

**The Libidinal Economy of the Japanese Sex Industry:  
Sexual Politics and Female Labor**

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
(Anthropology)  
in the University of Michigan  
2014

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*Für meine Eltern*

## **Acknowledgements**

I am greatly indebted to the many individuals who facilitated my research and allowed me to enter into their confidences. Foremost among these are the women working in the sex industry who shared their stories with me. Their morally complex engagements with work that presents both opportunities and risks lie at the very heart of this project. My debt runs particularly deep to the women I have named Shiori and Sayaka, who are true fountains of wisdom and generosity. The work of the sex worker advocacy group pushing for improved conditions in the sex industry is humbling and inspiring. I am also deeply grateful to the staff, interns, and volunteers at Let's Fight Slavery Japan (a pseudonym), who graciously welcomed me into their activities and patiently allowed me to think through their visions of a gender-equal society. I am also indebted to the men and "new half" individuals working in the sex industry, sex industry stakeholders, police officers and officials, journalists, human rights and women's rights activists, bureaucrats, lawyers, and others who generously shared their time and thoughts with me. Without them, this research would not have been possible.

This research was generously supported by the Fulbright IIE, the National Science Foundation EAPSI Program, and numerous sources at the University of Michigan, including the Department of Anthropology, the Center for Japanese Studies, the International Institute, the Institute for Research on Women and Gender, and the Rackham Graduate School.

The guidance and support of the five scholars who make up my dissertation committee have indelibly shaped this project. Jennifer Robertson has encouraged this project from its first inchoate forms. Our conversations about fieldwork, writing, and teaching have deeply shaped me as a scholar, and I am grateful to her for her insightful comments, pragmatic mentorship, and generosity. I hope one day to emulate the richness and scale of her scholarship.

Gayle Rubin is an immensely generous teacher and I am continuously in awe of her encyclopedic knowledge. We went through drafts of this text together, with Gayle going over language and ideas alike with a fine-tooth comb. Her words of wisdom, experience, and calm have made my passage through graduate school infinitely more pleasant. Her ability to link intellectual projects to social and political commitments has also left a deep impact on my scholarship.

I have left every encounter with Liz Roberts feeling energized and inspired. She has an uncanny ability to hone in on an argument and to probe, always, at what the big ideas are, even when I have not yet become aware of them. It seems that she can always see things that are not there yet. Our conversations have immeasurably enriched this dissertation.

Bridgette Carr does the difficult but inspiring work of both practitioner and teacher. I am thankful to her for making time for me in a workload that is already excessive, especially as my anthropological insights on sex work halfway across the world often seemed far less important than the practical work that she does every day advocating for justice for victims of human trafficking. I have benefitted greatly from our talks.

I always enjoy my conversations with Kiyoteru Tsutsui, who has provided wonderful perspectives on human rights politics in Japan and on the expansion of global norms to local contexts. His work with social movements and activist networks is inspiring.

At the University of Michigan, I have also benefitted from the guidance and mentorship of Elisha Renne, Holly Peters-Golden, Stuart Kirsch, Elizabeth Wingrove, John Mitani, Erik Mueggler, Sarah Besky, Eric Plemons, and Mark West. Conversations with Sabine Frühstück, Carole Vance, Miriam Ticktin, Setsu Shigematsu, and ann-elise lewallen have given me new ways to think about my work. I am also grateful for feedback received at the Community of Scholars Workshop hosted by the Institute for Research on Women and Gender and the Anthro-History Reading Group. A dissertation proposal received valuable feedback from Nancy Abelmann, Sara Friedman, and Michiko Suzuki at the Illinois/Indiana Dissertation Workshop on Gender and Sexuality in Modern East Asia. The Center for Research on Learning and Teaching at the University of Michigan provided a stimulating month-long workshop on Preparing Future Faculty from which I continue to benefit.

The capable and friendly staff at the Department of Anthropology have made the logistics of getting through graduate school a smooth and enjoyable experience: thank you to Debbie Fitch, Darlinda Flanigan, and Laurie Marx. Thanks are also due to the staff of the Center for Japanese Studies, especially Ann Takata, Yuri Fukuzawa, Jane Ozanich, and Margaret Rudberg.

The Fulbright Japan staff at the Japan-United States Educational Commission made sure that my long-term fieldwork stay was a pleasant one, and I am especially

grateful to Junko Brinkman in this regard. I am also thankful to Ms. Brinkman and David Satterwhite for their support in the period after the March 11, 2011 “triple disaster.” Muta Kazue at Osaka University hosted me for a summer of preliminary research and offered astute advice. Glenda Roberts at Waseda University graciously provided me with an institutional home during my long-term stay and welcomed me to her weekly *zemi*. I am also thankful to Omori Ryoko at Waseda’s International Office for facilitating my affiliation. The Asia-Japan Women’s Resource Center and the Tokyo Women’s Plaza have always been hospitable and welcoming spaces; my thanks go especially to Motoyama Hisako and Hamada Sumire for stimulating feminist workshops, and to the staff of the Women’s Plaza. I am also grateful to Aoyama Kaoru, Saitō Yuriko, Yoshida Yōko, Kainō Tamie, Tsunoda Yukiko, and Nagai Yoshikazu as well as to Watanabe Miho.

There were numerous individuals who kept me company in the field, offering friendship, support, and good cheer. Among these are Jake Adelstein, Akiko Ishiyama, Elaine Hung, Aimi Horie, Courtney Howell, Renee Riddle, Scott Larson, and Adam and Kaeko Liff, as well as Kate Goldfarb, Emma Cook, Ellen Rubinstein, and Jieun Kim. Aimi merits special thanks for taking Elaine and myself in after the March 11, 2011 “triple disaster,” when the shaking wouldn’t stop and a strange and terrible disaster was brewing; I will always remember the camaraderie we shared in those uncertain hours. Kirsten McGarrity deserves special mention as well for kind introductions that always led to fortuitous connections. Jake Adelstein provided me with a place to live during a summer of preliminary fieldwork and then again when I first arrived in Tokyo for long-

term fieldwork. He has always been eager to share with me interesting and unusual publications that he thinks might interest me and has fed me more times than I can count.

Graduate school has been a long trek that I would never have accomplished without the camaraderie and support of a talented group of colleagues and friends, especially Dan Birchok, Jen Bowles, Hillary Brass, Ali Chetwynd, Nishaant Choksi, Nick Emlen, Katherine Fultz, Nora Hauk, Emily Holt, Jieun Kim, Hiro Matsusaka, Scott MacLochlainn, Lamia Moghnieh, Regev Nathansohn, Neha Paliwal, Bruno Renero-Hannan, Jess Robbins-Ruszkowski, Perry Sherouse, Alex Sklyar, Steve Spiess, Stuart Strange, and Junko Teruyama. The friendship of Scott MacLochlainn has been especially invaluable to me. Stuart Strange patiently helped me to think through my ideas in the final, stressful stretch. The Kwaiser family – Zana, Kyle, Maja, and Anton – has always made space at their table for me. Shannon Brines fed me produce grown at his farm and visited me in Tokyo. Dimitris Economou has supported this project from the very beginning, when the seeds were first planted during our undergraduate years.

My family has provided unflagging support, through coursework, fieldwork, teaching, and writing. My brother is wise beyond his years, with a patience and good humor that I have often benefitted from. The irreverent humor, keen insights, and warmth of Malou make her company a pleasure. The companionship of Stuart drives me forward, toward a life of exploration together. My largest debts are to my parents. I think that my interests in anthropology probably stem from the opportunities fostered by a bilingual childhood, a home that was always filled with books, and summers spent visiting family in Germany. My mother is a model of sacrifice, strength, and deep reserves of love for her family. Her support is constant and unconditional. She is also the bearer of a deeply

inquiring mind. She had the surreal and gut-wrenching experience of video skyping with me during the aftershocks of the March 11, 2011 9.0 earthquake, watching me take cover numerous times and speaking to me throughout. I am probably much more like my father than I should be. He has read portions of almost everything I have ever written, and continues to ask when I will send him the dissertation. He is my earliest role model for what a scholar and intellectual should be, and has often taken me with him on his world travels, including my first trip to Japan. I hope that I reflect something of what my parents have tried to teach me about being a good person in the world. This dissertation is dedicated to them.

## **Preface**

Throughout the dissertation, Japanese names are presented family name first followed by given name. All translations from Japanese to English are mine unless otherwise noted. The macron line drawn over a vowel in a Japanese term (e.g. *fūzokujō*) indicates an extended vowel sound.

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## Abstract

This dissertation is an ethnographic analysis of contestations over the meaning of labor in the mainstream Japanese commercial sex industry. Through introducing the analytic of sex as care, this study explores new ways in which sex may be imagined as a socially productive activity. In Japan, female sex workers offer *iyashi* (healing), a deeply gendered affective labor that is seen as integral to the maintenance of male economic productivity. The value of this care rests on sex workers' successful enactment of the very assumptions of naturalized femininity that justify their exclusion from the full-time labor market. Consequently, women working in the sex industry present themselves as "amateurs," thereby concealing the laboring aspects of their work and contributing to the lack of labor protections in this industry. My research situates women's ambivalence toward selling their care as labor in the context of two competing rights movements that address abuses in the sex industry. The first is a sex workers' rights movement that uses a labor rights framework to mobilize sex workers and organize for political recognition. The second movement, driven by an American-backed anti-human trafficking "rescue industry," seeks to reframe the normalization of short-term female employment in the sex industry as exploitation.

Through approaching sex as care, this study reveals why women in the sex industry do not recognize themselves in the advocacy of competing rights movements even as they are deeply preoccupied with navigating the risks of an industry with few

labor protections. I argue that the political-economic, legal, and cultural structures that normalize sex industry work in Japan also preclude female sex workers from making political claims on their own behalf. This dissertation contributes to larger conversations and informed scholarship on what constitutes “sex” and how such definitions reframe our understandings of the political and economic implications of erotic life.

## Introduction

On September 18, 2006, two days before the scheduled election of the new leader of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party – a position that at the time led to becoming Prime Minister of Japan – the frontrunners appeared on the special program of a popular television show. Entitled “Ask Japan's Next Leader,” the program featured pre-recorded voiceovers with questions from the public, which were then put to the three male politicians on stage: Chief Cabinet Secretary Abe Shinzō, Foreign Minister Asō Tarō, and Finance Minister Tanigaki Sadakazu. One question came from a 24-year-old OL, or “office lady” (a low-wage female office worker), who said that she was barely making ends meet on her monthly salary of ¥140,000 (approximately \$1,200 at the time). Unable to rely on her parents for financial support, she saw no way of realizing her intended career plans. Would it, she wanted to know from Japan's next prime minister, be immoral to begin working in the sex industry several days a week as a way of supplementing her income?

The woman posing this question was asking about the mainstream, male-centered Japanese commercial sex industry, an industry whose existence (and necessity) is largely taken for granted within Japan. According to the most recent statistics published by the National Police Agency, there are currently approximately 31,000 legal sex industry businesses across Japan (Keisatsuchō 2014:15). While there is no official data on the number of female employees working in the sex industry in this nation of 127 million,

estimating that any given business has approximately ten women (a general average) on its pay roll, we can calculate that there are about a quarter million adult female Japanese sex workers employed in legally registered businesses nationwide.<sup>1</sup> Up to a quarter of these women are working in the greater Tokyo metropolitan area. There is, of course, no data on the number of businesses operating “underground.” Moreover, given the temporary nature of work in this industry with high turnover, more women are involved than these numbers seem to suggest.

Finance Minister Tanigaki, the first to be prompted, responded that the woman’s salary was indeed unusually meager when compared to the wages of a typical temporary worker. It struck him as rash, however, to immediately look to the sex industry. He advised the woman to consider that she might stigmatize herself, referring to potential obstacles to the woman’s marital and laboring future, among other things. Although he qualified, to audience laughter, that there were of course different types of sex industry jobs, he concluded by stating firmly that he would not recommend the work.

Tanigaki’s counterparts, in contrast, were far more ambivalent in their advice. Abe, who would be elected party leader two days later,<sup>2</sup> also began by acknowledging, to

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<sup>1</sup> As Peter Andreas and Kelly Greenhill point out in their introduction to the volume, *Sex, Drugs, and Body Counts* (2010), quantification is often critical to social and political recognition. Given the importance of statistics to justifying interventions, the process of measurement or quantification is also a highly political process, and one that becomes increasingly fraught when producing data on conflict or illicit activity. Joel Best, in his classic analysis of American rhetorical claims surrounding threats to children, has illustrated how statistics, once produced and circulated, often take on a life of their own, regardless of how they were calculated (Best 1990; see also Feingold 2010 in relation to human trafficking statistics). Aware of these politics of numbers, I have attempted to be as transparent as possible in my calculations on the scale of the legal sex industry.

<sup>2</sup> Abe was elected LDP party leader on September 20, 2006 and held office as Prime Minister for roughly one year. Following the LDP’s return to power in late December

further laughter, that the term “sex industry” encapsulates many different types of businesses. It is a legal and regulated industry and there are many people who take pride in their work. While alluding to the “traditional” nature of certain sex industry occupations, however, Abe advised the woman to consider the potential effects of the work on herself. He concluded by suggesting that the woman stop by the government-run unemployment agency *Hello Work*.

The third politician, Foreign Minister Asō, called upon family values as a guide. Tapping his right hand to his chest meaningfully, he advised the woman that if she could speak with her parents openly about the work, then it would be okay. If she felt that she had to hold something back from them, however, then she should reconsider. When the program host tried to elicit further commentary from Asō and the other guests, stating that there might be many women in similar situations, the female moderator, a smartly dressed woman in her thirties, cut him off and moved on directly to the next voiceover.

I open with this vignette of three senior Japanese statesmen giving a young woman advice on whether to enter the sex industry because it anticipates several themes of this dissertation on the mainstream Japanese commercial sex industry and the competing rights movements that have formed around it. What kind of labor is female sex work in Japan? How does it fit within rhetorical constructions of gendered economic domains – that is, within deeply gendered ideas of what “the economy” is? And, how do ideas of what female sex work is determine the political claims that women working in the sex industry can make?

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2012 after three years of rule by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), Abe re-assumed national leadership. As of this writing, he is still Prime Minister.

None of the three senior politicians who appeared on the television program took the woman's question as a critique of a limited female labor market, or of the role that their party had played in the recent restructuring of the economy and the welfare system. As the program host attempted to point out before being censored by his female comrade, female poverty and exclusion from the full-time labor market are widespread issues. In this context, sex industry work presents a uniquely lucrative employment opportunity for women – not only the one whose question was chosen for the television program. While the four males seemed relaxed and familiar with the subject of the sex industry, they also pointed out that for women, it is stigmatizing work. Discrimination might follow the woman out of the industry and damage her marital or career prospects. Similarly, it was left unsaid that the conditions of labor in this industry would necessitate that the woman assume risk to her physical and sexual health on a daily basis. No real solution was given to the woman for escaping her low-wage labor situation. The program moderator – the lone woman on stage – appeared to be the only one uncomfortable with the discussion and changed the subject.

This dissertation examines contestations over the meaning of female labor in the contemporary Japanese sex industry. My central argument is that the political-economic, legal, and cultural structures that normalize sex industry work in Japan also preclude women working in this industry from making political claims on their own behalves. Focusing on the adult Japanese women who enter this lucrative yet stigmatizing industry, I argue that female sex workers understand their work as female care work and that this understanding effectively depoliticizes them from making certain claims. This is because in a heteronormative social context in which male productivity is understood as being

dependent on female care, claims to rights can only clash with the understanding of sex workers as caregivers. Through the analytic of sex as care, my study is thus an account of why women in the sex industry do not recognize themselves in the advocacy of competing rights movements attempting to improve circumstances in the sex industry. In what follows, I will provide a brief overview of the Japanese sex industry and then emphasize those features central to my general subject of female labor, care, and rights claims in contemporary Japan. This introduction frames and contextualizes a summary of the chapters.

### *Tokyo's Sex Industries*

Public attitudes in Japan toward the sex industry are characterized by ambivalence, acceptance, and – still – a bit of discomfort. Although the 1956 Prostitution Prevention Law (fully enacted in 1958) prohibits prostitution, the narrow legal definition of “sex” as penile-vaginal intercourse has allowed for the gradual proliferation of an industry legally offering any and every sexual service short of this act. Today, commercial sex through the mainstream and alternative sex industries exists ubiquitously throughout Japan. Sex industry districts exist in every major urban space, as well as in many peripheral ones, such as prefectural capitals or regional towns relying heavily on tourism.

In Tokyo, the foundations of the contemporary sex industry emerged primarily beginning in the 1960s, as the postwar economic recovery took off and new businesses, such as “Turkish baths” (*toruko burō*; present-day “soaplands”) and strip theaters, appeared to fill in the gap left by the prohibition of prostitution. In the 1980s, the

mainstream sex industry diversified heavily, generating businesses that were characterized as representing a “new sex industry” (*nyū fūzoku*) organized around role-playing, arousal, and “changing one’s day-to-day frame” (NHK “Nihonjin no Sei” Purojekuto 2002:153). Throughout the postwar period, sex industry districts emerged across Tokyo, typically clustering in the close vicinity of major train and subway stations, which form shopping and entertainment hubs as well as the nodes by which much of the city commutes. Since their legal recognition in 1999, “delivery,” escort-based businesses (*deriheru*) have come to dominate the market, as they do not incur the same costs, adherence to zoning restrictions, and police surveillance as store-based businesses. In the mid-2000s, the Tokyo municipal government orchestrated a coordinated “clean up” of illegal sex industry businesses, hastening this shift toward mobile businesses.

Tokyo is home to some of the nation’s most well known sex industry districts, including the largest (Kabukichō) and the nation’s oldest (Yoshiwara), and is regularly a source of innovation in modalities for selling sex. Store-based sex industry businesses are highly integrated within the dense urban landscape amidst bars, restaurants, gambling venues, bowling alleys, arcades, karaoke parlors, convenience stores, and a host of other, “ordinary” businesses. More generally, sexually explicit material fills the urban landscape, from men’s magazines or sports papers which are read openly on crowded trains and that are filled with graphic imagery, to advertisements featuring the highly sexualized bodies of women and even girls on trains and elsewhere, to the gaudy and colorful love hotels and male employees standing near sex industry businesses, waiting to coax customers inside. As I discuss in Chapter Three, in a sense, nothing reflects the profound normalization of the contemporary sex industry so much as the fact that sex

industry employment magazines are handed out to female pedestrians of all ages at busy intersections at midday on weekdays.

Japan presents a salient site for re-thinking sex and sexualities, including in relation to commercial sexual services. The Japanese sex industry's long and complicated history goes back at least to the late sixteenth century, when the Tokugawa government established a system of licensed prostitution that became part of a burgeoning urban culture. Due to the relative fluidity and general "sex-friendliness" that has historically characterized the enactment of sex, gender, and sexuality in Japan, sexual practices have, until very recently, been divorced from politicized identities (such as "lesbian" or "gay male"). By the same token, pre- and extra-marital male "play" (*asobi*) has historically been legitimated by state regulation.<sup>3</sup> As I will illustrate in Chapter One, the dominant paradigm toward the sex industry has long been regulation and containment rather than prohibition.

In fact, I was often surprised, during fieldwork, by the frequency with which I heard expressed the sentiment that "the sex industry is necessary in order to prevent sexual assaults."<sup>4</sup> I heard this expressed by sex workers, customers, business owners, police, and even from "ordinary" Japanese women, such as my friend, a hair stylist in her thirties working at an upscale salon in the glamorous Omotesando shopping district (the "Champs-Élysées of Tokyo"). When I asked her how she felt about the existence of the sex industry, without skipping a beat, she immediately replied, "I think it's necessary."

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<sup>3</sup> This has not been the case for women, however. Until the enactment of the postwar Constitution in 1947, for example, adultery was a female criminal offense and grounds for divorce.

<sup>4</sup> This sentiment is, of course, a continuation of the logic that was used to rationalize the "Comfort Women" system and the postwar provision of Japanese prostitutes to Allied servicemen through the Recreation and Amusement Association.

She went on to explain that having an outlet where men could relieve their sexual desires kept down the number of sex crimes. This “common sense” is expressed more publicly as well, such as by the recent blustering of Osaka Governor Hashimoto Tōru, who suggested to a US military commander that American troops stationed in Okinawa would be more easily managed if they were permitted to make use of local sex industry businesses (Ianfu Mondai Fūzokugyō o meguru Hashimotoshi no Hatsugen Yōshi 2013). This framing of an outlet for male sexuality as social necessity is, I argue, part of a longer history of approaching male sexuality as something that should be managed so as to productively direct the energy of men, whether in the service of the wartime empire or the postwar economic miracle (Allison 1994; Frühstück 2003; Matsui 1993; Soh 2008; Yoshimi 2000).<sup>5</sup>

My analysis in this dissertation will be concerned with adult Japanese women who make conscious decisions to enter the legal and regulated sectors of the mainstream sex industry. This is a heteronormative and male-centered industry in which female sex workers service male customers. It is this demographic that is indexed as the laboring subjects by the generic Japanese terms for “sex industry”: *fūzoku* and *seifūzoku* (and, less commonly, *seisangyō*). In addition to this dominant sex industry, however, there is also a diverse and openly operating industry involving male and “new half” (*nyū hāfu*)<sup>6</sup> sex

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<sup>5</sup> This is in contrast to the United States, for instance, where sexual assault has been reconceptualized as being about power rather than desire. Even prior to the American reframing, however, Japanese understandings of the self-evident nature of male desire have long conditioned weak punishments for sex crimes.

<sup>6</sup> A term which straddles the Euro-American categories of transgender and transsexual without fitting neatly into either. “New half” individuals are typically anatomically male individuals who take hormones so as to develop their breasts but retain their male genitalia. In my observations, the usage of “new half” seems to be limited to individuals working in the sex industry, suggesting a market for bodies that offer both “male” and

workers. Its size is much smaller and the conditions under which these sex workers labor are configured differently. The laws regulating prostitution and the sex industry, for instance, concern only heteronormative commercial sex, while same-sex and transgendered sexual services are regulated primarily by public obscenity regulations. There is only a very small female-centered industry, limited mostly to male escorts (known variously as *shutchō hosuto*, *deribarī hosuto*, and *rentaru kareshi*), female patronage of gay male sex workers (*urisen*), and informal arrangements with male hosts off-premises of their clubs.

Of course, the scale and scope of what constitutes “the sex industry” is not always clearly defined. In the 1990s, widespread concern galvanized over the “compensated dating” (*enjo kōsai*) of middle and high school-aged girls (Miyadai 2006[1994]). At the time, arrangements between adolescent girls and their older male “dates” were made primarily through new modes of telephone communication, such as telephone clubs (*terekura*), in which male customers paid to receive blind phone calls from anonymous women, and dial-up telephone messaging services (*dengon daiyaru*) (Tomita 2005). The proliferation of mobile phone and Internet technologies has expanded opportunities for creating anonymous encounters, and “compensated dating” remains a chronic media topic. The proliferation of new “encounter-type” coffee stores and cafés (*deaikei kissa*, *deaikei kafe*) as well as internet chat rooms, web boards, and messaging services have generated forms of amateur prostitution among adult Japanese women, who use these venues to arrange “one-night stands” mediated by the exchange of money. Reports on

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“female” attributes. In contrast, “half” (*hāfu*) is an older and slightly pejorative term for a person of visibly mixed ancestry/ethnicity.

these venues have cited the noticeable presence of single mothers and financially desperate women (Ogiue 2012; Suzuki 2010).

Finally, there is also a relatively diffuse sex industry involving foreign migrant women. From the early 1980s onward, Southeast Asian and Latin American women began migrating to Japan to work as “entertainers” (officially) and hostesses (unofficially) in bars and clubs, and Eastern European women began joining these groups following the breakup of the Soviet Union. The venues in which these women worked often illegally offered sexual services to customers on the side, and many media reports have documented the coercive practices occasionally involved. Today, Chinese and Korean women constitute the two largest non-Japanese populations working in the sex industry. Both the Chinese and Korean communities are well established in Japan, and the existence of a visa exemption for South Korean tourists since 2006 has reportedly made the Japanese sex industry a popular destination for women with deep credit card debts. The Korean police estimate that there are 30,000 Korean women working in the Japanese sex industry today (Shakkin o Kaesenai Josei o Nihon ni Uri 2010).

### *Sex as Care*

In Japan, as in the United States, public commentary on the mainstream sex industry generally takes the actual “sex” that is on offer as self-evident. The prolific Japanese-language body of writing on the sex industry that I have encountered, for instance, includes economic analyses and “how to” guides, exposés of industry trends, personal memoirs and collections of interviews, photo essays, histories of specific sex industry districts, and nostalgic encyclopedias, among other genres. Within this

commentary, however, the question of what, exactly, constitutes “sex” in the mainstream sex industry has been left mostly unexamined, even as the industry’s sheer scale and diversity would seem to make it obvious that “sex” far exceeds the narrow legal definition of penile-vaginal intercourse, or of procreative or heterosexual acts.

While other sex industry media and advertising focus on material meant to titillate and entice potential customers, even they leave unexamined the question of what drives the specific forms that these desires for sexual gratification take. The plethora of men’s magazines and sex industry information magazines for customers, for example, are full of prurient material with explicit references to acts including oral sex, anal sex, touching, kissing, sexual massage, whipping, spanking, watching or assisting with masturbation, “vibrator play,” stripping, dry-humping, bondage, and so on – acts that, according to Japanese law are not “sex” (*seikōi*), but “acts resembling sexual intercourse” (*seikō ruiji kōi*). Similarly, a sex industry “dictionary” presents a typology of every imaginable legal sex industry service, sexual position, or equipment available to augment one’s experience, presenting a compendium of the different ways in which male bodies can be mechanically stimulated to feel sexual pleasure.

And yet, the scholarship on sex work makes it clear that erotic desires – as with other desires (e.g. consumer) – are always generated by larger social changes, especially political-economic transformations. Anthropologist Ara Wilson, for example, has written about the “erotic generativity of capitalism” (2010), by which she means the relationship between market shifts and the production of particular desires, forms of intimacy, and sexual subjectivities. Wilson has examined how the mechanized and impersonal performances of Bangkok sex shows have become a staple for Euro-American male

tourists to Thailand, whose masculinity is experienced as adrift in the shift from an industrial to a Post-Fordist economy. The “form and logic of markets,” she argues, “generate the erotic life of global capitalism” (Wilson 2010:65). Similarly, the sociologist Elizabeth Bernstein (2007), working in the San Francisco Bay Area, has argued that postindustrial transformations in the United States, especially the rise of the service industry and the information economy, have re-shaped modes of intimacy. She uses the concept of “bounded authenticity” to argue that both customers and sex workers understand commercial sex as “authentic emotional and physical connection” (2007:103), albeit one which must stay in the market and not penetrate the life of either. Bernstein links this concept to the strength of the escort industry in the United States and the emergence of a cohort of relatively privileged middle-class women within it.

In the initial stages of my fieldwork, I shied away from considering the question of what “sex” is in the mainstream Japanese sex industry. The question struck me as too far away from my interests in the political economy of the sex industry. Gradually, however, I came to realize that there were specific patterns to the ways in which the women I interviewed and spent time with spoke about their interactions with customers and that these patterns were central to larger questions concerning women’s labor market exclusions and their ability to challenge these.

In this dissertation, I argue that the central service of the mainstream Japanese commercial sex industry is female care and that this form of care is seen as integral to the maintenance of male economic productivity. Specifically, female sex workers offer *iyashi* (healing), a deeply gendered affective labor and care work through which sex workers – like wives and mothers – are understood as reproducing men as capable and effective

workers. In fact, the reigning metaphor of *iyashi* is maternal intimacy. *Iyashi* does not displace sexual desire or gratification as a primary draw of the sex industry. Rather, it co-exists alongside or even through the promise or realization of sexual release.

How does sex become care in a commercial context? To ask this question is to explore how sex workers rely on normative, middle-class family tropes of nurturing, especially the reified mother-child relationship within the nuclear family unit. In caring for their customers, sex workers employ an explicitly maternal intimacy to achieve male sexual gratification. Acting like indulgent mothers, sex workers create an environment in which customers can momentarily suspend their obligations and replace them with desires not attainable in the male-gendered workplace. I argue that perceptions of the increasing instability of middle-class masculinity amid economic restructuring and shifting family forms generate this desire for commercialized forms of domestic intimacy.

My work joins other recent scholarship that has examined the linkages between affect and the production of masculine and feminine identities through sex work. These studies show how sex workers manipulate their emotions as part of their service such that they are directly productive of capital (Hardt and Negri 2004; Hochschild 1983).

Anthropologist Katherine Frank, for instance, has looked closely at how the emotional labor of women working in strip clubs in the American South responds to the desires of an imperiled masculinity for escape or for a social space in which everyday values are inverted or suspended (Frank 2002). While Anne Allison (1994) focused on hostesses who do not provide sexual services, her research on Tokyo hostess clubs in the 1980s examined how the feminized – and often highly flirtatious – conversations of hostesses

facilitated male corporate bonding to produce committed workers for Japanese companies. These works demonstrate the value of commercial sexual (and sexualized) female labor to gender ideologies that undergird larger economic structures.

In pursuing an analytic of sex as care, I am not suggesting that every act of sex in Japan is defined by care. What I am suggesting is that a theme that is dominant and amplified in my research – sex as care – helps us to see things that may be unacknowledged – or underacknowledged – elsewhere, due to narrow definitions of what constitutes “sex.” While sex has often been limited to thinking about production, pleasure, or political liberation, approaching sex as care reveals other ways in which sex is imagined as a socially productive activity, thereby opening up fruitful avenues of theoretical inquiry.

### *Laboring Women*

Although *iyashi* as care work is understood as integral to the maintenance of male economic productivity, it is not, however, recognized as labor. In fact, the framing of sexual labor in terms of care leaves its practice as a form of “labor” unacknowledged. Because care work is already understood to be “women’s work” and *iyashi* conforms to beliefs about women’s primary identities as wives and mothers, women working in the sex industry generally feel deeply ambivalent about the nature of their work.

Although Japanese women have gradually made inroads into the full-time labor market, the prevailing pattern of female labor is still one that is largely determined by expected life cycle markers such as marriage and child rearing. The employment pattern of Japanese women has long been figured as an “M-curve,” whereby women work full or

part-time until marriage, at which point widespread expectations are that they will leave to have children.<sup>7</sup> These women typically rejoin the workforce as part-time laborers after their children become school age, forming a reliable source of inexpensive flexible labor (Brinton 1993; Ochiai 1997). The political scientist Kay Shimizu has noted that in 2011, a staggering 54.6 percent of all female workers were “non-regular,” meaning part-time or temporary workers (Shimizu 2013:166). Indeed, the concept of a “career woman” is sufficiently novel to engender its own vocabulary. Gendered ideologies continue to largely structure which areas of the labor market are understood as “women’s work” or “men’s work,” and women dominate in service industries and clerical work. Prime Minister Abe Shinzō has voiced his commitment to increasing the participation of women in the workforce. In April 2013, he announced a plan to push companies to double their childcare leave to three years, perhaps ironically reinforcing the idea that a woman’s primary identity is as mother and not as wage-laborer. As we will see, this gendered assumption of what women’s labor is and should be deeply shapes the affective dimensions of the sex industry.

The relationship of gender to labor in contemporary Japan is a second major theme of this dissertation. How is it that discourses of gender shape what is understood as labor and valued as such? Or, more specifically, to rest on a classical question of Marxist feminist analysis, how may individuals who are productive of capital be understood as outside of the category of laborer (Kuhn and Wolpe 1978; Whelehan 1995)? In this

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<sup>7</sup> For those newly wed women who attempt to balance both career and family, these expectations often coalesce as discriminatory workplace practices, including pressure to retire, demotion, and salary reduction. In the final revisions of this dissertation, the Supreme Court of Japan ruled for the first time on a “maternity harassment” case, ruling in favor of a physical therapist who said that she had been unfairly demoted from her managerial position after taking a year of maternity leave (Osaki 2014b).

dissertation, I approach the mainstream commercial sex industry as an embodiment of the labor market exclusions that Japanese women face. On the one hand, the construction of sex work as “healing” and as female care work entails a normalization of the work and, against the backdrop of a limited (and untapped) female labor market, has made the sex industry an attractive venue for short-term female employment. At the same time, however, even as women working in the sex industry show pride in their production of this service, the stigmatized nature of the sex industry makes them deeply ambivalent about their work. The value of *iyashi*, I argue, rest on sex workers’ successful enactment of the very assumptions of naturalized femininity that justify their exclusion from the full-time labor market. In other words, the same gendered ideologies that provide the basis for the inability to see women as laborers (e.g. that women are natural caregivers and more innocent, authentic, and naïve than men) render them valuable in the sex industry.

The women working in the sex industry with whom I spent time expressed deep ambivalence toward their labors. In order to navigate between the tensions of opportunity and risk, contemporary sex workers produce accounts that emphasize passivity over agency, highlight self-sacrifice and moral obligations to kin, and that, occasionally, cast doubt on the motivations of peers. Women’s self-presentation as *shirōto* (“amateurs”) plays an important role here. Although, similar to the English-language “amateur,” *shirōto* refers to someone without professional affiliation, training, or experience, this term has in practice often been applied to individuals who are actually highly experienced or accomplished, such as in the theater, where *shirōto* has been used in reference to trained actors in order to oppose dominant traditions (Morinaga 2005) or justify lower

compensation (Robertson 1998). Among women working in the sex industry, women's presentation of themselves as *shirōto* rests on highlighting innocence, authenticity, and naiveté. In doing so, *shirōto* creates a buffer between themselves and a stigmatized identity (e.g. “professional” sex worker) through foregrounding their ordinariness while also catering to customer demands. This self-presentation, however, conceals the laboring aspects of their work, thereby contributing to the lack of labor protections in this industry.

The undervaluing of female sex industry labor shares many similarities with the structure of part-time female labor in Japan more generally. Women constitute 70% of Japan's part-time labor force (Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training 2014:119) and many part-time positions offer little job security or labor protections. I argue that the lack of labor protections in the sex industry effectively originates in the fact that sex industry labor is women's (part-time) labor. The structure of a sexist economy, in other words, in which “the economy” is gendered male and “women's work” is always understood through reference to ideas of women's primary identity as caregivers, entrenches the inability to see women as laborers.

This dissertation is thus partially an inquiry into how scholars can confront labor abuses in the sex industry without presuming to know what exploitation is and how it is experienced. I propose a framework for thinking about labor abuses faced by sex workers in terms of the gendered labor ideologies that structure the economy in Japan more generally. Through examining the ways in which the women are denied understanding as wage-laborers – and thus not seen as warranting full labor protections – we can arrive at explanations that take labor abuses seriously while still taking into account that the work itself is not understood as intrinsically exploitative.

### *Competing Rights Movements*

What are the political implications of commercial sex as care for how sex workers conceptualize the rights claims that they are able to make? My research situates the ambivalence of female Japanese sex workers toward their work amid two competing rights movements. One is a sex workers' rights movement that uses a labor rights framework to mobilize sex workers and organize for political recognition. The other, driven by an American-backed anti-human trafficking "rescue industry" (Agustín 2007), seeks to reframe the normalization of short-term female employment in the sex industry as exploitation. The women with whom I engaged, however, saw themselves neither as victims of sexual exploitation nor as laborers who should demand workplace benefits or better compensation. At the same time, their stories are deeply preoccupied with navigating the risks of working in an industry with few labor protections – an industry in which labor conditions necessitate that women assume (their own) risk to their physical and sexual health on a daily basis. The equation of sex work with female care work, I argue, effectively depoliticizes sex workers from making rights claims on their own behalves.

In Euro-American scholarship, the proliferation of anti-human trafficking discourses in relation to sex industries over the past two decades<sup>8</sup> has reinvigorated debates over women's agency in sex work as well as the question of exploitation in commercial sexual labor. As feminist scholars have pointed out, much American media,

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<sup>8</sup> The origin point of these discourses is earlier when one looks at the feminist anti-prostitution literature (Barry 1984[1979]; Barry et al 1983; Farley 2003; Hughes and Roche 1999). As Gayle Rubin has noted, this literature itself has its origins in the British and American "white slavery" campaigns of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

activist, and popular rhetoric on human trafficking is characterized by a slippage in which “‘trafficking’ often slides imperceptibly into ‘trafficking into sex slavery,’ which in turn is equated with all commercial sex” (Rubin 2011:67; Vance 2011). Recent ethnographic work has provided nuanced views of the women – typically international migrants who move into underground sexual economies – who lie at the center of these narratives (Agustín 2007; Aoyama 2009; Cheng 2010; Parreñas 2011). These studies highlight the difficult choices that female migrants must often make in pursuing opportunities – for travel and romance as well as economic gain – even as these choices may make them vulnerable to labor abuses and stigma. Laura Agustín, for instance, works from a migration perspective to situate sex work as just one form of informal (and unregulated) labor that female migrants engage in. Challenging portrayals of migrant sex workers as “victims,” she illustrates how foreign migrant workers in Spain often accept debt bondage and endure labor abuses in order to pursue their goals. Agustín’s study also looks critically at the interventions of Spanish NGOs into sex workers’ lives, arguing that “social agents and their projects remain at the social center of attention while failing materially to improve the situations of people who sell sex” (Agustín 2007:186).

While this scholarship reflects the reality that in Euro-American contexts, policies and debates around sex industries continue to be dogged by disagreements over whether sex work is intrinsically harmful or whether it can be considered *as* work, in Japan, ideas about morality, deviance, and exploitation have played little role in engagements with the sex industry. While Japanese feminist groups have called attention to corporate-sponsored “sex tourism” in former colonies – especially Taiwan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand – in the 1970s (Matsui 1993) and referred to cases of forced

prostitution of foreign migrant women in sex and entertainment districts across the country since the 1980s as human trafficking (Ohshima and Francis 1989; Babior 1993; Asian Women's Association 1988; Kanagawa Onna no Supēsu "Mizura" 2002), these calls garnered little public attention outside of these small feminist circles. In the early and mid-2000s, human rights and media reports coalesced around foreign migrant labor in the sex and entertainment industries, spurred especially by US State Department attention to the issue (Caouette and Saito 1999; Dinan 2000; Jinshin Baibai Taikoku!? Nihon 2004; "Ō" Ōbei Josei "Kyōsei Baishun" 2004; Kyōto YWCA / APT 2001; Yoshida 2004).

In Japan, as elsewhere, sex workers' rights organizations have challenged NGO narratives of human trafficking. The advocates that I worked with, for instance, argue that the introduction of anti-trafficking legislation and policies (such as stricter immigration control) simply aggravates conditions for international migrants who will migrate anyway. Based on their own informal fieldwork, these women asserted that foreign migrants to the sex industry typically knowingly enter abusive circumstances but stick them out until things become too unbearable. These claims echo those of other sex worker organizations around the world who have challenged anti-trafficking policies, including, among others, the Empower Foundation (Thailand), the Global Network of Sex Work Projects, Giant Girls (South Korea), Scarlett Alliance (Australia), SWOP USA, and the Asia-Pacific Network of Sex Workers.

For the prominent anti-human trafficking NGO that I worked with – and which I name Let's Fight Slavery Japan – sex industry work can only ever be negative. This group has introduced dominant American advocacy methods and rhetorical framings of

trafficking in order to problematize the sex industry in a context in which commercial sexual labor and exploitation have hitherto only rarely been invoked together. This NGO attempts to reframe “ordinary” women and children as sexually vulnerable subjects, using a language of empowerment and social change to obscure a discourse that emphasizes protection over freedom. This agenda is empowering for the almost exclusively female NGO staff and volunteers, allowing women who are themselves excluded from the labor market a form of employment and a platform with significant moral capital. Ironically, through emphasizing protection, these women carve out a public space for themselves through the undermining of sex workers’ potential claims to labor rights.

Similarly, I argue that in its efforts to incorporate international anti-human trafficking standards, the Japanese government has narrowly constructed victims as non-Japanese female migrants in forced prostitution, designating a racialized and gendered subject as the subject of state intervention. At the same time, individuals in objectively similar circumstances to the women who are designated as victims of human trafficking – including male or transgendered subjects, Japanese victims, or victims of other types of forced labor – are not seen as falling under the government’s responsibility. I argue that behind this is a government approach toward human rights that constructs rights as emanating from citizens’ cultivated dispositions toward others rather than as a government mandate to ensure freedoms and protections.

While Let’s Fight Slavery Japan has partnered with the state, pushing it for further reform even as it is frustrated by the government’s narrow conceptualization of “human trafficking,” the advocates organizing for sex workers’ rights experience increased government surveillance of the sex industry as further infringements on their status as

laborers. When they encountered labor abuses and tried to challenge these – in courts, labor standards offices, and elsewhere – they are not granted full citizenship but distinguished from “ordinary” women.

Through juxtaposing a human rights and labor rights movement, we can become aware of some of the ways in which these two discourses may, at times, run counter to one another. This is an argument that has been made by scholars like Miriam Ticktin (2011), who has examined how humanitarian exceptions for sick or violated asylum seekers in contemporary France are accepted precisely because they do not treat individuals as laborers. Successful asylum seekers are those who can be reduced to the bareness of shared humanity. In this way, humanitarian discourses – although distinct from human rights discourses, nonetheless related – may act *against* labor rights movements. Similarly, Alice Miller (2004) has described a tension inherent in human rights paradigms – especially those related to women’s sexuality – between protection and freedom (Miller 2004:18; see also Brown 1995). Miller questions why international campaigns around women’s human rights failed to gain mainstream international legitimacy until specific forms of violence involving sexual harm became foregrounded. Her insight is that the focus on sexual harm – while to some extent necessary to prevent violence against women – “tends to reduce women to suffering bodies in need of protection by the law and the state, rather than as bodies and minds in need not only of protection, but participation and equality” (Miller 2004:27).

In my research, LFSJ used “human trafficking” to argue that women in the sex industry were being denied agency, and *not*, importantly, to argue that their right to work was being violated. For this NGO, commercial sexual labor is only ever negative.

Through emphasizing the vulnerability of women in the sex industry and their need, accordingly, for intervention and protection, this NGO unwittingly expressed the inability to see women as laborers. The sex workers right organization, on the other hand, faced obstacles in building a broader consciousness among women in the sex industry of themselves as laborers. Through foregrounding the right to labor, their advocacy clashed with women's ambivalence toward their work stemming from their understanding of it as female care work. In this context in which male productivity is understood as being dependent on female care, in other words, claims to rights can only clash with the understanding of sex workers as caregivers.

### *Contentious Evidence*

During the course of the research and writing-up phases of this project, I became aware of a problematic issue concerning evidence that is perhaps unique to working with sex workers. In a way that does not seem to be shared by anthropologists working with other populations, I found that my evidence in relation to women working in the sex industry (and to this group only) was often challenged. For instance, this happened on several occasions during conversations with American anti-trafficking activists when I produced an anecdote that challenged pre-determined notions of what exploitation in the sex industry might entail. The American activist would nod knowingly before making a condescending remark, such as, "You've only been there a year and a half..." implying that I had failed to get the "real story" from my informants and that, in time, what the speaker already knew would be revealed to me as well.

At the heart of this and other discrediting comments seems to be a great reluctance to take the statements of sex workers at face value (unless, that is, they confirm the sex-work-as-exploitation narrative). On the one hand, this reluctance likely stems from the high political stakes involved in the accounts of sex workers, given the polarized state of much advocacy around sex industries. More broadly, however, I think that this reluctance to take the words of sex workers seriously has to do with a particularly “American” fixation on sex workers as alienated. This fixation assumes that individuals in the sex industry either suffer from a false consciousness whereby they cannot recognize their situation of exploitation for what it really is, or, that they purposefully evade telling the researcher certain things, especially things that they are ashamed or embarrassed of. As North American and European sex worker activists and advocates have consistently noted, however, there is a long history of sex workers being silenced by those who claim to work on their behalf – especially feminists (Bell 1987; Delacoste and Alexander 1987; Kempadoo and Doezema 1998; Nagle 1990; Pheterson 1989). As the advocate Frédérique Delacoste wrote in the introduction to the second edition of *Sex Work: Writings by Women in the Sex Industry*, referring to the first edition’s positive reception, “Many people could not believe that sex workers could actually speak for themselves” (Delacoste and Alexander 1998[1987]:13).

In Japan, the absence of a history of thinking about commercial sexual labor through the framework of exploitation has prevented some of the worse abuses of speaking on sex workers’ behalves. At the same time, however, stigma toward those working in this industry as well as the often-temporary nature of the work has kept individuals from speaking out. It is evident, for instance, that the anti-prostitution

campaigns led by Christian women's groups and early feminist groups from the 1880s through the 1950s spoke more out of concern for Christian morality or "national shame" than the actual needs of those working in prostitution (Fujime 1997; Garon 1993:719; Sievers 1983). More recently, sex workers have begun challenging representations allegedly on their behalf by mainstream Japanese feminists. The 2000 edited volume, *Uru Uranai wa Watashi ga Kimeru* (I'm the One Who Will Decide Whether to Sell [Sex] or Not), entailed a series of responses by sex workers as well as writers and activists familiar with the sex industry to the writings of anti-prostitution advocates. The volume is a sharp critique of the sources of evidence of these advocates and turns their assumptions on their heads. As elsewhere, Japanese sex workers have challenged those who speak supposedly on behalf of sex workers without any visible participation *by* sex workers (Matsuzawa 2000).

The questioning of sex workers' statements speaks to more general questions about constructing ethnographic knowledge and approaching the question, how do we know what we know? This question becomes more urgent given the significant moral capital often given to anti-trafficking organizations to make claims about reality in contrast to the resources and audiences available to sex worker organizations.

Ethnographers accept, to some extent, that individuals steeped in a particular context may not articulate things that are so fundamentally basic to their understanding of the world (but which may pop out to the ethnographer) that they are unaware that things could be seen otherwise. There is an important distinction, however, between our informants telling us that we have gotten it wrong and someone who blanketly brushes aside experiential evidence produced by sex workers. My own stance is that sex workers' frank

assessment of their circumstances has less to do with “false consciousness” than with a cultural framework for thinking about commercial sexual labor that differs fundamentally from an American framework. As an ethnographer working with women in the sex industry, I am committed to grounding knowledge about these women’s lives in their lived social realities. At the same time, it is important to recognize the possibility that dimensions of accounts may be altered to place oneself in a more favorable light or to conform to expectations; this is, of course, not an issue that is unique to sex workers. This is a topic that I take up in Chapter Three, when I discuss a narrative of a woman’s entry into the sex industry that was contested and re-interpreted by another sex worker.

#### *Station Break*

At this juncture, some quick notes are due on terminology. First, following the usage favored by those who themselves work in the sex industry, in this dissertation I use the terms “sex work” and “sex worker.” Unlike terms such as “prostitution” or “prostitute,” these terms emphasize the labor-based nature of commercial sex while moving away from the moral baggage of older terms. Additionally, they are gender-neutral, whereas “prostitute” effectively presumes a female subject. Throughout these pages, I often use “sex worker” interchangeably as shorthand for “woman working in the sex industry.” I should note, however, that the latter – although much bulkier – remains truer to the Japanese conception in two ways. First, although “sex worker” can be used to broadly designate all individuals working in sexual commerce, it is also a politicized term that can imply a consciousness of a particular laboring identity. In this sense, using “sex worker” for Japanese women working in the sex industry is misleading, as I will discuss

in Chapter Six. Second, “woman working in the sex industry” is also the closest gloss to the Japanese term used to refer to the women I spoke with: *fūzokujo*. I use “prostitution” or “prostitute” in these pages only if that is the direct gloss from a Japanese quote, if using “sex work” would be anachronistic, or to refer to the prohibited act of penile-vaginal intercourse.

A second term that warrants some explication up front is “human trafficking.” I use this term to refer to extreme forms of labor exploitation, what may also be referred to as forced labor. Trafficking can thus occur in any of a number of labor settings, including farms, factories, manufacturing plants, sex industries, and private homes employing domestic workers. As Denise Brennan illustrates in her lucid ethnography of how formerly trafficked persons in the United States struggle to rebuild their lives, forced labor does not occur out of the blue but is one extreme on a continuum of exploitative labor practices (Brennan 2014:5). As will become clear throughout this dissertation, however, in activist, media, and popular usage, human trafficking is often used interchangeably with forced sexual labor. There is a dangerous slippage, in other words, between any and all forms of sex work and trafficking. This slippage was evident at the anti-human trafficking NGO that forms the subject of Chapter Four as well. In Chapter Five, I illustrate how the Japanese government has constructed its own narrow conceptualization of human trafficking, which is limited to the forced prostitution of foreign migrant women.

### *Methods*

This project is based on twenty-one months of ethnographic fieldwork and archival research conducted in Tokyo between 2008 and 2013. Intensive, focused fieldwork was conducted from September 2010 through November 2011. My research took me to sites in and around the sex industry, to non-governmental organizations, and to closed-door police conferences, government meetings, and hearings at the National Diet. I conducted formal and informal interviews with over seventy individuals for the project, including female, male, and transgendered Japanese sex workers, sex industry business managers and support staff, police officers, lawyers, human rights and feminist activists, journalists, researchers, and government bureaucrats.

I came into initial contact with sex workers for my study in several ways. Many of my informants were introduced to me through the prolific network of two sex worker advocates. I consulted closely with one of these women beforehand about putting together a self-introduction letter, what types of places to meet in, how to appropriately show my gratitude to informants, and confidentiality issues. At first, I stuck to interviewing only the women to whom I had been formally introduced through this network. As I gained confidence as a researcher, however, I also began using snowball recruiting and asking informants directly if they could introduce me to a particular workplace friend or employer that they had referred to in our conversation. I was always careful to give sufficient leeway for them to refuse or change the subject, in case they deemed my request inappropriate or pushy. In other cases, I met informants simply by socializing with sex workers I became close to or through other acquaintances with no connection to the industry. Curiously, I met one woman working in the sex industry through her anti-sex industry activism. Although I did not “count” these women as sex

workers for my research (as they do not see themselves in this way), I also met numerous strip theater dancers through participating on the crew of a documentary film team.

For our interviews, I typically met sex workers at a pre-arranged location, such as a particular exit of a train or subway station or in front of a particular store. From there, we moved to a nearby café or restaurant. Most of my initial interviews with sex workers took place in neutral locations like this. I was often surprised at how many of the women seemed to show little concern over being overheard by strangers. While the most cautious women made sure to pick the most secluded table in a café that they knew beforehand would be relatively empty at that time of day, most of my informants seemed to be relatively unconcerned over who might overhear them (although they surely scanned the surroundings first to make sure that they did not, in fact, know anyone there). A handful of my interviews also took place at private homes.

In the course of my sex industry research, I also forayed into various sites such as SM Clubs, strip theaters and their dressing rooms, sex industry exhibition shows for male customers, training sessions for new employees, and swinger's clubs (*hapuningu bā*). I was able to speak informally with individuals in most of these locations. As with my interviews with sex workers, my interviews with sex industry stakeholders such as managers and support staff, as well as sex industry journalists, largely took place in cafés and restaurants. One interview with a male manager of a soapland took place entirely in a van parked on the side of a road; it was evident that he wanted to be able to drop me off quickly if my questions proved too bothersome.

My identity shaped this project in ways both predictable and unexpected. As a woman in her mid-twenties during my fieldwork, I was around the same age as (or

younger than) many of the women working in the sex industry whom I spoke with and about the same age as (or slightly older than) many of the supporters and staff of Let's Fight Slavery Japan. This eased my entry into the highly feminized circles of both groups. In the case of Let's Fight Slavery Japan, although my perspectives often differed greatly, my longtime engagement with anti-violence against women politics also facilitated my relationships tremendously.

My status as a foreigner was a boon in unexpected ways. For women working in the sex industry who are primarily concerned with guarding knowledge of their work in a stigmatized industry, I was clearly outside of their social circles. This seemed to permit many women a degree of openness otherwise unimaginable among their Japanese peers. It seemed that many if not most of my sex worker informants enjoyed being able to speak frankly with someone who enthusiastically asked them about all the seemingly mundane details of work that they often kept secret from their closest family members, lovers, and friends. One woman told me during our interview that she was having the “strangest feeling, like being in a dream” over being able to speak openly about her work with an American woman knowledgeable about the Japanese sex industry.<sup>9</sup> A few women assumed that my knowledge stemmed from personal experience working in the sex industry, expecting that only another sex worker would be interested in their experiences. Many women had questions for me about what the sex industry was like in the United States or about my various experiences conducting fieldwork in Japan.

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<sup>9</sup> This woman was also the only sex worker to refuse my request to be recorded. She had recently married and was adamant that no evidence of our conversation possibly get back to her husband.

In my interviews with sex workers, I often tried to adapt aesthetic conventions for young women in order to make myself “softer” and more approachable as a researcher by meeting (to a degree) common expectations of gendered deportment. Despite (or perhaps because of) the status of women’s economic roles, in the often extravagant and luxury-filled spaces that make up parts of central Tokyo, (excessive) consumption seems to define the character of young women. The particular gendered ways in which this is expressed – with every aspect of one’s personal appearance seemingly open to minute personalization – occasionally caused me discomfort as I felt chronically underdressed and out of fashion. Neighborhoods dedicated to sex, entertainment, or shopping are often a sea of everything that is soft and feminine: hearts, flowers, glitter, polka dots, lace, pom poms, scrunchies, pearls, faux fur, and giant “cute” key chains – often worn layered over one another. Makeup is *de rigueur* for young women, and not a few apply makeup during their morning commute on trains and subways. One day, I met a woman for an interview who hadn’t been able to put on her makeup in her rush to meet me; she wore a white facemask (commonly used to cover one’s mouth and nose in public during illness) that obscured the entire bottom half of her face rather than show her unmade face in public. While I felt that adapting these aesthetic conventions facilitated my relationships with the women of my age cohort who dominated my research – both in the sex industry and in NGO spaces – it also struck me as basically disempowering in other ways. I certainly never wore my silk heart print shirt or my iridescent flats with giant “poof balls” on top when my research took me to masculinized spaces and centers of power, such as the central office of the National Police Agency or hearings at the National Diet.

A significant component of this research is based on a six-month internship I engaged in at the anti-human trafficking NGO that I call Let's Fight Slavery Japan. I met the director of this organization during my first summer of research and, through persistence in attending events and slowly meeting other staff (including board members, volunteers, and interns), gradually overcame her initial resistance to engaging with a researcher. This reluctance stemmed from experiences she had apparently had in the past with journalists and researchers who "take take take," with no benefit to her organization. I describe the process of applying for an internship with LFSJ in Chapter Four. During my internship, I participated in all the activities of the organization, with the exception of victim services and the emergency hotline, which are the realm of the director alone.

My research also involved attendance at government and NGO conferences concerning human trafficking and other issues of labor abuse in the sex industry. These included "opinion exchange" meetings between the national government and an anti-human trafficking lobbying group, the annual "Contact Point" conference on human trafficking organized by the National Police Agency (NPA), the annual conference on commercial sexual exploitation of children ("CSEC") also organized by the NPA, various public hearings at the National Diet on child pornography and on revising the Prostitution Prevention Law, a Diet-organized symposium on child pornography, an NGO-sponsored international conference on human trafficking, and a meeting of the Japanese Society for AIDS Research. In July 2012, I attended the International AIDS Conference in Washington, D.C. as an interpreter for a Japanese sex worker advocate. I also attended the events of numerous grassroots organizations working on issues concerning human trafficking, foreign migrant laborers, violence against women, and sexual minorities. My

perspectives on anti-human trafficking advocacy and government policy in Japan are also informed by my experience as a volunteer at a shelter for foreign migrant women and Japanese women in central Tokyo in the summer of 2009. Finally, archival research for this project was conducted at the Tokyo Women's Plaza, the National Women's Education Center (NWEC), the Tokyo Metropolitan Library, the National Diet Library, and the on-line archives of numerous Japanese newspapers.

### *Map of the Dissertation*

The six chapters in this dissertation can be roughly split into two major themes. The first half of the dissertation introduces the rubric of sex as care through exploring the paradoxes faced by women working in the Japanese sex industry whose socially necessary labor is simultaneously the grounds for their economic exclusion. The second half addresses the political implications of commercial sex as care for how sex workers conceptualize the rights claims that they are able to make.

In Chapter One, "Tokyo's Libidinal Economy: Consuming and Regulating Commercial Sex in the City," I draw on changing historical ideas about the regulation of social order and public morality to explore the sex industry's physical and economic presence within contemporary Tokyo's urban landscape. Historically, male pre- and extra-marital "play" (*asobi*) in the sex industry has been indulged so long as it has been contained within designated – and closely regulated – areas. In the postwar era, sex industry districts have spread throughout the city, aided by police ambivalence toward an industry viewed as socially necessary but also in need of special oversight. As such, the continuing policy of the state has been to normalize new business types through

incorporating them into the existing legal framework. The “grayness” of the law, however, allows authorities to crack down at will, creating a precarious existence for those working in the industry, such as managers, support staff, and sex workers. The recent “clean up” of numerous districts since the mid-2000s was enacted through orchestrated campaigns between local government authorities, the police, and citizens’ groups. These reflected a broader expansion of state security measures rather than a new hostility toward the sex industry. Since then, the industry has moved steadily “underground” into businesses forms that are much harder to regulate. At the same time, local micro-economies newly bereft of a major consumer attraction to their communities have had to reinvent themselves.

An analysis of the linkages made between male economic activity and the female-gendered nature (so to speak) of the Japanese sex industry is the subject of Chapter Two, “Producing *Iyashi*: Healing, Labor, and the Reconfiguration of Intimacy in Tokyo’s Sex Industry.” I argue that in contemporary Japan, the unpaid reproductive labor of the housewife has been partially transferred to the waged, market-based labor of female sex workers. Middle-class, white-collar male productivity has recently become linked to a form of deeply gendered affective labor and care work provided by women in the mainstream commercial sex industry. The services of these women center on *iyashi* (healing), a carefully constructed performance of intimacy that commingles maternal care with sexual gratification. Through achieving male sexual release, sex workers reproduce men as capable and effective workers. As the market troubles the care relationship, sex workers must conceal the laboring aspects of their work within notions of intrinsic femininity. I focus on the analysis of an employee training session at a sexual massage

business in central Tokyo to illustrate how gendered relationships are produced so as to seem natural, even when those producing them do so to their own disadvantage.

Chapter Three, “First-Timers Welcome!: High Income and Short-Term Labor in the Sex Industry,” examines how women who enter sex industry work navigate the tensions implicit in the opportunities afforded by the industry. Although women’s exclusion from higher-status sectors of the labor market that are gendered “male” make the sex industry a uniquely lucrative short-term occupation for women, labor in this industry nonetheless remains highly stigmatized. Prevalent stereotypes about sex industry work commonly frame women’s motivations to work in this industry in terms of extremes: namely, that women enter either out of desperate need, or, conversely, that they enter for selfish and socially transgressive reasons. These caricatures, not surprisingly, fail to account for the ambivalences and moral complexities that characterize women’s understandings of their labor. I argue that in order to navigate these tensions, women in the sex industry produce accounts that emphasize passivity over agency, highlight self-sacrifice and moral obligations to kin, and that, occasionally, cast doubt on the motivations of peers. At the heart of this chapter is a discussion of women’s construction of themselves as *shirōto* (“amateurs”), a culturally relevant notion signifying authenticity and innocence, which foregrounds women’s ordinariness and serves to create a buffer between themselves and a stigmatized identity (e.g. “professional” sex worker).

Chapter Four, “Trafficking Trajectories and Vulnerable Women: Japanese Anti-Human Trafficking NGOs,” follows the grassroots efforts of a prominent Tokyo-based anti-human trafficking NGO, which I name Let’s Fight Slavery Japan (LFSJ), to problematize the sex industry through reconfiguring ordinary Japanese women and

children as sexually vulnerable subjects. I show how a group of young activists, inspired by American rhetorical framings of prostitution, have introduced a framework of exploitation in the sex industry in a context in which this issue has hitherto only rarely been invoked. Focusing on “domestic trafficking” in the sex industry, LFSJ draws on transnational discourses of violence against women to produce a politics of care couched in the language of social change and ethical consciousness. For the cosmopolitan young Japanese who staff and support the organization, exploitation in the sex industry emerges from issues related to selfhood, including women’s underdeveloped self-esteem, individual agency, or communicative abilities. The interventions of this organization center around the “empowerment” of young women, including the NGO audiences themselves. Sex workers, however, largely fail to recognize themselves in the representations put out by this NGO. I argue that, paradoxically, although LFSJ embraces the universal subject of human rights, the discourse they produce undermines sex workers’ potential claims for labor rights.

Chapter Five, “Who Needs Protection?: Japanese Government Discourses on Victimhood,” is an analysis of the processes by which the Japanese government objectifies and uses the concept of human trafficking in response to calls to address labor exploitation in the sex industry. I am interested, in particular, in what these processes tell us about who counts as a victim and why, especially when distinctions are made between individuals in objectively similar circumstances. I argue that in its efforts to incorporate international anti-human trafficking standards, the Japanese government has narrowly constructed victims as non-Japanese female migrants in forced prostitution (i.e., as female “others”). The government thereby inadvertently produces a rubric whereby the

care of Japanese victims, male or transgendered subjects, or victims of other types of forced labor is left to grassroots organizations. Behind this is a government approach to human rights that constructs human rights as emanating from citizens' cultivated dispositions toward others rather than as a government mandate to ensure freedoms and protections.

In Chapter Six, "From Amateurs to Professionals: The Japanese Sex Workers' Rights Movement," I focus on an emergent movement, which uses a labor rights framework to mobilize sex workers and organize for political recognition. The conditions of labor in this industry necessitate that sex workers – although not recognized *as* laborers – assume risk to their physical and sexual health on a daily basis. The construction of women working in the sex industry as *shirōto* ("amateurs") thus works against their interests in terms of labor protections and, especially, health and safety. In this chapter, I consider what it means to advocate on behalf of a stigmatized laboring identity. These activists do not seek to challenge the status quo of a gender-unequal society but rather to reconfigure sex workers as legitimate citizen-subjects who can openly advocate for better labor protections and resources. Through participation in international networks of sex workers' organizations, Japanese sex worker activists must re-frame the specificity of their circumstances through normative human rights discourses on a global stage while also negotiating which elements of international activism are and are not useful at home.

Collectively, these chapters contribute to larger conversations and informed scholarship on what constitutes "sex" and how such definitions reframe our understandings of the political and economic implications of erotic life. Studying sex as

care reveals other ways in which sex may be imagined as a socially productive activity, in addition to reproduction, pleasure, or political liberation. This framework illuminates how the socially necessary labor of female sex workers is simultaneously the grounds for their economic exclusion and the ways in which individuals may be depoliticized from making rights claims.

**Chapter One**  
**Tokyo's Libidinal Economy:**  
**Consuming and Regulating Commercial Sex in the City**

In central Tokyo, thousands of pedestrians pass by sex industry businesses every day. Far from being ghettoized to certain neighborhoods, the sex industry has, until recently, been a part of the everyday urban geography of Japanese cities. Store-based sex industry businesses are centered in two types of business districts. *Kanrakugai* are entertainment districts historically dedicated to gambling, drinking, and buying [sex] – *utsu, nomu, kau*, the three traditional “male” recreational pursuits – but today also include venues such as movie theaters, arcades, karaoke parlors, and bowling alleys (Nagai 2002). In these districts, sex industry businesses are densely stacked above, below, or in between other businesses, forming a complex matrix dedicated to *asobi*, or “play.” In contrast, *fūzokugai* are districts dedicated solely to commercial sex. In these districts, other businesses (e.g. pharmacies, take-out restaurants) play merely a supporting role to sexual commerce.

In both *kanrakugai* and *fūzokugai*, most passersby seem hardly to notice the sex industry businesses in the background. These districts are generally safe, crowded, anonymous, and within easy access to the last train home. If you stand still for ten minutes, you will likely see housewives passing through on their bicycles, baskets full with groceries, and children walking to or from school. Groups of young adults will pass through weighed down by shopping bags or immersed in their cell phones. Men and

women in office dress will busily walk by, impatient to reach the local train or subway station. There may even be some tourists, taking photographs of the neon flashing lights, although they may be unclear on the exact nature of the businesses they are photographing.

In this chapter, I examine how the sex industry forms a part of the physical and economic geography of the city of Tokyo. As part of this examination, I will portray an industry that is constantly in flux as larger legal and political-economic changes re-shape the demand for different kinds of commercial sex. In particular, however, this chapter will necessarily dwell on the regulation of the sex industry over time, delving into changing ideas about “public order,” regulation and surveillance, recreational release from social responsibilities, and public morals. I argue that over the past ten years, an increasingly conservative state apparatus has cleaned up the store-based sex industry, pushing it underground in the name of “public order,” yet without changing any of the basic assumptions about commercial sex which fuel the industry’s existence. A linked argument is that the laws regulating the sex industry are kept purposefully vague, such that the police can expediently crack down at any point. While sex industry stakeholders thus live a precarious existence, at the same time, proliferating forms of sex industry businesses are normalized through their incorporation into the existing legal framework under the guiding principle that this will make it easier to keep tabs on the industry.

### *Past and Present in the Yoshiwara District*

A map toward the back of a sex industry employment magazine for women (see Chapter Three) depicts the larger Tokyo metropolitan area and its surrounding

prefectures as a web of interconnected train and subway hubs.<sup>10</sup> While many stations appear only as small dots by which the reader can orient herself, those stations with significant distributions of sex industry businesses appear as large blocks on the map: Shinjuku, Shibuya, Ueno, Ikebukuro, Ōmiya, Kawasaki... Glancing at this visual representation of the metropolis and its outskirts, a job-seeker can strategize about a number of factors. First, for women with family and a social network residing locally, distance from one's social base is the primary consideration in choosing a workplace. Imagining the commute to and from work is also significant, as is thinking about a location in terms of attributes such as the types of sex industry businesses dominant in a particular neighborhood, the overall atmosphere, shopping opportunities, and the potential clientele. Through studying this map, sex industry job-seekers can visualize the city in terms of spaces where they live their "real," socially acceptable lives and those spaces where they become workers in a stigmatized industry and create a new, liminal identity for themselves.

Conversely, in mainstream sex industry information guides for men, maps hone in on specific sections of the city, clearly demarcating certain neighborhoods as zones where diverse forms of sexual and sexualized services can be obtained. These guides – the most prolific of which is the *Manzoku* ("satisfaction") *Map Series* – break down the store composition of each district, using elaborate descriptors to indicate which types of services can be found where. Customers are informed, for example, on where they can go to find businesses that are *bijo-kei* ("beautiful woman type"), *sekushī-kei* ("sexy type"),

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<sup>10</sup> In popular imaginings of urban space, Tokyo denizens typically reference the closest train or subway station when giving their neighborhood, signaling the centrality of these transportation hubs to Tokyo's urban geography and to the self-identification of its residents. One's "county" (*-ku*) is given only as a secondary reference point.

*gakuen-kei* (“campus type”), or *hitozuma-kei* (“married woman type”). Although mobile businesses render location unimportant, to some extent,<sup>11</sup> even these businesses are typically associated with certain neighborhoods.

Both these species of maps – maps for job-seekers and maps for consumers – represent how commercial sex is distributed across urban space, such that laborers and consumers alike can imagine themselves traversing the city to cater to their preferences. This broad proliferation of commercial sex across urban space, however, is a recent phenomenon, as for much of the modern Japanese history of prostitution, the government explicitly followed a policy of “regulation through containment” (*kakuri seisaku*). This was realized through the spatial and structural technology of the *yūkaku*, or government-recognized “red-light district.” The *yūkaku* system was pioneered in 1617 with the establishment of the Yoshiwara district in Edo<sup>12</sup> following the petitioning of a brothel keeper who recognized the business potential in the “rapidly increasing and predominantly male population” of the growing castle town (Stanley 2012:45).<sup>13</sup> The establishment of the Yoshiwara district marked the formal beginning of the licensed prostitution system (*kōshō seido*) in Japan.

The Yoshiwara *yūkaku* was characterized by geographic separation that symbolized its place within the greater moral order promulgated by the Tokugawa government. Similar to its treatment of other forms of urban (male) leisure, such as *kabuki* theater (Shively 1955), the authoritarian Tokugawa government sought to contain

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<sup>11</sup> Some “delivery” businesses provide drivers to drop off and pick up sex workers at their assignation point, while others require customers to shoulder transportation (taxi) costs. For both, location is thus still relevant.

<sup>12</sup> Edo was the castle town of shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu that was effectively – although not formally – made capital in 1603 and which is now modern-day Tokyo.

<sup>13</sup> A precursor to the *yūkaku* was established in Kyoto in 1589.

potentially subversive recreational forms, permitting them only insofar as they could be tightly controlled and surveilled. In the case of prostitution, as with drinking and gambling, the potentially subversive element lay not in the act of indulgence itself but in *excessive* indulgence – for example, in frequenting the *yūkaku* so often that one’s finances, family relations, and reputation would suffer (Nagai 2002). Moral restrictions on prostitution were, thus, historically concerned with containing excess rather than prohibiting male indulgence. Additionally, due to their liminal nature, brothels were also suspected of harboring criminals, especially political enemies of the Tokugawa state (Nagai 2002:29).

Both spatially and structurally, the *yūkaku* emphasized a method of enclosure (*kakoikomi no hōshin*) whereby negative elements could be contained within a closed-off space on the margins of the urban periphery. In order to discourage their use, *yūkaku* were placed on the perimeters of towns. When the Tokugawa government first granted permission for the Yoshiwara district to be constructed, they designated a reed marsh on the city’s outskirts for its location. As the city limits expanded and gradually enveloped this site (what is today Ningyōchō in the Nihonbashi area of contemporary Tokyo), the government sought out another, less central site. From 1656-1657, the district was relocated further northeast to a space in the northeast quarter, in the vicinity of two other sites characterized by their exclusion from the moral order: the Kozukappara execution ground and a *buraku* (neighborhood for Japanese outcasts) (De Becker 1971[1905]8-11; Fowler 1996:36-37).

The walls and moats that encompassed the *yūkaku* district served to symbolically separate “wholesome” (*kenzenna*) society from a microcosm that represented, in some

ways, an inversion of the social order. Once inside the district, the rigid social distinctions between classes (e.g. samurai, farmers, artisans, merchants, and several categories of “non-people”) lost much of their social significance and attention was dedicated to recreation and pleasure. To arrive at the district, many townspeople would take small open-air boats up the Sumida River, following a popular river passage (Screech 2010). Upon their arrival at the district, customers entered and left through a single entrance, which was marked by the grand *Yoshiwara Ōmon* (“great Yoshiwara gate”). In doing so, they passed by two gatehouses, where “day and night not only watchmen and detectives but two members of the secret police sent from the city magistrate’s office were posted in rotation for the surveillance of pedestrians” (Sone 1999:171). “Ordinary” women and children, meanwhile, could not enter freely, and prostitutes, who were obligated to register at the *yūkaku*’s central office, could leave only in extenuating circumstances, both so that society could be “protected” from them and to prevent indebted prostitutes from fleeing their contracts (De Becker 1971[1905]).

Although the walls and moat are long gone, today the Yoshiwara district still retains this sense of isolation. The closest train or subway station is Minowa Station, a minor subway station serviced by only one line. Passengers getting off at Minowa must still walk ten minutes through a residential neighborhood before the first businesses begin appearing. The closest major station is busy Ueno, and a 20-minute bus ride drops commuters off two blocks from the district. The constant flow of taxis and store courtesy cars (*sōgeisha*) in the district, however, indicates that most customers know beforehand where they are going and prefer to be delivered directly to their destination. When I mentioned the inconvenience of getting to the Yoshiwara to a sex worker friend, she

immediately replied, “yeah, it was a *yūkaku*, so it’s not an area that you’re supposed to go to.” What remains unexplained, however, is why in the post-war development of Tokyo, when commuter networks have expanded across the city and other entertainment areas have emerged in highly centralized areas, this policy of isolation should still be the case.

On my first visit to Yoshiwara, I was accompanied by Risa, a sex worker in her late twenties who had previously worked in the district for about four years until she had followed a co-worker to a sex industry district outside Tokyo that promised to be more lucrative (I discuss Risa’s story in more detail in Chapter Three). We met in the early winter evening at Ueno Station and took the bus, passing the time by chatting about Risa’s concerns over the safety of her natal family. They lived in a small town in Fukushima prefecture, only about an hour or so away from the site of the now-defunct Fukushima *Daiichi* Nuclear Plant.

Looking out the window, I watched as the bus took us through the “Low Town” (*shitamachi*) neighborhoods that characterize northeast Tokyo. During the city’s development, the “Low Town” (“low” refers to the altitude of the land) was the area where the city’s petty merchants and artisans concentrated. Over time, the area became associated with a distinct down-to-earth “commoner” urban culture, which is often contrasted with the more modern, developed, and cosmopolitan centers of power in Tokyo (Seidensticker 1983).<sup>14</sup> Many of the early forms of mass amusement and entertainment – including the Ichimura-za *kabuki* theater, the Hanayashiki amusement park, the movie theaters of Asakusa’s Rokku district, and the horse races, large exhibitions, museums, and zoo of Ueno Park – were established in *shitamachi* districts in

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<sup>14</sup> There is also a wonderful *Shitamachi* Museum in Ueno Park, which focuses mostly on *shitamachi* culture in the Meiji (1868-1912) and Taishō (1912-1926) periods.

the 1800s and early 1900s. In contrast to Tokyo's cosmopolitan centers, the *shitamachi* is popularly imagined as retaining a more authentically “Japanese” ethos, and even today, many older residents speak with a distinct “Edo dialect” (*Edo ben*). In this sense, it is appropriate that the Yoshiwara district should be in the *shitamachi*, insofar as it carries a sense of an older, lingering world about it.

The bus from Ueno Station took Risa and myself through mostly residential neighborhoods and a series of small covered shopping arcades filled with mom-and-pop stores. We got off at a non-descript stop two blocks from Yoshiwara, just by the famous *mikaeri yanagi* (“looking back willow tree”), at which customers reluctantly returning home from a trip to the *yūkaku* were said to wistfully glance back one last time before passing back into the world of everyday work and family concerns. Today the tree stands directly next to a gas station. There is a large stone slab in front of it bearing its name, and also a plaque in Japanese and English which commemorates the willow and its place in Japanese poetry, pointing out also that the original willow was slightly to the north of the current site. Although the great Yoshiwara entrance gate used to stand immediately outside the district, if one looks up at the traffic signals, at a sign placed among the chaos of power cables spanning the busy street, one sees that the intersection has been named *Yoshiwara Ōmon* (“great Yoshiwara gate”), marking the historical existence of this entranceway to all who pass through.

Risa and I turned at the corner where the “looking back willow tree” stands, walking along a long curve in the road that obscured the first glimpses of the old sex industry district. Risa must have been self-conscious about whether the Yoshiwara – which, due to its longevity and historical influence on popular culture and art, is the most

famous sex industry district in the country – would meet my expectations, because she told me that with the post-Fukushima disaster energy-saving measures in place, the district would probably be relatively dark. As we walked, I reflected on her use of the word *kurai* (“dark”), musing that it could apply in at least two senses. First, the streets were indeed mostly dark, lacking the usually omnipresent neon lights of other sex industry districts, even as we reached the first soaplands.<sup>15</sup> Beyond the lit-up store signs and the moving spotlights created by passing cars, there was little light. Because it was a cold late November night during this first visit and everyone out was bundled up warmly, the darkness seemed especially tangible.

Among sex workers, however, there is also a secondary meaning to *kurai*. The word is often used in reference to soaplands to differentiate them from the supposedly “lighter,” more youthful and materialistic world of *herusu* and other sex industry businesses. Within the hierarchy of sex industry businesses, sex workers are known to earn the most at soaplands, but because the services are widely known to include (illegal) penile-vaginal intercourse (*honban*) as well as difficult techniques (as part of the service, soapland workers lather themselves up with soap and massage their customers using their body while on an air mattress), many women won’t work there. During my fieldwork, I commonly heard sex workers say that the women working in places like Yoshiwara were either those who needed money – whether to pay off a credit card debt or to support a

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<sup>15</sup> Soaplands (*sōpurando*) are businesses where customers are bathed by a sex worker before receiving sexual services. These services are widely known to include (illegal) penile-vaginal intercourse.

lover or family member – or those who were too old or unattractive to work elsewhere.<sup>16</sup> It wasn't uncommon to hear stories of forty- or fifty-year-old women working in the Yoshiwara, and most sex workers and male staff whom I spoke to agreed that a significant percentage of *soapjō* (women employed at soaplands) are single mothers. It is important to note, however, that the reference to “darkness” wasn't meant as an allusion to desperation, exploitation (*yami*, or “darkness,” is commonly used by Japanese anti-prostitution advocates to foreground the exploitative aspects of the industry), or melancholy. Rather, the use of *kurai* seemed to consistently refer to a seriousness of purpose that sex workers don't seem to associate with other businesses, where many employees are young women earning a disposable income.

Two blocks from the “looking back willow tree,” all of a sudden, the soaplands started to appear. First one, then one after another. Unlike other sex industry districts, there is no variety here – Yoshiwara is a concentrated “soapland town” (*sōpugai*). On some streets, the “soaps” (*sōpu*) stand shoulder to shoulder (see Figure 1), each with a distinct (and often garishly colored) façade, including Venetian-style balconies, faux stained glass windows or stonework, and mini turrets. Most buildings, however, distinguish themselves from their neighbors by color and building material. There are names like *Raten Kuōtā* (Latin Quarter), *Mūran Rūju* (Moulin Rouge), *Ōshitsu* (Royal Family), *Jo'ōbachi* (Queen Bee), and *Misutā Dandi Pāto II* (Mr. Dandy Part II). While elsewhere, a foreign-sounding name might possibly be a reference to the nationality of the employees, in Yoshiwara it is generally assumed that all the sex workers are

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<sup>16</sup> This stereotype fit Risa's own path to working in the Yoshiwara as well. As I detail in Chapter Three, Risa began working in a Yoshiwara soapland in order to help pay for her older sister's medical school fees.

Japanese; the foreign names are meant to evoke exotic glamour rather than be matter-of-fact.<sup>17</sup> The buildings are free-standing, and most are not more than three or four stories tall. Some stores open as early as 7 o'clock a.m., but all operate until midnight, at which point the law mandates closing. From morning to late night, male staff called *bōi* (“boy” – the diminutive indicates their place at the bottom of the staff hierarchy rather than youth) stand in the entranceways of businesses waiting to greet customers, whether they are arriving spontaneously on foot or, more often, arrive expected via taxi or courtesy car.



Figure 1: Six soaplands stand shoulder to shoulder on this Yoshiwara street, May 2013. Photograph by author.

Until fairly recently, the Yoshiwara housed approximately 250 soaplands. At this time, the maps in sex industry information guides resembled those of the old Yoshiwara

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<sup>17</sup> This is in contrast to Millie Creighton’s (1997) discussion of the use of images of phenotypically-non-Japanese foreigners in Japanese advertising as a method for breaking Japanese social conventions.

*yūkaku* in its heyday, with the entire space filled with businesses. Today, due to legal changes which I will discuss in detail shortly, that number has dwindled to about 140 businesses, and consumer maps now feature gray spaces which are occupied by a hodgepodge of small coffee or noodle shops, catering places (where *soapjō* can buy pricey take-out meals during their break), and apartment buildings. Significant portions of the land stand empty. On the taxi ride back to the nearest train station that evening, the driver, a man in his sixties who had lived in the area his entire life, asked Risa and me if we had noticed all the parking lots in Yoshiwara. Yes, as a matter of fact, there had been a lot of parking lots. Why was that? Those were spaces where soaplands had formerly stood, he told us. Because the law prohibits a retiring owner from passing on the business and many “ordinary” businesses are reluctant to move in, they had been converted to parking spaces. It was a real waste, he thought, implying that his sympathies lay with the soapland management rather than with local landlords missing out on rent.

While the contemporary Yoshiwara district retains some of the geographical marginalization intended by Tokugawa-period administrators, they would certainly have been shocked by the proximity of soaplands to residential areas. Narrow two-story pre-fab houses and concrete apartment buildings surround and infiltrate the historic district. During the daytime, these homes have futons hanging over the balconies for airing and laundry hung out to dry. The residents who look out their windows at soapland storefronts have surely internalized the constant sound of cars stopping to letting their passengers out and of those passengers being greeted as “BGM” (background music). And yet, neither during my initial nighttime visit to the district or on a subsequent daytime visit were there many pedestrians in the area. Most people seemed to pass

through on bicycles or in cars. Risa told me that it is widely assumed that pedestrians are either customers or employees. In fact, female pedestrians are often the subject of much interest and when she had been employed there, men had often called out to her to ask what store she worked at. It was simply assumed that she would have no other business in being there. This sentiment was confirmed on a subsequent visit when a former soapland manager I was interviewing pointed out one female pedestrian after another, telling me which businesses they worked at. Female pedestrians, it was clear, were still marked in this neighborhood.

And yet while many aspects of a normal residential district have crept into the Yoshiwara district, the history of the space is clearly acknowledged, even celebrated, by locals. On my second visit to the area, I went with another sex worker friend, Shiori, who despite her veteran status in the sex industry (she was one of the few sex workers I met who really delighted in her work and openly missed it after her “retirement”) and lifelong residence in Tokyo had never been to Yoshiwara. Shiori took great pride in her work and, unlike most sex workers I met, had done secondary research into the history of prostitution in Japan. It was at her apartment that I first saw reprints some of the old maps of the Yoshiwara district. Walking around the area one warm May afternoon, we stopped in at the Yoshiwara Shrine. Some local men (likely members of the town council) were in the midst of cleaning off the *mikoshi* (palanquin shrine) thought to house the deity associated with the shrine, which, an English-language sign posted just outside the shrine grounds informed us, was “Inari, the god of business prosperity, and Benzaiten, the

goddess of protecting women.”<sup>18</sup> Ambling around the streets on our way to the shrine, Shiori and I had noticed festival lanterns decorating the entrances of many of the soaplands. A poster indicated that the shrine’s regular festival would be held that weekend, no doubt in coordination with the much larger and famous *Sanja Matsuri* festival in nearby Asakusa. Once the festivities began later that same afternoon, the Yoshiwara area would be indistinguishable from any other neighborhood festival, with local business leaders – including soapland managers – dressing in the distinct short-sleeved *happi* coats worn at festivals.

We knocked at the window of the shrine office, then poked our heads inside the open doorway to call for a shrine attendant. Shiori and I both wanted to buy an *omamori* (protective amulet). Shrines often sell amulets suited for different purposes (e.g. for protection in childbirth, good fortune on an upcoming exam, or protection from traffic accidents) and I wondered whether there would be any amulets particularly relevant to local soapland workers. Given that it was a relatively small shrine, however, there turned out to only be one generic amulet. Amidst the other paraphernalia on sale, however, we spotted a *Yoshiwara Pawā Supotto* (Yoshiwara “Power Spot” – referring to places thought to have some kind of mystical energy stemming from their popularity) map for ¥100. Curiously, the map left much of the *yūkaku*’s history unexpressed, except for images of wood-block prints of courtesans, references to the type of boats used by customers to commute to the district, and close-ups of the “looking back willow tree” and an office where *geisha* used to congregate. The map focused instead on drawing attention

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<sup>18</sup> “Carried on a framework of poles, the shrines, which usually weigh hundreds of kilograms, are built of lacquered wood decorated with shiny metal fittings, elegant brocades, and colorful tassels, and are commonly topped by a golden phoenix” (Robertson 1991:48).

to the historical buildings, famous stores, and various literary figures (including Higuchi Ichiyō, whose face dons the ¥5,000 note) associated with the area.

In other locations as well, I noticed that the *yūkaku*'s history was selectively acknowledged. Just 50 meters past the shrine is *Taitō Byōin*, a district hospital. This hospital, located just outside the grounds of the old brothel district, was originally the Yoshiwara Hospital, established in the early 1900s as a venereal disease clinic. Unlike other sites in the area, this hospital does not have a historical placard. Another hundred meters past the hospital – and firmly outside the grounds of the old district now – lies the site of the former Benten pond. Placards in Japanese and English explain that the deity Benzaiten used to be worshipped in this spot and during the disastrous fire that broke out after the 1926 Great Kantō Earthquake, many prostitutes and customers sought shelter in the pond. The site is now a small memorial to the 645 individuals who died in the fire. A series of glass display cases exhibit other historical points of interest, such as old illustrations as well as a series of historical photographs referring to how Yoshiwara was affected by the great famine in Northeastern Japan in the early 1930s. The photographs show hungry-looking children eating radishes out of a garden, and young girls who have been indentured (“sold”) to Yoshiwara brothel owners holding small travel bundles. Another shows a community bulletin covered in a handwritten sign telling parents where to go to “sell” (*miuri*) their daughters into indentured labor. One caption comments that of the 58,000 girls “sold,” about half became prostitutes. The site is now a peaceful park with small, colorful flowers and glass wind bells that ring with the slightest breeze. In the quarter hour we spent in the park, perhaps ten pedestrians, mostly elderly, came to walk around the small park, with several stopping to peruse the glass display cases. Before we

left, Shiori took a minute to pray at the small shrine for Benzaiten. I wondered if the women who had lost their lives here in the great fire of 1926 were on her mind.



Figure 2: Shiori praying at the shrine for Benzaiten in Yoshiwara. Photograph by author.

### *Driving with a Loose Steering Wheel*

One of the most recurrent topics of conversation during my fieldwork involved how the ambiguous legal status of the sex industry posed numerous risks and challenges for industry workers that became mundane in their everydayness. The legal status of the industry, as I was often told, was “gray” (*gurē*). For quite some time, the exact *de jure* status of the industry was a source of confusion to me, as sex workers, industry stakeholders, and police officers would casually but vaguely refer to the illegality of the industry at the same time that people also spoke about “properly run” (*chanto dekita*) stores whose registration paperwork was all in order. To me it seemed that everyone somehow knew that the industry was illegal although no one would go into further detail

other than “it’s the *Fūeihō*.”<sup>19</sup> My reading of the law, on the other hand, made it seem as if sex industry businesses – as long as they were following the letter of the law – were perfectly legal. After all, the law went into mind-numbing detail about the particular conditions under which businesses should be run. It was clear that there were degrees of legality and illegality. Although I spoke with many individuals about the details about the laws structuring the sex industry, in the end, it was only through plodding through the laws themselves and commentaries written about them and *then* thinking back on what people had told me, that the conditions of the industry’s legal existence became clear. To understand the industry’s ambiguous status, we need to look closer at some of the recent revisions of the *Fūeihō*.

In 1964, the *Fūeihō* had been revised so as to prohibit sex industry businesses from operating within 200 meters of a government building, school, library, or child welfare facility. Using antiquated language that recalls the pre-war era, the wording of the law justifies this provision as necessary to “prevent acts which harm virtuous morals, a pure environment, and/or create obstacles to the wholesome cultivation of young people” (Fūzoku Eigyōtō no Kisei oyobi Gyōmu no Tekiseikatō ni Kansuru Hōritsu Article 28 Section 1). A major 1984 revision of the law added a further section to this article, in which it gave prefectural and metropolitan governments the ability to further stipulate prohibited areas of operation for sex industry businesses, again citing the need to protect the morals of society. No new businesses could be established in these prohibited areas (*kinshi kuiki*). While undoubtedly it took some time for zoning regulations to be developed in each prefecture, today, in all of Tokyo, regulations permit new businesses to

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<sup>19</sup> The Law Regulating Entertainment Businesses (see Introduction).

be built only in one small several-block area of Taito ward (in the Yoshiwara vicinity), in the northeastern part of the city (Tōkyōtochō 2010; Tachikawa 2007:71)! Thus, while there are a few areas around the country where one can freely build new stores (see Tachikawa 2007:70-71 for a nationwide listing), they are incredibly limited.

What happened to those stores operating in areas which were suddenly decreed prohibited spaces? No new businesses could be built, but the law also wanted to avoid businesses continuing for a long time. Those stores which had already been operating (and which had properly turned in all their paperwork), were recognized as having preceded the law (having *kitokuken*, or, vested rights) and thus their continued operations were recognized for the time being. The changes to the law were engineered so as to allow for the planned obsolescence of the brick-and-mortar businesses of the sex industry. Thus, these stores also are not allowed to remodel or rebuild, leading to many businesses with crumbling walls and infrastructure.<sup>20</sup>

At the time of the 1964 and 1984 revisions, the sex industry was thriving and no one could really imagine a time when this would not be the case. In fact, until a “clean up” campaign was launched in Tokyo in 2004, illegal stores operated with impunity and little regard for the law. It is only now that the state has taken a fundamentally new approach toward the sex industry, that these laws have become more socially relevant, as I will take up in later sections of this chapter. Today, *kitokuken* (vested rights) are what keeps store-based businesses alive as the police become more and more stringent about making sure that operators are strictly conforming to the letter of the law. In short, *kitokuken* recognize operations for that one respective generation of business operator.

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<sup>20</sup> Many businesses, it seems, have used underground (especially organized crime-related) connections to covertly remodel.

When that person retires or dies, even continuing the same business would require re-submitting the paperwork, which the police treats as a new business. In fact, the one thing that is legal requires much forethought. If you plan ahead and register a corporate entity (*hōjin*) and then just have the representative (*daihyōsha*) listed change, this is legal (Fūzoku Eigyō Kyōka Shinsei Zenkoku Mappu N.d.), although, recently, corporate licensing has begun to be challenged by local authorities as well.<sup>21</sup>

The revised parameters of the *Fūeihō* often create a depressing situation for industry insiders in which a popular and long-established business closes, not because of a lack of willing successors, but because the law prohibits the business' continuation. In October 2010, I attended the closing day of the famous Nagoya strip theater, Gin'ei, which was beloved by dancers and fans alike for its size, beautiful layout, and impressive lighting. I spent the whole day there, from opening (at noon) to closing (midnight), and observed the heightening and poignant emotions of dancers and fans, many of whom had

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<sup>21</sup> In October 2012, a chain group which owned eight soaplands in the Yoshiwara area was investigated over its registration status, as the owner had recently centralized the group's operations, leading local authorities to question whether this constituted a legitimate continuation of the *kitokuken* (vested rights). In the course of this investigation, the police "discovered" prostitution going on at the soaplands, subsequently raiding all eight stores and arresting 39 individuals. This caused a stir in sex industry circles, as the police were seen to have violated the longstanding "soapland loophole," the tacit understanding by which the police have long turned a blind eye to prostitution at soaplands. Within this tacit understanding, the customer pays the store for a bath and massage. When the customer and employee have sexual intercourse, this is officially explained as "free love," (*jiyū ren'ai*), in which the two are engaging of their free will, and for which the customer may give the woman a tip afterward, but with which the store has no connection (the female employees at soaplands are also independent contractors, having to rent their rooms from the manager, give "bonuses" to the male staff periodically, and so on). It is also worth noting that the act of prostitution itself (*tanjun baishun*), while illegal, has no provisions for punishment. The October 2012 Yoshiwara raids caused further consternation among industry insiders for the original investigation of the *kitokuken*, which was read as a further threat to the industry (Josei Jūgyōin 600ninkoe, Yoshiwara Saidaikyū Sōpu Keieishara 39nin Taiho 2012; Okiyama 2012).

traveled from around the country to be there that day. Many fans with whom I spoke (I was there as part of a documentary crew) expressed their sorrow to me about the theater's closing. I was told that after 38 years, the owner finally wanted to retire. The owner, for his part, was sullen and kept what was surely sorrow mixed with resignation inside himself. As I went in and out of his office throughout the day to retrieve items from my personal belongings, he sat at his desk with his legs up watching television. One of the cameramen on the documentary project told me he had done the same thing the day before. He was monosyllabic during my attempts at small talk, and when I made the mistake of directly addressing how sad everyone would be without the theater, his face tightened, and I quickly apologized and left. The mood among the fans was one mixed of support for a theater that clearly meant a great deal to many of them, and frustration with the law, which they described as having unfairly cornered Gin'ei into closing. One fan, in a letter he submitted to the documentary crew, asked, "what is the law meant to protect? What kind of a society is it trying to create? Was anyone harmed by the existence of strip theaters? Strip theater is part of Japanese culture and an art form, beloved by dancers, theater staff, and its fans, but..."<sup>22</sup>

The exact legal status of the sex industry becomes even murkier when one considers the system by which businesses are registered with the authorities. Amusement businesses involving drinking and entertainment or gambling (everything from hostess clubs to mahjong parlors) operate on a permission system (*kyokasei*), whereby the local Public Safety Commission<sup>23</sup> reviews paperwork submitted by them and hands down

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<sup>22</sup> Letter from Gin'ei fan to documentary film crew, October 31, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Consisting of police officials and high-status professionals.

official approval. The sex industry, on the other hand,<sup>24</sup> surprisingly operates by a notification system (*todokedesei*). Business owners do not submit paperwork and then wait for permission to be handed down to them by the Public Safety Commission. Rather, they submit the necessary documentation to the Safety Bureau (*Seikatsu Anzenka*) of the local police station in whose jurisdiction the business would fall, and notify them that they will begin operating soon. Provided no information is missing and all the filled-in information checks out with regulations, the owners can begin to operate their store, having “notified” the authorities.

This “hands off” approach keeps the police a modest distance away from the industry. When I questioned an official at the National Police Agency (NPA) from the Community Safety Bureau (*Hoanka*) of the Safety Division (*Seikatsu Anzenkyoku*), which is responsible for national policy related to regulating the *fūzoku*, about this policy, he leaned in across the table, and lowering his voice while smiling, said that if the police put the sex industry on the permission system, that would be tantamount to state approval of the sex industry. Although he didn’t say it at the time, it was clear that this went back to the ambiguity of the law. A police handbook on sex crimes and sex industry regulation clarifies the situation by pointing out that the law doesn’t explicitly say the sex industry is legal. What it has done is simply to say that it *isn’t illegal* for businesses to operate as long as they follow the laws. The handbook acknowledges that there will be some businesses that will illegally allow prostitution, but it would be unfair to uniformly prohibit all businesses because of these outliers (Fujinaga 2005[1996]:302). This distinction perfectly encapsulates the grayness of the law. The police official’s smile and

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<sup>24</sup> Late-night drinking establishments also fall into this “notification system.”

discretion conveyed to me that he was aware of the irony of the law but didn't want to be overheard as being insubordinate (the interview took place in a side room out of his open office) by joking about national policy to a foreign researcher. Undoubtedly he was also aware of the larger irony that prostitution is prohibited in Japan and that many Japanese themselves see the sex industry as simply a name change (that is, from “*baishun*” to “*(sei)fūzoku*”).



Figure 3: Police and sex industry businesses operating side by side in Shibuya. The charcoal gray building in the foreground is a police “box” (*kōban*) and the multi-story beige building in the center is a soapland business. The first floor of the soapland is home to an inexpensive Chinese restaurant (notice the yellow sign) popular with those looking for a quick bite to eat. Photograph by author.

In sum, the law is purposely made vague as it gives authorities greater leeway to clamp down when expedient or to loosen up. This makes it hard for business operators, who operate under the assumption that they have a tacit understanding (*anmoku no*

*ryōkai*) with the police, but who can be punished at any time. The two words which I heard most often in relation to the legal status of the sex industry were “gray” (*gurē*) and *aimai* (lit. “vague, ambiguous”), both of which invoke the liminal, neither-here-nor-there quality of the law within which little is clear cut. Informally, over drinks, two police officers in their late forties expanded on this approach. One of them explained to me proudly how when he was younger, he had patronized every type of sex industry business, stopping only when he was married (although not while he was dating). The other officer, although he himself wasn’t interested in the sex industry, freely acknowledged without prodding that he had also gone twice, together with his seniors. As with other police officers with whom I had spoken, neither opposed the sex industry, and both took its existence to be necessary. Neither thought it was a good idea to let businesses do whatever they wanted and flagrantly break the law, but neither thought the industry should be eliminated either. These two officers also felt that the industry was necessary for “maintaining” male sexuality while also preventing sex crimes.

The law was so vague that police officers themselves, one of the detectives explained to me, needed further commentary to know how to go about the nitty-gritty realities of regulation. A police handbook, *Fūzoku / Seihanzai* (Entertainment Industry and Sex Crimes) (Fujinaga 2005[1996]), gives detailed case studies of crimes and how police should operate in each one. One of the detectives told me, however, that the law is so vague, that reading legal decisions is more helpful than reading the actual law, because it tells them how the authorities are actually interpreting the vagueness of the laws.<sup>25</sup> He

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<sup>25</sup> In a highly patronizing interview, a male NPA official began our conversation by literally reading the *Fūeihō* out loud to me. When it became clear that he would continue unless I interrupted him, I did so with a question that showed I was clearly familiar with

posed a question. The *Fūeihō* says that businesses are not allowed to renovate, but what constitutes a renovation? Does fixing the walls constitute a renovation? Surely not. Similarly, a former soapland operator in Yoshiwara told me that they can submit paperwork to the police for approval of renovations, but the approval process takes about half a year, so it's very frustrating. Clearly, there is also a lot of fudging going on. When I asked this same operator about who would take over his business once he retired and how that would work legally, it quickly became clear that this was not within the realm of topics he was willing to discuss with me. He mumbled that it was possible to change the name of the operator on the paperwork but that it would be difficult; evidently this was not a strictly legal process.

Within this “gray” approach to the law, the operators and employees of sex industry businesses are largely at the mercy of the police, who might step in and decide at any point that a previously allowed practice is now in opposition to their interpretation of the law. Each of the operators and staff with whom I spoke were very much plugged into information networks within the industry, paying close attention to news of who had been raided or arrested and on what charges or interpretation of the law. One commentator on the sex industry, a sex industry journalist who also works part-time as support staff at a sexual massage business, likened the role of industry workers making the best of the legal situation to trying to drive a car in a straight line with a loose steering wheel – they were doing their best, fumbling, to maneuver within contradictory interpretations of the law, and it wasn't easy. His implication was that everyone *wanted* to follow the laws, thus

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the law and took a copy of a police handbook on dealing with sex crimes out of my bag. From his surprised look and amenability to answering subsequent questions, it was clear that my possession of such a text raised his estimation of me considerably.

placing the fault with the laws themselves, and not with any criminal intent on the part of industry workers.

When one wants to open a sex industry store, the necessary paperwork can be easily found on-line at the website of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department.<sup>26</sup> The Public Safety Commission (*Kōaniinkai*), a group made up of senior police officials and high-status professionals, decides what is necessary to register a business and posts the necessary documents on-line. These documents are posted on the same page as application forms for opening an antique goods store or detective agency, for public information disclosure requests, and for car labels that indicate senior citizen drivers. The instructions direct applicants to print and fill out the paperwork on standard A4-sized plain paper and reminds them that they must turn in the paperwork in person at the relevant local police station (Keishichō N.d.).

For reasons I explain at the end of this chapter, most applicants for sex industry businesses today will open mobile, “delivery health” businesses, and not store-based sex industry businesses. Two documents are necessary for opening a sex industry business. The first asks for personal information about the entrepreneur and representative, the location of the office and the waiting room, and the telephone number at which customers can contact the store. The second document asks for information concerning the delivery health’s methods of advertising (internet ads, newspaper and magazine ads, discount coupons, etc.), about whether non-Japanese will be hired as staff and what their role will be, whether minors will be hired and what their role will be, how they will caution minors from entering, and so on. There is further paperwork available for reporting to the police

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<sup>26</sup> Outside of Tokyo, the necessary paperwork can be found on the website of each prefecture’s police department (*kenkei*).

when there's a change of some sort in the business (for example, in the case of "delivery health" businesses, when there is a change in the office or the waiting room), when the business has been temporarily shut down or otherwise received a violation, or when the business closes.

To assist would-be entrepreneurs (or old hands) in filling out their paperwork, there are "Dummies" guides, which come in a series explaining business basics for entrepreneurs wishing to open anything from a ramen noodle store to a business for senior caretakers to a sex industry store. The guides are updated every few years to stay abreast of legal changes and present helpful advice that walks operators through these and other processes associated with running a sex industry business (see, for example, Sawada 2004; Tachikawa 2007). There are also lawyers and paralegals who specialize in filling out paperwork for sex industry businesses, and who are advertised on special websites.

#### *Clean-up Campaigns (Jōka Sakusen)*

Until the early to mid-2000s, many sex industry businesses operated illegally, and this was, for the most part tolerated. Among other things, "Dummies" books coming out ten years ago on how to run a business indicate that the Fūeihō was not a constraint. In many cases the difference between a legal and illegal business, from the eyes of the authorities, had little to do with the actual services offered. Rather, a store could be illegal for operating in an area outside of the zoning for sex industry businesses or outside of the hours of operation determined by the Fūeihō, for violating regulations related to advertising (such as putting out a sign or handing out flyers), for not paying taxes

properly, or for not having registered with the local police. In addition, stores might systematically offer penile-vaginal intercourse or hire foreigners without the appropriate work visa or minors. Periodically, the police would raid businesses that were seen as going too far in breaking the law. In describing this to me, a police officer referred to the saying, *ichibatsu hyakkai* (literally, “one punishment, one hundred warnings”), meaning that the police would make an example of one business in order to caution others from going too far. Overall, however, the sex industry was not a high priority for the police, in part due to attitudes toward the industry as self-evident and necessary.

Around 2003-2004, everything changed for the sex industry in Tokyo. In June 2003, following his successful re-election campaign as governor of Tokyo, Ishihara Shintarō appointed the Hiroshima prefectural police chief Takehana Yutaka (a National Police Agency official) as deputy governor of Tokyo. Two months later, on August 1, Takehana launched the Tokyo Metropolitan Emergency Office for Public Safety, through which he pledged to restore public safety, with emphasis on three initiatives: promoting a “safe town” (*anzen / anshin machizukuri*), preventing crime by juveniles, and combatting crime by foreign mafias (Tōkyōtochō 2004). Increasing regulation and surveillance of entertainment districts formed a key part of this campaign. The infamous sex and entertainment district Kabukichō, located in the Shinjuku area of Tokyo, was singled out in particular, with Takehana calling it a “dirty and unsafe area, with high concentrations of sex industry businesses and lots of traffic by foreign mafia” (Shinjuku Kabukichō, Kyakuhiki Gekigen 2005). In April 2004, the Tokyo Metropolitan Police (TMP) began cracking down on entertainment districts in the name of public safety (*chian*).

Looking back at the news from 2004-2005, and speaking to sex workers and other industry insiders, especially, one gets a sense of the shock that permeated through Tokyo's sex industries at the serious intent behind the *jōka sakusen* (lit. "clean-up tactics"). Everyone thought that it would simply be a matter of superficial punishment, as it usually was, and that things would then go back to normal. But the police began to go after these illegal sex industry businesses (especially massage stores) with venom, and in the first year of the campaign, over 280 stores (not limited to sex industry businesses) in Kabukichō alone were raided, with 200 of these being closed down (Shinjuku / Kabukichō, Kyakuhiki Gekigen 2005). Matsuzawa Kure'ichi, a well-known commentator on the sex industry, was quoted as saying,

"It's no casual thing to say that 'the cuckoo is crying' [business is in a slump] for Kabukichō. This is actually the death of the area. Casinos, illegal DVD stores, and unregistered sex industry businesses which have been tolerated until now are disappearing one by one. [The police] are even going so far as to arrest sex workers working at illegal stores on charges of aiding and abetting [...] At first, we all thought that the clean-up campaign would be the same thing it always is, just a superficial thing, but the Tokyo Metropolitan Police (TMP) are really going after us [...] It's the TMP who's leading the campaign, so they're bringing police from different jurisdictions to help with the raids. It's being done systematically. We've gradually realized that this is the real thing, and that Kabukichō is being destroyed. The manager of a sex industry business who I'm close to told me, 'I'm really nervous, but I'll keep on running the store as long as I can. Since there are so few stores right now, we're actually getting a lot of business.' A few days later, the police came to his store [and shut it down]. Just take a walk around Kabukichō, and you'll see that store after store is closed. For the customers, it's a 'season of hell'" (Yoshida 2005:54-55).

The serious intent behind the clean-up movement surprised business operators, but Ishihara's motivations were far from clear. Today, the most common sentiment on the street is that Ishihara cleaned up Tokyo's entertainment districts because he was going after the 2016 Olympic bid. Some also speculate that he wanted

to punish those businesses that weren't properly paying taxes, while another popular theory is that Ishihara wanted to make space for building a casino in Kabukichō. Ironically, during my most recent field visit, in May 2013, Tokyo was once again a finalist for the summer Olympics, and one sex worker speculated that the entire Yamanote train route – one of central Tokyo's busiest lines – would be cleaned up, encompassing most of the city's biggest sex industry districts. Among all the speculation about Ishihara's motives, however, no one seemed to entertain the thought that Ishihara might be waging a moral campaign.

In 2005, a year after the launch of the clean up campaign, the writer Yoshida Tsukasa offered a prescient interpretation of Ishihara's motives. Yoshida looked back on the novel which launched Gov. Ishihara's literary career in 1956, *Taiyō no Kisetsu* (Season of the Sun), and the subsequent dramatization of which launched one of the primary youth subcultures of the 1960s, the so-called "sun tribe" (*taiyōzoku*). Yoshida drew a contrast between the "spiritualism" (*seishin shugi*) of the pre-war and wartime periods, and the hedonistic release – what he calls "flesh-ism" (*nikutai shugi*) – that eventually followed afterward. Yoshida quotes the literary and cultural critic Etō Jun in saying of Ishihara that he provided postwar youth, who were yearning for new "postwar" ideas and emotions with which to express themselves, a mode of doing so. This mode was through the "flesh" rather than the spirit (Yoshida 2005:53-54). The "sun tribe" represented a new form of hedonism and desire, symbolized by young delinquents in Aloha shirts and sunglasses hanging around the beach and engaging in bold, co-ed fraternizing. Ishihara and his younger brother, Yujiro, who was cast in the film based on his brother's book, represented this new generation. Returning to the

clean-up of Tokyo's entertainment districts, Yoshida muses that this represents Ishihara's rejection of his former self (54).

Rather than focusing solely on the clean up of Kabukichō, Yoshida argued that looking at Ishihara's recent policy initiatives helps solve the puzzle; these include youth protective measures such as making it more difficult for minors to access adult books, preventing their late-entry into karaoke stores and internet cafes, and even a proposal to punish the parents of sexually active middle-schoolers; the installation of surveillance cameras across the city; cracking down on hawkers for sex industry businesses; and putting pressure on schools to sing the national anthem, among others (Yoshida 2005:57). At the same time, Ishihara was also talking about driving Chinese residents out of Japan, about illegal migrants as criminals, etc., against the background of anti-Japanese demonstrations in China. During his re-election campaign, Ishihara mused on how he admires the spirit of the Meiji period, in which a "non-white" people became a modern country and won the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars, despite widespread poverty and hardship. This was the spirit, Ishihara declared, of putting the country first. He quoted the famous Meiji-period intellectual Fukuzawa Yukichi in saying that the nation-state is supported foremost by the individual, and not the public (58). Yoshida concludes that the present is indeed the end of the former era of "flesh-ism," inaugurated by Ishihara himself, and that Ishihara is now ushering in a period of "rule by law," in which the clean up of Kabukichō is only the first step in a larger national intervention. Ishihara himself has referred to Tokyo as the heart and brain of the country, and that it is now being put forward as a national defense initiative. This motivation in turn sees the hedonism and

lawlessness of areas such as Kabukichō as holding anti-social potential, and that citizens need to be restrained for their own good, in an atmosphere of newfound national vigilantism and self-denial (Yoshida 2005:58-59).

In going after sex industry and entertainment districts, the local (and, later, national) police were inspired by a model promoted in New York City under Mayor Rudy Giuliani in the clean up of Times Square. Under this model, the police would actively pursue even small crimes, such as broken windows or graffiti, under the belief that letting these small crimes go unpunished would encourage more significant crimes. First utilized in Tokyo, the NPA then picked up this model to apply nationwide. This method of policing came up several times in my research, both in relation to the Tokyo Metropolitan Police (TMP) and the National Police Agency (NPA). Yoshida (2005:58) places the origin of this method within the TMP with the 2003 move to “clean up” Chinese mafia from Kabukichō. Similarly, one of the first initiatives of the Emergency Public Safety Office was the widespread installation of security cameras throughout the city. Given the local government and mass media’s fixation at the time on public security, this met with little resistance.<sup>27</sup>

While the police were leading the crackdown on illegal businesses, the clean-up campaign was spurred on by other forces as well. Notable among these was the dramatic increase in citizens’ “anti-crime” volunteer groups, which were actively

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<sup>27</sup> In an interesting parallel, in the aftermath of the April 2013 Boston Marathon bombings, a New York Times/CBS News poll found that 78% of respondents favored more pervasive installation of video surveillance cameras in public places (Landler and Sussman 2013), indicating that elsewhere as well, many find it acceptable to trade in privacy for perceived greater safety. A recent NOVA documentary on the bombings details how this technology helped flush out the bombers while also alluding to some of the more disturbing possibilities of surveillance cameras, infrared imagery, cell phone GPS, and facial recognition software (O’Brien 2013).

nurtured by the local government. An official at the NPA explained to me that by 2004, the feelings of local citizens toward illegal sex industry businesses in their neighborhood had changed, and they decided that they wouldn't tolerate "even one illegal leaflet or ad in a telephone booth" any more. The citizens, he explained, organized themselves into volunteer patrols and would notify the police of even the smallest infractions they encountered. The reality, however, seems more complex, as the news archive makes it clear that the Tokyo municipal administration and TMP actively fostered the formation and expansion of citizens' groups.

From the initial establishment of the Emergency Office for Public Safety, the city government solicited citizens' feedback on public security measures (Bōhan Kamera ni Rikiten 2003). In 2004, NHK News reported that Tokyo was the first city in the nation to offer leadership training for citizens on "anti-crime" activities, such as leading local volunteer patrols (Tōkyōto ga Chiiki Bōhan Katsudō no Rīdā Yōsei e 2004). Training consisted of two months of lectures by "experts" on how to make environments in which crime would be difficult to occur, including trips to local entertainment districts to discuss problem points and possible solutions. The participants of these training sessions, who would be drawn from local government units and anti-crime groups, would receive a diploma at the conclusion of the series and would be recognized by local community police as anti-crime leaders, subsequently receiving support as well as patrol clothing. At the time of this reporting, there were 500 volunteer citizens' groups in Tokyo. By the following year, when the city offered another, even larger, seminar series, this number had jumped to 2000 groups (Bōhan Boranteia 2005).

Today, one can easily find videos made by these citizens' anti-crime patrols on youtube Japan. The patrols are not limited to sex and entertainment districts, but more generally to areas where locals felt that additional public safety measures were necessary. For example, a volunteer patrol that met three times a week in 2004 in the Ikegami neighborhood of Tokyo was concerned primarily with discouraging purse-snatchers (*hitakkuri*) and burglars. The sixty-some volunteers, dressed in neon green jackets given to them by the local police, would pass out flyers about "safe town" activities, greet passersby, and walk around the neighborhood with flashlights, creating a distinct and regular presence. The group takes up quite a bit of space, creating an imposing presence, and seems to be made up mostly of older citizens, presumably retired.

Other citizens' patrols are more aggressively focused toward illegal sex industry businesses. One sex worker based in the Kyoto and Osaka areas described to me her fear when a local patrol came by, referring to the patrol as "protestors." At the time, she was working in an area of Osaka known for its illegal *manshon herusu*, (*herusu* businesses situated in private apartments). Each floor in every building housed one or two separate businesses, and she worked in the tallest building. The protestors came in the early evening, around 7-9 pm, just as business was picking up. This was a conscious decision, meant to dent business through discouraging customers from entering. The woman was with a customer at the time, and described how he froze up and the atmosphere shifted. "No one enjoys themselves when there's a protest going on," she said. And did the protestors harass you when you left the

building? “No, they know that that would be going too far. But even so, I just waited until they left.”

The Maebara Shinchō area of Ginowan, Okinawa prefecture, an area well-known for illegal prostitution, was famously shut down in 2011. Among the impetus in closing down the area was an array of not-so-strange bedfellows. On August 21, 2009, the City Life section (*shimin seikatsuka*) of Ginowan City Hall organized a “City-Wide Call to Action” against Maebara Shinchō. The event was sponsored by various municipal assemblies, the police, the local PTA, youth council, and network of women’s associations, and the event was held in the name of “protecting women’s rights” and “promoting the healthy upbringing of youth” (*seishōnen no kenzen ikusei o hakaru*). Around three hundred and fifty local citizens attended, and following the announcement of five resolutions, the group walked through the illegal sex industry area, surely creating an intimidating sight (Ginowanshi 2009; Shihō Ginowan 2009:9). By 2011, the area had been completely cleaned up, and local administrators, women’s groups, and police assembled to put up six banners reading, “Zero Illegal Sex Industry Businesses Here” (Ginowanshi ga “Ihō Fūzokuten Zero” Kanban 2011).

Within this increasing state and citizen surveillance, what happened to the historical tolerance toward the sex industry? The government crackdown on the sex industry winnowed out those stores which were operating illegally, but, as I have shown throughout this chapter, when the law itself is “gray,” it is often up to the state to decide how far to go. In this case, the state, beginning with Ishihara’s clean-up of Kabukichō but then moving throughout the country, wiped several famous districts off of the map, and severely curtailed many others. Yoshida, the journalist writing

about Ishihara's shift in stance from "flesh-ism" to abstinence and vigilantism, argued that this was part of a move toward the right. Similarly, the former public safety commission of Tokyo, Kubo Hiroshi, who retired in March 2005 (in the midst of Deputy Governor Takehana's clean up campaign), criticized the government and mass media for actively encouraging the perception that Tokyo (and Japan more generally) was becoming an increasingly crime-ridden place, the "worst" in the postwar period. His book, *Chian wa Hontō ni Akka Shiteiru no Ka?* (Is Public Safety Really Deteriorating?), argued that this perception strengthened the power of the government, especially the police (Kubo 2006).

### *Raid!*

On American Thanksgiving 2011, I spent the evening with two police officers working for the TMP. Following a sumptuous dinner at a glamorous *yakiniku* (Korean barbeque) restaurant on the 53<sup>rd</sup> floor of a skyscraper overlooking Tokyo's administrative and commercial center, the three of us traded stories about work. I knew one officer, the younger by three or four years, fairly well, having met through a mutual friend several years ago. The other officer I had only met a year earlier, at the same mutual friend's end-of-year party. In the manner that I, as a female non-Japanese researcher often experienced sexual harassment casually from police officers when meeting informally, he assured me however that he was my "number one fan" (see Frühstück 2007 for her experiences as a female European researcher conducting field work with the Japanese Self-Defense Forces).

Both officers expressed great curiosity about my research with women in the sex industry, and, as the drinks flowed, the younger responded to my prompt to tell me once again about how he had participated in a raid of a *herusu* business in Ikebukuro in which penile-vaginal intercourse (“prostitution”) was illegally being offered. He himself had long worked in anti-organized crime units, but when extra hands had been needed for the raid, he had volunteered, thinking it would be fun. Indeed, his face became animated as he spoke about how much he had enjoyed the experience. It was great fun for the police officers, he explained, because it all had to happen so fast. The police lined up outside the entrance, while one officer knocked. As one officer handed a warrant to the receptionist, the other officers rushed in as quickly as possible to throw open the doors to each of the individual rooms. Because of suspicion toward the Japanese police originating from the broad powers given them in the pre-war and wartime eras, much of Japanese criminal law, he reminded me, is based on being caught red-handed (*genkōhan*).<sup>28</sup> Prostitution could be proven in other ways than catching a customer and a sex worker red-handed, but these were onerous, such as collecting customer testimony (customers generally being unwilling to provide this) or proving that the penile-vaginal intercourse was store policy (for instance, if this were explained during the store orientation for a new employee).

These were, of course, only the case if the police wanted to bust a business under the Prostitution Prevention Law. Proving violation of the *Fūeihō* was typically far easier. But

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<sup>28</sup> Suspicion toward the police and fears of expanded police power originating in a time of authoritarian rule also affect the debate on child pornography. During my long-term fieldwork (from September 2010 through November 2011), the production, distribution, and purchasing of child pornography was prohibited, but, paradoxically, possession itself (*tanjun shoji*) was not. One of the arguments against criminalizing possession (made by liberals) is that it would give too much power to the police. Following continued international pressure and a push by the National Police Agency, the Diet voted to prohibit possession in June 2014 (Fackler 2014).

if one wanted to catch a store on prostitution charges, then catching a couple in the act was the easiest method. Of course, once a couple heard the commotion associated with the raid, they would stop whatever they were doing, so the speed of the police officers was of the utmost importance. As they threw open each room door, they would have a camera with them to take photographs of what they found. Unfortunately, that night they didn't have any luck in catching anyone. But he chuckled as he recalled the deer-in-the-headlights expressions of a couple that he taken pictures of naked and in the middle of "play" (*purē*, meaning, a sex act). After all the rooms had been investigated, they kept the customers there while they took down everyone's name and contact information, so that they could later collect testimony, if need be. With a wink, he said that one of the customers had been a Buddhist priest, whom they excused early so that he could get to a funeral service he was supposed to perform.

While the raid was – at least in hindsight – a topic for drinking banter, for sex workers, these raids are much different affairs. It is interesting that it is possible to see actual police and immigration raids on television shows such as *Keisatsu 24jikan* ("Police 24 Hours" – similar to the American television show *Cops*) and on news shows. These seem to mostly focus on raids of businesses where non-Japanese sex workers are working, providing a story line about foreigners coming to Japan for money and working illegally (and doing illegal things). Typically, these clips will show some reconnaissance footwork by police or immigration officials, as they try to determine the nature of the store, followed by their attempts to stealthily begin the crackdown, and ending with the actual entry, investigation, and interviews with (inevitably stubborn on camera) employees.

Police investigations and raids are often a fact of life for those working in the sex industry, even at those businesses that sex workers referred to as “properly run” (*chanto shita*) stores. When I asked my friend Shiori about how her former manager, whom she had been close to and who she had introduced me to two years earlier, was doing, her face clouded over. She hadn’t heard from him in months, even though she had tried contacting him in various ways. She was worried that he had been arrested. When I had met him, he had been working as support staff at a maid *herusu* in a residential area of central Tokyo. He had lowered his voice when he told me about it, conveying that the business wasn’t in the correct zoning district. And yet, just a few minutes earlier, he had earnestly told me about attending police seminars on revised sex industry regulations, so that he could stay on top of revisions and protect his business from police attention. Perhaps the manager at his current store had not been as scrupulous.

Not all sex industry districts have been cleaned up, and in some, the same practices that have worked for years still operate. This seemed to be the case in particular in the entertainment districts of northeastern central Tokyo, in places such as Ueno, Uguisudani, Yoshiwara, and Kinshichō. It was of these areas that I most often heard informants make vague references to the “strength of the locals” – what I assumed was a reference to organized crime and corrupt police officers. One soapland operator told me that he was still making regular payments to the police. He was wary of me and didn’t elaborate beyond saying that the police still come in spite of this. When I discussed this with some sex workers, including one who had worked at his soapland in the past, they said it was in order to get advance information on police raids. The former soapland

worker said that periodically, she and the other women would be told to wear the bloomers [sic] (that they always had on hand in their rooms just in case) to work that day. While this woman hadn't experienced a raid while she was working at that store, she did have to do this several times, such that if the police came running in, they would simply see a (not-entirely nude) woman bathing a customer. On the whole, however, the clean up of established sex industry districts throughout the country has accelerated a trend that I take up toward the end of this chapter, namely, the sex industry's movement underground.

### *Ghost Towns*

While returning from an engagement in neighboring Saitama prefecture one afternoon with Kanno Akiko, the director of an influential anti-human trafficking non-governmental organization (see Chapter Four), we made a spontaneous decision. The train taking us back to Tokyo had just stopped at Nishi Kawaguchi, a well-known sex industry district whose large distribution of illegal businesses had recently been the subject of a clean-up campaign. We decided to get off and have a look around. I had heard of Nishi Kawaguchi being spoken of as a “ghost town,” a town whose local business district had been devastated following the widespread crackdowns. In the following paragraphs, I want to convey some of the local business realities affecting neighborhoods which have been “cleaned up,” and the process by which local stakeholders attempt to re-envision their community.

Although Nishi Kawaguchi Station rests just outside of Tokyo, lying just a 30-minute train ride from Shinjuku Station, it has the feel of a regional train station to it.

There are only two exits, with an indoor overpass going from the station to the west exit, and once you exit, the space already seems much flatter and spread out. While there are many commuters from Nishi Kawaguchi and the surrounding areas to Tokyo, the pace of the train station carries less of the hustle and bustle of the city. The history of the sex industry in this area followed the development of auto racing as a local attraction, which created a market for bars and restaurants for the race patrons, and, eventually, sex industry businesses as well. It is this earlier history of cheap food and drink establishments that the “Nishi Kawaguchi Station West Exit Resuscitation Committee” (*Nishi Kawaguchi Eki Nishiguchi Saisei Kaigi*) refers to in its 2008 campaign to re-brand the area as a destination for “B-Class Gourmet” – cheap food fitting working-class tastes, such as ramen noodles, curry rice, and Chinese dumplings (“Fūzoku no Machi” *Fusshoku e* 2008; *Nishi Kawaguchi wa mō Fūzoku Janai!* 2008).

After we exited the station, neither Kanno nor I knew in which direction to go. From my newspaper research, all I knew was to use the West exit. After unsuccessfully trying our luck and wandering off in one direction for a few minutes, we turned back to the station and Kanno suggested we ask for directions at the police box (*kōban*) immediately outside the West exit. This confusion already hailed a change in fortune for the neighborhood, whose sex industry had supposedly once began right in front of the station. After agreeing that Kanno should be the one to do the talking, we entered through the glass sliding door. The police officer who was sitting behind the counter, a man who looked to be in his early forties, stood up behind the counter to meet us. As is typical, the counter had a laminated map of the local area on it. Kanno explained to them that I was interested in where the former sex industry, which had been flourishing prior to the clean-

up campaign, had been. Without hesitation, he pointed to the map on the counter between us and directed us on which streets to take. His companion, who had been in the back office, joined us, and I took the opportunity to ask about the pre-clean-up incarnation. There used to be 200-something stores here, right? Yes, that's right, but the district has been sharply reduced since then. After a few more seconds' chatting, we thanked them and exited.<sup>29</sup>

Following the police officers' instructions, we turned right at the bank behind the police box, getting us onto a small street of the kind with no side walks where you just walk down the side of the road and cars and bikes go in both directions between you, often making things tight. The first block or so was mostly small businesses but at the second block, the first sex industry businesses started popping up. Nishi Kawaguchi had been known for *herusu* businesses, including pink salons (*pinsaron*) and image clubs (*imekura*), as well as soaplands and, starting around 2002, an increase in Asian massage parlors (Hashimoto 2009:134). Although the exact provenance of the term is unknown, around 1995, the term "*Nishi Kawaguchiryū*" ("Nishikawaguchi style," typically abbreviated as *NKryū*) was used in advertisements for the area for non-locals. Many of the sex industry businesses in Nishi Kawaguchi were notorious for illegally offering *honban* (penile-vaginal intercourse, literally, "the real thing") as part of their services, and this became one of the terms that sex industry businesses in other areas as well would

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<sup>29</sup> What struck me about this encounter was that neither of the police officers seemed to find our question the least bit unusual. If they were surprised that two young women, one of whom was visibly foreign but Japanese-speaking, were curious about the local sex industry, and even had the knowledge and vocabulary to discuss the clean-up campaign, they didn't show it. Instead, they promptly gave us directions, as they do to so many lost passersby every day.

use as slang to indicate the inclusion of this service in their business (Hashimoto 2009:135-136).

By the time Kanno and I walked down the streets of Nishi Kawaguchi, it was a changed neighborhood. The Saitama prefectural police had launched their clean-up campaign in 2005. In order to prevent the type of cat-and-mouse game (*itachi gokko*) that occasionally happened in which a busted store would shut down and then shortly afterward re-open under a new name, the police began arresting building owners who knowingly rented to illegal sex industry businesses on charges of aiding and abetting crime. The police appeared at local real estate brokers' union meetings and announced this policy, making the first such arrest in October 2005. Although it was often difficult to prove without a doubt that the owner knew about what was going on, in this case the owner had visited a sex industry store housed in his building while it was undergoing renovations (Ihō Fūzokuten "Itachi Gokko" Tomero 2005). The clean up campaign proceeded swiftly, and around 2006-2007, more than two hundred illegal businesses – all within a 200-meter radius of the train station – lay empty ("Fūzoku no Machi" Fusshokue 2008; Shattāgai, Hanahiraita 2008). The signage of many multi-tenant buildings in prime real-estate were completely white, representing the absence of tenants within.

The empty storefronts and buildings that emerged in the wake of the clean up campaign presented a formidable problem for the surrounding community. The sex industry district had been part and parcel of the local economy, drawing in customers and distinguishing the neighborhood from other bar areas. In the absence of this local lure – and, in fact, the absence of business – the local community was faced with the question of

how to re-envision their neighborhood, and how to promote that re-branding to lure in new target consumers.

Several months after my visit to Nishi Kawaguchi, I met with the director of the Kabukichō Shopping Center Promotion Union [sic] (*Kabukichō Shōtengai Shinkō Kumiai*), a 20-some member union of property owners in Kabukichō 1chōme. As a businessman in Japan's most (in)famous entertainment district, he was refreshingly straight-talking and blunt. He lamented Kabukichō's change of fortune over the past several years, stating that even in the past four or five years, the number of consumers had fallen by roughly half, a combination of multiple factors, including the prolonged recession, the clean up, and the closing of Koma Theater, once a local landmark that had attracted 5000 spectators a day. Both the sex industry and the *mizushōbai* had been prominent draws to the area, and he explained to a friend (who was simultaneously conducting his own interview) and myself how the money had once circulated around the local economy. Customers would visit sex industry businesses and hostess clubs. The women working at these businesses would then go to host clubs after work, and the hosts would subsequently spend their earnings at the local game centers and arcades. In this way, the money flows around Kabukichō, from one business to the next. With only half the customers coming, this flow had been interrupted, and worse, with less customers, many businesses couldn't afford to pay the steep rents anymore.

Although when Kanno and I walked down the streets of Nishi Kawaguchi (back in Saitama prefecture), it was no longer the "ghost town" it had once been, the neighborhood was still bleak, looking gray and rundown, with relatively few pedestrians or bicyclists in what was still prime real estate. Many of the electricity posts had brightly

colored flags attached, which pictured a cartoon sunflower smiling underneath the words, “I shop in my town, in Kawaguchi.” We soon came upon a series of brightly painted shutters with green backgrounds and flower designs on them. These shutters were part of a 2008 effort by the Kawaguchi Chamber of Commerce to beautify the streets, and to encourage an image of Nishi Kawaguchi as a bright and cheerful (*akarui*) neighborhood (Shattāgai, Hanahiraita 2008). The shutters of twenty empty stores were painted, and this effort became part of a symbolic reclamation of the neighborhood. When Kanno and I walked there, there were fewer than twenty shutters; presumably, these stores had since found tenants.

While Nishi Kawaguchi’s re-branding movement – centered on its “B-Class Gourmet” campaign – has gradually moved it away from its image as a sex industry district, in Kabukichō, attitudes are different. In contrast to the reporting on Nishi Kawaguchi, for instance, which reported the area’s history as a “minus image,” the director of the Shopping Center Promotion Union stated that the sex industry was in no way a detriment to the area. He qualified that if commercial sex were all there was to Kabukichō, then that would be a different matter, but the sex industry exists in tandem with movie theaters, food and drink establishments, host and hostess clubs, hotels, and many other types of businesses. Kabukichō was meant to be a “comprehensive amusement town,” and “ejaculation businesses” (*nuki-kei*) were a part of this. Otherwise, customers could just go to any other entertainment district, and Kabukichō would be reduced to being a “Disneyland.” There would be nothing distinctive about the neighborhood.

While Nishi Kawaguchi has attempted to re-brand itself with working-class cuisine, Kabukichō, unsurprisingly, has grander aspirations. In a recently published interview, the board chairman (*rijiichō*) of the Kabukichō Shopping Center Promotion Union, Katakiri Motoji discussed his frustration with nay-sayers with the book’s author, a former host and now well-known personality of Kabukichō. Although the politically astute Katakiri claimed that he, too, supported the drive for law and order, he was frustrated with the encroaching sense that *everything* should be more strictly regulated. He wanted to make Kabukichō the flashiest entertainment district in the country again, but didn’t see how this was possible when either the local municipal government or neighboring business and/or residential associations kept on saying, “this is bad, and that’s bad...” His attitude was that it would be better if locals simply said, “this is bad, but if you do it properly in this way, without fudging, we’ll let you do it” (Yoritomo 2011:106). As with others with whom I spoke, Katakiri’s point was that sex industry operators are just trying to run a business with no intention of breaking the law.

### *Moving Underground*

In 1998, the *Fūeihō*, the Law Regulating Entertainment Businesses, received a major revision through which mobile, “delivery”-style businesses (*deriheru*) were officially recognized by the creation of a new legal category of sex industry businesses, the “non-store sex industry business” (*mutenpogata seifūzokuten*). Needless to say, the year that the revised law went into effect, April 1999, was not the year of the birth of *deriheru*. As an NPA official acknowledged, of course *deriheru* existed before the *Fūeihō* revision. It was the fact of their existence that led to their legal recognition, the logic

being that the police can better keep tabs on businesses when they are legally registered and, in theory, at least, thus cooperating with the police. This stance reflects a recent approach to regulating the sex industry; namely, of incorporating new businesses into the existing legal framework.<sup>30</sup>

The move toward *deriheru* businesses represents a significant departure from the historical approach of the government toward the sex industry, wherein (male) play has been tolerated so long as it was contained within designated – and closely regulated – areas. The number of *deriheru* has boomed in the past 14 years, exceeding the number of store-based businesses after just three years, and today, *deriheru* dominate the market (see Table 1). Numerous reasons account for their popularity. First, non-store-based businesses are, essentially, “escort” services, in which an office arranges the rendezvous between a sex worker and a customer, but the actual encounter occurs at a love hotel, rental room (a cheaper, no-frills option than a love hotel), or private home. *Deriheru* thus don’t incur many of the costs affecting store-based businesses, such as rent, utility bills, cleaning, etc. Second, *deriheru* can also avoid many of the zoning restrictions affecting store-based businesses.<sup>31</sup> Third, escort businesses have an easier time avoiding police surveillance, since they are “harder to see.” Of course, it is far from impossible to

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<sup>30</sup> The case of “*deai-kei*” *kissa* / “*deai-kei*” café (“encounter-type” coffee stores/café) is similar. In January 2011, these businesses, which had existed for quite some time, were incorporated into the *Fūeihō* as a way of prohibiting the entry of minors (these venues having been identified as “hotspots” for youth prostitution).

<sup>31</sup> If a *deriheru* business has a service counter (*uketsukesho*) where customers can arrange their assignation with a sex worker in person with a male employee, these locations are still subject to the local zoning restrictions. Merely having an office (whereby all assignations are arranged either by phone or internet inquiry) or a waiting room for sex workers, however, does not qualify as needing to accommodate the zoning restrictions. It seems that it is the in-person *transactional* element that is what is seen as needing to be regulated.

regulate them, only more difficult. As the same NPA official explained to me, *deriheru* businesses still have to put out advertisements – on the Internet, in sex industry consumer magazines, etc. – to replace their physical presence in a neighborhood and draw customers in. If customers can find these ads, the officer explained, so can the police. Of course, the lack of physical presence also makes these businesses – and possible business violations – easier to ignore.

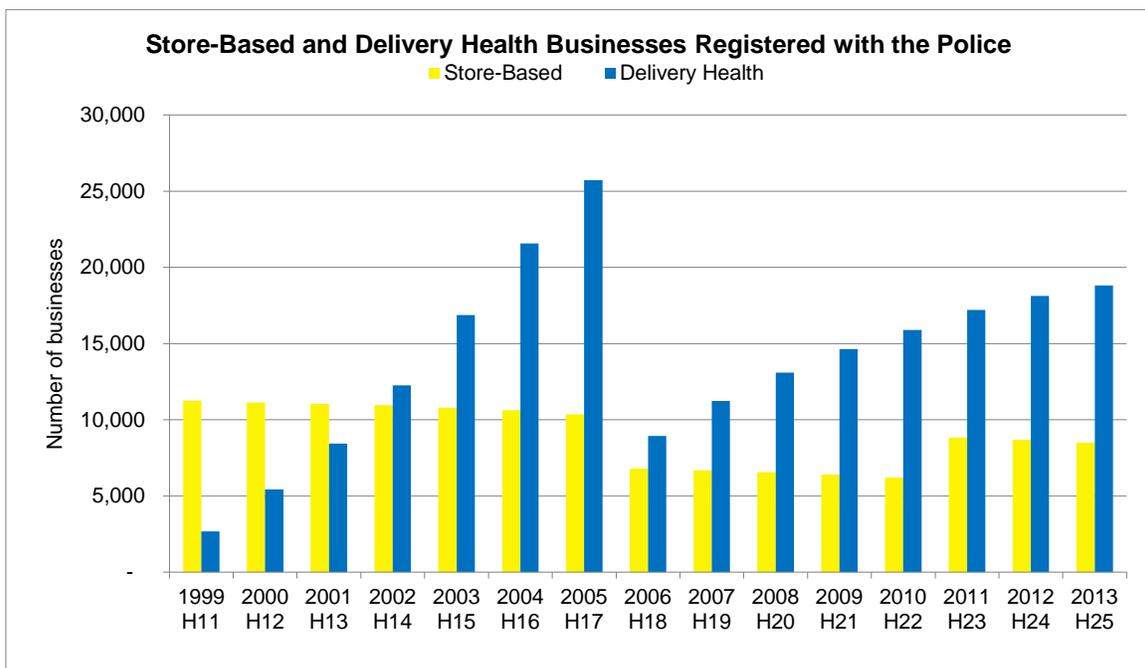


Table 1: Store-Based and Delivery Health Businesses Registered with the Police

Throughout my research, sex workers, industry stakeholders, and police officers alike spoke of the trend toward delivery health businesses as the movement underground of the sex industry (*andāguraundoka; chika ni moguru*). In particular, it is difficult to prove what goes on in the private encounter between a sex worker and a customer, when that encounter takes place outside of business walls. Given that penile-vaginal intercourse is illegal, but occasionally requested (with varying degrees of insistence or pressure) by

customers,<sup>32</sup> it is difficult to know what happens privately. Among sex workers and industry stakeholders, for instance, it is widely shared knowledge that in the western cities of Osaka and Kyoto, penile-vaginal intercourse is universally offered as part of the standard service. This isn't the case – so far – in Tokyo, although it is widely supposed that “prostitution” does occur on an individual basis.

From sex workers' perspective, the market dominance of “delivery” businesses has posed new risks. Many of the women I spoke with described these businesses as *kiken* (dangerous) or *kowai* (frightening), referring to the lack of oversight. I'll address the physical safety of sex workers in store and non-store contexts elsewhere (see Chapter Six), but, needless to say, sex workers are made much more vulnerable in a context in which they are completely alone with a customer. Private homes are not “safer” than the anonymous hotels or rental rooms either; a common concern is that a customer will have a hidden camera set up and will film their encounter, possibly uploading it to the Internet or using it as a means of threatening the sex worker.

### *Conclusion*

In mid-April, 2013, Tokyo Governor Inose Naoki – the successor to Ishihara Shintarō – made an off-hand comment during a visit to New York City. After observing a Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), Inose said that he wanted to transform Tokyo into a 24-hour city, and that running an all-day bus service from Roppongi to Shibuya would be a first step in doing so. His comments set off a flurry of excitement in the sex and entertainment world. Was he serious? What would this mean? The creation of

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<sup>32</sup> See Kaname and Mizushima (2005:72-74) on the frequency that sex workers at legal and illegal businesses are pressured for “the real thing.”

special business zones? Why Roppongi to Shibuya and not Shinjuku, where the real entertainment was? But the most speculation focused on what people would do. Since there would be no point to having 24-hour transportation but nothing to do, did this mean – insiders ventured hopefully – that Inose might consider allowing sex and entertainment businesses to operate into the early hours of the morning again, as they had once been able to? (Inose Tochiji no “Toei Kōtsū 24jikanka” Kōsō 2013; Tōkyōto no Basu o 24jikan Unkō Sasetemo Fūeihō o Kaisei Shinakereba Imi ga Nai? 2013)

While Inose was vague on specifics, his out-of-the-blue comments reminded me of the rumors that Ishihara had cleaned up Kabukichō in order to build a casino. It also reminded me of my interview with the director of the Kabukichō Shopping Center Promotion Union, during which the director had discussed not only the area’s requests for special 24-hour status, but also how a casino would re-vitalize the neighborhood and turn it into an entertainment district to rival Macau. In an article featured in the tabloid weekly *Shūkan Pureibōi*, Kiso Takashi, the director of the International Casino Institute, echoed a sentiment regarding public order which I have argued in this chapter. In response to a question of whether loosening the regulations on sex and entertainment businesses would create new sources of criminality, Kiso said, “No, it’s the opposite, actually. *Because they’re not allowed*, businesses have gone underground, and so even when there’s trouble, they can’t call the police.” In other words, so he implied, the businesses *wanted* to be legal. He went on: if they were allowed, the police would be able to keep tabs on these businesses, and they would be able to operate (Tōkyōto no Basu o 24jikan Unkō Sasetemo Fūeihō o Kaisei Shinakereba Imi ga Nai? 2013).

While it is unclear at the moment whether there is any substance behind Inose's comments (and the two police officers I spoke with about this were quite unhappy, thinking only of the additional work this would burden them with), his statement illustrates the multi-valenced approach toward entertainment districts, including commercial sex. While they are areas thought necessary to regulate – and, at times, to crack down on sharply in the name of “public order” – they are also seen as an essential and crucial part of the urban landscape.

**Chapter Two**  
**Producing *Iyashi*:**  
**Healing, Labor, and the Reconfiguration of Intimacy in Tokyo's Sex Industry**

One evening in late November 2011, a taxi driver taking a sex worker and me to a nearby train station in northeast central Tokyo gave us his unsolicited opinion on the sex industry's existence. My friend and I had spent the evening touring a local sex industry district whose history spanned four centuries, and we struck up a conversation with the taxi driver, a sexagenarian native to the area. We had been talking about recent changes to the district's physical landscape when he suddenly seemed to want to be sure that I, his young, female, and visibly foreign customer, understood the significance of the sex industry's existence. "Japanese men," he told us, with my friend nodding along, "work so hard that they just don't have the time to spend on seducing a woman. It's easier to just pay a woman to be healed (*iyasareru*) by her instead of investing a lot of time and money in a relationship."

The taxi driver was conjuring up normative images of male laboring subjects whose dedication and work ethic were excessive. Whether he was speaking from his observations of the thousands of male customers who had climbed into his cab (perhaps heading toward or leaving this particular sex industry district) or from personal experience, he was suggesting that productive workers are incompatible with full-time romantic or conjugal relationships with women. Male workers did not have the time for

emotional investment, and yet, there was something that they apparently needed to be successful: healing (*iyashi*) from sex workers.

A few weeks earlier, Shiori, a veteran sex worker who had worked in several different types of sex industry businesses, had offhandedly told me something similar about the men she encountered in her work:

“Most customers are sincere and completely ordinary individuals. They put all their effort into their work, and when the exhaustion and stress become too much, once in a while they go to the sex industry and refresh themselves. I’ve often had customers show up exhausted who left saying, ‘Thank you so much. I’m really glad I came. Now I’m ready to face anything again!’”

In our conversations about the sex industry, Shiori had often mentioned *iyashi*. Now, through her reference to exhausted customers coming to the sex industry to “refresh themselves,” she was suggesting – just like the taxi driver – that there is a “healing” occurring there that replenishes their productive capacities as laborers.

These anecdotes are two of many references to healing that I encountered over the course of 21 months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Tokyo on the mainstream commercial sex industry between 2008 and 2013. Whether as *iyashi* (healing) or the verb forms *iyasu/iyasareru* (to heal/to be healed), healing was foregrounded – by sex workers, customers, and managers and staff – as the central service of the sex industry. But healing *from* what? And *for* what?

In this chapter, I examine how the productivity of male workers in contemporary Japan has come to be premised on care – or *iyashi* – by women working in the sex

industry.<sup>33</sup> Recent political-economic and social transformations, especially economic restructuring and shifting family forms, have positioned middle-class, white-collar masculinity in a newly precarious state while also pulling women into a flexible labor market. These political-economic circumstances generate the desire for the deeply gendered affective labor and care work provided by sex workers, which recuperates forms of affect drawn from gendered ideologies that are no longer sustained by material reality. The services provided by women in the sex industry center on *iyashi*, a carefully constructed performance of intimacy that commingles maternal care with sexual gratification. Through achieving male sexual release, women in the sex industry reproduce men as capable and effective workers. Ironically, because *iyashi* is meant to partially replace the unpaid reproductive labor<sup>34</sup> of the disappearing professional housewife, the labor aspects of this work must go unrecognized in order for it to be valued.

My broad objective here is to examine how gendered relationships are produced so as to seem natural, even when those producing them do so to their own disadvantage. I do so through focusing on how the reorganization of the gendered division of market labor that follows from neoliberal reform and economic restructuring produces desires for specific forms of gendered caring – for *iyashi*, that is. The dualism between female and male has long held anthropological attention as a metaphoric transformation of the

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<sup>33</sup> I should note at the outset that the scope of this chapter is limited to the heteronormative sector of the sex industry, in which male customers patronize female sex workers. I thus do not take up questions of whether or how *iyashi* manifests itself in male same-sex or transgendered sectors of the sex industry. Anglophone sources on same-sex and transgendered sex workers in Japan include McLelland (2002) and McLelland et al (2007).

<sup>34</sup> I use “reproductive labor” in the Marxist sense to mean all work that reproduces labor power, including housework, the care of family members, and procreative labor.

nature/culture binary (Ortner 1974; MacCormack and Strathern 1980), and everyday performances of gender remain an enduring opposition that is often thought of as innate, even as the very categories of sex and gender have come under fire (Butler 1990). In Japan, gendered ideologies continue to structure which areas of the labor market are understood as “women’s work” or “men’s work,” even when individuals enter potentially ideologically transgressive occupations, such as women in the Self Defense Forces, men outside of full-time labor, or gender-bending actors in all-female theatrical revues (Frühstück 2007; Fowler 1996; Robertson 1998).

Examining how sex workers “heal” male workers helps us to understand the relational, complementary domains of male and female work in contemporary Japan. *Iyashi* rests on the performance of an effortless and intrinsic femininity. And yet, what is seen as intrinsically female is achieved through conscious and deliberate cultivation on the part of sex workers. Women in the sex industry go to great lengths to produce something understood as innate even as the successful achievement of this appearance obscures their work as labor.<sup>35</sup>

This set of concerns reformulates earlier Marxist-feminist debates about the relationship of female work to male labor and capitalist value production, specifically as concerns the unpaid reproductive labor of the housewife (Engels 1978[1884]; Kuhn and Wolpe 1978; Lamphere 1986; Rubin 1975). These debates critiqued social distinctions between “productive” (waged) labor and “reproductive” (unwaged) housework through

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<sup>35</sup> Marilyn Strathern (1988) responded to feminist debates concerning male exploitation of women’s reproductive labor by proposing the notion of “eclipsing,” wherein female labor is understood as implicit within male prestige-earning activity. While Japan is a post-industrial capitalist context rather than a gift economy, the metaphor of eclipse remains salient for elucidating how the concealment of sex workers’ labor in producing *iyashi* is not locally understood as alienation.

demonstrating how women's work in the private sphere – itself a culturally and historically specific phenomenon of capitalist relations – reproduced and maintained the workforce, thus providing the surplus to capital. More recently, with the mass movement of middle-class women into the full-time workforce in many post-industrial contexts, the dimensions of reproductive labor previously delegated to the domestic sphere are increasingly subject to the market. As Melinda Cooper and Catherine Waldby note, “Domestic tasks, sexual services, care provision, and [...] the process of biological reproduction itself have migrated out of the private space of the family into the labor market and are now central to post-industrial accumulation strategies” (Cooper and Waldby 2014:5).<sup>36</sup> In this chapter, I show that sex workers are seen as helping to reproduce middle-class, white-collar laborers, creating intimacy that the housewife is understood as unable to provide. At the same time, ideologies of intimacy from the private sphere – especially the idea that care should be naturally feminine – are carrying over into the marketplace, obscuring sex workers' roles as laborers.

The affective labor of women working in the Japanese sex industry produces emotions of well-being, pleasure, connectivity, and acknowledgment in customers. A consideration of affect is useful here for allowing us to think through how the creation of these immaterial products through *iyashi* is placed on a hierarchy of capitalist value

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<sup>36</sup> Although women have formed a flexible labor force in Japan since the onset of industrialization in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Sievers 1983), more recently, the migration of women to the full-time labor market has been more gradual than in other post-industrial contexts, in part due to the enduring strength of ideologies valorizing women's primary identity as wives and mothers. The market for domestic care and reproductive technologies is relatively small in Japan, while the demand for childcare and elderly care, in contrast, is burgeoning. National solutions to meeting this demand often uphold conservative gender ideologies. Jennifer Robertson has shown, for instance, that humanoid robots developed for household use are intended to supplement rather than replace women's labor (Robertson 2007).

production (Hardt 1999). In producing *iyashi*, sex workers must manipulate their emotions as part of their service such that they are directly productive of capital (Hardt and Negri 2004; Hochschild 1983). At the same time, the generation of affect itself becomes productive of other forms of labor (Muehlebach 2011; Parreñas 2012).

The culmination of this deeply gendered affective labor and care work by sex workers is the achievement of male orgasm. This completes the healing process, thereby allowing customers to feel that they can be productive workers again. In Japan, male sexuality has long been seen as something that should be managed so as to productively direct the energy of men, whether in the service of empire or the economic “miracle” (Allison 1994; Frühstück 2003; Matsui 1993; Soh 2008; Yoshimi 2000). The recent blustering of Osaka Governor Hashimoto Tōru, who suggested to a US military commander that American troops stationed in Okinawa would be more easily managed if they were permitted to make use of local sex industry businesses, was just the latest in a history of ideas expressed about the productive canalization of male energy through the control of male sexuality.<sup>37</sup>

The precise forms of intimacy generated in the sex industry, however, are significant. Elsewhere, scholarship linking the affective dimensions of heteronormative commercial sex work to political-economic transformations has explored how customer pursuit of sexual fantasy or gratification is often driven by the desires of an imperiled masculinity for escape or for a social space in which everyday values are inverted or

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<sup>37</sup> In his comments to the press, Hashimoto reported that he had told the US military commander, “In Japan there are places [sex industry businesses] that are regulated and where you can legally go to release your sexual energy. If you don’t make use of such places, you won’t be able to control the sexual energy of hot-blooded marines” (Ianfu Mondai Fūzokugyō o meguru Hashimotoshi no Hatsugen Yōshi 2013).

suspended (Frank 2002; Wilson 2010). Elizabeth Bernstein, working in the San Francisco Bay Area, has introduced the concept of “bounded authenticity” as a way of understanding how post-industrial developments have re-shaped modes of intimacy. This concept refers to the “sale and purchase of authentic emotional and physical connection” (2007:103), in which “boundedness” refers to the mutual expectation that this intimacy will stay in the market and not penetrate the private life of either customer or sex worker. Intimacy in the Japanese sex industry relies on familial ideologies that are increasingly unsustainable by demographic realities. *Iyashi* commingles maternal care with sexual gratification. Below, I use an analysis of a new employee training session at a sexual massage business in order to examine how women working in the sex industry deliberately and self-consciously craft these affects.

### *Exhausted Men*

I return now to what the taxi driver and sex worker from the beginning of this chapter collectively said – that men are excessively productive workers who periodically go to the sex industry to “refresh” themselves for work – in order to consider what forces are exhausting men. Although left unmarked, both speakers were referring to white-collar workers, specifically the dominant gender ideal of postwar masculinity: the “salaryman,” a middle-class white-collar worker in corporate or government work (Vogel 1971[1963]). Credited with producing the postwar economic “miracle,” this figure has long been understood as defined by excessive work and devotion to his employer, an entity whose corporate paternalism deeply re-maps the lines between public and private, work and play in the lives of employees (Allison 1994; Borovoy 2005).

Recent political-economic and social precarity have recast this gender ideal as a source of tremendous social anxiety in a context in which the tenets of the postwar male breadwinner ideology and nuclear family are slipping away. Since the asset bubble burst in 1990, the national economy has been subject to two decades of slow growth punctuated by periodic recession. Neoliberal reforms implemented by Prime Minister Koizumi Junichirō in the mid-2000s and large-scale economic restructuring have refashioned the dominant postwar employment system whose hallmark had been (male) lifetime employment and seniority-based wages (Kushida et al 2013; Rosenbluth and Thies 2010).

Workers of all statuses now experience more instability and risk. To lower costs, firms have slashed full-time entry-level positions for university graduates. “Non-elite” young men who previously had been guaranteed stable employment upon exiting high school now face the emergence of multiple tracks within companies and the rise of temporary – or “dispatch” – work (Brinton 2011; Kushida et al 2013). Similarly, job security is no longer assured for middle-aged and older male employees, and although seniority remains important, performance factors have become more significant in determining promotion and compensation (Conrad 2013). Most striking, however, has been the rise of non-regular employment as a permanent sector of the male labor market: around twenty percent of male workers are now non-regular, including part-time or temporary, workers (Shimizu 2013:166).<sup>38</sup> The rise of male economic precarity has

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<sup>38</sup> Kay Shimizu notes that in 2011, 35.4 percent of all workers were non-regular, including a staggering 54.6 percent of all female workers and 20.1 percent of all male workers (Shimizu 2013:166).

prompted national political and media attention to growing inequality and a poverty “crisis,”<sup>39</sup> including anxieties about the end of the “mass middle class” (Satō 2000).

The erosion of the postwar male breadwinner ideology has occurred hand in hand with the decrease in marriage and childbirth rates among the younger generations, calling even the existence of the dominant nuclear family into question (Ronald and Alexy 2011). The unpaid reproductive labor of the housewife, in particular, which has long subsidized male labor,<sup>40</sup> is no longer available for many men in their twenties and thirties, as women opt for careers or alternative family forms. This altered picture of male economic stability has led to simmering anxieties about Japan becoming a “sexless” society, as men who are not competitive economically are viewed as losing out on the marriage market as well (Kadokura 2009). These men are widely expected to seek sexual partners in the sex industry instead. It is perhaps no surprise that in this context, domesticity and disappearing family forms have become prominent signifiers for some sex industry businesses (see Figure 4).

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<sup>39</sup> I qualify “crisis” only because the recent media attention to male poverty largely ignores the reality that female non-regular employment and poverty has long been the overlooked norm (Asia-Japan Women’s Resource Center 2009; Fujiwara 2009).

<sup>40</sup> In the period of high economic growth, for instance, large-scale Japanese corporations acknowledged the economic contributions of professional housewives by making pension benefits available to them (Borovoy 2005:8).

ヘルスコンパニオン 熟女専門店ですから40代ではまだ若い!  
50代・60代の方も日々大活躍! 明るく・甘えた・マザコンがコンセプトの「おかあさん」

日給35,000円以上 月給80万円以上

資格 ◆40才～60才位まで (年齢・ボディラインは一切不問)

勤務地 ◆新大久保

勤務日 ◆自由出勤制(貴女のご都合に合わせて)

勤務時間 ◆10時～22時の間のお好きな時間でOK!

待遇 ◆初心者歓迎、アリバイ対策、日払い可  
体験入店可、最低保証有、自由出勤制  
交通費支給、罰金・ノルマなし、禁完備  
個室待機、各種ボーナス有、専用出口  
その他、生理休暇有り。

応募 ◆10時～22時  
お気軽にお電話・メールで♪

業種 ◆デリバリーヘルス

交通 ◆原新大久保駅より徒歩2分

**新大久保おかあさん**

新宿区大久保1-7 ☎0120-989-556

これから働く  
40代 50代 60代  
元気で働く まだまだ稼げる  
明るく前向き!

おかあさんには  
明るく元気な  
ポイント主義

当店最高年齢 62歳  
当店平均年齢 50.3歳  
当店限界年齢 69歳

●おかあさんのコンセプト

「明るく」マザコン「アニメ」新世代顧客層の獲得。  
「熟女店」でありながら、暗さ・下向き・密着さ等を一切排除し、従来  
の理由あり常連層中心の熟女店ではなく、「ポップ」で「明るい」  
コンセプトに毎日「新規・フリー」で賑わう状況です。

●年齢やボディラインは一切問いません!

「おかあさん」は世の男性なら誰もが憧れる「母性」「甘え」「包容力」(40歳～60歳)をコンセプトとしています。見た目ではわからない程やかな貴女なら輝けることをお約束致します。

池袋 0120-013-612  
新大久保 0120-989-556  
鷺谷 0120-448-456

Figure 4: Motherhood and domesticity are prominent signifiers for this Tokyo “escort” business, *Okāsan* (“Mother”), which recruits women in their forties, fifties, and sixties. The headline at the side, above the vacuuming housewife, reads, “Mother is positive, bright, and cheerful.” From the February 2011 issue of *Momoco*, a free employment magazine for the sex industry.

Examining the skyrocketing of diagnoses of depression since the late 1990s, Junko Kitanaka (2012) has demonstrated how salarymen have become the cultural representatives of both depression and suicide in the popular imagination. The “self-sacrificing devotion, discipline, and sense of responsibility” vaunted as normative values of salarymen, it turns out, have made them not just ideal workers but also the most likely candidates for excessive fatigue, alienation, and workplace-induced stress (Kitanaka 2012:131). This is especially so as the strains of a long-term economic recession have reconfigured which workers are valuable assets.

Against this backdrop of economic and social instability, *iyashi* has emerged as an objectified form. *Iyashi* first emerged as a buzzword in Japan in the mid-to-late 1990s, alongside an *iyashi* “boom” of consumer products and services (Matsui 2011). This consumer boom began at a time when awareness of mental illness – especially depression – began to skyrocket, amid broader attention to “existential alienation, loneliness, and loss of meaning” in the face of both national affluence and economic recession and restructuring (Ozawa-de Silva 2008:536). In the 2000s, Japanese commentators coined the term “society without connections” (*muen shakai*) to characterize the moment of insecurity and alienation that captured the nation (NHK “Muen Shakai Purojekuto” Shazaihan 2010; Allison 2013), recalling “the multiple forms of nightmarish dispossession and injury that our age entails” noted by Muehlebach (2013:298) in summing up recent ethnographic attention to precarity.

As noted by Chikako Ozawa-de Silva (2008:536), *iyashi* is less about healing in a medical sense and more about “something that is soothing, is comfortable, or brings one heavenly feelings,” thus spanning a broad range of mental, emotional, and psychological meanings. Today, all manner of products and services are classified as “healing type,” including vacations, music, aromatherapy packages, food, and collections of puppy or kitten photographs. Even personalities – such as those of actors, musicians, or lovers – can be signified in this way. The market for *iyashi* falls alongside deeply gendered lines, with products and services aimed at women centering on health and beauty, while for male consumers, *iyashi* typically implies sexual services (Matsui 2011).

The proliferation of *iyashi* suggests a larger phenomenon – real or perceived – of a sense of incompleteness, stress, or trauma that has been left unaddressed through

existing social relations. Alongside these influences, however, *iyashi* also refers to the need for relief from the unhealthy or anti-social build-up of stress, tension, exhaustion, or negative feelings. More concretely, perhaps, *iyashi* (and related terms) has been used as an umbrella term for a diverse set of activities and services aimed at helping those affected by the devastating March 11, 2011 earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster to overcome tragedy and trauma, especially through methods to physically or mentally displace individuals from their everyday circumstances. The use of *iyashi* by counselors and therapists co-exists with statements by figures such as the president of the Japanese Olympic Committee, who announced in 2012 that securing the 2020 Olympic bid for Tokyo would “heal” the nation (Tōkyō Gorin Shōchi ga “Nihon o Iyasu” 2012).

The sex industry has become a primary market for meeting male consumer demand for *iyashi*. I should be clear, however, that *iyashi* has not displaced sexual desire or gratification as the primary draw of the sex industry. Rather, *iyashi* co-exists *alongside* or even *through* the promise or realization of sexual release. My fieldwork informants echoed one another in commenting that while sexual gratification was ostensibly what was on offer in the sex industry, *iyashi* – the natural product of the encounter between female sex worker and male customer – was the central service. This is especially true since there is often high among between sex industry businesses. Most of the women I conducted research with had switched their workplace numerous times as part of continuous strategizing over how to maximize earnings relative to personal comfort level. The fluidity with which women circulate among businesses thus further suggests that *iyashi* forms the underlying coherence to what is offered in the sex industry while other distinctions (e.g. costumer play, special services) exist only at the superficial level.

## *Producing Iyashi*

In the specific context of the sex industry, *iyashi* is a deeply gendered form of care work and affective labor that revolves around a sex worker's carefully constructed performance of maternal intimacy. Put differently, it is a performed stance of nurturing warmth and care directed toward a customer, which produces in him deep-seated feelings of well-being, pleasure, connectivity, and acknowledgment. The sex worker enacts values that invert those of the male-gendered workplace, creating a female-gendered domain that complements the realm of male productivity. Through the enactment of the unpaid reproductive labor of the housewife, *iyashi* collapses maternal care of a child with the sexual or erotic gratification of the husband. The feelings produced in the customer through this encounter allow him to relax and, ultimately, to work again, renewing his productivity.

In September 2011, I partook in a training session for a sexual massage business, following an invitation from the session's instructor, a woman I call Mika. Sexual massage is only one category within a broad array of legal sex industry businesses in Japan today. In the early 1980s, the sex industry diversified heavily, and among the new types of businesses emerging, many were characterized as representing a "new sex industry" (*nyū fūzoku*) organized around role-playing, arousal, and "changing one's day-to-day frame" – perhaps anticipating the emergence of *iyashi* (NHK "Nihonjin no Sei" Purojekuto 2002:153). These businesses dominate the legal sex industry today.

Then 28, Mika had already worked in the sex industry for twelve years, having furtively (and illegally) started during high school. Her family always had dinner early,

she explained, smiling mischievously. It was easy to tell them she was going to study with a friend and then bike off to the neighboring town to the sex industry business where she was working part-time. She had been introduced after a friend at the hostess club at which she was (also furtively) working had told her one night that they were short an employee – wouldn't Mika come along and try it out? she had been asked. Since that time, Mika had explored the breadth of sex industry businesses and been the “Number One” (*nanbā wan*) – a designation given to the highest earning employee – numerous times. Being ambitious as well as entrepreneurial, Mika had started a successful side career as a sex industry instructor and consultant three years earlier and had even written a book about her experiences. Businesses interested in increasing their clientele and reputation hired Mika to train employees in everything from technique to conversational skills to building an appropriate ambiance for clients. These sessions were also available for purchase on home DVD. In the near future, she wanted to start a “sex industry school” (*fūzoku gakkō*), where beginners could learn basics ranging from technique to protecting oneself from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) to how to build up one's savings.

Mika was friendly and outgoing, with a charm capturing one of the qualities most highly valued among unmarried women in the Japanese sex/gender system: being *akarui*, or bright and cheerful with a consistently positive outlook. She also manifested the highly developed interpersonal skills that seemed to be shared, without fail, by successful sex workers: conversational dexterity, a memory for small details, and a seemingly effortless ability to personalize relationships. Speaking with Mika, one feels what Sayaka, another veteran sex worker, summarized as the essence of what all customers yearn for: “the

sense that the other person really understands you and that your individual existence matters to them.” As in other healing contexts, these healers perceive things that others cannot – or, at least, do not.

When I exited the ticket gate at a train station in central Tokyo early in the afternoon on the designated day, Mika was already waiting for me, smiling broadly. The live model, a man in his late twenties named Mr. Mori,<sup>41</sup> showed up a few minutes later, dressed casually in jeans and a t-shirt. Although he did not volunteer any personal information, Mr. Mori’s availability in the middle of the afternoon suggested that he, like many of his generation, was a part-time or non-regular worker (Brinton 2011).<sup>42</sup> He had participated in Mika’s demonstrations several times before as a way of earning some extra income. The three of us left the station on foot. In keeping with the general proximity of sex industry businesses to central commuter hubs and entertainment districts, our destination was only a two minute-walk from the station. Twenty meters down a side street off the main road, we turned into the entrance of a multi-story building housing several sex industry businesses.

At the training session, which took place in a former Internet café being converted to the office of an escort sexual massage business, eight spectators, including myself, sat on the floor around a massage bed in the center of the room. As Mika changed into a “sexy nurse” tunic with hearts on the sleeves and bust, visually exemplifying gendered care, a staff member distributed clipboards, notepaper, and pencils to the audience for

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<sup>41</sup> Through terms of address, I am trying to replicate the ways in which status and hierarchy are constructed between sex workers and clients. While sex workers go by their personal names as a way of demonstrating a lower and familiar relational status, customers are referred to deferentially by their surnames.

<sup>42</sup> There is some irony in the fact that a non-regular worker was standing in as a foil for a salaryman.

them to take notes with. Over the course of the next two hours, Mika and Mr. Mori demonstrated to us at close range a run-through of an ideal encounter between sex worker and customer.

What can be described as making a customer “feel like a man” is made manifest here through the collapsing of the role of child and husband in the customer. Mika narrated as she performed on Mr. Mori, often pausing to provide commentary on her actions. She explained to us that the reigning metaphor for the encounter between sex worker and customer should be a maternal one. Assuming a maternal stance allowed sex workers to create the circumstances in which a customer could momentarily suspend his responsibilities and obligations, replacing them with a desire to be indulged and to act selfishly. For example, Mika told us that women should speak to their customers as mothers to their children. If men were going to the sex industry to seek *iyashi* from work and responsibilities, then doing things “like a mother” was the ideal position from which to praise them and acknowledge their efforts. Similarly, when Mika demonstrated how to carefully dry a man off following the shower that preceded the massage, she suddenly enveloped his head in the towel and vigorously rubbed his cheeks, mimicking a familiar childhood gesture. In a high-pitched voice she exclaimed, “That felt good, didn’t it!” This explicit infantilization served to highlight that these white-collar salarymen could allow themselves to passively be guided by the sex worker.

Mika explained that she used the maternal approach most explicitly with customers up to their mid-fifties, whose masculinity was still tied up to being *amaechan* (“a spoiled child”). These men, she explained, craved to have this maternal recognition of their masculinity. While occasionally a customer would draw away from this treatment,

saying, “don’t treat me like a child,” often this was just a gruff exterior and he did not really mean it. Once customers reached their mid-fifties, however, they underwent a change in what they were looking for, and wanted to be recognized as men by their accomplishments. Rather than calling these men “cute,” she referred to them as “magnificent.”

The performance of a mother-child relationship, while perhaps also involving a degree of incestuous role play (although this was never mentioned),<sup>43</sup> is also an expression of a model of social relations developed by the Japanese psychiatrist Takeo Doi (1973). Doi’s widely popularized model held that *amae*, or the desire to be passively dependent on a benign caregiver, governs all Japanese social relations, including those between mothers and children, wives and husbands, and companies and their employees. In middle-class homes, the housewife has long been mother to both children and husband (Borovoy 2005; Goldstein-Gidoni 2012; Ochiai 1997; Uno 1993). Thus when Mika told us that the customer desired to play *amaechan* (spoiled child), she was drawing on the expectation that (male) selfish behavior would be indulged by an unconditionally nurturing and warm caregiver. The customer thereby straddled the boundary of child and husband, being infused with a deep sense of psychological well-being and security.

Framing the sex worker’s care of the customer as maternal care also allowed the sex worker to foreground the customer’s laboring status. It is through the sex worker’s performance, that is, that the man recognizes himself as a white-collar worker. This was evident during various subtle physical and verbal references. For example, later during

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<sup>43</sup> There is a precedent to the theme of the over-indulgent mother taking advantage of her son. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, anxieties over the excessiveness of the housewife as micro-manager of her (male) children’s socialization and education manifested in stories of mother-son incest that circulated the Japanese media (Allison 2000).

the massage, as Mika was rubbing Mr. Mori's shoulders, she told us to express concern, saying, "your shoulders are too stiff, you're working too hard again, aren't you!" It was not expected that the customer would respond to this with anything other than perhaps a grunt. In making such a comment, Mika was acknowledging the efforts of the man as a productive and capable worker. His hard work was corporeally manifest to her in his tight shoulders and his weary body, and in his passivity and desire to simply let himself be taken care of.

Mika had a two-fold understanding of *iyashi* in relation to male laboring bodies. First, *iyashi* involved an acknowledgement of the efforts, burden, and hard work shouldered by the individual. She explained to us that men have to steel themselves in order to succeed, subordinating their own desires and needs in order to put all their energy into a larger goal. "Lots of individuals," Mika told us, "at their companies and in their families depend on them to do this, but no one ever thanks them. That's what being a man means, after all." *Iyashi* was imagined as both an acknowledgment and a momentary suspension of customers' responsibilities and obligations. In other words, *iyashi* is understood, in part, as a form of deep psychological or mental relief.

While this first understanding of *iyashi* was thought to be primary and the most important, a second understanding acknowledged a carnal aspect. Mika dramatically explained male sexuality as following a wavelike trajectory, wherein male workers are asked to "endure, endure, endure, and then phewww---! They can release." Rather than explaining this aspect of male sexuality in biochemical terms, however, as she had earlier when discussing what happens in the brain during an orgasm, she essentially reiterated her earlier description of pushing oneself for the sake of a larger goal. Her description of

male orgasm, in fact, imagined it as a social act necessary for the continued existence of the company, the family, and, even, society at large. Anne Allison (1994), in her ethnography of high-class hostess clubs in Tokyo in the pre-Bubble 1980s, illustrated how Japanese corporations devoted significant funds to male after-hours “play” in these clubs as a way of reinforcing social attachments within and between firms. The feminized – and often highly sexualized – conversations of hostesses produced committed workers for Japanese companies. Similarly, in Mika’s description (echoed by other sex workers), the sex industry had now come to take over this function. Productive male labor, that is, seemed to be premised on the care of sex workers.

Throughout the tutorial, the spectators watched Mika closely. They nodded along as she spoke to them and took notes using the clipboard and notepaper distributed earlier by the male staff member. The women closest to the massage bed positioned themselves right at its edge in order to watch Mika’s movements – and observe Mr. Mori’s reactions to them – at close proximity. Two of the women made elaborate sketches of different parts of the massage, using small arrows to note the direction and ideal amount of pressure of stroke movements as well as writing down conversational points given by Mika. Judging from their skill at sketching, perhaps they were part-time or hobby *manga* (“comic”) artists, looking for a means to financially support their passion. As I looked around at the seven other women watching, some of them so fixated on the tutorial that they had felt comfortable enough to sit cross-legged with their dresses pulled up to their hips, clearly feeling at ease, I was struck by how the room was a sea of floral, heart, polka-dot, and teddy-bear patterns: everything that was constructed as soft, non-

threatening, cute, and stereotypically feminine. These women, it seemed to me, were already thoroughly immersed in the symbolic language of normative femininity.

### *Cultivating Attentive Empathy*

The production of affect in this context rests on the establishment of intimacy. This, in turn, rests on the assumption that the performance by sex workers emerges from a basic human kindness that is naturalized as female, and not from the pursuit of wages. Despite claims that sex work is “easy for women” by Japanese commentators – such as those on Internet web boards – with no experience working in the sex industry, most of the women I spoke with vehemently rejected the sentiment that “anyone can do this work.”<sup>44</sup> Aimi, a single mother who had worked in the sex industry until her late thirties, was fed up with such misunderstandings. Seated at a bustling Starbuck’s Coffee Shop with the next patrons only half a meter away, she exclaimed angrily, indifferent to her surroundings, “I think every woman should really have to do an interview [at a sex industry business] once in their life. That way they’d understand that you could be the cutest girl in the world and still fail your interview!” Like Aimi, others also bristled at comments that were ignorant or dismissive of the amount of effort they put into their work<sup>45</sup> and which attributed success to factors such as personal attractiveness instead. Those women without technique, empathy, or interpersonal skills, they told me, were the

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<sup>44</sup> Of course, women’s domestic identities as wives or mothers in Japan are often similarly attributed to a female biological “instinct” to nurture or care, rendering the work women do in performing these roles invisible – unless, that is, their “avatars” in public space (their husband or child) fail in some way.

<sup>45</sup> This resentment also undoubtedly stems from awareness of how such stereotypes about sex work justify lower wages and lack of recognition as workers.

ones who failed to attract a regular clientele. *Iyashi* was not something offered by those women who failed to think beyond their own needs.

Successful sex workers, I was unanimously told, were those who were – through effort and cultivation or personal narrative – able to embody the desires of customers. This required significant dedication and self-awareness, work that was accomplished individually through the woman’s own initiative. In fact, the sexual massage training session that I attended was something of a novelty. Across the industry, actual training for new employees is unusual, beyond a short orientation and a brief run-through of the standard service “menu” with a staff member. Women working in the sex industry are, in other words, largely left to manage on their own in cultivating erotic technique, interpersonal skills, legal and sexual health information, and industry savvy. Job training, as it were, is thus incumbent on women’s individual initiative and takes numerous forms. Mika, for instance, used her free time to immerse herself in music, movies, and *manga* comics popular among men. This gave her a repertoire that she could draw on in order to easily converse with customers and produce a sense of connectivity. More critically, she was always on the lookout for models that she could emulate in embodying an “ideal” feminine figure to her customers, and scrutinized women who she was told possessed erotic energy.

Attentive care in the sex industry has to do both with the numerous “subtle and mundane acts of care” (Buch 2013:637) that make up care work generally – in this context, for instance, warming up the shower beforehand, carefully deflecting shower spray from the nape of the customer’s neck, kneeling down in front of the customer while taking off his shoes, grazing one’s breasts on a customer’s knees while leaning into his

torso suggestively to undo his belt – as well as a deeper attentive stance. Attentiveness itself – which has been described as a key component of intimate labor (Boris and Parreñas 2010:4) – is a highly valued attribute in Japan. For instance, when prompted, Mika easily rattles off five different forms of attentive empathy that she employs in her work. These include: *mekubari*, *kikubari*, *kokorokubari*, *kizukai*, and *kokorozukai*. While the first three can be glossed as variants of “to be considerate of” or “to take care of,” the initial parts of the compounds refer to the distribution (*kubari*) of senses originating in different parts of the body: *me* (eye); *kokoro* refers to a “heart-mind” seen as being “the locus of feelings, consciousness, and authenticity” (Robertson 1991:88 n. 1); and *ki* (vital energy in the body). *Kizukai* and *kokorozukai* similarly refer to an earnest concern or solicitude mobilized through the use of one’s *ki* or *kokoro*. Attentiveness is a central component of hospitality and sociality in Japan generally, but is especially associated with service work, in which workers are, to some extent, expected to think on behalf of the customer, anticipating, for example, when a customer will want their sheets turned down, ice or alcohol added to their drink, or a lighter for a cigarette (Allison 1994).

Sex workers did not just rely on attentiveness when producing *iyashi*. Equally important was a form of cultivated deep association or empathy that recalls Viviana Zelizer’s definition of intimacy as interactions that depend on “knowledge and attention that are not widely available to third parties” (Zelizer 2005:14). Shiori summed up this necessity with a piece of wisdom passed down to her early on by a more experienced “older sister” at her first workplace: “Feel, don’t ask” (*kiku jyanakute, kanjiru*). The exhortation to “feel” expressed the need to build a deep association with individual customers that was both intuited and based on experience. In doing so, sex workers

constructed male workers as individual selves who needed to – and could be – intimately understood. This sets a considerable contrast to workers’ treatment in the male-gendered corporate or bureaucratic workplace, wherein their needs are wholly subsumed with those of the company. Whether a customer was married or not, the sex worker produced an imaginary in which she was the replication of an ideal wife and mother.

A story about another “Number One” told to me by Sayaka illustrated this.<sup>46</sup> The highest earning woman at a store where she had previously worked had been much older than the other employees. Although she had not been stylish or attractive and had never appeared in any of the advertising put out by the business, she had always put in more effort than anyone else:

“She would write notes about each customer so she could remember details like what they had spoken about. She would bring new socks as presents to her bachelor customers and would always remember birthdays. When she was with a customer, you could hear her moaning from across the store. Because she put in more effort than anyone else, the customers took a liking to her and would become her regulars. I always thought it was strange that she did so well since she was a single mother and could only work in the early afternoon [an unpopular time]. When I think about it now, though, I see that it’s *because* she had had various life experiences – like raising a child – that she really understood what hardship was and what it meant to do this work well.”

Sayaka’s statement that the woman “understood hardship” suggested that this older employee had a heightened capacity to genuinely empathize with others and to offer them understanding and acknowledgement. This capacity, coupled with the woman’s ability to

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<sup>46</sup> Stories of “Number One’s” abound in the sex industry. As symbols of success, they become objects of curiosity to other women working at the same business and, often, models against which to measure oneself. This is especially so as competition within stores is often subtly encouraged. In many of the stories I heard, the punch line was often that an older woman thought to be “past her prime” was in fact the most successful worker.

make each encounter feel unique, generated an attentive empathy that set her apart from her peers as an exemplary sex worker. In this way, personal narratives were linked to sex workers' abilities to enact a role of nurturing caretaker that was explicitly gendered female and tied to the successful performance of *iyashi*.

### *Amateurs not Laborers*

An important element in generating *iyashi* is also one that troubles its recognition as labor. While the women working in the sex industry whom I encountered drew on numerous factors (e.g. personal biographies) in producing *iyashi*, the value of the intimacy produced rested on the woman's presentation of authenticity. Although I take up this topic in detail in Chapter Three, put simply, women did better if they *appeared* to be naïve and amateurish. In this context, even Mika, the 12-year veteran and expert consultant, was an amateur. The paradox here is that women are saying that their work is natural even though they're obviously working in achieving an effortless performance of it.

Paradoxically, even in this high-paying sector of the female labor market, women have to conceal the laboring nature of their work. Although those women most highly sought after in the sex industry – such as, for example, “Number One’s” – deliberately and self-consciously cultivate their skills in producing *iyashi*, this cannot be made apparent to customers. The work that goes into producing *iyashi*, in other words, has to be concealed in order to be valued. The irony that women working in the sex industry cannot present themselves as skilled experts was not lost on Sayaka, a 14-year veteran of the sex industry who shrugged as she told me that customers would be turned away by a

“professional,” understood here as someone working in a cold and mechanical way. What they wanted was authenticity, which was associated with innocence and naiveté – or, rather, the *appearance* of innocence and naiveté.

While “private” forms of intimacy are moving to the market, even this market-based, waged care work is eclipsed by the male labor that depends on it. In writing about home care workers in the urban United States, Elana Buch has argued that the deference of care workers – mostly women of color and immigrant women – to their clients comes to be seen as morally legitimate due to the role of workers’ embodied care practices in sustaining elderly personhood. Buch writes, “This form of care reflects and intensifies broader social patterns in which the value of women – historically constructed as ‘natural’ caregivers – is measured by their willingness and ability to subjugate their bodies and deny themselves bodily pleasure to meet the expectations and desires of others” (2013:647). Similarly, women in the sex industry conceal the laboring aspects of their work in the service of gendered ideologies, which posit male productivity as dependent on female care. The healing of customers paves the way for male sexual release, which is seen as necessary for the reproduction of the company, the family, and even society itself.

### *Changing Family Relations*

Why is *iyashi* outside of the realm of the family or of romantic relations? Often, during interviews with female sex workers, the topic of heteromartial family relations would come up. It did so one day, when I asked Sayaka, a sex worker and long-time advocate (I discuss her activities at length in Chapter Six), what she would want future

readers of my research to know about the Japanese sex industry. We were in her small studio apartment in a well-furnished complex in Shinjuku, just outside *Nichōme*, the heart of Tokyo's gay subculture. Unlike many urban Japanese, Sayaka frequently invited people to her apartment. Perhaps it had to do with Sayaka's origins in the Kansai region and the time she had spent in Osaka. Throughout Japan, Osaka residents are known for being straightforward and open, a perception that links back to Osaka's days as a mercantile center. After I asked her about what she'd like to convey to American readers, Sayaka paused. She asked if I would mind if she smoked, and took her usual position in the kitchen next to the open window, where the smoke could waft out.

After a few moments of pensive silence, Sayaka began. What she really wanted Americans to understand, she said, was not about the sex industry but about Japanese marital and home relations. She wanted readers to know how these were different:

“For example, you know that Japanese men are under extreme amounts of pressure, right? Americans and Europeans get a month of summer vacation, but for Japanese men, once you graduate from university, there's no more vacation. Only Saturdays and Sundays. You do overtime every day and always have to work your hardest. The longest break you get is at New Year's, or maybe for Obon [a three-day holiday in mid-August in which urban residents return to their familial villages to commemorate their ancestors]. But even then, it's only three or four days. If you can take a week off, you're lucky. But Japanese men are also under pressure because, well, rather than being under pressure, it's more like something that's not healing them [*iyasarete inai*], which is that marital relations tend to grow cold quickly. Sexlessness is a huge problem in Japan. And couples don't say, “I love you” to one another. Lovers might say it, but once you get married, after a year or two, no one says it anymore. If you have a child, you stop being a man or a woman and become a father or mother. This is what all my customers have in common – they all say this. So they come to the sex industry. It's the only place where they can be healed by a woman. Their wife isn't a wife anymore, but a mother, and that's why I think the demand for the sex industry is so high. Although an American woman might get angry if her husband went to the sex industry, in this kind of society, a Japanese wife might wonder whether her husband is going to the sex industry, but doesn't care so long as she doesn't have to know about it.”

Sayaka's account captured numerous ideas that I heard repeated throughout my fieldwork, ideas which tied together the structure of middle-class labor with marital relations that centered on a couple's role as parents.

The "common sense" seemed to be that following the birth of a child, the wife turned her energies into identifying foremost as a "mother" rather than a "wife," and lost interest in sex. Rather than the new mother simply being too tired from taking care of her infant to have sex, the implication was that something fundamentally shifted in her primary self-identity as she transitioned from "wife" to "mother."<sup>47</sup> This was understood as producing a parallel shift in a woman's priorities: rather than taking care primarily of her husband, she now divided her attention.

Similarly, among my informants, it was also often echoed that as they aged, wives didn't want to have sex anymore – their husbands, however, still did.<sup>48</sup> Shiori recounted one such case to me over dinner one night. It was meant to be a typical example of a married man who went to the sex industry, and involved a middle-aged man whose wife simply refused to have sex with him. The man was in his forties, and based on the way he spoke about his wife, Shiori said that it was clear that "in his heart" he really loved her. He was suffering, however, because of his wife's stubbornness. So he came to Shiori (and likely others as well). From her recounting of the story, it was clear that she found

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<sup>47</sup> This "common sense" is eerily reminiscent to the Tokugawa period notion for women of a certain class that "marriage effectively was the rite of passage that [...] severed a woman from her sexuality" (Robertson 1991:97). While wives were relegated to the realm of procreation, "sexuality proper was limited to concubines and courtesans" (97).

<sup>48</sup> Feminists have noted that this construction of Japanese wives foremost as mothers denies them an autonomous sexual identity and institutionalizes their role in domestic labor, while the husband's sexual identity is given no limits (Buckley 1997:140-141; Mackie 2003:138).

the wife selfish, although when I pushed her on this, she softened her stance somewhat. Clearly, however, she was highly sympathetic with the customer. I thought about how sex workers who were the type to make “Number One” at more than one store also seemed to sympathize actively with their customers even outside of work.

Popular ideas about what constitutes adultery facilitates the search for intimacy outside of the household. In their research on the Japanese sex industry, the sex worker-scholar duo Kaname and Mizushima cite a survey from the now defunct Tokyo evening paper, *Naigai Taimuzu*, in which 79.5% of respondents stated that it was *not* infidelity to go to the sex industry (Kaname and Mizushima 2005:66).<sup>49</sup> In an NHK survey of the sexual attitudes of Japanese men and women in two different age cohorts, 36% of young men through their thirties had no problem with “buying sex” (*okane o haratte sekkusu o suru (kaishun)*) and 19% of older men had no problem with it. These figures strike one as surprisingly low, especially among the older generation (NHK Nihonjin no Sei Purojekuto 2002:40-41). In a discussion of the NHK data, two well-known social scientists and public intellectuals, Miyadai Shinji and Ueno Chizuko, note that, overall, approximately half of men have purchased sex, with men in their thirties at the highest number, at 62% (153). Miyadai contextualizes these differing responses within recent shifts in the sex industry, especially the industry transition in the early 1980s alluded to earlier in the chapter toward a “new sex industry” (*nyū fūzoku*), in which the emphasis

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<sup>49</sup> As with other evening papers and sports newspapers, the *Naigai Taimuzu* frequently carried articles and advertisements related to the sex industry, meaning that its readership would not be unfamiliar with the industry. Kaname and Mizushima also queried the 126 female sex workers they surveyed in their own research on whether going to the sex industry – or working there – was considered “cheating.” 79.4% of their respondents did not think that it was infidelity for a man to go to the sex industry even if he was in a relationship, and a slightly higher number – 81.7% – did not think that working in the sex industry was cheating (Kaname and Mizushima 2005:65).

was less on penile-vaginal intercourse (e.g. in *soaplands*), and more on role-playing and arousal (153). He suggests that this market shift accounts for the disparity in statistics given in the survey, given that the term “buying sex” might make less sense in an industry revolving around *iyashi* (153, 155).

The difference between infidelity and extramarital or extrarelational sex seemed to be based on the nature of the personal relationship. It seemed that the assumption was that the exchange of sex for money established a distance between two people, which meant it was *not* infidelity. As noted in the aforementioned sex worker survey, “If [the customer] develops feelings for (*hamatte shimattara*) one woman, that would be cheating,” or, “It’s okay if it’s just a breather, but not if you go all the time” (Kaname and Mizushima 2005:65). Among the Naigai Taimuzu respondents, comments included, “You’re paying money, so it’s not cheating. If you’re just going to fulfill your sexual desire, then you’re not emotionally betraying your wife,” and, “Things that you deal with using money are business transactions. Where there’s a bill, there are no emotions” (66).

In line with these survey responses, when I spoke with my informants about whether they thought that going to the sex industry was considered “cheating” (*uwaki*) or not, the consensus seemed to be that it was in a different category. This reflected a distinction often made between *uwaki* (extramarital or extrarelational sex, “cheating”) and *furin* (“adultery”). While the former seems to allude to an inconsequential acting out of what is regarded as natural desires (on the part of the male), the latter holds a seriousness that can serve as the basis for divorce. As the scholar Tanabe Seiko notes, “If you come home, it’s *uwaki*. But if you think hmm, tonight, I’m not coming home, it’s *furin*” (cited in West 2006:266). Although *uwaki* is not seen as “good,” per se, it is

explained as the result of bio-social causes and does not have the gravity attached to it that *furin* does. *Furin* then, is a relationship that threatens the man's obligations to his wife and family. It was understood that it was about sex and the man's desire to have sex with many different women.

Although attitudes are changing and generational differences are important as well, it still seems to be the case that distinctions are made (by men) between going to the sex industry and having an affair. That in the former, it's understood that there are no real attachments. In a survey of three hundred men published in the "career woman" journal *Nikkei Woman*, about 40% of male respondents had been to the sex industry (Nikkei Woman 2011a:125). Although most of the male respondents (73.6%) denied ever having had sex with someone who was not their lover/partner, about 60% stated that they had no problem (in theory) with having an affair, including 20.9% who answered "it's okay as long as you love your wife or partner" (Nikkei Woman 2011a:125). In a close-up, one man commented anonymously that he often went to the sex industry with his colleagues from work (both his seniors, juniors, and peers): "When men go to the sex industry together, the feeling of solidarity between them strengthens. So I go both for the connection/relationship with/between co-workers and for my own sexual desire" (Nikkei Woman 2011b:126). This response clearly recalls the company men of Anne Allison's fieldwork in elite Tokyo hostess clubs in the 1980s, in which corporate relationships – both within and between companies – were fostered by the masculine bonding that occurred at hostess clubs (1994).

Given that I argue in this chapter that the sex industry is a location where authentic intimacy – in the guise of *iyashi* – is produced, it is highly ironic that

extrarelational visits to the sex industry are justified based on the notion that the exchange of money establishes a “distance” between sex worker and customer. “Distance,” in this case, seems to refer to a lack of obligations, suggesting in turn that intimacy occurs in spaces where there are no obligations. Returning to my earlier discussion of a *muen shakai* (“a society without connections”), one wonders whether the seeking out of intimacy in the sex industry speaks to a larger reconfiguration of the gendered division of labor in Japan. Against a backdrop of decreasing marriage rates, perhaps the labor of the idealized housewife-as-mother is now being transferred to sex workers.

### *Conclusion*

The critical and ethnographic study of how Japanese sex workers socially reproduce the male labor force offers the potential to understand how women’s labor may remain hidden in the marketplace, even as the dimensions of reproductive labor previously delegated to the domestic sphere are increasingly migrating in this direction. In producing *iyashi* for their customers, women working in the Tokyo sex industry draw on “private” forms of intimacy, especially that of the ideal wife and mother, to salvage an otherwise imperiled middle-class, white-collar masculinity. In order to be valued as authentic, however, *iyashi* must come across as emanating from a woman’s intrinsic femininity rather than deliberately cultivated skill. It is ironic that as these women move into the marketplace, they enact forms of unpaid female reproductive labor represented by the housewife. Female care must be presented as outside of the realm of the

marketplace, even as sex workers themselves are uncomfortable with attitudes that attribute their success to supposedly innate feminine qualities.

Panning outward, an examination of *iyashi* helps us to understand how sex workers are devalued in a context in which ideas about exploitation and sexual labor are not generally brought into conversation together. Although female sex workers are helping to reproduce the male labor force, their labor remains hidden as it is tied to biological identity. Through the devaluation of this labor *as work*, including discrimination and a lack of labor protections or health and legal information, sex workers are marginalized, even as sex work itself is widely tolerated. The implications of this are disturbing, given that the increasing need of women to seek out work to support themselves, the diminishing of social welfare programs, and the normalization of sex work through the metaphor of healing suggest that we should anticipate *more* women entering the sex industry.

At the same time, *iyashi* serves to show us something about what is understood as innate and, in particular, how gendered relationships are produced so as to seem natural. This recasts older Marxist-feminist debates about the relationship between women's work and capitalist value production, suggesting that even with the migration of reproductive labor to the marketplace, areas that are identified as "women's work" will remain less valued. This structural inequality in the marketplace becomes seen as commonsensical, bound up as it is with ideas about biological differences between men (wage-earners) and women (caretakers).

### **Chapter Three**

#### **First-Timers Welcome!: High Income and Short-Term Labor in the Sex Industry**

In December 2012, as part of its pre-Lower House parliamentary election coverage, the left-leaning Tokyo newspaper, *Tōkyō Shimbun*, ran a front-page story focusing on female poverty, which opened with a description of a 24-hour daycare center operating on the outskirts of the Kabukichō sex and entertainment district in Shinjuku, Tokyo. Two-thirds of the parents sending their children to this particular daycare were women working in the sex industry. The article introduced one such parent, a 26-year-old single mother who had been struggling to cover her living and childcare expenses, while also making monthly payments in settling the considerable debt with which her father had left her and her mother when he had abandoned them nine years earlier. Concerned about saving money for her son's future, the woman had begun working in the sex industry at age 23, and was currently making about ¥500,000 (approximately \$5,800) per month by working three or four days a week. Although she planned on leaving the sex industry the following year when her son entered elementary school and her father's debt was almost paid back, she worried about whether she could make ends meet on a job outside the sex industry in the current economic climate (Rupo Hifuyūsō no Genjitsu: 2012).

Several months later, when I was in Tokyo for a brief research trip, I happened to switch on a television news program just as a minor scandal was being broadcast involving an Osaka public school teacher who had been found working in the sex

industry. The story was briefly picked up on numerous national print and television outlets. The Osaka Board of Education had received an anonymous notification that a 29-year-old high school teacher was working at a *hoteheru*<sup>50</sup> business after school and on her days off. When questioned, the teacher confessed to having shopping debts and residual student loans. She had chosen the sex industry because she could work short-term and had hoped to pay off her debts as quietly as possible. Over the course of five months, she had made \$16,000; unfortunately, very little of this money had actually been put toward her debts, several media outlets pointed out. While the teacher had clearly violated local regulations prohibiting public servants from engaging in part-time work, the Board further announced that the nature of her work had been extremely inappropriate and that she had betrayed the trust of students, parents, and Osaka residents. The teacher was given a hefty suspension, although she immediately submitted her resignation (Kōkō Kyōyu Fūzoku de Baito 2013; Sensei “Hōkago” wa Fūzokujō 2013).

In both of these cases, women in their twenties look to the sex industry as a temporary refuge in the labor market. Both women assume that they can flow out of the industry as easily as they entered once their situation improves and both earn considerable wages working part-time. The first story is highly sympathetic, using the case of a single mother supporting her son and parent to highlight issues surrounding female poverty and labor market exclusion. The woman is concerned about protecting her son from discrimination in case she is “outed” and wants to leave the industry as soon as possible. What types of work will be available to a woman her age on a blank resume,

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<sup>50</sup> Short for “hotel health,” a *hoteheru* business is an “escort” business in which a sex worker meets a customer at a designated hotel. Oral sex and manual stimulation are the standard service.

however, is left unclear. The coverage of the second case, in contrast, coolly reports on a teacher whose actions are deemed unsuitable for a public servant: the implied excessive materialism, debts, violations of work restrictions, failure to repay her debt, and, to crown it all, her work in a highly stigmatized (although legal) industry. Following a semi-public shaming, the woman resigns her post, seeing no future in her work in the school district. In the outrage over her transgressions as public servant and woman, there is no concern for where she will turn to next.

In Chapter Two, I argued that female sex work is understood as a form of deeply gendered care work and showed how ideologies of male and female labor necessitate *iyashi* (healing) by female sex workers in order to reproduce men as capable and effective workers. Although sex work is perceived of as necessary, however, and women's exclusion from higher-status sectors of the labor market that are gendered "male" make it a uniquely lucrative occupation for women, sex industry labor is also highly stigmatized. In this chapter, I examine how women working in the sex industry confront some of the tensions implicit in working in an industry that is becoming normalized, on the one hand, but which nonetheless remains antithetical to dominant norms about appropriate female behavior.

Prevalent stereotypes about sex industry work (mirrored in the above accounts) commonly frame women's motivations to enter this work in terms of extremes: namely, that women enter either out of desperate need or, conversely, that they enter for selfish and socially transgressive reasons. These caricatures, not surprisingly, fail to account for the complexity or fluid nature of women's motivations and their understandings of the labor. In this chapter, I will illustrate some of the ambiguities and moral complexities that

shape women's labor in the sex industry. While structural constraints such as a limited labor market and the valorization of authenticity in the sex industry have normalized the sex industry as a site for short-term female employment, sex workers produce accounts that reveal their own internal conflicts about their decisions. Although sex work is often an opportunity for women to achieve a particular goal – supporting a child, paying off a debt, becoming upwardly mobile, or earning money with which to pursue hobbies – the stigmatized nature of the work causes sex workers to reproduce discourses that devalue the work, question the accounts or motivations of others, or emphasize passivity over agency. In particular, through narratives of themselves as *shirōto*, or “amateurs,” a term that highlights innocence, authenticity, and naiveté, women navigate the moral complexities of laboring in a stigmatized industry.

### *The Era of Amateur Prostitution?*

In 1995, the journal *Bessatsu Takarajima*<sup>51</sup> proclaimed the “era” of amateur prostitution (*shirōto ga baishun suru jidai*), declaring that the excessive consumerism of (late-)capitalist Japan had turned sexuality itself into a commodity (Bessatsu Takarajima Henshūbu 1995:4). New information and communication technologies, the journal pointed out, had accelerated this commodification, resulting in ubiquitous sex media that advertised “female college students,” “office ladies,” and “married women” (*hitozuma*) in the same ways as merchandise in bargain ads folded into newspapers. This availability of sex media as signs in an oversaturated consumer environment stimulated male desire and

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<sup>51</sup> Since 1976, this alternative journal has been dedicated to making hitherto repressed subjects visible and public. For example, in 1987 the journal produced one of the first “lesbian reports,” and have, over the years, published extensively on such taboo topics as divorce, schoolgirl prostitution, and violence against women.

prompted women to “sell their bodies” [sic] in order to access a more lavish consumer lifestyle (4). Alarmed especially by the noticeable appearance of housewives and schoolgirls in the sex industry, the editors announced that prostitution was now the domain of “ordinary” (meaning, “middle class”) people.

While the journal glossed over the historical reality that young daughters, married women, and women engaged in other occupations have always comprised the demographics of those involved in prostitution both seasonally or more long-term from at least the Tokugawa Period (1603-1868) onward – it being expected that their labor would support the household economy<sup>52</sup> (Hane 2003; Sievers 1983; Stanley 2012; Yamazaki 1999) – the point of the editors was that there was something qualitatively different about the contemporary sex industry. Reluctant self-sacrifice in the face of poverty, they asserted, was no longer the defining feature of women’s entry into the sex industry. The new cohort of sex workers entered the sex industry of their own will (*jiyū ishi ni yoru baishun*). As such, the editors asserted, old assumptions and ways of thinking about prostitution needed to be rethought (Bessatsu Takarajima 1995:4-5).

Discourses on the “amateurization” of the sex industry generally locate its origins from the 1980s to early 1990s. This period includes the height of the Japanese “bubble economy,” a period often looked back upon now as one of excessive materialism and consumption, when Japanese consumers supposedly lost their sense for money in the pursuit of a luxurious lifestyle (An’i ni Kosu Fūzoku e no Issen 1998). In the early 1980s, the sex industry also diversified heavily. Among the new types of businesses emerging,

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<sup>52</sup> Despite the revisionist thinking of conservative politicians such as Prime Minister Abe Shinzō, the so-called “Comfort Women” were, of course, “amateurs” as well (Yoshiaki 2000[1995]).

many were characterized as representing a “new sex industry” (*nyū fūzoku*) organized around role-playing, arousal, and “changing one’s day-to-day frame” (NHK “Nihonjin no Sei” Purojekuto 2002:153). These were businesses which moved away from an explicit emphasis on sexual services and more on *iyashi* (see Chapter Two). These businesses dominate the legal sex industry today. The media focused on stories of middle-class housewives working during the afternoon while their husbands and children were away, as a way of earning personal spending money or money with which to feel a sense of independence (*jiritsu*) for themselves (Yonahara 1995). From the early 1990s on, the sexuality of schoolgirls emerged as a “social issue” (*shakai mondai*) as commentators far and wide ruminated on “delinquent” schoolgirls who engaged in so-called “compensated dating” (*enjo kōsai*). These debates crystallized anxieties about materialism, women, and sexuality (Cullinane 2007; Leheny 2006; Miyadai 2006[1994]).

Curiosity about “ordinary” people, including not just schoolgirls and housewives but also career women and “office ladies,” entering the sex industry was fanned especially by a highly sensationalized murder case nicknamed the “TEPCO Office Lady Murder Case” (*Tōden OL Satsujin Jiken*). On March 19, 1997, the body of Watanabe Yasuko, a 39-year-old female career employee in the management track of the prestigious Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) was found strangled in an empty apartment in the Maruyama area of Shibuya, Tokyo, an area known for housing one of the city’s densest concentrations of love hotels.<sup>53</sup> Two months later, the police arrested

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<sup>53</sup> Despite being a full-time career track employee, Watanabe has commonly been referred to as an “office lady” due to prevalent sexism in the workplace (and replicated in the media), by which female employees have been lumped together and, regardless of their position, made to wear uniforms and serve tea to their male colleagues, amongst other menial tasks.

Govinda Prasad Mainali, a Nepalese man who had overstayed his visa while working in a restaurant and sending money home to his family, on a robbery-murder charge. Mainali lived in the building next door to the apartment where Watanabe's body had been found, and had admitted to having sexual relations with her, although not around the time of her suspected death. While the evidence pointing to Mainali was highly circumstantial,<sup>54</sup> public attention fixated on victim following the revelation that Watanabe had been living a "double life" as a street prostitute. Watanabe's personal life quickly became fodder for the media, especially the tabloid-like weekly magazines, which scrutinized her path from working nights at a hostess club, to a sex industry business, and, finally, to her work as a street prostitute who spent her nights waiting for customers in Maruyama – all while working at TEPCO during the day.

Intense speculation turned on the subject of why Watanabe, who was successful and had an elite position within the company, should be motivated to work as a street prostitute – seen as a step below even the lowest form of (illegal) store-based prostitution in a country in which commercial sex is widely accepted. A flurry of investigate reporting, television dramas, and movies moved to capitalize on this seeming paradox of

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<sup>54</sup> In 2003, following a re-trial which found him guilty after his initial acquittal, the Supreme Court convicted Mainali of murder based on highly circumstantial evidence, and amid accusations that the prosecutors were withholding key evidence suggesting that someone else had been with Watanabe on the night of her death. In November 2012, Mainali was exonerated following the prosecutors' release of DNA evidence found on the victim, which pointed to another individual. Mainali is now seeking ¥68 million in compensation from the government for 15 years of wrongful imprisonment (Mainali: 15 Years in Jail Equals ¥68 Million 2012). Throughout its long development, the case has garnered much criticism toward the judicial system, especially in regards to police investigative and judicial biases toward non-Japanese.

a successful career woman moonlighting as a prostitute.<sup>55</sup> The excessive and intrusive disclosure of Watanabe's personal life prompted a group of lawyers and a civil rights organization to write an open letter to the media asking them to refrain from sensationalistic coverage, which posthumously violated the victim's right to privacy (Tōden no Josei Shain Satsujin Yōgi 1997).

In the midst of the media sensationalism, something about this case struck a chord with the public. There was an outpouring of empathy for Watanabe from women. In a book entitled the "TEPCO Office Lady Syndrome" (*Tōden OL Shindorōmu*), the writer Sano Shin'ichi, who has long defended Mainali's innocence and pushed for the release of withheld prosecutorial evidence (Sano 2004), has described how women came to pray and pay their respects at a *jizō* statue (a guardian Bodhisattva who is thought to protect women, children, and travellers) near the location where Watanabe had stood and waited for customers. The statue was nicknamed "Yasuko Jizō" and, for some time after the murder, well-wishers supposedly adorned the statue with lipstick (Sano 2001; Reitman 2001).

The "double life" that so intrigued the public became a metaphor for the stress and insecurity of being a "career woman" (meaning, a woman who has chosen work outside the home as her primary occupation) in a sexist society in which one's work was perennially undervalued. Two commentators located women's empathy for Watanabe's "double life" in the stress stemming from women's still ambiguous roles as professionals in a context in which gender role expectations discouraged women from becoming

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<sup>55</sup> The 2011 release of the movie *Guilty of Romance (Koi no Tsumi)*, which self-consciously references the TEPCO OL murder case and features a plot that revolves around similar themes of professional women leading "double lives," suggests that the commercial potential of exploiting the public's interest in this theme has not yet run dry.

professionals. A year after the murder, Sakai Ayumi, herself a former sex worker who has written prolifically about the experiences of women in the sex industry, published *Nemuranai Onna* (“Women Who Don’t Sleep”), which she said was motivated both by public prejudice toward Watanabe but also her own curiosity about Watanabe’s inner state (Hayami 1998; *Hiru to Yoru no Kao o Egaku* 1998).<sup>56</sup> The book featured profiles and interviews with fifteen women, including university students, housewives, tax accountants, teachers, and elite career women (Sakai 1998).

Sakai characterized what these women had in common as a “double face” (*daburu fuēsu*), using a term that attributes a certain duplicity to the women in that their “day face” and “night face” (*hiru to yoru no futatsu no kao*) are different. Although the reasons why these women chose to lead a double life are not explicitly laid out, Sakai has argued that the contemporary male-gendered workplace requires women to “throw out” their “womanliness” (“*onna*” *de aru koto o suteru*). Professional women feel enormous stress from the recognition that they are perceived of as unqualified (and unnecessary) workers, and the sex industry acts as a venue of self-affirmation and stress-relief for these women. Although their bosses heap abuse on them during the day, at night, Sakai says, those same men come to the sex industry as customers and value the women, and the women can catch a glimpse of those men’s “true colors” (*dansei no shōtai o kaimamiru*) (*Hiru to Yoru no Kao o Egaku* 1998). Similarly, a commentator on the book contextualizes this

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<sup>56</sup> Sakai had briefly worked at the same *hotetoru* business with Watanabe. *Hotetoru* derives from *hoteru* (“hotel”) and *torukoburō* (“Turkish bath,” the earlier name for *soaplands* prior to a complaint from the Turkish Embassy), and is a business that arranges for a sex worker to meet a male customer at a hotel and provide *soapland* services in his room. Before publishing *Nemuranai Onna*, Sakai had capitalized on this brief association with the murder victim by writing her own take on the case, entitled *Kindan no 25ji* (“The Forbidden Early Hours of the Morning”).

within an era of diluted family relations and a cut-throat “me first” atmosphere, in which individuals are likely to inflict harm on themselves, and that through hurting others and being hurt, they evade the relationships that they initially wanted (Hayami 1998).

Sakai’s reading of women’s motivations to moonlight in the sex industry overlaps in an important way with best-selling author Kirino Natsuo’s interpretation (2007[2003]) of Watanabe’s motives in *Grotesque*, her fictionalized account of the “downfall” (*daraku*) of an elite career woman. In an interview, Kirino said that through her characters she tried to portray the pressures facing women in contemporary Japan, revolving around intense competition with other women for beauty and outward looks and the (still) male-oriented nature of company environments. In this context, the character “Kazue” – a driven, obsessive, socially awkward, and generally unsympathetic classmate of the unnamed narrator – looks for acceptance both from the narrator and her beautiful younger sister, with whom Kazue is competing for attention. Although she eventually becomes a successful career employee at a prestigious company, Kazue feels what comes across as a self-destructive urge to work as a prostitute. It is in the time she spends soliciting for customers that she is able to flee the pressures of work and feel a sense of freedom. In an interview, Kirino explained this impulse in the following way: “Through having sex, for a second you get a powerful feeling that one’s existence is irreplaceable; for the first time, you feel that you’re wanted” (Kirino Natsuo, “Gurotesuku” o Kataru 2003).

In both Sakai and Kirino’s interpretations of public fascination with Watanabe, women looking for recognition in the workplace don’t find it there; they find it, instead, through sex with men for money. I lay out these different public meditations on women’s

entry into the sex industry to draw out two points. First, that the notion that women with fixed social statuses (e.g. “housewife,” “career professional”) would enter the sex industry elicited a generalized sympathy stemming from of a wider set of anxieties about women’s fragile standing in the workplace. Second, that this generalized sympathy was predicated on a sense that the women had other options but chose to go into the sex industry anyway; it was not the same thing as a more general concern for women for whom the sex industry was the best option.

### *Sex and the Labor Market*

Shiori, one sex worker whom I came to know very well over the course of my research, would frequently tell me how much she enjoyed her job as a dominatrix. Every day, she told me, she came home from work with interesting stories about her encounters with customers. She wondered how people could endure having “boring” jobs. She hadn’t always felt that way, of course. After graduating from a four-year women’s college with a degree in computer graphics, she had worked briefly as a programmer but had been dissatisfied with the salary. She had accumulated some debts, too. When she learned that her boyfriend was actually married, she described the feeling of betrayal as the tipping point. She decided that she wanted to work in the sex industry, to “do to men what they did to me.” Her image of the sex industry at that time was “of a dark place where desperate women worked against their will.” After being cheated on, however, she said that she hadn’t cared anymore. She would embrace the sexual freedom tolerated for males but frowned upon for women. And, of course, she told me smiling, she wanted the money.

When Shiori and I first met, she had been working in the sex industry for about ten years. In the interim, she had briefly returned to “ordinary” work once or twice, but quickly found that she had become accustomed to a certain degree of everyday extravagance that only her sex industry salary could support. At our first meeting, she arranged to meet at a train station near a sex industry business where she had previously worked. It was a *fasshon herusu*<sup>57</sup> that was well-known for its good service reputation. Shiori had been the “Number One” there and several years later was still featured on the banner outside the store. It was so that she could proudly point it out to me that she had arranged to meet there.

A year and a half later, Shiori got married. Her husband was an American who had had no moral qualms about her work and was open to it about many of his expatriate friends. After the marriage, however, he asked her to stop working because he was concerned about sexually transmitted infections. Shiori began working as a clerk at a shipping warehouse. It wasn't long, however, before she began to speak nostalgically about her old work. It wasn't just the money. Working full-time and ordinary hours was a new lifestyle for her, and her three-hour round-trip commute ate up her free time. Moreover, the work was monotonous and I suspected she chafed at being subordinated to a clerical position that was not so different from being an office lady. During my most recent visit, in May 2013, Shiori had just begun working at a massage business opened by an ex-roommate who had also previously been a sex worker. In fact, all of the employees at this business were ex-sex workers. Although the business was *not* a sex industry

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<sup>57</sup> A *fasshon herusu* (“fashion health”) is a store-based business in which oral sex and manual stimulation are the standard fare.

business, it marketed itself as a “sexy massage” and had a mostly male clientele, suggesting the often liminal borders of the sex industry.

In this section I argue that the sex industry is not only an important “safety net” for women in financial straits but, increasingly, also a normalized venue for short-term female employment. In Japan, gendered ideologies continue to structure which areas of the labor market are understood as “women’s work” or “men’s work,” even when individuals enter potentially ideologically transgressive occupations, such as women in the Self Defense Forces, men outside of full-time labor, or gender-bending actors in all-female theatrical revues (Frühstück 2007; Fowler 1996; Robertson 1998). The same political-economic and social transformations – especially economic restructuring and shifting family forms – that have recently positioned middle-class, white-collar masculinity in a newly precarious state (see Chapter Two) have also pulled women into a flexible, and often highly feminized, labor market.

Although Japanese women have gradually made inroads into the full-time labor market, the prevailing pattern of female labor is still one that is largely determined by expected life cycle markers such as marriage and child rearing. The employment pattern of Japanese women has long been figured as an “M-curve,” whereby women work full or part-time until marriage, at which point widespread expectations are that they will leave to have children. These women typically rejoin the workforce as part-time laborers after their children become school age. The political scientist Kay Shimizu has noted that in 2011, a staggering 54.6 percent of all female workers were non-regular, meaning part-time or temporary workers (Shimizu 2013:166). Indeed, the concept of a “career woman” is sufficiently novel to engender its own vocabulary. Today, women dominate in service

industries and clerical work. As part of Prime Minister Abe Shinzō's efforts to increase the participation of women in the workforce, in April 2013 he announced a plan to push companies to double their child care leave to three years, perhaps ironically entrenching notions that women's primary identity is as mother and not as laborer (Yoshida 2013).

A longtime recession and the subsequent restructuring of the economy in the mid-2000s frame the recent national increase in non-regular workers. In this context, full-time employment has increasingly been inaccessible to young people of the cohort that graduated from high school during the 1990s and 2000s, especially those "educational non-elite" for whom high school connections traditionally provided a transition into the workforce (Brinton 2011). Due to persistent sexism in the workplace and gendered work expectations, women have been especially hard hit by these forces. In this context, labor in the sex industry represents the best option for women who need to work, especially those who need quick money.

Many women start out in "ordinary" work but, like Watanabe, feel either unrecognized, underutilized, or disillusioned, or, simply want more out of their work, whether that is higher wages, greater flexibility, or more time to pursue their hobbies. Speaking with female sex workers, it was often a given that there was no other industry in which women could earn a lot of money. "There's nothing," they would tell me. "Just the sex industry. Nothing else." In this context, we can think of the sex industry as a reliable safety net for women and *not* a desperate, "only hope" venue. Thus, to a certain degree, it doesn't even make sense to speak of women entering under financial duress,

since we can assume that for many women, entering the industry will be the norm rather than the exception.<sup>58</sup>

Although “poverty” (*hinkon*) has recently become a more familiar term in Japan, where widespread pride in the national economy’s global strength long fostered a myth of social egalitarianism, female poverty has largely remained invisible (Fackler 2010).<sup>59</sup> Social welfare advocates and feminists have pointed out that the recent media and political attention to a poverty “crisis” has been deeply gender-biased, addressing poverty only as the number of male non-regular workers increased sharply following the economic deregulation of the mid-2000s. Under a tax and pension system that institutionalizes a male breadwinner/female housewife model, however, female non-regular employment and poverty has long been the overlooked norm (Asia-Japan Women’s Resource Center 2009; Fujiwara 2009). This is especially so as the welfare system has long been based on a “welfare through work” model and the assumption that family will take care of down-and-out members, assuring that women on their own will be especially hard hit (Miura 2012; Osaki 2013a).

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<sup>58</sup> Although there is no data available, we can speculate that non-ethnic majority Japanese, such as descendants of the historical outcasts (*Burakumin*) or second or third-generation ethnic Korean or Chinese residents (*Zainichi*), are also over-represented in the sex industry, due to long-standing discrimination and differential access to education and social welfare.

<sup>59</sup> Despite apparently having collected data since 1998, the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare only released statistics on the national poverty line in October 2009, following the ascension to power of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) (Fackler 2010). According to these and later statistics, in 2006, the national poverty rate stood at 15.7%, and rose to 16% in 2009 (Fukue 2009; Osaki 2013b).

Single mothers, for whom there is little social or government support, are particularly vulnerable to “falling through the cracks.”<sup>60</sup> According to a government survey, nationwide women in more than *half* of single mother households were engaged in irregular labor in 2011 (47.3% were engaged in part-time work – up by 3.8% from the last survey in 2006 – and 4.7% were engaged in temp work; only 39.4% were engaged in full-time labor) (Kōseirōdōshō 2012). Such irregular jobs have low wages, no job security, and few benefits. According to the same report, in 2010, a year earlier, the average yearly income for a single mother household was ¥2,910,000 (approx. \$34,000; up from ¥2,130,000 five years earlier), a figure only a little over 40% of the average yearly income (¥6,580,000 – approximately \$77,000) for two-parent households with children (Boshi Setai Nenshū 291man’en 2012). This figure becomes more striking when combined with the fact that eighty percent of single mothers are divorced, highlighting how divorce remains an economically precarious decision for most women (Kōseirōdōshō 2012).

As in other contexts around the world, the sex industry is an important and reliable economic “safety net” for women, not only but also including those who “fall through the cracks.” This was consistently clear throughout the period of my fieldwork (2008-2013), which coincided with the most recent recession catalyzed by the 2008 “Lehman Shock” and compounded by the economic blow struck by the March 11, 2011 “triple disaster.” As in other times, during this period, it was seen as common sense that, as an industry, the sex industry would be robust and resilient in the face of any crisis (*fukyō ni tsuyoi; sayū sarenai*), following the logic that men’s presumed universal needs

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<sup>60</sup> Welfare restructuring over the past decade has diminished the already minimal financial assistance given to single mothers (Fujiwara 2008; Miura 2012).

for sexual outlet wouldn't simply disappear in the face of national calamity. Even a brief internet search will reveal a plethora of blogs and message boards confirming this belief. This "common sense" seemed to be hyper-confirmed when, for instance, in the immediate aftermath of the devastating 9.0 earthquake, Tokyo sex industry businesses faced a deluge of customers, who were ultimately turned away because many sex workers were fearful of leaving home in the midst of ongoing aftershocks and uncertainty, and due to the imposition of electricity-saving measures on businesses (Kasai de Fūzoku Fukko 2011; Kyaku to Onna no Ko ga Taoru Ichimai de Dasshutsu 2011). One sex worker, when asked about the post-disaster health of Tokyo's sex industry, laughed and said that the practice of "self-restraint" (*jishuku*) characterizing the immediate post-disaster period seemed to stop short at the sex industry.<sup>61</sup> Commercial sex, she said, would literally outlive every other industry.

And yet, to use these data as a confirmation of the (disparaging) common belief that women only enter the sex industry under conditions of financial duress would be misleading and inaccurate, especially against the larger context of a persistent labor double-standard and the normalization and ubiquity of the sex industry. In the most comprehensive study of female Japanese sex workers, the sex worker-researcher pair Kaname Yukiko and Mizushima Nozomi asked 126 women, mostly between the ages of 18-29 (60.3% were 18-23), about their *initial* motivations for entering the sex industry, being careful to point out that one's reasons for working typically change over time.

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<sup>61</sup> The exercise of *jishuku* calls for sobriety out of a sense of collective national loss. After the March 11 disaster, excessive displays of festivity or celebration were deemed inappropriate, leading to the cancellation of cherry blossom-viewing and workplace parties, and numerous festivals. See Field (1993:21-25) for her account of *jishuku* in the period immediately preceding and following the death of the Shōwa Emperor, Hirohito.

While 85.7% responded that “economic reasons” had initially motivated them, Kaname and Mizushima point out that this answer glosses diverse motivations and meanings far more complex than those that the two prevailing caricatures (either that a woman is in such financial trouble that she has no other choice but sex work or that she is motivated by her desire for expensive brand-name goods) allow (Kaname and Mizushima 2005:18). Dividing women’s motivations into three broad categories – “negative reasons” (poverty or debt), “everyday purposes” (living expenses or spending money), and “positive reasons” (savings or money necessary to realize a specific goal) – they pointed out that despite stereotypes, “economic reasons” was by no means a self-evident category (18-19).<sup>62</sup>

Kaname and Mizushima continue by explaining why many women might choose to continue working in the sex industry in the absence of financial duress. In contrast to “ordinary” work, sex work has a high-value return on the time investment. It is short-term, in other words, in part *because* it is high income. It also provides significant flexibility, which is especially important for single mothers or women interested in pursuing other interests or hobbies on the side. In addition, no degree or other skill-set is necessarily required and, compared to most other professions where long hours working are compensated by only minimal pay, sex industry work is “easy for women” (see Chapter Two for a critique) (Kaname and Mizushima 2005:19).

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<sup>62</sup> Interestingly, “economic reasons” (*keizaiteki (na) riyuu*) is also legal grounds for induced abortion in Japan, based on a clause in the Maternal Protection Law (*Botai Hogo Hō*) that permits abortion for socioeconomic reasons. Norgren (2001) points out that the clause has been interpreted broadly since its inception in 1949, leading to a situation in which 99-100% of Japanese women who have received legal abortions have done so filing official paperwork that cites “economic reasons” (46). It is thus not surprising that women’s entry into the sex industry for “economic reasons” would similarly gloss diverse and complex motivations that cannot be reduced simply to economic need.

These sentiments were corroborated by my own research. In my interviews with women who had either worked or were working in the sex industry, women spoke enthusiastically about the points that distinguished sex work from “ordinary” occupations. For everyone, the relatively high wages were the bottom line. Women take home a little less than half of their earnings (a little less because various fees are often deducted, whether on a daily or more infrequent basis, depending on the business). As with Shiori, many women enter to pay back debts but then stay on in the industry when they become accustomed to the work. While for some of my informants, sex work was their sole occupation for a time, for others, it was an occasional side job with which they supplemented work that they enjoyed, was socially acceptable, and could put on their resumes. Many women saw the opportunity to meet and interact with many different people as an important draw, expressing this interest in terms of wanting to see “different facets of human nature.” Others spoke about finding the work interesting and exciting, or about a feeling of freedom to be creative in their work.

The flexible schedule and ample earnings allowed those without further commitments to travel extensively or study abroad, to pursue their passions in theater or computer graphics, or to simply enjoy a degree of everyday extravagance otherwise inaccessible to them, such as commuting by taxi instead of public transportation. Similarly, several informants told me that the conditions of office work, with its stringent hours, expectation of unpaid overtime, and little time off simply did not suit their personalities. These were individuals who rejected the long-held association – linked especially to male labor – between one’s sense of identity and one’s workplace (Brinton 2011; Nakane 1970; Vogel 1971[1963]). For these women, the flexible working hours

and same-day payment, as well as other features such as introductions to childcare facilities or provision of cheap housing, among other factors, were significant features.<sup>63</sup>

*First-Timers Welcome!: Sex Industry Employment Magazines*

When Yumi, a petite and soft-spoken woman from Kyoto, was looking for a new career at age 30, she collected all the employment magazines she could find. Since finishing junior college and a training program in massage therapy, she had worked in beauty salons for eight years doing oil massage and aromatherapy. She had begun to feel burned out from the work and had recently been propositioned by an older male customer who wanted her to become his mistress. They had gotten as far as discussing the subject of an allowance when she backed out, feeling nervous about the arrangement.

She had been ready to try something different, Yumi told me over breakfast at a bustling train station coffee shop. She carefully looked through each of the employment “free papers” she had picked up around town. Yumi had already told me that her longtime hobby was stage acting and going to drag shows. She liked how individuals – both males and females – transformed themselves and their bodies for an audience. She laughed as she talked about her fascination with the incredible breasts male drag queens

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<sup>63</sup> The paucity of childcare facilities has been a major issue in Tokyo and around the country, so much so that in the 2013 Yokohama mayoral election, the incumbent made her success in reducing the number of children on local daycare waiting lists to zero a significant part of her campaign message (not to mention, national headlines) (Yokohama Hōshiki, Seiken mo Iyoku 2013). Sex industry businesses can try to introduce their employees to daycares with openings available, but it is an introduction only and there is no guarantee of space availability. For this reason, many sex workers who are single mothers choose to work during the late morning and afternoon, while their children are in school, even though fewer customers typically come during these times.

made for themselves. Putting her hands to her own breasts, she shook her head and told me that hers, unfortunately, were just ordinary.

Talking excitedly and using her hands to express herself, she reported her astonishment when she had come across an advertisement for dominatrices at an SM Club (*esuemu kurabu*) while flipping through her pile of employment magazines. “Huh, what is this?!” she cried, dramatizing for my benefit how she had looked at the magazine cover in shock and realized only then that it must be a sex industry employment magazine. She told me she didn’t know anything about the sex industry, professing – as almost every one of my informants had – a naiveté about the nature of male sexuality prior to entering the industry.<sup>64</sup> But the advertisement stayed on her mind. It appealed to her interests in performance and the body, and it wasn’t long before her curiosity got the best of her and she called the store for an interview.

To American readers, it may seem surprising – unlikely even – that Yumi would have been unaware that she was looking at a sex industry employment magazine. How could she not know? And where would she even have picked it up? Her lack of awareness, however, can be explained by two factors. The first is the naiveté of many Japanese women toward the sex industry. Although, as I described in Chapter One, sex industry businesses form a taken-for-granted element of the urban pedestrian periphery, many women display an almost willful ignorance about the workings of the industry.

While most Japanese women I spoke to generally accepted the sex industry’s existence as

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<sup>64</sup> While I never asked my informants about their sexual experience prior to entering the sex industry, I took these regular professions of sexual naiveté less as evidence of sexual inexperience than as an element of a transition story. In other words, emphasizing that they “really hadn’t known anything” before working in the sex industry was a way of expressing how their knowledge of male sexuality – and, it was often implied, an essentialized male nature – had deepened over time.

social necessity, it was clearly one that was outside the realm of acceptable female curiosity, as if knowing too much – or, indeed, anything at all – would be read as evidence of personal experience. The overwhelming reaction of “ordinary” Japanese women in their twenties or thirties whom I spoke with about my research was blank faces and apathy. They typically changed the subject. This was in great contrast to American or European women with whom I spoke socially about my research, and who typically expressed tremendous curiosity about what was to them, also, a taboo industry. Thus, it is in no way unlikely that Yumi would not have been able to discern offhand that she had picked up a sex industry employment magazine. In fact, given the emphasis on healing foregrounded in many of the ads (see Chapter Three), as a masseuse and aromatherapist, Yumi might have found many of the advertisements unremarkable.

The second, and more critical, factor explaining Yumi’s lack of awareness of the nature of the employment magazine is the very *ordinariness* of the magazines. Unlike “ordinary” employment magazines, many (but not all) sex industry magazines are aesthetically pleasing, with bright and glossy covers, which typically feature a smiling cover girl in her early twenties wearing the latest fashions. Some magazines emphasize fashion trends on their covers, drawing readers in with makeup tips (“learn how to do AKB48’s natural look!”) and the latest seasonal trends (“summer nail and swimsuit collection”). The magazines are discreet, speaking not in euphemisms so much as suggesting that there is nothing out of the ordinary about either the work or the women doing it.

Sex industry employment magazines (*kōshūnyū kyūjin jōhōshi*) are monthly free papers that advertise “high-paying work” for women. Although some of the magazines

may include a handful of advertisements for jobs outside of the sex industry (mostly hostessing work), in the context of the limited female labor market, “high-paying work” is commonly understood as a euphemism for sex industry work. Across Japan, there are countless such magazines available. In the greater Tokyo area alone, I counted at least a half dozen different magazines, of which *Momoko* and *LunLun Work* are the most visible. Due to the city or region-specific nature of the content, many magazines publish several editions across the country each month. In such cases, only the first twenty-or-so pages will be identical throughout the country.

These magazines circulate in high-traffic commercial areas, but especially in shopping areas popular with young women. At busy intersections, such as Shibuya Crossing, or locations outside train stations, such as Shinjuku Station’s East Exit, female pedestrians of all ages may be handed the magazines.<sup>65</sup> The individuals passing out these magazines are part-time workers hired by a distribution company to distribute a range of advertising products, including the ubiquitous pocket tissue packs with advertisements slipped into the plastic covers, handheld fans in the summer, flyers, and various product samples.<sup>66</sup> As with these other items, the magazines are often picked up unthinkingly by

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<sup>65</sup> The magazines are distributed rather indiscriminately to female pedestrians. Although I am phenotypically Euro-American, I was also offered the magazines on numerous occasions. When I asked the individuals distributing the magazines – typically young men in their late teens or early twenties – why they gave one to me when I obviously would not be able to work in any of the businesses advertised therein on my (student/researcher) visa, they invariably shrugged and mentioned their distribution quota. They weren’t concerned with what people actually did with the materials they put into circulation, just that they did so. Similarly, I once watched as a pair of women in their sixties was handed the magazines. They looked at the cover and exclaimed, “High-paying work for girls!” before laughing and walking back to return the magazines to the young man.

<sup>66</sup> In a sense, nothing reflects the profound normalization of the sex industry more than the fact that the industry openly recruits (including in the early afternoon on weekdays) in

pedestrians as they move through a busy crowd only to have a young man or woman thrust a hand in front of them. The item is usually only examined once already in hand, and, wanted or not, tucked into a bag for dealing with (and perhaps perusing) later, due to the scarcity of trash cans in public spaces. Publishing companies might also pay small businesses, such as “mom and pop” groceries, a small stipend to display a free paper stand in front of their storefront where passersby can browse through different magazines. Occasionally, the magazines – or the websites associated with them – literally form a part of the urban landscape as large billboards propped up on buildings inside shopping districts or displayed across from train platforms (see Figure 5). One night I was even surprised to see an ad truck for *Momoko* – with the catchphrase *onna no ko no baiburu* (“the bible for girls”) – circling around the upscale department stores and boutiques of Shinjuku San-Chōme. As the vehicle slowly pushed forward in the rush-hour traffic, the giant advertisement it was carrying was visible to many.

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locations – such as the Shibuya shopping district – that represent Japanese notions of youth and femininity.



Figure 5: “Cute” graphics highlight innocence and naiveté in this billboard for the sex industry and hosting employment website *Vanilla*, located prominently across from a train platform at busy Shibuya Station, Tokyo, July 2011. “Get information on high-paying work!! I want to earn more! I really love money! Access us now and get information by searching ‘vanilla’ and ‘wanted ads.’” Photograph by author.

These magazines act as a gateway for first-timers in the sex industry and are an important resource for women who are looking for work – both those, like Yumi, who don’t quite know what they are looking for and those who have already decided on sex industry work – but don’t know where to start. Unlike “ordinary” job seekers (meaning, those looking for work in non-stigmatized industries), women looking for information on sex industry work are unable to consult openly with family members, friends, guidance counselors, or any other institutional help in finding a suitable workplace. Unless an individual who is considering – however vaguely – sex industry work already has a close friend or acquaintance in the industry who is “out” to them about their work, they will be

on their own. Sex industry employment magazines are thus important for providing basic information and serving as a navigational tool for first-timers.

The magazines foreground the possibility of earning considerable money with relatively little effort. The cover of one edition of *LunLun Work* (see Figure 6), for example, squeezes in as much text as possible to make its pitch to potential readers who are looking for high-paying work.<sup>67</sup> Large headlines urge the reader to “Debut into high-paying work!!” while reassuring them that “First-timers and those without experience can relax.” Smaller boxes and bubbles explain that the work is untaxing, “small” (*puchi*) part-time work for those over age 18 and note the availability of a guaranteed minimum salary for new employees, transportation funds, and the option of doing a one-day trial to see how you like a store. One line directly under the magazine title assures the reader that “you will definitely find something! [We have] 106 ads for workplaces that will suit you!” Anticipating the concerns of older readers, a small pink box assures readers that there are also 39 listings for businesses which hire women in their thirties and forties. This isn’t too late to debut, the cover informs the reader, adding that having children is no problem and that women needn’t worry about their identities getting out.

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<sup>67</sup> The magazine’s name is onomatopoeic, evoking the sound of an engine being revved (“*run run*”). It suggests women can jumpstart their work – as well as their goals – through consulting the magazine.



Figure 6: The cover of the popular sex industry employment “free paper” *LunLun Work*, August 2010. The banner at the bottom exclaims, “Debut into high-paying work!!” while the left-hand side assures readers, “First-timers and those without experience can relax.”

While there are, of course, distinctions among magazines, I will review some of common features of the major free papers. The first few pages are generally glossy and colorful, and some function partially as fashion and lifestyle magazines for women, including items such as before-and-after makeover tips, seasonal manicure styles, information on recent movie releases, popular host clubs, and even pet fashions. To entice readers to collect new issues, some magazines offer free giveaways to the first three hundred readers who get in touch with them: prizes include items such as one of two Louis Vuitton purses (valued, the magazine points out, at ¥95,550 and ¥75,600, respectively) and a Coach wallet (¥34,800). As you flip through the first few pages, you learn that the cover girl is a sex worker. The cover girl is typically featured in a close-up on her successful debut story, which always includes an interview with standard

questions such as, “were you nervous the first time?” (standard answer: “yes, but the staff was really supportive, so I was able to relax”). In the “wallet check!” section, three or four high-earners introduce themselves and their store and provide a breakdown of how they spend their incredible earnings. One magazine offers a regular series entitled “Become a Sparkling Miss who Beats the Recession” (*fukyō ni katsu pikajō ni naru*), which features numerous (occasionally seasonally-inspired) tips with which to surprise one’s customers.

From some of the common magazine features it becomes apparent that many readers (and potential recruits) have very little formal work experience. For example, one magazine which emphasizes the pragmatic provides a feature on the nuts and bolts of setting up and receiving an interview. Among the interview tips provided are to arrive a little early, dress neatly (makeup is a must, although readers are advised not to overdo it), and anticipate basic questions beforehand. So that readers can make some sense of the employment ads to follow, every magazine has a “work guide” in which brief descriptions of different types of sex industry businesses are provided. Invariably, the magazines adopt what Sabine Frühstück calls “the strategic use of cuteness” (Frühstück 2007:136), featuring cartoon figure caricatures representative of employees in that particular business type, which are meant to make the work recognizable not as something taboo but as appealing and approachable, something which ordinary women need not be wary of trying. The figures have oversized heads with disproportionately large dark ovals as eyes. They are outfitted in a symbolic costume of their trade while posing coquettishly. Their smiles and gestures suggest the work is light-hearted and fun, based

as they are on a visual repertoire of “cute” graphics familiar to readers to convey images of innocence and naiveté.

The brief work descriptions accompanying these figures are, as one former sex worker mused to me as we poured over a magazine together, exceedingly “polite.” Many of the magazines, for example, cheerfully gloss over the service part of the labor, at most vaguely mentioning that you service the customer with your hand and/or mouth at a particular business, for example, while foregrounding other information – such as that one business type is better for “more passive” women or that another is especially popular with those who enjoy costume dress-up – instead. For example, none of the descriptions for *soaplands* in any of the magazines I surveyed noted that full intercourse (two-three times) is a standard part of the service. While this lacunae likely has to do with avoiding the legal repercussions of advertising “prostitution” (penile-vaginal sex being prohibited – see Introduction), readers who are unaware of the standard service expectation at *soaplands* will nevertheless not be enlightened by this description. In one intricate variation of the work guide, one magazine featured a small pentagonal graph next to each job box, on which elements such as calories burned or the amount of freedom you have in choosing your shift are plotted with faux mathematical precision, suggesting that these points become the denominators by which women should base their decisions about which business type to enter.

The magazines and the employment ads themselves seem mostly oriented toward young women and first-timers with no experience. Women with more experience in the sex industry will know how to read “between the lines” of the ads, winnowing out claims that are exaggerated (such as the average daily income) or untrue (“you can work within

the parameters of your own comfort zone” – as one sex worker put it, “You don’t know what my comfort zone is, how could that be true?”). In fact, experienced workers mostly abandon the magazines as they build information networks in the industry and instead come to rely on information-sharing with their peers when they’re interested in switching stores or business types.

The employment ads themselves are hardly more illuminating than the work guide descriptions. Most ads fixate on providing information about working conditions, such as whether transportation fees are covered, whether you are free to set your own schedule, quotas, minimum wages, introductions to alibi companies, and so on. The ads provide an age bracket under the “qualifications” heading, and give a few details meant to reassure the potential employee – typically, for example, mentioning that customers are not allowed to touch the women or emphasizing that the work is something that “anyone can do!” (*daredemo dekiru yo*).

The vagueness of these employment magazines (caveat: the websites of the magazines *do* provide some more useful information) and the ads themselves lends itself to two explanations. First, women are not fully informed about the nature of the work because a premium is placed on naiveté and authenticity. The recruitment of young women, especially those without work experience, suggests that they will be less knowledgeable about the work beforehand. The second interpretation is that the vagueness of the magazines reflects that something besides sexual services are actually at the heart of the service (see Chapter Two). In either case, the magazines highlight *ordinariness*, thus dovetailing with how many women construct themselves as *shirōto*, or “amateurs.”

## *The Cultural Politics of Shirōto*

While the term *shirōto* glosses into English as “amateur,” it diverges in important ways from American cultural understandings of amateurism. In a recent general audience book on amateurism in the United States, the writer Jack Hitt has noted that in American usage “amateur” refers, contradictorily, both to those with passion for a subject but little skill or experience as well as to those who pursue a subject outside of dominant or professional institutions (Hitt 2012:3-5). While *shirōto* similarly refers to someone without professional affiliation, training, or experience, there are ample examples of the term being used to designate individuals who are actually highly experienced or even trained. The theater scholar Maki Isaka Morinaga, for instance, has pointed out that the Japanese “New Theater” movement accepted the notion of “amateurism by professionals,” whereby established *kabuki* actors were recruited to join a movement that was defined as the counterpoint to *kabuki* theater (Morinaga 2005). Similarly, in her work on the all-female Takarazuka Revue, Jennifer Robertson has shown that the Revue used highly-trained “amateurs” to distinguish itself as a less serious, more innocent form of theater – and, also, to justify compensating the actors less (Robertson 1998).

In the context of the sex industry, I found that unlike our English-language usage of “amateur,” *shirōto* is defined less by lack of experience or skill and more by an emphasis on innocence, naiveté, and authenticity. *Shirōto* was the general term used to refer to women working in the sex industry, such as those with whom I conducted my research. It was also the term that was associated with these women in media discourses such as those discussed above. When speaking with my informants, *shirōto* was not a

term that typically came up as the primary adjective of self-identification. Rather, it was so implicit within women's basic understandings of themselves that it rarely came up in conversations except as an aside when commenting on the nature of the industry in the abstract.

To me, the use of *shirōto* was surprising. Were the sex workers I knew – women like Mika, the sex worker consultant and trainer introduced in the previous chapter – really *shirōto*? On the one hand, to my informants, it seemed obvious that customers would prefer a sex worker who seems more like a “real” girlfriend – someone who is fumbling and preferably doesn't show too much knowledge about sex. In Chapter Two, I argued that those women most highly sought after in the sex industry deliberately and self-consciously cultivate their skills in producing *iyashi*, or healing. This however, cannot be made apparent to customers. The work that goes into producing *iyashi*, in other words, has to be concealed in order to be valued. The irony that women working in the sex industry cannot present themselves as skilled experts was not lost on Sayaka, a 14-year veteran of the sex industry who shrugged as she told me that customers would be turned away by a “professional,” understood here as someone working in a cold and mechanical way. What they wanted was authenticity, which was associated with innocence and naiveté – or, rather, the *appearance* of innocence and naiveté. Describing oneself as *shirōto* was thus a selling point.

On the other hand, I slowly learned that through describing themselves as *shirōto*, women working in the sex industry could create a buffer between themselves and a stigmatized identity. Placing oneself in the category of *shirōto* differentiated oneself as someone who was just passing through the sex industry. In this sense, it matched

women's experiences. As women who were working short-term in this industry, they were indeed amateurs. The term of course also reflected the reality that women in the sex industry receive no training. As I noted in the previous chapter, the sex industry training session led by Mika was something of a novelty. Across the industry, actual training for new employees is unusual, beyond a short orientation and a brief run-through of the standard service "menu" with a staff member. Women working in the sex industry are, in other words, largely left to manage on their own in cultivating erotic technique, interpersonal skills, legal and sexual health information, and industry savvy. *Shirōto* thus reflected this reality.

And yet, in other ways as well, the appellation of *shirōto* dovetailed with some of the ways in which women in the sex industry emphasized youth and naiveté. For example, among sex industry employees, customers, sex workers themselves, and even bureaucrats and officials, female sex workers are referred to as *onna no ko*. The term is a generic expression for "girls" when used to refer to female children and adolescents, but becomes a diminutive expression when applied to adult women, as *onna no ko* literally means "woman child." In the context of the sex industry, the term has a double valence. On the one hand, it connotes social immaturity and trivializes these women, signifying that they are not full, responsible, and contributing members of society, not having fulfilled the expected route to female social adulthood, namely, marriage and motherhood.<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, because youth – or the appearance of youth – is a

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<sup>68</sup> The use of *onna no ko* also masks the over-representation of single mothers in the sex industry. Nationwide, single mother households are estimated to comprise only about 7% of total households (Fujiwara 2008), but – although there is of course no data available – from what my informants told me, it seems clear that single mothers are disproportionately represented in the sex industry. Whenever I asked my interviewees to

marketable selling point among sex workers, who often go to great lengths to appear younger than they are (especially when they are “past their prime”), the term is embraced and ubiquitously used. Ironically, women in the sex industry thus replicate a linguistic practice that implies that they are not fully mature actors. Youth is a selling point in the industry, maturity is not.<sup>69</sup>

Paradoxically, when women in the sex industry produce images of themselves as innocent, authentic, and naïvé, they reinforce the stereotypes that undergird gendered ideologies that exclude them from the full-time labor market. In other words, it is precisely the production of these stereotypes that engender ideas of women as being incapable of laboring. While these ideologies make them marketable in the sex industry, they also justify their exclusion from the (male) labor market. Women in the sex industry thus effectively contribute to the undervaluing of their work as laborers.

### *Sex Workers Construct Themselves as Shirōto*

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tell me about some of the other women working with them, they invariably mentioned the presence of single mothers, often adding that these individuals were especially valued employees because of how their seriousness of purpose shaped their work ethic.

<sup>69</sup> I quickly learned during my fieldwork that *onna no ko* was the accepted – and expected – term to use when referring to female sex workers. The use of *josei* (“female”) or *onna no hito* (“woman person”) was seen as stiff and inappropriate. *Onna* (“woman”), in contrast, is a term which historically has had strong sexual connotations although it was re-claimed, in part, by “Women’s Liberation” (*ūman ribu*) feminists in the 1970s (Shigematsu 2012). *Onna* was thus avoided as well. *Fujin* (“lady”) carries an old-fashioned ring to it and has been critiqued by feminists for its connotations of married “respectability.” Thus, even in interviews with bureaucrats and officials such as middle-aged male police officers, *onna no ko* was the standard term for referring to sex workers, signifying a larger set of trivializing attitudes in which these women are not seen as full adults or contributing members of society. It is similar to how “girls” may be used to refer to mature adult women in the United States, while the ambiguous “guys” (which is vague as to age and even gender, in that males and females can together be referred to as such) is used to refer to adult men rather than “boys.”

In this next section, I will explore some of the moral complexities involved in accounts over women's entry into the sex industry. Structural constraints that render sex work stigmatizing even as it is an attractive labor option for women mean that there is a lot at stake in women saying that they like the work or like things about it. Women who enter the sex industry thus face the dilemma of how to justify their labor to themselves as well as how to present themselves to others. Navigating this territory is fraught, as different models of what female success looks like prompt women to frame their accounts in ways that often leave others skeptical.

These constructions of women's entry into the industry became especially clear to me following one woman's striking and morally complex recounting of her sex industry debut. Risa (see Chapter One), a 28-year-old woman originally from a small town in Fukushima prefecture, had worked in soaplands for four years when I met her. She had first worked in Yoshiwara and then followed a friend to a business in Kawasaki, an industrial town nestled between Tokyo and Yokohama. As it seemed unusual for someone so young to begin her sex industry career in a soapland, without trying a *herusu* or other business first, I asked her about this. The "common sense" of the sex industry stipulated that there were only two reasons why a woman would make a beeline for a soapland: either she was too old or unattractive to "make it" in a *herusu* business, or she was desperate for money.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> As I noted in Chapter One, among legal, regulated sex industry businesses, soaplands typically fall on the lowest rung for many sex workers. While soaplands promise the highest wages, because the services are widely known to include (illegal) penile-vaginal intercourse as well as physically difficult techniques (as part of the service, soapland workers lather themselves up with soap and massage their customers using their body while on an air mattress), many women won't work there. The services at *herusu*

Over milkshakes at an inexpensive family restaurant in Ikebukuro with her friend from work, Risa told us how she had decided to work in Yoshiwara to support her older sister. Her paternal grandfather had been a doctor, and in her father's regret over his failure to follow in his own father's footsteps, pressure had been put on her older sister to become a doctor. After the older sister failed the national exam twice, Risa decided to help her sister out by supporting her financially so she could focus full-time on her studies. Although Risa had gone to a well-known private university in Tokyo, she had heretofore only had part-time jobs; at the time, she was working as a hotel receptionist. The fastest way for a woman to earn money, everyone knew, was to enter a soapland. Being close to her parents, Risa brought the matter up with them. Her mother protested but accepted her daughter's decision, and her father, although refusing to discuss the matter, did not forbid her.

While there is nothing unusual about a woman entering the sex industry to support a family member or lover, Risa's construction of her personal narrative struck me. She said that she felt as if she had been sold to the Yoshiwara district by her family, and used the historical term for parents selling their child into debt bondage: *miuri*. Even her parents' reactions – her mother's grief-filled acceptance, her father's sullenness and pride – seemed to match historical tales of girls sold into prostitution (see Chapter Four). The work was hard and she had suffered through a lot, but, she told her friend and me, thanks to her sacrifice, her sister had finished her medical degree and was now working in a hospital in nearby Ibaraki prefecture. To my surprise, however, she denied being particularly close to her sister, and her sister was only giving her a minimal “stipend”

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businesses, in contrast, revolve around oral sex and manual stimulation; they are known for hiring primarily women in their early twenties.

even though she now had a secure and well-paying job. Furthermore, Risa was still working in the sex industry, and had no plans of leaving.

This narrative confused me for a long time. To me, it seemed as if Risa had indeed not wanted to work in the sex industry but had done it in what I couldn't help but feel was an over-generous but misguided gesture to a selfish sister who did not want to work part-time while studying. Convinced that I had got some element wrong – Risa's ambivalence, the depth of her relationship with her sister, her parents' involvement – I asked Risa about this story the next time we met. She reiterated every element, neither embellishing the story or leaving anything out. I didn't know what to make of Risa. While it wasn't exactly true that she had been “sold” by her parents – as many children were in what had been a common practice from roughly the late Tokugawa period through the 1930s – she clearly found this metaphor to be resonant of her experience. And indeed, elements of her account did seem to mirror the Tokugawa-era notion that female sex exists for the sake of the household (Stanley 2012). Risa seemed to embody the continuation of the celebrated virtuous daughter who sacrifices herself for the continuity of the household – literally so, insofar as her efforts were directed toward helping her sister continue the “family career.”

Risa's decision to enter the sex industry to support her sister likely changed her relationships with her family, perhaps earning her newfound respect, trust, or even status. After all, whether it was because she was the younger daughter or for another reason, Risa had, apparently, not been expected to pursue her grandfather's career. Perhaps, feeling the distance between Tokyo and her home in Fukushima prefecture, she had wanted to feel closer to her family. Unlike most of the sex workers I knew, who were not

“out” about their work with family members, Risa was able to speak relatively freely with her mother about her work.<sup>71</sup> Once, while having dinner together, Risa took a phone call from her mother and had a lengthy consultation about whether her cold-like symptoms might actually be a sign of a sexually transmitted infection. To a degree, her work had become something that she and her mother could casually discuss.

Nine months later, when I recounted Risa’s story to the veteran sex worker and advocate, Sayaka, I heard an alternative interpretation of Risa’s motives. Sayaka wasn’t surprised by Risa’s account at all and said that she often heard similar narratives. She told me that elements of the narrative were undoubtedly true – Risa loved her family and had wanted to help her sister out. But she questioned whether this was Risa’s only motive for joining the sex industry. More likely, she had entered because she wanted to support herself and buy nice things that were out of her reach on her part-time income. Having migrated from rural Fukushima to Tokyo, it wasn’t a stretch to assume that Risa wanted to participate in a modern consumer lifestyle. That was all well and good, but, Sayaka told me frankly, you couldn’t say that to other people. It was easier to say to people – and easier for them to hear – that you were working on behalf of someone else.

As interpreted by Sayaka, Risa had mediated her narrative to me through social expectations of what a legitimate reason for entry into the sex industry would be so as to cast herself sympathetically. Knowing that a material motive would be judged harshly as

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<sup>71</sup> Most women working in the sex industry are not “out” about their work to their family or friends. In Kaname and Mizushima’s study of 126 sex workers, for instance, 92.9% of respondents had not spoken to their family about their work, while 57.1% had not spoken to their lover or partner about their work (Kaname and Mizushima 2005:62-64). From these numbers we can gather that the number of individuals to whom sex workers must construct themselves sympathetically is fairly small, and mostly includes peers, customers, and store staff.

grounds for entering the sex industry (especially the lowest rung of the legal industry) and would seemingly affirm the worst stereotypes surrounding the supposedly crass materialism of young women, Risa had rationalized her entry in terms of moral obligations to family members. That her motive for working had seemingly been accomplished with her sister's landing a position as a doctor, was left unaddressed. It also rendered her less threatening as a financially independent unmarried woman, folding her into existing narratives about what women should be doing; namely, taking care of one's kin.

Sayaka was suggesting that through constructing her narrative in terms of self-sacrifice, Risa produced a *positive* identity out of the stigmatized labor. She was a good daughter and a loving sister. Like other sex workers, Risa described herself as an amateur, even four years into her sex industry career and I realized that describing oneself in this way and emphasizing one's sacrifice for the sake of others could be a way of defending yourself against stigma. Saying that you were an amateur created a distance – or a buffer – between the work and yourself.

Sayaka's interpretation of Risa's account echoed something that she had told me nearly two years earlier. We had been at her apartment, and she had been telling me about the lack of information available on how the police determine who is a victim of human trafficking. She had been speculating on some of the factors, when she wandered thoughtfully onto what she knew about the treatment of Japanese sex workers by the police during raids on illegal businesses. She said, "of course, it's best if women themselves say to the police that they're victims. I've heard lots of people say that, and when I used to work at a store [she was currently working at a Korean *delivery health*

business], the boss told us that too.” She raised her voice, mimicking how the boss had told his employees to act in the case that the police came, “I didn’t want to work in the sex industry, but I don’t have a choice. It’s so horrible, I want to get out of here as quickly as possible.” That was what he had told the women to say to the police, she told me, her voice returning back to normal.

“If the police come and try to arrest you, say it like that. You can’t say that you’re working because you like it or because you voluntarily chose to do it. If you say that to the police, they’ll look down on you and treat you like an accomplice. Saying you’re a victim is just easier for the other person to understand. If someone, anyone, asks you why you’re in the sex industry and you say, ‘I wanted to do it and decided to give it a try,’ no one will understand you. But if you say, ‘I didn’t have any choice, I had to do it for the money, I had to do it to help my family,’ then people will feel for you and tell you they admire your strength. That’s just how it is.”

Sayaka’s point was that just as in the past, when daughters had been indentured into prostitution by their parents, even today many people assumed that no one would willingly enter the sex industry. While the industry itself was widely accepted and its existence taken for granted, women who entered it of their own volition were looked down upon and subject to stigmatization. The common sense was that you were “supposed” to do it only in sacrifice for someone else, that this was what women did – submit their own needs in service to the success of the family.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Although most of my informants entered the sex industry for reasons other than supporting a family member, there are many written accounts of women working to support destitute, bankrupted, or indebted relations (Sakai 2006; Sawamura 2008). The Japanese welfare system situates the family as the first safety net for those who are unemployed or unable to work, for example through background checks by local welfare offices into the finances of better-off relatives (Osaki 2013a). Can we thus posit women’s labor in the sex industry as another branch of the Japanese welfare system?

While Sayaka's interpretation of Risa's motives for entering the sex industry made sense, as an advocate, she clearly had her own investments in a particular framing of the narrative. Her interest was in normalizing sex industry work, such that women could talk freely about their work as with any type of "ordinary" labor. Sayaka had never met Risa, of course, but as a veteran sex worker and advocate, she had listened to countless women come to her with their problems. Sayaka was also undoubtedly aware of how narratives of self-sacrifice only seemed to confirm widespread stereotypes about sex work as shameful and taboo work. If women emphasized their suffering in the sex industry in order to earn the respect – rather than scorn – of others, they also reinforced negative images of the work. Denying personal agency reinforced the stereotypes through the woman's implicit admission that the work was shameful.

For Risa, the structural constraints that make sex industry work attractive while also rendering it stigmatizing produced alternate accounts over her motives. Through earning a wage, Risa could invest in at least two different ideologies of female success. In one ideology, female success looks like sacrifice for the family. In the other, it is measured by feminized consumerism. Each course offers a different social status and set of relationships, and Risa – straddling these two courses – perhaps wanted to have both.

### *Getting Stuck*

In this section, I consider the women for whom sex industry work is *not* short-term work. For the majority of women working in the sex industry, their stay in the industry is relatively brief. Over 90% of women surveyed by the sex worker-researcher duo Kaname Yukiko and Mizushima Nozomi, for example, left the industry within four

years; the average length of stay was about one and a half years (Kaname and Mizushima 2005:27). Because sex industry work is high income, women can often afford to leave quickly, once their initial goal is achieved. The existence of cautionary tales, however, signaled that women were always aware of the danger of “getting stuck” in the industry.

Shiori, the sex worker introduced earlier in this chapter who had openly loved her work as a dominatrix and been the “Number One” consistently at numerous businesses, had had a very successful career in the sex industry. She was quite entrepreneurial and associated herself with friends who were likewise. In the sex industry, she had gravitated toward other women who were confident and had a concrete idea of goals they wanted to achieve. She had a college degree in computer graphics and had recently married a cameraman-turned-filmmaker whom she often assisted in his projects, filling whatever role was called for, whether it was as interviewer, accountant, or assistant.

On numerous occasions, Shiori shared with me her plans for the future. She and her husband wanted to emigrate to Australia, but the visa process (especially the associated fees) was putting their plans on hold. In the meantime, through her work at the shipping warehouse, she had been learning a lot about importing procedures and was looking into opening a business importing cars from Australia and New Zealand to Japan. She could buy them at reduced rates at auctions overseas, have them shipped here, and then pay someone to fix them up before selling them at enough of a profit to get by. As noted earlier, when I last met her, in May 2013, she had recently returned from a month-long trip to Thailand where she had earned a certificate in Thai massage. She was now working in a recently opened business managed by an old friend who she had met when they worked in the sex industry together.

After working in the sex industry for over ten years, Shiori was clearly pleased with herself for getting out of the industry without having had any fallout (e.g. without being “outed”) and to then be able to get a “real” job. She represented herself as in command of herself, her relationships, and her future. But perhaps she was a bit too insistent on how well she had done. After all, while Shiori *was* entrepreneurial, the type of person who would always find something, she wasn’t on that secure financial footing either. Maybe she wasn’t as confident about her prospects as she made out and felt insecure or self-conscious about her own decisions. I began to think this might be the case after reflecting on her stories about and interactions with her ex-roommate and friend, a woman named Erina.

Shiori’s stories about Erina seemed to take the form of a cautionary tale. Although the two of them were good friends, privately Shiori spoke about her almost as if she were a sympathy case. I heard about Erina from Shiori on numerous occasions, and met her twice. The first time, at their shared apartment, Erina had joined our dinner party late and the two had egged each other on to dramatically reenact their favorite customer stories. Erina had been lively, friendly, and curious about my interest in the sex industry. The second time we met was in a joint interview with a friend. Perhaps she felt on the spot, but at that this meeting, she had mostly let her friend talk, giving only short, often very cynical answers. She had been upfront, however, about her credit card debt and other matters.

Erina was, as Shiori put it, a case of one of those girls who gets stuck in the sex industry. There are those like her, Shiori said indicating herself, who plan ahead and are always thinking about what comes next. These are the women who save money and plan

for the future by getting a qualification or taking courses, and then quit the sex industry and move on with their lives. These women, as she put it, have happy endings. And then there are those who “get stuck” in the industry. She was saying this not to imply that the sex industry was bad or harmful, but in the sense that it was sad how these women’s options were limited. She (and others) had often told me of older women, in their forties or even fifties, working in sex industry businesses who were “Number One” at their store because they had a goal in mind and put all of their efforts into their work.

Shiori told me Erina’s story. Erina had grown up in nearby Tochigi prefecture, and when her parents had divorced early in her life, the children were split up between the two. Erina had ended up with her father, who had largely neglected her, while her mother started another family. Without much of a family life, Erina had dropped out of high school, and even today, Shiori had noticed from living together that Erina had trouble reading newspapers due to her inadequate knowledge of *kanji* (Chinese characters). Erina had wanted to get out of rural Tochigi, and in her early twenties, she moved to Tokyo. Without anyone to support her and having trouble finding a job with her lack of high-school degree, she began working in the sex industry around age 22 or 23. It was around this time that Shiori and Erina first met, when they were both working at a well-established *fashion herusu* business in Ebisu. According to Shiori, Erina had been really good-looking and popular at the time, and had made a lot of money even without working that much. Erina was able to spend her money freely but also saved quite a bit. At some point, however, according to Shiori, Erina had begun not coming to work so much, and bit by bit, she spent her savings. When Shiori left the store in Ebisu following a dispute with the new manager, Erina and three others had followed her, and eventually

Erina also joined Shiori at a *herusu* in a famous sex industry district in rural Ibaraki prefecture, about a three-hour drive from Tokyo (a store employee would drive them back and forth). By this time, Erina wasn't so good-looking anymore and had put on weight, plus she now had a credit card debt that she had to pay off. It was clear by that point that Erina didn't have a very good work attitude and wasn't really skilled at what she was doing. The two worked in Ibaraki until the March 11, 2011 earthquake, at which time much of the area was partially destroyed by the strong tremors. Temporarily out of work while the manager decided whether he could shore up enough funds to invest in reconstruction, Erina went off on her own to a soapland district outside Tokyo.

What seemed apparent to Shiori was that Erina was rapidly falling down the sex industry hierarchy. Erina's current soapland was a cheap place where she wouldn't be able to earn much money and Shiori was concerned about where Erina would go next. Likely, the implication was, Erina would soon have to start doing services that other customers were not willing to do in order to attract customers, such as agreeing to anal sex or participating in threesomes. Or, Erina would have to begin "store hopping" as a strategy. While most sex workers had moved stores at least once or twice, once they found a store where their level of comfort and their earnings hit a happy balance, they tended to stay there, building up a customer base and leaving only if there was a major change in the management or if they became convinced that they could earn more money elsewhere. Women who were not very successful at attracting a regular clientele could "store hop." When you're first hired, Shiori explained, the management makes an effort to help new employees by directing any customers who haven't designated a specific sex worker their way. If you move stores frequently enough, you can make up for not having

a customer base of your own by surviving off of those customers the store sends your way. This becomes a strategy for scraping by, but you can only do it for so long at any one store.

Although Shiori didn't say so, it was clear that she was telling me Erina's story as a case of a sex worker, once popular and high-earning, steadily falling down the sex industry hierarchy. Erina was, as Shiori put it, a *yobigun*: a sort of "reserve" troop, or "wannabe," that the store could rely on if need be but who would never be their first choice. *Yobigun* were the first to get sacked. This was in contrast, she said, to a *supā sabu* ("super sub[stitute]"), usually an older woman who would get called by a manager if everyone else was sick or on vacation and couldn't work. This type of "back up" had a positive meaning, in contrast to the term used to refer to Erina, which seemed to designate a worker whom no one really wanted but who was there anyway. From Shiori's point of view, it was clear that Erina just didn't have any motivation. She was different from others who pushed themselves to achieve a certain goal. In contrast, Erina seemed to live as if she would be working in the sex industry forever. And Shiori seemed to think that might be the case. "She's not even any good at housekeeping!" she exclaimed, suggesting that she wouldn't even be able to marry her way out of the industry. The implication seemed to be that Erina would have to be "rescued" by someone if she were ever going to get out of the sex industry. At the time, Shiori was trying to set her up with a friend from Tochigi who was in the market for a wife. A few months later, when I asked, Erina shook her head. It hadn't worked out.

During my last trip to Tokyo, in May 2013, I heard from another mutual acquaintance that Erina had paid off her debts and had quit her work, and was now living

at home in Tochigi while looking for work at the local unemployment office. When I relayed the news to Shiori, she seemed doubtful of how successful Erina would be since she didn't even have the computer skills to be an "office lady." Since she hadn't done any work on the side outside the sex industry, her resume was completely blank. What could she possibly do?

Erina's story was the type of cautionary tale sex workers told one another to avoid becoming. It wasn't that they felt sorry for Erina because they felt that the industry was a shameful or negative place to be. Rather, their pity for Erina seemed to focus on her limited options and a sense that she had already fallen to the bottom of the sex industry hierarchy. Sex work, the common consensus seemed to be, was good work if you had an end goal to achieve. This ensured that the work would be short-term and that you could get out of the industry unscathed; that is, without harming your chances for "real" work, marriage, or a good reputation. I sensed that according to Shiori, Erina's trajectory was problematic because it had no clear direction except down. Women in the sex industry weren't supposed to let themselves become complacent; they weren't supposed to let themselves get stuck. Clearly, Erina was disadvantaged by her unprivileged upbringing; her lack of high school degree or qualifications made it unlikely that she would be able to find decent work elsewhere.<sup>73</sup> As Shiori had seemed to imply, marriage might be the only way out for Erina, although she had seemed doubtful even about this.

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<sup>73</sup> The organization "Grow as People" (*Gurō azu Pīpuru*), established 2012, seeks to assist women working in the *yoru no sekai* (literally, "the night world," an umbrella term for sex industry and hostessing work that draws attention to its separation from "ordinary" daytime labor) who want to find work elsewhere. The organization, which is small but seems well-funded and well-connected, aims to employ such women as interns and provide horizontal support (rather than top-down counseling) to encourage them to think about their skillsets in planning for what comes next. The director, a thirty-year-old

Erina seemed to reflect how people outside of the sex industry occasionally spoke of women in the industry. In third-person and, occasionally, personal narratives, passivity and a lack of agency are often foregrounded in framing a woman's entry into the sex industry. It is not uncommon, for instance, to hear of a woman spoken of as "flowing" into the sex industry (*fūzoku ni nagareru*). The use of the non-agentive (or non-volitional) intransitive form implies that a woman has been swept up in forces beyond her control and landed in the sex industry, in contrast to agentive transitive forms (e.g., *fūzoku ni hairu*), which denote action and intention.<sup>74</sup> While this linguistic device obviates personal responsibility, it also implies a sense of expectation or inevitability; this is especially the case when third parties comment that a woman working in the hostessing industry has "flowed" (*nagareta*) into the sex industry, or, that a woman who was once a "Number One" at a popular *fasshon herusu* is now working at a soapland. The passive is also often used to describe women who, like Erina, seem "stuck" in the sex industry, especially those who begin working at a young age without ever working elsewhere and have no resume to show for themselves when they want to leave, as in the expression, "[*fūzokujō ga*] *dondon ochite iku – tsugi wa Yoshiwara*" ("[sex workers] will fall quickly – next up is Yoshiwara"), which indicates the path toward Yoshiwara that sex workers who are not

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male, is adamant that individuals always have the power to change their situation and, especially, that those who have gone through hardship (potential clients) are best suited to change society through reaching out to like others (Grow as People 2012). The organization also seeks to disseminate non-judgmental information about women working in the sex industry and/or hostessing and insists on a social justice oriented approach. At a meeting, the director, Takuma Jun'ichirō, said, "when I hear people say they want to make (*yamasasetai*) sex workers quit their jobs, it really bothers me. *Make* them? Okay, so *you* pay their rent then. And their childcare expenses."

<sup>74</sup> Similarly, in her study of place-making and nostalgia in an urban "bedroom town," Robertson (1991) has illustrated how the intransitive *naru* (to become) is used to refer to the negative impact of external forces such as westernization, while the transitive *tsukuru* (to make, to build) is used to denote positive, agential change by local residents (29-30).

careful will inevitably take. That women's agency in entering the sex industry should be downplayed makes sense when we consider that the wages are attractive but it is still work that is stigmatized. Thus, through manipulating how they speak of themselves, women can avoid taking personal responsibility for their presence in the sex industry (Hill and Irvine 1993).

While I was never able to speak frankly with Erina about how she thought about her career trajectory or her future plans, I was struck by the seeming harshness with which Shiori spoke of her friend. It was uncharacteristic of her genial and positive nature. Erina seemed to be a foil through which Shiori reassured herself about the wisdom of her own decisions.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter, I have taken up the question of how women deal with the moral complexities of entering a stigmatized industry when they are excluded from the larger labor market. In this economic system, men are seen as the primary economic actors and men's work is paid, valued, and recognized. As I discussed in the previous chapter, a major part of the sex worker's service is to acknowledge that male labor and reproduce it. Women's economic contribution, on the other hand, is to take care of these men. In the sex industry, youth, inexperience, and naiveté are the qualities that make a woman valuable, in contrast to the male-gendered labor market in which age (seniority) and experience lead to promotions. It is precisely the ideas that exclude women from the labor market – ideas about their naiveté and intrinsic nurturing abilities – that make them valuable in the sex industry.

While academic debates as well as human rights policies often assume that those engaged in sex work can be neatly divided based on a forced/voluntary dichotomy (Doezema 1998), in this chapter I have also shown that this oversimplification simply doesn't take into account the ambivalences and moral conflicts faced by sex workers. In Japan as well, while Sayaka pointed out that women going into sex work to take care of their family members will be respected, it doesn't make sense to talk about "no choice" when the labor market is so limited for women. Although many of the women I conducted research with found aspects of sex industry work rewarding or enjoyable, they had to grapple with knowing that the work would not be accepted or understood by those close to them. Women enter sex work to move up or to stay afloat but there is always the danger of "getting stuck," as Erina did.

While the sex industry is becoming normalized as an attractive venue for short-term female employment, labor in it is still fraught with moral complexity. In the next chapter, I examine a non-governmental organization that resists the idea that there can be anything positive about sex industry labor.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Trafficking Trajectories and Vulnerable Women: Japanese Anti-Human Trafficking NGOs**

In January 2011, just a few months into my 15-month field trip to Japan, I applied for an internship with Let's Fight Slavery Japan (hereafter LFSJ), a prominent anti-human trafficking non-governmental organization based in Tokyo.<sup>75</sup> LFSJ was established in 2004 as the international branch office of an American organization and has aligned itself closely with dominant American advocacy methods and rhetorical framings of trafficking. I had first become acquainted with the organization's director, Kanno Akiko, in 2008, during my first summer of preliminary fieldwork, and in the intervening years had attended numerous events organized by the group. By early 2011, I

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<sup>75</sup> The director of LFSJ, Kanno Akiko, and I had discussed the possibility of my doing an internship several times prior to this. As a small organization with an overloaded staff, however, LFSJ only accepts interns who can commit for a minimum of six months, so as to compensate for the time and effort seen as necessary to immerse interns in the group's activities and organizational culture. Since I had thus far only been available during brief summer research trips, I hadn't been an attractive candidate. On this occasion, however, knowing that I was funded by a prestigious research fellowship and that I would be in Tokyo for at least another half year, Kanno agreed that I should apply – albeit murmuring that she was skeptical of whether the unglamorous office work associated with the daily operations of an NGO would provide me with much research fodder.

I filled out LFSJ's six-page application form, writing that I was interested in interning with them so that I could learn firsthand about the daily operations of an anti-human trafficking NGO that deals with exploitation in the sex industry and which is trying to re-shape social attitudes about what constitutes commercial sexual exploitation. In a separate research request letter that I sent with my application, I explained the nature of ethnographic research (including "participant observation") and my project in greater detail, clarifying that I would use what I would learn through my internship in future publications and teaching. A week later, Kanno e-mailed me to set up an interview at the LFSJ office. At the end of the e-mail, she provided me with their office address, requesting that I delete the e-mail after noting the directions due to security concerns.

had already re-oriented my research project from focusing solely on anti-human trafficking advocacy in Japan to a study on the sex industry and the competing human rights movements around it. I was interested in interning with LFSJ in order to observe firsthand two phenomena: how human rights movements (especially anti-human trafficking movements) travel across different contexts and what anti-trafficking organizations – which often posit themselves as holding unique insight into the seedier and exploitative aspects of the sex industry – “do” on the ground.

As human rights discourses have gained traction worldwide since the 1990s, anthropologists have examined how global human rights norms have emerged and, in particular, the processes by which these norms have become appropriated in local contexts (Cowan et al. 2001; Goodale and Merry 2007; Wilson 1997). As anthropologists Sally Engle Merry (2006) and Annelise Riles (1998) have detailed, the language of human rights is constructed based on extensive deliberations and consensus building at United Nations-sponsored meetings, leading to documents that are so broad, vague, and self-referential that all countries can agree with their aspirations. While the power of human rights documents lies within the legitimacy that this consensus-building process confers upon them, it is up to local movements and activists, especially NGOs, to take human rights language and use it as a tool in their own local circumstances. Sally Engle Merry has termed this process “vernacularization” (Merry 1997, 2006), in which advocates demonstrate the implications for social transformation within their own context, convey a sense of these rights to local audiences, convince them of their values,

and, importantly, leverage them for social change.<sup>76</sup> Importantly, however, despite the local meaning given to a human right, ultimately, it is enforced based on the meaning that the United Nations employs – vernacularization does not change this.

Among human rights issues, human trafficking is unique for the undue influence of American discourses on the worldwide agenda. The ways in which discourses and claims about human trafficking travel are thus particularly worthy of note. The evaluations of American government instruments to monitor human trafficking globally have been tied to international policy and aid, while American activists have used the rubric of anti-trafficking to establish large and influential activist networks overseas. Although contemporary international legislation to deal with human trafficking was only established in 2000, both at the United Nations and in the United States, attention to the issue is sizable.

This American influence often causes the issue of human trafficking to be narrowly reduced to forced sexual labor and, even, to be conflated with sex work. In both

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<sup>76</sup> This conclusion is anticipated by those studying how global forms operate on the ground. Ian Condry (2006), for example, has examined how hip-hop undergoes a process of localization – or hybridization – in Japan that transforms this musical form. While certain elements of the Tokyo hip-hop scene would be familiar to American audiences, other aspects are shaped by its performance in Japanese, cultural inflections on the subject matter, and the practices surrounding its performance. Moving away from that metaphor of something new being created, Tsing (2005) has conceptualized this process as “friction.” Tsing rejects a dichotomy between “global” forces and “local” places, instead paying attention to how networks such as stock markets or environmental movements connect diverse groups and places. These networks don’t operate smoothly, as is suggested by the term “circulation” but are often shaped by awkward encounters (“friction”) such as misunderstandings or antagonisms, which lead to the creative friction that characterizes global connections. Collier and Ong (2005) have similarly called for a focus on how networks of heterogenous elements that make up “global assemblages” create new social phenomena, arguing that certain phenomena – such as ISO standards or, especially, processes and practices coming out of the field of technoscience – have “a distinctive capacity for decontextualization and recontextualization, abstractability and movement, across diverse social and cultural situations, and spheres of life” (2005:11).

United Nations and United States law, human trafficking is defined as an extreme form of labor exploitation. Trafficking can thus occur in any of a number of labor settings, including farms, factories, manufacturing plants, sex industries, and private homes employing domestic workers. In practice, however, by far the most policy and activist attention, both in the United States as well as internationally, continues to center on trafficking into forced prostitution, commonly referred to as “sex trafficking.” In the United States, in particular, trafficking is often readily reduced not simply to forced prostitution, but conflated with *any form* of prostitution. As Gayle Rubin has noted, along with others, “In [U.S.] popular rhetoric and media coverage, trafficking is often treated as indistinguishable from prostitution [...] Anti-prostitution activists tend to cultivate these elisions and treat trafficking as simply an alternative language for commercial sex” (Rubin 2011:67). These conflations, reductions, and confusions draw on the particular British and American histories of trafficking discourses that I will draw out below.

In the first half of this dissertation, I have shown how the sex industry is normalized and taken for granted in Japan today. Now, in this chapter, I focus on Let’s Fight Slavery Japan in order to provide an account of how anti-human trafficking movements travel, displacing local movements at the same time that they create new ways of speaking about existing phenomena. I am interested, in particular, in the activities of NGOs on the ground and in how activists use particular framings of human trafficking to attempt to reconfigure local social agendas. Specifically, I show how a group of young activists, inspired by American rhetorical framings of prostitution, are introducing a framing of exploitation in the sex industry in a context in which this issue has hitherto only rarely been invoked.

The NGO that I follow here, LFSJ, has gained significant momentum over the past decade, despite being led by young individuals with little social status. LFSJ inserts itself into the local lobbying politics while, at the same time, displacing other, longer-standing discourses. LFSJ has gained traction due to two major factors: first, it has aligned itself closely with the American government and (mostly) American expatriates in Japan. As the offshoot of an American NGO, the approach of LFSJ to the sex industry resonates deeply with the perspectives of these parties, who provide significant resources and (media) publicity to the organization, giving it much of its early momentum. The momentum that LFSJ has from its American connections provides them more legitimacy and success in conveying a different kind of message to Japanese audiences. Second, the particular interventions of LFSJ, which focus primarily on the self-empowerment of young women, provide it with a steady base of young female supporters who use the activities of an organization ostensibly organized around helping victims of trafficking to empower themselves. In doing so, LFSJ bypasses pre-existing Japanese historical and feminist discourses on trafficking in favor of American understandings that are largely motivated by an anti-prostitution agenda.

Through examining how LFSJ has sidestepped the local history of human trafficking discourses, we can make sense of how this NGO managed to do an “about face” in its advocacy. While LFSJ initially focused its activities on the forced prostitution of foreign migrant women, it has increasingly gravitated toward using trafficking as a rubric for larger issues relating to the sexual exploitation of Japanese women and children. I found, in other words, that this NGO uses “human trafficking” to reconfigure ordinary women and children as sexually vulnerable subjects. In doing so, it has pulled in

a new set of issues that have not previously been treated as “human trafficking.”

Paradoxically, while this movement embraces the universal subject of human rights, it undermines potential claims to protect sex workers through labor rights.

I should note at the outset that the focus here is on discourse. This is not an empirical study of what human trafficking is or a qualitative assessment of how effective LFSJ’s methods are. My interest is in how LFSJ makes claims about trafficking, how these claims translate to NGO practices and policy advocacy, and how the organization operates in its local context. Moreover, this chapter is also not intended to be taken as a critique or negative evaluation of anti-human trafficking NGOs. Rather, it is aimed at thinking about how they can align their goals more closely with those they seek to serve and at examining the gaps – or “friction” – that exist now. Nonetheless, this chapter takes the potential capacity of NGOs to effect political or social transformation seriously, as LFSJ has, within a relatively short amount of time, attracted significant media attention and outsized opportunities for interfacing with government authorities; while there has been little policy change in Japan over human trafficking since 2005, LFSJ has been active in shaping public consciousness (albeit a limited one) on this issue.

### *Orientation*

Two weeks after submitting my internship application to LFSJ, I found myself at the train station of an upscale office and residential neighborhood in central Tokyo. I was there to partake in an interview with the NGO staff. Although the neighborhood was within walking distance of one of Tokyo’s most popular shopping, entertainment, and business districts, it felt comfortably removed from this bustle and at that hour of the day,

the streets were filled with young professionals on their lunch break and housewives in designer clothing pushing infants (occasionally miniature dogs) in strollers. As I walked past one bistro and retail boutique after another, I thought of the neighborhood in which I lived, only several kilometers from here but a half hour commute on Tokyo's labyrinthine train and subway system. My part of town had cachet as a stomping ground for aspiring artists and musicians, and was proud of its contribution in reviving the small-theater movement in the early 1980s. Wandering the narrow streets near my apartment, I was used to mingling among "alternative" types browsing the area's plentiful second-hand, or "vintage," clothing shops, idiosyncratic record and knick-knack stores, bars, and cafés. In contrast, the high-priced neighborhood around LFSJ's office catered to well-heeled and cosmopolitan Japanese and Euro-American expatriates.

The LFSJ office was located in a non-descript multi-story apartment building several minutes' walk from the train station. Nothing outside the office indicated the organization's presence in the building, and it was only after I knocked and Kanno opened the door that I felt certain that I had found the right place. As she and a male co-worker prepared some tea for our interview, I looked around. I was surprised by what I saw. Given LFSJ's sizable influence within the anti-human trafficking field in Japan and their volunteer presence, I had always imagined that their operations would be much larger than what I saw in front of me. The office was a "2LDK": a two-room apartment in which the living room ("L") was combined with the dining area ("D") and kitchenette ("K"). At the time, the organization had two full-time and one part-time staff members, in addition to a six-month intern. The office, I also learned, was time-shared between LFSJ and another non-profit organization (NPO), which had claim to the space on weekends.

Because of this arrangement, only Kanno had a permanent work desk, which was crammed into a corner by the entrance and perpetually overflowing with paperwork. The other staff (and occasionally volunteers) took the middle space of the room, using two giant wooden slabs, which we set up on metal props as tables on Monday mornings and replaced on Friday evenings with a low-lying coffee table. Besides the large “barrier free” bathroom and the long narrow entranceway – which was used for filing and storage and would eventually house a large photocopier – there was only one other small adjacent room, which was used as a quiet space for staff to rest during lunch breaks.<sup>77</sup>

The internship interview seemed to reflect the notion implicit at LFSJ that the internship experience itself has the capacity to transform the individual. LFSJ’s director, Kanno Akiko, and her male co-worker (who would leave the organization several weeks later for “not fitting in”) asked me numerous questions, few of which seemed directly relevant to the intern position itself. What was the most difficult experience I had ever had to deal with and how had I overcome it? What kind of a society would I like to create? Am I a good multi-tasker? What qualities make an effective leader? What do I like to do in my free time? Being familiar with how NGOs are often hungry for free manpower, I was surprised that much more would be relevant for this internship beyond Japanese-English fluency and a demonstrated (or professed) interest in human trafficking.<sup>78</sup> I wondered whether this “getting-to-know-you” process was inherited from their American “mother” organization. It certainly differed from any previous

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<sup>77</sup> After the massive 9.0 earthquake on March 11, 2011, Kanno and several of her friends – who became so-called *kitaku nanmin* (“refugees who cannot go home”) following the shutdown of the train and subway systems – took refuge here, taking advantage of the office’s central location and relatively sturdy infrastructure.

<sup>78</sup> All internships at LFSJ are unpaid.

employment, intern, or volunteer experience I had had in Japan. Toward the end of our conversation, Kanno asked why I wanted to become an academic instead of an activist, alluding to the common perception (alive in Japan as well as the United States) that the two are mutually exclusive. She mentioned – as she often would – that she is frequently approached by American students in Japan for internships or volunteer opportunities, but only by very few Japanese students. If I became a professor at a Japanese university, she suggested, I could teach students about human trafficking and “empower” them to change their society. This focus on empowerment and transformation, I would learn, would be a common theme during my tenure at LFSJ.

LFSJ was founded in 2004 as an international branch office of an American anti-human trafficking organization by Kanno, then in her early twenties and just returning from several years in the United States. Alliance, the American “mother” organization, had itself been founded only two years earlier by two college seniors who had read about forced migrant labor occurring in the backyard of their elite university. The idealism of these young graduates and their fledging organization appealed to Kanno, who was herself just graduating from a large public university in the Midwest. After an interview with Alliance’s directors fanned her enthusiasm, Kanno moved across the country and began an internship with the organization. Feeling that her parents would have disapproved of unpaid NGO work, Kanno – not unlike many of the sex workers and other young Japanese that I interviewed over the course of my fieldwork – provided her parents with only minimal information about her doings, telling them only that she was working. Her parents – like those of the others – seemed satisfied with this and did not probe further.

Although Kanno never said so directly, I often got the impression that she had decided to attend university outside of Japan in part because of feeling constrained by growing up in a conservative small town off of the main island. When reminiscing about her college days in the United States, she never failed to become animated as she recalled living in a “hippie” co-op, becoming a vegetarian, her disdain for the “princesses” in the campus sororities, participating in anti-sweat shop protests, and being introduced to American mainstream feminism. Her experience of college as a period of immense personal freedom and exploration seemed to have generated a tremendous receptivity toward ideas that could challenge the status quo that she had grown up with in Japan. She described becoming increasingly self-conscious and critical of Japanese society on her visits home. The sex and entertainment districts became a particular focus for her after a Thai woman told her about Japanese sex tourism to Southeast Asian countries, priming her for her eventual interest in sex trafficking.<sup>79</sup>

Kanno’s internship at Alliance coincided with a period in which the young organization was aggressively looking to expand. There was a lot of momentum for launching new offices, contingent on the presence of a local individual strategically positioned to do so and a perceived need for an anti-human trafficking movement in that location. Kanno’s enthusiasm matched the leadership’s vision of a successful

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<sup>79</sup> While East and Southeast Asia remain popular tourist destinations among Japanese men, as I describe in Chapter Five, corporate sponsorship of Japanese “sex tourism” peaked in the 1970s and the overt, institutionalized forms of this tourism had declined by the early 1980s. Protests by women’s groups in the destination countries and by Japanese feminist groups and well as international media coverage contributed to this decline. See Matsui (1993) and the materials put out by the *Ajia no Baibaishun ni Hantai suru Otokotachi no Kai* (The Men Against Prostitution in/from Asia [sic]) (1995[1989]) for non-mainstream Japanese theorizations of organized male tourism to Asian countries as part of patriarchal and imperialist domination of Asian women.

entrepreneur-advocate. Moreover, around the time when Kanno proposed opening a Tokyo office to the Alliance leadership, human rights and media reports from Japan portrayed a grim picture of the forced prostitution of foreign migrant women – especially Filipino, Thai, and Colombian nationals – in sex and entertainment districts across the country (Caouette and Saito 1999; Dinan 2000; Kyōto YWCA / APT 2001; Human Trafficking Becoming a Hot Topic 2003; Yoshida 2004; Asian Women’s Fund 2004; *Jinshin Baibai Taikoku!? Nihon* 2004; “Ō” Ōbei Josei “Kyōsei Baishun” 2004). With few other non-profits working on the topic nationally, a visiting executive director later told me, the Alliance leadership sensed a strategic opening to establish themselves in Japan.

Politically, the timing of the expansion into Japan was fortuitous. In June 2004, the Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP Report), released annually by the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (G/TIP) at the United States Department of State, placed Japan on the Tier 2 “Watchlist” ranking, essentially a probationary stop on the way to Tier 3 (i.e., worst) status. While this move would catalyze political action in Japan, as I will describe in the following chapter, this ranking also made Japan a “priority country” within G/TIP. Kanno successfully applied for the initial seed money necessary for launching LSFJ in the form of a G/TIP grant. This State Department connection would mark the beginning of what remains a close relationship between the Tokyo Embassy and LFSJ, because LFSJ continues to align itself closely with American government views of what trafficking is and what solutions to combat it are.

Kanno steadily built up LFSJ, with much support from volunteers, especially European and American expatriates.<sup>80</sup> During the first few months of the organization's existence, LFSJ was based out of the office of an international law firm through the support of one of what would be a long slew of expatriate benefactors of the group. Kanno spent the first year fund-raising for the organization and preparing to open an advocacy hotline, which she did in 2005. In 2006, following receipt of funding from the Yokohama city government, LFSJ put out a manual for police officers and social service providers, in part to legitimize their existence to some of the more established anti-human trafficking advocates. Around 2007, Kanno began offering workshops to police and immigration officers and social service providers, and in 2008, LFSJ began holding a monthly seminar series. Throughout these early years, Kanno was the predominant or only staff member, although there have been part-time staff and numerous interns and volunteers, who are each bound by several months-long commitments. By the time that I joined the organization as an intern, there had been thirty-some interns, mostly college-age women. At the time of my departure, LFSJ was actively recruiting a second full-time staff member and Kanno aspires to significant growth in the organization's capabilities over the next few years. Today, the LFSJ staff divides the organization's activities into five broad areas: a hotline, client services, public outreach activities, training sessions for professionals, and policy advocacy. They are active in each area.

Over the years, LFSJ has had to balance presenting itself as an authentic Japanese NGO while still retaining ties with the United States and the many benefits that accrue from this relationship. Since 2009, LFSJ has been registered as an independent non-profit

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<sup>80</sup> Sounding both exasperated and proud, Kanno often mentioned that LFSJ had never received "even one penny" from the Japanese government.

(*NPO hōjin*) in Japan, which also involved a name change. This was done to increase the organization's legitimacy within Japan. Recently, there has been a more total name change, to further mark LFSJ as a distinct organization with a name more readily understandable to Japanese audiences. Although this move formally changed relations between Alliance and LFSJ, LFSJ is still supported by the US office, with frequent visits from the directors and regular e-mail and phone communication. Through the period of my fieldwork, with one or two exceptions, the board of directors of LFSJ was entirely American. Buoyed by its American supporters, LFSJ has increasingly been covered by the Japanese media, and Kanno has received semi-celebrity status through being profiled as a "person to know" in high-circulation national news publications, such as *AERA* and *Nikkei Woman*.<sup>81</sup>

### *Seeing the Sex Industry as Americans Do*

One afternoon several months into my internship, Kanno turned around from her desk in the corner of the office to announce that she had just received an e-mail from the Tokyo Embassy staff member responsible for coordinating the upcoming visit of a G/TIP officer. Kanno wanted to take the officer around a sex industry district where you could "see things going on." Could I recommend any place besides the Kabukichō sex and entertainment district (see Chapter One), which the visitor had seen on a previous trip? We threw some options back and forth. With the success of the clean-up movement in the mid-2000s and the industry shift to "mobile" businesses (see Chapter One), even existing

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<sup>81</sup> *AERA* is a weekly news magazine published by the Asahi Shimbun, one of Japan's leading national newspapers. *Nikkei Woman* is a business monthly for so-called "career women," meaning, women who choose work outside the home as their primary occupation.

sex industry districts would offer little to see beyond brightly lit storefronts. I asked Kanno, why does the visitor want to see a sex industry district? After the clean-up campaign, these are all legally registered businesses operating with police permission.<sup>82</sup> Kanno responded, “Because that’s where human trafficking happens!”

By what logic was the director of this anti-human trafficking NGO associating legal businesses with no sign of illegal activity with forced labor? Did she know something that the rest of us didn’t? Or, was she simply imagining, based on her own conceptions of sex work as intrinsically harmful, that exploitation was occurring? Would her guest share her assumption?

LFSJ’s growth over the past decade and its outsized publicity and influence originate primarily from the momentum provided by American supporters, from government representatives to business and legal professionals to study-abroad students. This support, however, hinges on Americans misreading, or, rather, using their own frameworks for understanding the Japanese sex industry. LFSJ benefits, in other words, from dominant American framings of commercial sexual labor *as exploitation*. In a context where the “common sense” about the sex industry is not dominated by ideas about exploitation, Americans are more likely than Japanese to read Japan’s legal sex industry as rampant with exploitation. LFSJ relies on these frameworks.

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<sup>82</sup> This is not to say that human trafficking does not occur in legal businesses. However, the conditions for forced labor seem most rife in settings that are illegal or underground or which employ (undocumented) migrant labor. As Denise Brennan illustrates in her lucid ethnography of how formerly trafficked persons in the United States struggle to rebuild their lives, forced labor does not occur out of the blue but is one extreme on a continuum of exploitative labor practices (Brennan 2014:5). In other words, human trafficking typically occurs in settings that are already rife with abuse.

Providing tours of the sex industry to visiting Americans, I learned, was a staple LFSJ activity. A few months after my return to the United States from long-term fieldwork, I noticed an LFSJ blog posting about a tour to Kabukichō that Kanno had recently given to a visiting group of law students representing a prestigious American university. Although I was never given an opportunity to join, it was a common practice for Kanno or a trusted and veteran volunteer to take non-Japanese visitors on tours of local sex industry districts, allegedly in order to educate them about human trafficking in Japan. One of the participants in this particular tour, a young woman, was quoted in the post as having commented afterward that even if you didn't know anything about Japan, that just by looking at the adult information available walking around as well as on the Internet, you'd learn something about the commodification of women's sexuality. On other, smaller tours that I heard about, visiting male government officials were taken to sex industry businesses and spoke – through an LFSJ volunteer – with the male staff, pretending to be a customer. This, too, was deemed to be educational about human trafficking.<sup>83</sup>

As noted earlier, human trafficking is defined primarily as forced labor; as such, it can occur in any of a number of labor settings, including farms, factories, manufacturing plants, sex industries, and private homes. In light of this, it is notable that LFSJ representatives take American visitors exclusively to sex industry districts, thereby

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<sup>83</sup> This is similar to what Bernstein (2010) describes in her account of the activities of young American evangelical activists who visit brothels in Thailand. These young women feel that they are entering a transgressive sexual world and get to role-play to some extent while still maintaining boundaries. Their experience is validated because it is understood as promoting social justice. Bernstein writes, “Whether by directly entering the third-world brothel or by viewing highly sexualized media portrayals, the issue of trafficking permits a sexualized frame to exist without threatening these women's own moral status or social position” (Bernstein 2010:63).

reinforcing the conflation of human trafficking with prostitution. In these districts, American visitors are more likely to “read” exploitation, even among legal businesses. Despite the aspiring lawyer’s assertion that one could learn a lot about the sexualization of women by walking through a sex industry, it is unclear to me, however, what she is basing this on. In my own experience taking foreign visitors (that is, my own guests) to local sex industry districts, visitors were typically unaware of when we had entered a district, integrated as they often were with other entertainment businesses, such as restaurants, bars, karaoke studios, mahjong parlors, and so on. To those who cannot read Japanese, the flashy store signs of sex industry businesses do not necessarily stand out from the equally garish signs of the businesses around them. And yet, a curious transformation seems to take place once visitors are alerted to their location – they ask if it is safe to walk there. They ask if the women around them – of which there are many, often carrying shopping bags and immersed in their cell phones – are sex workers. Their entire reading of the landscape changes. Even without being able to read the signs, they become able to “read” the landscape around them only too well, using their own cultural assumptions about sex work and “red-light districts” as linked with danger and exploitation to read their surroundings.

The framing of Kanno and the aspiring lawyer who was shocked at Tokyo’s sex industry draws on a particular Anglo-American history of thinking about prostitution as trafficking. This understanding has been codified into laws and policies. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a panic about “white slavery” erupted, carried by highly sensationalistic stories of young girls entrapped into prostitution. This panic spread to the United States, where a combination of anxieties surrounding immigration, urbanization, and changes in the

sexual habits of the working class led to media attention and mass hysteria around the alleged international traffic in white women and girls, supposedly led by a vast syndicate of foreign criminals (Doezema 2000; Langum 2006[1994]; Limoncelli 2010; Walkowitz 1980). Later historians and government researchers have found that there was little evidence to substantiate the wild claims that were being made. Nonetheless, at the time it was widely believed that women “were being lured to brothels by false pretenses, or pricked by poisoned darts or hypodermic needles and then dragged off to dens of iniquity,” where they were thought to be held as slaves and prostituted against their will (Langum 2006[1994]:27). At this time, the language of “white slavery” referred to prostitution under the assumption that all prostitution is inherently exploitative.

Although the language has shifted slightly, many of the underlying assumptions of prostitution as inherently exploitative and going against a woman’s will have stayed with us. In the 1980s and 1990s, American radical feminists such as Kathleen Barry revived the rhetoric surrounding the “white slavery” campaigns to make new arguments against prostitution. Prostitution was re-branded as “female sexual slavery” (Barry 1984[1979]; Barry et al. 1983), and slavery was meant as more than a metaphor as these advocates argued that prostitution was the epitome of male violence against women and male control over female sexuality. The formulation of Barry and others galvanized mainstream American feminist thinking toward the issue at a time when the first prostitutes’ rights organizations had recently emerged.<sup>84</sup> From the mid-1990s onward, these “abolitionist” feminists capitalized on the expansion of human rights discourses to

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<sup>84</sup> The first – and most famous – of these organizations was COYOTE, founded by Margo St. James in San Francisco in 1973. The name is an acronym for Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics.

frame prostitution as a human rights abuse and win gains over the sex workers' rights and migrants' rights movements which had championed the right to work in prostitution. As the sociologist Elizabeth Bernstein has observed, abolitionist feminists "have effectively neutralized domains of political struggle around questions of labor, migration, and sexual freedom via the tropes of prostitution as gender violence and sexual slavery" (Bernstein 2010:50).

In the late 1990s, "trafficking" became conceptually separated from prostitution for the first time (Kempadoo 2005:xii). This allowed for the subsequent recognition in international law of human trafficking as a phenomenon defined by forced labor in a broad array of industries.<sup>85</sup> In practice, however, an analytical separation between "sex" and "labor" trafficking lives on in many contexts around the world, but particularly so in advocacy work. In European and American contexts, more popular and activist attention has been fired up by sex trafficking than by fighting forced or highly exploitative labor in contexts not involving sexual services. Gretchen Soderlund (2005) and Elizabeth Bernstein (2010) have described this rhetorical framing in the United States as the result of a coalition between the Bush administration, evangelical Christians, and abolitionist feminists. Bernstein has coined the term "carceral feminism" to refer to the alarming development of a mainstream American feminism that embraces punitive measures such as incarceration over other forms of social justice through which issues of labor exploitation might be addressed (Bernstein 2010). Soderlund and Bernstein both argue that the anti-trafficking campaigns under the Bush administration dovetailed with other

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<sup>85</sup> See CdeBaca (2011) for G/TIP Ambassador-at-Large Luis CdeBaca's evaluation of progress made in focusing on human trafficking as a set of common exploitative practices rather than as a crime defined by the presence of specific services (e.g. sexual).

administration policies to “police nonprocreative sex on a global level” (Soderlund 2005:79).<sup>86</sup> This federal legislation has, in turn, had a significant impact on the rest of the world through the TIP Report and through how United States funding is tied to conceptions of trafficking.

Over the past decade, LFSJ has grown steadily and gradually gained publicity in large part due to its access to English-speaking donors, benefactors, media representatives, and, especially, the US Embassy in Tokyo which provides the group with privileged access to government representatives and occasionally intervenes directly with the Japanese government on the organization’s behalf.<sup>87</sup> Shortly after I returned home from the field, I heard that Kanno had just auditioned for a local TedX convention, exemplifying perfectly the audience to which she was addressing her message and which was providing her with momentum and legitimacy: this audience was an English-speaking one, predominantly American, well-educated, and cosmopolitan.

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<sup>86</sup> Most notable among these Bush administration policies were the so-called “Global Gag Rule” of 2001, which prohibited abortion-friendly international NGOs from receiving federal funding, and PEPFAR restrictions on funding to grassroots international HIV/AIDS organizations. PEPFAR, or, the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, made American aid through USAID (the United States Agency for International Development) contingent on whether individual organizations working with foreign populations vulnerable to HIV signed an “anti-prostitution pledge” announcing their opposition to prostitution and sex trafficking. This policy has been roundly criticized by HIV/AIDS and sex worker rights advocates for effectively cutting off HIV/AIDS outreach funds to sex workers. In 2013, the United States Supreme Court ruled these pledges unconstitutional, on the basis that requiring organizations to “pledge allegiance to the government’s policy of eradicating prostitution” violated their right to free speech (Liptak 2013).

<sup>87</sup> For instance, when LFSJ was organizing an international conference on human trafficking and not having much luck in securing attendance from government officials, the political secretary at the Embassy charged with collecting data for the TIP Report jumped in, instructing me to make a list of bureaus for him to contact.

In my many conversations with expatriate supporters, it became clear that they saw the Japanese sex industry not as local Tokyo residents did, but – not surprisingly – as Americans. Upon coming to Japan and encountering a sizable sex industry operating overtly in public space, they resorted to the narratives they had grown up with; they seemed to take it for granted, in other words, that exploitation was naturally happening on a mass scale in the sex industry. They experienced walking around sex industry businesses as a transgressive act, but while they were curious about these businesses, they were uncomfortable thinking of them in any framework other than exploitation. It seemed almost as if being able to refer to the sex industry as human trafficking was a relief for many. Equating sex work with exploitation made it easy for them to turn to LFSJ activities as a way of understanding this industry.

This demographic actively supports LFSJ's efforts and was, in turn, also actively recruited. In fact, the organization had a parallel event calendar and publicity and funding mechanisms for English-speakers, in a way that was surprising for a small organization. During English-language seminars, expatriate audiences reacted much more vehemently to Kanno's lectures – there were audible gasps, laughs of disbelief, and sounds of dissatisfaction. The donation box was always fuller. And, importantly, these audiences were often much more active in using social media to promote the organization's message. It is the perspectives of these American expatriates living in Japan who perceive the sex industry in a particular way and welcome LFSJ activities as a potential antidote who have provided much of the initial momentum and resources to the organization. That the Japanese sex industry is legal and regulated by the police is almost irrelevant; in the eyes of these expatriates and visitors it is assumed to be plagued with exploitative

practices and its existence a manifestation of sexist stereotypes. This is an example of how American perspectives are directly influencing an NGO that's operating transnationally in a field in which local assumptions are very different. And yet, that NGO is benefitting from these American readings of the situation.

### *Interventions*

LFSJ has grown in a landscape in which certain types of volunteerism have recently become more institutionalized in Japan. Although volunteerism in the sense of unpaid labor freely given for a common cause has long defined women's activities in the public sphere (Leblanc 1999; Nolte and Hastings 1991), it is only in the past twenty years that the government has formally provided incentives for certain types of public activity represented by the non-profit organization. The 1995 Kobe earthquake galvanized a surge of volunteerism, following a slow and disorganized reaction by the state. This created social and political impetus for the 1998 Law to Promote Specified Nonprofit Activities (*Tokutei Hieru Katsudō Sokushin Hō*). The number of nonprofit organizations has ballooned since the passage of this law, as the state has formally recognized "the development of citizens' nonprofit activities that would enhance the public interest" (Otsuki 2011:302).

The March 11, 2011 earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster catalyzed another boom in NPO development, as the scale of the "triple disaster" – and the perceived inertia of the state in the rebuilding process – has engendered new forms of civic consciousness and volunteerism. This is especially the case among young workers disenfranchised by the long-term economic downturn, for whom volunteering has provided meaning and a

way of building connections when full-time labor is unavailable to them (Belson 2011). Several weeks after the disaster, the Diet passed a reform of the 1998 NPO law to provide tax incentives to nonprofit organizations meeting certain criteria.<sup>88</sup>

The expansion of the NPO landscape in Japan roughly parallels the growing inclusion and influence of NGOs in international policy-making since the 1990s, when the United Nations conference system began providing an institutionalized forum for NGO participation (Merry 2006). This parallel development means that there is ample opportunity for Japanese NGOs to be influential if they engage in transnational networks, as LFSJ does.

LFSJ's interventions in the anti-human trafficking realm can best be illustrated through an analysis of a typical seminar. Every month, the organization holds an educational seminar featuring a guest speaker. There are about ten seminars a year, which are organized around a loose theme, such as "Do You Know about Human Trafficking" (*Jinshin Torihiki o Shitte Imasu ka?*) or "Can We Stop the Commodification of Children's Sexuality?" (*Kodomo no Sei no Shōhinka o Tomerareru ka?*). These seminars represent the primary interface between LFSJ and the public, and new volunteers and interns are often recruited there.

During the majority of my long-term fieldwork, LFSJ's seminars took place at the event space of the central Tokyo shop of the major international cosmetics retailer, The Body Shop. As part of its corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities, this retailer has partnered with a major international NGO to launch a campaign against the trafficking of

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<sup>88</sup> As of mid-2013, of the 47,771 NPOs recognized by the government, only 459 have favorable tax status (Naikakufu NPO Hōmupēji 2013). See Robertson (2012) for a critique of the outsourcing of reconstruction work to NPOs and of the overlap between corporate interests and NPO tax incentives.

children into forced prostitution (also commonly referred to as “commercial sexual exploitation of children,” or CSEC).<sup>89</sup> As with other CSR campaigns, this retailer allows consumers to donate to their campaign through purchasing specific products, a percentage of the profits of which will be donated to anti-trafficking NGOs. Following scholars Richey and Ponte, this creates a form of “conscientious commerce” or “heroic shopping,” whereby shoppers are constructed as consumer-citizens who are “fashion-conscious yet actively engaged and [ethically] reflexive” (Richey and Ponte 2008:714). Similarly, the supporters who attend LFSJ meetings at this cosmetics retailer also embody an image of young, hip, and ethically conscious citizenship.

Taking the stairs up past the aromatherapy and massage room on the second floor, attendees reach the third floor, The Body Shop’s dedicated CSR event space. The entrance fee is about \$10 USD, less if you have a student ID. There are between twenty and thirty people in the room. There are very few men; mostly the room is filled with young, college-aged women who are involved in “gender circles” (similar to study groups) on their college campuses. There are also a handful of older women in their fifties and sixties; they are mostly social workers, staff members at publicly-run women’s centers, or Christian women involved in anti-prostitution work. There is some milling about and chatting before the event begins, but for the most part, attendees find a seat and quietly peruse the handouts they have been given. These include an outline of the speaker’s main points as well as numerous publicity materials for LFSJ and The Body Shop. In this interim period before the event begins, a promotional video plays from the projector screen at the front of the room. The video contains a brief introduction to

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<sup>89</sup> It is notable that this campaign focuses solely on sexual labor and that there is no equivalent campaign against children’s labor in other settings, such as factories or fields.

LFSJ's mother organization, Alliance, and alludes to the American history of chattel slavery as an inspiration for the organization's founders. None of the Japanese participants ever commented on this video. Being unversed in the history of American slavery, they were undoubtedly unclear on the connections with contemporary urban Japan.<sup>90</sup>

It is in this space that Let's Fight Slavery Japan translates their message of human trafficking to the public. A volunteer acts as MC and begins with an icebreaker for the audience, asking them to take a few minutes to turn to their neighbor and address a given question, such as, how many victims of human trafficking do you think there are in Japan? (One answer: police address more than 5,000 cases of commercial sexual exploitation of children each year, but this is expected to be just the tip of the iceberg) On this particular occasion, the guest speaker is a male doctor in his late fifties who has made a name for himself promoting sex education (notoriously paltry in Japanese public schools) to middle and high school students. Kanno introduces him as being an important figure to look to in this era of the commodification of children's sexuality and a time when children with low self-esteem may feel drawn to the sex industry. The doctor speaks for an hour, focusing his argument on a lack of communication within the family and how this predisposes young people from openly negotiating about their bodies, desires, and limits. We need to think about how children are growing up today, he tells us, and what that means for the future. He has obviously given the same presentation

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<sup>90</sup> References to American's history of institutionalized slavery are a commonly used and rhetorically powerful theme in American anti-human trafficking campaigns. Denise Brennan (2014) notes, however, that referring to trafficking as "modern-day slavery" is misleading, as the forced labor that constitutes human trafficking is not institutionalized in the same way that chattel slavery was (2014:7-9).

many times before, as his speaking is perfectly timed to his PowerPoint presentation, which is set on an automatic timer.

During the Q&A that follows the doctor's lecture, Kanno brings up several case histories of victims of human trafficking she has worked with. These focus almost exclusively on cases of child pornography and child prostitution – what she calls the sexual exploitation of children. Due to greater tolerance in Japan for configuring children as the acceptable objects of sexual desire of adult men, LFSJ identifies a significant problem of human trafficking in Japan, as the United Nations does not necessitate the presence of force, fraud, or coercion in the prostitution of minors.

In their stories, representatives from LFSJ focus on children being deceived, bullied, or led astray by friends or strangers they had deemed trustworthy. One story Kanno often told involved a 14-year-old girl who was told by her friends that she had a bad attitude and who was pressured to engage in *enjo kōsai* (“compensated dating”). The girls' friends posted her contact information on a website advertising under-aged girls and made arrangements for her to meet older men for money at hotels across the city. This went on for a month before the police got involved. LFSJ was contacted after the case had already been closed, to help support the adolescent girl. In her narrative, Kanno highlighted the on-going emotional problems and low self-esteem the girl had even now, two years later. These include an inability to say “no” to men, feelings of disgust toward her body, and inexplicable outbursts of crying. At sixteen, she is illegally working at a hostess club.

While cases involving child prostitution are common, increasingly so, Kanno tells the audience, are cases involving child pornography. With the proliferation of mobile and

other technologies whereby one can easily take photos or videos of oneself and post them on-line, the Internet has developed as a major zone of potential danger for minors. Kanno draws on hotline phone calls she has received involving children who sell images of themselves to strangers on-line. She tells us that they tell themselves that they're smart and will avoid the mistakes that others have made. That in their hubris, they can even think that they'll fool the people they're selling their images to. And then, they are threatened with having their name and image outed to their school and they become prey to the Internet. The culprit here, Kanno says, is an environment saturated with sexual imagery, including of young people. In ordinary convenience stores, she likes to tell audiences, you can buy magazines with images whose possession would carry a felony charge in the United States. Young people, she tells the audience, are aware that their body has a market value. Is anyone surprised that they would try to take advantage of this?

Through focusing on these case histories of children, LFSJ conveyed the idea that sexual harm and exploitation in the sex industry originate from issues such as low self-esteem and the celebration of the sexual naiveté of women and girls. In other words, staff members conveyed the idea that these issues – issues which relate to the self, specifically, to a neoliberal conception of the self as essentially independent and responsible for itself – lead to human trafficking.

Although the stories were almost always about children, LFSJ representatives linked these to the situations of adult women in the sex industry without giving firsthand accounts, suggesting that these adult women were really just the grown up versions of the vulnerable and abused children they were trying to protect. This slippage between

underage victims and adults neatly avoided the need to give concrete data on women (of which they seemed to have little). LFSJ representatives used accounts that focused on the manipulation of children and themes of shattered innocence to make broader claims sex industry work as intrinsically exploitative. As in the United States, the rhetorical invocation of children, in other words, served as a rhetorical smokescreen (Best 1990; Fass 1997) – one which was not scrutinized by the audiences I observed. Through focusing on children but making an argument about both children and adult women, LFSJ could avoid dealing with complex issues that speak to the concrete reasons relating to economic injustice and familial obligations that frame why women typically enter the sex industry.

Through these seminars, the sense that Kanno gives is that every woman or child is a potential victim of sexual exploitation. There is no sense that a different social status or circumstance would affect someone’s likelihood of becoming a victim. There is a democratization here, in which ordinary women and children are reconfigured as being sexually vulnerable subjects. These cases, Kanno tells the audience, involve individuals who are also “like slaves” (*doreiteki*).

When I first encountered the organization in 2008, they were still primarily focused on the forced prostitution of foreign migrant women. Since that time, however, it has increasingly gravitated toward using the concept of human trafficking as a rubric for larger issues relating to the sexual exploitation of Japanese women and children. This was expressed under the rubric of “domestic trafficking.”<sup>91</sup> Although LFSJ still saw

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<sup>91</sup> It is interesting to note that LFSJ has never theorized how differences in social status – especially being non-ethnic majority or non-middle-class Japanese – would affect someone’s likelihood of becoming a victim of human trafficking or sexual exploitation.

international trafficking into forced prostitution as within the group's mandate, increasingly their advocacy shifted into a direction marked by a set of issues separate from those facing female migrant workers.

Like similar organizations operating in the United States, LFSJ has introduced practices that encourage building awareness of the potential suffering of strangers who might be victims of human trafficking. They do this through actively encouraging audience members to call or e-mail their advocacy hotline, available in Japanese, English, or Korean. The hotline functions as a consulting window for individuals calling on their own behalf or on behalf of an acquaintance or stranger to report activity which may be indicative of human trafficking, including labor violations, cases of fraud, or the presence of minors in the sex industry. LFSJ has constructed this act as *kizuku*, meaning “to become aware of, to recognize.” This term refers to an ethics toward those that LFSJ argues are often unable to seek help for themselves.<sup>92</sup> Implicit in this ethics, however, is a partnership with law enforcement and criminal paradigms, what sociologist Elizabeth Bernstein has termed “carceral feminism” (Bernstein 2010; Bumiller 2008).

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Given the pervasiveness of a myth of Japanese “mono-ethnicity,” perhaps it is not surprising that Kanno would imagine her audiences as equally at risk. See AMPO, *Japan Asia Quarterly Review* (1996) for perspectives from women representing non-normative statuses in Japanese society.

<sup>92</sup> Others, including progressive social activists, left-leaning researchers, and, especially, sex workers, are critical of this policy of *kizuku* as fostering a “surveillance society” in tandem with the marked increase of surveillance cameras and other technologies of population control over the past decade (see Chapter One). In the aftermath of the “outing” of a public school teacher in Osaka who was working at a *hoteheru* after work in order to pay back her credit card debt, Sayaka, the veteran sex worker and advocate said that she thought that LFSJ received no calls from victims themselves; instead, they only received “tattle” calls like this, issued by customers who were pleased to avail themselves of sex workers’ services only to feel righteous enough to out them later.

Throughout the many seminars I attended, it was striking how the highly feminized audiences of the NGO responded to this message. Many of the young women in the audience seemed energized by the discussions and after the event was over, the room buzzed with excited chatter between young women who had found a common link with the stranger sitting next to them. In a sense, it seemed as if the term *iyashi*, or healing (see Chapter Two), could also be applied to what these young women who felt stifled by gender and familial structures were seeking in attending these events and supporting LFSJ. The issues of low self-esteem of children – especially girls – and related issues seemed to speak deeply to concerns of theirs. As I have mentioned, many of these young women were college students who were just learning about gender studies for the first time. Listening in on their conversations, I heard them making links between what they were discussing in their study groups and issues of exploitation in the sex industry. Through attending the seminars and, especially, the informal dinner at a nearby pub afterward, they were given a space in which they could voice their ideas and perhaps even their own experiences of low self-esteem and sexism. And, importantly, find like-minded others.

There seemed to be several unexpected parallels connecting the sex workers I worked with and the NGO workers and supporters. Although the young women who engaged with LFSJ were often of a higher socio-economic standing than my sex worker informants and had studied abroad extensively, usually in the United States, they were also marginalized from the labor market. In this economic context, the activist spaces of human rights NGOs, particularly those perceived to be speaking to women's issues, afford young women opportunities to shape the social landscape and become politically

involved in ways that might otherwise be unavailable to them. Kanno, for instance, clearly felt great pride in her achievement in growing the organization to its current strength. She would occasionally remark that it was really *her* organization (*jibun ga tsukutta dantai*), acknowledging the extent to which it reflected her own personal passions and prejudices. Certainly, directing LFSJ had allowed Kanno an exceptional role for a woman of her age.

Similarly, the interns and young volunteers I worked with at LFSJ attended hearings at the national parliament. They met local politicians and the staff of foreign embassies. They worked together to plan and implement an international conference on human trafficking. This NGO work was clearly deeply meaningful to them and embodied a form of care work on behalf of other women. Through working or volunteering with LFSJ, they were empowering themselves through using a human rights discourse to focus on the empowerment of other women.

Like sex work, human rights advocacy through LFSJ is also a performance of care work that is set against the backdrop of a restrictive female labor market. A further irony is that because interns and volunteers at the organization are unpaid, this NGO work is another manifestation of the unpaid (or underpaid) care work of women.

### *Rights Discourses*

A disturbing side to LFSJ's focus on manipulation and the slippages between children (understood as innocent) and adults manifests itself in the implications of their advocacy for rights discourses. Paradoxically, the rhetorical framing that Kanno accepts about sex work as human trafficking verges on precluding the possibility of seeing the

expression of free agency in a sex worker. This inability became clear to me one day as Kanno and I discussed a Korean sex workers' protest that had occurred several weeks earlier in Seoul. Although a 2004 South Korean law prohibited all sex work, sex industry districts had long been tolerated by the police. With the prodding of a nearby luxury department store, however, a sex industry district in central Seoul had experienced a month-long police crackdown. In protest of the intensity of this crackdown, four hundred sex workers had marched around a sex industry district in Seoul, demonstrating for their right to make a living. Several of the women covered themselves completely in black and red body paint and ran naked through the streets. A few doused themselves with lighter fluid and attempted to set themselves on fire (South Korean Prostitutes, Pimps Rally Against Police Crackdown 2011). As Kanno and I were coming back to the office after lunch, we chatted about the photographs of the protest that had been circulated on various blogs, images which I had found very moving for the women's juxtaposition of visual protest with their use of rights language. Kanno, however, seemed troubled by the images and asked, "Do you think their pimps [sic] forced them to do the demonstration?"

Kanno's questioning of whether the Korean sex workers participating in the protest march – when their livelihoods were being threatened – illustrates how the framework of prostitution-as-trafficking denies sex workers any agency. This protest, which seemingly exemplifies sex workers' self-consciousness of themselves as rights-bearing subjects was also open to questioning whether they weren't being manipulated. It is a matter of constantly reading manipulation or, even, false consciousness, onto sex workers while claiming that you have the "truth" about their circumstances.

The presumption of Kanno and likeminded activists seems to be a deep conviction that sex workers are always and at all times manipulated. This stance raises the question of whether anti-prostitution organizations that engage in human rights discourses want those they claim to want to help to have rights. It seems as if everyone has rights, except for sex workers, whose expression of their rights is always interpreted as undergirded by force or manipulation. It is easier for anti-human trafficking advocates to speak of the victimization of ordinary women and children when individuals in the sex industry have no consciousness of themselves as right-bearing subjects who can assert their own demands. Thus, paradoxically, while this movement officially embraces the universal subject of human rights, it undermines potential claims to protect sex workers through human rights and labor rights. The human rights and women's rights campaign represented by LFSJ, in other words, *negates the possibility* of a sex workers' rights movement.

Alice Miller (2004) has written about the tension inherent in human rights paradigms – especially those that deal with women's sexuality – between protection and freedom. She points out that women's rights were largely marginalized on the international human rights agenda until issues of sexual violence were highlighted. This focus, however, often falls back on conservative views and attitudes that locate women as powerless and in need of protection, rather than as rights-bearing subjects who are being denied full freedoms. Similarly, while LFSJ speaks about empowering women, their narrative is one that reproduces accounts of individuals who can be manipulated and thus need societal action to protect them.

## *Trafficking Trajectories*

In their activities and framings of human trafficking, LFSJ consistently bypassed pre-existing historical and feminist discourses on trafficking in Japan. That LFSJ sees itself as part of the post-UN Protocol world, as opposed to the continuation of an indigenous anti-human trafficking movement, is abundantly clear. It is telling that in a presentation timed to immediately follow the 2012 release of the TIP Report, LFSJ included a timeline of “major events in human trafficking in Japan.” The timeline begins in 2000, the year in which both the UN Protocol and US federal anti-human trafficking legislation were adopted. Whether the intention was brevity or whether this is a product of the group’s lack of awareness of the history of trafficking discourses in Japan, this date artificially makes it appear as if the anti-trafficking movement emerged just at this time out of a prior vacuum (c.f. Yamaguchi 2005). Similarly, a timeline of newspaper articles covering human trafficking in the first edition of LFSJ’s service providers’ handbook again begins in 2000. This point of origin is even more confusing as LFSJ seemingly misses the chance to impress upon readers the chronic nature of the issue!<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> In part, at least, this timeline-making may reflect the ways in which modern Japanese history is now taught in the primary school system. Kanno is in her early thirties and is part of a generation whose history education has been shaped by revisionist re-makings of recent history, especially as concerns Japanese aggression and expansion in Asia in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This translates occasionally to a larger lack of understanding of the value of history. One day over lunch, Kanno was telling Kobayashi-san (LFSJ’s part-time financial manager) and me about her recent trip to the southern island of Kyūshū for a presentation on human trafficking. When I remarked that many *karayuki-san* (Japanese women and girls sent to Japanese outposts and colonies overseas to work as prostitutes in the early twentieth century) had come from impoverished areas of Western Kyūshū, creating an interesting historical connection with present-day advocacy, Kanno corrected me, saying I must be mistakenly referring to the *Japayuki-san* (a 1980s term referring to Filipina migrant workers to Japan). She was unaware, it turned out,

Terminology alerts us to some of the politics of translating the post-UN Protocol understandings of “human trafficking” to a local context. During my fieldwork with LFSJ, three different terms were used to refer to the concept of human trafficking. While the LFSJ staff used these somewhat interchangeably, however, different meanings inflect each of the terms. In their day-to-day activities and amongst themselves, LFSJ staff refer to human trafficking as *jinshin baibai*, a term combining a referent to the physical body with a word connoting selling and buying. As a compound, *jinshin baibai* refers literally to a trade in human beings. It contains the nuance of dehumanizing individuals and reducing them to commodities and is thus also the term used when referring to a slave trade. Critically, *jinshin baibai* rests on the literal exchange of money. In common usage, the term refers abstractly to the historical practice – common from roughly the late Tokugawa period through the 1930s<sup>94</sup> – of parents “selling” their children into indentured labor as a strategy for dealing with rural poverty. While boys were sold into factory or field work, girls were typically sold into prostitution, factory work, or work as maidservants.

*Jinshin baibai* was reclaimed by feminists and migrant women’s advocates in the 1980s and 1990s to refer to the new phenomenon of foreign migrant women working in highly exploitative conditions in the sex and entertainment industry. Due to the term’s historical meaning, however, usage of *jinshin baibai* by LFSJ or others to refer to human trafficking often causes considerable confusion among members of the general public.

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about this historical phenomenon that many Japanese feminists have identified as a form of human trafficking!

<sup>94</sup> One informant, the director of a public women’s “rehabilitative center” in Tokyo, claimed that this practice existed *into the 1950s* in impoverished areas in rural northern Japan.

Individuals who are unfamiliar with activism around foreign migrant women or with LFSJ assume that Kanno is suggesting that children are being sold by their parents in contemporary Japan! Confusion about the meaning of this concept was also apparent in the types of phone calls that LFSJ received on their office phone line. In part reflecting a general confusion concerning what *jinshin baibai* refers to and in part reflecting a paucity of social services, AAJ receives calls relating to human trafficking, domestic violence, child abuse, homelessness, fraud, HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, international marriages, stalking, and sexual violence. Although AAJ has connected itself to various social service provider networks and tries to refer those cases not involving human trafficking as best as they can, there are also many nuisance and prank calls, and even calls from employers who might themselves be involved in exploitative practices. For example, Kanno once told me about a call she received from a “mama-san,” a female bar proprietress, who called to complain about a non-Japanese employee who had run off before she had finished her contract and paid back her cash advance. Apparently, this caller thought AAJ would provide a sympathetic ear!

In contrast, *jinshin torihiki* is the term used by the government and within Japanese translations of international human rights legislation. *Torihiki* (“transaction”) refers to the *exchange* of human beings in a broader sense, not constricted by the literal exchange of money, and thus encompasses the different forms of manipulation, coercion, and control that human rights advocates argue signifies forced labor. This broader usage also makes semantic space to encapsulate issues such as *enjo kōsai* (“compensated dated”) and child pornography into its parameters. The term is overly legalistic however,

and LFSJ staff typically reserved it use for interactions with governmental officials, as it was unfamiliar to the general public.

Finally, *torafikkingu*, a direct transliteration of “trafficking,” was occasionally used by the LFSJ staff in casual conversation as well as during public seminars. The term clearly marks trafficking as a foreign concept introduced to Japan recently. It is unfamiliar to the general public.

Another element to consider in terms of LFSJ’s “vernacularization” (Merry 1997, 2006) of the concept of human trafficking is the attitude of the staff themselves, notably the assumption that human trafficking movements are, to a degree, homogenous entities. In early 2011, for example, an executive director of Alliance spoke to an audience of about fifty people, mostly American college students studying abroad in Tokyo, on the topic of human trafficking. In his presentation, he drew on examples from both the United States and Japan, but mostly he spoke generally about the global anti-human trafficking movement, speaking as if the crime could be divorced from its local circumstances. During the Q&A session, I asked him about how Alliance mitigated different local histories and understandings of prostitution and trafficking. He remarked that anti-trafficking movements *cannot* follow a “one-size-fits-all” approach, noting that where such attempts have been made, they haven’t worked very well. Nevertheless, after mentioning some of the criteria that he felt that activists from one context transplanted to another would have to familiarize themselves with, he went on to say,

“I do think that there is an astonishing similarity to how trafficking networks operate around the world [...] It never ceases to amaze me, and it almost feels as though traffickers all over the world are playing from the same playbook, and they’ve all sent a memo to each other of, ‘here are the sixty-eight ways to control a woman.’”

Launching a successful anti-human trafficking movement, he felt, involved striking a balance between contextualizing local circumstances and applying global lessons relating to prevention, prosecution, and victim advocacy.

While the Alliance and LFSJ leadership may acknowledge that, in theory, at least, human trafficking may be subject to differing local histories and understandings, it is clear that they believe that their framework for understanding and approach trafficking is a movable entity, which can be transferred across contexts. In many instances throughout my internship, it also became clear to me that Kanno, similarly, feels that the local differences in what she sees as human trafficking in Japan are just details, with the essence of the crime being the same. The strangeness of this situation, however, becomes apparent when one looks at how human trafficking has historically been framed, given that this is a context in which exploitation has not been invoked a priori with commercial sexual exchange. This illustrates how this NGO displaces other historical and feminist discourses on human trafficking in favor of a US-based discourse.

Japan has had a well-developed commercial sex industry since the late sixteenth century, when a precursor to the soon-to-be-developed red-light districts was established in Kyoto in 1589. As detailed in Chapter One, the system of licensed prostitution was established in 1617, when the spatial and structural technology of the *yūkaku*, or government-recognized “red-light district,” was pioneered with the establishment of the Yoshiwara district in Edo. While some prostitutes in early modern Japan entered into long-term employment contracts with brothels independently, many were indentured into prostitution by their parents or other family members (Ramseyer 1991). The practice of

parents indenturing their children was commonly known as *miuri* (“selling into bondage,” a compound made up of the characters for the physical body and “to sell”). Through the early twentieth century, conventions of male authority and women’s obligations to the household economy made indentured prostitution common practice for impoverished families (Fujime 1997; Sievers 1983; Yamazaki 1999[1972]) and *miuri* commonly functioned as a survival mechanism for families coping with agrarian poverty, especially in periods of famine. The practice was not limited to the peasantry, as demonstrated by former samurai daughters who eventually entered prostitution following the 1871 dissolution of the four-tiered Tokugawa class system (Kunimitsu and Sugimura 1980:184). *Miuri* was seen not as a criminal activity but as a tragic yet unavoidable byproduct of family hardship and misfortune.

In the Meiji Period (1868-1912), the indentured prostitute became the locus of considerable political debate following an embarrassing diplomatic incident. In 1872, local Japanese authorities judged that the transport of 231 Chinese laborers aboard the *Maria Luz*, a Peruvian ship docked in Yokohama, entailed a slave trade (*jinshin baibai*) and had the laborers freed. In response, the Peruvian party claimed that the widespread practice of indentured prostitution itself entailed a trade in human beings, embarrassing the Japanese government in its efforts to appear as sophisticated and modern equal to Western powers (Ishii 1958:256-257; Ramseyer 1991). Shortly thereafter, the Meiji government issued a decree that “liberated” all prostitutes working under contracts.

The *Maria Luz* affair allowed Japanese authorities to engage in Western debates about individual freedoms and slavery on an international stage, but brought about little change in terms of the actual circumstances of prostitutes. The official circular

broadcasting the emancipation decree included the language of “trafficking in human bodies” (*jinshin baibai*), and included the following famous lines: “Indenture contracts rob people of their rights and reduce them to horses and cattle. As one cannot demand that horses and cattle repay their debts, neither can one demand that prostitutes and geisha repay their indenture amounts” (Ramseyer 1991:97). Needless to say, while the decree allowed women under indentured prostitution contracts to be temporarily relieved of their debts, it did not change their economic circumstances, and by 1875, the emancipation decree had effectively been voided (De Becker 1971[1905]:93; Ramseyer 1991:98).

The *Maria Luz* incident marked the beginning of a confluence of various social actors interested in dismantling the licensed prostitution system. With few available outlets for women’s activism (following a 1890 law prohibiting all female political activity), many women joined Christian women’s groups, the most famous and powerful of which was the Tokyo Women’s Reform Society, founded in 1886.<sup>95</sup> This society, together with the Japan branch of the Salvation Army, became substitute political parties for women, as the charity-driven nature of the groups allowed their political advocacy to slip under the radar (for a time, at least; Sievers 1983). Prostitution and concubinage were the first issues taken up by this group of mostly upper-class women. Taking their cue from social purity movements in England and the United States,<sup>96</sup> they argued that these practices were uncivilized, and undermined the status of women in the family (Sievers

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<sup>95</sup> Although it has since undergone a name change, this group is still active today. In 1986, on the one hundredth anniversary of the Reform Society’s founding, the organization established what is now the oldest shelter for foreign women in the Tokyo area.

<sup>96</sup> The Tokyo Women’s Reform Society was a branch of the international Women’s Christian Temperance Union.

1983). They also deployed a nascent human rights argument against licensed prostitution, calling it a “system of slavery” (Garon 1993:719) that was leading to national disgrace. However, although the Reform Society established a rehabilitation home for prostitutes, most of the members saw prostitution as a “Social Evil,” and had little sympathy for the realities of individual prostitutes (Garon 1993:719; Sievers 1983). Rather, prostitution was a site over which larger issues over women’s status and sexuality could be waged.

While many women were indentured to local brothels, as part of the Meiji government’s industrialization and expansion policies, thousands of so-called *karayuki-san*<sup>97</sup> were also sent to work as prostitutes in Japanese outposts and, eventually, colonies overseas (e.g. Yamazaki 1999[1972]). These were mostly women from the impoverished western regions of the island of *Kyūshū*. While most women were sent across East and Southeast Asia, a few *karayuki-san* were even sent as far as Hawaii and California (Hane 2003:219)! Remittances sent to Japan from the *karayuki-san* played an important part in Japan’s growing economy, especially in the late nineteenth century (Colligan-Taylor 1999:xxii). Indeed, Lie (1997) has referred to the *karayuki-san* as “modern Japan’s first major exports” (253), invoking the language of human trafficking to suggest that the Meiji state exploited these young women for the sake of nation-building.

Although Christian reform and women’s groups continued to agitate against the licensed prostitution system, prostitution was not outlawed in Japan until 1956. Lower-class women continued to be sent abroad as prostitutes throughout the Second Sino-Japanese War and Japanese imperial expansion, at which time women in countries occupied by the Japanese military were also recruited to work as *jūgun ianfu*, so-called

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<sup>97</sup> The term means “women going over there,” with “there” referring to China.

“comfort women,” for Japanese soldiers (Soh 2008; Yoshimi 2000). The close of the Second World War occasioned a particularly interesting case of state involvement in domestic organized prostitution: on August 18, 1945, three days after the Japanese surrender, government bureaucrats began discussing ways to minimize sexual violence against Japanese women by the incoming American occupation army. Their solution consisted of the establishment of the Recreation and Amusement Association (RAA). Japanese women were recruited for this system to work as prostitutes for the Americans. The opening ceremony took place at the grounds of the Imperial Palace (Dower 1999:127-128; Lie 1997:256-257). Although both the RAA and the system of licensed prostitution were abolished in March 1946, when the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP) declared that prostitution was unbecoming of a democratic nation, unlicensed prostitution continued en masse as a viable post-war survival strategy for many individuals.

Around the late 1960s and 1970s, when Japan emerged in the postwar period as an economic power, Japanese companies began to invest and expand their business interests overseas in neighboring Asian countries. At the same time, middle-class Japanese became affluent enough for the first time in the postwar period to travel abroad widely. Around this time, Japanese men began going on so-called “sex tours” to countries where prostitution was legal (Matsui 1993). These tours were organized by Japanese tourist agencies and were often sponsored by the companies where these men worked. Taiwan, where Japanese was still understood due to fifty years of colonial rule, was one of the first destinations for these tours, followed by South Korea, the Philippines, and

Thailand. With Japan’s growing economic dominance in the region, prostitution was effectively outsourced at this time.

Japanese feminists at the time pointed out the parallels between Japan’s wartime colonial empire – driven by military power – and what they saw as a new form of imperialism, driven by economic power this time (see Figure 7). The *Asahi Shimbun* journalist Matsui Yayori was especially influential as a feminist activist who theorized the complicity of Japanese women in the economic imperialism of Asian women, writing, “We Japanese women play a double role: we are discriminated against in Japanese society and, at the same time, we benefit from the exploitation of other Asian women [...] We are both victims and oppressors” (Matsui 1989:4). These “sex tours” were protested by women in Japan and in the various destination countries, including at airports receiving groups of Japanese tourists (Matsui 1993).



Figure 7: “Guns in the past, a roll of banknotes today.” In this caricature, featured in the feminist journal *Ajia to Josei Kaihō* (Asian Women’s Liberation), a Japanese salaryman type is surveying a tourist map of Asia that aligns with much of the territories of the former Japanese Empire. The boxes next to each country compare national circumstances under Japanese occupation with circumstances as a host to Japanese businesses and tourism. *Ajia to Josei Kaihō*. 1977, 2: p. 2.

Following these women’s protests and international media coverage, the overt, institutionalized forms of this tourism had declined by the early 1980s and in its place emerged a reverse flow of Asian migrant women to Japan to work in sex and entertainment districts around the country. At first, these women came primarily from the former receiving countries of sex tours – especially the Philippines and Thailand – but from the 1990s on women also came from Latin American countries such as Colombia, Brazil, and Peru, where Japanese business and criminal groups had already established networks. Following the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian and Eastern European women began showing up as well. In a play on the historical term *karayuki-san* (again, which referred to Japanese women sent to Japanese outposts and colonies overseas), these female labor migrants traveling to Japan to work in the sex and entertainment districts were widely referred to as *Japayuki-san*, meaning “[women] going to Japan.”

Groups who trace their origins back to the influence of Matsui Yayori have connected the *karayuki-san*, “comfort women” and RAA systems, and the *Japayuki-san* of the 1980s and 1990s, arguing that all three represent an ongoing history of the traffic in women’s bodies for Japanese men. Today, the Asia-Japan Women’s Resource Center (*Ajia Josei Shiryō Sentā*) and its sister organization, the Women’s Active Museum on War and Peace (*Akutibu Myūjiamu Onnatachi no Sensō to Heiwa Shiryōkan*) represent this perspective most vocally. *Jinshin baibai* (again, the term for a trade in human beings) is the term that these organizations use. This discourse, however, is bypassed by LFSJ in their anti-trafficking advocacy.

## *Conclusion*

When I repeated some of the stories told and assertions made at Let's Fight Slavery Japan meetings to my sex worker informants, they inevitably brushed these aside, saying, "That has nothing to do with me." The response of even politically apathetic women toward feminists' claims of exploitation in the sex industry were scorn or ridicule, followed by sardonic statements, like, "The people who say those things don't know what they're talking about," or, "Maybe they should make some friends in the sex industry." To more veteran sex workers who had thought about the sex industry's location in the larger cultural landscape, Kanno seemed to be just another middle-class feminist advocate who was anti-prostitution without, it seemed to them, ever having met an adult sex worker. They were wary of such women and avoided them.

Why is there a dissonance between the issues raised by Let's Fight Slavery Japan and the issues important to sex workers? In other words, why do sex workers not recognize themselves in the depictions put out by LFSJ? For the sex workers I spoke with, the abstract arguments of the anti-human trafficking organization about women's exploitation did not bear any relation to the issues of health and safety, compensation, or discrimination that they have to navigate daily. The women I knew were interested in practical solutions to their problems. Empowerment for them meant figuring out how to more successfully make money, negotiate for condom use, attract customers, and leave the industry without any fallout.

Anti-human trafficking campaigns have been criticized – along with other anti-violence against women organizations – as often promoting a message of “protecting

women” rather than “protecting women’s rights” (Miller 2004:18; Soderlund 2005). Although LFSJ staff spoke about the empowerment of young Japanese women, it was in a narrow sense that predetermined what choices women could make; women could do anything, that is, but sell sex. Indeed, the sex worker advocacy group that I discuss at length in Chapter Six has critiqued LFSJ for telling young women not to work in the sex industry “because it’s exploitative,” rather than educating women about how to work safely. The rhetoric of LFSJ ignores the reality that women working in the sex industry often engage in tremendous moral ambivalence as they navigate the tensions implicit in an industry that is uniquely lucrative but also stigmatized (Chapter Three); nonetheless, they enter because the industry offers a way for them to achieve various goals. Where LFSJ promotes surveillance of others and looking at issues of self-esteem over labor market issues, their advocacy often fails to meet the needs of women already working in the sex industry. The organization’s message is, however, appealing to demographics such as female university students. It is this demographic that is now fueling their campaign.

From the first half of this dissertation, it will be apparent by now that the approach of LFSJ toward the sex industry diverges from pre-existing frameworks. Whereas gendered ideologies of female and male labor shape the contemporary structure of the sex industry (Chapter Two), LFSJ introduces an American-based framework of sex work as exploitation. The friction between the discourses of this NGO that aims to help sex workers and between what sex workers themselves want tells us something about how human rights are often remade in local contexts. Although Let’s Fight Slavery Japan representatives were drawing on ideas of universal rights, in translating these rights to a

local context (Tokyo), these highly cosmopolitan individuals introduced a framework for thinking about exploitation and sex work that did not match local conceptions for thinking about these issues. The manner in which American supporters (both government and private citizens) have provided the initial momentum for the group and, now, it's very framework, lend support to the notion that American discourses are colonizing, and erasing, pre-existing discourses and trajectories.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Who Needs Protection?: Japanese Government Discourses on Victimhood**

Since 2001, when the National Police Agency (NPA) first began collecting data on human trafficking, the Japanese government has recognized 657 victims of this crime (Keisatsuchō 2014). Of this figure, Thai nationals have comprised the biggest demographic (with 223 victims), followed by Philippine nationals (174), Indonesians (76), Colombians (58), Taiwanese (49), Japanese (42),<sup>98</sup> and South Koreans (12). The group is almost entirely female; only *three* of the individuals identified as human trafficking victims have been male.<sup>99</sup> Using these numbers, government officials confidently report that they are effectively combatting human trafficking in Japan.

For roughly three decades, the Japanese government has been the target of international and domestic calls for urgent action against human trafficking. From the mid-1980s onward, grassroots migrant support organizations began calling attention to cases of exploitative laboring conditions involving foreign migrant women recruited as “entertainers” in bars but compelled to engage in sexual relations with customers (Ohshima and Francis 1989; Babior 1993; Asian Women’s Association 1988; Kanagawa

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<sup>98</sup> The common knowledge among anti-human trafficking advocates is that the victims identified with Japanese nationality are primarily so-called “JFC” (Japanese-Filipino children) who were raised in the Philippines and came to Japan as young adults to work.

<sup>99</sup> Note that neither the police nor immigration include the sex of individuals identified as human trafficking victims in their breakdown of the yearly statistics. It is only through carefully going through commentaries on these reports by other institutions that I was able to come up with a figure for male victims (see, for instance, HURights Osaka 2011). The three male victims identified were forced to work as cleaners at a sex industry business (HURights Osaka 2011).

Onna no Supēsu “Mizura” 2002). These early calls for action were gradually joined by human rights and media reports that portrayed a grim picture of forms of forced prostitution of foreign migrant women in sex and entertainment districts across the country (Caouette and Saito 1999; Dinan 2000; Jinshin Baibai Taikoku!? Nihon 2004; “Ō” Ōbei Josei “Kyōsei Baishun” 2004; Kyōto YWCA / APT 2001; Yoshida 2004). In June 2004, the US Department of State catalyzed Japanese government action when it placed Japan on the Tier 2 “Watchlist” (essentially a probationary stop on the way to Tier 3 – i.e., worst – status) ranking in its annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report. Following the release of this report, the Japanese government acted with remarkable expediency<sup>100</sup> to create an Action Plan for combatting human trafficking.

Throughout the second half of this dissertation, I examine the human rights movements that have formed around the Japanese sex industry in order to address the broader question of how the global spread of human rights discourses has recast claims surrounding labor and sexual rights. In this chapter, I momentarily move away from an explicit focus on (Japanese) sex workers in order to focus on how the Japanese government has responded to calls to address labor exploitation in the sex industry. I argue that in its efforts to incorporate international anti-human trafficking standards, the Japanese government has narrowly constructed victims as non-Japanese female migrants in forced prostitution (i.e., as female “others”). The government thereby inadvertently produces a rubric whereby the care of Japanese victims, male or transgendered subjects, or victims of other types of forced labor is left to grassroots organizations. Behind this is

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<sup>100</sup> It is widely assumed (and joked about) in research and advocacy circles that the Japanese government acted so quickly only because of its embarrassing international ranking.

a government approach to human rights that constructs human rights as emanating from citizens' cultivated disposition toward others rather than as a government mandate to ensure freedoms.

I should note at the outset that, as in Chapter Four, the focus in this chapter is on discourse and practice related to human trafficking, and not on challenging particular claims of what trafficking is.<sup>101</sup> Rather, I am interested in the processes by which the government objectifies and uses the concept of human trafficking and in what these processes tell us about who counts as a victim and why, especially when distinctions are made between individuals in objectively similar circumstances. Further, it is critical to point out at this juncture that the Japanese government has *not* yet addressed forced labor in industries outside the sex industry. Although there has been agitation for official recognition of forced labor more broadly, particularly in relation to the problematic “Foreign Trainee and Technical Internship Program,” this has yet to be addressed by the government and is thus beyond the scope of this chapter. In Japan today, official rhetoric on human trafficking, in other words, is synonymous with forced sexual labor.

### *Official Narratives of Human Trafficking*

In July 2011, I attended the eighth annual “Contact Point” meeting on human trafficking hosted by the National Policy Agency. The conference is a major part of Japan’s anti-trafficking efforts and has been held every year since 2004. It is a symbol of the government’s efforts to end human trafficking in Japan. Although the majority of conference participants are representatives from prefectural police agencies, it also

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<sup>101</sup> See Aoyama (2009) and Parreñas (2011) for ethnographic accounts that challenge the conflation of foreign migrant labor in the Japanese sex industry with human trafficking.

involves representatives from relevant ministries and government-run women's centers as well as foreign embassies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). It is a highly ritual event held in a large and ornate meeting hall in central Tokyo. The conference is closed to the public and invitations are sent out by the NPA several months in advance. Like the UN Trafficking Protocol itself, the conference focuses on law and order, with state agendas of border control and criminal justice conveyed clearly – it is not a human rights event.

I attended this conference with a team from the prominent anti-human trafficking NGO Let's Fight Slavery Japan (LFSJ; see Chapter Four), and had been looking forward to the conference for months. I was curious to see what the interactions would be like between the different stakeholders present at the conference, especially between government representatives and advocates pushing for improved victim support measures. Based on what various anti-trafficking advocates had told me to expect, however, it seemed that most advocates skeptically view the annual event as simply a yearly performance. Certainly, no one I spoke with beforehand expected anything concrete to be accomplished. The most they hoped for, it seemed, was to network during the breaks and at the reception following the conference.

The LFSJ team had agreed to meet up beforehand at a nearby subway station so that we could arrive en masse. Kanno Akiko, the director of LFSJ, had spent the morning re-reading the government's 2009 Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons (hereafter 2009 Action Plan), a follow-up to the original 2004 plan. She was pretty riled up by the time we met at the station. Why had nothing changed in the past few years, she

wanted to know, muttering that everything was still exactly the same as it had been at the plan's conception.

We arrived early at the conference, and had some time to kill. I had noticed coming through the lobby that many of the male bureaucrats and police officers – all in dark suits – were waiting for the conference to start by milling about in the corridors and outside, mostly huddled around the ashtrays, smoking. I was eager to make small talk with them and wished (one of many times during my field work) that I were a smoker. Meanwhile, Kanno scanned the seating chart on the last page of the conference handouts to plan who to approach during a break. I followed suit.

The seating arrangements at this conference are highly political and bear little relation with who actually has the most contact with potential trafficking victims. It is telling, for instance, that the American and Canadian embassy representatives (countries from which no victims have been identified but which have been active in pressuring the Japanese government into action) were assigned to the center front row. Seated behind them were representatives from countries from whom victims of human trafficking have been identified: Colombia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Russia. The fifth and sixth rows were reserved for public women's center staff and behind them were prefectural police representatives. With few exceptions, the women in the room were almost entirely at the women's center and NGO tables. Males occupied the positions of relative power. While representatives from groups such as the sex worker advocacy group which I worked with or associations of sex industry business operators had not been invited, privileged seating had been given to an elderly representative from a Christian women's organization pushing to criminalize the legal sex industry.

The conference began with a welcome by the director of the NPA's Safety Division (*Seikatsu Anzenkyoku*), who noted the seriousness of the crime of human trafficking and how the government had mobilized to combat it. To convey the urgency of the situation for which we had assembled, he noted that already in the first five months of that year, there had been nineteen arrests related to trafficking, with eight victims identified. Following his welcome, police and immigration officers gave a series of presentations.

One such presentation, by a police officer from Gifu prefecture (located in the center of the main island), focused on an elaborate case involving the government's newest focus in cracking down on illegal foreign migrant labor: so-called "fake marriages" (*gisō kekkon*). The case involved a single owner of a "Philippine pub" (a hostess club employing only Philippine women) who had been arrested three different times in the course of an ongoing investigation. The police officer described how a Filipina woman in her early twenties had come to a local police station the previous year, seeking help. She had originally come to Japan to work so as to support her family in the Philippines. She had agreed to enter into a fake marriage that the pub owner arranged with the manager of his business; this way, she could successfully apply for a spousal visa and have no restrictions on where she could work. It wouldn't be a real marriage, he told her, it would just look that way from the outside.

The working conditions that the Filipina woman encountered upon arrival, however, were highly restrictive. She was forced to work long hours without freedom of movement and without control over her wages. She lived communally with other pub employees, but couldn't go out on her own. "Fees" were imposed for minor infractions,

such as failing to air one's futon over the apartment balcony. Based on these conditions, the prefectural police identified the woman as a victim of human trafficking and launched an investigation into the business where she had been working. Five other Filipina women were identified as trafficking victims. All of these women had had fake marriages arranged for them by the pub owner, and two had even entered the country on fake names. The police sent these women to the prefectural women's consulting center for shelter, thinking the case closed for the time being.

As the investigation progressed, however, a novel twist became apparent: the fake marriages had become a gateway for swindling public welfare funds. The police investigators in the case found that one of the six women, "Victim E," had been receiving public assistance for several years. Like the others, she had entered a fake marriage in 2006 in order to work. The marriage had been with a trusted customer of the business. Although he was only in his late fifties, however, he suffered from severe diabetes and passed away in 2008. Anticipating this, the pub owner had come up with a novel plan to ensure the woman's continued ability to work in Japan. Although "Victim E" and her spouse had had no children – it being a contractual arrangement rather than a procreative one – the woman had been instructed to return to the Philippines to procure an official birth certificate for a child that didn't exist. Back in Gifu, this certificate was registered at the local city office, and the woman began receiving child support payments. As a parent (allegedly), she was also able to apply for permanent residency. Following the death of her "husband," the woman additionally received an "orphan" allowance and a survivor's pension. Although the bank account was in her name, however, it was the store manager who had control over the account. The police estimated that in total, he had used the

woman – who apparently knew little about what had been going on – to swindle upwards of ¥2,600,000 (approximately \$26,000) from welfare funds.

The police were shocked when the details of the case became clear. Although “Victim E” had already been recognized as a trafficking victim, the officer explained that she had been so clearly used as a tool in more ways than one. They also realized that the owner had, since 2006, arranged about forty fake marriages. In the end, he was arrested on charges of falsifying documents, registering a non-existent child, and misuse (swindling) of public funds. The sentence for these crimes was two years. Meanwhile, the police consulted with the city on how to petition for a return of the welfare funds.

It is cases such as this one that law enforcement officials use as evidence that human trafficking methods are becoming increasingly more sophisticated and nuanced. While the police investigators present at the Contact Point conference were primarily interested in the alarming misuse of public funds, what gets missed in such evaluations, however, is the migrant’s initial motivation to come to Japan, by means that would make her vulnerable to abuse, if necessary. Cases of “fake marriage” have become buzzwords for law enforcement to call attention to as a threat to border control and sovereignty, but scholars have noted that such methods are attractive to migrants only in the absence of legal means available by which to work (Agustín 2007; Brennan 2014; Spener 2009).

### *Policy Changes*

Japan’s anti-human trafficking policies have been criticized on many counts: for being slow, too narrow, underfunded, ineffective, heavy on border control and weak on victim protection, and so on. The difference, however, that having any legislation at all

addressing human trafficking made became clear to me during a conversation with an interview with a social worker at an embassy that had once had a significant problem with their nationals being trafficked in Japan in the late 1990s until the mid-2000s but whose trafficking hotline has grown completely cold in recent years. In fact, the embassy was so eager to erase this aspect of their recent history, that I was asked not to identify them. The social worker spoke at length about her efforts on behalf of trafficked women and about what it had been like working on this issue before there had been any national legislation on it.

Whenever the social worker had had a tip-off, she would call the police, but there was often little they could do on behalf of the woman. Why? At the time, she explained, there was no word for “human trafficking.” All the police could do was to ask for the woman’s immigration status, and, if she was illegal, deport her. The social worker quickly qualified that as humans, individual police officers undoubtedly sympathized with the women when they saw their circumstances, but there was no legal framework for them to do anything except check their immigration status. Japanese authorities’ tendency to simply deport illegal migrants, regardless of their circumstances, has been discussed elsewhere (see, for example, Dinan 2000). The social worker dismissed NGOs such as Let’s Fight Slavery Japan and others that had arisen since the mid-2000s as greenhorns who only appeared after the height of the problem. At the time, there were just three shelters that she worked with. Even the IOM, she said, which now helps with victim support and repatriation, had at the time just been a tiny office concerned with organizing festivals. The allies that she aligned herself with were other embassies – especially the

US embassy which, she said smirking, was the only one that the Japanese officials really listened to – and the three main shelters at the time.

In 2004, following Japan’s placement on the TIP Report’s “Watch List,” the Japanese government acted with remarkable expediency to create an Action Plan with which to enact legislation and policies to act on human trafficking. Among these was the addition of the crime of “buying and selling human beings” (*jinshin baibaizai*) to the penal code (Penal Code Article 226-2) in June 2005.<sup>102</sup> The crime was enforced beginning in July 2005 and first used in October of that year. As is suggested by the name of the crime, however, it is narrowly defined by the exchange of cash for a person; if this transaction is not overtly present, then the perpetrator will not be charged under this crime. In fact, the crime is so narrowly defined that since 2005, it has only been used fourteen times (Jinshin Baibai Bōshi 2012). Most traffickers identified by the police have been arrested on charges carrying relatively light sentences, such as employing a non-Japanese without the proper work visa. Human rights advocates have argued that the overly narrow definition of “buying and selling” leads to a situation in which most traffickers are prosecuted on crimes that do not reflect the degree of coercion that distinguishes human trafficking from other crimes. They have called for the establishment of a new crime in the Penal Code that recognizes the diverse methods by which compelled labor is extracted in human trafficking, such as psychological

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<sup>102</sup> Other legal changes that were enacted with the 2004 Action Plan included revisions to the Immigration Control and Refugee Act (e.g. adding “trafficker” to the list of individuals not allowed to enter the country; granting TIP victims special permission to stay), cracking down on the “entertainer” visa, increasing immigration security measures (such as adding an IC chip to passports), and a change to the Law on Entertainment Businesses (*Fūeihō*, see Introduction) whereby any employer who did not check the immigration status of their non-Japanese employees at the time of hire would be heavily fined.

manipulation or physical threats, such that the punishment for trafficking would be commensurate with the nature of the crime.<sup>103</sup>

Regardless of evaluations of the changes wrought by the National Action Plan, it is clear that they *have* changed circumstances. There is some recognition now, at least occasionally, that foreign migrants in the sex industry are not “criminals.” Since the mid-2000s, many observers have commented that trafficking has gone down in Japan. These observers include the aforementioned embassy, but also private shelters – when I spoke to different shelters about human trafficking, most dismissed me by saying that while they had previously had trafficking victims, in recent years they hadn’t had any. Groups like LFSJ counter these attitudes, saying that traffickers have “gone underground” and now use sophisticated methods to target Japanese women and children instead, thus going under the radar. It is this type of sophistication that they also cite as a reason for changing the penal code crime for trafficking to encompass different degrees of coercion, and to evolve as authorities’ understanding of different methods progresses. Others told me that anti-trafficking policies had made metropolitan police more aware of trafficking, such that traffickers now focused on the countryside instead.

At the same time however, from my observations and conversations, it seemed as if the government were also growing frustrated with its unchanging “Tier 2” status in the annual US Department of State TIP Report. The implicit attitude I commonly encountered among government officials was, what more do we have to do to get to Tier 1? In an interview with a high-ranking police officer involved with anti-trafficking

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<sup>103</sup> A notorious case, for example, is that of “Sony” Hagiwara, who, despite admitting to trafficking dozens of Colombian women, was found guilty in 2003 only of breaking immigration and labor laws and served a mere twenty-two month sentence.

policy, I asked him about the TIP Report, and he said he doesn't read it. I thought he was joking until he told me next that if Japan criminalized the possession of child pornography, as Euro-American governments and media had long been pressuring them to do, then they would surely get "Tier 1" status in the next report. Given that laws on child pornography are not evaluated in the TIP Report (c.f. child prostitution laws), it suddenly seemed much more likely that he was telling the truth when he said he didn't read the report.

As with other sex worker advocacy groups around the world,<sup>104</sup> the group I worked with (see Chapter Six) argued that anti-human trafficking laws have had primarily harmful effects on migrant sex workers. Although sex workers have, not surprisingly, been at the frontlines of arguments against anti-trafficking policies, scholars have also recently noted how anti-trafficking responses often perpetuate underlying problems (Dewey 2008). As discussed above, the increasing crackdown on legal methods by which to enter and work in Japan led migrants to instead seek out increasingly risky methods of entry, such as "fake marriages." One sex worker who had conducted considerable research among non-Japanese migrant sex workers and their employers argued that managers of sex industry businesses, eager to guarantee their investment on a foreign sex worker until she paid back her debts, were more likely to confine their employees, restrict their movements, or take hold of their passports. These actions did not make them unscrupulous, she pointed out. Rather, they became necessary under circumstances in which heightened scrutiny of migrant women made them vulnerable to

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<sup>104</sup> Groups which have challenged anti-trafficking policies around the world include, to name just a handful, the Empower Foundation (Thailand), the Global Network of Sex Work Projects, Giant Girls (South Korea), Scarlett Alliance (Australia), SWOP USA, and the Asia-Pacific Network of Sex Workers.

deportation. She also pointed out how the immigration crackdown had, ironically, made women in exploitative circumstances even less likely to seek help from authorities, out of a misguided belief that if they were identified as a TIP victim, they would be put on a list and not allowed to come back into the country at a later time.

Sayaka herself, as a visible advocate for sex workers' rights, had been sought out several times by the political secretaries at the US Embassy who were collecting information for the TIP Report. During my fieldwork, as well, the newly transferred political secretary asked me several times whether I could help arrange a meeting between the two of them. Sayaka, however, was no longer interested in doing so. During her meetings in the past, it had been clear that the political secretaries were only interested in her knowledge of organized crime groups' involvement in the sex industry. They weren't interested in the rights of sex workers and changed the subject whenever it came up. In one case, Kanno – who had sat in on a meeting – told me privately that a visiting TIP Ambassador had bluntly told Sayaka that he didn't care about her movement.

The politically engaged sex workers I met often made fun of the anti-trafficking laws and, especially, the “trafficker” designation, occasionally pointing out the absurdity of the categories. One woman, for example, who sometimes brokered liaisons for friends who wanted to work informally, told me with a smile that I was talking to a “trafficker.” Another time, when Sayaka and I were speaking on Skype with an advocate from the Asia-Pacific Network of Sex Workers about a joint conference panel on sex worker rights they were organizing, another advocate explained to me on the side that one of the organizers of this group wasn't allowed to enter the United States because he was a “trafficker.” Of course, underlying their attempts to poke fun at these categories was a

serious note. These advocates had a significant stake in combatting trafficking and exploitative practices. What they were pointing out, however, was that the state's emphasis on immigration crackdown and on criminalization wasn't helping those most affected. For these advocates – as with others – the problems they identified were primarily structural ones, especially exploitative immigration policies, policies concerning migrant workers, and sex industry laws. For them, human trafficking requires a human rights or labor rights paradigm rather than a criminal paradigm that pushes migrants into increasingly dangerous methods of entry without addressing structural issues that contribute to labor exploitation.

### *The Visual Politics of Victimhood*

One of the major frustrations of anti-human trafficking advocates in Japan concerns the lack of information available as to how police and immigration officials make judgments in identifying victims of human trafficking. Neither party provides information on the criteria by which authorities make their decisions, suggesting that officials have broad discretionary power by which to act. When I asked Officer Iida, at the time one of the NPA's top trafficking officials, about how decisions were made, he matter-of-factly stated that they used the definition established in the third article of the Trafficking Protocol.<sup>105</sup> He paused, as if this were the most transparent answer in the

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<sup>105</sup> Article Three of the Trafficking Protocol states: "For the purposes of this Protocol: (a) 'Trafficking in persons' shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of

world, then added that authorities look at the protocol and judge if a case fits the conditions described or not. When they take someone in for questioning, he explained, they assess whether someone is telling the truth (how this assessment is made was not elaborated on either), and then they make a judgment from there on whether human trafficking is involved or not. He added that in the event that they decide that a case does *not* involve trafficking, then they treat it as just another ordinary criminal case, and apply whatever violation applies most clearly. In other words, this procedure marks the difference between someone being viewed as victim or criminal.

Notwithstanding that the Trafficking Protocol has a fairly broad definition of trafficking which can be interpreted in multiple ways, it is unclear how authorities actually make their decisions. The 2010 TIP Report states,

“Although some Japanese authorities use an IOM-issued handbook on victim identification, authorities did not report having formal victim identification procedures. Moreover, although personnel in the various Japanese bureaucracies do have portfolios that include trafficking, the government does not appear to have any law enforcement or social services personnel dedicated solely to the human trafficking issue” (US Department of State 2010:190).

Anti-trafficking advocates feel left in the dark about the process of victim identification, and call for more information about how authorities make their decisions. Since 2005, the government has contracted the Tokyo office of the International Organization for

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sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs; (b) The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used; (c) The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered ‘trafficking in persons’ even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article; (d) ‘Child’ shall mean any person under eighteen years of age” (United Nations 2000).

Migration to assist with victim services, but even then, the police or immigration typically make an initial judgment about whether the individual they have apprehended or has come to them is telling them the truth. It is only then that they call upon the IOM for assistance in interviewing the individual to determine the specifics of her case and to explain procedures to her. Less frequently, in cases in which victims seek help with the IOM or an NGO, IOM staff put a case together which they then present to the police or immigration. Either way, most cases that the IOM assists with end up being recognized as victims, but the initial judgment process by which the police – as Officer Iida put it – determine whether a woman is “telling the truth” is unclear.

The legal scholar Dina Haynes, writing about trafficking victim identification in the United States, has argued that a focus on looking for certain types of victimhood often prevents government authorities who come into contact with trafficking victims from recognizing them as such; instead, any demonstration of personal will or agency is read as evidence that the victim was not under coercion. Haynes writes,

“Conflation of trafficking with other political agendas has either confused those who are in the best position to ‘certify’ a trafficking victim or has made them fearful of erroneously certifying someone who might be a terrorist, a ‘simple’ illegal migrant, a prostitute, or another criminal – assuming (incorrectly) that victims cannot also have engaged in criminal behavior” (Haynes 2007:340).

Haynes further notes that there is a higher likelihood that someone will be identified as a victim of human trafficking if they are “rescued” by authorities than if the same individual eludes their traffickers and seeks out assistance from the authorities on their own (2007:349-350).

How are judgments about whether someone is a legitimate subject of compassion made? In very different contexts from Japan, Liisa Malkki (1996) and Miriam Ticktin (2006) have written about how suffering in the “other” is often reduced to irrefutable physical injuries. Both argue that, whether in media representations or political debates, stripping the body of the “other” down to their biological selves elicits humanitarian compassion in a way that thinking about these same bodies as political or social – and thus possibly transgressive – subjects does not. For instance, Ticktin has illustrated how in an anti-immigrant political context in France, undocumented migrants (“les sans papiers”) have been able to pursue legal residency through a humanitarian exception in the nation’s restrictive immigration law. This so-called “illness clause” permits residency for the sick and the disabled on the basis that they cannot expect reasonable care in their home countries. The illness clause thus becomes a means of emphasizing migrants’ “common humanity.” And yet, Ticktin illustrates how medical officials in charge of migrant patients interpret their case for residency partially based on gendered and racialized images of the Other (44). A female Algerian incest victim, for instance, matched their perceptions of “pitiful Muslim women,” whereas an Algerian man petitioning for residency was deemed too agentive and thus suspect (43-44). In other words, when a patient is not considered passive enough, compassion for their suffering is not deemed necessary. Mehta (2011) provides a similar account in describing the process whereby asylum applicants to the United States fabricate their accounts so as to fit more closely into officials’ images of who a victim is.

While in Japan, procedures for victim identification are unclear, the visual politics by which the government represents victims of human trafficking portray an image of

victims as foreign women in forced prostitution, as passive, without agency, and innocent. Every year, for instance, the NPA prints thousands of emergency outreach leaflets, which a potential human trafficking victim can use to access assistance. They fit easily in one's pocket or wallet when folded, and provide information in several languages when pulled open like an accordion. From around 2008 on, these leaflets became text-only, perhaps in a bid to prioritize the provision of different languages over visual appeal, but browsing the materials at a public women's center in the summer of 2008, I happened across a leftover copy of an older incarnation, which depicted an earlier era of government representations of human trafficking.

The cover of the leaflet (see Figure 8) is much more arresting than the more recent versions. A cartoon man in a purple suit is superimposed over a black background. His head, which dwarfs the rest of his body, is dominated by a shock of brown (peroxided?) hair, a large sideways grin, and black glasses drawn over his nose to reveal sharply slanted eyebrows and a scheming look in his eyes. In one arm he is carrying a woman who is flailing helplessly. She is well dressed in a pink dress suit and pearls. Her skin is a darker hue than the white-yellowish skin of the man, and she has long blonde hair. Her eyes are squeezed tightly shut and there is a sweat drop on her temple. The two figures are superimposed on top of a globe that he is carrying her across. "Help!" is written in large font about the two, and copied in smaller font in five other languages.



Figure 8: The front cover of an emergency outreach leaflet for victims of human trafficking, retrieved in the summer of 2008. The leaflet is produced by the National Police Agency as part of its anti-trafficking efforts.

The visual representations of both trafficker and trafficking victim deserve our scrutiny. The trafficker, with his exaggerated devious eyes and eyebrows, bears resemblance to illustrated depictions of *yakuza*, or organized crime groups. His fiendishness is offset by the flailing victim. In Japanese *manga* comics, blonde hair is typically a visual marker of innocence and naiveté (especially in women) rather than an indicator of ethnic difference. Given that most trafficking victims have been Southeast Asian and East Asian women, it seems especially unlikely that the blonde hair would be meant as a literal representation of ethnic identity.

On the subsequent pages of the outreach leaflet, each page provides an explanation of “trafficking in persons” in a different language<sup>106</sup> and explains that the red

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<sup>106</sup> The top of the leaflet reads, “‘Trafficking in persons’ refers to a crime committed by organized crime syndicates or other criminal groups to bring in foreign women, children or others to be forced into prostitution or forced labor.” It is worth noting that for many victims of trafficking, the kind of awareness of one’s circumstances and of one’s

page at one end can be shown to a Japanese stranger, who will then help the victim to find help. The red page reads (in Japanese), “I am a trafficking victim, so please call the police.” The blonde woman is pictured again, this time holding the card out in front of her. At the bottom, a police officer smiles while saluting. Since the leaflet assumes that the stranger helping the woman will make the necessary phone calls, all the relevant phone numbers are collated on one page.

From around 2008 on, the NPA switched to a text-based card. Like its predecessor, it fits easily in a pocket when folded, but this one provides information in ten languages (including Japanese). The front cover has “HELP!” listed in nine languages, and the individual pages provide a short description followed by phone numbers. For instance, the English page reads, “Were you brought to Japan and tricked into prostitution/the sex industry [sic] or forced labor? The Police, the Regional Immigration Bureaus, the Women’s Consulting Offices, NGOs, and other organizations will protect these trafficking victims. Please don’t be afraid to call one of the following phone numbers or show the page marked with ★□ to someone to seek help.” The English page lists the contact numbers of the police, immigration bureaus across the country, and an NGO hotline. While other language pages provide an embassy phone number, the English page simply refers the reader to the other embassies listed. It is unclear whether this is because the NPA bureaucrats designing this card couldn’t imagine an Anglophone victim, or because there is not enough space to list several embassies – it is worth noting that the Spanish-language page lists only the Colombian embassy number.

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complicity in them suggested by this definition might not have much meaning. Migrants’ rights advocates, sex worker advocates, and others have called for their active participation in anti-trafficking activities.

These cards can be found at a hodgepodge of government centers, including women's centers, consultation desks for foreigners, municipal government offices, and legal bureaus. In fact, I first encountered one at a local city office when I was living in rural Shimane prefecture in 2006. Let's Fight Slavery Japan always had some available in their office, and when I met with the political secretary responsible for researching human trafficking at the US Embassy, he gave me a large stack, still wrapped in plastic vinyl, to distribute. Perhaps, he suggested, they would be useful in my fieldwork. The Japanese government reports that these outreach leaflets are widely distributed at locations where a victim might come across them, and since 2005, approximately 280,000 leaflets have been distributed (Naikaku Kanbō 2013:5).

Unconnected to the leaflets printed by the NPA, the Cabinet Office has released anti-human trafficking posters meant to raise awareness of trafficking among the general public every year since 2005. In the first two years of this program, the posters were published only in Japanese. Since 2007, however, they have been translated into English on the reverse side. They are printed both as large posters and on A4-size paper as glossy flyers, which can be picked up at various government offices.

Seen over time, these posters show changing government attitudes toward representing human trafficking. All nine posters produced to date show victims who are female or youthfully androgynous. Innocence is a continuing theme, as is passivity or helplessness. In the very first poster (see Figure 9), a giant black arm and hand tower over a small female figure like a wave. She looks behind her with a frightened look on her face and is trying to get away. "Don't snatch away my future," read large block letters, and smaller font explains that human trafficking (*jinshin torihiki*) is a crime by international

organized crime groups that involves the forced prostitution of foreign women. The poster adds that buying sex (*kaishun*) causes human trafficking, and requests that any reader who is asked for help by a victim please contact the police or immigration.



Figure 9: The first human trafficking awareness poster printed by the Cabinet Office in 2005: “Don’t Snatch Away my Future.” The poster states that human trafficking is a crime involving the forced prostitution of foreign women.

In another poster, the imagery is of a woman huddled on top of a giant palm that is about to grasp her, and in another, one sees only the backside of a woman with her head in her hands, presumably crying. Another shows just a hand clutching a stuffed rabbit doll; the arm has a barcode on it. In 2007, a note mentioning that human trafficking causes grave physical and psychological harm to victims and constitutes a violation of both human rights and human dignity was added. But it was only in 2008 that the

definition of human trafficking on these posters was adapted to include forced “harsh labor” in addition to prostitution. In the past few years, the posters have focused more on emphasizing that human trafficking does occur in Japan (e.g. “Trafficking in persons is actually happening in Japan. This is NOT about other countries”). The 2007 poster stands out for targeting Japanese male overseas travelers. The backdrop of the poster is at an airport and two memos superimposed on this scene feature “to do” items: wake up at 8 am, go sight-seeing at 1 pm, and go shopping at 3 pm. Among the items the returning tourist wishes to buy are whiskey, perfume, a scarf, and sex – with both women and children. Superimposed on this image is the message, “Can you really talk about all the things you bought abroad?” (note: the poor quality of the English translations suggests that the production of these posters is not a high priority for the Cabinet Office, e.g. “You bought Abroad.... Can you honestly declare ALL?”).

### *Who is a Victim?*

The particular gendered assumptions of trafficked labor become clear when examining the victim support structure for human trafficking in Japan. The 2009 Action Plan recognized, where the 2004 plan did not, that in theory, at least, there might also be male victims of human trafficking, referring to the possibility of exploitation in the “Foreign Trainee and Technical Internship Program.”<sup>107</sup> The 2009 Action Plan further

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<sup>107</sup> There is no visa category for “unskilled” laborers wishing to migrate to Japan. In 1990, however, the Japanese government established the “Foreign Trainee Program” (*Gaikokujin Kenshū Seido*), which was expanded in 1993 to include a “Technical Internship Program” (*Ginō Jisshūsei Seido*). Branded as a form of international aid through human resource development, this program has created a window for unskilled laborers to migrate to Japan for up to three years in fields such as agriculture, fisheries, construction, food manufacturing, textiles, and machinery. Participants have come

acknowledged that support for female victims had simply been conducted through incorporating them into the pre-existing infrastructure for female victims of prostitution [sic] (and which had itself been overwhelmed over the past decade or two by victims of domestic violence), that the government would look into establishing a victim assistance infrastructure for males (Hanzai Taisaku Kakuryō Kaigi 2009:11), although the 2013 follow-up report makes it clear that this infrastructure has as of yet still to materialize (Naikaku Kanbō 2013), and that the government has dragged its feet on this, its own stated goal, for the past five years.

As I have noted, the Japanese government views “trafficking” as an issue of the forced prostitution of non-Japanese women. Only three male victims of human trafficking have been identified (for cleaning work in a sex industry business (HURights Osaka 2011)), and there is no discourse whatsoever of male or transgendered victims of trafficking.<sup>108</sup> Only LFSJ refers to male trafficking when it talks about the sexual exploitation of boys. I argue that the media and government are reluctant to address male and transgendered sex trafficking because sexual labor is officially the domain of female (or feminized) bodies. It is not what males are supposed to be doing. This attitude is, of course, highly ironic in a country with a vibrant and diverse same-sex and “new half” sex and entertainment industry. But, the laws avert their gaze from regulating this industry in

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predominantly from East and Southeast Asia, especially China, and at the program’s peak, in 2008, there were about 200,000 trainees in Japan (Ito 2013). Although the Japan International Training Cooperation Organization (JITCO) oversees the program, it has no regulatory power and only provides support or assistance. Over the past decade, reports of trainees being made to work long hours at minimal pay (and without overtime), having their bank accounts controlled by their employers, and having their movements restricted have led to heavy criticism of the program as paving the way for gross exploitation of migrant workers who are dependent on their employer for a renewal of their contract.

<sup>108</sup> To my knowledge, there has not been a single victim of labor trafficking in the “foreign trainee” system identified.

the same way that the heteronormative industry is regulated and seen as being potentially harmful to society's larger morals. The Prostitution Prevention Law (*Baishun Bōshi Hō*, or *Baibōhō*), for instance, explicitly refers to prostitutes as female and limits the act of prostitution to penile-vaginal intercourse. Similarly, sex industry business legislation rests on a definition of heteronormative sexual service. This unwillingness to address male or transgendered forms of commercial sexual labor translates not just to a lack of identification of potential victims, but also no infrastructure to support them.

A case in the summer of 2011 illustrated some of these structural inadequacies. In July, a group of five Filipino women in their twenties traveled from their home province to Kumamoto prefecture, on the southern island of Kyūshū. They arrived on “entertainer” visas to work as dancers, but when they arrived in Kumamoto, were put to work as hostesses entertaining Japanese men. Their passports were taken from them and they were paid only minimal wages. From the scanty Japanese media, it is clear only that someone from the group went to the local police to complain about the situation and, while the working conditions apparently didn't warrant launching a criminal investigation/case, the five women were declared to be victims of human trafficking.

At this point, the case took an interesting turn that sheds light on the structure of victim support in Japan. One of the five women was a “new half” (*nyū hāfu*).<sup>109</sup> As the media on the case clumsily described her, “externally” she was a woman, but anatomically, her sex was male. Although normally, officially identified victims of trafficking are given public assistance (including shelter and medical assistance), because

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<sup>109</sup> A term which straddles the Euro-American categories of transgender and transsexual without fitting neatly into either. In contrast, “half” (*hāfu*) is an older and slightly pejorative term for a person of visible mixed ancestry/ethnicity.

this assistance is channeled through the government-run women's consulting centers, the woman had to be sent to a private shelter instead. While her compatriots stayed at a government shelter for one month before returning home, the woman returned home after ten days (likely encouraged to leave earlier since the private shelters were spending their own funds). The media reporting was upset that an officially identified trafficking victim had repatriated without receiving any public assistance, writing about it as an embarrassing event (Jinshin Torihiki Firipinjin "Dansei Hosutesu" Seibetsu no Kabe 2011).

Several weeks later, at a panel discussion between several representatives of organizations working with migrant women, I asked a woman employed at an NGO offering emergency shelter to Japanese and foreign migrant women in Fukuoka – not far from Kumamoto – about the case. She recalled it immediately, and said it had caused a bit of a stir, especially at the regional liaison conference on human trafficking between immigration, the police, public prosecutors, women's consulting centers, and private NGOs. Immigration had been insistent that, as a victim of human trafficking, the Filipino woman (the NGO employee seemed uncertain of how to refer to her herself, referring to her first as a "new half woman," and then as a "new half person") receive public assistance. Because, however, the women's consulting centers – which also offer emergency shelter, particularly for victims of domestic violence – can only accept individuals who are registered as female on their household registers, the women's consulting centers were unable to accept the woman, and a private shelter had been sought out instead. She pointed out that there are also many sexual minorities among victims of domestic violence, and because of the same government limitation, they end

up being channeled to private NGOs as well. These private NGO networks are now debating among themselves what to do, whether to channel all sexual minorities to one shelter or to base shelter on the victim's gender identity (i.e. such that a "new half" woman would be able to stay with other women) – it was an ongoing discussion they were having. At this, another panel discussant – a professor whose work focuses on Thai migrant women to Japan who have repatriated – jumped in to say that the trend in Japan has been for NGOs, and not the government, to be at the frontlines of support for victims of domestic violence or human trafficking as well as supporting sexual minority victims of violence. It's all up to private organizations to step up and create their own models for assistance – the government isn't doing anything.

Although it didn't cause any waves, this case made me realize that, more broadly, there is no discernible discourse of violence (physical, psychological, or sexual) against men. With the exception of groups working with sexual minorities, at no other time did I encounter any explicit attention to adult men as vulnerable subjects. Even LFSJ focused on boys, with no stories of adult men to parallel those of adult women. While this marks a lack of imagination on the part of the Japanese women's movement (noting, also, that the nascent rights movement for sexual minorities has not yet entered into state feminist institutions such as the women's centers), it is also part of a system where the Human Rights Bureaus, as I describe below, advertise separate hotlines for women's and children's rights but there is no mention of men as also being vulnerable in certain ways. The one exception is male victims of forced labor in the trainee/intern system.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Since they are non-Japanese, we can speculate that they are, presumably, placed in a different category.

As the Kumamoto case makes clear, there is no infrastructure providing support for men *as* vulnerable subjects. In the case of sexual minorities, because women's centers require people to be registered as females on their household register (*koseki*), they are not accepted with public assistance, and it is up to the efforts of private organizations and shelters to use their own funds to assist these individuals. Similarly, the issue of intimate partner violence against men has gone unaddressed. As pointed out in a Japan Times piece, although a 2012 government survey found that 18.3% of male respondents reported physical, mental/emotional, or sexual abuse from their heterosexual partners, this went unaddressed. When the Japan Times contributor spoke to the bureau about this, a representative reportedly said that because the purpose of the survey was to learn about the extent of intimate partner violence toward women, violence against men was outside of their mandate (Hassett 2012)! This kind of blatant averting of one's gaze, while undoubtedly also reflecting lack of funds and other infrastructural limitations, demonstrates that the topic of male vulnerability to partner violence or, to put it differently, males as victims, is simply not an acceptable discourse. Following the Kumamoto case, LFSJ commented on their website that the case demonstrated the inadequacy of the government's support for victims of trafficking, and that civil society needed to hold them accountable to their claim to "look into" creating shelters for males in the 2009 Action Plan. LFSJ did, however, also mention that the "forced sexual labor is about women" myth is also tied to a larger neglect of male victims, and that we need to stop thinking about victims as just men or women but in terms of a whole spectrum of gender and sexual orientation.

Later on it occurred to me that if the government defines “trafficking” as just involving the forced prostitution of non-Japanese females, then it can appear to be protecting human rights while actually ignoring a host of issues concerning migrants and/or the sex industry (not to mention that, as I have already noted, the identification procedures of victims are themselves murky).

The reporting style of the government itself renders those male or transgendered victims who have been recognized by the government invisible. That is, the yearly reports put out by the NPA and immigration do not specify the gender of the victims (only the nationality, age group, and visa status); gender goes *unmarked* in these victim statistics, presumably under the assumption that they will be female. Certainly, seen together with the posters and outreach cards put out by the government, one would assume that all victims are female. Thus, I learned about the three male victims identified in 2010 only from a non-profit group’s memo on the report, in which they noted that they had contacted the relevant ministry and received the information first hand. Similarly, while I knew before looking at the data that there was at least one transgendered victim in 2011, this was not made explicit in the data (interestingly, the HURights Osaka memo – undoubtedly out of a greater sensitivity to the individual’s chosen gender identity – noted that all victims were women, thus, ironically, making her invisible as well). Surely, male and transgendered victims demand extra and adapted awareness-building efforts (c.f. government posters) as well as additional resources, such as shelters.

One major example of this is the government’s own contradictory stance on women’s commercial sexual labor. Both the Prostitution Prevention Law (written in 1956, fully enacted in 1958) and the Cabinet Office’s Gender Equality Bureau’s “Plan for

Gender Equality 2000” (and subsequent documents) refer to prostitution in no uncertain terms as infringing upon women’s human rights and human dignity. The latter document also suggests that eliminating prostitution is a necessary for achieving gender equality (Danjo Kyōdō Sankakukyoku 2000). At the same, the reader will remember that “prostitution” is defined as penile-vaginal intercourse. While the government declares this act as denigrating women, it has no problem, apparently, with the sex industry as a source of the denigration of women’s dignity. I am not arguing that the sex industry should be seen as a source of the violation of women’s rights or dignity. Rather, I am pointing to the arbitrary or awkward logic by which penile-vaginal intercourse is seen as infringing upon women’s rights but anal sex, oral sex, or any other host of acts is not. As many conservative feminists point out, it rings hollow for the government to point to one as being harmful while regulating an entire sex industry and leaving it be.

### *Government Discourses on Human Rights*

Attitudes about who is a victim of violence align with broader approaches to human rights in Japan. The anti-human trafficking materials I discussed above assume that human trafficking is an issue affecting non-Japanese women, and refer these women – or the individuals they have asked for help – to various authorities, including the police and immigration officials. In July of 2008, I visited the Human Rights Counseling Center for Foreigners at the Tokyo Legal Affairs Bureau. This is one of the sites that the Ministry of Justice lists in its materials on the human rights of foreigners. It seems a strange place to expect potential human trafficking victims – or, for that matter, any foreigner whose legal status might be questioned – to come.

The Bureau is nestled in Tokyo's Chiyoda district, an area that is home to many institutions symbolizing national power – including numerous national government agencies, the Imperial Palace and gardens, and Tokyo Station. Like many government buildings, it is characterized by a bland postwar architecture consisting of a towering grey block building. Walking through the lobby to the elevator, one might think of the 2009 Action Plan, which says that “institutions concerned will enhance the effort to identify victims by creating an environment where people feel comfortable seeking guidance and do not hesitate to report cases of trafficking in persons” (Ministerial Meeting Concerning Measures Against Crimes Japan 2009:8). Despite official proclamations of making this a welcoming experience, traveling to the heart of Tokyo's administrative center to consult on a human rights issue might necessitate a level of conviction that many individuals might not have. They might have second thoughts in the time it takes for the elevator to take them up to the twelfth floor. In fact, the irony that the government actively encourages potential trafficking victims to get in contact with the police or immigration – or locations such as the Legal Affairs Bureau – has not gone unnoticed. Early in my fieldwork one veteran advocate smirked as she looked at the NPA's emergency outreach card, noting that for many foreign migrant laborers, the police and immigration represent authorities to avoid at all costs. Even a trafficking victim would think twice before calling them.

After exiting the elevator on the twelfth floor, I headed a few steps down a long and drab hallway until I saw a temporary sign set up advertising the counseling window outside a door on the right. When I entered, the receptionist behind the counter got up to greet me, but the first thing I noticed were the two toddler-sized plastic blow-up dolls

sitting on chairs at the entrance to the room (see Figure 10). They were the two mascots of the Ministry of Justice’s Human Rights Bureau, and each held up a sign in its hand advertising one of the bureau’s hotlines.



Figure 10: The gendered mascots of the Ministry of Justice’s Human Rights Bureau greet visitors to the counseling desk for foreigners at the Tokyo Legal Affairs Bureau. The signs in their hands advertise hotlines for women’s and children’s rights. July 2008. Photograph by author.

Like many commercial, educational, and government ventures in Japan, the Human Rights Bureau has its own set of campaign mascots, a male-female pair named Jinken Mamoru-kun and Jinken Ayumi-chan. The word *jinken*, which forms the surname for both,<sup>111</sup> means both “human rights” and “civil rights.” In practice, the usage is often ambiguous, but in this case, the Ministry of Justice itself glosses *jinken* as “human rights.” The two Chinese characters which make up *jinken* are physically represented on

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<sup>111</sup> While the success of mascots seems to rest partially on how their personalized characteristics are balanced with cuteness, it is unclear, however, what kind of relationship the two mascots are supposed to have with one another – whether they are siblings, for example, lovers (their age is also ambiguous), or have some other familial relationship with one another.

the bodies of the mascots themselves – the bangs or forelock of each are shaped as the character for “person” and the second character, “ken,” is written in Romanized text on their clothing. The “female” gendered mascot, Ayumi (“progress”), sports a red dress, red booties, and red headscarf, while her “male” counterpart, Mamoru (“to protect”), wears a green jumper, orange booties, and an orange hood. Other than their clothing, their gender is marked primarily by Ayumi’s exaggerated eyelashes and Mamoru’s more confident – even cheeky – facial expressions and body language.

Together, Mamoru and Ayumi are charged with popularizing the concept of human rights to the public. Their image is prominently splashed across educational materials produced by the Bureau, and even on administrative documents (such as the sheet you fill out to report a human rights violation). They even show up “in person” at events in giant mascot costumes. Seeing them seated at the entrance to the consulting counter, however, what surprised me was that Ayumi held a sign advertising the women’s rights hotline and Mamoru held a sign advertising the children’s rights hotline. Why was the mandate of the Human Rights Bureau being divided in this way?

Frühstück (2007:128-138), writing about the Japan Self-Defense Forces’ use of mascots in public relations materials, notes the “significant communicative potency” produced by the “cuteness” of mascots (136). While this is true as a public relations or marketing tool more generally in Japan, she illustrates how the Self-Defense Forces have manipulated the “strategic use of cuteness [...] as a tool for achieving a more sympathetic public response,” (136), in this case, normalizing and familiarizing the military with a public that has, in the postwar period, been unfamiliar with the role or necessity of national military forces. One can imagine a similar role for Ayumi and Mamoru, as

“jinken” is a word that is often associated with historically discriminated against groups in Japan. On Human Rights Bureau paraphernalia, the two are always pictured together, in activities, for example, such as running through a field of flowers with thought bubbles above them reading, “let’s think about others’ feelings,” or, “let’s cultivate a sympathetic heart” (*sodateyō omoiyari no kokoro*). These characters are likely popular with children, and the phrase “a sympathetic heart” reappears on the flower containers associated with the “Flowers for Human Rights” (*jinken no hana undo*) campaign launched by the Bureau as part of its promotional events. As described in a pamphlet put out by the Bureau,

“The ‘Flowers for Human Rights’ campaign launched in 1982 is an educational campaign aimed primarily at elementary school students. Seeds and bulbs are sent to elementary schools and the children must work together to plant and raise the flowers. In the process, they witness the preciousness of life, and foster an abundant and sympathetic heart. Through presenting the flowers to their parents or to residents at senior homes and holding drawing and appreciation sessions, the campaign is effective in promoting respect for human rights in the family and the local community” (Hōmushō Jinken Yōgokyoku 2007).

This sense of human rights as something that emanates from a particular disposition toward the people around one pervades the construction of human rights conveyed by the Bureau, as I describe below.

This approach to human rights seems to be institutionalized within the mechanisms for addressing human rights concerns. The young woman who had stood up to receive me when I entered the room asked what she could do for me. When I told her that I wasn’t there to consult about a possible human rights issue but wanted to learn more about the mechanisms for protecting (foreigners’) human rights, she took a folder under her arm and ushered me into one of two small rooms opposite the reception counter.

Each room was furnished only with a desk, two chairs, and a phone. She left the door open. Next door another bureaucrat was having a loud phone conversation (his door was open as well).

The woman gave me some bureau materials and outlined for me the system for dealing with violations. The mandate of the Legal Affairs Bureau – and seven others like it, plus more than forty District Legal Affairs Bureaus – is twofold: to provide counseling and mediation, including investigation into possible cases of human rights violations, and to help promote a human rights consciousness among the public through educational activities. The woman explained to me that the bureaus don't have any decision-making or enforcement powers. Rather, their role is to act as mediators whose job it is to resolve a dispute between two parties. A successful settling of a case involves having the other party involved come in (with the consultee's permission) and achieving a conciliation between the two. In the case of a criminal act, they will refer the case to the police or, in the case of domestic violence, for example, send a victim to a women's counseling office for emergency shelter (the assumption being, of course, that the victim is female). The woman was reluctant to disclose what kinds of cases they typically arbitrate, but generalized by saying things relating to the workplace, international marriages, or cases of stalking.

Later on, when I rifled through the materials provided to me during our conversation, I realized that the sense in which "human rights" was being used at this bureau was very different from what I had expected. The issues most prominently represented in materials put out by the Human Rights Bureau (HRB) revolve around fairly low-level incidents like bullying, sexism in the workplace, and the mistreatment of

the elderly (e.g. negligent children). While the HRB also identifies issues such as those concerning disabled persons, Burakumin, Ainu, foreigners, HIV-positive individuals, the rights of ex-criminals – issues that deal with structural or systematic discrimination – they are given short shrift.<sup>112</sup> These are issues that are more identifiable to Americans, for example, as human rights issues, but, for the most part, the sense is that the consulting bureaus are there to deal with low-level disputes. Rosch, writing of the bureaus in the mid-1980s, confirmed this:

“Less than five percent of the cases require more than counseling by the commissioners. Cases arise from complaints about neighbors, family members, and minor public officials. A great many involve public nuisances, such as dogs, loud music, noisy children, bad odors, and noise or vibrations from trains, planes, construction, or business activity” (Rosch 1987:245).

He further pointed out that “less than one percent of the cases involve public officials” (1987:244).

Rosch argues that “human rights” (again, it can also be glossed as “civil rights”) as constructed by the HRB have more to do with social or group rights than individual rights per se. This is significant. As the expatriate American law professor Colin P.A. Jones wrote in the Japan Times, “the underlying assumption is, of course, that human rights violations are a problem caused by citizens with an inadequate understanding of the subject” (Jones 2008). This is very different from the understanding of human rights of, say, the United Nations. Discourses and practices of human rights historically evolved from Euro-American reactions to oppressive governments and the understanding that

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<sup>112</sup> It is also surprising, for instance, to see that acts such as marriage discrimination against individuals of *Buraku* descent are put in the same category as unfair blame on a foreign resident of an apartment complex for misplaced trash. While both acts are motivated by prejudice, the degree of harm caused seem very different.

rights were needed as a way of protecting individual citizens from government abuses of power. In this formulation, human rights are a way of protecting citizens *from* the state, with the state as the violator – or antagonist – of human rights. In contrast, as seen through the HRB, the state has co-opted the language for itself, addressing rights violations as private acts between citizens that stem, supposedly, not from systematic structures of oppression or discrimination, but from an inadequate or underdeveloped sense of empathy for those around you.

In addition to the legal affairs bureaus which promote the work of the Human Rights Bureau, a system of human rights commissioners (also referred to as “Human Rights Volunteers” [sic]) complements the work of the Human Rights Bureau and the legal affairs bureaus. These are private citizens working as volunteers who are selected by their local municipal government and then nominated to the Ministry of Justice. There are approximately 14,000 commissioners today. Their mandate is to be available as mediators in their local communities and also, even if no one steps forward, to investigate local incidents that they might catch wind of. Essentially, however, like the legal bureaus, they function as a form of extra-legal conciliation. While they seem to be picked as upstanding members of their communities, in reality, the qualifications of these commissioners as sensitive experts in human rights work is unclear. Writing in 1996 (although it is unclear whether much has changed since then), Ian Neary wrote that “the positions are prestigious, mainly filled by retired men” (1996:7). It is unclear what depth of expertise or training these privileged older men have, including as concerns sensitivity to issues of discrimination.

Neary has pointed to “the government’s preference for measures that discourage litigation, reward cooperation with the state and dependency on the bureaucracy in order to maintain control over social change” (Neary 1996:16). Certainly, grassroots NGOs in Japan have criticized the system for being ineffectual, and it is telling that none of the human rights groups I have worked with have ever mentioned this system nor had I ever really heard anyone talk about it. As Rosch put it more than twenty-five years ago, “groups traditionally discriminated against, such as Koreans, women, and Burakumin [...] do not find the CLB especially useful” (Rosch 1987: 245).

A major criticism of human rights mechanisms in Japan is that there is no mechanism *independent of* the government. As noted, the HRB is nested within the same government ministry that is also responsible for prisons, detention centers, and immigration centers (Amnesty International 2008). A United Nations synthesis of NGO criticism reports, “The lack of independence of this institution, inherent in this arrangement, undermines its authority to function effectively and to speak out on human rights concerns without fear of censorship” (Amnesty International 2008).<sup>113</sup> The same report also points out that potential claimants might be deterred by submitting a complaint about the government *to* the government. The United Nations continues to recommend that the Japanese government set up an independent human rights institution

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<sup>113</sup> Similarly, as a supposed concession to the opposition to a highly controversial “State Secrets Bill” (*Tokutei Himitsu Hogo Hōan*) in December 2013, Prime Minister Shinzō Abe announced that a special oversight body would be created to check possible government abuses. Opponents of the bill immediately noted, however, that members of the proposed oversight body would be drawn, in part, from ministries under the jurisdiction of the Cabinet, thus compromising the body’s independence (McCurry 2013; Mie 2013). The fact that Prime Minister Abe suggested that this body would be an effective “third party” mechanism suggests, as with the lack of independence of the Human Rights Bureau, that it is more broadly acceptable for the state not to put checks on itself.

external to the Ministry of Justice that fits the parameters of the Paris Principles. In fact, a bill to create such a body was submitted to the Diet in November 2012 by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ Submits Human Rights Panel Bill 2012); when the Liberal Democratic Party regained power, however, the bill was thrown out (Ministry Drops DPJ Rights Panel Bill 2013). Other criticisms of the Japanese human rights system as it stands are that the burden is placed on the victims to approach the counselors or bureaus and, critically, that there are no laws protecting against discrimination. Thus, although much of the human rights paraphernalia put out by the HRB urges against discrimination and/or prejudices, it does little to actually address the structures that allow it in the first place, or to address social and/or economic empowerment of marginalized individuals or groups.

### *Exchanging Opinions on Human Trafficking*

What, then, are some of the obstacles to improving victim assistance? Since 2003, JNATIP, a coalition of Japanese anti-human trafficking advocates, has lobbied the government for improved victim support measures. Some of the issues involved in the government-NGO relationship, however, will become apparent in what follows. A few months after the NPA's "Contact Point" conference, I was able to observe the relationship between the government and NGOs more clearly when I attended an opinion exchange meeting (*ikenkōkankai*) between the two parties. While the "Contact Point" conference might be seen as a symbol to the rest of the world of the Japanese government "taking on" trafficking, the opinion exchange is a meeting between representatives from relevant government ministries and the JNATIP anti-trafficking lobbying group. The opinion exchange implies that the government and civil society are equal partners in

combatting human trafficking, an illusion that is normally shown as just that. Although the exchange is supposed to happen once a year, it had lapsed the previous year (in 2010), so this time JNATIP had taken the initiative to make sure it happened. This resulted in a much smaller room and group than the last time I had attended, in the summer of 2009, when we had been in a formal meeting hall in one of the large Diet buildings.

The exchange took place in a meeting room at one of the administrative buildings connected to the Cabinet Office. As with the “Contact Point” conference, the seating at the opinion exchange was highly circumscribed. In this case, packets with our names and affiliations printed on them were placed on the large table in the middle of the room or on the chairs in the back, for those designated as “observers.” There were about thirty people seated at the table, and an additional nine observers associated with JNATIP, plus several aides on the government side. The government side took up three sides of the table, ironically providing the appearance of a face-off between the two parties. With perhaps one or two exceptions, most of the government representatives seemed to be mid-level bureaucrats, not the authorities in charge. Due to the “vertical,” top-down hierarchy (*tatewari*) of Japan’s government bureaucracy, NGOs commonly referred to meetings with middlemen as a waste of time.

Unlike at the Contact Point conference, the smaller size and format of this meeting allowed for more interaction between the two sides. The meeting began with each government representative briefly summarizing the actions which their ministry had recently taken (or was continuing to take) to combat trafficking. These often took no more than two minutes each. For example, the first representative, from the Gender Equality Bureau within the Cabinet Office, briefly reported on the Bureau’s printing of

the posters described earlier and how they attempted to build public awareness that human trafficking is a human rights violation and that buying sex can lead to it. Following these brief presentations, the remaining time was given over to a conversation between the two sides. JNATIP had submitted a list of questions beforehand, although there was sufficient leeway during the meeting for swaying off subject.

Glancing around the room during the meeting, there were some stark contrasts between the two parties. The government side was, as usual, mostly male, with only four women among the group. All wore dark suits. The NGO side, in contrast, was much less formal. It was highly feminized, with only two males present. The NGO side, frustrated with previous meetings in which nothing had been accomplished, seemed to be pursuing a more aggressive strategy this time, through pressing the government representatives on specifics, such as who was leading the anti-trafficking awareness sessions for police officers and how often exactly did they occur.

While the advocates seemed to grow increasingly exasperated with the non-committal government responses, the majority of the government representatives seemed to be trying to just get through the meeting. One woman was nodding off throughout, while two men were writing notes intently the entire time – they were so absorbed in this, in fact, that it seemed unlikely to be related to the matter at hand. Others continually rifled through the documents in front of them, searching for something that wasn't ever found. The most active speakers on the government side were Officer Iida from the NPA, and a representative from immigration and from the Cabinet Office. In response to the aggressive questioning from JNATIP, the government employed various deflection tactics, such as saying “we're looking into it” before changing the subject, simply

thanking the speaker for their opinion, or begging off entirely, “I was just transferred here, so if my predecessor said that, then I don’t know anything about it.”

When a representative from a Yokohama-based anti-trafficking group posed a question about why the prostitution of under-aged girls wasn’t treated as human trafficking, Officer Iida seemed to temporarily forget his manners, leaning forward to express his surprise, “heh?!” In many of the materials put out by the government, child prostitution is mentioned, but separately from human trafficking (e.g. “human trafficking and child prostitution”), not as one manifestation of it. Officer Iida protested that runaway teenagers, for instance, might stay with a friend, have sex with an older man in exchange for money, and then keep all the money for themselves. Although he didn’t say so, his implication was that clearly, this wasn’t human trafficking. This contrasts with the US framework for human trafficking, however, where minors engaging in the exchange of sex for money are automatically seen as victims according to federal law (although federal and state law often clash – such as in Michigan, for instance, where state definitions of “minor” do not align with federal definitions). Officer Iida’s surprised reaction that under-aged prostitution should automatically be seen as trafficking made me reflect on some of the assumptions in Japanese law. The 1999 anti-child prostitution and pornography law had criminalized individuals who buy sex from children, following the notion that children can’t really consent to participating in prostitution or pornography. And yet, while it was believed that children needed extra protection, there was no intrinsic belief that because of this they should automatically be seen as trafficking victims. Officer Iida, in other words, took the agency of minors seriously.

As at other meetings, the unspoken assumption throughout the opinion exchange was the human trafficking was an issue of the forced prostitution of non-Japanese women. For the first time, however, Torii Ippei, a leading supporter for improved labor rights for foreign migrants workers,<sup>114</sup> was invited to the meeting, representing the first participation of a labor rights representative. He urged the participants at the exchange to think more broadly about the category of “labor exploitation” and what forms it might take. Speaking of his own experiences representing exploited foreign laborers in the Foreign Trainee and Technical Internship Program, he explained that the majority of trainees and interns are in Japan legally, and yet are often exploited by unscrupulous managers. He asked the participants to recognize that farms and factories could also be “hotspots” of human trafficking.

While the Contact Point meeting has a reception and breaks during which you can network with others, the opinion exchange is a two-hour meeting after which everyone leaves. Five minutes before the close of the meeting, one of the government representatives thanked all the participants for a productive meeting and closed the proceedings. Following the usual five minutes of scuffling as JNATIP members tried to catch government representatives they wanted to talk to on their way out, the room emptied out. I walked out with some JNATIP representatives, and asked them how they felt about the exchange. As usual, they felt that nothing much had been accomplished, and wondered whether it wouldn't be more effective to meet in small groups with key representatives. This might allow them to get more done. Although this opinion exchange

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<sup>114</sup> Torii is a longtime labor union activist. As of this writing, he is secretary-general of the organization Solidarity Network with Migrants Japan (*Ijūren*) and vice chairman of the Tokyo-based *Zentōitsu* labor union.

meeting is nominally an opportunity for civil society to impact government policy, they felt perpetually ignored. It was clear from the meeting that the government representatives felt that they had already acted sufficiently against trafficking, what more was there for them to do?

### *Conclusion*

In its efforts to incorporate international anti-human trafficking standards, the Japanese government has narrowly constructed victims as non-Japanese female migrants in forced prostitution, designating a racialized and gendered subject as the subject of state intervention (although not compassion). At the same time, individuals in objectively similar circumstances – including male or transgendered subjects, Japanese victims, or victims of other types of forced labor – are not seen as falling under the government’s responsibility. I have argued that behind this is a government approach toward human rights that constructs rights as emanating from citizens’ cultivated dispositions toward others rather than as a government mandate to ensure freedoms. In this way, the government can effectively defuse human rights challenges to it, at the same time that in the international arena, it must respond to international pressure by showing action on human trafficking.

## Chapter Six

### From Amateurs to Professionals: The Japanese Sex Workers' Rights Movement

In 1997, an essay entitled “A Sex Worker Looks at the [Birth Control] Pill” (*Sekkusu Wākā kara Mita Piru*) appeared in a theme issue on the pill in the leftist Japanese journal *Impaction*.<sup>115</sup> Despite over three decades of petitioning by Japanese pharmaceutical companies, the low-dosage pill had not yet been approved by the Ministry of Health and Welfare (MHW).<sup>116</sup> It would take until 1999, when the MHW’s almost immediate approval of the male impotency drug Viagra catalyzed public outcry over the obvious double standards in the approval process, for the MHW to declare the pill “safe and effective” and approve it for mass production (Norgren 2001:129-130). Throughout the postwar period, Japanese family planning had been characterized by a stance of “abortion before birth control,” with interminable turf wars between ob-gyns, midwives, and pharmaceutical companies generating considerable misinformation and doubts over the pill’s safety (Norgren 2001; WuDunn 1999). Newspaper polls conducted shortly before the pill’s approval showed public ambivalence: a mere 7.2% of respondents reported that they would take the pill (Efron 1999). *Impaction*’s theme issue intervened with critical in-depth perspectives on the pill, considering issues such as its

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<sup>115</sup> Published since 1979, *Impaction* is a bimonthly journal of leftist activism that “positions itself as a radical democratic media for articulating social issues that can link different movements together for criticizing imperialism” (Sakiyama 2001:366).

<sup>116</sup> The predecessor of today’s Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare (MHLW).

place in the history of contraception, the MHW's foot-dragging, and the tension between female bodily autonomy and national population interests.

The author of the essay in question identified herself as Momoka Momoko (a pseudonym), a sex worker and activist. Although it was nowhere noted in the journal issue, three years earlier at a speech at the 1994 International AIDS Conference in Yokohama, Momoka had also been the first Japanese to publicly “come out” as a sex worker.<sup>117</sup> Discussion of the pill, Momoka wrote in the *Impaction* essay, presented an opportunity to talk about what women working in the sex industry needed in order to work safely (Momoka 1997). Although Momoka identified herself as working in the smaller – and illegal – “intercourse sector” of the sex industry, she suggested that the sexual health risks that women faced there differed only in degree in an industry in which the common expectation of both managers and customers was that sex workers should be on the pill.<sup>118</sup> Sex workers took the pill for a variety of reasons: to prevent unintended pregnancy, to regulate one's menstrual cycle, and to distinguish between sex with customers and private sex. At the forefront of female sex workers' sexual health concerns, however, were sexually transmitted infections (STIs), especially HIV. Customers at illegal businesses mistook the pill as permitting unprotected sex, but even in

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<sup>117</sup> Sex workers have appropriated the transliterated English term “coming out” (*kamingu auto*) from “sexual minorities,” which is a term commonly used in Japan for referring to non-normative sexual or gendered populations. The appropriation of this term indicates a shared sense of an act of revealing something taboo about oneself to others who may not understand. Given broad national differences in identity politics, however, it is unclear to what extent the Japanese use of “coming out” runs parallel to American notions of an authentic identity being revealed and realized.

<sup>118</sup> A high-dosage pill had been available by prescription for therapeutic – but not contraceptive – purposes (e.g. menstrual problems) since the 1960s. The side effects attending use of this pill may have been to blame for some of the widespread skepticism over the safety of the low-dosage pill.

the mainstream sex industry, condoms were institutionally discouraged, in part because the services on offer would not lead to pregnancy. The pill was irrelevant to many of the risks that women throughout the sex industry were exposed to on a daily basis, such as those associated with giving fellatio without a condom, swallowing semen, or anal sex.

Sex work, Momoka observed, is neither intrinsically risky nor intrinsically violent. The problem, however, is that it often *becomes* risky or violent – why? Some of the problems faced by sex workers were shared more broadly. Customers who put sex workers at risk by insisting that the pill made condom use unnecessary were part of a larger cohort of men who put their wives or lovers at risk by being stubbornly oblivious to the difference between contraception and disease prevention. Low levels of sex education among the public were to blame, as was the vague or even inaccurate information about AIDS disseminated by the media. While most Japanese were complacent about their lack of access to sexual health information, sex workers had to take it upon themselves to learn about these topics. In the process, they often inadvertently became *de facto* educators of safe sex practices. Momoka noted that although she had never taken the birth control pill herself, she had had an almost 100% success rate in persuading customers to use condoms. She was, however, unusual in this regard.

In Momoka's essay, the oral contraceptive pill comes to stand for the question of sex workers' autonomy and empowerment. While it would be impossible to eliminate all risks associated with having sex, Momoka wrote that she wanted to explore how to reduce the risks of sex as much as possible while also maximizing pleasure. The ability of women in the sex industry to work safely was not rooted in whether they took the pill or

used a condom or limited what services they were willing to perform; it was rooted in their ability to exert decision-making power (*ketteiken*) over their own bodies and over the terms of sex and for those decisions to be respected.<sup>119</sup> Sex workers needed to have better access to sexual health information and to doctors who would not let stigma compromise women's ability to access accurate information or good care.

At a time when commercial sex had re-emerged as a topic for debate among Japanese feminists and scholars,<sup>120</sup> Momoka's essay made waves as the first statement about sex work from someone actually working in the sex industry. It was also a political stand, introducing the European/American framework of sex work *as* work and thus sex workers as autonomous agents who needed better working conditions but whose decisions also needed to be respected. Although outlining some of the parameters of the stigma faced by sex workers, she strongly rejected the notion that they were victims, saying that such attitudes overlooked those who really were victimized. She ended with a call for the building of a network of sex workers.

Momoka's essay, although written almost two decades ago, speaks to many of the issues that continue to hold primary relevance for women working in the Japanese sex industry today. The conditions of labor in this industry necessitate that sex workers –

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<sup>119</sup> The concerns voiced by Momoka in this essay are similar to those noted by the veteran Australian sex worker activist Cheryl Overs fifteen years later in her plenary speech at the 2012 International AIDS Conference in Washington, D.C. Overs quoted the former UNAIDS Executive Director, Peter Piot, in saying, "The [AIDS] epidemic is not driven by the lack of a pill or a gadget. The epidemic is driven by repression" (Overs 2012). Similarly, Momoka points out that fixating on the pill as a supposed panacea grossly overlooks the fact that stigma, marginalization, and lack of choices are the real causes of disease and danger in the sex industry.

<sup>120</sup> Among the issues related to commercial sex under debate in Japan throughout the 1990s were the commodification of sex, foreign migrant women working in the sex and entertainment industries, and the "compensated dating" (*enjo kōsai*) of middle and high-school girls. The latter became a topic of considerable media attention.

although not recognized *as* laborers – assume risk to their physical and sexual health on a daily basis. In this chapter, then, I consider what it means to advocate on behalf of a stigmatized laboring identity. The efforts of women working in the sex industry to organize and advocate on their own behalves and to galvanize a nascent identity politics are fraught by stigma surrounding the industry. In Chapter Three, I discussed how *shirōto* (“amateur”), is an often unspoken primary self-identification for women in the sex industry. This construction, which emphasizes authenticity and innocence, acts as a buffer against the stigmatizing label of “professional” sex worker and signifies that women are only passing through the industry short-term. While presenting oneself in this way conveys benefits to women, this chapter will make clear that shying away from a professional laboring identity also works *against* women’s interests in numerous ways. When women working in the sex industry present themselves as *shirōto*, they downplay – and devalue – their experience and knowledge, in ways reminiscent of the devaluation of female labor more generally.

This chapter, then, considers the question of identity politics in relation to the sex industry. I will show how some of the structural issues relating to a lack of labor protections that sex worker advocates challenge are held in common with other forms of women’s part-time work, including hostessing. The advocates organizing for sex workers’ rights experience increased government surveillance of the sex industry as further infringements on their status as laborers. Similarly, in courts, labor standards offices, and elsewhere, they are not granted full citizenship but distinguished from “ordinary” women.

## *STIs and Sexual Health*

In the context of the sex industry, one area in which an emphasis on “amateurs” has serious implications, and around which advocates thus devote significant energy, is the health of the sex workers themselves. As suggested by Momoka Momoko, due to the paltry state of Japanese sex education, wherein little information is conveyed about sexual health or sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and in a society in which being assertive about sex is seen as “unfeminine” and “knowing too much,” many Japanese women have little knowledge of sexual health or are discouraged to negotiate for safer sex (Castro-Vázquez 2007; Fu 2011; Japanese Association for Sex Education 2007). Rather, women are often encouraged to be *ukemi* (“passive”) when it comes to sex (see also Japanese Association for Sex Education 2007:36-37). The “pull-out” or “withdrawal” method (*sotodashi*), which offers no protection against STIs, is a common method of birth control (Kitamura 2011), and condoms are generally viewed as a contraceptive rather than prophylactic tool. Although HIV/AIDS rates are low in Japan compared to other postindustrial nations, Japan is notable for having an *upward* trend in cases (Kōseirōdōshō 2011:23). Males account for 93% of the total of HIV cases among Japanese citizens (and 84% of total cases in Japan), but while two-thirds of these cases are traced back to male-male unprotected sex, 22% of cases are traced back to male-female unprotected sex (Kōseirōdōshō 2011:25). Given that Japanese females only account for 7% of the registered HIV cases, it is likely that these 22% of male cases originate in the sex industry.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> For a report of rates of other STIs, see Kōseirōdōshō (2014).

In contrast to the United States, where public health campaigns that encourage sexually active individuals to make STI and/or HIV testing a routine part of their health maintenance have become relatively institutionalized (especially on college campuses), testing in Japan remains stigmatized. My own general health practitioner, who operated a busy practice in central Tokyo, told me that he only rarely receives requests for routine testing. His suspicion was that patients assume that these tests are only for individuals who have been up to some kind of abnormal (read: deviant) behavior. Due to both lack of awareness and fear, patients typically only came in for testing once their symptoms had already progressed.

The structure of the national healthcare system also discourages routine testing. Although Japan has an excellent national healthcare system whereby, among other things, one can see a specialist without a referral, STI exams are dealt with in a curious manner. The national healthcare system is based on a treatment model of dealing with conditions as they develop rather than a preventive care model. National insurance thus covers an STI or HIV exam only if a patient complains of symptoms; insurance will *not* cover a test for an individual who simply wants to receive a routine health exam.<sup>122</sup> The bill for the standard four exams given (Gonorrhea, Chlamydia, Syphilis, and HIV) amounts to about ¥10,000 (approximately \$100 USD). This translates to a significant financial burden for sex workers, who are obligated by their workplace to receive monthly or even semi-monthly check-ups and who must bear the full cost of the exams. Should a test return positive, sex workers cannot return to work until the symptoms have cleared.

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<sup>122</sup> When I discussed my options for getting STI exams with a sex worker friend, she suggested I pretend to have symptoms so that I could minimize my expenses. She acknowledged that this method could only be called upon once in a while though, as clinic staff would soon become suspicious and/or change their attitude toward me.

Participation in this system of medical surveillance of sex workers (c.f. customers) is enforced as managers prohibit women who do not submit regular health forms from working. In an industry without worker's compensation, this can be quite an economic burden for employees.<sup>123</sup>

Even in cases in which a sex worker exhibits symptoms of an STI and could apply her health insurance toward testing and treatment, the shared nature of health insurance often discourages this in practice. When a sex worker shares coverage with family members, they will avoid having the test and treatment show up on insurance reports and will pay out-of-pocket instead. While free and confidential testing and counseling is available at public clinics (*hokensho*), the time windows are typically limited to just a few hours on certain days of the week and the availability of tests varies greatly. While all clinics offer HIV testing, tests for other common STIs are more restricted. Moreover, some sex workers (especially “new half” sex workers) report being lectured to about their lifestyles and work by the clinic staff. In summary, the effect of this payment system seems to be part and parcel of a cultural atmosphere in which the prevalent attitude is that only people who have “been up to no good” need to worry about getting tested, and suggests that a large number of individuals are unaware about their STI-positive status.

The dangers of the emphasis on *shirōto* (“amateur”) sex workers under these conditions are obvious. Members of the general public have little knowledge about sexual health and, as in other areas, it is incumbent upon individual sex workers to learn on their

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<sup>123</sup> The issue of why treatment for an STI transmitted “on the job” should not be covered by worker's compensation (*rōsai hoken*) as job injuries or “accidents” came up numerous times during my fieldwork and is another example of how sex workers are vulnerable to weak labor law protections in this industry. I encountered only one woman – a strip theater dancer, who, like all dancers I met, did not consider herself a sex worker – who had taken out private insurance to protect herself in the event of injury or illness.

own. Employment magazines such as the ones described in Chapter Three typically have only a short feature on sexual health (although associated websites feature more comprehensive information).

Significantly, many – if not most – sex industry businesses have store policies that discourage – or even forbid – the use of condoms for many services. This occurs in a competitive market in which requiring condom use would mean losing out on business. According to a recent survey of 377 (female) sex workers from across Japan, female sex workers did *not* use condoms for routine sex industry services at the following rates: dry-humping (54% out of 326); fellatio (56% out of 330); ejaculation inside the mouth (70% out of 322); anal sex (21% out of 95); and penile-vaginal intercourse (14% out of 56) (Higashi 2010:28-29). When asked why they weren't using condoms, the overwhelming response (81%) was, “these are not services where it's necessary to wear a condom” (Higashi 2010:29). Similarly, during my interviews, sex workers also commonly said that because only the sex worker and not the customer is put at risk, oral sex without a condom is standard. While these comments suggest a lack of information about the transmission of STIs that is in itself alarming, it is also true, on the other hand, that regardless of the desires of individual sex workers to use condoms, they often have little say in the matter unless store policy explicitly allows it or customers themselves request condom use (Mizushima 2002).

With the domination of the sex industry by mobile, “delivery health” businesses since 1999 (Chapter One), oversight over the encounter between a sex worker and customer has diminished, making it more likely that unsafe – or illegal – sexual practices will be performed. Advocacy groups such as the one I worked with provide services to

sex workers by providing resources about sexual health on their website (formatted to be viewable on cell phones for more privacy), on informational pamphlets that are distributed to sex workers, and through hosting regular “happy hour” type events in which individuals currently or formerly working in the sex industry can casually mingle and exchange information. Private companies, such as STD Lab, a maker of home-STI tests, have also hired sex workers as consultants to produce semi-promotional materials that educate sex workers about sexual health. Their home test kits are expensive, however, and primarily offer the advantage of privacy.

Although sex workers are generally much more educated and aware of the risks of “unprotected” sex than the general population, as elsewhere, public policy in Japan focuses on sex workers as vectors of diseases.<sup>124</sup> Despite the fact that the sex industry is a legal and ubiquitous industry, there is little public or government interest in ensuring the health and human rights of sex workers, beyond providing minimal funding for HIV/AIDS research. In fact, sex worker advocacy groups are funded almost entirely by the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare (MHLW) and from local municipal funding. Both the MHLW and local governments outsource support work to the four social groups identified as “at-risk” (foreigners living in Japan, men having sex with men (MSM), sex workers and their clients, and young people), thereby channeling funding to advocacy groups (APLF 2004:58). As Miller (2002) and Momoka (1997:55) point out, it is a delicate subject for the government to do HIV research on sex workers because to

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<sup>124</sup> Cullinane (2007) and Miller (2002) have also discussed the larger irony that, despite Japanese females accounting for only a tiny percentage of Japanese HIV/AIDS cases, mainstream discourses initially focused first on foreign women, and then on Japanese women as the “culprits” responsible for transmitting the disease throughout the population.

acknowledge that penile-vaginal intercourse is being performed would be to acknowledge that prostitution – an illegal activity – is occurring with the government’s knowledge. This makes it very difficult to collect accurate data on topics such as condom usage.

### *Advocacy on the Ground*

The field of sex worker advocacy in Japan is small and revolves around mostly the same handful of individuals who form new groups to achieve a specific project and then peter out once it has been accomplished. During the period of my field research, there were two primary sex workers’ advocacy groups operating. Although I only had official contact with one group, many of the individuals in this group were active in the other as well. In fact, although the two groups had emerged at different times, it seemed as though the primary difference was their division of labor. The group I worked with is an advocacy group that conducted government-funded research into the sex industry, operated as a support hotline for women in the sex industry, and actively engaged with overseas networks of sex worker rights organizations. The other group, in contrast, is primarily a “self help,” or support, group and is exclusive to sex workers only. Both groups alternated events between the two major metropolitan areas of Japan: Tokyo and the Kansai area (housing Osaka, Kyoto, and Kobe).

I first met the woman whom I have called Sayaka throughout this dissertation in October 2010. Sayaka was a primary representative of the sex worker advocacy group and also a veteran sex worker. Although I had unsuccessfully been in contact with her on previous research trips, we met by accident at an event at the office of a leftist feminist group promoting pan-Asian women’s solidarity. The occasion was a talk by a Nepali

anti-human trafficking activist who was herself a trafficking survivor. In the Q&A session, Sayaka identified herself as a sex worker rights advocate and calmly asked two questions. The Nepali activist had told us that her anti-human trafficking organization, among other things, provided information to potential labor migrants warning them of the risks of human trafficking. Sayaka wanted to know whether they also provided information about how those labor migrants could safely find workplaces (including in the sex industry) where they would be less vulnerable to exploitation or labor abuses. I would later learn that this question was one she frequently came back to; namely, rather than dissuading individuals from sex industry work, Sayaka was interested in what information could be provided to them that would respect their decisions while still giving them tools to avoid danger. Her second question asked whether the Nepali police differentiate between victims of human trafficking and sex workers who experience labor abuses.

Sayaka is in her mid-thirties and originally from the greater Kansai area. She had come to Tokyo to attend university but had dropped out midway through. It was around this time that she first entered the sex industry and it wasn't long before she joined a newly formed advocacy group. Another advocate, a woman active in the hostess union (see below), described Sayaka as having a "mania," a fanatic drive going beyond the ordinary realm of enthusiasm or interest for advocacy. I later learned that a close family member of Sayaka's had been active as a longtime labor union organizer and had deeply impacted Sayaka.<sup>125</sup> Although Sayaka and I never spoke of this, I learned later that she had already been politically involved and advocacy-oriented from a young age, at least

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<sup>125</sup> Sayaka's concern that she or her family member be "outed" causes me to write in a roundabout way here.

since high school, when she and a friend had organized meetings for high school students in the greater Osaka area to talk with their peers about issues such as discrimination and the parameters of love and friendship. She had also been active in anti-war activities.

In many ways, Sayaka's values and actions seemed to be the reverse of dominant norms. She led a transient sort of lifestyle. At one of our first meetings, she described her lifestyle to me as *chūya gyakuten*, meaning literally that her nights and days were reversed; she slept during the day and was awake at night (this paralleled, of course, the schedule of the sex industry). I usually got e-mails from her late at night, but somehow she managed to meet during the day as well. I never saw her energy flag or her betray a sign of exhaustion once. In a sense, it seemed as if her life – the passions and activities she had set out for herself – also mirrored this reversal of everyday norms and values. She was anti-marriage, speaking casually about the capitalist underpinning of the “romantic love ideology, and was actively interested in ethnic-minority Japanese issues. This may have originated from her origins in the Kansai area in western Japan where these issues have been stressed more in the educational system due to prevalent discrimination, but is still unusual. She spoke often of wanting to be a single mother. She was learning English and Chinese and had taken the unusual step of working at Chinese, Korean, and Filipina sex industry businesses in order to become close to foreign migrant women and learn about their labor circumstances.

Sayaka's activism was grassroots and eminently practical. From her years of activism and working in the sex industry, she had prolific networks of contacts, including managers, male support staff, sex industry journalists, male, female, and “new half” sex workers, community advocates, and, outside of the industry, lawyers, doctors, and

researchers. As I discuss later in this chapter, she had contacts with Korean and Australian sex worker advocacy groups as well as with international groups. She seemed to have the most stamina of any of the advocacy group members and her apartment often served as a meeting place and office. Her apartment was where she invited women in the sex industry seeking consultations to meet with her and she even offered it as a space for my own interviews.

Once, after I had met with her and another advocate for two hours at the apartment to Skype with representatives of an international sex workers' advocacy group about an upcoming international AIDS, Sayaka dropped me off at the local train station and immediately picked up a researcher that the group was collaborating with on an STI project. Sayaka always had her phone in her hand, like a sort of fixer. She would often act as a direct one-on-one advocate, consulting at length over the phone and using her network to assist individuals, such as, for example, one Korean sex worker who had had secretly-taken footage of her having sex with a customer uploaded to the Internet. The advocacy activities Sayaka organized were typically eminently practical, such as Q&A sessions with lawyers or collating materials on social welfare or on the legal parameters of paying back loans.

Recently, Sayaka has had a two-year contract with the Osaka city government to do outreach activities with so-called "high-risk" groups for HIV (a euphemism in her case for sex workers). It was clear to her, however, that the city government didn't appreciate the sexual health work that she was doing, and her contract was not being renewed. In fact, she told me that her supervisor at the city government has even sexually harassed her, assuming that she was a sex worker (although she wasn't "out" to her

colleagues) and telling her that he wanted to be her customer. With this job nearing its end date, Sayaka was looking for new funds to support her work. As with other forms of social advocacy, grassroots organizations are at the frontlines of support for individuals who are not being served by the government (see my discussion of sexual minority victims of violence in Chapter Five).

The advocacy work of Sayaka and her compatriots, however, is not recognized as labor, just as sex work itself isn't. Through spending time with Sayaka and other activists, I observed a great contrast between sex worker activism and the activism of Let's Fight Slavery Japan (Chapter Four). At the anti-human trafficking organization, full-time staff were employees who received regular salaries. Kanno Akiko clearly felt strongly that her organization was spearheading important work that civil society needed to be doing; as such, she felt that they should be funded and given grants.<sup>126</sup> Kanno can think this because her work is – in the abstract, at least – in line with accepted norms and mainstream values of protecting children and young women. As such, it appeals to both conservative and progressive voices. The sex worker advocates, however, are largely on their own and expect this to be the case. All the members of the sex workers' advocacy group are volunteers. They don't expect anyone to fund them and the funding they do receive comes largely from HIV/AIDS policy money, whether government or international NGO-supported or from private foundations. This funding is typically terminal in nature. The issues of sex workers – as with the issues of female part-time workers – are not seen as being important. To conduct advocacy activities, members had

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<sup>126</sup> This was ironic at times as Kanno frequently complained about other organizations expecting her to come speak for free at the same time that she was benefitting from the uncompensated labor of a team of interns and volunteers.

to fund themselves, and many of Sayaka's activities came directly out of her pocket. "I work *so that* I can do [advocacy] activities," she told me once. For these reasons, burn out among individual members is a frequent issue.

The sex worker advocates seem to be operating *within*, rather than trying to push, the limits of stigma. That is, they are attempting to make health and safety information more easily accessible, to create venues where women working in the sex industry can meet and exchange information with peers, and to provide opportunities to speak with experts on improving one's customer rankings, dealing with debts, and knowing what to do if a customer secretly films an encounter. Recently, SWASH members have been building networks with business owners so that they can try to positively influence store practices (Suzuki et al. 2012:45).

Sayaka was always realistic and practical about the group's goals and expectations. Ultimately, the goal of the sex worker advocates was normalization. Sayaka explained that she wanted sex work to be treated like "normal" work, such that men would see no problem in marrying sex workers and children wouldn't be discriminated against for having a parent working as a sex worker. Unlike mainstream feminists, sex workers like Sayaka didn't think that "opposing patriarchy" was in line with the sex worker rights movement. As she said to me pointedly, many women in the sex industry want to marry and become housewives. That is, they want to marry into exactly the normative family system that produces the sex industry in the first place (Chapter Two). Feminism for her meant normalization such that women could include sex industry work on their resumes and use what they had learned in this industry (e.g. empathy, communication skills) as marketable skills. This would also entail women working in the

sex industry as discarding internalized stigma, and empowering themselves to take on leadership roles in the sex industry, such as becoming managers or even owners (Suzuki et al. 2012). The belief of Sayaka and others was that if women could build on and share their experiences, conditions would improve and stigma and discrimination would decrease. Without normalization, full legalization of sex work would be meaningless. Normalization, however, was contingent upon self-recognition by sex workers of themselves as laborers.

### *Politicizing Identities*

The issue of how to build a notion of shared experiences or group consciousness is shared by all identity-based social movements. In the case of sex workers, isolation, prejudice, and stigma may make the movement-building process more difficult (Kempadoo and Doezema 1998). This is especially the case in Japan where, as I have argued, women working in the sex industry construct themselves as *shirōto* (“amateurs”), a culturally relevant notion signifying authenticity and innocence, in order to create a buffer between themselves and a stigmatized identity (i.e. “professional” sex worker). In this section, I will examine the linguistic modes through which sex worker advocates attempt to create a network of peers.

Perhaps one of the terms most associated with minority-based social movements in Japan today is *tōjisha*. The term can be glossed as “the people (directly) concerned,” and originates from a legal context, where *tōjisha* distinguished those individuals directly involved in a legal dispute from third parties. In the 1970s, the women’s movement and disability rights movement appropriated the term in order to articulate a notion of shared

subjectivity emerging from experiences of discrimination. By the 1980s, a range of social movements had embraced *tōjisha* (McLelland 2009:195-196). Mark McLelland has observed that *tōjisha* politics have been radical for producing a paradigm shift in how minorities have been viewed in Japan, leading to “a rejection of minority ‘problems’ in favor of ‘needs,’ a rejection of ‘management’ in favor of ‘self-determination,’ and a refusal of ‘benefits’ in favor of ‘rights’” (McLelland 2009:196). *Tōjisha* politics has been successful in making the case that social difference needs to be valued, not suppressed, and that the voices of individuals who have been structurally discriminated against hold authentic, unassailable knowledge of a situation.

Although I was not able to observe multiple Japanese sex workers engaging together in political action, from my interactions with politicized sex workers as well as my reading of the literature, I assess that *tōjisha* has not been embraced within the sex workers’ movement. Partially, this seems to be a matter of timing and practical limitations. *Tōjisha* politics necessitate that individuals recognize their own circumstances as part of a broader structural violence that they share in common with others. In other words, it requires individual recognition or awareness as well as a group identification. As I have discussed in Chapter Three, however, women working in the sex industry typically see their ventures in this industry as a short-term matter. There is no broader sense by women of themselves as *tōjisha* because, as women’s construction of themselves as *shirōto* demonstrates, they are actively trying to avoid the stigmatizing label of sex worker. The stigma against sex workers is still too strong and the movement too small for *tōjisha* to have taken hold as an articulated subject position.

Instead, it seemed that *tōjisha* was used by sex worker advocates in an exclusive sense, as a way of distinguishing themselves from others in order to empower themselves. At advocacy events, for example, such as STI education sessions, *tōjisha* was used to designate the space as off-limits to those who were not sex workers (or former sex workers). While entrance was never policed – that is, it was understood that only oneself could determine whether one was a *tōjisha* or not – the term itself emphasizes authentic experience. Limiting participation to *tōjisha* provided a space for sex workers to meet and network, and access support from their peers. Similarly, *tōjisha* was also used to validate certain opinions over others. It is used, for instance, to criticize the arguments of anti-prostitution feminists by challenging the sources of their evidence and the bases of their assumptions. As elsewhere, Japanese sex workers have challenged those who speak supposedly on behalf of sex workers without any visible participation by sex workers (Matsuzawa 2000).

Notably, in her essay on sex workers and the birth control pill introduced at the outset to this chapter, Momoka Momoko does not use the term *tōjisha*, choosing a different – but not mutually exclusive – politicized term instead. Momoka introduces readers to the term “sex worker” (*sekkusu wākā*). The term originates from “sex work,” which was first coined by the American activist Carol Leigh (the “Scarlot Harlot”) in 1978. The term was picked up by the American prostitutes’ rights movement and soon spread internationally as a salient term for emphasizing the labor-based nature of providing commercial sexual services. Through the 1993 translation of Frédérique Delacoste and Priscilla Alexander’s edited volume *Sex Work: Writings By Women in the Sex Industry* (1987) as well as Momoka’s networking with Euro-American and

Australian sex worker activists at the 1994 Yokohama International AIDS Conference, “sex work” and “sex worker” gradually spread to activist circles in Japan.<sup>127</sup>

Momoka introduces the term “sex worker” to foreground the labor aspects of commercial sexual labor – what is often explained in English as “sex work *as* work.” While *tōjisha* highlights shared experiences of discrimination, “sex worker” foregrounds a shared status as laborers. Momoka writes that while the closest indigenous gloss would be *fūzokujō* (“woman working in the sex industry”), this term does not include men, transgendered individuals, or those who are working in the adult video industry or in venues like SM Clubs that, although clearly within the domain of the sex industry, don’t have the same identity as a *fūzokujō*. Similarly, to speak of “someone employed in the sex industry” (*seifūzoku sangyō jūjisha*) also includes individuals such as store managers or adult video producers; these individuals don’t share the same issues that sex workers do (Momoka 1997:54). It is notable that “sex worker” is a transliterated English term, and represents a larger pattern throughout Japanese society of using foreign terms to express unconventional or even transgressive concepts.

In practice, the two advocacy groups currently active in Japan carefully alternate the terms they use in their advocacy. For events at which they seek to recruit as many individuals as possible, especially newcomers, they tend to use *fūzokujō*, the standard term by which women in the sex industry would identify themselves. Occasionally, the advocacy groups also use more circuitous and even less identity-based terms that indicate

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<sup>127</sup> The 1993 translation of this volume was cited numerous times by some of the more politicized members of the advocacy group as having been a watershed in how it frankly conveyed the direct experiences of sex workers. In the Japanese media, “sex worker” started appearing around 1993, usually in connection with AIDS conferences, which is where much early activism was centered.

current or past experience working in the sex industry, such as “a person doing sex industry work” (*fūzoku no shigoto o shiteiru hito*), “a person doing work offering sexual services” (*seiteki na sabisu o teikyō suru shigoto o shite iru hito*), or “a person with experience working in the sex industry” (*seifūzoku de hataraita keiken no aru hito*). Occasionally, the terms *seirōdōsha* (“sexual laborer”) or *seisangyō rōdōsha* (“sex industry laborer”) are used, but these also have an awkward ring when used to recruit newcomers. Typically, one of these terms – or *fūzokujō* – is used first and then the more politicized term of *sekkusu wākā* is introduced.

### *“It Can’t Be Helped”*

In spite of the openness within which the sex industry operates, there is still a double standard by which it is acceptable to be a customer but stigmatizing to be a sex worker. Stigma prevents sex workers – even those who are politicized – to openly claim their rights. Many women working in the sex industry feel that they are powerless to change these circumstances. The general attitude is often one of resignation, of “It can’t be helped, that just how it is.” Stigma toward women working in the sex can take many forms, such as women being turned away from hospitals for their regular STI check-ups because “this is a hospital where ordinary wives come” (Momoka 1997:57) or the stigma of having worked in the sex industry following them throughout their lives (Suzuki et al. 2012).

There are also institutional obstacles to building a group identity: in many sex industry businesses, freedom in choosing one’s shift and high turnover mean there is often little interaction between women working at the same business. At many stores,

employees may not even share a waiting room.<sup>128</sup> Some managers also discourage socializing between employees, knowing that it is often centered on information sharing, gossip, or grumbling (Suzuki et al. 2012). Many women have other side jobs (or sex work is their side job), so there is little impetus for investing energy into petitioning for change, especially when it's much easier to simply move to another business where the conditions are more favorable if one is unhappy with working conditions.

Similarly, many women internalize prejudices toward sex workers and assume that if they're unhappy at a particular business, that the fault lies with them (Suzuki et al. 2012:42). Managers retain copies of women's certificate of residence as well as promotional photographs showing employees' faces, and some women fear that these materials may be used in retaliation by unscrupulous manager. Concerns such as these dissuade many women from "making trouble" for the manager. Perhaps all of these obstacles hinge around the fact that women working in the sex industry have no identity *as* sex workers because their labor in this industry is seen as short-term work that they move in and out of; for women looking to attract as little attention to themselves as possible, the easiest solution to a problem is typically to simply switch businesses. This is, of course, an individual solution and not one that addresses issues endemic to the industry as a whole.

What are some of the factors working against sex workers' organization of themselves *as* laborers? In an early interview with Sayaka, she implied that there was a limit to what labor unions could accomplish in a context such as the sex industry. In

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<sup>128</sup> An employee waiting room at a sex industry business is a common room where female employees can relax, eat, or chat with one another while waiting to be designated by a customer.

2000, a union for women working in the sex industry (*Fūzoku Jigyō Yunion*) had briefly existed, but it was only after I had finished all of my fieldwork in 2013 that I heard of it for the first time. None of the activists I spoke to, including some who had apparently been involved in it, had ever mentioned it by name, and I learned of it only from brief newspaper accounts of its establishment. It was perhaps the evident failure of this union that tempered Sayaka's attitude when she pointed out that it would be more efficacious to educate women about avoiding bad labor environments in the first place than to petition on their behalf after something had happened. Even if one successfully made their complaint heard at a labor standards office – which was an issue in itself, as I discuss below – oftentimes, little could be done. In many cases, for instance, if a sex industry business was not paying an employee, it was because there was no income. She thus focused her efforts on teaching women to read the symptoms of stores where the staff were unscrupulous or where little business was coming in, so that women could avoid these businesses altogether.

The Hostess' Union was also often referenced as a cautionary tale about the limited efficacy of unions in a stigmatized industry. In December 2009, several hostesses established the *Kyabakura Yunion* (literally, “Cabaret Club Union,” abbreviated as *Kyaba Yunion*), the first union for women working as hostesses in so-called “cabaret clubs.”<sup>129</sup> The founders of the group had approached several unions to house them, and following numerous rejections had eventually been accepted by the *Furītā Zenpan Rōso* (All

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<sup>129</sup> The Hostess' Union provides consultations and engages in collective bargaining with hostess club management, often taking video footage of these encounters.

Freeters' Union),<sup>130</sup> a union that represents (mostly male) part-time, temporary, and contract workers. Their inclusion in this particular union was, perhaps, inevitable. In a society in which full-time employment for men has long been a fundamental tenet of normative ideals of masculinity, the mostly male non-regular workers represented by the All Freeters' Union were themselves the subject of social ostracism and stigma, especially stereotypes of their personal attributes, such as that they lack work ethic or strength of will (PAFF 2004). The Hostess' Union was a gendered variant of this social marginalization.

The impetus for the *Kyaba Yunion*'s founding was long-term frustration with seemingly endemic issues in the hostessing industry, including unpaid wages, the arbitrary application of employee fines (e.g. for failing to meet strenuous quotas), and both sexual harassment and power harassment from male staff and customers.<sup>131</sup> At the heart of these issues was the low, or even non-existent, oversight of the hostessing industry by the Labor Standards Office. In fact, one of the negotiators for the union told me about how she had gone to the local Labor Standards Office to file a complaint about

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<sup>130</sup> The term "freeter" (*furītā*) was coined in the 1980s as a combination of the English *free* and the German *Arbeiter* ("worker"). It is often used in a derogatory sense to refer (especially) to young workers who are thought to reject the normative values of full-time employment in favor of part-time work that permits them to pursue their hobbies. Although the media originally cast such young workers as irresponsible and frivolous, the entrenched nature of the economic recession have raised some awareness that for many young part-time workers, their labor status is less a matter of choice than an economic reality (Brinton 2011:5-7).

<sup>131</sup> Power harassment (*pawā harasumento*) is a form of workplace bullying that has been problematized in Japan since the 2000s, with increased attention to the ways in which workplace relationships can be negative. The term refers to undue emotional or psychological stress caused by human relationships at the workplace, not necessarily limited to a superior-junior direction.

workplace sexual harassment. Upon hearing her case, the male clerk had laughed in her face and responded, “You’re a hostess, what do you expect?”

I digress on the subject of the Hostess’ Union to draw out the point that although the hostessing industry flagrantly violates the Labor Standards Law, hostesses are not treated as laborers. In fact, the widespread image of hostesses, as promoted in television dramas and popular magazines, for instance, is of frivolous young women in pursuit of a luxurious lifestyle. When they complain, the common trend on web blogs that I browsed was to say that these women felt they didn’t need to follow the same rules as everyone else, such as coming to work on time, and that they shouldn’t complain because all they could do was dress up and talk to men – in other words, that these were women without any other redeeming skills. The prejudices surrounding hostesses are astounding, especially when contrasted with the size of the hostessing industry and the role it has played in sustaining Japanese corporate practices (Allison 1994). On-line commentators also freely said that these women should have no rights as laborers, since they didn’t pay income tax and often evaded municipal taxes – whether they actually know this or not and how true this is another issue (the same accusations and justifications are often lobbed at sex workers as well).

When I approached one of the *Kyaba Yunion* negotiators, a woman in her late thirties who had worked as a hostess on and off for years in order to support her career as a camera person/video producer, it took several rounds of back and forth before she would agree to speak with me. This was the case even though I had been introduced by a mutual friend and, coincidentally, knew the woman’s housemate through an institutional connection. When we did, finally, meet, she explained to me why she had exercised such

caution: she had been sexually harassed by a powerful figure within the All Freeters' Union. When she had complained about this, instead of receiving a sympathetic ear, she had been accused of lying and had been ostracized within the union. It was highly ironic how the issues (including sexism) that the hostesses were fighting against in the workplace were being replicated within the labor union, which was supposedly a refuge for protecting the women's rights *as* laborers.

One factor that had prevented the formation of a union – and which still creates obstacles – is that many hostesses simply take labor issues in the industry for granted, internalizing many of the attitudes displayed by the Labor Standards Office clerk described above. For example, it is simply taken for granted that when you give notice at a business, your last month's wages will not be paid, even though this practice – and many others – are in violation of the Labor Standards Law, which stipulates that employers must clarify all working conditions in writing and so on (Matsutani 2010).

These realities are troubling, given the location of hostessing in a limited female labor market. In 2007, hostessing was listed as the ninth most popular (future) profession among Japanese women aged 15 to 22 (Miura and Yanauchi 2008:15).<sup>132</sup> The image of the hostessing industry from the outside is that it is a fun and easy way for young women to earn money, when in fact it is plagued by endemic violations of labor law. More troubling still is the reality that hostessing is a safety net for female poverty, a poverty that, as one union member writing in the journal *Impaction* (noted above for publishing

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<sup>132</sup> A glance at this list of popular professions among girls and young women is illustrative of the careers that young women are aspiring to. The first five professions were, in order of their popularity, singer or musician, music-related professional, shop clerk, baker or pâtissier, and nail artist. In eighteenth place was public servant and manager or company president was in twentieth (Miura and Yanauchi 2008:15).

Momoka Momoko's article on the pill) observed, is mostly invisible in the media and political landscape (see Chapter Two). This union member, Negoro Yū, notes the structural similarities between hostesses and day laborers, arguing that they often face similar social ostracism and intractable poverty as the male figures lining up for work early in the mornings (Negoro 2010). She further observes that in an economic recession, especially, no attention is given to regulating women's part-time labor – labor which is expected to be sold cheaply. No one is interested in the rights or self-esteem or health of these women. Negoro reveals aspects of her own story about how bullying and feelings of isolation while working as a hostess caused her to become suicidal (Negoro 2010).

The disinterest by authorities in overseeing the sex industry, beyond cracking down on businesses that are operating illegally or offering illegal services (see Chapter One), is striking. During my fieldwork, the police officers I spoke to seemed to be generally indifferent to the vulnerabilities that sex workers might face. It was clear that they did not see the prevention of labor abuses against sex workers within their jurisdiction and when I asked police officers at the National Policy Agency (NPA) how sex workers could better protect themselves from either unscrupulous owners or potentially violent customers, I was met with blank faces. The responsibility of the police, it became clear, was *torishimari*, or regulation and cracking down on illegal activities; it wasn't prevention. In one case, a sympathetic police officer from central Japan told me that he wanted more sex workers to report small infractions by their stores, such as withholding of payment. This would help the police out as well as sex workers, he said. He grudgingly admitted, however, that coming to the police and identifying

oneself as a sex worker and pressing charges would necessitate risking ridicule and discrimination.

A well-known feminist lawyer who has represented sex workers in the past told me over dinner that she often gets the feeling that sex workers think that they have no rights.

“According to the law, however, their relationship to their workplace should really be like that of any other employee to an employer. As long as the women aren’t participating in any illegal activities themselves [note: which they themselves might not be aware of, since there is no legal education at sex industry businesses], they should feel comfortable coming forward to the police or other authorities with any issues.”

When I asked the lawyer, who was in her late sixties, how sex workers can determine without a doubt whether the store that they’re working at is registered with the police, given that businesses don’t, in practice, typically show this paperwork to prospective employees, she responded immediately: “well, they can go to the police and find out, can’t they?” She paused awkwardly for a second, taking in what she had just said before giving an embarrassed laugh. We both knew that the likelihood of a woman interested in working in the sex industry going to the highly masculinized space of a police station to inquire about legal work options was extremely low. Like many other feminists making abstract arguments about sex workers, she did not come across as being particularly concerned or sympathetic with sex workers’ day-to-day realities.

Similarly, criminal cases involving sex workers, such as the 1987 “Ikebukuro Case,” so named in reference to the Tokyo neighborhood where the incident took place, illustrate some of the biases built into the legal system as far as women in the sex industry are concerned. In the “Ikebukuro Case,” a woman working for a *hotetoru*

business<sup>133</sup> was, upon arrival at the arranged hotel, attacked and then threatened by a knife-wielding customer who bound the woman's ankles and wrists and filmed her for an hour and twenty minutes while he sexually assaulted her (Burns 2005:xiv). Eventually, through pretending to enjoy the acts, the woman was able to escape her bonds and grab the knife that had been used to threaten her. She stabbed her attacker in the stomach, and after some further tussling, he fainted. It later turned out that the man had been stabbed 33 times, and he eventually died from his wounds. The woman was arrested for murder two weeks later (Burns 2005:xv). In the criminal trial, the judges accused the sex worker of *excessive* self-defense, arguing not only that she had brought the crime on herself (*jigō jitoku*) in landing in such a situation in the first place, but that prostitutes also had less sexual and physical freedom than “ordinary” women and children (Burns 2005:xvii; Haha no Kai 2005:12). Burns notes that not only was the woman not seen as a victim because she had transgressed social mores by becoming a prostitute, but she had also transgressed these mores as a woman who fought back against her attacker (Burns 2005:xvi). The “Ikebukuro Case” thus ended with the bizarre conclusion of a woman being criminalized for defending herself.

The high-profile lawyer involved in the defense, Tsunoda Yukiko, analyzes the “Ikebukuro Case” and others like it in her book, *Sexism and Violence (Seisabetsu to Bōryoku)*. In doing so, she notes an inconsistency in legal attitudes toward women in the sex industry – one that always, unfortunately, works to the disadvantage of the women themselves (Tsunoda 2001:133). This has to do with the idea of the “prostitution

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<sup>133</sup> *Hotetoru* derives from *hoteru* (“hotel”) and *torukoburō* (“Turkish bath,” the earlier name for *soaplands* prior to a complaint from the Turkish Embassy), and is a business that arranges for a sex worker to meet a male customer at a hotel and provide *soapland* services in his room.

contract” (*baishun keiyaku*) that is entered between the prostitute and the client.<sup>134</sup> In some legal cases, the judges find that because this contract goes against public order and morality (*kōjo ryōzoku*), any kind of arrangement is illegal. Thus, a prostitute is not eligible for compensation for absence from work due to a traffic accident, for instance, because her work is based on illegal activities that go against public order. Similarly, if a woman were not paid her wages, the same legal reasoning would prevent her from making a claim in court. In both cases, because the “contract” entered into is deemed void to begin with, there is no legal basis for making a complaint, and the woman is deemed to “get what she deserved” (*jigō jitoku*). In the “Ikebukuro Case,” however, Tsunoda points out that this logic was inverted. In this case, the judges took the prostitution contract seriously, and argued that because the woman had (implicitly, by showing up) entered into this contract with the customer, she had given up her sexual and physical freedoms and thus did not have the same right to self-defense or to protecting herself as “ordinary” women and children. The legal rationale, in other words, was that the woman had lost her right of refusal (Tsunoda 2001:131-134). The bottom line is thus that from the perspective of legal institutions, sex workers do not have full citizenship.

Cases like the “Ikebukuro Case” resonate today, in a context in which the number of “delivery health” businesses has skyrocketed and come to dominate the sex industry market (Chapter One). Many of the women I spoke to told me that they were afraid of working in “delivery health” businesses because they would be outside of the protection

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<sup>134</sup> Note that Tsunoda uses “prostitution” in the broad sense of including both illegal prostitution (i.e. penile-vaginal intercourse) and legal sexual services through the regulated sex industry. In her view, the distinction between these acts is meaningless, especially given that women often face the same risks regardless of this legal difference (Tsunoda 2001:127-128).

of the store and they would be responsible themselves for their safety. They were afraid that if a violent or extortive incident occurred with a customer, that they would face legal biases such as the one described above.

### *International AIDS Conferences and Transnational Networks*

In April 2012, I received an unexpected e-mail from Sayaka, announcing that she would be coming to the United States in late July. The biennial International AIDS Conference (IAC) was being held in Washington, D.C. and she was going in order to meet representatives of American sex worker advocacy groups. Would I be interested in coming along as her interpreter so she could take part in some of the informal discussions between sex workers?

Although several IACs had been held in the United States in the early years of the AIDS crisis, 2012 marked the first time that the conference had returned to the United States since 1990. In the late 1980s, a flurry of exclusionary legislation created at the height of the AIDS panic also produced a ban on the entry and residency of non-citizens who had tested HIV-positive. Although public health officials, researchers, and advocates had long protested this legislation as doing little besides encouraging discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS (or, PLWHA), it was only in 2009 that President Barack Obama lifted the ban (Preston 2009). In celebration of this welcome policy change, the IAC organizers chose Washington, D.C. as their 2012 conference site.

While American government travel restrictions on PLWHA were lifted, however, two key “at risk” populations for contracting the HIV virus – intravenous drug users and sex workers – were still denied entry. US Code Title 8 Section 1182, which enumerates

“inadmissible aliens” to the United States, imposes the state’s vision of morality and criminality through prohibiting the entry of drug users or addicts as well as anyone who has “engaged in prostitution within ten years of the date of application for a visa, admission, or adjustment of status” (8 U.S.C. 1182).<sup>135</sup> These exclusions caused outcry among many of the advocates present at the conference, and the large hall in the conference venue dedicated to advocacy booths was decorated with signs reading, “No drug users? No sex workers? No internat’l [sic] AIDS conference,” pointing out that the legitimacy of any discussion of HIV/AIDS in the absence of two of the major affected parties would be compromised.<sup>136</sup>

International AIDS conferences have been an important site for networking and organizing among sex worker groups from around the world. In fact, because public health concerns that narrowly view sex workers as “at risk” groups make AIDS advocacy funding available to groups in “first-” and “third-world” nations alike (leveling some of the inequalities in representation between these groups), AIDS conferences have reinvigorated international sex worker activism and become one of the primary fora

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<sup>135</sup> Prior to the 1994 IAC in Yokohama, Japan, the Ministry of Justice made an exception to its entry restrictions for non-national sex workers, granting special entry permission to “key persons” traveling to Japan to participate in the IAC (Kīpāson Jōriku no Kyoka mo 1994). The Ministry of Justice thus evaded criticism for keeping sex worker advocates from the conference while maintaining its exclusionary policies.

<sup>136</sup> An excerpt from a statement of protest drafted by US-based sex worker advocacy groups and circulated at the 2012 IAC meeting reads, “Despite the successful repeal of the ban on HIV positive foreign nationals entering the U.S. in 2009, U.S. immigration law still bars entrance to anyone who has engaged in sex work in the past 10 years – *even if they have no criminal convictions or if they work where it is legal*. This ban prevents international sex workers and former sex workers from attending critical public health meetings, such as the International AIDS Conference. This and other restrictive immigration laws keep sex workers undocumented, foreclosing them from health services and legal work options, and increasing their risk for HIV. We demand that this policy change as part of a broader overhaul of U.S. immigration policies, emphasizing human rights instead of criminalization” (italics mine).

where new priorities and directions in the international rights movement take shape (Kempadoo 1998:21-22). Immigration restrictions to the United States, however, explained why Sayaka had only mentioned American sex worker advocacy groups in her e-mail inviting me to Washington – international sex workers were not invited to the party.

Although nationals from countries with visa waiver agreements to the United States (such as Japan) could enter on a tourist visa without having to make any declarations about their past or former status as sex workers, sex workers from “third world” countries would have to fill out visa paperwork asking them questions that would inevitably lead to a rejection of their application. Immigration restrictions put sex worker advocates in the awkward position of having to lie about their backgrounds while they were petitioning to enter the country in order to attend a conference to combat stigma and empower themselves *as* sex workers. In protest of this policy that indiscriminately excluded sex workers from a major venue of international funding and activism, international sex worker advocates – led by the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) – decided to convene an alternative conference in Calcutta, India, which would take place simultaneously with the IAC in Washington. This conference would, pointedly, be called the “Sex Worker Freedom Festival,” and all sex workers were encouraged to attend.<sup>137</sup>

The 2012 IAC meeting would thus be devoid of much of the usual boisterous sex worker activism as sex worker advocates from “third world” countries could not attend

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<sup>137</sup> The Freedom Festival registered with the IAC as an official “conference hub,” thus maintaining official support from the conference secretariat as well as from funders such as UNAIDS.

the meeting, and many of those from “first world” countries opted to protest the United States’ exclusionary policy. Even within the advocacy group that I worked with, the members who wanted to attend the conference were divided. Sayaka decided to attend the Washington meeting, while two other members traveled to Calcutta. Nevertheless, although diluted and diminished, the IAC was not completely devoid of sex worker advocacy. Those sex workers who did attend the Washington meeting were largely either those who had opportunities to make sex workers’ voices heard at the main stage of power – that is, either through giving presentations or as sex workers’ representatives at international institutions – and representatives from American sex worker groups. In each of their presentations or performances, these representatives explained to the audience why many sex workers had been excluded from the conference. There were also various representatives of sex worker organizations present at the conference in other capacities.

The IAC took place at the convention center in downtown Washington, occupying several giant halls. The hub of sex worker activism at the conference, however, was an area in the so-called “Global Village,” located in a separate building across the street from the main conference building and designated as a space for hundreds of advocacy groups from around the world to set up booths and interact with conference attendees and members of the public. Entrance to the Global Village did not require conference registration, opening both advocacy group participation and public attendance up to those who could not afford the prohibitive conference registration costs (costs which this researcher, in the social sciences, was dumbfounded by).

The large hall was divided into spaces for panel discussions that would be directly relevant to advocacy audiences (such as the panel “A Labor Rights Approach to HIV and

Sex Work”), meeting rooms, exhibits and booths, and other spaces meant to encourage different forms of interaction and community-building. Sex worker representatives had secured a “networking zone” space from conference organizers, which provided them with slightly more space. The space was an informal meeting space filled with chairs and several tables set up with representatives where anyone could stop and chat as long as they wanted. It became a home base for many of the American sex workers at the conference. Several events were scheduled to take place in this zone, but otherwise it was just a place to stop and rest and meet other sex workers and “allies.”

When Sayaka and I arrived at the conference, we found our way to the networking zone. Not knowing any of the mostly American representatives, we introduced ourselves to anyone who happened to look up (I introduced myself as a researcher there to interpret for Sayaka, a member of a Japanese sex workers’ organization). Sayaka recognized a few advocates she had met at other conferences previously and spoke to them briefly. Sayaka was surprisingly shy in front of non-Japanese activists, and attached herself closely to a staff member of the well-known Thai sex workers’ organization, Empower.

Although this was the first time that I had accompanied an advocacy group member to an international conference, several of the group members were active in attending such conferences, at both the international and regional levels. Reports of their participation in these conferences were typically written up in newsletter format and also presented at group events. I also knew about their participation because Sayaka and another member often presented at meetings, usually in panels or events they organized

with Korean, Australian, or Asia-Pacific sex worker groups, and when they did so, I was often asked to translate their materials beforehand.

To symbolically represent the united nature of the international sex workers' rights movement, advocates in both sites kept open video Skype communications and arranged video conferences regularly, including at some of the panels or sessions involving topics relevant to sex workers. Oftentimes, however, the Internet connection cut in and out, causing inevitable disruptions in the transmission and making communication difficult at times.

A large stage was set up at one end of the Global Village hall, at which groups from around the world had been carefully scheduled to present performances. Sex workers were given one thirty minute segment several days into the conference. Entitled "Star Whores Go Galactic," the segment was meant to present performances both at the Washington site and via the Internet from Calcutta. Taking place in the late morning in Washington, the Calcutta side hosted a party at which sex workers representing different countries gave short speeches and performed dances or music. Two American advocates hosted the American side of the segment: Carol Leigh (the "Scarlot Harlot," noted above as coining the term "sex work" in 1978) and Mariko Passion, a Los Angeles-based sex worker and performance artist. Wearing an American flag dress, red tights and feather boa, a giant red purse covered in hearts, and carrying a red umbrella, Carol Leigh led the audience in a karaoke sing-a-long to "Bad Laws," set to the tune of Donna Summer's song, "Bad Girls." Her performance poked fun at the perceived righteousness and hypocrisies of anti-human trafficking "rescue" organizations and governments that made laws that drove sex work underground. The performance also poked fun at the common

“rehabilitation” strategy of “rescue” organizations, which often take women out of brothels seemingly so as to teach them how to sew.

The sex worker performance included outrage as well. Mariko Passion closed the performance by emulating a recent sex worker demonstration in Seoul, South Korea (Chapter Four). In this protest, four hundred sex workers had demonstrated against a recent crackdown on their work, and many had covered themselves completely in red and black body paint. Several women had doused themselves with lighter fluid and attempted to set themselves on fire (South Korean Prostitutes, Pimps Rally Against Police Crackdown 2011). Passion closed the performance by stripping naked in front of the audience and dousing herself with a clear liquid coming from a gasoline tank. As images of murdered and assaulted sex workers played on a projector screen on the stage, she held a lighter over herself momentarily before running away, visibly upset. Moments before, she had told the audience that her performance was a tribute to sex workers who couldn't be at the conference, especially those who had been murdered, assaulted, abused, or infected with HIV. When I looked at Sayaka during the performance, I noticed that she was connected via video Skype with Momoka Momoko and was directing the screen toward Passion's performance.

### *Looking Forward*

During one of my last interviews with Sayaka during the main period of my fieldwork, Sayaka asked me how to say, “I'm devoting my life to this movement” in English. I wrote down the words for her and we repeated them together a few times. On her work desk next to where we were sitting, she had a picture frame of her and two advocate colleagues at an international sex workers' right demonstration. She had been

telling me about how she wanted to make sure that there were always multiple discourses in play about sex work, not just the anti-prostitution discourse of Let's Fight Slavery Japan. She spoke in English, saying, "I love sex workers," before switching back to Japanese:

"I love the people who are fighting for sex workers' rights around the world. I love them. People who are fighting for sex workers. That's my happiness. I want all sex workers to be able to be happy. If we can decrease the number of miserable sex workers by even one person... All I do is think about how to make it so that sex workers don't have live in misery – that's what I work for. I also believe that [the situation of sex workers] is tied to a society's happiness. That sex workers can bear and raise their children in happiness, that those children don't fall to a vicious circle where the only path they see is to become sex workers themselves, but that they have a right to be happy too. That they aren't discriminated against just because their parent is a sex worker, but that they can go to college, too. That the mother can raise her children while working safely, in good health, and without fears of being arrested. That she can be a part of the child's social life and go to events like school sports days. That's she's not treated like a criminal."

Sayaka ended by trying out the phrase we had just practiced, "I'm devoting my life to this movement."

## Epilogue

Since the early days of Prime Minister Abe Shinzō's second administration, Abe has voiced the importance of increasing women's participation and status in the full-time workforce as a key part of his economic reform policies. This so-called "womenomics" (*ūmanomikusu*) policy has been inspired in part by the much-buzzed-about analysis of the global investment banking firm Goldman Sachs that boosting equal gender participation in the workforce could increase Japan's gross domestic product by as much as 15% (Matsui et al 2010:1). As part of this policy, Abe has called for extended corporate childcare leave policies, more daycare and nursing facilities, flexible workplace arrangements, and equal salaries and promotions.

Almost two years later, however, the status of these policies seems unclear, at best. To signal his commitment to providing leadership opportunities for women, Abe named five women to his Cabinet during a September 2014 reshuffle. As I write the final revisions to this dissertation, the two most high profile of the female Cabinet ministers – Trade Minister Obuchi Yūko and Justice Minister Matsushima Midori – recently resigned within hours of one another due to separate scandals. A few days later, the Abe administration was dealt another embarrassment when a female civil servant launched an unprecedented lawsuit against her government ministry for "institutional sexism" that, she claimed, had denied her promotions and pay raises over the course of nearly two decades of service (Osaki 2014a). Perhaps more tellingly, left-wing feminists have

expressed severe skepticism over policies for “empowering” women by a conservative group of politicians that has heretofore been chilly to questions of women’s rights and that has slashed social welfare programs (Onnatachi no 21 Seiki 2013).

What does “womenomics” herald for female workers? As noted in this dissertation, neoliberal reforms implemented by Prime Minister Koizumi Junichirō in the mid-2000s and large-scale economic restructuring have refashioned the dominant postwar employment system such that workers of all statuses now experience more instability and risk. The replacement of full-time positions with part-time or contract labor has become a permanent feature of even the male labor market. In this context, female workers are typically the first to be downsized, and the feminization of poverty has become increasingly apparent.

I have argued that gendered labor ideologies that situate women’s primary identities as caregivers and not as wage-laborers justify their continued exclusion from the full-time labor market. The mainstream commercial sex industry embodies many of these labor exclusions that Japanese women face. In this industry, the inability to recognize women as laborers manifests itself tangibly in understandings of sex as care, in the self-presentation of sex workers as *shirōto* (“amateurs”), and in the lack of labor protections for women in this industry. These gendered labor ideologies generate obstacles for those advocates attempting to improve laboring circumstances in the sex industry as well, as female sex workers do not recognize themselves in the advocacy of competing rights movements. Without a sea change in ideas about the relationship of gender to labor, policies such as “womenomics” will only lead to change for the most

privileged women. This is especially likely to be the case as Abe's aggressive push for economic growth continues to "rationalize" labor practices.

Meanwhile, the sex industry's movement underground is expected to continue. The market dominance of "delivery," escort-based businesses grows each year, and nearly all of the women whom I spoke with throughout my research grudgingly predicted that the future of the sex industry would be a mobile one. Changes in the material conditions of the sex industry will necessitate women working in this industry to take on even more risk – risk that they are expected to assume on their own, as they become more isolated, and more responsible for negotiating what sexual services are provided and under what terms. Moreover, with its successful bid for the 2020 summer Olympics, Tokyo has begun mobilizing itself for the infrastructural and security challenges of hosting a major international event, leading to speculations from within the sex industry that the remaining store-based sex industry districts will be "cleaned up" prior to the arrival of international crowds.

In this context of continuing job insecurity, the sex industry will continue to be an economic safety net for women, and its normalization will likely increase. Desires for *iyashi* in the sex industry will, I predict, become *more*, rather than less, important in this economic and social climate, as anxieties over the perceived disappearance of the postwar male breadwinner ideology and nuclear family unit continue and more women, shut out of the full-time labor market, seek out lucrative employment opportunities doing "women's work." These women will navigate an industry that will be seen as socially necessary as ever but also fraught with more risk and isolation.

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