

*Pornography, and the Declining
Social Culture of Japan*

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INTRODUCTION

Japan is known for many things that boost its social culture. These things include; anime, manga, Akiba and its bright lights, gaming platforms, and the Japan of olden days. However, Japan is becoming increasingly more known for its growing pornography usage. With over thirty-eight publishers, the pornography business has room to grow at an alarming rate. Although the pornography industry is seen in a good light by many; in Japan it is negatively affecting society by contributing to the declining birth rate, the rise in sex crimes, and the objectifying of women and men.

One of the major problems that contemporary Japan faces today is the ever declining birth rate. As of 2008, the birth rate dropped below the death rate in Japan. This decline in the birth rate leads Japan to think that it will become a less prosperous, more troubled, and all around worse off nation. According to the census, Japan has a strikingly low amount of births per one-thousand people: only 8.39. "Births are down to an all-time low of 1.39 per woman," (Coleman). With the birth-rate still declining today, Japan is facing some of the things they feared. In a school near Tokyo, the first grade class only has one student in it, as compared to a normal class of twenty or thirty. The lowering birth rate is already contributing to a lot of primary schools being closed in rural places due to lack of enrollment. Without having children enrolled in schools, many educational systems fail to bring money into the economy like it has been.

The declining birth rate in Japan comes from many different things in today's society. It is thought that the problem is mostly stemming from women in the work place. According to a study by Sawako Shirahase, the more women entering higher levels of learning directly

correlates with the lack of births in Japan. Another thing that is contributing to the lowering birth rate is that women are getting married less often, or later in life. According to the finding of the 11th Japanese National Fertility Survey in 1997, “when viewed in terms of attitudes, marriage and children are considered closely connected, as 78% of men and 72% of women agreed that ‘one should have children once married’” (Shirahase). Because women aren’t getting married, they don’t want to have children because then the child seems illegitimate and wrong. However, it also happens that by the time women get married in Japan they have already spent so much time working on their careers, it is either biologically too late to have children or they don’t want to lose the good spot in a company by taking a maternity leave.

It is in my opinion, that the incredible rise and usage of pornography in 20th and 21st century Japan, is also contributing to the lowered birth rate. I believe that because people are watching so much pornography they don’t have time or want to be with other people. Although far fetched, I do believe it can happen. In The People’s Republic of China, where pornography is banned, they are having the exact opposite problem that Japan is facing when it comes to child birth. Although it is hard to measure China’s birth rate due to the one-child policy, obviously they were not facing a problem if this policy had to be enacted. (China.org). Another reason why I believe that the pornography industry is contributing to the lowered birth rate is because there is a “growth of sex and masturbation addiction” (Russell). I think that because there is such a high amount of masturbation addiction, that both men and women would rather please themselves and become bored with the opposite sex. When it comes to this kind of addiction, it can ruin relationships and cause harm to the surrounding family members, which, in Japan’s case - are the

future children. However, the declining birth rate is not the only thing that is causing contemporary Japan to suffer.

Sex crimes, although they happen everywhere, are especially a problem in Japan. One of the most common places for sex crimes to happen are inside of the train cars. Although it may seem innocent, just a simple grope of someone on the train, it is a major crime and a violation of sexual space. Because of the high amounts of complaints, “women-only train carriages have been introduced in Japan as a response to widespread groping (*chikan*) by men” (Hiroii). Although train car groping isn’t the only sex crime that happens in Japan, it is one of the most prevalent. Japan also faces more serious sex crimes like child pornography and rape. Although the numbers might look low when looking at the data of sex crimes, not everything is reported. According to the Japanese Ministry of Justice, only 13.3% of crimes are reported (Ogasawara). “The annual average was 2,177.9 [crimes reported were] for rape” and that doesn’t include rape with armed entry or any other things (Ogasawara).

This relates to pornography because, in Japan, there are genres dedicated to rape and molestation. Some of the most notable genres of pornography are groping, tamakeri, broken dolls, rape play, virtual dating, GV, yaoi, and many others. Because Japan is the highest producer of pornography in Asia, it is no surprise that they have so many shocking genres. However, when a country has more than just a few rape genres there can be a problem. In the genres broken dolls, rape play, and virtual dating, among others, the primary goal of the film is to depict a rape scene (Weisser).

However, there are people who do not see the correlation between violent pornography and sexual violence. One man states that his “findings are consistent with a social learning view

of pornography, but not with the view that sexually explicit materials in general contribute directly to sex crimes” (Bauserman). He states that, although there can be some links, pornography viewing does not force people in to becoming sex offenders. When interviewing a student in class, I got more views on how pornography doesn’t effect what people do. “It’s not real and people should know that” (personal communication, Yokoi).

I, on the other hand, do think that pornography can shape a young person’s mind. Because some of the videos are made to look like real life events, I think it can influence someone’s thought process. A study in the University of Pennsylvania states that: “Japanese males exposed to a depiction of rape in which the woman enjoyed the rape were more likely to believe that women in general enjoy rape, and that they make false accusations of rape when compared to males exposed to a depiction in which the women showed pain” (Barak). I agree with this statement because if someone sees a pornographic video for the first time they may think that it’s not acted out. This leads people to believe that it’s okay to follow in the footsteps of some pornographic features which is why I think heavy usage of pornography can lead to sex crimes. Not only does the heavy usage of pornography lead to sex crimes in some cases, but it also goes hand in hand with the objectification of men and women.

When I first picked this topic, I wanted to solely focus on the objectification of women. However, once I started researching I realized that Japanese pornography is so different than any other type in the world. For instance, there is an entire genre, called tamakeri, dedicated to a woman kicking a man in the genitals. Therefore, I wanted to expand my research to not only have the objectification of women, but of men as well.

It is obvious that pornography can objectify women in the lewd way that they show them on screen, especially with the genres in Japan today. For instance, broken doll genre is about a person, typically a woman, on a hospital bed covered in stitches, bruises, cuts, casts, etc. After seeing a relationship between the patient and doctor, the doctor or nurse brutally rapes the victim. It's showing objectification of the patient because they are in a state where they cannot defend themselves, yet the director still produces a film where they are used like objects. Even the name, broken doll, hints that they are not a human and as such don't have feelings. There is also a genre called play molester, where high school-esque girls are on a train and men grope them. The fact that these subcultures exist is both shocking and disturbing because they are treating women like nothing but toys.

On the other hand, it happens to men in Japan as well. More often than in the United States, there are genres specifically dedicated to humiliating males. Sexual objectification refers to the practice of regarding or treating another person merely as an instrument (object) towards one's sexual pleasure, and a sex object is a person who is regarded simply as an object of sexual gratification. To cause physical or emotional pain to someone in order to sexually satisfy one's self is objectification because they are treating it, in this case males, as if they were not living. Although there are similar genres of humiliation throughout the world, I believe Japan takes it to another level because they are physically injuring men for their own sexual pleasures.

Like all things, there is an opposing side to this as well. "It is a widespread belief that pornography causes negative attitudes toward women, but tests on this belief are contradictory" (Padgett). Some people think that pornography isn't the issue when it comes to objectification because it's so fake. "I think it's not necessarily just adult films that objectify

people because, let's face it, not everyone watches it" (personal communication, Grattan). There were also people that interviewed who agreed that it objectified people, but didn't necessarily think it was a bad thing. "Porn is meant to objectify people. That's why it's there! The actors and actresses don't care that it's happening. Who cares" (personal communication, Langstaff). The matter at hand, though, is not the actors and actresses, it's the real people. However, many people that I interviewed felt as though pornography had a lot to do with the sexual objectification of people everywhere. "I think it definitely objectifies [women]. I also think it happens to men as well. Porn objectifies everyone, no doubt about it" (personal communication, Nagy).

Conclusion

Adult films can cause substantial harm to the surrounding community. For Japan, it may be the cause of some of its most hardening issues. However, the facts will be forever unknown because, unlike most social issues, pornography is one of the most racy and controversial there is. It is my hope that after reading both sides to the issue of the adult industry, that one can see the negative affects it has on the community. It is not to say that everyone who partakes in watching said films is suddenly a criminal, but prolonged exposure can severely damage the system as a whole.

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