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Being Young in Super-Aging Japan

Formative Events and Cultural Reactions

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4 Youth sexuality under the spotlight in a super-aged society with too few children

Beverley Anne Yamamoto

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the issue of youth sexuality in an era of well-being below replacement fertility and hyper-aging. Despite its huge and very visible sex industry and highly sexualized media output, as a nation Japan seems rather uncomfortable with the issue of sexuality. It is generally not regarded as an appropriate subject for serious public discussion, academic research, or for educational instruction. While international research and human rights documents suggests that sexuality could well be viewed as a potentially healthy and enjoyable area of life (WHO 2006; Lindau and Gavrilova 2010; Smith, Frankel and Yarnell 1997), in Japan deeply rooted taboos and negative attitudes remain strong (Asayama 1977: 577; Yonemoto 1997: 18). This impacts the discourse around youth sexuality and constrains young people's access to sexuality education. Given this situation, young people are often accessing information about sex and sexual relationships from pornographic material, magazines, manga, blogs, or other social media forms. It is suggested that this may mean that young people engage in "abnormal sex" based on these media presentations, that later result in revulsion or antipathy (Sugiura 2011: 64–65).

The taboo around sex means that sex education is not well developed in Japan, and attempts by schools to offer a more comprehensive approach have been fraught with difficulties. A nationalist backlash against what was represented as "excessive" or "radical" sex education arose in the 1990s, but became more coordinated from 2002 (see Asei et al. 2003; Murase 2005). This backlash squeezed further what was already a very limited curriculum of sex education. The movement was able to exert sufficient pressure to secure restrictions on the language use in the classroom and led to a decrease in taught content. Those protesting "excessive" sex education do not regard schools as an appropriate space for such teaching and regard very basic abstinence education as the only appropriate form of instruction (Tashiro, Ushitora and Watanabe 2011).

On the other hand, there has also been a vocal and dedicated group of liberal academics, health care professionals, and educators who have tried to expand teaching around sexuality, with the more obvious names here being Kitamura Kunio, Director of Japan Family Planning Association, Kōno Miyako, a gynaecologist

with her own clinic in Hiroshima, and Murase Yukihiko, former academic and current Chairperson of The Council for Education and Study on Human Sexuality. As with those involved in the backlash movement, these advocates are from a generation who were born during or just after the baby boom following the end of the Asia Pacific War. Their vision of sexuality education is comprehensive, upholding teaching about the value of life, human rights, and youth empowerment. Yet this Shōwa-born generation holds values around sexuality that are arguably different from that of the Heisei youth of today. Few view youth sexuality in a wholly positive light, but take a pragmatic approach that if young people are clearly sexually active, then it is necessary to protect them against the risks of unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and HIV. Trying to identify the distinguishing features of the sexual values and behaviors of the Heisei youth relative to that of the generation who are able to shape the wider discourse around sexuality is one aim of this chapter.

This chapter, then, explores the sexuality of young people of the Heisei era, the millennials. It asks whether there is a generational divide around sexual interest, values, and behavior between those who have the power to create the discourse in this domain and young people themselves, whose voices have been given little authority to date. It highlights some of the ways that youth sexual behaviors may be regarded as different from that of previous, post-war generations. In particular, the chapter looks at recent concern about the rise of a generation who are reported to have little interest in sex. The epitome of this representation of youth sexuality is that of the herbivore male (*sōshokku danshi*) who is depicted as having little interest in matters of the flesh, namely sex. He is contrasted with the carnivore males (*nikushokku danshi*) of the Shōwa generation, who are presented as virile and even predatory. The latter part of this chapter offers emic views on sexuality voiced by young people. This is achieved first by looking at texts generated from a class I have taught to first-year university students for the past 10 years on “Thinking about sexuality”. These texts are in the form of comments and reports based on thoughts about sex education in Japan. Next, an emic voice is presented on the basis of specific feedback offered verbally and in written form by four young people involved in health advocacy and sexual health counseling in Tokyo. This emic perspective is far from comprehensive, but it offers a counter narrative of youth resilience and creativity.

Through this exploration of Shōwa gatekeeper voices on youth sexuality with that of a small group of Heisei youth, I hope to identify some of the distinct generation-making mechanisms in the domain of sexuality that are in operation in low fertility and hyper-ageing Japan.

Sexual behavior across generations

This section considers the quite dramatic changes that have occurred in self-reported youth sexual behavior over the past 40 years. By drawing on data from regular, nationwide surveys of youth sexual behavior carried out by The Japan Association for Sex Education (*Nihon seiyōiku kyōkai*, abbreviated to JASE)

since 1975, we can gain a good overview of this changed landscape (JASE 1975, 2013, 2016).

The JASE Surveys on The Sexual Behavior of Youth show that between 1974 and the most recent survey, 2011, there was a dramatic increase in high school and university students reporting experience of sexual intercourse (Figure 4.1). The change in reported behavior was particularly marked for young women. Whereas in 1974 only 5.5 percent of female high school students and 11 percent of female university students reported experience of sexual intercourse, this rose to a peak of 30.3 percent and 62.2 percent respectively in 2005. While the upward trend is not as dramatic for young men, the percentage of male high school students reporting experience of sexual intercourse more than doubled between 1974 and 2005, from 10.2 percent to 26.6 percent and rose from 23.1 percent to 61.3 percent for male university students.

The remarkable shift in reported experience of sexual intercourse of young people across these surveys reflects the very changed trajectory of young people's lives, one that was characterized by increased independence, affluence and gender equality from the 1980s through into the 1990s (see Yamamoto 2009). It is also said to reflect an ideology of individualism where sex is a matter of individual choice (Kato 2010: 73) and a loosening of constraints on women where losing one's virginity is a "rite of passage" for young women (Sugiyura 2011: 64).

In contrast to the dramatic increase in young people reporting experience of sexual intercourse from 1974 to 2005, in recent years much attention has been given to the sharp decline in young people reporting experience of sexual intercourse between the 2005 and 2011 surveys. Similar declines have been noted

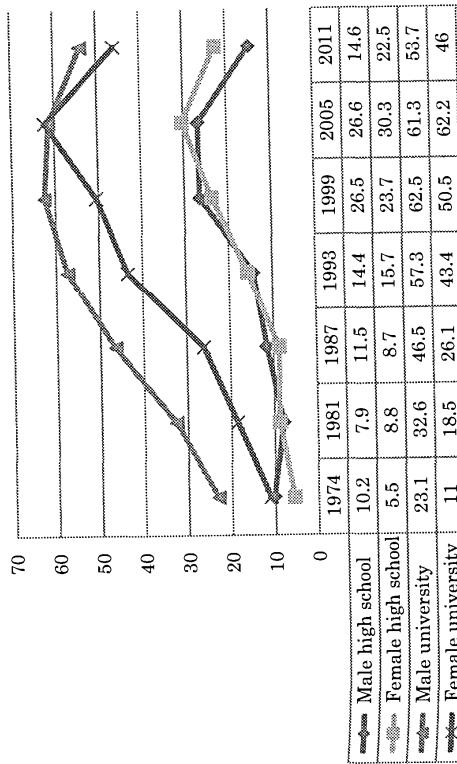


Figure 4.1 Percentage of students reporting experience of sexual intercourse, 1974–2011

Source: JASE (2013: 24)

in other surveys that measure sexual activity among young people. The dip in the number of young people reporting experience of sexual intercourse between 2005 and 2011 in the JASE survey has fed concerns, if not panic, about the possible “sexual lethargy” of young people, especially that of young men. While this is an issue that will be dealt with more substantively when we address the discourse around “herbivore” males, if we look only at high school level, male sexual behavior does appear somewhat lethargic when compared to that of their female counterparts. Nevertheless, the picture changes at university level. Figure 4.1 reveals that the recent decline in high school students reporting experience of sexual intercourse is far more marked for males than females. Already in 2005, more female than male students were reporting experience of sexual intercourse both at high school and university levels. In the 2011 survey the gap had further widened between male and female reporting of sexual experience at high school level (14.4 percent for males and 22.5 percent for females). Nevertheless, there was a sharper decrease for female than for male students at university level. In 2005 slightly more females than males reported experience of sexual intercourse (62.2 percent and 61.3 percent, respectively), but in 2011 the female figure had fallen to 46 percent, whereas for males it had only dropped to 53.7 percent).

Given that the data only tells us whether respondents have ever experienced sexual intercourse, we are left to speculate on the disparity between male and female high school students in reports of sexual intercourse. It could be that sexually active female high school students are having or have had sex with older males rather than with young men in their own age cohort. Certainly we know that on average young women marry men two years their senior (Beppu 2010: 11). Just as possible is that a smaller pool of sexually active high school male students are having sexual intercourse with multiple partners from a larger pool of less promiscuous female students. There is support for both these explanations in the literature (Genda and Kawakami 2006; Kitamura 2011). Whatever the explanation, the so-called “sexual revolution” in Japan has clearly been more dramatic for young women than young men (Sato and Iwasawa 2015). This suggests not just a change in sexual norms, but gender norms as well.

While there was a dip in the number of young people reporting that they had experience of sexual intercourse between 2005 and 2011 in the JASE surveys that sparked widespread angst, we should not overlook that well over four times as many female high school and university students reported experience of sexual intercourse in 2011 compared to 1974. While the increase is not as dramatic for males, over 53 percent of men in university report experience of sexual intercourse compared to 23.1 percent in 1974. Thus, we should not be too quick to represent the millennials as “sexless” and young men as “herbivores” in comparison to their fathers and grandfathers. At the same time, Figure 4.1 does reveal an interesting shift.

Changed meanings around sexuality

By the end of the 1990s, well over half of all university students surveyed by JASE reported experience of sexual intercourse. With the average age of marriage

in the late 20s for women and early 30s for men by this time, it is reasonable to assume that much if not most of the upward trend in young people reporting experience of sexual intercourse represents a rise in premarital or perhaps more accurately non-marital intercourse.

JASE and other surveys confirm that by the 1990s, the majority of young people were accepting of premarital sexual intercourse. This is in sharp contrast to earlier generations. The National Fertility Surveys show that even by 1992 the number of 18–24-year-olds reporting that they were accepting of premarital intercourse was as high as 78 percent for men and 73 percent for women. This figure rose even higher to 84 percent and 82 percent respectively by 2005 (Sato and Iwasawa 2015: 137–138). Rutherford, Ogawa and Matsura also note an across the board change in values relating to premarital sex that began in the 1980s, but resulted in a sharp shift in behavior among young people in the 1990s (Rutherford, Ogawa and Matsura 2001: 89). There is agreement that during this period there was a “normative transformation of premarital sex from deviant behavior to acceptable behavior” (Sato and Iwasawa 2015: 142). With marriage increasingly delayed, it appears that sexual encounters for Heisei youth are no longer linked to the promise or prospect of marriage or even a more intimate relationship.

Whereas previously, sexual relations had been regarded as a way of cementing a relationship, research suggest that it was now happening quite early on in relationship, if not at the start. “For young people today, a sexual relationship is not the goal of a romantic relationship, but rather a gateway to it” (Sato and Iwasawa 2015: 144). The main evidence for this conclusion is that despite a sharp rise in young people reporting experience of sexual intercourse, the proportion who are either married or in a romantic relationship has declined sharply. This points to the casual nature of sexual relationships among young people today (Sato and Iwasawa 2015: 144).

The National Surveys on Family Planning offer some insights into sexual activity of single women through questions on current use of contraception. This suggests a close relationship between male friendship and sexual intimacy. Between the 1990 and 1998 surveys, the percentage of single women aged 16 and over reporting they were currently using contraception rose from 38 to 53 percent. Given that not all sexually active women will be using contraception, these figures reflect a minimum percentage of single women who were sexually active at the time of the surveys (see Rutherford, Ogawa and Matsura 2001). Rutherford, Ogawa and Matsura note that in the 1998 National Survey on Family Planning, 55 percent of all single women responded that they had at least one male friend, leading them to conclude that most women with a male friend were having sexual intercourse. The number of single women reporting current use of contraception had risen to 57 percent in the 2000 round of the National Survey on Family Planning (Rutherford, Ogawa and Matsura 2001: 88).

The intimate association between having a male friend and being sexually active is also voiced by popular essayist Sugiyama Yumiko. Talking about single women in their 20s who she interviewed, she argues that [hetero]sexual relationships for women are largely grown out of a friendship with a male friend. She argues that

the move to sexual intimacy is in the form of an extension of feelings of friendship (*oyijo encho*). As such, a sexual encounter may mark the move from friendship to one of “sex friends”, hence it acting as a “gateway” to romantic intimacy (Sugiura 2011: 108). In the context of the rise of women going to co-ed four year universities rather than all-women (gender segregated) junior colleges, it became easier in the 1990s for single women to strike up friendships with males (Sugiura 2011: 108). Yet at the same time that college-age men and women found themselves more likely to be in the same classroom, further education gave women more independence over who and if they dated (Kato 2010: 72).

Sugiura also suggests that with women’s greater independence and sense of individualism, single women do not feel it is necessary to become friends with or move to sexual intimacy with men they are not attracted to. There are perceived dangers to intimacy, especially regarding loss of independence, so only if there is a strong attraction will they take the risk. She also points to pragmatism among women who entered their teens in the years after the economic bubble burst. With fewer men able to support a family wage, she argues that women are no longer waiting for a knight in shining armor to rush them away on a white horse (Sugiura 2011: 64–65). She argues that women are also no longer limited to a passive role in sexual relationships and are more likely to express sexual desire if they find a man attractive (Sugiura 2011: 64).

Sugiura’s conclusions support those of Genda and Kawakami (2006) who argue, based on an analysis of the Japan General Social Surveys, that there has been a polarization of male sexual activity based on their attractiveness to women. Men in high status positions have high levels of sexual activity even if they are working long hours. Long hours have been regarded as depressing sexual desire. Nevertheless, for men in insecure positions or unemployed, sexual activity was low. They conclude that “being out of work diminished the meaning of sexual behavior” (Genda and Kawakami 2006: 80). This suggests that an unemployed or underemployed male may internalize his own lack of attractiveness and not even search out a relationship. Certainly, Kato notes that over the lost decades of the 1990s and early 2000s, there was a “decline in economically attractive men” (Kato 2010: 77). While the high school and university years may be a period of greater sexual activity, this appears to tail off by the 30s and 40s with some men being “winners” in the sexual attractiveness game and others emerging as “losers”.

A generational shift?

The generation whose behavior was reported on in the 1975 JASE survey would have been born in the mid- to late-1950s and are today around retirement age. As a generation, they married earlier, and their transition to adulthood was more predictable and more highly gendered. This generation played a significant role in and enjoyed the fruits of the period of economic growth and prosperity that lasted through to the 1990s. For this generation, education was framed as a time of restraint, and evidence of early sexual onset was regarded as deviant, especially

for female students. The restraints placed on women were stronger and their behavior more heavily supervised (see, e.g., Matsumoto 1985: 171; Arahorri 1990: 625). This suggests a profound generation gap.

Even those with relatively liberal views from this generation can express quite negative views about teenage sexual experimentation. For example, despite alarm over the percentage of youth saying they have no interest in sex, many adult commentators on youth sexuality find it hard to move away from the default discourse that has dominated the literature for nearly three decades, even those calling for comprehensive sexuality education. Ishiwata Chioko, in her paper on “Sexual health education for school children in Japan: Timing and contents”, which appeared in the *Japan Medical Association Journal* in 2011, outlines a comprehensive program of sexuality education proposed by the School Health Committee of the Japan Medical Association. The proposal is impressive, yet the author begins the paper by making a highly negative case for the need for a better program of sex education:

People tend to think that sexual behavior between two people not legally married is nothing special. This means that accurate knowledge about sexuality is increasingly essential to ensure a more meaningful life. There would be almost no sexual problems if people refrain from sexual activity before marriage or until they can be fully responsible for their own actions. However, in reality this is not the case. (Ishiwata 2011: 155)

The idea that there is an age when it is possible to be “fully responsible” for your actions and that this happens sometime after you reach the age of majority is commonly echoed in adult-generated discourses around youth sexuality, but no evidence is provided to back up such claims. There is a marked tendency in the literature for those of an older generation to construct the teen years as an extension of childhood when it comes to sexuality, rather than a transitional stage before adulthood where sexual experimentation may be healthy and positive. This is seen frequently at academic meetings when presenters refer to sexually active teenagers as *kokomo* (“children”). This has resulted in a lack of distinction about the background to and risks associated with sexual intercourse for young people. Discursively constructed as “children”, there is no space for a discourse of sexual pleasure to emerge (Fine 1988). Likewise, efforts to expand sex education have been dogged by the idea that it is better not to wake sleeping children (*nerareru ko o samasu*), suggesting that young people are not only infantilized in some adult discourses, but also de-sexualized. This is evident in recent MEXT directives that prohibit any teaching relating to sexual intercourse or contraception at elementary school (6–12 years) level, perhaps understandably, but while these subjects can be taught at junior high school level (12–15 years), the phrase “sexual intercourse” (*seikō*) must be replaced with imprecise vocabulary, “sexual contact” (*seiteki sesshoku*), even when teaching about STIs, HIV, and unplanned pregnancy (Ishiwata 2011: 158). While the huge generational gap between the

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gatekeepers of discourses around youth sexuality is recognized, even the most liberal adult speakers articulate values that are very different from the young people their policies and ideas target.

Concerns about sexless youth

In this section I would like to move on to explore the more recent discursive landscape, which has been characterized by concerns about “sex-phobic youth”, often conflated as “herbivore men”, who are seen to be contributing to Japan’s demographic woes. There is also concern that “herbivore” men will not have the strength to support a growing elderly population, as they do not have the drive of “meat-eating” men.

Herbivore men

Mariko Fukusawa, a popular media communist, coined the phrase *sōshoku danshi* (“herbivore male” or “grass eating man”) in 2006 to indicate males who were not driven by a desire for sex or money, but instead were concerned about their looks and being frugal. They were depicted as gentle and somewhat effeminate. The idea gained significant coverage in the media as columnists lamented the perceived loss of assertive, competitive, and hard masculinity. In 2009, the phrase *sōshoku danshi* was nominated as one of ten top buzzwords for that year (Morioka 2013). Morioka Masahiro credits the sudden popularity of the term, especially in the media, with the way the idea of the herbivore male matched the more feminine sensitive male figure that people were seeing in daily life (Morioka 2013).

Kon Issho, in his popular book entitled *Ubawareta seiyoku* (*Stolen Sexual Desire*), focusing on the herbivore male, laments young men who not only lack drive but have no strong desire to strike up a romantic relationship even if they have an opportunity for a relationship with someone of “the opposite sex” (Kon 2009: 3). He claims that while on the one hand the herbivore male has little desire, on the other any desire he does feel is experienced as something gross (*kimochi warui*) and so is to be avoided (Kon 2009: 25). This is in contrast to the carnivore male who “does not hesitate to ask [for sex]” and even if he is rather inexperienced in the beginning, “acquires strategies and accumulates know-how and experience of negotiating” with women. The carnivore male “takes for granted that ‘sex is a negotiation’” (Kon 2009: 24). Kon suggests that for herbivore men even the desire to ejaculate is feared as a loss of control of self. He then speculates further by claiming that for the herbivore male to then “transfer this to a desire for sexual intercourse without being able to establish whether this is a legitimate desire (*seitō na seiyoku*) or not leads him to flounder before he has even made a move” (Kon 2009: 104).

While Kon and many others discussing the herbivore male are doing little more than speculating, within this discourse we witness attempts to reinforce a heteronormative and highly gendered understanding of what sex is and how it should take place. Morioka suggests that those most concerned about the rise of herbivore men are middle-aged and older men.

For men in middle-age and older, the herbivorization of young men seems to be seen as something truly deplorable. I think this feeling of disapprobation on the part of older men comes in two varieties. One type is simply a feeling of regret and sadness that young men have lost their “manliness”. They deplore the fact that young men have lost their masculinity and become effeminate, and that as a result they will be unable to support Japan’s economic growth going forward and the country will succumb to international competition. When it comes to family life they suspect that in the future men will be shamefully henpecked and dominated by their wives.

(Morioka 2013)

Morioka carries on to suggest that the herbivore male could be welcomed for being a more gentle and peace-loving male, which could result in a society with less propensity for violence (Morioka 2013). Kon argues that the herbivore male is a product of a peaceful society where men do not have to fight to survive. Under such circumstances their sexual desire is weak. He argues that, in contrast, Japan’s peaceful society since the war has created circumstances where women are able to express their sexual desire more easily, suggesting a mismatch between young men and women in contemporary Japan (Kon 2009: 37).

While both authors, in keeping with much of the discourse around the herbivorization of Japanese males, are highly speculative and often reinforce heteronormative assumptions (Kon more than Morioka), they differ in their interpretation of the trend they describe. Yet, at the same time, they agree that young men today are characterized by a low level of sexual desire beyond auto-eroticism, and may be conflicted even by the latter. Let us now look at some of the evidence that has added fuel to this speculation.

The rise of a generation who “dislike sex”

The Japan Family Planning Association’s (JFPA) biannual Surveys of Male and Female Lifestyle and Attitudes: The Sexual Attitudes and Behavior of Japanese People provides a data source that records the “evolution” of sexlessness among the population generally (JFPA 2016). This traces the rise of sexlessness among Japanese couples over the past 15 years. The latest data (2016) shows a steady increase in couples reporting that they are sexless since the first survey in 2002 (see Figure 4.2). This data has been reported widely in the Japanese and western media, and has helped to constitute Japan as a “sexless nation” (Sechiyama 2014).

Kitamura Kunio, who has led this research, has specifically drawn attention to what he presents as a generation of young people who have little interest in sex.

In the latest JFPA survey, singles with an experience of sexual activity were asked whether they had had sex (sexual intercourse) over the past month. Only 37 percent answered positively to this question, and 57.9 percent reported that they had been sexless over the past month. This is perhaps not surprising as for singles, a critical impediment is lack of a partner. For singles, “not having a partner”

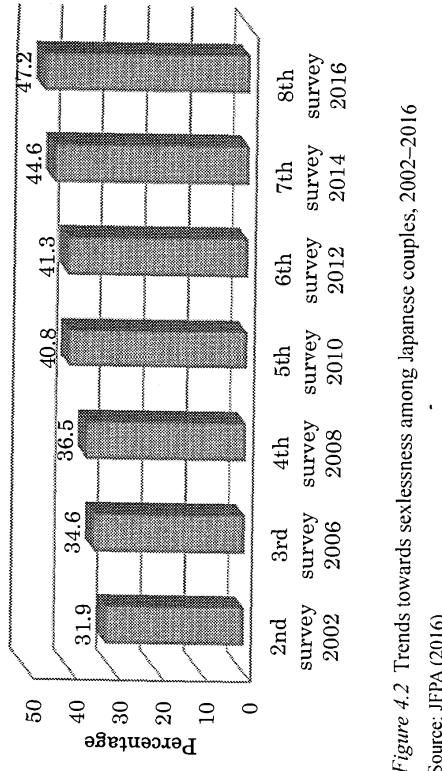


Figure 4.2 Trends towards sexlessness among Japanese couples, 2002–2016
Source: JFPA (2016)

was given by 68.8 percent of respondents as a reason they could not be positive (*sekkyōkuteki*) about sex (JFPA 2016).

Data from the JFPA surveys goes further to support the idea that many young people are not only failing to engage in any sexual activity, but that they have no interest in sex. Figure 4.3 shows that depending on age group and gender, between 10 and 50 percent of young people in the survey reported they were not interested in sex or were averse to sex. The figures for women at each age range are notably much higher than they are for men. This is in contrast to data presented earlier that shows young women more likely to report experience of sexual intercourse than young men. There has been little exploration of why the figure is so high for women.

In his popular book, *Sekkusu kirai na wakanototachi (Young People who Hate Sex)*, Kitamura Kunio devoted all but a few pages of the book to discussing male youth and their apparent lack of interest in having sexual relationships. Female sexuality is not touched upon until page 111. Kitamura suggests that young men are turning their backs on three-dimensional sexuality (person-to-person) and instead engaging in two-dimensional, masturbation encounters through digital media and manga. This viewpoint has gained currency in the media. He suggests that many young men do not feel they have the economic resources for dating and/or they are not confident in their ability to attract women. Within the context of a gendered discourse of youth sexuality, female sexuality is being represented as largely passive. Kitamura speculates that if young women are reporting that they dislike or lack interest in sex, the cause must be the poor skills or performance of young men. Nevertheless, no evidence is presented in the book to back up this idea (Kitamura 2011). What I would like to do now is move on to provide space for an emic perspective on youth sexuality.

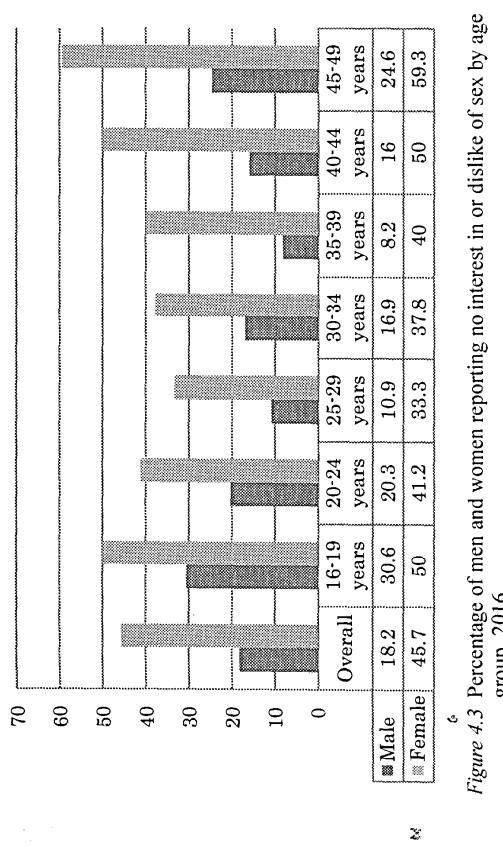


Figure 4.3 Percentage of men and women reporting no interest in or dislike of sex by age group, 2016
Source: JFPA (2016)

The voices of young people on sex education

Without wanting to over-emphasize the influence of sex education in its highly marginalized positioning in the Japanese curriculum, I would like to argue that it functions as a regulatory mechanism within a broader, highly conservative discourse that denies young people a space as “legitimately sexual” and does so in highly “constraining gendered and heteronormative ways” (Allen and Carmody 2012: 458). In the context of below-replacement fertility, this regulatory mechanism may be having unanticipated effects with young people ending up regarding sexual behavior as “dangerous, dirty, risky and/or murky”².

I have been delivering a lecture on sexuality to first-year undergraduate students at Osaka University as part of the course “Women’s studies, men’s studies: Thinking about discrimination” for the past ten years. As an elective assignment, I have had students write reflectively about their associations with the word “sex”, and their experiences of sex education. I also asked them to imagine what school-based sex education should look like if the aim were to convey a sex-positive message. They were also asked to give their opinion on “sexless youth”. While this is a highly selected voice of youth, over the past ten years there has been incredible consistency in the way my students have talked about sex and sex education. Their surprise at the idea that sex could be healthy and the consistency with which certain words appeared to describe how sex was constructed through sex education, such as scary (*kowai*), dirty (*kitanai*), impure (*yogore*), dangerous (*kiken*), and taboo (*tabi*), runs through most of the reports I have received over the past decade.

Drawing on reports submitted in the 2016 academic year, I would like to cite some representative views. All translations of the original Japanese are my own.

While at junior high and high school, due to the policy of those in charge I received much more in-depth sex education than took place at other schools (we even learned how to use a condom while at junior high school). However, because the content was treated negatively the image I gained of sex was "scary". As this way of thinking about sex was so profoundly instilled in me I never thought I might want to embrace a more positive image, but for those students who have yet to have any sex education I would really like them to be given more positive contents. When it comes to the causes of young people having no interest in sex, I think the compression of time is one reason. In other words, we are expected to be efficient with everything and work time has increased so time to spend on sex is just not there and we are too tired to get into that kind of mood anyway. I think this is probably the main cause.

(Female, first year in the School of Engineering)

The above passage is impressive for its insights, and in different ways I have heard young people articulate ideas about sexuality education and sexlessness in similar ways.

Up until now I have naturally thought about sex negatively with the view that it is dirty, and shameful. However, Japanese sex education is only from the perspective of biology and medicine and although there are many things I would like to know about sex it is hard to ask because talking about sex is taboo. In addition, the very important topic of "consent" is not covered at all. I think that the fact that there are problems around sex and sex crimes can be put down to this kind of sex education. I would like us to start thinking about sexuality as something healthy.

(Female, first year student in the School of Letters)

Consent was one issue that we discussed in class. Despite Japan having an age of sexual consent that is lower than most other developed countries, age 13, the issue of consent is not covered in schools. Indeed, legal issues around sexuality are not covered in sex education.

Students express surprise that they have been given space to think and discuss sexuality, as the following student's comment makes clear.

In Japan, when you have sex education students breath a heavy sigh and the atmosphere that is created makes you feel that there is something embarrassing about the whole thing. For me too, I feel strongly that this was how I was made to feel. As it is always necessary to attune yourself to the opinion of others I have never had the opportunity to express positive views up until

now. I think that today's lecture allowed me to think more about sex than I ever had in my life before.

(Male, first year student in the School of Engineering Science)

The comments I have received over the years suggest that the young internalize a negative image of sex and have few resources to develop a more positive image. This does not necessarily stop young people from engaging in sexual relationships as the JASE data presented earlier makes clear, but it may affect how they think about such relationships and the way in which they value it. It is important not to lay the blame solely on sex education, but to understand how sexuality is represented in wider society. As one student astutely noted:

I think the reason why we cannot be open about sex has less to do with sex education and more to do with the negative way in which sex is dealt with generally in Japanese society. I don't know if this is good or not, but I think this way of thinking may have speeded up the trend towards very low fertility (*shōshika*).

(Male, first year student in the School of Engineering Science)

Some of the ideas expressed by the students echoe Kon's writing about herbivore men who may feel sexual desire is something "gross" (Kon 2009: 25). While the Heisei generation may have different values around sex, the tendency to view it negatively may be a point of commonality with older generations.

Youth as opinion leaders around sexuality and their discourse of resilience

When planning to write this chapter, I spoke with a group of four young people, two male and two female, who are active around reproductive and sexual health/rights issues in Tokyo, in March 2016. Two gave me permission to use their names. Both are organization leaders. One is Yanagida Masayoshi, President of Link-R,³ a Japanese NGO providing sexual and reproductive health/rights related services to youth in Japan. He is also a member of the World Association of Sexual Health (WAS) Youth Initiatives Committee and a former member of U-COM, a youth committee established by the Japan Family Planning Association. Born in 1983, he is not quite a member of Heisei youth, but a key member of the youth movement on sexual and reproductive health.

The other youth leader is Horisawa Mio, a university student training to be a *yoga*, or nurse teacher. Horisawa is leader of the Adolescent Health Committee⁴ (Shishunki Hoken I'inkai), a volunteer group with links to Link-R made up largely of students studying health, medicine or health education. She has been involved with organizing the annual LGBT Seijinsiki@Saitama (LGBT coming

of age at Saitama) activities. The other two interviewees are active in this group. One is a nurse and the other a university student. Horisawa and her group seek to make up for the gaps in school-based sex education to ensure that young people not only have correct knowledge, but also like themselves and feel empowered.

When asked whether young people felt pressured to marry and have children given the very low birthrate, the consensus was that these seemed quite a distant issue for most young people that they spoke to. For many, they thought, the focus was on successfully becoming a *shakaijin*, or a full contributing member of society, which was largely measured through *shishoku*, or getting employment. This was seen to be the case whether the young person was male or female. With anxieties about the future, it was seen as difficult to commit to a relationship in the present. Having a relationship was not a priority even under the weight of societal expectations to produce the next generation.

Echoing Suguri noted above, these four activist young people noted that the gendered pathways to adulthood that dominated in the past, where a man was expected to work and be the economic provider and the woman the homemaker and mother raising children, seemed to have less resonance in their lives. Getting steady employment was seen as the main worry and unless that part of the transition to adulthood was successfully negotiated, then getting a partner and starting a family was something far in the distance. Even more casual dating seemed to be off the agenda. Issues around economic instability mentioned as important by writers such as Genda and Kawakami (2006) and the complexity of negotiating a successful transition to adulthood noted by Ishida (2013) and Kato (2011), among others, were reflected in the understandings of these young people.

Psychological reasons were also forwarded for any reluctance of young people to date or enter sexual relationships. One member of the youth group, a nurse, suggested that many young people raised in families where they are the only child or only have one sibling are not used to sharing or being physically close to others. She noted that some young people find it difficult to be physically close to others. The idea of embracing the sweaty body or smell of another person is repugnant, she felt. In a society where many young people wear masks in order to protect themselves from the “germs” of others, physical intimacy may be difficult.

Rather than accept the current status quo, these four young leaders have been working as advocates and opinion leaders around reproductive and sexual health/rights. They are offering drop-in counseling sessions at different locations in Tokyo, conducting workshops and lectures on sexuality, and taking part in youth-adult think tanks and projects to raise awareness around sexuality. Asked the importance of their activities around sexuality and reproductive health/rights for them personally, and for other youth and wider society, Yanagida and Horisawa offered the following explanations:

For me personally, when I was 19 years old, I decided to work on promoting sexual health issues and solving adolescent's concerns. So, I decided I will continue this work whatever happens. For other youth, I want to provide places and opportunities for young people to ask advice about their sexual problems. For wider society, if adults see that young people are *genki* (healthy and energetic) adults also become *genki*. If adults are *genki*, then young people will

be *genki*. As a result of this cycle, communities and wider society will also be active and healthy. Whether young people are socially, economically and politically strong or weak, as they become adults they have a role to play in society. To be able to do this it is necessary to learn life skills so that that the older generation can hand over the baton to the younger generation.

(Yanagida, 19 September 2017)

Yanagida offers an inclusive vision where everyone can contribute to society whether strong or weak. He also articulates a very strong interest in the promotion of youth sexual health.

Horisawa's response was in many ways more pragmatic. She sees it as one aspect of her future career as a nursing teacher. However, her vision is of herself as a teacher who acts as a facilitator to help young people to think about their sexual and reproductive health/rights. Horisawa states:

I don't want to be the kind of nursing teacher that is tied to her own experiences and values relating to sex. I want [my students] to be able to think deeply about their own life plan based on their own thinking about reproductive health and rights.

(Horisawa, 19 September 2017)

She hopes to make a difference to young people by passing on knowledge about sexuality when topics relating to sex and relationships come up. She can introduce her own youth activities and this she thinks will make it easier for them “to ask her questions without hesitation”. As a result of this, Horisawa hopes to contribute to wider society by helping to decrease the number of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. She also hopes that her role in sexual counseling and LGBT activities will be “a model for students to take part in activities about sexual issues” (Horisawa, 18 September 2017).

When asked about the challenges they face in their activities, Yanagida talked about economic constraints and having to deal with social prejudice. Economically, it is hard to raise funds to support their activities. On the other hand, they come face-to-face with deep-rooted taboos around sexuality.

As we are involved in sex education it is thought that we are going to awaken young people to sex and they will be promiscuous. Young women will take the pill and then will be sexually promiscuous, etc. As a result of this kind of mistaken thinking and prejudice (social values) there are many cases when we just can't move things ahead.

(Yanagida, 18 September 2017)

Horisawa notes that it is difficult to get young people involved in the activities and that there is a trust issue when you are dealing with sexual issues.

One problem is that the number of members of our organization is small. People are happy to take part in events, but it is hard to get them to be active in

the organization. There is also the problem that when you introduce yourself as an organization involved in activities around sex then people are suspicious. I think it is good to hold events that are a little removed from the subject of sex that students will think of as fun and interesting.

(Horisawa, 19 September 2017)

These young people's activities are a clear demonstration of their resilience. While on the one hand, wider society is concerned that young men are not interested in sex, on the other, youth who are attempting to change the conditions in which young people understand and experience the sexual face tough barriers that make it difficult to bring about change.

Outlook

This chapter has explored youth sexuality in low fertility and hyper-aging Japan. We have focused both on survey data and popular discursive accounts of youth sexuality to do this. On the one hand, survey data points to a dramatic shift in values and behavior between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s, in which sexual intercourse became an accepted and relatively normal (normative) part of young adulthood. Yet the data also suggests that many young people are not sustaining sexual activity into adulthood, when fewer and fewer men or women report having an intimate or even friendship relationship with the “opposite sex”. On the other, sex education remains limited and efforts made to engage young people on sexual issues generate criticisms that they are being sexualized.

While adult society resists recognizing young people as legitimate sexual beings, it also desires men to be carnivore males with strong sexual desire and the motivation to pursue women for sexual intimacy. The discourse around herbivore men reproduces stereotypical ideas around gender and sexuality. It seems to be tied to notions of manhood that belong in an earlier age. While logically, recent concerns about sexlessness should create a space for thinking about sex in a more positive way, this is not generally happening. On the one hand, the young people whose voices come through clearly in this chapter are engaging in a positive way with sexual health and rights, and active around LGBT issues. On the other, adult gatekeepers still frame intimacy in terms of men pursuing sex with women, who in turn are positioned as “the opposite sex”.

Notes

¹ It is reasonable to assume that those currently using contraception are either engaged in a sexual relationship or expect to be in the near future for the minority who might be using an oral contraceptive or IUD. The male condom remains overwhelmingly the most commonly used form of contraception in Japan even today.

² These are words that have frequently been offered by students in my classes to describe their immediate association with the word “sex”.

³ Link-R website in English Online available at: [www.link-r.org/english](http://link-r.org/english)

⁴ The website is only in Japanese Online available at: <http://hoken.link-r.org/>

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5 Raising children and the emergence of new fatherhood in a super-aging society

Masako Ishii-Kuntz

Introduction

In Japan, some major demographic changes over the past decades such as social aging, delay in first marriage, decline in fertility, and an increase in women's labor force participation have necessitated adjustments in the parental sharing of childcare. For example, although the Japanese overall population has been rapidly aging, we have witnessed a decrease in the number of three-generational households. This means that for many young Japanese families, grandparents can no longer be considered as a main support for childcare at home. A rise in female labor force participation also makes it necessary to reevaluate and improve both formal and informal support systems for childcare, with the latter including fathers' involvement in childrearing. These recent demographic changes, along with the shortage of daycare centers and other childcare facilities, and the father-friendly revisions of the childcare leave law all point to the direction of increased paternal involvement in childcare. The emergence of "new fatherhood" since the mid-2000s, therefore, can be seen as a result of these changes and demands.

In this chapter, I discuss the new generation of fathers called *ikamen* ("child caring dads") in contemporary Japan. To accomplish this objective, I will first explain how demographic changes and family policies and laws have contributed to the rise of *ikamen*. Second, I will summarize research findings on fatherhood in Japan. I will also discuss the effects of social aging on the emergence of new fatherhood. Finally, I will explain how the post-bubble generation of Japanese men has adopted this new fatherhood and the sharing of childcare responsibilities with their spouses.

Demographic changes and family policies/laws

Social aging: current state and future outlook

According to the Cabinet Office (2017), only 4.9 percent of the total population was older than the age 65 in 1950, but this percentage increased dramatically to 26.7 percent in 2015. It is projected that by 2055, almost 40 percent of the entire population or one in 2.5 Japanese will be over the age of 65. Additionally, the