Seeking entertainment as a part of one's job is expected behavior for corporate Japanese men. Referred to generically as *kōsaisettiahi*, this is a practice of entertaining clients or employees on company expense which is a common and acceptable policy of many medium- and large-size corporations in the economically prosperous period of post-1960s Japan. The participants in and target for this practice are *sarariiman*: white-collar male workers who are the working elite and essence of Japan, Incorporated. Veterans of a rigid entrance exam system (which determines entrances into both high school and college) on which adult careers, particularly those of the highly desirable *sarariiman*, are entirely dependent, these men embody and realize the standard for the typical Japanese male.¹

Admired for their success, *sarariiman* are awarded social status and a job security of "life-time employment" that many other categories and positions of worker often lack. What *sarariiman* have expended and must continue to expend in order to guarantee their successes, however (long hours; hard work; an all-consuming and exacting commitment to one's job; rigid and meticulous corporate rules; and the constancy, scrutiny, and hierarchies of company life), are well known and ridiculed in the collective imagination. *Sarariiman* as beleaguered and routinized, forever cogs in someone else's wheel, are common images in the popular culture of television, film, novel, cartoons, and comics. Men whose only willful act is to urinate on their boss's desk, whose sexual desires are frustrated by the realization of their own impotency, whose expectation for promotion is squashed when the nerd in the office is promoted instead—the stories about *sarariiman* portray their lives as busy, oppressive, and filled with a meaning (de)limited by work.²

It is as a respite from and a reward for the everyday mining in corporate work that the practice of entertainment on company expense is partially framed. The intent, as stated by most informants³ who were participants in this practice, is to unwind and relax in a setting that is neither officially work nor officially home. Men venture out from the workplace in the company of other men, those with whom they either work or are attempting to negotiate a business transaction, and they (re)associate with one another at a bar, golf course, or club. Work or business per se is rarely or little discussed, yet the unhinging of tensions is expected to strengthen male bond-
ing as a source and resource for the good working relations which must continue
the next day. The agenda is therefore double and split: to relax from work and to
relax for work. As my informants also stated it (though usually at different mo-
ments), kōsaisettaihī is about work but also play: about having a good time, but
also about having a good time as part of one’s job.

In this paper, I will examine this particular aspect of corporate entertainment—
the split in intent between work and nonwork—in terms of one particular location
for kōsaisettaihī (a hostess club) and one particular pattern of behavior (the ritual-
ized dominance men act out in front of female hostesses and as a fact of this fe-
male presence). My aim is twofold: first, to navigate the journeys men take with and
at the hands of women in the hostess club, and second, to consider what compels
and is rewarded by company-paid outings where workers, routinely and ritualisti-
cally, act like dominant men.

I conclude that in company-paid outings to a hostess club the split between work
and nonwork of the activity, and between work and someone-besides-worker of the
participant, is encoded in primarily two relations of gender and power. At one level,
workers are treated as privileged and empowered males (within the club). At an-
other, however, this masculine privilege depends on the ability and willingness of
males to continue as productive and compliant workers (within the workplace). Al-
lowing workers to act as masterful men in a hostess club thus relieves the psycho-
logical stress of demeaning and disempowering aspects of work for the worker yet
also reinstalls that worker in a relationship to work which pays for and orchestrates
even this aspect of the man’s life.4

Industrial Principles of a Corporate Practice

Company entertainment on corporate expense is a practice of business and busi-
nessmen in Japan. It is referred to conventionally by three terms: settaï (referring to
receptions or meetings organized by companies); tsukiai (a more generic word for
get-togethers or friendly connections); and kōsaihi (company expenses or expen-
ditures). Spoken together, kōsaisettaihī encodes three separate dimensions of this
institution: the agenda of business (settaï), the form of friendship which business
coopts and presumes upon (tsukiai), and corporate money, which funds and con-
ditions these outings (kōsaihi).5 In speaking, however, kōsaisettaihī is not a term
conventionally used. Rather, it is a custom which is spoken of differently in different
conversations by different speakers: more commonly by the term tsukiai when in
the midst of entertaining itself, for example, and by the terms settaï and kōsaihi
when discussing its utility with a business office, wife, or inquiring anthropologist.

As a business principle and expenditure, corporate entertainment is considered
to be “an indispensable expense of industrial profits” and one that is calculated to
increase profits even in depressed times.6 As such, the expenditures can be enor-
mous, consuming as much as 5 percent of the annual operating expenses in some
companies and averaging as much as $5,000 or $6,000 per male company em-
ployee per year.7 The government unofficially sanctioned this practice with a cor-
porate tax law, which, between the years 1954 and 1982, allowed most spent on
corporate entertainment to be written off as tax deductible. Even after this law was restructured, however, kōsaihi expenditures have continued to increase, reaching an all-time high of 3,620,200,000 yen ($18,101,000) spent nationwide in 1984. As Tabe Shiro, the author of a study on the practice of kōsaihi and its relationship to tax laws in Japan (Kigyō Kōsaihi to Zeijittsumu Jōhō [Practical information about taxes and enterprise kōsaihi]), has explained, the expenditure of resources on entertainment may seem a useless or frivolous expenditure (jōhi) yet is an essential element in the operating expenses of Japanese corporations, one which actually increases in periods of low economic growth and high competition.8

The rationale and intent of corporate entertainment is to add something beyond the workplace where relations of work transpire during the day. As one informant, an executive from a large company, explained, “Men who have been trying to do business with one another for months in the office, will conclude the deal during one evening of drinking together in a bar.” The implication is that work in the workplace can only go so far and that work delimited to the workplace will fail to realize something essential or desirable to working relations in Japan.9 The ingredient incomplete or incompletely at an office is often referred to in terms of ningenkankei—the human relations of work that are cited frequently as the key to Japan’s industrial practices and success. A concept as imprecise as it is all-inclusive, ningenkankei is a reference to both the structural hierarchy of (most) social relations in Japan and the cultural coding for behavior in structural relations.10 Positioned as a subordinate, a Japanese is expected to be loyal and respectful: positioned as a subordinate, the expectation is to be benevolent and responsible. As such, the complexities of ningenkankei mean that social relationships can be both oppressive and warm. And, as applied to the workplace, ningenkankei is that which both encases and extends the rationality of “pure” working relations: that which, according to one Japanese scholar, is the feudalistic foundation of Japan’s modern and capitalistic economy,11 and that which, according to another Japanese scholar, provides a warm and humane “back” structure to an otherwise “cold” and utilitarian “front” (omote) structure of corporate organization.12

In its operationalization as a principle of work in Japan, ningenkankei is not only slippery but also contradictory. It is this complicated and ideological13 concept which makes work what it is, but also more or other than what it is as “merely” or “coldly” work. Hence, in its adoption of the ningenkankei component, the practice of company-paid entertainment likewise takes on this double/doubling operation. On the one hand, that is to say, it serves to establish the very trust that work relations, particularly those in some businesses such as securities firms and trading companies, depend on. In the words of an executive at Nomura Shoken, a securities firm: “Kōsaishī is an expense extended toward amicable relations between customers (ningenkankei). In transactions on the money market the feeling of mutual trust is indispensable. This is particularly true in the case of securities companies because transactions involving large sums of money are made without exchanging contracts.”14 On the other hand, however, outings participated in by work groups are intended to dispel certain pressures and attitudes that are inevitable, even essential, at the workplace. Such work-situated behaviors are often referred
to by the same term, *ningenkankei*, and denote the culturally appropriate stances for persons, in this case workers, depending on what place (usually hierarchical) they assume in a relationship.

When a party of *sarariiman* enters a hostess club, for example, the highest ranked among them will state explicitly *Bureiko shioka*, meaning “let’s break with all decorum, rules and rank.” Thereafter the objective is to relax and unwind in ways that would be both impossible and inappropriate to manage while still at work. What subsequently takes place—joking with one another, exchanging stories, taking turns singing, receiving service from hostesses—is considered to be a mechanism for relieving the stress of not only working hard but also behaving according to the rules of social order and hierarchy which must be maintained during the day. As such, work-structured outings are functionalistic because they relieve the tension and raise the egos of *sarariiman* who become frustrated and discouraged at the workplace. And as functionalistic, such outings also refurbish the psyches of beleaguered workers, so they can return to work, psychologically and socially refreshed, the next day.

In this principle of work functionalism, a company outing could theoretically take place at any location not officially marked as one of work. And, in practice, work groups that are composed with far greater diversity than those of mainly male *sarariiman* from medium- or large-size companies (groups, for example, of blue-collar workers, students, and professors, OLs,\(^{15}\) younger office workers of mixed gender) do venture out at night to inexpensive pubs (i.e., *akachōchin*\(^{16}\)), bars (i.e., *karaoke bars*\(^{17}\)), and restaurants (i.e., *yakitoriya*\(^{18}\)) where their expenses are often paid by themselves. For these groups, extravagance is rarely an objective, whereas it often is for outings paid on company expense. As informants explained, the more a company pays to entertain clients or workers in clubs whose class is measured in terms of the beauty of the hostesses, the elegance of the furnishings, and the quality of the service, the more a customer is flattered.

By this logic, the objective of company-paid entertainment is not simply one of relieving work-induced stress and allowing men to “open up” (*uchitokeru*) to one another in ways that both relieve and produce the *ningenkankei* of work relations. Rather, the aim is, or is also, one of making men feel important. And for important clients or for occasions when a company wants to reward a division of workers for work well done, outings can run into the hundreds, thousands, or tens of thousands of dollars. Per person, a simple meal or a couple of drinks could cost under a hundred dollars; an evening at medium-priced clubs or a half day of golf could be two or three hundred dollars; and a full day of golf or an evening of going out to a fancy restaurant and then to a (or a number of) fancy priced hostess club(s), perhaps on the Ginza or in Akasaka, is easily over a thousand dollars.

Apart from what actually takes place between men at a golf course, restaurant, or hostess club, the form these outings take in terms of price and style carries a symbolic meaning all its own. As a sign of and for self-importance, the sheer cost and flashiness of an outing are important factors in which companies are the highest spenders of *kōsaihi*. Corporations which are service based and dependent on selling or negotiating business with high numbers of clients or customers expend
the most on company entertainment and often spend more in times of economic
depression when competition is high.

According to a ranking of the 200 top spending companies of kōsaihi that has
been issued by the magazine Shūkan Daiyamondo since 1979, the ten biggest
spenders invariably are trading companies; other top spenders are securities com-
panies, construction businesses, and pharmaceutical companies.¹⁹ For these
businesses, company-paid entertainment is as desirable as it is necessary, yet ex-
penditures depend on a number of factors. These include company style (Mitsu-
bussan, typically the highest spender, for example, is known for its hade, or flashy
style), financial health (when business is down, outings may actually increase but
the locations may be adjusted: to one hostess club rather than three, for example),
and importance of a particular customer, employee, or negotiation (the more im-
portant, the more expended).

This exhibitive principle of kōsaisettaih is a mechanism for promoting “industrial
image”:²⁰ of identifying corporate strength with and by an elegance in entertain-
ment style. This is illustrated by a Western informant who described his evening of
being entertained by the Japanese company with whom he had just contracted a
business deal as a series of one hour blocks at different but equally opulent host-
ess clubs. At each club, the expense of the outing was made obviously apparent,
and at the end of one hour, the client was dislodged from an engaging conversation
with a hostess to move to the next club and yet another symbolic display.

As stated by Yoda Akira, an aficionado of the realm of bars and clubs (mizu
shōbai)²¹ which is the frequent and perhaps most desirable site for company-paid
entertainment, the principle is one of “showing one’s face” (kao ga kikku).²² To be
seen in a fancy club with a beautiful hostess raises one’s social status in the eyes
of others and hence one’s self-esteem in the eyes of oneself. In fact, what differ-
entiates a high-class club from ones with less prestige comes down to the polish on
the tables, the class of liquor, the expense of the hostesses’ clothes, and the glisten
of the bathroom counter—matters of symbolic form, or, in Yoda’s words, of pure
“image.”²³

Yet what, as image, could be considered no more than empty form at one level is
experienced, according to Yoda, as a process which is personally satisfying, en-
riching, and confirming. A man needs to be recognized, as he states it, but this
recognition is rarely given at work, with its expectations for collective, self-sacrific-
ing, and hierarchical behavior, nor at home, by a wife and family who has known
the man for years. At a club, however, it is the job of the hostess to make a man feel
accepted, recognized, and important and it is this desire for self-recognition, what
Yoda terms jikokenjyoku, that the female servicer, more than any other figure or
feature in the mizu shōbai, is expected to serve.²⁴ This service of hostesses, which
men expect and for which Japanese corporations pay money to give to their work-
ers, is highly predictable and fetishistic. Conditioned by three factors—(the) gender
(difference between server/served), (the) power (differential between server/
 served), and (the) sexual license indulged in the interactions—it is to this service
which I now turn.
Servicing Workers as Men

The hostess club where I worked as a hostess and participated-observed as an anthropologist in 1981 was situated in the Roppongi district of Tokyo. Considered a somewhat “young” area filled with stylish bars and popular discos, Roppongi cannot compete with the more elegant nighttime districts of Ginza and Akasaka. The club, called here Bijō, was nonetheless considered a niryū, or second-ranked club in a ranking of mizu shōbai clubs of about eight classes. Located on the top floor of an eight-story high-rise building, Bijō was a members only club that seated up to forty or fifty customers at a time. Furnished with obviously expensive objects (a Parisian painting, a red-lacquered baby grand piano, heavy-set red velvet chairs, a gold-plated phone), the club’s style was remarked on in approval by many of the customers.

The center of Bijō’s attraction and appeal was unquestionably the “Mama,” a woman who owned and ran the club and was referred to by the customers as a bijin (beautiful woman). Trained originally as a geisha and the daughter of a woman who had led her life in the mizu shōbai, Mama (who refused to be called by her proper name) cultivated the air and demeanor of a refined but professionally demimonde woman. In her case, this meant wearing an exquisite and costly kimono every night, matching her accessories to be perfectly coordinated, coifing her hair in the upswep traditional fashion, and behaving with the allure and savvy of what in Japan is recognized to be “the mizu shōbai woman.”

What defines the mizu shōbai woman varies by speaker, but informants, both women and men, characterized her as ideally young (under twenty-five), beautiful, well dressed, a good conversationalist, charming, flirtatious, and insincere. This last quality was alluded to and expressed in a variety of ways: as a person whose behavior is always and ultimately motivated by only money and who thus remains disingenuous and untrustworthy at some basic level. Occasionally this aspect of the mizu shōbai woman was referred to in terms of dirtiness (kitanai): of women who behave sexually for money and are dirtied somehow by this sexual commodification.

Mizu shōbai women are also categorized by the contrast they pose with other kinds of women, namely those who willingly marry and bear children. One informant, herself a married housewife and mother, referred to women in the nightlife as “animals” as distinct from the “human” type of women who enter marriage. Forsaking marriage, according to this speaker, is a choice that women willingly and consciously make when entering the nightlife. Yet from what I have learned about the mizu shōbai, remaining unmarried is often less a choice than an effect of women’s mizu shōbai experience. As conveyed by respondents to a survey I administered, once a woman has experienced the mizu shōbai, something of the mizu shōbai remains with her, forever tainting her chances for future marriage and respectability.

Nothing equivalent, however, is said about a man’s encounter with this domain. He can enter a club as a sarariman and respectable worker/husband and leave the club with the respectability of his identity still intact. Whatever transpires with, to, or for him in such places, it does not transform or mark him as this domain imprints
women. Restated, a man can be both “human” and “animal” in the words of the same informant quoted above. This, in fact, is the meaning and construction of masculinity in Japan. To be a man in the context of home and work is to be hard working, devoted to one’s job, and willing to comply to Japanese notions of duty and place. To be a man in the context of a bar or club, by contrast, is to be uninhibited and loose with drink, woman, and song.

The construction of masculinity is thus double(d) and split in a manner that femininity as socially constructed is not. The dutiful, self-sacrificing, always responsible and dependable behavior of the wife-mother has no under or split side as does the behavior of the working male.25 Thus women who pursue an alternative course to marriage are conceptualized as not only different but other: as “other” to women who mother and as a symbol of the “otherness” which is the split side of/within man himself. Men go to a bar or club to express an other side of themselves, one which relieves expectations placed on them to be certain kinds of “men” during the day. What they find there is the mizu shōbai woman, a woman unique and distinct. She marks this terrain for the man and eases him into a behavior and identity marked as different. The man acts up and relaxes. When he leaves, however, it is the woman who both physically and socially stays behind.

At Bijō, there are two types of servicing women, the Mama and the hostess, and the service they performed was related but distinguished. The Mama, as an icon of luxury and class, was both more distanced from the customers and special to them. Perfect in manner and dress, her interactions with men were likewise perfected yet restricted. Typically she would show up every night around eight and move from table to table for intimate but brief conversations. During these moments she would personalize her attention by recalling details of men’s lives that they had revealed to her months, even years, earlier. Addressing them in the terms by which the men had used to speak and represent themselves (a trip to New York six months earlier, a knee operation two years back, a dream of taking opera lessons for the future, a hobby of collecting bugs on the weekends), Mama would never mention or inquire about a “fact” unrevealed nor question the veracity of a story that was spoken. Further, she would act as if charmed or infatuated with any aspect of a man’s presentation—laughing coyly or complimenting him at his ability to collect stamps, tell a good joke, or travel to New York.

Allowing men creative license, as it were, the opportunity to create or recreate themselves by any aspect or image of themselves they select, this service is what Yoda refers to as “recognition.” By implication, it is recognizing a person not for what he necessarily or actually is but for what he presents or crafts himself to be. A good mizu shōbai woman, in his words, “accepts the surface expression”26 of the man no matter how foolish or unbelievable that expression is. In this sense, a mizu shōbai woman, not quite “real” herself, accepts the man in his imagined, other, or nonrealities as well.

In this performative quality, Bijō’s Mama was a pro. A seeming computer bank of hundreds of details of hundreds of men’s lives/conversations, Mama’s skill in eliciting/hearing/recalling/repeating men’s stories was paradigmatic, in two respects, of the various services she offered at Bijō. The first was her own style and
class—a woman considered beautiful, skilled, charming, and refined. To be in the presence of such a woman, one customer stated, makes a man feel important himself. To take clients and employees to a club with such a woman, according to another informant, elevates a man in the eyes of other men.

In a second respect, Mama's value was not only symbolic—symbolizing by her classiness, the class and success of her male customers—but also (inter)active: acting, by set behaviors, to flatter and center men in ways that assured them of their self-importance. Referred to as sabisu (service), Mama's was considered top-rate and included seeing each and every customer off when they left the club; sending each customer chocolates on Valentine's Day and presents on their birthday; not allowing hostesses to smoke or put their elbows on the table in front of guests; singing a duet with two or three privileged customers a night and having a "memory photo" taken of the event; and extending special treatment to regular customers such as calling them on the phone, giving them presents, and going out with them for an occasional dinner or drink.

Intended to be personal and personally flattering, sabisu is also routinized and commodified—given to any man as, and as long as he is, a customer. These two aspects of sabisu are, of course, not unrelated—it is a business of selling personal esteem, a business Japanese corporations purchase and a commodity of flattering personal egos that women such as Bijo's Mama sell. Sex, or the illusion or pretense of sex, is also a feature of this transaction. As one informant described it, while customers assume that a woman like the Mama at Bijo has a lover, Mama herself keeps such personal facts a secret. Hence, when she flirts with a customer, the possibility that she may be interested is not entirely closed off. It is a game, but one that is pleasurable and flattering all the same. Hence, even without the reality of sexual intercourse, the Mama can be imagined and fantasized as a type of pretend or stand-in mistress. And in a society where mistresses become a privilege, practice, and sign of men in power, imagining a classy woman as one's mistress becomes a means of imagining oneself as a powerful man.27

It is in the form of sexual interplay that a customer's relationship between Mama and the hostesses at Bijo differs, at least in terms of manifest behavior, the most. Structurally, the relationship differs little in that in both cases the woman is paid for her service and in neither case is there likely to be a love or sexual connection that continues outside the club (this was club policy, according to the Mama, an infraction for which a hostess would be fired). Yet with a hostess (women who at Bijo were generally less classy, beautiful, poised, refined, or expensively attired than the Mama), men behaved more imperialistically and chauvinistically. At times a hostess was completely ignored, sitting at a table and performing the two duties minimally required of her—lighting men's cigarettes and keeping their drinks filled—with the constancy and compulsiveness men expect.28

Far more often, however, the men would draw on the woman's entire body to feed other consuming desires constituted as male. While the form this took might vary, comments or references to female breasts were so common as to be invariable. Used as a formula to start conversation between men or to confirm a man's place in conversation with a woman, men would say to or about a hostess: "How
big are your breasts?” “She’s as flat as a man,” “She’s got nothing, less than I do,” “Are your breasts real?” “Are your breasts on vacation tonight?” “Nice melons, aren’t they?” “Tiny as ping pong balls.”

Often placed at the beginning of an interaction with a hostess but frequently interspersed throughout, these remarks could generate longer, more detailed commentaries about the hostess’s body. Men would tell a hostess that her hair was flattering or unbecoming; her arms pencil thin or chubby; her legs slender or stumpy; her dress enticing or revolting. Acting as judge of bodily appearance, men would also act as interrogator of personal, often sexual experience. Questions such as “When did you lose your virginity?” “Do you wear underpants?” “Did you wipe yourself when you went to the bathroom?” “What length penises do you like?” “How many boyfriends do you have?” “Do you sleep with them all?” “What sexual position is your favorite?” are routinely asked of hostesses. Expected to speak of their own sexuality, hostesses are expected to listen to that of the men as well. Details of penile length, erotic escapades, girlfriends’ bodies, and sexual fantasies, the latter often involving the hostess herself, are passed between men and spoken to the woman as a constant of hostess club talk.

During these references to body or sex, men usually refer to themselves as sukebe— a word translated as lecherous, horny, or lewd and used almost exclusively by and about males. Admiring a woman’s breasts, for example, the speaker will identify himself as a sukebe, or questioning a hostess about her sexual preferences, the men will wonder aloud whom amongst them is the biggest sukebe. In this language of lechery, inspired by the presence of the hostess, men find themselves united, sharing a common interest and speaking as uniform men. A useful service for men differentiated and hierarchized by rank at the office, this sexual language is also liberating, for it displaces those concerns of duty, responsibility, and performance which envelop the man elsewhere, namely at home and at work.29

It is as a subject of and for talk that the hostess, at one level, is primarily valued. As sexualized female, gendered different from the males and socially other from their order and class, the hostess is an easy, uncomplicated, and unifying topic of conversation. Were she not to breathe a word or merely answer rhetorically and passively the sexualized questions fed to her, she is appropriated and used for speech—a speech that is comfortable between men, speaking as “simply” men.30 At times the hostess is used in only this manner, as basically an object to fill up and fill in the words between men.

At other times, however, even such banal talk seems beyond the efforts or energies of tired workers and then the hostess is called upon to actively start and sustain conversations. She might address such a party by referring to her own breasts or asking which, amongst them, would like to guess her bust size. Thereafter, she may move the discussion through a series of topics (golf, Chinese restaurants, songs, the weather, riceballs, allergies), ensuring that the minimal requirement of such outings—the exchange of conversational pleasantries between workers operating here as “friends”—is adequately realized.

As wives of sarariiman and sarariiman who regularly host tsukiai pointed out,
while the platform for business entertainment is simple (having fun and having fun together), it is a burden that an exhausted businessman at the end of a long day is relieved to hand over to a hostess. When the hostess can engineer the evening’s platform (encouraging and even badgering customers to drink up, sing in front of the room, tell more jokes, and lecherously engage the hostess), she has provided a useful function for the companies footing the bills.

Yet functionalistic explanations, the only explanations Japanese gave me for the role of the hostess in business tsukiai, disregard a second, absolutely critical utility and utilization of the hostess—that of structural subservient. As servicer, the hostess, like the other staff—at a hostess club, positions the one being served as okyakusama—a position of honor, privilege, and respect given anyone in Japan placed as customer or guest. Yet in the case of the hostess, who spends far more time with customers than the less available Mama and the more invisible and irrelevant male staff, her role in structuring the power differential between server and served is not only more constant but is also constantly situated in codings of gender and sex. That the hostess is a woman and a sexual object, in other words, is a means of expressing and heightening her place in servicing a man. And in receiving service, the place of superior and masterful customer becomes merged with those of sexual subject and male.

The manager at Bijo implicitly referred to this operation during a staff meeting conducted one evening before work. Reminding us that “customers to a hostess club are paying three times what they would in a store to drink their liquor on our premises,” he stated that what men were paying for was “service.” In the types of service that were expected of us, the manager then specified two. The first was to never counter or disagree with a customer or act offended at anything he said or did. In other words, we were being asked to treat customers as customers: as those with the prerogative, right, and privilege of an empowered class. The second service was stated in terms of what, according to the manager, all men ultimately and essentially are. This is a sukebei—men with sexual appetites that are base and animalistic. Concretely, the manager stated, we were to abide, indulge, and humor men in their lecherous behavior. If anything got out of hand, he assured us, a male staff member would discreetly move us. Otherwise, even if unpleasant, fielding sexual remarks was a part of our job as specifically female servicers in a service industry directed to specifically males.31 To allow men expression of their sexual instincts is thus, in the context of the hostess club, not only a pleasure given men but also a right they can take. And by this ethos of service, implied the manager, customers are positioned as dominant and the dominance their position assumes is over women and as sexual males.

Institutionalizing Sexual Harassment as a Mechanism for Conducting Business

Recently, the first sexual harassment case in Japan was won by a woman who, having been barraged by the sexual invitations and crudity of a male co-worker for years, quit her job. In the mass-media coverage accompanying this case, the term
for "sexual harassment" (seku hara) has become insinuated into everyday speech and appropriated as an idiom to discuss gender and sexual relations. According to a report in the New York Times, however, Japanese men remain befuddled by the terminology, conceptualizing the behavior as anything but offensive. In a reaction reminiscent of opinions voiced during the Anita Hill—Clarence Thomas hearings in this country, men seemed surprised that a woman wouldn’t find a sexualized comment about her body to be flattering or complimentary. And stated from their own perspective, they find the impulse to sexually observe, pursue, and approach a woman at the workplace to be an activity that enlivens their jobs and makes work more bearable and pleasurable for them. As one young respondent commented lightly, "I might try sexual harassment some day when I’m older."32

If sexual harassment can be defined as an act which uses the power differential of work relations to address an inferior in terms of gender and sex, it is hardly surprising that Japanese male workers do not recognize it as illicit or illegitimate. Sexual harassment by the above definition, after all, is institutionalized by the most prestigious corporations in a practice for the most successful and aspiring white-collar male workers. It is as part of their jobs that sararinman taken to hostess clubs are encouraged to sexually engage women from a position of male lecher and dominant master. Described as an activity that men enjoy in their essence as men (sukebei), this is also an activity that is ritualized and instituted by big business as a structure that benefits corporate interest. Importantly, then, the company rituals of male bawdiness that take place in establishments such as hostess clubs on company expense not only legitimate preexisting attitudes of male chauvinism but also actively promote and produce these relations as a mechanism for doing and sustaining business.

Why does this system work, however, or, more precisely, how does this system work both as a pleasurable experience for the participating men and as an effective device for the promotion and sustenance of business? It is the former part of this question that those outside the practice—wives of men who visit hostess clubs on company expense, for example, or Westerners, particularly men, taken to hostess clubs on business—are hard pressed to fathom. Japanese women laugh at the gullibility of their husbands to be taken in or charmed at all by the formulaic gestures and compliments of mizu shōbai women. And Western men find the same formalism of the sexual and heterosexual relations at hostess clubs to be either boring or insulting.33 As one American told me, he initially believed that a hostess’s compliance indicated her willingness to form a sexual liaison with him later that night. Once he realized that her behavior was performative—limited to talk, the hostess club, and her role as hostess—he became frustrated and uninterested.

Yet it is the very predictability of a hostess’s performance—her willingness to serve a man, build up his ego, and indulge his lecherous comments—that gives Japanese men a certain pleasure, according to my informants. As one man explained it, Japanese men only have limited time at night and yet they’re still sukebei. When they go to a hostess club, they are assured of a certain treatment—that the women will treat them as men and that they as men will be allowed to act "manly."34 As another man described it, talking with, at, and about hostesses is
self-confirming to a man and though sexual is not about sex per se. "When a man wants to ejaculate, he can go to other clubs or home to a wife." When a man wants to feel good about himself as a man, by-implication, it is less sex as an act of penetration and release than a talk about sex with a woman who, as servicer, must never counter the man and indulge everything he says that proves effective.

This effectiveness of hostess service and subservience is not only used by men seeking pleasure but also by companies who use this servicing of male pleasure to manage business. This operation, doubled and linked, borrows on desires constituted as "essentially" male (sukebei) but also constitutes and naturalizes these desires in a form to serve and suit the interests of big business. This process is what Jean Laplanche discusses in terms of "anaclisis," propping up on desires regarded as natural, a pattern of social behavior that is energized and compelled by the desires to which it has been coupled. Roland Barthes also writes about a similar operation in terms of the "alibi"—having a semiotic system of meaning with two levels where the meaning shifts and can be forced to shift between two poles. When an activity is constituted as both work and play, for example, its constitution can be as "play" at a certain moment to conceal and or legitimate its meaning as (also/alternatively) work. What is motivated as an economic structure in the way of kōsai-setaihi, that is, is made more palatable and possible by framing it in codings of male desire.

Co-opting and constructing male desire to establish outings to hostess clubs as a corporate practice, this practice then yields benefits to business relations. At one level these benefits are very mechanistic—literally and socially extending the work day into night so as to make work more than a rigid nine to five commitment for men. When men are not only allowed but also expected to drink and carouse at night with business colleagues and clients as part of their jobs, men can also be asked to work rather than drink during evening hours. And when they are asked to work longer and harder by a person not only a boss but also a "friend," refusal is made difficult. Also, when nighttime rituals of work are as masculinized as those within a hostess club, women are not only excluded from these avenues for promoting their careers but also men are enabled to work longer hours because as men and as workers their commitment is to job and not family or home. At a very literal level, then, more labor can be extracted from men by making their work day longer and their conception of work broader.

At a second level, however, the operation of company-paid jaunts into the nightlife is both more insidious and deeply effective. Men are permitted and expected to indulge their male egos at the hands of a subservient female. Relations of hierarchy that produce experiences of subordination, victimization, and humiliation at the workplace are relieved at the hostess club, yet they are not negated as much as merely rearranged. What a man must abide himself as a worker he can then project and deflect onto a female worker of the nightlife. Thus the relations of work per se, those that demand the hard work, stringent codes of duty, and unbending dimensions of hierarchy that men must endure during the day, are not transformed or improved in the nighttime process but merely imagined temporarily away.

It is as an imaginary that the operation of company-paid outings into a hostess
club work for the male participants and work to benefit the corporations who are footing the bills. As Lacan has used the metaphor of the mirror to describe this construction, an infant first visualizes himself as a coherent whole when seeing his image in a mirror. Thereafter he takes pleasure in this self-image of coherency, yet the image itself is a production—one that depends on the artificial machinery of a mirror.\textsuperscript{40} Women, for men, are often these mirrors\textsuperscript{41}—verifying a completeness of self which, in reality, is absent, impossible, and elusive.

In the hostess club, women are mirroring men. The completeness of male imagery they produce, however, is itself produced by a woman's formulaic gestures of sexual and gender subservience which is a production in turn of company expense. Men, situated to control and dominate women here, are thus themselves placed in a situation by which they become controlled and dominated in terms of desires they have even less time to explore anywhere else. Too busy to realize their sukebei nature in any other fashion, as one informant described the situation of sarariiman visiting hostess clubs, a man's bushy(=)ness also dictates that rituals of institutionalized male lechery stand in for and take the place of other forms of intimacy that a man could develop, for example, at home. Directed to a sphere where pleasures are mediated through factors of money and work, a man finds women whose behavior is not only commodified but obtainable as a commodity only as long as the man continues to be successful and hard working as a sarariiman.\textsuperscript{42} Once a man stops productively working, his outings to hostess clubs will virtually end. Imagined as more than worker by the practice of kōsaisettohai at places like hostess clubs for years, the absence of this practice at the time of retirement will reduce them, then, to less than a man.\textsuperscript{43}

In the late capitalist, postmodern landscape of thriving Japan, it is sobering that corporations are paying women to be abused as a mechanism for promoting better self-images and work relations for white-collar male workers. As a corporate system, however, the abusiveness is directed not only at the women.

\textbf{NOTES}

1. This is class dependent and much more a middle-class than upper- or possibly lower-class ideal. In Japan, however, those who identify themselves as being middle class are in the vast majority. See, for example, Ezra Vogel, \textit{Japan's New Middle Class} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963); Norma Field, \textit{In the Realm of a Dying Emperor: A Portrait of Japan at Century's End} (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991).

2. See, for example, the comic series entitled \textit{Sarariiman Senkyo} (Special course salary-man) drawn by Shoji Sadao (Tokyo: Rippu Manga Bungo, 1980) or "Good-Bye and Other Stories," completed in the 1950s by comic artist Tatsumi Yoshihiro and translated into English (New York: Catalan Communications, 1987). I discuss the comic imagery of sarariiman drawn by both these artists in my book \textit{Nightwork: Sexuality, Pleasure, and Corporate Masculinity in a Japanese Hostess Club} (forthcoming, University of Chicago Press).

3. The research for this paper was gathered during fifteen months of doctoral fieldwork in Tokyo, Japan, during 1981–82. As an anthropologist, I used primarily three methods for data collection: (1) participant-observation as a hostess in a hostess club for four months, (2) interviews with customers to hostess
clubs as well as various authorities or experts in the field relating to this topic and Japanese women with husbands who frequent the nightlife, (3) reading Japanese scholarship or journalistic coverage of corporate life and the practice of corporate entertainment.


6. Ibid., 204.

7. Ibid., 197.

8. Ibid., 2.


10. Whether or how the difference in party composition (members of the same company versus members of one company entertaining clients from another company) affects the production of ningenkankei in a hostess club was never made clear to me by an informant or in my reading.


13. Ideological in the sense that it is often spoken of as a cultural tradition, and as a cultural tradition it is used to naturalize economic behavior.


15. OL stands for “office lady,” a woman performing office work that usually includes serving tea to male co-workers. It is significant that this term is as gender-coded as the man portion of sarariiman.

16. “Red lantern pubs”: drinking establishments where the price is considerably lower than that in hostess clubs.

17. Karaoke means, literally, empty orchestra and refers to the extremely popular system of providing cassette music in bars and clubs with microphones so customers can sing along and perform to their favorite music.

18. Yakitori are skewers of chicken and vegetables; restaurants that serve yakitori (yakitoriya) can be relatively inexpensive.
20. Ibid., 23.
23. Ibid., 203.
25. For example, Japanese women who attempted to explain why their husbands went out drinking at night often used the word asobi, which means literally “play.” Frequently these women would say that their husbands work hard during the day and need some form of release, which drinking and talking with co-workers and hostesses provide. When I asked them then what they, as women, did for an equivalent release, however, they denied that they either had or needed an equivalent outlet. One woman stated the difference of gender in the following way: “Women don’t ‘work’; hence, women don’t need to ‘play.’ ”
27. Since there was only one Mama in the club, however, she was virtually unattainable. This unattainability was therefore a condition of her role and her appeal. I thank Gali Hershatter for the emphasis of this point.
28. These services, as minimal as they may seem, were actually as ritualistically performed by the hostess as ritualistically expected by the customer. I observed men wait for minutes with an unlit cigarette in their mouths for a hostess to service them. And I, as well as every other hostess at the club, literally clung to a pack of matches all night so as to be able to light a cigarette the second it was removed from a man’s pack. In a real as well as symbolic sense, then, lighting cigarettes and pouring drinks constitute the core of a hostess’s service.
29. In this sense, it could be said that women not only mediate the relations between men at a hostess club but also mediate the various relations and subjectivities of within a particular man.
30. The heavy discursiveness of hostess club activity, including and particularly that constructed as heterosexual and sexual, is reminiscent of Foucault’s argument about the discursiveness of Western sexuality. In this Japanese context, however, the discourse about sex is far less linked to concepts of truth and the self, or at least a Western concept of self as defined in terms of “truth” (Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Vol. I: An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley [New York: Vintage Books, 1980]). One does see here, nonetheless, the power of a sexual discourse to (re)situate the speakers in different positions. Men who enter the club as ranked unequal find an equality between them when speaking, uniformly, as men about the hostess as uniform Woman (for a discussion about the relationship between language and subjectivity, see, for example, Emile Benveniste, “Subjectivity in Language,” in Problems in General Linguistics, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek [Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1971], 223–230; Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, Language and Materialism: Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject [Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977]; Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays [New York: Monthly Review, 1971]).
31. Interestingly, the manager never mentioned the more concrete services of lighting cigarettes and pouring drinks in which the top-ranked waiter instructed us on the first night of any of our employments.
33. These commentaries, both by Japanese women and Westerners, were made to me.
34. "Manly" (danseirashi), in this context, meant being allowed to act in a sexual fashion (that appears to be) of their own choosing and over which they didn't need to negotiate or consult with the woman. Manly, in other words, meant chauvinistically.

35. Clubs that offer various sexual services are widely available in the Japanese nightlife and include pinku saron (with such services as fellatio and "assisted masturbation"), soaplands (with services of oral sex and intercourse), and touchy-feely bars (with services that include various kinds of touching to various body parts). As a general rule, talking with hostesses in classy hostess clubs costs far more than any of these more sexually "concrete" services, and men have told me that they may talk with hostesses at different clubs all evening and then stop briefly for fellatio at a cheaper club on the way home. What is pleasurable, then, at least for some Japanese men, is more the boost to their ego provided by hostesses than actual sexual release. In a different context, I have raised the question of the meaning and construction of sexuality in Japan in "A Male Gaze in Japanese Children's Cartoons, or, Are Naked Female Bodies Always Sexual?" (ms.).


38. In the four months I worked at Bijo, for example, only one female executive was brought there as a client being entertained on company expense.

39. Yuzawa Yasuhiro, “Katei ni Okeru Otō no Yakuwari” (“The role of the husband in the family”), in Gendai Seikyoiku Kenkyu (Tokyo: Nihon Seikyoiku Kyokai-Henshu, 1982), 62–75, has written about the social role of husbands and fathers in the Japan of the past decade and describes it as being centered almost entirely on work. The one familial role a husband/father is expected to serve, according to his research, is to bring home the paycheck. In an age that he calls "the age where father is not needed" (oto fuyō jidai), men are expected to devote their prime energies, time, and commitment to work as much as women are expected to manage the home and raise the children (even if and when they have a job outside the home). Reflecting and situating a gendered division of labor that remains rigid, the workplace is heavily masculinized in Japan (although 50 percent of adult women work, few do so in managerial or professional occupations and more do so increasingly in part-time jobs kept at the part-time level so they can tend to their children and homes) and the home and family are heavily feminized (see my chapter “Family and Home,” in Nightwork: Sexuality, Pleasure, and Corporate Masculinity in a Japanese Hostess Club).


41. For a good discussion of this process in terms of gender differences, see Gender, Identity, and the Production of Meaning by Tasmin Lorraine (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990).

42. Hostess clubs, particularly the classier ones, are so expensive that only wealthy men can frequent them on their own for more than the occasional night out.

43. There are many images in the Japanese popular culture that depict men upon or after retirement as impotent, sexually undesirable, weak, inept, or useless. See the sources referred to in note 2.