Tokyo Mango” summarizes the general appearance of a hostesses being a
woman with “[l]ong voluptuous wavy hair, light skin, big doe eyes, fake lashes, [and] silky
loungey dresses.” Based on multiple photos I have found, hostesses’ hair tends to be either wavy
or curly and the majority dye their hair golden blonde. While dying the hair blonde is generally
common for hostesses, not all put volume in their hair or give it waves and curls. Many
straighten their hair and frequently have minimal volume.
Although, the hair styling of a hostess is more extravagant than a typical Japanese woman, hostesses themselves do not appear to place a great importance on their hair as hosts do. Unlike hosts, hostesses do not use their hair as a tool for identification nor as their primary facet. Instead, their hair is simply meant to complement their fashion. Although the Figure 4 shows the hostesses in similar white tops and various hair styles, within the club, hostesses’ fashion is more unique while still following dress protocol. This is in contrast to hosts where the “menu” differentiation them and then inside the club, they are more uniform. In any case, styled hair may be a necessary feature within the hostess style, but clothing and accessories are more important to the hostess identity and useful for future enterprises.

In the majority of the newspaper articles and blogs discussing hostesses, hair was never mentioned while clothing was continuously emphasized. When hostesses were marching in Tokyo to protest “unpaid wages, sexual harassment and tough conditions”, an article from *The Independent* only described the feminine appearance of the hostess in contrast to their aggressive, protestor role: “attractive women in cocktail dresses” and “marched unsteadily on
high heels” (McNeill & Matsumoto 2010). Another blog described what it means to become a hostess by summarizing the role of the job and their appearance as a “hot, sexy, ostentatious lady in a brightly colored tight suit and four-inch heels” (Being a Hostess in Japan). Additionally, Nobue Suzuki, an anthropology professor at a Japanese university, equated the hostess lifestyle to that of a celebrity, which is primarily characterized by fancy material items: tiaras, gowns, and perfumes (The Editors, 2009). Hair, once again, is not mentioned as a key feature of a hostess.

Various authors discussed the possibility of a hostess becoming an entrepreneur using the “hostess look” as a basis for her endeavors. Eri Momoka is a prime instance of a woman making use of her title as a hostess to start a TV career and a clothing and accessory line (Tabuchi 2009). Fashion continues to be used as a tool hostesses utilize in their entrepreneurial aspirations through the creation of fashion magazines featuring and dedicated to hostess style. The leading magazine that targets women who work as hostesses and uses real hostesses as models is Koakuma Ageha. With the wide circulation of Koakuma Ageha and related magazines, hostess style began to influence street trend where women adopted the looks of a hostess regardless if they work at the clubs. The new street trend is called agejo (Lisa 2009). In these cases as well, it is illustrated that clothing takes precedence over hair styling.

Generally, it appears that the continued hostess fashion trend is driven by socioeconomic forces. Women who become hostesses tend to come from a lower socioeconomic background and are ushered into the profession through economic motives. W. David Marx in “Kyabajo Japan” (2009) used researcher Miura Atsushi’s findings to explain why women have increasingly been entering hostess work. One interpretation is that the recession economically destabilized men, making it more difficult for women to secure a middle-class lifestyle. Many authors, including Marx, also stated the need for university students to save up money for tuition or
personal funds. These college women are usually part-time hostesses as opposed to career women whom are mainly those vying for the middle class lifestyle. Many of the career girls subscribe to the yankii (rebel) subculture, which is bound within the lower-middle and working class communities, as well as the gyaru subculture. He goes on to say that female yankii are more likely to read Koakuma Ageha and another magazine featuring “deep gyaru” style called Egg instead of others directly geared towards the middle-class style (D. Marx 2009). Therefore, these women are subscribing to both the yankii and gyaru subcultures. Gyaru girls are known for their heavy makeup, elaborate clothes and excessive amounts of accessories. They place more importance on their style, image and how they portray themselves to others (Park 2011). According to Atsushi, the yankii/gyaru female’s values are conducive to hostessing because of their willingness to rebel against common societal ideology and their obsession with appearances. In summation, hostess fashion choices are formulated from the lower-class women’s reinterpretation of middle-class women’s style to fit within their socioeconomic background.

Another important beauty feature listed by “Tokyo Mango” is white-face, which is also partially derived from a socioeconomic background. Mikiko Ashikari (2003) states that the majority of middle-class women—which refers to women married to or expecting to marry a salaryman and living in an urban setting—wear foundation to make their faces look whiter than the skin’s usual complexion when in public. In the Taisho period (1912-1926), traditional white-lead powder was substituted for non-lead white powder allowing for a more translucent, pure white complexion and the ability for it to be worn for everyday life. However, Westernization also introduced other forms of makeup along with non-lead white powder, such as eye shadow and false eyelashes. The prevalent discourse at the time was that a proper middle-class woman—
a housewife—was to only wear foundation to create the everyday white face. In contrast, eyeliner, eye shadow and false eyelashes were associated with bar hostesses and dancers. After World War II, white face officially transitioned from being “white” to skin color—foundation being the official makeup terminology (Ashikari 2003).

The acquisition of middle-class styling techniques into a line of work considered to be lower class equates the hostesses with middle-class women. However, the class difference forces a differentiation in which the hostesses are left obscured from previously defined categories. Therefore, hostesses can be viewed as the creators of an alternate section of middle-class women within the world of the mizu shōbai. As a whole, the look designed for hostesses and hosts transform the portrayal of the typical housewife and salaryman through the reapplication of fashion and the ideology supporting these styles.

**Gender Formation within the Club**

*Hosts*

While examining the various media representations of hosts and hostesses, all depicted each as performers of ideal male and female genders, which are based on their customers’ desires. Therefore, hosts behave according to the interpreted desires of women. In his blog, Marko Akinaga (2011) explained that women want someone to listen to her and her feelings, thoughts, problems, gossip, etc. He inferred that men inherently have difficulty focusing on these discussion topics women desire. Therefore, hosts fulfill women’s desire for this attention. Tomohiro Osaki (2010) goes further on to say that hosts are compelled to aid these women in their escape from reality as gift to the women contributing to their club sales. This motivation is supposedly solely derived from “pure kindness”. While working as a host for one night, Justin Lee Collins in “Turning Japanese” is often told to make sure the customer laughs and must raise
her ego by praising her for choosing a particular host. Additionally, the other hosts always called the customer “princess” when explaining proper host etiquette to Collins. The women’s experience is further enhanced through the hosts’ attention to aesthetics especially regarding drinks. When holding the glass, hosts must place one hand under the glass and the other near the top with only the fingertips providing support. Cheering with the “princess” also requires the host to hold the glass lower; it is impolite to raise the glass higher than the customer. Similar rules translate into the other documentary, *Shinjuku Boys*, in which the hosts must hold a bottle at the bottom when pouring drinks for their customers. These hosts’ extreme attentiveness is further demonstrated by the need for them to turn ice in a glass if it has a hole so it does not face the customer. These instances portray the importance of the hosts’ consideration for aesthetic pleasure when attempting to create the near perfect fantasy for women.

Additionally, *The Great Happiness Space* illustrates the hosts’ ability to provide women with their fantasy through verbal interactions. One host in the film describes the routinized process to gain the love of their customers that begins with cute gestures. Providing such affection will eventually lead to women being more candid and trusting. At this point, the relationship between the host and customer is more than acquaintances, giving hosts the ability to begin scolding her. Gaish from *Shinjuku Boys* directly addresses his customer about him scolding her, “It makes you feel better when I’m mean to you. It makes you pull yourself together.” Scolding, according to a host, is not viewed negatively by the women. Instead, scolding is viewed as a form of affection that legitimizes their relationship because the hosts are looking out for the customer’s well-being. As a result, she increasingly feels able to depend on him (Clennell 2006).
The “de-masculinized” role hosts play for their customers, both in actions and the maintenance of their appearances, cause them to be stereotyped as soushokukei-danshi, or herbivorous boys. Many Japanese people use this popular derogatory term for men accused of lacking virility. Men’s virility is often defined from perceptions of their inability to pursue women and the excessive concern with their appearance (Osaki 2010). Japanese citizens group hosts within the “herbivorous boys” category based on the latter criterion. However, the intense competitive nature of the host industry forces hosts to be noticeable in order to physically appeal to women and eventually make them patrons through their personality. Therefore, “excessive concern” for their appearance is a mandatory part of the job that contributes to the men’s survival as a host. Interestingly, after explaining the misconception of hosts being soushokukei-danshi, Osaki makes the comment, “But the good news is they all really do love women.” In fact, he supports his statement by quoting another host saying they must like women in order to be successful. Juxtaposing the stereotyped soushokukei-danshi alongside these quotes begins to paint the portrait of a host as a feminized, homosexual male. Increasingly problematic is the lack of a separation between homosexuality and femininity. Instead, the feminine nature is inherent within homosexuality.

While only Osaki made an overt implication conflating hosts’ sexual identity and their performed gender, other authors, and quotes from hosts, implied that host work is not defined by the typical show of masculinity. Japanese masculinity is valued based on productivity, characterized by dominance and is embodied in the salaryman (Condry 2011). Now, negligence has become a trait attached to typical Japanese masculinity. Continuously emphasized is the lack of attention salaryman males pay to women, which leads them to seek fulfillment from hosts. Hosts’ deviation from that masculine role is caused by their efforts to counteract the neglect
women feel. Within the gender binary, relinquishing masculinity automatically means the acquirement of femininity. *Ouran High School Host Club* literally uses this concept by basing the anime/manga on a girl joining the host club and fooling her female customers into thinking she is a male host. Throughout the series, the maintenance of her female gender and heterosexual sexual identities fosters the idea that host work can be done well by a woman because she has understands women’s needs. However, host work, as a whole, does not clearly translate as distinctly masculine or feminine. The techniques used by hosts are a mixture of what is considered stereotypical of either gender identity. Stereotypical feminine behaviours hosts adopt include giving cute nicknames to customers, making cute gestures, and the way in which they must hold glasses and pour from bottles. Hosts play on the hierarchy established between the superior male and subordinate female. By reversing this role where they become the subordinate male and the customer is the superior female. As the relationship between the host and customer develops, this dynamic begins to revert. For example, hosts reaffirm their masculine role when their relationship ascends to the level of scolding. Nevertheless, the designated dominant/subordinate roles oscillate for the remainder of the relationship because of the combined effeminate actions and the masculine interactions. When hosts reach the scolding level of their relationship, they are simultaneously establishing financial stability by enticing the woman enough to be a patron. Unsurprisingly, the threshold for where the relationship becomes fairly solidified is at the same point hosts acquire a masculine role. Issei in *The Great Happiness Space* comments that the financial aspect is not only structured from their customers’ bar tabs, but also when the women want to financially worship them. His argument about a customer’s need to spend money on hosts stems from women wanting to show that they can anything for
their men. He continues on to say that many Japanese women feel similarly, but that longing is denied.

**Hostesses**

As I examined each source related to hostesses, it became clear that a successful hostess is defined by her femininity and therefore, her subservience to male customers. *Being a Hostess in Japan* directly confronts the gender requirements enforced on female hostesses simply by their customers being salarymen. With middle-class women increasingly entering the work force, the more women began to deviate from the traditional mold created for them by the male dominated society. Traditional women are ideal wives and are characterized by docility, seriousness, responsibility, and being good mothers that will raise quality Japanese children. Many authors, including from this blog, note that *geisha* are the classic embodiment of these traits, but Norma (2011) explained how the economy constrained the availability of this perfected performance of femininity. Consequently, hostess work was created at a time when femininity was in high demand. However, men are not one-dimensional in that they only seek out women worthy of marriage; women considered unacceptable to wed, but provide simple fun or play are also greatly enjoyed. These dual desires resulted in the simultaneous embodiment of both types of women in hostesses. Being the wife-type can instill a sense of commitment, but it is widely stereotyped that salarymen spend a significant amount of time away from home. Thus, the second female identity balances out the negative consequence of being the wifely figure. The fun woman entices the customer causing them to feel a desire to return, while the wife-like portrayal keeps the customer committed to a particular hostess. Together the dual feminine identities of a hostess are the primary contributions to developing a fantasy world for their male customers; a
world where they have two types of women in one and who will be subservient, which reinforces his masculinity.

Interestingly, the dichotomization of hostesses’ femininity is paralleled in women that are navigating ordinary Japanese society. Normally, women would follow a path that would eventually lead them to becoming housewives. When entering the labor force, women who become Office Ladies, such as a secretary or clerk, are choosing the life track which will eventually lead them to marrying a salaryman and becoming a full-time housewife. However, when choosing to become career women (female equivalent of salaryman), women are stereotyped as “unfeminine”; therefore, undesirable for marriage because they are infiltrating the male-sphere (Ashikari 2003). In summation, women in the mizu shōbai and the “normal” society are subjected to gendered value judgments that determine their marriageability based on the femininity they project to the public.

Additionally, the appearance of a hostess directly descends from gender relations in Japanese society. Ashikari claims that the ideology of gender relations is produced and reproduced through its connection with the material world. This material connection is apparent in many areas of Japanese society including white face as make-up for the soto—outside world—which I discussed previously in socioeconomic terms. White face emerged as a social norm for both male and female nobility and then transformed from a purely class-based feature into a female gendered, classed-based characteristic. Throughout the period when white face began to transform into the contemporary foundation, it managed to remain a symbolism for ideal womanhood. Ashikari argues that white face’s traditional symbolic power became pervasive by becoming a normal occurrence. She continues this argument by differentiated the purpose of foundation in the West and in Japan. Foundation functions to improve appearances
and is for social satisfaction in the West. Japanese use foundation to achieve the white face that has become standardized by the middle-class Meiji women. White face is believed to be the “normal and right” complexion of Japanese women and this idea is the basis of makeup in Japan. Additionally, the standardization of white face, meaning all Japanese women present the same complexions, unifies middle-class women and makes them appear “normal” in public. Middle class women sustain their status through the honorable representation of herself and family in the public sphere. By not wearing foundation in public, thus looking abnormal, a woman will consequently give the impression that she does not appreciate values of traditional feminine virtues and is challenging the social norms and gender ideology.

Finally, Ashikari discusses the effect of women’s symbolic white face on salarymen. She argues that middle-class men cannot project their “superior” image without women taking on the role of a subordinate. The reliance men have on the actions of women, thus allows women to have power over the men. Likewise, relationships between hostesses and their male customers demonstrate the same type of power dynamic. Earlier, I elaborated on the ability of a hostess to incorporate two variations of feminine identity which emanate from subordination. However, both are used to elicit a specific reaction from males and by utilizing each simultaneously, hostesses successfully gain control over males to benefit themselves professionally and therefore, financially. With all things considered, Ashikari urges readers to understand that men and women are organized in a gender ideology that is renegotiated through social economic relations in the material world. These connections are associated in the social realm, but are economically dependent in some way. It is noticeable in the relationship the salaryman and housewife, and the hostess and salaryman, where each is between a man and woman (social), but has a varying economic affiliation. As a result, a renegotiation of the gender ideology becomes apparent,
particularly when examining the female roles. She continues on to explain that gender is not a static concept, but is the “product of both the reflection of a dominant symbolic construction and the reflection of the actual relationship between men and women in everyday life” (Ashikari 2003:31).

**Club Customers**

Media representation and judgment of host/hostess club workers is unbalanced, but becomes more distinctly disproportionate concerning their customers. All of the media outlets I analyzed focused primarily on female customers if customers were a topic of discussion. Additionally, female customers were given harsher criticism. Of the newspapers and blogs, the main inquiry about female customers was what was compelling them to seek out host clubs. Every answer given was related to their subservient position to men or the lack of love and romance from men. Manabu Numata comments in an interview that he believes women attend for the hierarchy reversal where the men serve them and they also desire a conversation. Worse, he rationalized that women, particularly those that financially worship hosts, are mentally unstable (Marx 2010). Similarly, Miki Tanikawa (1996) states that women are willing to pay exorbitant fees of a host club because being catered to a man is a “rare treat” for Japanese women. She substantiates her claim by quoting Yoko Tamija, a professor of women’s studies, who said that women are not considered equal partners; therefore, Japanese men—single or married—do not feel obligated to carefully listen to the problems of women. On the other hand, Akinaga (2011) argues in his blog that women visit host clubs because they have substituted a fulfilling love life to be career women. “[M]odern career women with well paid jobs and high up positions in the Japanese market” have become “lonely souls” because they do not have time for dating or meeting men. Akinaga essentially states that out of desperation, women turn to host
clubs in which they pay men to give them attention. The manga *Bloodhound* even portrays the only female customer given a storyline as a callous woman that objectifies the hosts and equates them to servants. As her life story unfolds, it is revealed that her demeanor and treatment of the hosts originated from her father scorning her for being female. This is another situation in which men are driving women to host clubs. In *Turning Japanese*, Collins, who is British and completely unfamiliar with Japanese culture, is shocked by the purpose of host and hostess clubs, but cannot understand women falling into this system. He appears distraught after leaving, saying that women do not need to be customers at places like the host club because they are beautiful. According to Collins, men spend their lives trying to attract women with their beauty. However, he can fully comprehend men attending clubs, such as hostess clubs, but labels these men as “inept and ridiculous”.

Although it is well-known that customers of host clubs are wives and daughters of rich men, the majority of women that patron the clubs today are hostesses (John). Hostesses (as well as other women in the sex industry) are also able to afford the expenses of the club, but are able to openly be seen at the club unlike rich housewives and daughters. They must maintain a veil of secrecy because it is not socially acceptable to be in the nightlife, especially the red-light district. Considering the backgrounds of hostesses and housewives, Tamija sees that “much of their time is spent pleasing men” and they are possibly more feminine than the average woman out of necessity. These characteristics elucidate a commonality between the two worlds that helps us to understand why these two types of women frequently visit host clubs. A hostess Tanikawa interviewed explained that her purpose for going to the club is to relieve stress through the same pampered treatment she must provide for her customers. Furthermore, David Marx (2009) argues that hostesses’ second identity as a fun woman, which stigmatizes them as unmarriageable,
explains why they allow themselves to spend so much money at the clubs. Therefore, hostesses cling to hosts with the idea that they are the only men in their lives that will promise to marry them. Even though hostesses work in the same environment and provide the same services, they are not truly fooled by the display of emotion, but they can leave the host club satisfied.

Conversely, only three authors who discussed hostess clubs mentioned their male customers. This is a significantly disproportionate amount considering nearly all the material on host clubs discussed the female patrons. Of the three, only Susanna Quinn (2012) referred to them negatively by calling them “sleazy men”. Quinn’s depiction of the men does not come as a surprise because her article “The Grim Truth about Life as a Japanese Hostess” details the possible consequences of hostess work such as substance addiction, the possibility of paid sex with customers, and a degeneration of moral values. Severely contrasting Quinn’s portrayal are those of David Marx in “Kyabajo Japan” (2009) and an unknown author in “Japan for the Uninvited” (2006). Both describe the hostess club as a space for a harassed salaryman to relax and enjoy the company of glamorous women without needing to worry about personal presentation and manners. Marx delves somewhat further by claiming the salarymen are in a day and age where they are no longer able to sexual harass their secretaries in the workplace. They are nostalgic of the time before women were educated, independent, judgmental, aggressive and demanding. Thus, the hostess club is a location where these prohibitions are more flexible. Men who go to the hostess club to relax and party are not driven by any female factors, unlike women whose attendance is always described as a reaction to men’s actions. These commentaries effectively remove women’s agency by not considering entertainment not caused by a lack in their personal lives as a possibility, while the only option given for men was leisure entertainment.
Emotional Labor

A hosts’ and hostesses’ appearance and gender performance complement each other to facilitate the construction of a fantastical world for customers. This world is separate from the customer’s lived reality, yet is not separate from societal reality. The fantasy world created is one grounded in real social characterizations, but has become surreal through the power of mutability customers hold. By the power of mutability, I mean the customer’s ability to alter a situation or person. Hosts and hostesses can be held under that power, but the utilization of “play” gives them the ability to deceive. Customers are led to believe they have ultimate control when, in reality, their influence is limited. This dynamic relationship is shaped from the affective, or emotional, labor of hosts/hostesses. As a result, they create a fantasy world for their customers to enjoy.

Arlie Russell Hochschild in The Managed Heart (1983) was the first to introduce the idea of emotional labor and the management of feelings. He divides the act of management in to two categories of deception: surface acting and deep acting. Surface acting functions only to deceive others, but does not skew what is truly felt. On the other hand, deep acting equally deceives the self and others equally, which leads to sincere displays of emotion.

The process of acting creates a binary of “authenticity” vs. the “natural” in various aspects. First, it is exhibited in regards to the self and which is “real” or “fake”. During the process of acting, Hochschild describes the “real self” as the one that is forced to be buried inside. Surface acting is the process that is most vulnerable to the active separation and disconnect of the self. Within this action, the body is utilized as the primary tool in the evocation of emotion in the audience. Additionally, surface acting requires the actor to “depersonalize” situations in order to successfully complete the action. “Depersonalization” requires the actor to
distinguish which part of the self is applicable to the situation. Using the categories of deep and surface acting, Hochschild outlines three different outlooks workers can take towards their work and the resulting consequences. Extending from deep acting, workers can identify completely with their job and lack awareness of a “false self”; emotional burnout is a consequence. Surface acting was divided in which one point leads to the worker blaming oneself for insincerity while the other does not. As a result, the latter develops a more positive outlook on the job which provides a greater capacity to perform the necessary emotional labor (Hochschild 1983).

Gillian Abel uses Hochschild’s ideas and specifically applies them to sex work in his article “Different Stage, Different Performance: The Protective Strategy of Role Play in Emotional Health in Sex Work” (2011). Unlike many other service jobs, sex work segregates the audience where the worker does not always perform the same role as they do for another. Abel references Sanders take on the separation of self into a public and private identity as a task that can also lead to emotional exhaustion. The metamorphosis of feelings into a monetary resource is also said to occur when they are managed in a commercial setting.

Hochschild’s concept of emotional labor is further discussed by Robin Leidner in “Emotional Labor in the Service Economy” (1999). The workers focused on in this article are “frontline service workers” who have direct contact with customers. A challenge workers need to overcome is the ability to efficiently cope with the management of their own emotions while they simultaneously manage the emotional responses of others. The “others” can range from the customers to employees or colleagues. When emotional management is part of a commercialized sphere and is integral in the production of capital, interactions between workers and customers become standardized. Scripting of speech, movement and body language are enacted to standardize these exchanges. Due to the scripting of interactions, workers are provided with a
routine set of feeling rules, such as “anger-desensitization”. A positive aspect to this process is the reinforcing of the workers’ sense of dignity or morals if they are being challenged by an interaction with a customer. In this situation, the differentiation of self is beneficial to emotional health of the worker. However, the loss of autonomy may cause negative effects in the workers’ emotional well-being.

Kalindi Vora continues the discussion in her article “Transmission of Care” (2010) by coining the term “machinic subjectivity” where workers project a false persona as a form of protection of their personalities from their work by reorganizing themselves as subjects. This projection also serves to maintain fantastical social relations within the shared cultural sphere. The idea of deception and unawareness is articulated again in this article as inherent characteristics of affective labor and structures. Workers must convince (deceive) themselves that they are the person they are portraying themselves as while keeping the customer unaware of the deception; repression of emotions that are not in alignment with the job’s tasks are crucial. Vora then touches upon Karl Marx’s theory of self-estrangement and relates it to “machinic subjectivity” by arguing that this type of subjectivity results in the alienation of one person from the other whom affective energy is invested in. A consequence of the deception and alienation from the person on the receiving end, there is a separation of between the affective labor and the person producing the activity. Once that person realizes this detachment from their labor, the labor then turns into a form of suffering. The substance of the labor, vital energy, is increasingly lost and is therefore, also a cause of emotional exhaustion.

Hosts and hostesses can be considered “frontline service workers” as they directly interact with customers and therefore are automatically included among those who utilize emotional labor. Furthermore, the feelings of their customers are one of the main driving forces
for their business. Akiko Takeyama (2008) explains that within the sphere of a host or hostess club, a separate capitalistic economy is formed where emotions, feelings and romantic relationships are commercialized. Romance, sex and love are essentially “sold” for money. Therefore, in a host club, romance has become the commodity. Takeyama proceeds to explain how the post-industrial consumer culture and neoliberal governance intersect at the body and images of self. Human capital is given more significance. As a result, both host and client are compelled to fashion oneself in order to be seen as desirable. In the case of the host, they fashion their affective self to gain the ability to manipulate others’ affect and to entice them into believing they are “freely” acting for both ends. The hosts’ skill in affective labor can lead to the blurring of the line between commercial and non-commercial affect. In this confusion, the relationship between the host and client can become complicated.

Separation of the “true self” and “false self” and the management of emotion is the most apparent in *Ouran High School Host Club*. Haruhi Fujioka, the girl disguised as a boy host, could not comprehend the amount of tears the other hosts could produce on a whim for their clients. She soon discovers that they all use eye drops to falsely produce tears. One of the Hitachiin twins claims that it is common for hosts to use eye drops because “a woman can’t resist a man on the brink of tears”. This new information disrupts Haruhi’s division between reality and fantasy. When the “prince” appeared to be feeling compassion towards Haruhi wanting to bring her deceased mother a memorial offering, he also has tears in his eyes. Haruhi automatically shunned his expression of emotions because of the eye drop incident. In response, the “prince” comically acts offended and exclaimed how a true host can produce real tears without the use of eye drops.
In the section “The Look”, I discussed the various personality types created for the hosts in *Ouran High School Host Club*, which were based on a pre-existing personality trait. The types designated to each host consisted of the cool, little-devil, princely, strong silent, boy Lolita and natural types. Still, all the hosts were forced to adjust their personas to better fit the character chosen as the best fit to their personalities. Additionally, I explained the need for hosts’ physical appearance to coincide with their personality type in order to depict the perfect image. The primary example I gave was the application of Band-Aids, bumps and bruises, and drawn on scars to create the naughty type look. The careful structuring of hosts’ look, attitude, and actions must complement each other and as a whole, make the hosts more efficient “tools” in entertaining their clients.

However, none of the hosts, besides Haruhi, were able to openly express their true self. Joining the host club was a way to do just that and receive acceptance from it. In the last episode, Haruhi generally makes this by stating that providing entertainment gives them all some satisfaction in some way. Even though each host is given a personality type, the incorporation of the “real self” prevents me from entirely categorizing the host as a performer of the artificial. This facet transforms the much of their artificiality into truth. Their personality types are characterized through their “real self”, but the “real self” is accentuated through performance.

The only other media sources showing a divide between true feelings and the feelings portrayed for the hosts are on the documentaries about host work. A host from “Turning Japanese” tells Collins that hosts must tell whatever is necessary at the moment even if it is a lie, such as making a customer think a host likes them. *The Great Happiness Space* demonstrates this more extremely by showing various hosts telling their customers “I love you” even though it is dishonest. One customer says that “love is everything for girls; more important than work or
anything else.” Furthermore, Issei justifies his actions and having these fake love relationships by indicating that he is in the business of selling dreams. This type of mindset is in alignment with the form of “depersonalization” Hochschild described in which Issei does not blame himself for the surface acting required by his profession. Other hosts in Issei’s club have vocalized their guilt about women spend so much money on them because of a false romance. Emotions of guilt and shame are risks when participating in commercialized affective labor and can lead a person to quit if they do not learn to emotionally detach.

Additionally, Shinjuku Boys demonstrates another aspect of emotional labor only slightly touched upon by the various authors who have focused on this topic: the need to keep customers unaware. The scene begins with Gaish, a host, is spending time with another host and his girlfriend over dinner, but then he receives a call from one of his a new customers. Immediately, the other host and girlfriend become quiet and remain utterly quiet throughout Gaish’s conversation with the customer. He then tells the camera in the interview midway through that the customer cannot hear another woman’s voice when she calls. Otherwise, the customer will become jealous and no longer believe it is only customers she must compete against. Her status is severely threatened if an outside woman comes into the picture. This documentary frames the necessity of keeping customers unaware of deception by showing a physical separation between the customer and the host. Along with this separation, it is important that the host does not rupture the customer’s ideal vision of the environment she thinks he is in (Vora 2010). This is one of the techniques used to maintain customer loyalty and promote club patronage (Parrenas 2011).
Conclusion

The increasing presence of the host and hostess phenomenon in scholarly material warrants closer analysis of these professions in a context that reflects the common ideas floating around society. For this reason, I have chosen to examine various popular media outlets to decipher an overarching purpose behind these professions. Academic works explain that their purpose is to sell a fantasy to escape the harsh reality. However, it is not explained why this would be the mode in which societal stress is alleviated or why specific characteristics were chosen over others. Through the themes I have observed, I am able draw new conclusions about hosts, hostesses, and the mizu shōbai, all of which are more connected to the conventional Japanese society than I initially expected.

Throughout my research, three overarching themes became apparent: appearances, performance of gender and gender relations, and discrete control over emotions. In this paper, I subsequently created the three sections to encompass each theme: “The Look”, “Gender Formation within the Club”, and “Emotional Labor”. During my analysis of media representation of hosts, hostesses, and their customers, I understood more about Japan’s gender ideology and substantiated these findings with work done by scholars on gender in Japan. This gender ideology provided an explanation as to why particular physical traits, such as fashion and hair, were greatly emphasized and how emotional labor was utilized. All interconnect and facilitate the manufacturing of an ideal fantasy world specific to either male or female customers.

Between hosts and hostesses, hosts’ style elicited more interest especially because it was drastically different than the style of the typical Japanese man. Even though it was relatively easy to find what they use to influence their style, I encountered difficulty when it came to understanding why the specific looks were chosen. Using Laura Miller’s (2003) paper on male
beauty practices in Japan, the most logical reasoning is that there was a need to break away from the salaryman paradigm. Salarymen are *oyaji* (old men) that are de-eroticized by corporate culture. In a profession where sexual flirtation and romance are used as currency, eroticization is a necessity. Although there is a drive to resist this model Japanese man, hosts have unknowingly paralleled the salaryman because they adopted the foundation of that model: uniformity versus individuality. On the other hand, hostesses’ style originates from a reinterpretation of specific elements of middle-class women’s fashion. These tended to be the more fancy styles, which appealed to a common desire of men to have by their side a beautiful, sexy woman who is always dressed to perfection.

The alignment of the hosts’ and hostesses’ appearances with those of the conventional men and women of Japan connects to the way their gender performance. Hosts’ look only parallels that of the salaryman, but does not match it. With the salaryman representing the typical male, it makes sense that hosts’ actions do not solely reflect typically male characteristics, but instead oscillate between characteristics typical of either the male and female gender. In contrast, hostesses’ look aligns more with the typical woman, but they go a step further by acquiring feminine styles on a more consistent basis than their model. Additionally, they embody two different female types. Consequently, hostesses are hyper-feminized. As I analyzed media’s portrayal of host/hostess club patrons, it was apparent that media was extremely more critical of women. With more negative attention placed on women, it is expectant that hostesses would overcompensate while hosts are able to undercompensate their masculinity. Because the roles hosts and hostesses play are atypical, they are fetishized, thus transforming them and their services into commodities. Therefore, their commodification contributes to the continuation of these uncommon renditions of gender.
Additionally, affective structures, such as club protocols, are put in place to filter other traits that differ from what hosts and hostesses must to portray. Their ability to create the fantasy world desired by their customers is only possible because of this filter. As a result, hosting and hostessing are considered commercialized emotional labor because the work they put in to their gendered performance is essential to the business. Many scholars have labeled host and hostess work as unskilled labor, but this categorization was probably formulated from the notion that any job requiring previous training is classified as skilled labor. However, this idea automatically devalues jobs that do not qualify for this category and implies that no skills are required. I suggest that host/hostess work requires the ability to put on a believable performance and to provide customer care; thus, it should be classified as skilled labor (Parrenas 2011; Suzuki 2009).

While using the housewife/salaryman model as a basis for examining hosts and hostesses in each section, it became apparent that the gender ideology that created this model in Japanese society was reproduced within the club. Hosts and hostesses are essentially equated to salarymen and housewives because they continuously embody an altered version of each. Furthermore, the recreation of Japanese society in the clubs destabilizes the concept of a fantasy world, which is the foundation for the profession. Are customers truly escaping into a fantasy away from society? Based on the ethnographic research done by scholars inside hostess clubs, the existence of a fantasy world cannot be disputed. Yet, this world is rarely discussed in escapist terms, but instead as the entrance into an affective economy where intangible goods are exchanged. After interpreting the representations of hosts and hostesses in popular media, I argue that customers are provided a domain to escape to, but they are not fleeing society because specific facets of Japanese society are enhanced to construct that fantasy world. Instead, customers are solely given an escape from responsibility and other negative factors in their lives.
The problem still remains that host work has been studied so little by scholars and not as in depth as hostess work. Men and masculinity studies are still an underdeveloped field in comparison to women’s studies; this would explain the why host clubs have been a neglected subject. It is necessary to do ethnographic research on these men and how they interact in their environment (and with customers) to get a more accurate depiction of their work in relation to hostess work. The conclusions I can make are limited because I only have access to a minimal amount of primary sources on host. Therefore, I suggest a comprehensive examination of host work to provide a foundation separate from hostesses for future research.

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