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12 February 2010
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Appropriate With Your Dying Will!: Boys' Manga and the *Doujinshi* Subculture

Introduction

It's 10AM in the morning, and outside the Big Sight, Tokyo's largest convention space, thousands upon thousands of people are lined up on the convention center steps, stretching as far as the eye can see. You likewise fall into line and follow the flow of the crowd up the steps and into the Big Sight's main exhibit hall, where lines of small, plastic folding tables and chairs are lined up precisely in countless rows all the way to the other end of the hall. Eager young people are seated at these tables, and in front of them are spread a wide array of colorful, hand drawn *manga* volumes, all for sale for a modest price. It doesn't take long to notice that not only are the covers of these books adorned with the images of popular *manga* characters, but a staggering number of them depict well known male heroes locked in the embrace of other men. You cannot help but wonder – since when was *Dragonball*'s Son Goku gay?

Welcome to the Comic Market (or Comiket, as it is commonly called), the world's largest *anime* and *manga* convention. Twice a year, in August and December, fans of Japan's *anime* and *manga* scene gather at the Big Sight to take part in the collective spectacle – they can be seen dressed as their favorite characters, buying figures and other sorts of merchandise en masse for their personal collections, and interacting with other fans. The event is not unlike America's own comic conventions, but there is a twist in the Comiket scheme. The main attraction of the market is *doujinshi*, short, self-published *manga* volumes that frequently borrow characters from

professionally published games and *manga* so that the artist¹ can weave these characters into the artist's own imaginative tales of adventure, friendship, and, most markedly, seduction.

But pornography and blatant copyright infringement aren't the only unique features of Comiket. Take a quick stroll through any busy aisle in the West Hall, and one will notice that both buyers and sellers of *doujinshi* do not quite fit the popularized image of the greasy, overweight male comic geek. Instead, the vast majority of attendants and participating circles at the Comiket are young women in their teens or twenties, all of them appearing no different from anyone you would see walking the street in the trendy Tokyo districts of Harajuku or Shibuya. These fans make up a growing population of female *manga* fans, or *fujoshi*², who have formed fan communities dedicated to depicting their favorite characters in homosexual relationships.³ Many of these communities lift characters and situations from *manga* published in popular magazines such as *Shuukan Shounen Jump* or *Gekkan Shounen Gangan*, publications that have traditionally been created by men, for consumption by adolescent boys. This movement, in which women are not only actively consuming male-targeted works of pop culture, but taking these works and using them for their own creative and sexual expression, allows women to break away from patriarchal, heteronormative notions of sexuality and womanhood and to form communities in which notions of desire can be discussed in the safe absence of societal

¹ These artists, or groups of artists and writers, are known as 'circles'.

² The term is a pun on the word for 'respectable woman' (婦女子). Female fans have replaced the feminine 婦 character for the homonymous 腐, the character for 'rotten'. Tamaki Saito, "Otaku Sexuality" in *Robot ghosts and Wired Dreams: Japanese Science Fiction from Origins to Anime*, ed. Christopher Bolten, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr., and Takayuki Tatsumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2007), 224.

³ Books depicting homosexual relations between two men are generally sorted into two categories: BL (boys' love) and *yaoi*. BL is normally characterized by focus on romance and intimacy without the overt depiction of sex. *Yaoi*, an abbreviation taken from the phrase "yama nashi, ochi nashi, imi nashi" ("no climax, no point, no meaning"), explicitly depicts sex. Bookstores generally sort both these sub-genres under the generic terms like BL or *shoujo*. It's worth noting that in years prior, the term *shounen-ai* was also applied to BL, and thus appears frequently in many scholarly sources, but has since been abandoned by fans after the term evolved to carry pedophilic connotations.

expectations. I hope to examine this movement through an exploration of both the media that it creates, and the community that it gathers, taking into consideration not only academic opinions and the texts and images of the books themselves, but also my own personal experiences within the world of the Comiket and *doujinshi* fandom.

A Brief Overview of *Doujinshi* and the Comic Market

The *doujinshi* market saw its first boom in growth in the 1970's, after technology allowed for copy and print services to become cheap and accessible to the Japanese public. Small, privately run printing ventures began to appear, catering to the photocopying needs of young people who distributed small political 'zines, erotica, or underground *manga*. The numerous barriers that had previously existed between amateur authors and publication via large corporations dissipated, giving birth to the *minikomi*⁴ industry. Kinsella points out that thanks to the amateur, decentralized structure of the industry, coupled with the new freedom of distribution that it offered the individual, the birth of *minikomi* in the 70's and 80's was not unlike the advent of the internet in the 1990's, which likewise led to a similar boom in fan-generated art and literature.⁵ While private publishing was beginning to flourish, the large publishing houses that distributed professional *manga* had become risk-averse and more concerned with appealing to the masses to which they catered, choking new, creative talent from the market. In reaction to this phenomena, Aniwa Jun, Harada Teruo, and Yonezawa Yoshihiro, a group of *manga* enthusiasts, gave birth to the idea of the Comic Market, a place where amateur artists could distribute their work free of the restrictions that publishing houses had placed upon their art.

⁴ "Miniature communications", in contrast to "mass communications". Mark McLelland, "No Climax, No Point, Mo Meaning? Japanese Women's Boy-Love Sites on the Internet," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 24:3 (July 2000): 276.

⁵ Sharon Kinsella, "Japanese Subculture in the 1990s: Otaku and the Amateur Manga Movement" *The Society for Japanese Studies*. 24. 2 (1998): 294.

Yonezawa, who went on to become the president of the Comic Market, remarked that “[you went] from being able to publish all kinds of stuff in the mainstream magazines, to only being able to publish unusual stuff in *doujinshi* underground magazines. What else can you do but start again from the underground?”⁶

The first Comiket was officially held in December 1975, and hosted 32 circles and 600 attendees over the course of three days. It grew steadily in population each year after its inception, with the participating circles slowly shifting from artists who gained “professional” published status through their exposure at Comiket, to a population of teenage fans who were content to stay solely within the amateur manga scene.⁷ With the shifting artist demographic also came a change in the books they had to offer – parody manga, based on boys’ comics, that depicted homosexual relations between men became the mainstay of many circles, who based their works on titles such as *Spaceship Yamato* and *Captain Tsubasa*. By the early 1990’s, parody *doujinshi* represented 45.9% of the books sold at Comiket, while the number of attendees grew to over a quarter million.⁸ And despite faltering sales of printed manga in recent years, Comiket continues to grow. Today, the event attracts over half a million eager fans and 35,000 circles to the Big Sight twice a year. From its inception, these groups of enthusiasts have, consistently, been dominated by women. The official Comiket site notes that out of all total attendees, about 57% are female, and out of all participating circles, a staggering 71% are headed by women.⁹ Many of the *doujinshi* sold by these female circles persist in the tradition of

⁶ Ibid., 295

⁷ Ibid., 299

⁸ Ibid., 301

⁹ Comic Market Preparations Committee, “What is the Comic Market?.” February 2008.<http://comiket.co.jp/info-a/WhatIsEng080528.pdf> (accessed January 30, 2010).

borrowing characters from popular *manga* series – for example, for the past several Comikets, women’s *doujinshi* has been dominated by parodies of Amano Akira’s *Katekyou Hitman*



Fig. 1. Gokudera, Yamamoto, Lambo, Tsuna, and Reborn as they appear in the fifteenth chapter of *Katekyou Hitman Reborn!*

Credit: Akira Amano, “*Katekyou Hitman Reborn, target 15: Dr. Shamal*” [from: *Shuukan Shounen Jump (Tokyo: Jump Comics, 2004)*]

Reborn!,¹⁰ a *manga* that is serialized weekly in the boys’ magazine *Shounen Jump*.¹¹ If these numbers are any clear indication, the popularity of *Reborn!* amongst female fans in Japan eclipses the more widely known *Jump* series, such as *Naruto*, *Bleach*, *Dragonball*, and *One Piece*, which have significantly fewer devoted circles attending Comiket. Thanks to the vast fanbase that has

formed around *Reborn!* and the infinite variety of *doujinshi* that it has produced, this examination of the feminist elements in *doujinshi* subculture will focus on *Reborn!*, its related *doujinshi*, and the female fans and artists that make up its fanbase.

Pretty Boys, Feminine Spaces, and Power Dynamics in *Doujinshi*

At first glance, it may be difficult to believe that *Reborn!* *doujinshi* could possibly express any feminist values. After all, the books draw upon a series that, while popular among

¹⁰ *Katekyou Hitman Reborn!* (家庭教師ヒットマンリボーン!) follows the adventures of Sawada “No Good Tsuna” Tsunayoshi. Despite his standing as an unpopular, middle school loser, Tsuna is approached by an infant hit man named Reborn, and informed that he is next in line to become the tenth boss of the Vongola Family, the most influential family in the mafia world. Under Reborn’s tutelage, the reluctant Tsuna amasses a group of misfit followers, and finds himself forced to combat escaped convicts, defend his right to succession from a rebellious group of the Vongola’s own assassins, and is even transported to the future to fight the super-powered boss of a malicious, rival mafia family. And all the poor kid really wants to do is make friends and go on a date with series’ *yamato nadeshiko* figure, Sasagawa Kyouko.

¹¹ According to unofficial fan surveys of participating circles, *Katekyou Hitman Reborn!* has been one of the top 2 parodied series at Comiket for the past three years, with over 1,000 circles devoting their *doujinshi* to its characters and their erotic encounters. “ジャンルコード別サークル数一覧 (C70~C76) と夏コミ告知.” August 11, 2009. <http://d.hatena.ne.jp/myrmecoleon/20090811/1250008156> (accessed February 2, 2010).

females, was originally written for a male target audience and is thus tailored to closely adhere to the normative ideals of male, heterosexual dominance. Female characters are few and far between, and when the series is translated into BL *doujinshi*, the overtly feminine figures only appear on the sidelines, or vanish entirely. Upon first glance, it would seem that *doujinshi* artists are reinforcing the patriarchal values of their society by eliminating the feminine presence from the story, effectively banishing women from the world of male interaction.¹² However, all is not as it seems – rather than annihilating the feminine, *doujinshi* artists engage in the far more subversive action of reintroducing a female presence into their stories by imbuing the male characters with culturally unmasculine traits and moving the settings of their stories from the masculine, public view, to a more intimate, domestic location. While the physical presence of the female disappears, the spaces become gendered while masculine personas are mitigated by the addition of culturally female traits.

The spaces that individuals move in carry heavy connotations within Japanese society. Japanese men, commonly represented by the figure of the salaryman, are expected to be the ones working outside of the household, distancing themselves from domestic affairs, and devoting their time to the public entity known as the corporation.¹³ Women, on the other hand, are expected to work within the boundaries of their home, charged with more domestic tasks.¹⁴ At the same time, women possess a greater freedom to form interpersonal bonds and openly express

¹² Dominic Strinati, *An Introduction to the Theories of Popular Culture*. 2 ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004): 163.

¹³ Megan Harrel, “Slightly Out of Character: Shounen Epics, Doujinshi, and Japanese Concepts of Masculinity,” *Virginia Review of Asian Studies* (2007): 2.

¹⁴ In 1997, women made up 41% of the labor force in Japan, with a majority of them being part-time workers. In the same year, women’s wages were 63.5% percent of the average man’s wage, and women were more likely to suffer decreases in wage after the age of 30. Additionally, the average length of full-time employment for a woman in Japan was 8.3 years, as many women are expected to leave their jobs once they become pregnant. Gordon, Bill, “Equal Employment Opportunity Law System and Women” October 1998. <http://wgordon.web.wesleyan.edu/papers/eeol.htm>.

emotion,¹⁵ and they face a lesser risk of social stigma in the event that they cross the socially defined boundaries of femininity. In contrast, the *soushoku danshi*, or “herbivore men” who shun Japan’s stereotypical image of masculinity (pursuit of career, money, sex, distance from family, etc.) still draw media attention and criticism from the public for being “fragile” or “passive”¹⁶.

In Kanda Zuka’s *424*, Gokudera Hayato and Yamamoto Takeshi, two of the protagonist Tsuna’s trusted friends and family members, are shown celebrating Yamamoto’s birthday by making love to one another. The action of the story never leaves the confines of Gokudera’s apartment, a space that the brash Gokudera is never even shown entering in Amano’s *manga*. From the very first page of the story, the male characters are shown interacting within an environment that Japanese society has coded as private and expressly feminine, displaying opposition to the very idea of gendered spaces. Yamamoto and Gokudera do not appear out of place or emasculated by their surroundings – instead, they seem to embrace the environment, using it to interact with one another on an emotionally intimate, almost vulnerable level. Gokudera is shown shaking, nervous, and blushing before what proves to be his first sexual encounter, though he makes several attempts to deny his anxiety. In response, Yamamoto worries that he’s scared his partner, telling Gokudera that he doesn’t want to be forceful, and admits “I’d be miserable if I scared you off.” Both characters express feelings of fear, worry, and

¹⁵ Like Harrell, I have decided to reinforce this statement with John E. William and Deborah L. Best’s survey of Japanese gender stereotypes, *Measuring Sex Stereotypes, a Multinational Study*. In the study, individuals were asked to associate an adjective with either the male or female gender. Women were very frequently associated with words such as “emotional” or “sentimental”, while words like “unemotional” and “self controlled” invoked more masculine images. John E. William, Deborah L. Best, *Measuring Sex Stereotypes, a Multinational Study* (Newberry Park, CA: Sage, 1990): 323.

¹⁶ Morgan Neil. “Japan’s ‘herbivore men’ – less interested in sex, money,” *CNN.com* (June 9, 2008). Interestingly enough, Hibari Kyouya, the student council president of Tsuna’s middle school and an obvious caricature of the aggressive, stoic figure, levies similar criticisms at those he perceives as weak, referring to them as *soushoku doubutsu*.

anxiety, though the traits are hardly depicted as negative. Through male interaction, the book displays the positive counterparts of words such as “fearful,” “shy,” and “spineless” that the Japanese public closely associated with women in William and Best’s survey. Thus, the image of the weak female, imbued with negative stereotypes, is subverted through the act of displaying men with these qualities in a positive light, without any sense that they have been emasculated.

424 overtly displays both deep physical and emotional intimacy between Yamamoto and Gokudera, but the feeling is only accentuated when one realizes that there’s no sign of another character in the book. Unlike some original boy love works, whose strictly male casts are problematic because of the author’s choice to exclude women entirely from the world of their *manga*, the absence of not only female characters but of other characters entirely speaks to a different purpose in parody *doujinshi*. The women in *Reborn!* are never expressly ejected from the world of the series – they simply do not take part in the intimate relationships of the couples that are portrayed. For that matter, neither do any other male characters. Within the sample of twenty *doujinshi* that were examined, characters outside of the circle’s preferred romantic couple or threesome rarely played major roles in the stories, and instead were starkly absent, or only appeared for a few fleeting panels before disappearing again into obscurity. The isolation of the paired characters is not a rejection of female figures, but rather a product of the artist’s desire to focus entirely on emotions shared between two characters and depict a scene that can allow the reader to derive voyeuristic pleasure from the idea that they are witnessing something that no one else is able to.

But the voyeuristic nature of BL *doujinshi* does not simply imbue a sense of pleasure or arousal – it allows the female artist to depict a relationship in which power is equally distributed,

and gives the female reader the opportunity to vicariously experience relationships of that nature. Romantic and pornographic *manga* authored by men, whether they depict heterosexual or homosexual relationships, seem to have a strong fixation on imbalances of power. Countless volumes of men's *doujinshi* line the walls of bookstores such as K-Books and Mandarake, as they do in the female-targeted counterpart stores. The notable difference is that while female authored *doujinshi* depict men on the covers holding one another, hugging, or kissing, the covers of men's *doujinshi* depict women and men in scandalous positions, covered in bodily fluids, submitting to a bland male character or an anonymous phallus. In his article "No Climax, No Point, No Meaning? Japanese Women's Boy-Love Sites on the Internet", Mark McLelland points out that male-authored comics "tend to emphasize scenes of sadism and violence...[and are generally] obsessed with "brutal" fantasies depicting rape, torture, bondage, male dominance, and a misogynous *zeitgeist*".¹⁷ In other words, male-authored comics strongly emphasize the importance of dominance in a relationship, drawing the line between "submissive" and "dominant" along distinctions between gender, age, or societal/cooperate position, and make sure to convey that sex is an act that involves a dominant partner *doing* things to a submissive partner.¹⁸

Likewise, the importance of power in Japanese male culture is also expressed through more benign channels such as boys' *manga*. The stereotypical *Shounen Jump* series can be described as the hero's constant struggle to attain more power – readers are introduced to a terrifyingly powerful villain, the hero finds himself dominated by the villain's overwhelming strength, and then struggles for hundreds upon hundreds of chapters to gain greater power via

¹⁷ McLelland, 279.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 280.

training or triumphing over tasks and trials. In *Reborn!*, the characters' power is measured in terms of their resolve, which manifests itself in a "dying will flame." Tsuna is constantly pushed to strengthen his flame and "fight with [his] dying will!", and while each fight presents him with a villain that possesses a stronger flame or greater powers, the overwhelming purity of his fire and his resolve allow Tsuna to triumph. Despite the ubiquitously good message that "determination, friendship, and compassion triumph" found in *Reborn!* (along with many other boys' *manga*), the fact remains that similar to male-targeted pornography, the progression of the story necessitates a focus on power and, ultimately, on the subjugation of another. There is also a social hierarchy among *Reborn!*'s characters; as the boss of the Vongola, Tsuna possesses power that places him at the top of this hierarchy. While he does not necessarily exercise the privilege that this position grants him, other characters frequently defer to Tsuna based on their position, or encourage him to wield his power more freely. Gokudera, for example, defers to Tsuna linguistically by speaking to him using extraordinarily polite forms of Japanese, a habit he reserves expressly for Tsuna.

On the surface, women's *doujinshi* also stereotypically feature uneven balances of power. Relationships in these books are portrayed as a *seme/uke*¹⁹ dynamic – a system of apparent dominance and submission between the penetrator and the penetrated. Characters smaller in build, less forward in personality, or who are perceived as less "mature" frequently fall under the umbrella of the penetrated *uke*, while *seme* characters are usually taller, more aggressive, or depicted as older or more sociable. Many have interpreted these trends as an attempt to cast the

¹⁹ Derived from the words *semeru* ("to attack") and *ukeru* ("to receive"), respectively.

uke in the stereotypical role of the “dominated” woman. However, closer examination shows that the relationship is less supportive of that heteronormative power dynamic than it may appear.

Go Happy, a collection of stories by Macora that depicts the relationship between an older Tsuna and Gokudera, is a prime example of how subversive BL *doujinshi* can be. In these stories, Gokudera is portrayed as *uke*, while Tsuna is *seme* – designations that seem problematic from the get-go because of the boss/subordinate dynamic that is depicted in *Reborn!*’s canon.²⁰ But rather than conforming to the idea that Tsuna, whom Gokudera acknowledges as possessing greater societal power, should play the role of the “man” and constantly initiate and dominate, both characters are shown as equally able to initiate sex, and are both equally concerned with the give and take of pleasure during intercourse. Andrea Wood succinctly states the difference between male-authored pornography and the sort of romance depicted in Macora’s book when she points out that “in opposition to a one-sided visualization of pleasure that emphasizes the importance of the penetrating partner’s orgasm, a mainstay of heterosexual pornography, *yaoi manga* are more interested in illustrating both partners’ erotic fulfillment and gratification.”²¹ Dialogue between the two characters further enforces the idea that both partners acknowledge the equality that exists within the relationship. In “Gokudera Hayato no Tameiki,” Gokudera finds himself the victim of an enemy attack that he fears is a form of biological warfare.

Determined not to get Tsuna sick, he refuses a kiss. Tsuna responds to this by trying to comfort his partner, saying that “What’s mine is mine, and Hayato’s is mine too...your pain and your pleasure – they’re the same happiness.” Gokudera wastes no time in correcting this statement,

²⁰ “Canon” in this case is a term derived from fans that refers to the actual published work, rather than derivative fan-produced works.

²¹ Andrea Wood, “‘Straight’ Women, Queer Texts: Boy-Love Manga and the Rise of a Global Counterpublic,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 34 (2006): 403.

arguing, “I can’t agree if you don’t say “What’s mine is Hayato’s” – I want all of your pleasure and pain, too,” a sentiment with which Tsuna happily agrees as he allows Gokudera to kiss him.

Thus it’s clear to see that the reinforcement of the societal idea that an imbalance of power is a component of all relationships is not found in of the *seme/uke* dynamic. Rather, it is what Adrienne Johnson calls a “dialogic relationship.”²² Johnson derives the term from a form of Japanese communication strategy, in which speakers do not speak from their standpoint alone, but instead integrate the positions of the people with whom they are communicating. Likewise, in the *seme/uke* dynamic, both partners represent two halves of a whole, and their relationship is unable to progress unless they integrate the desires of the other into their own desires. The act of being penetrated as the *uke* in these relationships is not inherently a matter of being feminized or emasculated, but instead the product of the character adjusting to fit the desires of their partner.²³ Thus, BL *doujinshi* is not subverting heteronormativity merely through its depiction of homosexual relationships, but also via its movement away from the display of power dynamics within their stories, and through depictions of relationships in which power is evenly shared.

Doujinshi’s Fan Communities

Up until now I have focused closely on the subversive nature of *doujinshi* stories and characterizations. While the books themselves are doubtless an inextricably important part of the subculture, I believe the most important feature of the subculture is the living, breathing body of fans that produce *doujinshi*. In a similar way, the existence of an entire underground genre of comics that consistently buck male dominance and heteronormativity is an amazing thing to

²² Adrienne Johnson “Give and Take: Examining the *Seme/Uke* Relationship of Boys’ Love *Manga*”. Bachelor of Arts Thesis, Pomona College, 2009.

²³ Ibid.

witness in and of itself, but the greater benefit of this genre is that it provides a place for women to gather and form communities in which they can interact with one another.

Despite the public image of *manga* fans as cloistered, agoraphobic *hikikomori*,²⁴ Comiket is actually an incredibly social event. While selling comics is an obvious goal of the artists who participate in Comiket (especially for the more popular circles, who frequently draw lines of fans that can stretch out the convention center and around the building), they are also able to interact with fans in ways mainstream *manga* authors are normally unable to. Artists at Comiket can be seen talking to fans, donning *cosplay* costumes along with the other Comiket participants, or taking small sketch requests from their patrons.

The vast area of BL *manga* that is the Comiket's West Hall has come to be seen as a women's world. Very few men can be seen amongst the throngs of people, and those who are frequently seem to be a boyfriend, towed along by an enthusiastic *fujoshi*. Unattached men who appear to examine the comics for sale are frequently greeted with odd looks from the surrounding fans. In a similar manner, men who venture into the bookstores on *Otome Road*²⁵ tend to be avoided by the female customers. These reactions may seem extreme, but *fujoshi* have come to view their hobby as a safe haven from societal (read: masculine) expectations and restrictions. In the same way that "the invasion of the boy-love world by a sexually aggressive adult male would undermine the fantasy...by introducing an all-too-familiar power dynamic from the real world,"²⁶ the presence of men in a "fantasy" area of the Comic Market or *Otome Road* can also be seen as an intrusion, or a rupturing of the feminine space. The need for the

²⁴ Individuals who choose to withdraw from social situations, often to extreme ends.

²⁵ *Otome Road* is small street in Tokyo's Ikebukuro ward, and has become known as the woman's Akihabara. The area is home to a number of stores that carry merchandise and *doujinshi* aimed at a female clientele.

²⁶ McLelland, 281.

safety that events such as Comiket can provide is deepened by a fan's awareness that they are breaking a number of societal norms; they desire a place where they can enjoy their hobbies in the company of like-minded individuals. One fan explains that "Because of guilt over fantasizing over BL, or the fear that 'if people knew I was a *fujoshi*, they would dislike me,'" there's a large number of *fujoshi* who hide their hobby."²⁷ This anxiety extends even to circles, a handful of which hide the fact that they are participating in such events,²⁸ or are understandably hesitant to discuss their work openly because of the delicate nature of their craft.

The world of *doujinshi* doesn't simply provide a "fantasy world" for women to immerse themselves in – *doujinshi* also offers a creative outlet which women use as a sandbox to explore their own sexual desires. There is an acknowledgement amongst fans and artists that this sandbox is in no way representative of the real world, allowing women to willfully abandon notions of realism (as opposed to being entirely ignorant of them, as some western fans have interpreted it) so that they might explore their imaginings of sex and romance entirely unrestricted. "... They are like a Spielberg movie, they are an imaginary playground..."²⁹ one fan pointed out. A playground that artists use to its full potential: the most common answer to "why do you draw these sorts of comics?" is simply "because I wanted to." In response to the sex scenes in *424*, Kanda comments that she wanted to explore what Yamamoto and Gokudera's first night together would be like, and wanted to see what she would be able to draw in terms of penetration. Ultimately she concludes that she feels that she was able to draw something that would "make people blush." Similarly, Macora comments in an author's note that she got the

²⁷ "男性の同性愛が「好き」「腐女子」が増殖中." *J-Cast* ニュース. 18 Feb 2007. <http://www.j-cast.com/2007/02/18005485.html>.

²⁸ Daniel H. Pink, "Japan, Ink: Inside the Manga Industrial Complex," *Wired*, October 22, 2007, 3.

²⁹ McLelland, 287.

idea for one of her stories from a conversation with a friend, in which they wondered what it would look like to draw scenes of penetration while the characters were still wearing their underwear. Exploration of sexual scenes and fantasies contains a very obvious link to the emotional aspects of the relationship, as well. In Suno Ichino's series of books, *Nude Diamonds*, Yamamoto loses his memory after a car accident, leaving Gokudera to try and reassemble their relationship. Suno comments that ultimately she wanted to show her readers a relationship that is strengthened through emotional pressure – the “payoff” that the readers are shown, after Yamamoto has recovered his memories and confessed to Gokudera, manifests itself in a sex scene between the two, but the notion that this sex is symbolic of growing love between the characters is strongly reinforced.

The fact that sex is a central theme in the *doujinshi* community, and that exploration of sexuality is actively encouraged by its participants allows women to trump the dichotomy that society draws between the “loyal wife” and the “disgusting whore.” Fans express a feeling of liberation over having material that they are allowed to fantasize over, and a community in which discussion of these fantasies is acceptable. At the Comiket Market, artists share books with one another, and on many occasions small clusters of curious convention-goers will gather when someone opens up a new book to share the dirtiest, most interesting parts of the comic. In a similar act of community sharing, female employees at bookstores like the ones that line *Otome Road* occasionally label their favorite books as a recommended read. Employees of the bookstore chain Mandarake even go as far as to rate the “sensuality” of the scenes in the books they carry. These actions by fans to share their likes and fantasies with other fans speak to *doujinshi*'s ability to make women aware that they are allowed to embrace their sexuality and fantasize in the same

way men are *expected* to experience sexual desires. The use of characters from boys' comics in women's *doujinshi*, I feel, further reinforces the "acceptability" of female desire. Men are frequently allowed the opportunity to fantasize over specific women – idols, *manga* characters, actresses are all fair game. There is far less cultural acceptability in the idea of a woman attaching her desire to a specific figure outside of her spouse or partner. Thus, by appropriating characters that previously existed in a staunchly male medium and making them targets of desire, much in the same way a man makes an actress the target of his desire, female fans and artists are expressing the idea that not only is female desire perfectly acceptable, but that desire is not confined simply to what society deems "female oriented."

The female community of *doujinshi* fans, its media, and the social environment that it provides has proved to act as a counter-balance to the denial of youth and female sexuality that is extolled by not only Japan, but by many other modern nations. Wood's article optimistically notes that participants in the community have experienced shifts in how they view both sex and relationships – *fujoshi* have come to expect more from relationships, and actively participate in healthy, friendly communications about sexuality and desire.³⁰ While it would be presumptuous to say that this movement is poised to foster a change in Japan's social climate, it is clear that *doujinshi* is not only a subculture that allows women to express their dissatisfaction with the status quo via subversive art, but one that is having a markedly positive effect on the women that do become involved with it.

³⁰ Wood, 409.

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