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# For \$1,000 I'll love you too: an understanding of Japanese hosts and host clubs

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FOR \$1,000 I'LL LOVE YOU TOO:  
AN UNDERSTANDING OF JAPANESE HOSTS AND HOST CLUBS

by  
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Anthropology Capstone

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## **Abstract**

Japanese host clubs are a phenomenon not many people understand in America. If one looks deeper into Japanese culture while explaining the differences in similar sub-cultures hosts are identified with one will learn that a host is not a sex worker. Hosts resemble a pseudo-psychologist, healer or as they refer to themselves 'chivalrous men.' To understand how Japanese hosts began, one must understand Japanese culture. Japanese people must hide who they really are while trying to become accepted among their peers. This is done by using the concepts of ninjo and giri. The rest is accomplished by honne and tatamae. A Japanese person must wear constant masks, while never reviling too much or unaccepted parts of him or her self. While this is being done they have no outlets, acceptance of mental illness or private life. This form of life can be over bearing and stressful on a person and thus they turn to private 'things' to relax.

## CHAPTER 1

### JAPANESE CULTURE AND JAPANESE HOSTS

What would you say if I offered you a job that consisted of drinking all night, singing, joking with friends and making the opposite sex smile, with no sexual obligations? Did I mention this job could pay around \$10,000 a month? This sounds like a dream job to many Americans I spoke with and it exists in Japan.

I discovered this line of work during a study abroad in Shinjuku, Japan (2008-2009). Every night, walking down the busy, crowded street of Yasukuni-Dori I passed men soliciting. This area is known as Kabuki-cho, the red-light district. These men resembled rock stars. They had spiky, cartoon hair with a tall, slender physique. They wore expensive suits with rhinestone belt buckles, wallet chains, necklaces, sunglasses, and stood with a stance that held a certain ‘cool’ attitude. They crowded in small groups and lined the street. All standing around talking, some limply holding cigarettes, inhaling and exhaling without losing their cool. Then, he would see an attractive girl and chase after her trying to hand out a business flier.

Natalie, my host sister, said, “Oh those, those, are just hosuto.”

I retaliate “Hosuto?”

“Yeah, stupid girls pay tons of money to them so they pretend to be her boyfriend for the night at the bar. I’ve had friends give thousands of dollars to them,” she replied, rolling her eyes and laughing.

Laughing I respond “What?”

“The new ones are sent out on the street, this is the only way they pick up clients. They have to stand out here and hand out flyers until they are gone or they find women to bring into the club. You make a lot of money working there and you get to drink a lot. It’s cheap if you



only go once and it can be fun. Maybe we can go there one day.”

I planned to depart Japan in April. Before I left Natalie, her friend Katie and I went to a host club called “Club Black” which today is no longer open. To find the club we entered down Kabuki-cho, into a small alley to an unmarked building. Here we crammed into an elevator and went up a few floors. The doors opened to an awkward, silent hallway. As we reached the end of the hallway we heard faint techno music getting louder. When we reached the club, solid black double doors opened to an all-black, leather furniture room and five Japanese hosts screaming “*irasshai*,” meaning welcome.

It was early, so the club was empty. We sat in the back of the room while hosts came and sat with us. Katie’s host friend poured our drinks while we discussed life. The three of us participated in the “first time fee.” This was a two hour trail costing \$30. We were treated like celebrities. The hosts would pour our drinks, talk and joke with us. At the end of the night we said our goodbyes and went our separate ways.

After that experience, I became fascination by the job and culture of Japanese hosts. This line of work would not be possible or understood in America. When I try to explain it, no one has heard of it and has a harder time comprehending it. The first question asked is, “Do they have sex?” Japanese people, on the other hand, are shocked I know about hosts and hold a negative view towards them. Due to these experiences, I decided to do an investigation and place the host in his rightful category. To do this, I utilized unobtrusive direct observation, participant observation, structured and unstructured interviews, discussions, analysis of texts, and an open ended survey available on survey monkey. This research explains how hosts are not sex workers once one understands Japanese culture.

## **Nippon**

*Nippon no bunka* means Japanese culture, *bunka* is something national and defining, similar to patriotism in America. *Sekensama*, is one's obligation to society and *giri* is a social promise to act in a manner that does not bring shame to the people around you (Minami 1971). This concept of *giri* is fluid. When a person lacks *giri* they have no respect for the community or its members. When a person has *giri*, you care about your community and the society to which you belong. To keep *giri* high one must care about their *sekentei*, your social reputation and appearance. *Giri*, when combined with *ninjo*, human feeling, creates the basis for Japanese social relationships (Moeran 1986).

## **Japanese-ness**

Japanese people cannot separate themselves from their “Japaneseness.” A Japanese person is not interchangeable from the public. *Ninjo* and *giri* together are used to create social relationships keeping one from going into excess and becoming arrogant. Lacking *ninjo* and *giri* annoys others and disrupts the emphasized group mentality (Minami 1971). The group mentality is the most important aspect to Japanese society. To be *Heibon*, ordinary, is the desired way to live life in Japan (Buruma 1985).

One remains ordinary in Japan by not mixing private thoughts and feelings with their public thoughts and feelings. This is understood through *honne*, one’s true feelings or private thoughts. *Tatemaie*, is thoughts and feelings that are displayed to their peers or any public setting. (Moeran 1986). Social organization is crucial to the Japanese individual by using pieces of Japanese culture. Social organization is what Japanese people owe their identity, to the group in which they belong (Moeran 1986).

Sexuality in Japan is viewed differently than what one is accustomed to in the west.

Men in Japanese culture are considered 'feminine' in comparison the West. The representation of masculinity is constantly changing in Japan (Snyder 2012). During the Kamakura period (1185 - 1333) women were subjected to sexual segregation (Buruma 1985). Left over from this time was homosexual chivalry, leaving influences of homoerotic overtones between Japanese men (Buruma 1985). Masculinity is a fluid representation while femininity is static and unchanged over the years (Snyder, 2012). Men have two main stereotypes; *koha*, the tough guy, and *nanpa*, the romantic guy. These stereotypes can be combined or contradicted and visible in various male dominated sub-cultures (Snyder 2012).

### **Behavioral ideology**

The concepts of Japanese society are old and go back to the Pre-Edo Period. These concepts are seen in Japanese literature and still applicable in Japan today. In Japanese society people believe there is a place for you, this is known as *honbun*. Identity depends on the group in which you associate yourself (Buruma 1985). The Japanese individual is viewed as part of something larger. If you are not associated with a group you are considered a loner (Buruma 1985). The Japanese group is not always based on friendship, instead it is based around community, career, or the school you attend. The group is ones extended family. Upon leaving the group, one leaves membership and all affiliation or association with the group (Buruma 1985).

Japanese living is centered on community and workplace, holding a known group consciousness. Japanese people have little social life outside of their group affiliation (Befu 1974). One must remain loyal to your group by conforming and cooperating to avoid conflict and competition (Moeran 1986). Each group has a different degree of independence and laws that bind one to their group. Because of this, there is a large gap of discrimination among

relationships between different types of groups. If one is an outsider of that particular group, this person is seen as non-human (Befu 1974).

Since Japanese consciousness is seen in relation of the group in which they are affiliated, one shows respect for the group by only using *tatemaie*, they only express their group consciousness not their personal feelings. *Honbun* assists in the removal of one's private life and replaces it with their affiliated group. The lack of distinction of private and public life in Japan can be related to the group identity and the combination of *honbun* (Naoi & Schooler 1985).

In the workplace, Japanese do not use self-directedness because the group is the center of importance. An individual only exists alongside the group that he or she belongs in; this view of group identity is prevalent inside of Japanese work ethics. A worker's interest is always organized with the interest of the group or job (Naoi & Schooler 1985). Two different thoughts are used to explain the effects of Japanese work; the job affects the personality or the personality reflects the job (Naoi & Schooler 1985). These concepts can be used to explain the different types of people working as hosts in Japan.

A popular subculture in Japan that can sometimes be related to hosts is known as visual kei. Visual kei is a genre of Japanese popular music, in this genre band members wear makeup along with gothic and punk attire. Inside of this community fans also dress up similar to the band members (Hashimoto 2007). Some say visual kei is not just a music style but a form of visual expression. Visual kei can contain some sexual fantasy about cartoon characters, similar to a fetish; alongside of this they also show a type of sexlessness in their attire (Snyder 2012). Men and women can and do wear the same clothing. Visual kei is also as a type of subversion through musical and visual performance (Snyder 2012).

Almost all visual kei fans participate in this type of dress up through appropriate

costumes. These members are able to represent non sexuality through *kawaii*, cute or *kowai*, scary behaviors, that remove Japanese male visual kei members from the western version of masculinity (Snyder 2012). This costume play has been known to create a type of sex appeal or lack thereof, self-expression and a new found freedom that is not common in Japan. Snyder's (2012) study suggests that visual kei is representation of absence of gender and sexuality can disrupt the view of male and female gender roles.

The first wave of visual kei bands and style came with the band X-Japan (Snyder, 2012). X-Japan's fan base formed in the 1990s and still holds popularity in Japan today but the second wave of visual kei seems to be more extreme and is seen in Japan today. Malice Mizer is the band that is known for this newer version of visual kei (Hashimoto 2007). This group at first tried to remove themselves from the conformation of the group by individual outlets, yet by doing so formed a new group they all belong in known as Visual Kei.

Visual kei is not the only group that started as a form of self-expression. Another subculture is called *otaku*. Otaku are considered antisocial and narrow minded, since they are extreme anime and manga fans that face a lot of discrimination in Japan. Some Japanese otaku are considered mentally unbalanced and obsessive because they do not communicate like regular members of society.

Otaku do not care about fashion or other things considered important in society. As times change, manga and anime are becoming popular in the west and other areas, from this a different version of otaku was created. They are known as *shinjinrui*, which means new human being, and is mostly made up of the younger *otakus*. This new version of otaku is considered cool and stylish (Hashimoto 2007).

## **The Geisha, the Sex Worker, Kyabakura and Kabuki**

Geishas first appeared in Japan in the 1750s (Okada 2003). Geisha are performers and very different than the hostess and sex worker. Before the abolition of prostitution geisha were forced to have sex with clients but this has since ceased (Okada 2003). Today geisha are located in the Gion district of Kyoto; to be a geisha she must attend school and be properly trained in the art of *gion*. This is vigorous training of dance, the tea ceremony and others. Japanese policy states that the geisha must work very hard because she represents Japanese culture (Okada 2003). Today geisha perform at special dinners and cultural events and can sometimes be seen in the Gion district of Kyoto (Okada 2003).

The term sex worker originated in 1979 from Carol Leigh, who was an American feminist/prostitute (Yamagishi 2009). The origin of this term is used to describe the sale of a sexual service (Kovener 2009). Sex workers in Japan mostly associated with military base cities when Japan was occupied by the United States. In 1956 prostitution became illegal and many legal prostitutes were out of work (Kovener 2009). This impacted Japanese society; there was a lot of money to be made in selling sex to western men. *Panpan* was the term used to describe streetwalker, prostitute and base worker. Currently in Japan, soap girls or pink salons are legal and consist of the woman giving oral sex to men.

Finally the female hostess or *kyabakura* appeared and many believe the hostess is taking the place of the geisha. Hostesses work to have a higher standard of living (Tamanoi 1990). Inside the *kyabakura* club, the female hostess keeps the customer happy by being attentive and keeping conversation lively (Wicker 2011). Today most *kyabakura* are in their early twenties and are overseen, or protected by the mama. In the hostess club, the hostess must remain professional

all times; she cannot smoke and can only drink when the customer asks her to drink with him (Wicker 2011). Men go to these clubs to talk to women.

It is believed that since the 16th century high class women would secretly arrange meetings with Kabuki actors in tea houses (Prideaux 2006). The women paid to spend time and have sex with these actors, I believe this is the precursor to the host clubs (Leiter 2002). Kabuki actors consist only of males that play both gender roles. The kabuki actors come off as sexless and only appear to be male or female (Buruma 1985). Kabuki acting originated in the 1600s and continues to this day in Japan (Leiter 2002).

### **The Japanese Host**



Street life in Kabukicho outside Host Club Casanova. Adapted from Hodges 2008.

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According to Fulford (2004) hosts see themselves as entertainers, companions, psychologists and businessmen. The first host club was located in Yaesu train exit in Tokyo in 1966, and was kept private to the public (Takeyama 2005). This first host club was called Night Tokyo and employed over one hundred hosts (Prideaux 2006). The guests consisted of hostesses, yakuza wives and sex workers. Takeshi Aida was one of the first hosts, now in his sixties, still

refers to himself as "King of the Hosts." He now owns a successful host club known as Club Ai located in Kabuki-cho (Prideaux 2006). Since this time hosts clubs have changed, the prices have been reduced by removing bands and dance floors, changing the operating hours and moving the clubs to better, safer locations (Fulford 2004). After 1984 the first law restricting host clubs passed. It constricted the operating hours of the host clubs. Host clubs can now operate between the hours of 4:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. or 7:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. (Toyama 2007).

The majority of host clubs are focused in bigger cities like Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya (Takeyama 2005). The 1200 estimated host clubs throughout Japan bring in around \$1.4 billion dollars annually and the average salary of a host is \$10,000 (Fulford 2004). Some hosts can make the same amount of money in one month as a salary man does in a year; but a lot of this money goes towards bills (rent, fees for spilt drinks and broken cups at the club, clothing and sometimes monetary protection) (Prideaux 2006).

Turn around employment is high inside of the host clubs, usually two or three out of over one hundred hosts last longer than a few months (Fulford 2004). To be a host there are no educational requirements, the only requirement is that he is good looking and has the ability to talk. (Prideaux 2006). When a host is hired he must go through a provisional period before he is allowed to call himself a host. He is taught how to have conversations, be subtle and always make women smile (Tanikawa 1996). Fulford (2004) believes there is a hierarchy of tasks, inside the host club, a host must to do earn his place. The newest members or lowest ranked hosts must do menial tasks such as sweeping, cleaning toilets and cleaning up spills. The next stage is known as "*catching duty*." This is a popular thing you can see out on the streets of Kabuki-cho. Catching is when the host solicits guests out on the street, he must do it every day until he gets a regular guest (Prideaux 2006). The host that last through all of this and become successful



usually retires and runs host club websites, clothing lines and/or cosmetic lines (Fulford 2004).

The guests at the host club consist entirely of women. Forty percent of the women are *kyabakura* workers, another forty percent are sex workers and the remaining twenty percent of the women is made up of everything else. Every woman that visits the club regularly has a designated host, which is known, as her *shimei* (*shimeisha*, the actual word). Designating a host to the women prevents competition inside of the club and the woman only visits and pays her host. She may never change her *shimei* (Toyama 2007).

Hosts make 35% - 50% commission off of the drinks they sell. Hosts can make this amount of commission because they charge eight to ten times more for drinks and food at the club (Takeyama 2005). With commission being the base of the pay, hosts entertain multiple customers a night (Toyama 2007). Hosts are ranked based off of who can sell the most and who makes the most money (Toyama 2007). The host who sells the most is the number one; he is treated better than the other hosts and is the most popular. Being number one is an advantage, women want to spend their time with number one, and he is considered a celebrity inside the club. (Clennell 2006).



Figure 2 Since You Group. 2013. [Top Host Ranks]. Magazine.

You become number one by remembering small details about your guests. Prideaux (2006) believes remembering her work, hobbies and birthday will keep conversations going and she will continue to visit you. A host by the name of Kyotaro sends his guest text messages and emails every day. He is ranked number two in his club called Top Dandy and makes up to \$300,000.00 a year (Toyama 2007). Being a successful host is based off of how much time one spends outside of the club 'being a host.' This can be understood through the Japanese work ethic. The best hosts are not always the most attractive; they are good to their guests and remember the smallest details (Toyama 2007). Fulford (2004) states that that hosts must also be able to attentively listen, read women's magazines to keep up with trends and master the art of conversation to be successful.

Inside of the host club men play different roles, as entertainers, listeners, story tellers and chivalrous gentlemen. These women that pay anywhere from \$30 an hour to \$10,000 a night, depending on the events and specials. Hosts make the women feel like the center of the world by pretending to be interested (Clennell 2006). Hosts provide kindness and caring while providing the guest with opinions and ways to better her life (Cullin 2001).

Now the question of sex, many people believe sex is a requirement of the job, but not all hosts have sexual relations with their guests. A top host named Ryo believes that sleeping with his patrons can ruin their relationship. He also said "Rumors spread like wildfire and if the girls get jealous that's two good customers gone for nothing," (Prideaux 2006). Hosts are human, so sex does happen between the host and guest but there is no monetary exchange, and it does not happen during work hours or in the club.

Women attend these clubs to relax after work and be entertained (Hindell 1997). Some hostesses go to the clubs because they want to receive the same pampering they offer their clients

every day. *Kyabakura* women sometimes bring in their male clients to pay the tab (Tanikawa 1996; Toyama 2007). Women visit these clubs to feel encouraged to escape from the outside world (Clennell 2006). One host said "It's not all about the money, I'm helping them develop as people they grow as better women and humans," (Wollaston 2007). Takeyama believes there are three main reasons women visit these clubs: the women are manipulated by the hosts, there is nowhere else for women to go in Japan for entertainment, and finally because hosts offer some sort of "gentleness" that the normal Japanese man does not (Takeyama 2007).

The job of a host is not all fun and games, hosts tend to throw up every night and many worry about alcohol poisoning or other side effects from the daily drinking. The Japanese work ethic also extends to the host clubs, because of this they have irregular sleep schedules, no holidays or weekends (Toyama 2007). You are a host all day, every day.

### **Can Japanese-ness affect one's mental health?**

Many hosts believe they are healers who offer an escape or fantasy for women. Because of this, I started questioning the roles of mental health and different outlets available in Japan. This led me to interviewing Mrs. Keener-Stephens, a PsyD. Candidate with a M.A. in Psychology, who informed; "A mental illness is something that causes problems for the person's day to day life. A mental illness usually has an organic nature or can be based from social issues." If it were to go undiagnosed, "A lot of times people don't know how to function. They don't know proper tools they can use, not proper medication, if it goes undiagnosed they don't know what to look for, they don't understand what's going on with them nor how to treat it." She also informed me of the different types of outlets one can have, "It's always good to have a support system, in patient, out-patient, you can use groups. Or you can go do active things and not acknowledge they're trying to make themselves feel better." This type of un-

acknowledgement is the key aspect to Japanese society and was a turnaround point in my research.

## CHAPTER 2

### MATERIAL AND METHODS



Grand Host. 2013. Shinjuku Kabukicyo Area map. Magazine.

The hosting website *HOSTXHOST* has listed every host club registered in Japan. On this website I was able to get the statistics and lists of the all the host clubs in Kabuki-cho where I am focusing all of my research. During the time of my data collection there were 193 host clubs in Kabuki-cho. I was able to pull statistics from half of these clubs by randomly picking clubs and hosts that are employed in the clubs. Based off of this data and 519 host profiles I am able to

conclude that the average age of a host is twenty-four years old. On average the host clubs employ twenty-four hosts per club.

On this web page I was able to get a sense of the host's view of himself. Hosts ranked themselves on a scale of one to five for the following; their humor, ability to drink alcohol and how good looking/cool they are. Each of these rankings averaged to 3.3, meaning the majority of hosts view himself as average. This view of being average is consistent with Japanese culture. Each host club has their own page with facts about the hosts that work there. Each host has the ability to update and answer the questions provided by the website. Almost all of the hosts view themselves as cool, visual kei, a healer, a drinker, sexy, wild and performers.

I have utilized as many outside tools as possible to conclude and identify a host. First I came up with a handful of open ended questions and created a survey which was posted to *SurveyMonkey*, a survey website available to anyone. The survey was posted in both English and Japanese allowing for responses in either language. Within this data, I was able to obtain over fifty completed results and over one hundred responses of at least one answer.

The overall survey monkey data is as followed: There were 86 total participants with 52 females (average age 25) and 34 males (average age 25). The largest proportion of participants held a Bachelor's degree (34). The other participants held the following: current students (16), associate's degree (14), high school diploma (9), master's degree (8), doctorate (3), and certificates (1). The survey takers identified with the ethnicities of Japanese (36), followed by Caucasian (19) and Asian (11) with one or two from other ethnicities; Africa, black, Canadian, Puerto Rican, Russian, Italian, mixed and other. Profession was also held closely with education completed: current students (43) , teachers/professors (19) professional jobs (6), sales/corporate (10), health care (5), food (2), self-employed (4), music/movies (2) and host/hostess (6).

After gathering survey data I also interviewed Japanese college students in America (2), Japanese professors (3), Japanese people in Japan (4) and non-Japanese people (4) that have studied Japanese culture or lived in Japan to gather information about Japanese culture, view of mental illness and different sub-cultures (including hosts). The age range of these interviewees is between 19- 43, with almost all currently college or with some sort of bachelors degree or higher.

In Japan I set up an interview session inside of the host club called *Since You...Hag*, part of the second largest host club group *Since You Group*. There I interviewed nine hosts and spoke with many more. I also took part in a participant observation inside of *Club Gently*. This host club is part of the largest host club chain in Japan, *Club Billion Jap*. Here I was able to interview intently one host and speak with six or seven other hosts throughout the night. In Japan I also interviewed two females that worked in *kyabakura* clubs and an American female that went to her first host club.

These concepts of Japanese culture are very foreign, and can take a while to get accustomed to, even when you live in Japan. Everything is kept so private that you may never visit a friend's home, you only spend time with most of your classmates during or after class. You do not meet your classmate's friends that are outside of the university, nor do you really speak after you leave the university. When I attended college in Japan at Lakeland College I had many friends we spent a lot of time together, but after graduating and returning to America I lost contact with all but three of those people. These three I was able to see during my research trip, but they were all busy with work issues, it seems they made the transition from the college group now to the work group. Natalie took a few days off work while I was there but she had to take constant calls and do work even though she was off. Her having spent time in Europe and America she told me, "I'm off work, quit calling me, I don't want to do work when I'm off work

but that's what's expected, damn Japanese hard workers." In Japan the best thing to do is assimilate, keep everything private and work hard.

**Kabuki-cho:** 歌舞伎町



Henson, K. 2013. Since You Billboard in Kabuki-cho. Photograph

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In downtown Shinjuku, the most densely populated area of hosts is known as Kabuki-cho, but it depends on the time of day if you will be able to see hosts on 'catching duty'. Based on the information from Kein, my *shimei* from Club Gently and one of my main informants, this is because of the different time tiers that were enforced by the Japanese government in the 1980s. Tier one is called *ichibu* which operates from 7:00 p.m. to 12:30 a.m.; the second tier, *nibu* runs from 6:00 a.m. until 11:30 a.m.; *sanbu*, the third tier runs from 9:00 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. All of these tiers operate with different hosts for different types of clients.

One of my day time observations of Kabuki-cho started at 12:30 p.m. on a Wednesday. The streets are very different during daylight hours. You can see the actual buildings, clean/clear sidewalks and roads which does not happen during the night. During this observation I passed

over fifty host clubs with billboards posted out front of them. I saw ten drunken hosts and three guests stumbling out of the clubs on their walk to the station or wherever they are going. On my walk I saw three buildings designated to only host clubs. I noticed one building that had ten host clubs in the building.

I ran into three hosts I met a few nights before from *Club Gently*. We all greeted one another with a nod and “*konnichi wa.*” I made it a point not to initiate conversation to see if they remember clients outside of work. I watched them all stagger across the street into the batting cages. They had their arms around one another. Tatsuya, who I will talk about later on, had on the same clothes from a few days ago and even with eyeliner smearing down his face. The hosts I saw usually had red faces, bloodshot eyes; they stagger instead of walk and always look exhausted. One host club that stood out to me was called *Fantasy*, which had a gorilla wearing



American flag shorts. The sign above the door had six hosts in matching suits and relatively similar hair tinted in a rainbow color, light above it.



Henson, K. 2013. Club Fantasy in Kabuki-cho. Photograph

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In front of the entry to this club there were five hosts pulling on and joking with a seemingly drunk Japanese girl with a blond bob haircut. They showed her to the exit while, at the same time, not letting her go home and pulling on her arms, while another girl and her host, who was in blue skinny jeans, were crouching near the ground on the other side of doors. She kept trying to kiss him while he playfully pushed her away to avoid the kiss. They were all somewhat loud but really entertaining to watch.



Henson, K. 2013. Host Club Advertisement. Photograph

A common theme that I noticed about the host clubs of Kabuki-cho were that they were all black and silver. The hosts always appear to have a type of sophisticated butler appearance. Host banners and logos consist of the hosts wearing black or white suits, clear, pale faces (no tans), serious expressions, gold, silver, and other neon colored fonts were used on the logos. The signs have the name of the host club, the top hosts' names, near their photo and the location/phone number of the club.

During daylight hours you usually only see hosts when they are on their way home. When night falls the hosts start to come out on the streets along with izakaya workers, karaoke workers, pachinko staff and some African men that run the soap clubs and pink salons. The streets are packed; even the roads are full of people moving out of the way of passing traffic. The buildings are blinded by the illuminating signs in the dark.



SeesaaInc.2013. [Kabukicho]. Retrieved from <http://lynceus.up.seesaa.net/image/kabukicho.jpg>

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Almost all of the signs I passed during the day are now lit up. You can hear different music; techno, American club music or Japanese pop music. Hosts stand in the road, on the sidewalk or walk beside of un-expecting women. Since it was relatively cold the hosts were partially covered up by jackets, however you can still see some of their rhinestone belt buckles and high hair under the coats. This identified them as hosts. I noticed even at 3:00 a.m. when walking with my informant, Kein, the streets were still full of people. Some were friendlier around this time, some hosts attempted to speak with me, in broken English, when I was alone on the streets. They would smile and say silly lines like "HI...MY...NAME IS KI-TA-RO," extremely slow

and sounding out the vowels.

You can usually tell who the hosts are; they are always looking over the crowd for women who seem like they would be interested in the clubs. I was able to do a nightly experiment; I dressed differently on different nights, to see what hosts responded to. One night I wore regular American clothing. It was just basic jeans and a pink t-shirt. I received no invitations. Another night I wore a visual kei outfit. It was a checkered red skirt with black boots. I received some response from the more visual kei looking hosts. The final night, I dressed more fashionable, similar to the *gyaru* fashion, all black with some rhinestones, Chanel earrings and my coach bag. I received fliers and hosts trying to talk to me. This means the hosts look for women who are more similar to their common guests. Hosts are usually holding pamphlets or business cards advertising for their clubs.

Three hosts stood on the back of the street corner down on the inside of Kabuki-cho. One had short blond hair and a grey suit with a lot of rhinestone accessories while the others had long black spiky hair with black suits. When they see a woman that seems to have money or seems like she would be interested in the club the blonde host ran up to her and tried to give her a flier and talk to her. She blew off the blond host by making no eye contact with him, moving her hands up to hold her jacket collar, and walked quickly by. He walked along side of her for a couple of steps then realizing he was not going to get a response he went back to his group of friends and they continued talking back and forth.

The hosts noticed me walking down the street; they probably spotted my giant Coach bag I use for class. We made eye contact, they looked like they would have moved toward me, but I was already walking with a host, another one of my informant, Sumu, he raised his hand and waved, they then turned around scouting in the opposite direction.

Near the entrance of Kabuki-cho, beside Don Quixote, there are always hosts crowded around the opening of the street. They all have darker, spiky hair with black or grey suits/jeans on. All of them have giant rhinestone belt buckles; some had Louis Vuitton wallets sticking out of their back pockets. As the night goes on (usually around 3:00 a.m.) six or seven hosts can be seen hanging out at McDonalds after or before their shifts. At night the clubs light up and you can hear house music outside of them. Occasionally, you can see hosts running in and out of the clubs, I saw one host piggyback ride his guest out of the elevator towards the road to hail her a cab. She was a slender woman, but when he sat her down he yelled “*futoi*” or "Heavy," in a joking, sarcastic manner. She playfully smacked him and got into the cab waving goodbye.

This playful activity continued between many different hosts and their guest exits. Around 2:00 a.m., one girl, who appeared to be a *kyabakura* worker and her friend, drunkenly stumbled towards the club. She was hunkered over and could not physically stand up while her friend was trying to walk her and hold her up. They stumbled down the street, circled around to the elevator, she hit around the open button six times before actually hitting the button, they then fell into the elevator.

**Survey Monkey.** Survey Monkey questions focused solely around views and understandings of host clubs. My series of questions started with a simple inquiry of whether or not they would ever go to a host club. Sixteen said yes while thirty-five said no. Common reasons for a negative response were that the survey taker was a male, the clubs are too expensive or that person has no interest in hosts. The “yes” responses were because they have never been to a host club, but would go for the experience. If they will not go to a host club, would they consider working at one? The responses were similar to the first question, 14 responded they would work at a host club mostly because you can make a lot of money.

However the majority, 36, responded “no”. Their reasoning for not working at host clubs are it is too hard or you have to drink too much. Even though most of my respondents have a negative view of hosts, 35 say they would be friends with a host, while 14 would not. From this survey, 37 out of 49 believe that Hosts are overall easy to identify.

From the seven hosts that took this survey only two believe that anyone can be a host. Almost everyone agreed on the definition of a host and host club: a completely male-staffed organization that has the job of entertaining women, making women happy, drinking with these women, selling faux love and being very talented at conversing. The only negative response I received referred to a host as being narcissistic. They believe that hosts are young, charismatic, attractive Japanese men that have a specific look; they are entertainers, and finally many say hosts are people who need money.

This ties into my question of why one becomes a host; usually the person needs money, sexual relationships and reverse sexual power (which this response was not really clarified). Host lifestyle is believed to be easy, while few say it seems like a hard life. Most people agreed that the host lives a nocturnal life that is really exciting and full of parties. Even though the host makes a lot of money, 31 out of 39 believe it is not a respectable job. Since the majority of the survey takers would not go to a host club, they believe the type of people that do visit host clubs are women looking for a good time, lonely and rich women and few responded with *kyabakura* and prostitutes as frequenters of the host clubs.

Hosts that responded to this survey said they became hosts because they had a financial need but all of them enjoy their job because it is such a different world. Based off of Japanese community and work ethic I asked if the job leaves when the club closes only one says yes, because it was a different type of host club, while the rest say no, you are always a host. When

you are at work you entertain, pour drinks, listen to women and give dreams. The negatives from a hosting job are being responsible for customer's unreasonable attitudes, health problems associated with alcohol and a lot of responsibility. Finally, I wanted to know if hosts have relationships with the women outside of work. They tend to not have women who are guests to the club as friends and a couple hosts responded that they have occasionally had sexual relationships with one of the women outside of work.

### **It's what makes you Japanese**

During my non-host interviews, I focused mainly on Japanese culture and different sub-cultures to link the older literature with current Japanese society to see if it is still relevant to today. First I asked about *giri* and *ninjo*; these terms were referred to as a social or family duty, one's obligation and a feeling that is needed for society. The next terms that are supposed to be important to Japanese society are *honbun* and *sekentei*. *Honbun* is something you have to do. Nancy told me this term is old and has since then been replaced with *gimu*, which is what you are supposed to do, it is your responsibility to do more than just the surface level of requirements. *Sekentei* was referred to as your social side, it is what you do to fit into your community, how people view you in public. Nancy also referred to *honne* and *tatemaie* as being the way a Japanese person can only show his or her good part of self to the public by keeping everything inside and never confronting people.

She also mentions the negative things that have happen in Japan because of this privacy. "Sexual harassment and power harassment have gotten so high and outrageous now, that some people have started telling, so it's good and bad, traditional society, yet, individual human rights... no. If you push *sekentei* too much you will lose your individual rights, so there needs to be a balance."

*Honne* and *tatemae* was the next subject. Everyone consistently believes that *honne* and *tatemae* are constantly present in society today. You are always being private, but you must have a balance, without a balance it is harder to communicate. Sara, who holds a bachelor's in Japanese said; "All the time, it's part of their culture, it's who they are. They do it in speech, like they're always going around and never answering you, like they'll say '*choutou*' (which does not have a direct translation in English but usually “means” maybe or “inconvenient”) instead of just saying no. You can like never get a direct answer out of them."

### **What's Private stays private, but at what cost?**

After learning the privacy of Japanese life I asked if Japanese people are ever able to be his or her self, or if they are constantly their job title or part of the community. Everyone said there is not really a private life. Zane, a Japanese, male said "Yeah, even if you're in trouble, then your group will look bad too." Based on these statements all of your actions are always related back to your job, your school or your community, there is really no type of private life.

This lack of private life can be reflected in the Japanese group mentality. I had many different answers for why Japanese people always relate back to a group. Zane said, "The same type of people stay together and don't let others in." Jessica a Japanese female said, "It's always been that way, feel like they belong because of *sekentei*. I always felt out of place so I moved to America." Nancy said, "I think it's the island mentality. Just because Japan is an island country and never been conquered by other nations, it's myth that Japan is so special and developed. Some people still believe that unfortunately."

### **There's no pill for that here**

Everyone I interviewed referred to mental illness as something that is not accepted in Japan. Based on my interviews all eight of them revered to mental illness as something that is



looked down on, stigmatized and not talked about. Zane said, "I never thought about it, I'm always nice to *shinjou*." (*Shinjou* is the slang term he used to refer to the mentally ill). This was also a trigger showing me they are stigmatized. I figured since they are stigmatized they probably do not openly talk about mental illness. Most replied with the same response, though the non-Japanese college students replies were somewhat different. They said that Japanese people care too much about being judged; while the Japanese people said no, followed by it being personal and needing to be kept as private as possible. One example that Martha said stood out to me; "My host sister to this day never knew she had leukemia. Only the parents knew because she was underage and the doctor only told them. They tell the doctors, because diagnosing them will make them not want to try and overcome the problem. It keeps hope."

Why then, do Japanese people pay for the *kyabakura*, hosts or *enjokousai* (rent-a-friends)? Martha, who has never been to a host club, stated "In Japan, Japanese people are always so busy and they always have ideas of position, they were different types of masks all the time. It feels nice to have no mask. You can do that in a host club."

Nancy believes, "The illusion of having a friend, or somebody, I think it's something to do with Japan is such a strict country or society of people on each other, so people instead of praising others, will get on to you so you will hustle and do more, even inside of the family.....You put yourself down, your family puts you down and you are put down with others so you want to hear something good, so that's their job to give compliments because you want to have a good time and make you feel good. I think people think 'I don't want to be put down anymore,' so let's go to *kyabakura* and drink, it is like an escape from reality." Everyone else mentions you go because the people are lonely; they want someone to talk to and it being an escape from normal everyday stress. Japanese culture really seems like it can affect someone's

mental health, based on my interview responses. Host clubs may really be a support system for these women who have no other outlet because of the strict set up of Japanese culture.

### **How well do you know these subcultures?**

The data from my interviews seem to support the literature written about Japanese society. This led to my questions about different types of sub-cultures mentioned in Japan and showing some sort of affiliation with host clubs. The first sub-culture I asked about was visual kei. The non-Japanese women viewed visual kei as a fashion and always referred to the cute boys. Everyone stated that visual kei was a music genre that consisted of men that identified with bands, and they wear crazy clothes (similar to punk, goth and rock styles) with crazy hair (usually spiked with multiple colors). Nancy said they dress up with the “intent of giving shock or a big impact...anything goes.” Martha said, "It's dress, a manner of being, it allows exploration of a different way of being. Like cosplay, but cosplay is dressing to portray an identity, visual kei is so much more, cosplay takes on manga for a temporary time, visual kei, you become that outfit, it's the real you."

Geisha was the next subculture. Everyone mentioned the kimonos, white make-up and Kyoto, while the Japanese women all viewed geisha as a woman skilled in the arts with many years of training. Many mention serving skills, music, *taikyo* (drums), *shamisen*, singing, dancing, playing games, serving alcohol and keeping good company. The extreme answers were from Sara, "A prostitute, but they don't think they are," and Zane, "I don't really know, they're in Kyoto right? Traditional dancer maybe men or women, entertained customers like 100 years ago." Both of these responses were extremely shocking to me, with the knowledge I have about Japan, and the fact one was Japanese, I assumed most knew what a geisha is. They are the face of Japan and what many people think of when they picture Japan. When I refer back to one of the

answers Martha said, she perfectly answered this for me; "Seems like westerners go overboard. Funny actually, I met Liza Dalby, the American geisha, it's an idea of patronage, not for arts but for sex/prostitution in west because they don't know any better, it's a misrepresentation of the profession. Like memoirs of a geisha, it was a bad image, geisha had purple eyes, which we know isn't real. It's still a misrepresentation."

Nancy actually partook in a research study of geisha, and has interviewed a few. "The traditional *geiko* or geisha, *geiko* is strictly trained in *gion*, Kyoto, that was beginning, strictly selected women that serve their skills, music, *taiko*, drums, *shamisen*, singing and dance, they serve alcohol and have to keep really good company so those three areas are important. Then every kind of hot spring area all over Japan start having Geisha. *Geiko* is very specific, only Kyoto and *gion*.....*geiko* and *maiko* (younger version of a geisha) so the mixed word of geisha, geisha can be anything really if they dress up in makeup and kimono, but the *geiko* is very strict world."

Along with geisha, I asked questions regarding the *kyabakura*. Everyone referred to the *kyabakura* as hostess, attractive females that serve old men alcohol and food, like a host club and have nothing to do with sex. Some said that *kyabakura* clubs were easier than host clubs because the women are more protected and less stigmatized. They viewed hosts in a similar way; it is a job that entertains women by flirting, pouring drinks, having crazy hair, and suits. They are referred to as "looking like visual kei, but not visual kei."

"When I was in college, hosts would try to solicit girls in the cafeteria. They would come in during lunch and try to get them to go to the clubs with them." Jessica said. She does not have an extremely negative view of hosts, but she did seem somewhat uncomfortable with them. Larry a non-Japanese told me, "Hosts are super pretty, I can tell you who would make a good

host, but I can't really say 100% if someone's a host or not." Martha told me that hosts are; "Someone who converses, entertains, wonderful things. Japan relates it to prostitution but it's a misrecognition of who they are; it's interesting because what people say. All hosts are very looked down on but listen and talk to people while getting them to spend money. A host can be successful just from 1 client." She also informed me that during her time in Japan, she never attended a host club but she was friends with a few American hosts who she asked to participate in my survey on survey monkey. The overall consensus of my interviewees was similar to the survey monkey response that they would not go to a host club, but Zane would defiantly visit a *kyabakura* club if he had the chance.

### **I have no idea what he's saying to me**

During my visit to *Club Gently*, I talked an American girl, named Rachel, into going with me since host clubs are always more exciting in numbers. She is twenty-six and this was her very first day in Japan. We met that day from a mutual friend, who was too jet lagged to experience the host club. Kein, my *shimei* for this club told her "This is a Japan experience not all foreigners get to experience. It's a once in a lifetime type of thing." Rachel had zero Japanese experience and was only familiar with Japan through anime culture. When we entered the club and the hosts started the night, she came off as being extremely nervous. She was a first timer, which meant at the end of the night, she had to declare a designated host. None of the hosts spoke English so Kein and I played translator, which was a lot of fun because we turned her words upside down and made it more entertaining. The hosts would sit beside Rachel, put their arms around her and try to speak English and act more American. We almost talked one host into sitting on her lap because "It's okay in America."

Throughout the night I was able to ask Rachel if she was having a good time, "Other than it being 8:00 in the morning, I'm having fun." She told me overall it was the weirdest experience she had ever had, but it was a lot of fun. By the end of the night, or should I say morning since it was 10:00 a.m. when we left, she had really warmed up to the idea of the host, she started drinking more and talking to them. We also had fun pointing out which host and woman was the drunkest. Then we realized it was St. Patrick's Day, which made the night more entertaining. Kein and I finally got Rachel to a point that she knew what was going on and what to expect. Kein left us for a while and we were left to fend for ourselves while hosts came to talk, sometimes I could not understand them so Rachel and I would make eye contact and say "***I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT HE'S SAYING,***" then we would start laughing.

"I thought it was pretty fun, if that was something that was offered here, I would love to do it, I had a good time and if I could talk to the guys I think I would have a little more fun." - Rachel

### **The Playboys and their Shops**



Since You. 2013. [Since You.....Hag Club]. Retrieved from <http://www.sinceyogroup.com/>

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The first club I visited was called *Since You..Hag*, is the second largest host club chain in Japan. The room we interviewed in charges their guests around \$600 a night, it is isolated, extremely private and the most expensive room in the club. The room had karaoke, a flat screen

TV, an L shaped couch with glass table and small round circle chairs on the other side of the table. My informant's name is Sumu. I brought my friend Mell with me because I really questioned my Japanese ability and I was somewhat nervous since this was my first time returning to Japan in four years. Sumu was very friendly and talkative; he made a lot of jokes and spoke really fast Japanese, at first I had a really hard time understanding him. Here I was able to interview and talk with eight hosts on that Friday night.

When we got comfortable inside of the private room Sumu asked what we wanted to drink, anything we liked, so Mell had a beer and I had *shochu* with green tea. They poured our drinks, asking how strong I wanted mine, and kept them filled throughout the entire night, even while interviewing. The drinks were placed on coasters that resembled small rugs. He then presented me with one of their yearly magazine that comes out. It only features their clubs and ranks of all of the hosts in the Since You Group of clubs.

The club is nothing like an American club. The only way they are similar is that they play current club music. Instead of an open dance floor, the club has tables and chairs with walkways in the middle and smoke fills the air as the night goes on. There are gothic style chandeliers, almost in every section of the room had a gothic renaissance look to it. Tonight was a customer's birthday, all the hosts are surrounded around her and singing happy birthday. They push her in the middle of them, while pushing her into the middle asking her questions while they all scream "aye" in the background. The girl thanks them all and they give her presents and a cake, she blew out the candles and everyone cheered. Security members, I believe, were walking around to make sure nothing went wrong with the other women while they were celebrating. This man walked around the entire night, he was not a host, but more like security staff or a manager. He had a menu and an earpiece and would whisper to the hosts.

In the middle of the club you can see that everything is painted black (this is a common theme among host clubs) dark red and white. They have concert lights hanging from the ceiling and a projector screen in the middle of the room. The club lights were on but would flicker to the beat of the music and sometimes dim out and red lights would come on. I heard them play Lady Gaga, The Black Eyed Peas, and even some Katy Perry.

Women started to fill up the club in small groups as the night went on and by the time I left it was full. The host plays a type of musical chairs, he greets the woman, bows and asks her what she wants to drink then he quickly gets it. It is a lot like amazing customer service, but instead of leaving after he pours her drink the host will sit with her, sometimes multiple hosts join in and sit and talk with the guests. By 9:30p.m. I saw hosts already stumbling out of the bathroom, and allowing clients to enter (it is a unisex bathroom). When a woman enters her host waits outside for her, then gives her a hot towel to wipe off her hands and walks her back to her seat. The bathroom is catered to a woman; it has pink toilet paper, tampons, pads, perfume and a light feminine look to it.

When a host entered the room he would bow his head and say “*shitsureshimasu*” (polite excuse me) then he would tap his glass with yours similar to a cheers before he sat down to join the conversation. Hosts use one glass throughout the night; he carries it around with him, usually in his pocket. When the host has to leave the conversation or if he were requested, he would acknowledge his exit by taking his glass and tapping our glasses just like on his entry. When talking with each host they would also present their business card, with both hands, a well-known Japanese way of introduction. They also tried speaking English “How are you...nice to meet you,” all very slow and sounded out, but nice of them to try. None could speak English, but a few could understand a couple of lines, but that is about it.

All of the hosts sat up straight, usually with their legs spread and arms bent on their legs and hands clasped, while intently listening. When they would talk all of them used really big arm motions, they would completely extend their arms and make everything more dramatic when listening and talking. This made conversation smoother and it also made the environment more relaxed. Sumu was extremely helpful and open with any question I asked. He told us many life stories and how he started working in the club. Everyone was eager to talk with me and seemed excited I wanted to learn about the club; simply because of the negative view many people have towards them.

Interviews with #1 and #16 wrapped up the night, the other hosts that were busy with their guests, I thought, but then they surprised me with a *Champagne call*. I was really excited because in reality I would never be able to afford one. Champagne calls can cost anywhere from \$300-\$10,000. This is when one of the guests orders a new bottle of Champagne and how the host can really make some money. There were at least fifteen hosts that crowded into the room. Three carried in microphones and turned on the karaoke machine. He picked a song on the machine; it was Honey by Gazette, a very popular visual kei band.

The host with light brown hair and a suit jacket over a skull tank top, lead the call. He started speaking fast Japanese similar to an auctioneer. He was saying small bits of information about me and why I was there. In between each sentence or break in speech all the other hosts would yell “aye” and stick their hands out. All of them looked and smiled at me while listening to the leader of the call. It kind of made me really nervous having all of them so close to me yelling, staring at me and smiling. Finally at the end he asked me my name and how I liked the club. He asked in Japanese and again in poor English while the other hosts were trying to think of the English words and making fun of each other because they could not pronounce it. I



answered with my name, and that I thought the club was a lot of fun. He then did the same to my friend Mell. Finally all the hosts started to cheer, they were really glad I enjoyed my experience.

While this was going on a host in the back near the door had the Champagne in his hands. The music went silent and the leader of the call put the microphone to the bottle to have the ‘pop’ of the cork echo throughout the club, everyone cheered at the sound of the cork popping. This appears to be a common theme the Champagne calls are centered around. The host then poured everyone a glass and passed them around. After that we all yelled *kanpai* (cheers) and then the hosts started chanting “*ike ike*” or chug it, so my friend and I chugged our drinks. It was followed with more cheers and the hosts drinking their glasses. After the drinks were gone all the hosts bowed and said thank you, then cleared the room to go back to their tables. The Champagne call seems a lot like a cue for performance, then when it was over, all trace of it is gone.

After that excitement Mell and I packed and headed out, I did not want to miss my train back to my friend’s house. As I left I noticed all of the hosts were now with their guests. The hosts that I spoke with yelled out “Bye” and “Thank you” while Ryo walked up to me and shook my hand telling me I should come back, then other hosts I did not get to talk with walked with me out of the club. When we were at the door, everyone yelled *otsukare* (which means thanks for all your hard work) and bye or thank you. Sumu lead us out along with three other hosts. We all posed for a couple of photos, I promised I would definitely visit again, then bowed and parted ways.

I felt somewhat like a celebrity while at the club, it was natural, I did not feel out of place or like they felt obligated to talk with me. I had another great experience; they were able to communicate with me even with the language barrier. While I was talking to them I did notice

that the hosts refer to the place only sometimes as a club, but mostly as a shop. They also referred to the women as guests, not clients, which is why I instead rephrased my description of the women as guests, not clients. I believe this has some significance.

The next club I visited was *Club Gently*, which is a part of *Club Billion Jap* and the largest host club chain in Japan. This club is located in the second basement or 'B2F' of a building nowhere near *Since You*. Kein, Rachel and myself headed down the stairs around 5:50 a.m. and there were already seven women waiting in the hallway. Kein told me these girls are usually *kyabakura* or *soap girls* simple because this is when they usually get off work. When the club opened at 6:00 a.m. hosts lined up with their guest and walked her to the door, the women went in one at a time while the hosts inside all yell *irasshai*. The security (remember these are not hosts, but overseers) checks your ID at the door then seats you. You are seated away from other women, but relatively close. They do not put you all right beside one another. After being seated one of security came up to me, he got on his knee in front of our table and asked who our requested host was. I replied Kein, because that is what he told me to say. The man then said okay, smiled and walked away. Because this was my first time at that host club, I did not have a *shimei*, but now that I have requested Kein, every time I go to that club, he will be my designated host. Kein then came and sat with us, like the other club, he then asked what I wanted to drink, how strong? He disappeared for less than a minute and returned with the *shochu*, green tea and Calpis soda. In between our chatting he and all the other hosts would yell welcome when another guest entered the club. He was a lot louder compared to hanging out with him before the club opened. He did warn me that inside the club he is a different person, "I get high off of the environment since I'm not able to drink at the bar."

The first Champagne call was 6:25 a.m. by this woman sitting beside of us, she was one

of the women waiting outside of the club before it opened. She is a larger girl that is wearing pig tails, she is somewhat unattractive. Kein said she frequents the club a few times a week and spends so much money. He is not sure how she gets her money. I asked if maybe she was a sex worker and his response was laughing "She's ugly and I don't think anyone would pay to have sex with her." He also told me she spends a couple grand a month and knows almost all of the staff.



Hager, Jennifer. 2013. [Club Gently building]. Photograph

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Almost all of the hosts leave their positions and get up on the stage in a huddle to pick the type of call they are going to do. Then view of her quickly disappeared and only hosts could be seen. One host led the call yelling fast Japanese while the others jumped up and down yelling “aye” throwing their hands up in the air. Then the leader of the call directs the microphone to the

woman, she simple said “*arigatou*” then the microphone was redirected to her *shimei* and he said something but I could not understand it. This first call created some jealousy; the next call was this attractive small girl in the corner, who was also waiting outside for the club to open. Her call was declared as soon as the first woman’s ended. The hosts did the same huddle on the stage, and then surrounded her jumped around yelling ‘aye’ while one of the hosts’ rambled auctioneer Japanese into the microphone. Soon after it ended she ordered another and the Champagne call dance repeated. Other women look annoyed when their host leaves them for these calls, but I think that is the point. If you want your host back you must order a call, the prices range from \$400 - \$10,000 depending on the bottle and this is how a host can really make money.

This club’s appearance was similar to *Since You*, everything was painted black and silver. But instead of the gothic renaissance look, it had more of a modern look with pyramid stacks of champagne glasses located throughout the club. It resembled a rocket ship. The drinking spaces were separated with walls, chandeliers hung from the ceiling and there was a projector screen, concert lights and TV’s. This club was a little different, they had a stage, I was told this is for the nightly performances which not all host clubs have. Each table/sitting area is coded; alpha 1, 2, beta 1, 2 gamma 1, 2 etc. This is done to help the hosts know what area to go to. Hosts also use this to keep an eye on the other hosts.

Kein entertains his guest while also watching the other hosts to make sure they are doing their job and making sure none of the women are left unattended for too long. On the tables the hosts have three different towels used to keep the area clean: one is used to wipe off the glasses, another used to wipe the table and the final one is used to wipe his hands. On our table there was a small paper heart on a stick with our names written on it and our drinks so the hosts would

know our names and drinks. These are also kept in the club and used to keep track of first time visitors and return visitors.

The bathroom's appearance was also similar, pink toilet paper, tampons and pads, perfumes for the women. Your host also escorts you to the restroom, then wait for you to come out, hand you a warm towel and then escort you back to your seat.

The hosts are under a lot of time pressure and follow constant rules that you would not even see as a guest having a nice time. This group of hosts also have to show up to work six hours early to get their hair fixed, clean, have meetings and prepare for the club to open. If a host is bringing in a guest at 6:00 a.m. he is allowed to miss the meetings and cleanings but keeps in constant contact with a superior at the club explaining to him what is going on and that they are still coming. If the host does not bring a guest at 6:00 a.m. he is fined and in trouble with the boss.

Through out the night, the men that I believe are security constantly patrol around the club. They keep a watch on the hosts and when their time is up at a table this man comes and pats them on the shoulder, this means wrap it up, it is time to go to your next table. While doing this, he is also helping out the hosts. My phone was dying so he took my phone and charged it for me. Also when the guest wants to order a drink the host raises his, the security member runs to his side, kneels on the floor and takes the order returning quickly with what the guest wanted. Whenever we needed something Kein would throw his hand up in the air stiffly and one of the security would run to our table. He would kneel beside Kein and bring us whatever we needed.

As the night, or should I say morning went on, hosts would stop by our table and bow, introduce themselves by touching our glasses together. They would sit beside Rachel and try to talk to her. This is repeated throughout the night, the hosts are allotted five minutes to bond with

her or become memorable because at the end of the night she had to pick a *shimei* incase she were to ever return to the club. This was difficult for Rachel because she did not know what to expect and had no language ability so she mostly just went with the flow.

Kein left our table a few times throughout the night to go entertain other guests, hosts continued to visit our table. None spoke English so communication was interesting. They tried to speak English, but I was able to small talk with them in Japanese and translated a bit for Rachel. They kept the conversation relatively simple, there seemed to be a theme of questions they would all ask: “Where are you from? How old are you? How long have you been in Japan? Do you like Japan? Are you having a good time?” When they found out I was researching Hosts their attitude changed; they were extremely interested. I felt bad for them because of their limited time allowed at our table. Hoping, like the hosts of *Since You*, that I would help give them a good name. When they talked and listened it always appreciated like they were legitimately interested and cared about what I was saying, but at the same time, I wonder how much of it is because they are really good at their job?

Around 8:00 a.m. the woman beside our table, who ordered the first Champagne call was passed out, lying on the couch. By 8:30 a.m. the club was packed, women and hosts fill every seat. I then heard another Champagne call, this time it came from the far left side of the club. The lights dimmed with only red lights pulsing to the music. They did their routine; I am assuming this woke the girl beside of us up, next thing you know she is ordering another call. This time when the hosts surrounded her they were humping the air and one another. They made her stand up with them and she covered her face in embarrassment while standing.

After that call I felt bad for our underage host, he was so great to use the entire night so I bought him some soda. It ended up being \$5.00 a bottle but it was fine because it was a thank

you for being such a great, well host, literally. I then found out that the hosts are not allowed to drink anything but water unless the woman purchases him a drink, I thought Kein was only drinking it because he was underage. He is also not allowed to share the woman's drinks (unless she buys a bottle, then it is hers). Hosts also get commission off of the drinks that are bought for them plus the ones you buy for yourself.

Kein kept telling us, it is almost time for the performance. Not many host clubs do performances so it is rare. As we wait for this performance the room started to fill with smoke and it was hard for us American's to breathe since we are not used to this smoking law, or lack thereof, in Japan.

I was able to meet Kein's superior, one that introduced him to the host club life. He was an older man with long curly black hair and a full beard which these are very uncommon looks among the Japanese. He smiled at us and bowed, a very nice man and had an earpiece in. The club owner also greeted us. He also had long hair and a beard. Since we have been with Kein since midnight and now it is 8:45 a.m., I was exhausted, every time he saw that Rachel or I started to get tired, he and the other host sitting with us chanted for us to drink more.

Finally the performance started. It consisted of three songs that featured different types of lip-syncing, real singing and choreography. There were three hosts on the stage and one to three hosts on the main floor. They were singing and dancing to different Japanese pop music, it all seemed to be boy bands I was not familiar with. They had a dance routine similar to boy bands and all the hosts at the tables would show support by moving their hands to the beats or doing the dance from their seats. Women that frequented the club were also doing the dance steps from the seats. The hosts performing would interact with these women and the other hosts by directing their hand motions or singing to that person. During the last song all of the

performing hosts went around to the tables playfully forcing the women to chug their drinks. Kein did this also, he was able to put both his hands under each of our glasses and push our drinks to our mouths so we had to drink to the beat of the music.

Kein informed me that this host club chain is trying to become global solely based on the fact that they have 1 bilingual employee: him. He is also able to bring in foreigners that would not normally be able to experience a host club because of the language gap. They have started releasing club fliers with Japanese and English on them to attract different types of women. *Billion Jap* is one of the few clubs with a native English speaker.

At the end of the night, Rachel finally picked her *shimei*, a host named Tatsuya. He was a crazy, funny, loud guy, similar in style to Kein and he sat with us the last thirty minutes. He seemed drunk by then, he sat in-between us with his shirt unbuttoned and his leopard print trucker hat tipped to the side. He wore a thick coating of eyeliner and had one long piece of hair, like a bang, that went down the right side of his face.

When it came time to leave Kein carried my giant purse while Rachel's *shimei* held her hand and made her skip out with him. When we went to leave the club everyone yelled goodbye to us. Our two *shimei* escorted us to the elevator, we bowed, waved and said our goodbyes as the doors closed. When the doors opened again we came out to the sunshine of the day. The first beam of sunshine sent a haze and blinded my eyes, it took a minute to readjust because I did not realize that it was already in the afternoon. When we entered the club it was dark out and the streets were filled with a different type of people, but now you see business men and other workers walking quickly to their jobs. I must admit I felt like good friends with Kein and Tatsuya even though we just met that day. I was disappointed in the amount of interviewing that I was not able to do because of the fast paced switching the hosts had to do all night.



"Everyone looks the same, I mean all the hosts start to look the same after a while, it's so hard to tell them apart. That's why I dress so differently than everyone else. I change my hair every month and everyone's like I wonder what he's going to do next." –Kein



Billion Jap. 2013. Host Business Cards

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Kein, 19, does look different compared to the many other hosts I have seen. When we first met he wore a large hat that had giant feathers sticking out of one side and what he called a pirate outfit. It was red and black and loosely hung off his arms and legs while the pants were shoved down into his black army boots. He had bright pink hair that was about shoulder length but shaved on one side. He was shorter and not slender like you are accustomed to with most hosts. He also wore bright pink eye shadow with black fingernail polish. He matched his visual kei appearance.

When hanging out before work, he was down to earth and sarcastic a lot like an American (probably because he was raised in America). Inside the club his attitude drastically changed, he became full of energy, bouncing around, loud and yelling across the room whenever another guest came in or when a champagne call began. He also had big flailing arm motions, which I have noticed a lot of hosts have.

Inside of *Club Gently* we spoke with Sora, 23, he was a very slender host with light brown hair and a nasal voice. He was one of Rachel's *shimei* options, his Japanese was simple and well articulated so he was really easy to understand and talk with. We also spoke with Yuma and Shun, these two were some of the top players at *Club Gently*: this year Yuma made \$100,000 and Shun had \$200,000. The Final host was Tatsuya, who was Rachel's *shimei*.



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Seino, Susumu. 2013. [Since You...Hag]. Photograph

The *Since You* staff I spoke with were all around the same age. Minato, 22, Natsuki, 22. Their faces also looked young, it seems like the drinking has not caught up to them yet. Ryo, 26

is the face of *Since You* and the assistant manager. He is featured on billboards and magazines discussing his job. In person he appears different, you can see the drinking and long nights have taken their toll on him, but his personality is great. He was also slender and well dressed. Riiya, 26 also has this similar look. He has a more *kawaii* look on his business cards than in real life. He had light hair and blue jeans that had rips in them. Riiya is featured on a lot of host magazines and is one of the top sellers at the club.

Ruki was the shortest, with red hair. He appeared to be visual kei. All of the hosts used large arm movements when talking or listening. I noticed that all of them wore rings on multiple fingers and long chains. Sumu was not really a host, but one of the PR guys. He had long hair, wore a baseball cap and thick rimmed glasses. He dressed extremely casual compared to the hosts, more like a regular guy. Though when I interviewed everyone at *Since You*, there seemed to be no difference, they all appeared to be good friends. We were able to laugh, joke and have an overall good time.





Since You..Hag. 2013. Host Business cards

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### "Ultimate Service"

During my host interviews I at first want to know what is a host. All of the hosts believe a host's job is to serve guests. All also refer to their club as a shop and the clients as guests. I believe this means something, the way these men refer to their job location and the women they serve. In Japanese there are words for club and client, this could mean the perceptions of the job is as a shop that assists guests, instead of a club that entertains clients. They view it in a more positive light. Ryo said "Chivalry, isn't in Japan, you know chivalry put the lady first. At the host club we show chivalry, the women are appreciated." Sumu told me "Host job is to serve guests, you even work outside the club. You go out to eat and take care of the women even when you're not at work. Hosting is an everyday job."

Since hosting is just serving women and talking, could anyone be a host? Most said that anyone willing to work hard can be a host. Ryo believes "Yes anyone can do it but it's not easy. It seems easy, but you have to drink a lot and people want professional hosts that act professional,

or the clients get angry. You have to be strong with alcohol and make the woman happy. It's also a balance of respect." Riiya told me, "Players, think they can be a host, but realize it's hard work and they can't just sleep with all the women, you have to change yourself to be a host. You become confident and you can be a host."

They then informed me that this player only looking to have sex with women is known as a *urisen* and does not last long working in the host clubs. Sumu told me that not many of the men trying to be a host last. This shows me that there is a large turn around rate inside the clubs because men believe it is an easy, ideal job, but then are surprised when they actually have to work hard.

**"I look Visual Kei, but I don't really like it."**

"The host's fashion is suits but now more casual, it's being changed, it always changes with the time. We have a rocker hairstyle but now wear blue jeans, it's a lot more casual but still hard to define. It's more like visual kei but before, a few years ago it was more like *gyaru*," according to Ryo. Riiya responded similarly: "Suits and casual but if you don't do well you have to wear suits but if you do well you don't have to dress up, you can dress more casual. But this is the only place that has this rule. We make good environment/job." They informed me that this club is they only one they know about that has this rule. If you do well you can dress more casual and individualistic.

Since the hosts believe they have the visual kei look, and many considered themselves visual kei on host2.jp. Natsuki said he personally did not like visual kei but "Many hosts like visual kei but less than 1/2 of the hosts are actually visual kei." Ryo believed that this visual kei style started in 2008 back when it was more popular but 'everything changes.'



"Yeah, maybe because the fashion is more like visual kei," admitted Ruki (to liking the visual kei look, but not really being interested in the visual kei culture). Kein, identifies himself as being visual kei, told me "In truth not that many hosts like visual keis in my experience. I know many who lie just so they have something to talk about with their patrons. Some hosts like myself like visual keis but not enough to say, 'Hey, I like visual kei.' I wouldn't say our lifestyles are similar, but our motives initially are more often the same. What I mean is that people start visual keis because they like girls and want to be popular with them. Same applies for host. I myself joined because I wanted to know how to woo women. Shit, it worked."

Another growing subculture that is similar to visual kei is otaku. Ryo told me, in response to asking if they had otaku hosts, "Not normal otaku, but we have all kinds. The president likes AKB 48." This is an all-female idol group. Kein told me "There are actually growing numbers of otaku hosts. Although they don't last and don't generally go higher up in sales yet."

### **Charisma**

Most of the hosts I spoke with have only worked at one host club. Riiya used to work in the Gion district of Kyoto at a club called Lovetrap but it is no longer in existence. He moved to *Since You* last year and was able to move up to rank #2; he believes it is because of his 'charisma.' Other hosts working at *Since You* have been there for a few years. Kein has only worked at his club *Radio 3rd*, which is now called *Club Gently*. Since most hosts have only worked at one club, I asked what their salary is; I was told anywhere from \$100,000 to \$300,000 a year by the top selling hosts. The lowest host working at *Since You*, goes by the name King Kazu, told me "I don't really get a salary, but maybe around \$160.00 a month. I live by taking food from people around me, drink lots of water and eats guests food. Kind of like an

American."

Sumu explained how this was possible by telling me their income is based only off of sales and how many guests they have. "Some people don't earn anything because they don't have customers. It can be \$0-\$500 at the low end. Host trends change all the time, you need your own style." Other clubs usually have a base pay or minimum wage if the host is unable to get a steady reputation or guest.

**"I like host clubs, the host image is *kawaii*, actually not *kowai*"**

Many people wonder why a host becomes a host, they all had different answers, but usually held the same view of not being interested in hosting prior to being recruited. Ruki, Minato, Kazu and Kein all had someone affiliated with host clubs recruit them into joining. Natsuki was in college and wanted a life change. "I was in college and invited by the president of the company and needed money. So I quit school to save money and started working here." Kazu was working a difficult, demanding part time job and wanted something with a dream. "I want to be famous." Usually the hosts are approached by other hosts on the street or by the owner of the clubs and asked if they would be interested in working with them. The hosts seemed to have no association or interest in host clubs before joining. They held a negative view towards host clubs and hosts, like many Japanese people, but after joining they realized hosts are nice people and good friends. Natsuki said, "I was a regular college student but I thought I was too boring and too normal so I wanted to make life exciting so I quit school because I couldn't afford it and became a host. Hosts were always viewed as the bottom but after I started working here I saw they were all nice and all different. It was different than I thought."

Kein seemed to be the only one interested in host clubs before joining, "I was always interested in being a host. It took approximately three minutes for me to join. It didn't take long

for me to go into the host scene...however, it did take some time to learn what host is like. I would say about a month, as that's the usual for anyone who joins to decide whether to stay or go."

When not working the hosts sometimes spend time together whenever they are not going out with women. Riiya said "We go bowling, to the sauna, or to Kabuki-cho. Some of us go to *kyabakura* clubs, but it's a secret. I spend sometimes \$1,000 - \$2,000 between all of us in one night. Usually two or three of us will go and I am the trouble maker (laughs)." Other hosts say that they sometimes go out to dinner after work or on the weekends. Kazu told me that one time they went to a casino in China and he ended up winning \$12,000. "I know it's not related, but it was exciting." Since hosting is viewed as a negative job hosts seem to be really close, they admit the best part about being a host is their co-workers and the guests.

### **"Is painted eyebrows makeup?"**

I also found out that hosts do not really have holidays or days off "That holds a double meaning for us. Holidays are not something to take a day off on. It is a day where we can make the most money by hosting an event related to respective holidays. Christmas, for example, all hosts and any *mizu-shobai* employees will take part in Christmas events. Many places also participate in Bee Years Event, where the club basically transforms into a casual host club where it is just about having fun rather than making sales," said Kein. *Mizu-shobai* refers to all the nighttime entertainment like hosts, *kyabakura* and soap girls/pink salons.

The hosts also admitted to wearing make-up. Some wear eye shadow and eyeliner while almost everyone draws on their eyebrows (which they do not consider makeup) and foundation. *Club Gently* has an in house hair dresser so they are able to get their hair fixed before work while *Since You* members end up going to the Axy (hair salon) and paying \$10.00 to get their hair



styled daily. It usually takes two hours for them to get ready for work, and the hair is the most difficult part, while Riku said "It only takes Kazu an hour and that's why he's last."

### **24/7 Host**

As Sumu said earlier a host's job is never ending and this is reflected in the negatives of the job. Riku says, "Not enough time to sleep. If you're a student or have other job, you have no time to rest. Don't think we have one, no private life. We have to call and text and meet clients. Sometimes it's fun and the girls are energetic but sometimes they're not. Girl's lie all the time." Riiya said "It's difficult being top because people look up to me and following me sometimes, I am on magazines, it can be stressful." There seems to be a lot of negatives but overall the hosts enjoy their job.

I wanted to know who could remember their first day working as a host, "*Shokokebu*. I was so nervous I didn't drink anything all night and went into the bathroom to hide and started crying," laughed Ruki. No one else knew this so everyone started laughing and giving him a hard time. Kein's first day was at a *Club Radio 3rd* and was a bit different, "Everybody was kind and even the clients were kind. I was always seated with someone experienced who talked to me to invite me into the conversation. Luckily I have great talking skills so I was never too shy. It also helped that I was unique in a sense that I am Japanese American. I felt rather at home so I joined that day."

Hosts' guests age range from nine-teen to women in their forties. Because of this large age gap I asked what incidents have made them uncomfortable. Sumu told me of this type of woman the only comes to the club to complain. These women come for the 'first timer' rate which is \$30 for two hours all you can drink and "The women come only to complain and share their stress and bitch, then never come back." The hosts refer to them as *shoukai urashii*. Kein

told me of a time he saw his coworker's guest vomit on the way to the bathroom in the floor and it made a mess someone else had to clean up.

Many people want to know if hosts have relationships with their guests outside of work, most hosts said it depends. Ruki said, "Sometimes." Sumu told me "It depends on the people. Because hosts have no time, only work. Our owner used to be a good host, he was called *ACE* because one girl fell in love with him and she was probably a prostitute so he never had sex with her but by going to the club she was emotionally satisfied with him. She didn't need sex she wants to be mentally and emotionally healthy."

Then they all told me they now have a bad image of women because they see the bad side of them in the club. Kazu said "Hosts can't trust girls, they are scary now. Then sometimes you actually like a girl even though you try not to and you're not trying for a relationship but it can happen." They then told me that if sex happens it is outside of the club and has nothing to do with work. They just think the girl is attractive and then they end up having sex with her, like everywhere else. Kein told me "The best idea is to fall in love with the clients too. That way, we don't feel burdened, and there will be mutual feelings. Win-win situation."

My final question was wanting to know why Japan needs hosts. The hosts gave an array of answers but they all lead back to women receiving something they did not have. Minato believes "People want happiness." While Sumu said "Certain things are acquired in the host clubs, in Japan there's no place for women to satisfy desires. There are people who sell their bodies for money and need to be cured. Or some people have more money than they can handle. Some people don't know how to use money or how to pursue their dreams. Our job is to give dreams, always be positive. Men go to *kyaba* (*kyabakura* clubs) because they want to see cute girls they want to date, kind of the same thing. The relationship is to try hard by giving them

money. My girlfriend is a *kyaba*, so sometimes I get jealous. There's also cute girls and sometimes you want to have sex with them. But it has nothing to do with the job. Most people think hosts are for the uneducated people but they're able to earn a lot of money, hosts exist for men that aren't smart enough or good enough to get a good job. It gives them a chance to have a life now. The girls see this and want to help support them and help push him up the ranks."

Ruki's answer was simple, "Girls lost the reason to live and they find a new reason for life at the club." Kazu responded "We are nice to the guests and *yashida* (try to heal them). Lonely girls want healed, they go to the host club so they can be funky/fun girls in the clubs but are shy and quiet in real life." "Women pay the men so the hosts give them the ability to have dreams and help them pursue their dreams. They can have a bad experience here and it can affect the club," said Sumu.

### **The Government**

My interview questions lead us to the topic of the Japanese government and them becoming stricter on host clubs as time goes on. Riiya told me about the times that hosts were allowed on TV, there were anime, dramas and documentaries but these are no longer allowed to be shown. He told me that there was a new law that passed four or five years ago that restricted host clubs to only be allowed to advertise publically. Sumu believes this regulation started because of the host peak time, "Hosts started acting bad, getting drunk, spitting on the streets and breaking things." They told me a rumor about the Tokyo government family. They said some of the women were really into host clubs and spent all their money there.

Then the newly elected government changed the rules. During this time a lot of host clubs became politically active and voted for the more host friendly candidate but lost. Sumu believes that many young people do not think their votes count because they're outnumbered by the

older generations. They hope to one day change all these strict laws on host clubs. Although all of the hosts mentioned some sort of laws, rules or other governmental sanctions against host clubs, I was unable to find any laws about host clubs. It could possibly be because they have yet to be translated or they are not worded directly to 'host clubs.'

## CHAPTER 3

### Discussion

In general, everyone familiar with Japanese culture believes it is a constant influence to their everyday life, while living in Japan. The emphasis of *honne* and *tatemae* are perfect examples of that. Everyone emphasized that you have to keep everything private. The Japanese people currently in America who I interviewed say the strict rules of Japanese culture are one of the reasons they currently live in America. According to the non-Japanese people I interviewed, like Sara, Japanese culture is a hard thing to accept. She understands Japanese culture but still admits that it's annoying. "Why can't they just say what they really mean?"

In context of how the strict, enculturation of Japanese society should function and the constant needing to be in association and acceptance with a group (usually consisting of your job, school, or community) they all understand how this must be difficult for a Japanese person to be able to be independent, original and his or her self. When I inquired about mental illness and they emphasized how stigmatized it is, they completely understood why the majority of the host's guests are sex-workers or *kyabakura*.

When Martha mentioned the many different masks a Japanese person must wear it describes how a Japanese people can function in his or her day to day life, but have a completely different inside view. Like Hannah said, "It's all about balance," so when one is unable to wear that mask or balance their life, they need to have somewhere they can remove this mask, start fresh, and as many people are unaware of, this is what happens inside of the host club.

Everyone I interviewed and the survey participants had nothing extremely negative to say about hosts, they just seemed negative towards the career because they view it as easy and that these hosts are uneducated people that are able to succeed. This could be seen as their own

prejudice, or perhaps jealousy, of these uneducated men, with what they view to be an easy job they are able to make so much money by removing themselves from the bound Japanese culture. One could also return to the Kein's discussion of *mizu-shobai*, the fact that this job changes like water or is viewed as a muddy, dirty, way to earn a living. Even though, many do not know that being a host is very difficult, there is a lot of timing and acting that they must account to everyday. In a way Japanese Hosts themselves are bound by their Japanese-ness to allow these guests to express their *honne*, or inner, deepest feelings to give them a 'dream.'

The hosts believe their job is to be an, as Sumu says, "Ultimate service" to these women. These hosts know their job is a balancing act of professionalism and their own personality. They are able to give the woman whatever type of man she is looking for while listening to her, giving advice, helping her, and drinking at her request. From guest to guest, they are able to be energetic, serious, childish, and intelligent on top of the constant drinking. The host is constantly portraying *tatemaie*; he can never let his inner feelings out. He must not let the woman know if he really dislikes her, or thinks she is using him to get out all of her frustration. He must also follow all of the rules set up by the host club.

As I mentioned above, the club is very structured and the host has many rules and guidelines he must follow at all times. When I was in the host club, I observed this structured behavior when I watched the hosts bounce around from the guest's tables. When I was talking to a host during my participant observation, I felt like I had his complete attention, he looked me in the eyes when we spoke and it seemed real. My *shimei* and I seemed like we had a real fun time together, so as I know it is their job, and he knew I was there for research, the hosts still seem like they take every client seriously and personal. The host puts himself completely in his job. The fact that he spends time with these women outside of work emphasizes how much effort a

host puts into his job.

The structure and constant balancing act hosts put on inside of the club highly reflects Japanese *giri* and *ninjo*. Many hosts I spoke with had no affiliation with hosts before becoming a host, and now they are all good friends. This confirms the Japanese group mentality. Hosts also frequently portray their work or a professional side which means they respect their *tatemaie*. Guests who visit host clubs are free to show their *honne*, they can use the club as an outlet to relieve stress, depression or just talk to the hosts and receive some advice.

The money a host makes can be explained by Japanese people having a higher income to buy more 'luxury' things. In Japan I was always baffled by how much money my host family would spend on an outfit, or for movies, everything is more expensive, but at the same time money, healthcare, etc. is a lot lower. So a host is able to make so much money because of where the priorities of finances are in Japan along with the different types of wages made. The women pay for the drinks they buy themselves and their hosts. The overpriced drinks allow the host to make money without the women paying directly for the host's time.

## **Conclusion**

In America a host club would not be able to succeed because, as Americans, individuality is stressed along with stating your feelings. Being private is frowned on, because it takes away from one's ability to be mentally fit. If you have an issue with something it is always seen best to express these emotions. In America, extremes are more encouraged and it is considered positive to view yourself as a 'bitch' or an 'asshole'. Americans take satisfaction in these frames of mind; you are able to talk your problems out with a friend or coworker, or stranger in class. While in Japan they are unable to do this. If you stick out you are stigmatized because people do not really openly talk, or ask for advice from friends or coworkers.

Because of this, they need an outlet for such things. Women are able to have this outlet inside of the host clubs, and men are able to inside of the *kyabakura* clubs. Host clubs are viewed as an escape from reality: women can come in, if it is her first time, pay the cheap first time fee and remove her masks, be a different person and try to view her life in a more positive light. It seems like a human reaction, to want to be happy, but still be accepted in society.

In a way you can say a host is a type of unregistered psychologist that uses Japanese culture inside of the functioning of the host club to allow women to go against Japanese culture. This acceptance of the removal of Japanese culture can be a reason the Japanese people and government stigmatizes them. The Japanese island mentality could believe this type of change would kill Japan's uniqueness. Because of this Hosts are stigmatized and viewed as sex workers to help encourage the non-acceptance of hosts inside of Japan. Hosts sell alcohol not sex.



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## **Appendix i: Glossary of terms**

**Arigatou** (ありがとう)- "Thank you"

**Bunka** (文化)- "Culture"

**Catching duty** (キャッチ)- When hosts solicit women on the streets and try to bring them into their host club.

**Champagne call** (シャンパンコール)- When a guest at the host club buys a bottle of champagne, all of the hosts surround her and sing/chant and dance. They then have her and her shimei drink out of the bottle in celebration. The bottle is now hers to drink throughout the night.

**Choutou** (ちょうとう)- "almost" "maybe" "inconvenient." This word can be substituted as a polite way of saying "No, I'm kind of busy."

**Enjoukousai** (炎上交際)- "Ablaze dating" or "rent a friend." Japanese people sometimes pay to have a companion go to movies with them or sit a talk over coffee.

**Futoi** (太い)- "fat" or "heavy"

**Geiko** (芸子)- Geisha that are trained from childhood in dancing, singing and entertaining.

**Geisha** (芸者)- "Artist" or "Person of the arts" traditional Japanese female entertainer.

**Gion** (祇園)- District in Kyoto, Japan near the Yasaka Shrine known as the geisha district. And these geisha refer to themselves as geiko.

**Giri** (義理)- One's obligation, duty, courtesy, honor, sense of duty or debt of gratitude.

**Gyaru** (ギャル)- Originated from a brand of jeans called "gals." Refers to younger girls, obsessed with fashion who lack interest in work and want to remain *kawaii*.

**Heibon** (平凡)- "mediocre" "ordinary"

**Honbun** (本文)- "body"

**Honne** (本音)- “Real intention” or one’s inner feelings and desires. These are usually not disclosed in public settings.

**Ichibu** (一部)- Tier one operating hours of host clubs, from 7pm-12:30am

**Ike ike** (いけいけ)- Literally means "go-go" Also used when trying to get people to drink.  
"Chug, chug"

**Irasshai** (いらっしやい)- “Welcome” said by employees when a customer enters into anyplace of business in Japan.

**Izakaya** (居酒屋)- cheap restaurant/bar that is open late

**Kabuki** (歌舞伎)- Classical Japanese dance/performance. Performers are all male, playing as both gender and known for their elaborate make-up and costumes.

**Kabuki-cho** (歌舞伎町)- The red-light district located in Shinjuku, Tokyo, Japan. Where all of the host clubs, kyabakura clubs, pink salons, yakuza, etc are located.

**Kanpai** (かんぱい)- Cheers

**Kawaii** (かわいい)- “cute”

**Koha** (硬派)- “Tough guy” derived from Swahili

**Konnichi wa** (こんにちは)- "Hello" or "good afternoon"

**Kowai** (怖い)-“scary”

**Kyabakura** (キャバクラ)- Cabaret clubs where women sit and entertain men with drinks. Also known as hostess clubs.

**Maiko** (舞妓) - Women who are apprenticing to be a geisha and are not trained in *gion* or *geiko*.

**Mizu-shobai** (水商売)- water trade, referral to red-light entertainment in Japan (hosts, kyabakura, pink salons). Red light professions change like the ‘flow of water.’ It can also be seen as muddy, dirty, way to earn a living.

**Nanpa** (ナンパ)- A type of flirting often seen as romantic with young adults in Japan.

**Nibu** (二部)- Tier two operating hours of host clubs, from 6am- 11:30am

**Ninjo** (人情)- “Humanity” or a feeling in which it is to be human.

**Nippon** (日本)- “Japan,” can also be said as *Nihon*.

**Nippon no bunka** (日本の文化)- “Japanese Culture”

**Otaku** (オタク)- “Geek” in referral to someone who does not go outside and socialize a lot, reads manga, watches anime, and collects action figures.

**Otsukare** (お疲れ)- Thanks for all your hard work. What you say when leaving work/class environments. Usually said by co-workers or classmates.

**Panpan** (パンパン)- Literally means "full" "smack" but also referred to "prostitutes" or "streetwalkers" during World War II

**Pink salon** (ピンクサロン)- Sex work in Japan where a male pays for oral sex.

**Sanbu** (三部)- Tier three operating hours of host clubs, from 9am- 2:30pm

**Sekensama** (世間様)- *Seken* can mean world while *sama* is used to refer politely to a person. It is literally what you do in the world. In Japan it is viewed as one’s societal obligation.

**Sekentei** (世間体)- Literally means “respectability” or your reputation in a social setting.

**Shamisen** (三味線)- A three stringed Japanese musical instrument played with a *bachi*.

**Shimeisha** (指名者)- Literally means "nominator." In host clubs *shimeisha* is the guest's personal host that she picked and pays when visiting that particular host club. Also called *shimei*.

**Shinjinrui** (新人類)- “New race,” this term is used by newer *otaku* that are more popular in Japanese society.

**Shinjou** (しんじょう)- One of my interviewees used this term to define mentally ill people.

**Shitsureshimasu** (しつれします)- "excuse me"

**Shochu**- A type of alcohol similar to vodka

**Shoukai urashii** (商会ウレシイ)- Women that visit host clubs as 'first timers' and only use the hosts to get out her aggression and drink, then she never returns to that host club.

**Soap girl/Soapland** (ソープランド)- Referring to sex work in Japan where a male pays for non-penetrative sex to achieve orgasm.

**Taiko** (太鼓)- A drum that is made out of wood with a leather drum head, it usually looks like a bass drum and is played from one side.

**Tatemaie** (建前)- “Public stance” or one’s shown feelings in society. This is one’s ‘fake’ feelings or displayed feelings shown in public usually to avoid conflict or argument.

**Urisen** (売り専)- "male prostitute" "rent boy"

**Visual kei** (ヴィジュアル系)- Visual style usually based around Japanese Visual Kei musicians and some sort of costume play. Costume play usually mimics the musician style and can be seen mixed with “sexiness” or “sexless.” Most clothes are unisex and extreme. Usually extreme hair, clothing and facial piercings are seen within Visual Kei society.

## **Appendix ii: Characters**

**Hannah:** Female, age late 20s, Japanese. She works as the Japanese outreach initiative coordinator at an American university. She has lived in American two years now, but has also studied in multiple other countries.

**Jessica:** Female, age early 30s, Japanese. She is one of the Japanese instructors at an American university. She has been teaching at this university for at least four years. She recently married an American male and I believe applying for American/Japanese dual-citizenship.

**Katie:** Female, age early 30s, Japanese. Katie was one of my English students. She was a also good friend of Natalie during this time. I actually met her through Natalie. Katie's English level is pretty low, only understanding a few phrases at first, but she was better over time and could hold conversations. One of her ex-boyfriends from many years ago was the owner of Club Black. My first host club experience in 2009. This host club has since then closed and during my return to Japan she was in Korea.

**Martha:** Female, age 30s, Puerto Rican. She currently teaches Japanese language and literature at an American university. She is fluent in Japanese and has lived in Japan for a number of years. She has published papers on Japanese Literature and has also worked as a translator.

**Mell:** Male, age 23, Japanese. Mell was actually my first Japanese classmate friend, when I lived in Japan. He was very young when we met at Lakeland and he planned on studying in America, which he did. I helped prepare him for culture shock and taught him different ways to help assimilate. He referred to me as mom, and I him as son. He received his bachelor's degree from an American university and now lives and works in Tokyo. When we first met he was really into host fashion, so I took him with me during my first set of interviews. He also helped with translating, because I really had little confidence in my Japanese at that time. I was able to

receive feedback from a straight, Japanese, male soon after the interviews. It was nothing like he expected.

**Mrs. Keener-Stephens:** Female, age 27, American. She currently works for a psychiatric facility as a psychologist and teaches psychology at an American university. She is also pursuing her PsyD from an American university and currently holds an MA in psychology.

**Nancy:** Female, age 30s, Japanese. She is the head of the Japanese department at an American University. She received her PhD and MA from different universities in America. She also has papers published about how foreigners learn Japanese and why they want to learn Japanese. She is currently married to an American male and has two small daughters.

**Natalie:** Female, age 25, Japanese. Natalie was my host sister when I was in Japan in 2008. She is extremely aware of Japanese, European and American high fashion and popular culture. She has a bachelor's degree from a university in Europe and currently works in the high fashion world in Tokyo. Back when she was younger she used to perform as a vocalist and knows many different people in the music world of Japan. She is also familiar with the kyabakura world, having worked at a hostess club for a short amount of time. Her she was able to meet women that frequented host clubs and understand why they exist. Natalie also lived in Europe for a few years so she has had outside experience and understands that Japanese culture is different than anywhere else in the world.

**Rachel:** Female, age 29, American. I met Rachel through Sara in Japan. She is a big anime and video game fan. She also likes traditional Japanese culture. She has no Japanese language ability and has never heard of Hosts until I took her to a host club.

**Sara:** Female, age 25, American. Sara has her bachelor's in Japanese and Teaching. She is currently a substitute teaches at an Elementary school that is working on adding a Japanese



language class which she would then become a full-time teacher. She has also visited Japan and has numerous Japanese friends. She considers herself otaku and participates in their costume-play here in America.

**Zane:** Male, age 22, Japanese. Zane is from Japan and is currently getting his bachelor's degree from an American university. His family lives in both Japan and American during different times of the year, owning homes in both. He is very familiar with English and is well assimilated in American culture. At the university he is in a social fraternity and acts like your typical college student.

**Hosts:**

**Kazu:** Male, Japanese. Host at *Since You*.

**Kein:** Male, age 19, Japanese/American. He is employed as a host at *Club Gently* and also as an English translator in Tokyo. Kein was one of my main informants for this research and my *shimei* when I visit this host club.

**Minato:** Male, age 22, Japanese. Top host at *Since You*.

**Natsuki:** Male, age 22, Japanese. Top host at *Since You*

**Riiva:** Male, age 26, Japanese. Top host at *Since You*. Also featured in different host magazines.

**Ruki:** Male, Japanese. Top host at *Since You*.

**Ryo:** Male, age 26, Japanese. Top host and assistant manager at *Since You*. Face of this hos club, he is seen on fliers and banners throughout Kabuki-cho.

**Shun:** Male, Japanese. Top host at *Club Gently*.

**Sora:** Male, age 23, Japanese. Host at *Club Gently*. Rachel's second *shimei* choice.

**Sumu:** Male, age late 20s, Japanese. Sumu is the PR representative at *Since You* in Tokyo. He was also one of my main informants, who really treated me to an amazing host club experience,

while answering all of my questions, taking photos and allowing me to interview all of the hosts that were available.

**Tatsuya:** Male, Japanese. Host at *Club Gently*. Rachel's *shimei*.

**Yuma:** Male, Japanese. Top host at *Club Gently*.

## Appendix iii: Letter from the Institutional Review Board



**Office of Research Integrity**  
Institutional Review Board  
401 11th St., Suite 1300  
Huntington, WV 25701

FWA 00002704  
IRB1 #00002205  
IRB2 #00003206

December 6, 2012

Marty Laubach, PhD  
Sociology Department

RE: IRBNet ID# 385927-1

**At:** Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral)

Dear Dr. Laubach:

<b>Protocol Title:</b>	[385927-1] An Understanding into the Lives and Boys at a Japanese Host Club	
<b>Expiration Date:</b>	December 6, 2013	
<b>Site Location:</b>	MU	
<b>Submission Type:</b>	New Project	APPROVED
<b>Review Type:</b>	Exempt Review	

In accordance with 45CFR46.101(b)(2), the above study and informed consents were granted Exempted approval today by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Designee for the period of 12 months. The approval will expire December 6, 2013. A continuing review request for this study must be submitted no later than 30 days prior to the expiration date.

This study is for student Kristy Henson.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Coordinator Michelle Woomer, B.A., M.S at (304) 696-4308 or woomer3@marshall.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.