

Living as *On'nanoko* or Female Sex Workers, at an S&M Club in Tokyo:

A Study on the Sex Industry World and Urban Way of Sexuality

Yoko KUMADA

The aim of this Ph.D. thesis is to reveal the “urban way of sexuality” through the analysis of *On'nanoko*, female sex workers, who belong to the lawful sex industry in Tokyo, Japan. The main argument is based on findings from a participant observation that has been conducted for over 6 years at an S&M club (hereinafter referred to as the “Club”). In contrast to generally-accepted images of the sex industry, such as “illegal” or “underground”, the Club has established its lawful status through the submission of its business permit to the National Public Safety Commission. It indicates that the Club is connected and deeply embedded in the public sphere (i.e. politics, economics, and culture) of contemporary Japanese society. For those reasons, this thesis regards the Club as well as other lawful sexual businesses and their ties with society as the legitimate “sex industry world”. Through the analysis of the sex industry world, the “urban way of sexuality” that constitutes a crucial part of the “urban way of life” is explored.

Earlier studies by Chicago school sociology and urban anthropology indicate that cities have always been the site of power in terms of structuring human lives. Meanwhile, however, not all lives, or their entire lives, are completely under the influence of such structure. Urbanites, especially those who live in the social periphery, use or even take advantage of living in a city to survive or to enjoy their freedom. Focusing on sexuality, which is the very basis of human existence, the thesis tries to unveil the reality of such peripheral lives.

The overall analysis deals with what is called “urban relationships”. Unlike in villages, one is able to divide and disconnect the networks he or she owns in cities. As a result, those who meet the individual through a single network are not able to comprehend what kind of relationships he or she has in other networks. This type of relations or relation-making technique is possible only in cities where the population size, density, and heterogeneity is excessive compared to rural areas. Furthermore, the way of making and presenting a “self” is distinctive in urban relationships. Because in a city, one disconnects his or her networks and keeps them secret from each other, he or she can also divide his or her “self” into parts. In other words, one is allowed to show only his or her partial self to establish urban relationships. Others, on the other hand, are forced to guess who he or she really is as a total person, knowing what they are seeing is only a part (or parts) of him or her. This making and presenting of “self” is done through two

specific practices. First is the “practice of disconnection”. It is a practice that not only divides but also disconnects, or keeps the “self” in parts, and hides them from those who are not in the network in question. The second is the “practice of connection”. Once one divides his or her “self”, depending on the situation, he or she can re-connect the parts as he or she wishes.

Based on the discussion above, the main analysis focuses on four individual *On’nanoko*, female workers: *Yuko*, *Momo*, *Kanoko* and *Hikaru*. Although they are all in a single occupation, *On’nanoko*, their lives are distinctively different in terms of how they come to the Club, how they work, and what they believe is most important when it comes to making relationships with their clients. As a result, crucial differences are observed as well in their “practices of disconnection (and connection)” of making each “self”.

Although this thesis is about the sex industry world and urban sexuality, the analysis also leads to the reconsideration of social structure, an everlasting issue of social science, through the discussions on the robustness and fragility of urban social structure.