



**UNIVERSITY  
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***“If they were my son I’d have to apologize”***

An Examination of Masculinity in *Terrace House: Opening New Doors*

East Asian Studies

Master's thesis

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This thesis combines Japan studies, reality television studies and gender studies in an attempt to map how masculinity is performed and represented in the reality television show *Terrace House: Opening New Doors*. Through a combination of qualitative close reading of the show and a review of prior theories of Japanese masculinity, this thesis seeks to produce a stance on whether the trajectories of hegemonic masculinity have been upset in the Japanese society and whether a shift to a more inclusive view of masculinity as suggested by Eric Anderson could be applied to the Japanese setting. The mundane, upper middle-class projective drama of the show provides us with a convenient mirror of assessing what kinds of practices of masculinity are acceptable in a decisively uncontroversial setting and thus perhaps in the society more widely. This thesis contends that in keeping with trends already identified in western settings, also the Japanese normative gender practice has had its boundaries moved and made accessible to more varied iterations of masculinity. It also contends that while successful masculinity has thus become societally less important, it has also become more difficult to achieve, suggesting that there exist distinct categories of ‘acceptable’ and ‘successful’ masculinity.

**Key words:** Masculinity, Japan, Reality television, Gender, Terrace house

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

In the very last episode of *Terrace House: Opening New Doors* there is a scene where one of the participants Wada Masao confesses his feelings to Tanigawa Risako<sup>1</sup> whom they have been wooing for the entirety of the season. On a wintry evening at a Fukuoka waterfront, he shares his emotions in a calm, paced voice, standing straight. Teary-eyed, Risako answers, upset, spilling into her Kansai-dialect, that she just can't see him in that way. "Thank you for giving it serious though" he says. A passing ship blares its foghorn and with that everything is over.<sup>2</sup>

Is this real life? At the very least it is amazing television, and it has the power to move us all the same. We find ourselves in their shoes, sympathize with them, evaluate them. To me, it seemed that Masao met his defeat with graceful poise, head held up, like a man. But what does that even mean? Why does masculinity even inform this evaluation?

This thesis examines how masculinity is performed and represented in *Terrace House: Opening New Doors* and through this examination attempts to provide a glimpse into just what is contained within the contemporary normative Japanese masculinity. Obviously, such a wide phenomenon as masculinity cannot be thoroughly examined through a lens of just a single media product. Instead, this thesis seeks to provide one possible angle to look at the phenomenon, and thus to participate in the creation of a wider understanding.

People often ask me how I arrived at this topic. What I usually answer to the question is that the arrival was serendipitous, I was watching the show to brush up my Japanese and had become rather invested in it. I was also interested in the prevalence of popular culture gender studies informed discourse and its apparent lack of interest in serious examination of masculinity. Why not then combine the two? There were obvious benefits to this. The body of research on masculinity is rather narrow, and it is even more so on Japanese masculinity. Same is true of Japanese reality television. If there even exist English language studies that combine these two approaches in a Japanese setting, I was not able to find them. This fact had its flipside, as it made room for some serious creativity. I figured that writing a master's thesis

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis all Japanese names are written as they themselves do, with surname first followed by given name.

<sup>2</sup> *Terrace House: Opening New Doors*. "Departure Whistle" Episode 49, Netflix, 12.2.2019

is supposed to be a learning experience, so why not choose something that I know very little about and then learn as I go?

So, choose I did, and thus this thesis titled “*” If they were my son I’d have to apologize”*: An examination of masculinity in *Terrace House: Opening New Doors*’ began forming. As I write this introduction, two years have passed since that day, but I am glad to say I have indeed learned a lot and even had some fun along way. While this thesis was affected by the considerable body of literature I had to take up while writing, perhaps in the end I would not be the son who their parents have to apologize for.

Masculinity remains an understudied topic in just about any setting, so much so that I had no difficulties in familiarizing myself with pretty much the whole relevant body of literature during this process. This is an obvious oversight, one that is fortunately being addressed across the field with growing interest in the ‘masculinity in crisis’ genre of academic writing, a discourse in which this paper also participates in. While I am unsure of any crisis, and the field also seems to view it as a contemporary truism of sorts, it provides us with a point of departure, a fracture that we can conveniently delineate and address. Study of masculinity is important because it is a phenomenon that everyone is forced to engage with, whether inside or outside one’s body. Understanding masculinity also helps us to understand the power relations coupled with it, even as they are slowly coming loose across the western world. While the choice of reality television was serendipitous, it is a convenient, contemporary mirror that builds on the intimacy of television as a medium. It seeks constant emotional response from its viewer, a system in which values for bodies, identities and relationships are ascribed rapid-fire, as seen in poor Masao’s case. When we look at Anglo-American reality television, we can see emergent post-racial, post-gender casting solutions, where these have ceased to be a point of contention due to the perception that underlying tensions have already been ‘solved’. It is exactly in such taken for granted *mise-en-scène* where the most important talking points of this thesis also lie, even if race and gender discourses probably never have and most probably never will reach the same intensity in the Japanese context. This is not to say that these dynamics do not exist or lack importance, quite the contrary the fact that such tensions hide better creates supple ground for a scholar in feminist critique.

This thesis consists of 9 parts, in this introduction I will begin with introducing *Terrace House: Opening New Doors*, in the second part moving on to familiarize the reader with some terms and discourses of reality television studies. In part three, the part around which this

whole thesis was built, I examine the histories and current trajectories of masculinity in Japan through a selection of theories. Parts four and five introduce my questions as well as some of the concepts as well as issues found at the crossroads of masculinity and reality television.

Part six contains my methods and data, followed by part seven where a close reading of six scenes that I picked from the series is conducted. A deeper discussion as well as my findings are offered in part eight. Part nine is reserved for reflections and final remarks, much like the introduction that you are reading right now.

## 1.1 What is Terrace House?

Terrace House is a Japanese reality television show that first aired on Fuji Television from 2012 to 2014 and has since received several iterations. Subsequent seasons have aired as Fuji TV and Netflix co-productions premiering internationally as Netflix originals and domestically on Fuji TV. In my examination I will be focusing on the most recent completed season<sup>3</sup> *Terrace House: Opening New Doors*, that ran from late 2017 to early 2019. Terrace House is best described with the introductory mantra of the series repeated at the beginning of each episode:

「テラスハウスは見ず知らずの男女6人が共同生活する様子をただただ記録したものです用意したのはステキなおうちとステキな車だけです台本は一切ございません。」

“Terrace House is a show about six strangers living together and we observe how they interact. All that we’ve prepared is a beautiful home and automobiles. There is no script at all.”

Indeed, as in much of reality television there is a promise of the real made right from the get-go. While there of course is a script pertaining to what kind of people are chosen to be in the

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<sup>3</sup> The most recent season *Terrace House: Tokyo* suffered from the onset of the CoVid-19 pandemic and was ultimately cancelled altogether following the suicide of one of its participants.

series and how they are discussed by the cast commentators, there is also undoubtedly a degree of naturality to their actions in part forced by the pervasive surveillance of the house. Perhaps the most striking difference when comparing Terrace House and similar western shows is the presence of a cast of celebrity commentators who analyse and joke about each segment of the show. As Ball and Nozawa note in their paper, such nested framing linking the studio and the location is a common technique in Japanese variety shows, a textuality that invites the viewers into a celebrity in-group<sup>4</sup>. The celebrities provide an inbuilt frame of interpretation assisting the viewer in decoding what is present on the screen. Expanding on this we can say that they are involved in the process of representing the guests' behaviour in certain pre-scripted ways, whether this is what the guests themselves had intended and as such help to enforce the roles into which the guests were casted.

There is a mundane, sometimes even flat-out boring quality to Terrace House where a lot of the time nothing much is happening at all. Indeed, the mundane seems to be a cause for celebration here similarly to slice-of-life anime (Jap. 日常系, *nichijoukei*, every-day type), a subgenre of animation dedicated to portraying wholesome every-day occurrences.<sup>5</sup> In a similar vein, I would go as far as to call boredom one of the defining aesthetics of the show. While conflict between the guests is emphasized on the level of production in a similar way that we can see in western shows such as *The Bachelor*, it never reaches even a fraction of the same intensity. The guests of *Terrace House* tend to be young adults between 19-31 years of age and their time in the show is to a great degree framed as a transitional experience, where they reach full-fledged adulthood by passing through the liminal space of the show. When they fulfil their personal goal which they state upon their entry to the house, and which might range from finding love to acquiring inspiration for song writing, they then leave the house in a ceremonial manner discussed in the series as 'graduation' (*sotsugyō*, 卒業). While dating and romantic tension have a place in the show, it is not a 'dating-game' as such but rather places itself in the self-realization genre of reality television. The shows focus on the transitionary nature of the experience places a weight on gender in the sense of becoming men

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<sup>4</sup> Christopher Ball & Nozawa Shunsuke, 2016

<sup>5</sup> Perhaps owing to particularly strong normative structures and middle-class identification, the categories of mundane, every-day or normal seem to carry more discursive power in Japan than they would in many other societies. This is important also because it draws on the larger myth of homogenous nation. "Ordinary" in the Japanese case has to then be understood as middle-class, urban, nuclear family.

and women. There is a process of negotiation, or as Dasgupta suggests, ‘crafting’ going on which results in an entry to and internalization of a certain norm structure<sup>6</sup>.

Other differentiating features from similar western shows are in what the show lacks. There are no components in the show that would necessitate competition between the guests as there is no system of eviction from the house, but rather guests themselves decide when they want to leave. There is also no isolation from the outside world in a way that we might see in shows like *Big Brother*, but rather the guests continue their regular school or work duties whilst living in the house. Occasionally this results long spells that some of the guests are not in the show at all but on a work trip or family vacation. Lack of competition and eviction make employment of game-like tactics unnecessary for the guests, arguably making them appear less fake, more ‘authentic’. In lieu of this however we can see plenty of self-branding take place, as the guests market their following careers during their time in the show. When the guests eventually emerge from the house, they indeed often have hundreds of thousands of followers on various social media platforms both domestically and internationally. On Instagram at the time of writing for example one of the guests Sato Tsubasa had 282,000 followers<sup>7</sup>.

Stylistically *Terrace House* is sleek, it has none of that grainy or hand-held camera shaking quality, which is often used to give viewers that on-location sense of realness, but rather opts for cinematic, thought-out shots of certain places in the house and sometimes restaurants, cafes or workplaces of the guests. This style could be compared to the MTV series *The Hills* which employs a similar highly produced style which seems to trade its authenticity for aesthetic. In *The Hills* this style is adopted in part to distinguish the people of the show as fashionable and well-off, living in a sort of consumerist fantasy. Amanda Ann Klein has called this type of reality television ‘projective drama’ which allows its viewers to associate with a beautified version of reality of which they might themselves one day become part of<sup>8</sup>. This is also partly true of *Terrace House*, guests of which are certainly young, fashionable and middle class. There is little to no ugliness in the show in terms of bodies and clothing, and its guests frequent trendy restaurants and shopping centres while sporting signifiers of wealth. In this way its polished version of reality resembles more a drama than a reality television show, and were there not the intermissions of celebrity commentary, a viewer might easily

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<sup>6</sup> Romit Dasgupta, 2004

<sup>7</sup> Instagram, @koroChan25

<sup>8</sup> Amanda Ann Klein, 2011

forget they are looking at a reality show at all. One of the functions of the commentary cast is probably indeed to reassure viewers of the authenticity of what they are seeing. Indeed, even if the interactions themselves are not scripted in the show, there is a highly constructed quality to the events that the viewers see. When all the guests sit down for dinner in front of the rolling cameras to discuss their most recent discontents with each other, it is clear that there is a degree of control imposed on them as to where, when and how they should be engaging in this otherwise 'unscripted' behaviour. All of this is part of the show's performative context, the dimensions created by the physical and emotional constraints imposed on the cast by the production in order to maximize their emotional expressiveness, an important design feature of any reality television show.

## 2 STUDYING REALITY TELEVISION

There are many angles and traditions to the study of reality television, but for the purposes of this thesis I have in this chapter opted to focus on the ‘reality’ part of reality television. How is this claim made and enforced? Still, perhaps in studying reality television we should first depart from defining the terms that are attached to *Terrace House*. Reality television is a notoriously wide category that borrows and combines conventions from many different types of programming. It is a sort of umbrella term in this sense, because the only thing linking two shows within this category is their vague claim to “realness” or “authenticity”. Often reality television employs the immaterial labour of ordinary people -ordinary in the sense that they are not actors- which in providing this labour create the by-product of realness, a basis for the claim. In the Japanese example this borrowing of conventions is obvious in the prior mentioned nested structure, which has its root in the variety show, a convention that is less prominent in the west. Viewing *Terrace House* on Netflix, one can find it under the category “docusoap”. A seemingly perplexing oxymoron, Docusoap refers to programming in which the raw footage is real human interaction, subject to documentary gaze which is then edited in a way to construct or magnify the drama akin to that one could see in a soap-opera. Although in a way, as pointed out by Jonathan Bignell<sup>9</sup>, the soap-opera also has a claim on realism through it being a reflection of an ordinary social world, albeit a made-up one. Bignell discusses this phenomenon as emotional realism, where while the goings on might be thoroughly outside the scope of the ordinary for the audience, the social-emotional context is recognizable and real.

Docusoap is also a great example of another phenomenon typical to reality television, the accumulation of conventions. Indeed, reality television mixes and builds upon on such a myriad number of conventions that it requires a considerably higher viewer literacy than what would be immediately apparent. This hybridity, referencing, and play on conventions is a key defining feature of the genre. Soap opera, and by extension docusoap tend to also borrow a lot from melodrama. The exaggerated, underlined raw emotion of melodrama is most of the time a less prominent feature of *Terrace House*, however all this is set aside whenever one of the members leaves the house or “graduates”. Graduation is a tear-jerking rite of passage in any

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<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Bignell, 2014

society, but it has a special place in Japanese pop-culture, and it is during these scenes that also *Terrace House* reaches its emotional maxim.

Reality television is an interesting phenomenon in that it seeks to enhance that which was already a key value in ‘*televisuality*’. John Corner explains that realism has been regarded as “television’s defining aesthetic and social project.” Furthermore, television is an inherently domestic medium, and historically television stars have been created through a mixture of intimacy, relatability, regularity and conformity<sup>10</sup>. In this visual tradition reality television is very much a logical continuation that plays on existing strengths.

Realism however is not any single inherent thing, but rather a more vague, constructed concept that forms the backdrop against which *televisuality* happens. Now, this thesis considers a series viewed on a streaming platform rather than television, but I would argue that while this change of medium necessitates a disruption of viewing practices, it has had less of an impact on the contents and conventions<sup>11</sup> and that nothing in *Terrace House* makes it a series inherent to streaming platforms. When we consider the evolution of the mediums, streaming services continue in the vein of penetrating domestic spheres of intimacy much in the way that television started and are seeking to tap into more and more intimate nooks of our lives. Even so such build-up happens within the same tradition and thus for the purposes of this thesis the series will be then examined against the conventions of television.

Returning to realism, it is for our purposes an interesting notion that reality television often derives realism from mundaneness, and that the droll that is made to constitute the basis for a claim to authenticity, is oftentimes something that we would not even notice in our everyday lives<sup>12</sup>. *Terrace House* indeed is also a boring series, but cunningly this boringness is exactly what makes it appear real and relatable for the viewer. Realism is then something negotiated on a case-to-case basis and the things that convince the viewer about it are different in different products. Realism is also important because it is what makes *voyeurism* possible. Voyeurism is one of the key pleasures derived from reality-television and in order to peek into the lives of these people, we have to believe that they exist in the first place. Same is true of the concept of projective drama where the viewer has to be able to buy into the fantasy to be

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<sup>10</sup> Julie A. Wilson, 2014

<sup>11</sup> This is obviously not true when discussing streaming services such as Twitch.com, but my discussion here is limited to the streaming of conventional programming. Even in conventional programming the departure from broadcast television has resulted in “narrowcasting” meaning contents that target narrower demographics. Audiences and reception, however, are not the key focus of this study.

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Bignell, 2014

able to project themselves into it, or conversely of the ‘anti-projective drama’ where the viewer is happy to be able to not be the guy on the screen. Such ‘revel in the abject’ or ‘hate-engagement’ is not really a feature that is purposely cultivated in *Terrace House* but is a manner of engagement that is always taken up by some part of the viewers of any reality show. Even in *Terrace House* one of the cast commentators, Yamasato Ryota has as his explicit job to find a negative angle from which to address any guest performance.

## 2.1 Seeing is believing

Authenticity seems to be a key value against which audiences measure the quality of a reality television show, and something that is hotly debated among viewers of reality television shows as shown by Annette Hill<sup>13</sup>. There is however a duality in play here as observed by Misha Kavka, who writes that in reality television performance and authenticity are not entirely oppositional to each other, but rather performance can serve as a tool in conveying the self. In Kavka’s words:

How is it, then, that authenticity and performance can co-exist within the same framework? The answer lies in recognizing *Big Brother* as the pop culture manifestation of a shift that is commonly linked to postmodernism: from a notion of performance that is dependent on a distinction between artificial and true identity, to a notion of performativity that is defined as the self coming into being through the act of performance<sup>14</sup>

This is an elaboration on John Corner’s idea, who calls this process ‘*selving*’ where in Corner’s words: “‘true selves’ are seen to emerge (and develop) from underneath and, indeed, through ‘performed selves’ projected for us.’<sup>15</sup> This is a key notion to keep in mind also while watching *Terrace House* where the artificiality of the situations is often highlighted by the sleek cinematography. This is an interesting notion, because here the action of hiding the mechanical aspects of the production serves to heighten the sense of artifice, a completely reverse logic from a drama production, where the dangle of a boom microphone can

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<sup>13</sup> Annette Hill, 2007

<sup>14</sup> Misha Kavka, 2012

<sup>15</sup> John Corner, 2002

completely obliterate one's sense of immersion. Conversely the presence of cameras and other production equipment in shows such as *Big Brother* serve to reinforce authenticity. Thus, when discussing reality television, we have to do away with strict dichotomies of authenticity/performance and actuality/artifice. Lothar Mikos has described *Big Brother* as a 'carefully produced drama of authenticity'<sup>16</sup>, a notion that is also transferable to *Terrace House*, albeit with some reservations due to the different qualities of the shows. The notion of authenticity is complicated here also because we are not receiving 24h surveillance akin to *Big Brother* but rather the surveillance is present only few hours a day and the guests know when this is happening. In addition to this the footage we receive has then been edited adding a further layer of scrambling to the ways in which guests intended to present themselves. Knowing this we can say that the production sets a stage for the guests to perform on, and then chooses which parts of the performance to show and how to discuss them, this constitutes the performative context of the show. My hope in this thesis is to be able to distinguish and discuss what is being done at these different layers and what are the ideological messages contained in each of them. All in all, when looking at *Terrace House* we are dealing with a highly produced show, which reorganizes otherwise ordinary lives into story arcs of at least moderate drama. Viewers then must actively engage in a degree of suspension of disbelief concerning the authenticity of the guests, if we are to assume that authenticity even is relevant. Another salient point in discussing the veracity of the series content is that reality television also presupposes a certain willingness from its audiences to buy into their artificial realities<sup>17</sup>. In saying this I am then establishing a point of departure in the idea that everything we see in *Terrace House* is firstly performed and secondly framed by production, factors which do not necessarily make what we are seeing less real or capable of exerting influence through its representations. As in any fiction, we agree to buy into the story when we begin our engagement with it, however unlike just any fiction reality television contains the additional pleasure of debating its artificial reality. Did he really say that? Surely this is scripted, right? What if it isn't scripted? Such questions are a part of this pleasure.

While I do not possess the particular knowledge of how the casting process has been carried out in the case of *Terrace House: Opening New Doors*, I would like to say a few words about reality television casting processes more widely. Typically casting is carried out in a way that the prospective cast-members apply either online, or in a dedicated casting call event. During

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<sup>16</sup> Lothar Mikos, 2004

<sup>17</sup> Jenn Brandt, 2014

successive interviews professional casting agents label and categorize prospective members creating fitting pieces for prior planned categories. Scripting of the unscripted behaviour then begins much before those appearing on screen have the knowledge of their participation in a show. As in any work interview, the applicants flatten into a list of features before their entry into the position is confirmed. More widely such process of commodification of affective content is called reification, a process of which reality casting is a prime example.<sup>18</sup>

Considering the scope of this thesis, masculinity is one such system that is thus reified and prepped for consumption. It is safe to assume that *Terrace House* follows similar practices to those discussed above, although invitations and networks also probably serve a part of this as the show sometimes fields cast members from prior seasons such as is the case with Shimabukuro Seina in *Terrace House: Opening New Doors*.

Heightened visibility and agency of ordinary people in such shows has been discussed through the concept of “demotic turn”<sup>19</sup>, a notion which supposes the empowerment through the participation of the ordinary subject and thus a diffusing of power from the media production to ordinary people. While it is indeed true that ordinary people have more opportunities to bring out their voices in such settings, it has to be understood that in no way does the production relinquish control of these voices and what is happening is thus in my opinion more akin to exploitation rather than empowerment. For this reason, I find the concept of demotic turn not to be particularly applicable for reality television, this is however, a wider debate within the field which is why I am also mentioning it here. Now, in areas where it suits the production, or even where the production has no stake in what is being said, there exists indeed a heightened capability of expression for the ordinary person. What exactly these areas are, however, the viewer has no way of distinguishing. Expanding on the notion of the ordinary, we have to note that the considerable fluidity of any participant subject position. Simply by entering a show such as *Terrace House* these people already relinquish some of this “ordinariness”. Ordinariness is shed because in the moment of entry to the house the cast members become micro-celebrities of sort, as the labour of managing their fame is immediately thrust upon them. Again, “ordinary” in this context is much like “real”, something that is negotiated and the existence of which is precipitated on the persuasive power of the show rather than on any objective thing.

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<sup>18</sup> Vicki Mayer, 2014

<sup>19</sup> Graeme Turner, 2014

## 2.2 Feeling is really believing

To wrap this chapter up, I would still like to discuss the affective economy of *Terrace House: Opening New Doors*. As noted earlier, reality-television is an umbrella term of sorts, meaning that the programming contained under it encompass the whole breadth of human emotion. At its core, it however, always seeks to invoke an affective response of some kind. When people refer to reality-television as vapid and kitsch, it is the immediacy of these affective triggers that they are most often referring to. And it is true, often reality-television seeks to provide the most cost-effective thrill available for their production. Close-ups of crumbled-up crying faces, candid shots of sex-acts and grainy footage of alcohol-fuelled brawls are all aimed at essentially the same thing, the fishing out of affective response. In the neo-romanticist affective economy of reality-television, the capability to invoke emotion is a key means of production and conversely the audience sentimentality is an inherently valuable product. Affective content is also in direct interplay with authenticity as put by Misha Kavka:

One way to understand the appeal of reality television is in terms of a mutual reciprocity between affect and authenticity, where viewers' affective responses serve as proof that what plays out on screen is real while the fact that the people on screen are real justifies viewers' affective responses.<sup>20</sup>

Now, what does *Terrace House: Opening New Doors* do with this? One obvious thing is the projection of self into upper-middle class fantasy, sense of ease and graceful, effortless taste. An admiration and identification with its characters, that we are expected to befriend through the screen. A vicarious sense of victory when they succeed, a face-reddening shame when they are rejected, a sense of catharsis mixed grief when our favourites graduate. During the kitchen scenes of the show, the camera is always placed at the end of the table, a seat for the viewer from which to join in at dinner among friends. Were there a single thing that *Terrace House: Opening New Doors* tried to invoke, it would be the everyday kind of intimacy of a family. The guests time in the show is painted as a transformative experience, but in the same mundane way that growing up among one's family would be. Here again, boredom provides

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<sup>20</sup> Misha Kavka, 2008

us with the necessary emotional context to identify with the portrayed peaceful household. As we sit down in that table and turn a serious ear to these discussions, we have surrendered our disbelief.

In this chapter I have tried to explain how the authenticity of *Terrace House: Opening New Doors* is made and maintained and what, if anything, it means. With this I will be proceeding on to the next chapter, in which I will be mapping the trajectories of masculinity studies in the Japanese context. This chapter will focus less on the show at hand, but rather tendencies true to Japan more widely.

### 3 STUDYING JAPANESE MASCULINITY

To examine masculinity in a given media product we have to first understand what exactly is the stuff that masculinity is made of. Masculinities are sets of ideas, attributes, bodily features and roles stereotypically associated with maleness. This system has influence over how men and women think about and act towards their ideas of what “being a man” means<sup>21</sup>. This thesis takes as its departure point R.W. Connell’s idea of hegemonic masculinity, which supposes that there are many competing masculinities in a hierarchical relation to each other<sup>22</sup>. Masculinities are different in relation to time and place which makes their continuous observation and discussion relevant. In Connell’s words:

Hegemonic masculinity is the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women<sup>23</sup>

Not included here but equally important to my writing here is that it also guarantees the dominant position of certain masculinities over others. An important aspect of this theory is that the most desirable, hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily the most dominant in terms of population. In fact, it might even be that no single person at any given time completely fills the requirements of this category, but rather it is a model that exercises the greatest cultural power and is most desirable in terms of what the surrounding culture and governing state require of the individual.

(A salient historical example in the case of Japan might be the figure of a samurai) In Connell’s terms the hegemon has then made a “successful claim to authority” which is only possible if there is “correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power”.<sup>24</sup> This kind of hegemonic masculinity as per Connell is time and place sensitive in that these requirements shift from society to society. While a hegemonic masculinity then has no transnational qualities per se, it is interesting to note that industrialization, urbanization and expansion of white-collar labour have required similar things from the individual and the

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<sup>21</sup> R.W Connell, 1996

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 70

family in many societies.<sup>25</sup> In Japan this category has until the bursting of the bubble-economy been filled by the salaryman. This man is wholly committed to his work in the company, in which he enjoys a lifetime position. This work requires most of his time, and in the domestic sphere he is only a passing presence. While this man is married with children, he does not have any time or interest for housework or childcare. In this model the spheres of work and home are clearly separated into the masculine and feminine. It is an important point in Connell's definition that the claim to hegemony is not defined only by prevalence. For example, a statistic from 1986, the height of the 'economic miracle' shows that 80% of persons employed are done so by enterprises categorized as medium-small or employing less than 100 persons. Businesses of this size are unlikely to provide the benefit of lifetime employment for a large demographic of their workforce and it has been estimated that at the extreme heyday of the social contract only about 20% of male work force attained lifetime employment necessitated by the hegemonic ideal.<sup>26</sup> Romit Dasgupta defines salaryman as such:

Arriving at a precise definition of the term "salaryman" can be difficult. At its narrowest, the term refers to salaried white-collar male employees of private sector organizations, typically characterized by such features as life-time employment, seniority-based salary indexing and promotions, and a generally paternalistic concern for the employee on the part of the company in return for steady, diligent loyalty to the organization.<sup>27</sup>

While this definition by Dasgupta excludes the notions of family and relations within the family-unit, these considerations are also very relevant for the image of salaryman. While this man is still the head of the household or *daikokubashira*<sup>28</sup> literally the supporting pillar, he is less involved than a man of earlier generations might have been<sup>29</sup>. Later Dasgupta adds that: "The salaryman/*kigyô senshi* [corporate warrior] figure in many ways embodied the notion of the Japanese male as the archetypal heterosexual husband/father and producer/provider."<sup>30</sup> This definition includes sexuality, family relations and race, all of which are relevant to the

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<sup>25</sup> For example: Anthony Margavio, 1989

<sup>26</sup> James E. Roberson, 1998, 122

<sup>27</sup> Romit Dasgupta, 2003, 119

<sup>28</sup> This allegory draws from the idea of the head of the household sitting his back against the supporting pillar of the house i.e *daikokubashira* while having dinner.

<sup>29</sup> Romit Dasgupta, 2000

<sup>30</sup> Romit Dasgupta, 2003

salaryman as a type of masculinity. Often cited is also Vera Mackie's definition of the archetypal Japanese citizen as "male, heterosexual, able-bodied, fertile, white-collar worker"<sup>31</sup>. Here Mackie includes bodily dimensions, such as capability for reproduction and the absence of physical defects. As argued by Dasgupta in his thesis, the family unit and the salaryman with it are state generated and fitted for the needs of the high-pace industrialization of the nation<sup>32</sup>. Indeed, to a lesser extent similar models have emerged in many industrializing nations, but nowhere to the same extreme as in Japan. In a way salaryman can then be said to be a product of modernity as much as it is a product of the Japanese culture, which is a point we should make in order to avoid cultural essentialism often encountered in writing on Japanese society. Sometimes the term of salaryman has militaristic undertones, as they are referred to as *kigyō senshi*, the "corporate warrior". This narrative is easily traced to the post-war rebuilding, which represented a different kind of war and maybe even something of a continuation for the samurai spirit. This narrative has since been compromised as Robertson and Suzuki note, saying that traditional salaryman masculinity has experienced a series of what they call 'losses'. In their words the bursting of the asset price bubble resulted in "loss of legitimation, loss of authority, loss of seduction, loss of genius"<sup>33</sup>. If salaryman model has become unattainable, what exactly are these men being denied access to? If we consider the salaryman as a masculinity formed around lifetime employment, then the loss of employment does not mean only that, but also the loss of means to provide, to fulfil fatherhood, and indeed the loss of the central part of maleness, the capability to exist and perform as a man as defined by surrounding culture. Even if the salaryman as such has ceased to be the hegemon, there are components of it that have persisted in the common imagination. Itō Kimio cited in the edited volume "Recreating Japanese Men" suggests that this might be the era of distinct "men's problems" and that there is an ongoing crisis of Japanese masculinity.<sup>34</sup> This volume addresses some possible departures from the traditional salaryman model of understanding Japanese masculinity. These texts work on the fringes of or counter to the hegemonic or the iconic and thus somewhat participate in the process of redefining it.

Tom Gill has discussed the notion of *daikokubashira* from the perspectives of marginalized masculinities of the day labouring Japanese men and defines it as an area that excludes men of lesser economic means from filling this traditional model of family head. Gill notes that while

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<sup>31</sup> Vera Mackie, 2002

<sup>32</sup> Romit Dasgupta, 2004

<sup>33</sup> Robertson & Suzuki, 2004 p. 9

<sup>34</sup> Itō Kimio, 2011

there is a lack of access for these men to the traditional family model, they are also bestowed new freedom of mobility through this exclusion. Therefore, it should be noted that the traditional model put great stress upon the breadwinner/father/head that people might also wilfully give up<sup>35</sup>. Whether wilful or not, there are few distinct trends to be found when we look at the emergent masculinities in Japanese society. Many writers seek to define masculinities through the things these people find fulfilment in. A concept often encountered both in Japanese studies as well as popular writing is *ikigai* (lit. life meaning, *raison d'être*). For a conventional salaryman type of masculinity, his *ikigai* would be work. It should be noted that there is also possible room of negotiation in the different kinds of pleasure derived from work, whether the point is self-fulfilment, providing for family, a company pride or some other or hybrid enjoyment. Indeed, even if the salaryman type of masculinity would otherwise remain constant, the definitions of work will have broadened, intensified and diversified<sup>36</sup>. Finally, it needs to be noted that considering that the salaryman-type of masculinity was only ever attainable by a small fraction of the population, not much has really changed for the majority of Japanese men. Since there never was a link between the accessibility of the hegemonic position with its prevalence, the economic downturn should not mean anything to it. It is then entirely feasible for the salaryman type masculinity to endure as the hegemon, perhaps enhanced or transformed in one manner or another. Moving on, in the following sections I will discuss the relevant literature pertaining to possible new types of masculinities.

### 3.1 New men: Herbivore

Many scholars have addressed potential departures from the salaryman masculinity, and the general tendency in academic writing on the subject tends to be that the salaryman is in one way or another done and to be replaced by something else<sup>37</sup>. One of such replacing types is the ‘herbivore man’ 「草食系男子」 (*sōshokukeidanshi*). This term was originally coined by Fukusawa Maki in 2006 in order to describe heterosexual men who “lack ambition, engage in feminine consumption practices and shirk relationships with the opposite sex”<sup>38</sup>. The first

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<sup>35</sup> Tom Gill, 2003

<sup>36</sup> Taga Futoshi, 2017

<sup>37</sup> Kumagai Keichi, 2013; Jef Smitmans, 2015

<sup>38</sup> Fukusawa Maki, 2006

appearance of the term in English language writing, and thus the first to be relevant for this literary review was made by Steven Chen in 2012. Chen describes this type as “‘softer’ masculinity centred on family values, comfortable lives and hedonic pursuits”<sup>39</sup>. Somewhat paradoxically however the trade-off from choosing less-paying jobs in order to spend time with one’s family results in not having enough money to date, let alone assume the ‘breadwinner’ role, which probably in part leads back to Fukusawa’s definition. Justin Charlebois on the other hand sees the herbivore masculinity as an oppositional masculinity to the salaryman.<sup>40</sup> All of these writers highlight the primacy of consumption for the herbivore, who again somewhat paradoxically at the same time is less interested in money. In Charlebois definition another key component is the formation of intimate opposite-sex friendships, unlike the prior salaryman for whom the ‘meat-eating’ -behaviour results in viewing the opposite sex mainly with companionship in mind. Indeed, even after these accounts, herbivore masculinity remains as something constructed mainly on the pages of magazines and without a single coherent form. One departure that all writers seem to agree on however, is the rebalancing of work and leisure and the unwillingness to overwork themselves when compared to the salaryman. It ties into the wider contemporary self-realization narrative, where individual happiness overtakes more conventional social mores.

### 3.2 New men: Ikumen

A more active project, but somewhat in the same vein and certainly addressing the same men is the *ikumen* -discourse. While family dynamics are somewhat outside the scope of this thesis, it is still worthwhile to look at this discussion as a new means to structure masculine identity. First comprehensive account on the *ikumen* was provided by Ishii-Kuntz in 2013, however for want of an English language source I will use Mizukoshi et al.<sup>41</sup> instead. *Ikumen* is a neologism made up from the kanji-character *iku* (育) which means raising and nurturing, as well as the English word ‘men’, and it is used to denote active, hands-on fatherhood (It is also a wordplay on *ikemen*, a stud, hunk). Similarly to the herbivore men *ikumen* is a concept popularized in magazines and talk-shows, rather than a strictly academic term. Hannah

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<sup>39</sup> Steven Chen, 2012

<sup>40</sup> Justin Charlebois, 2013

<sup>41</sup> Mizukoshi Kosuke, 2015.

Vassallo traces the evolution and contents of the term saying that it represents a mirror image of the traditional *Kazoku saabisu* (dedicating your Sundays to the family and otherwise being away) performed by the absent father<sup>42</sup>. *Ikumen*, along with *Ikuboss* are also a politically enforced buzzwords, as there exists a project by the same name launched in 2010 by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in an attempt to raise the percentage of fathers using their paternity vacation days. It can be said that again similarly to the herbivore, there exists a departure from the work as *ikigai* and a breakdown of the traditional breadwinner-housewife dichotomy, however rather than being its own distinct type, *ikumen* might be regarded as something that exists complementary to the other types.

### 3.3 New men: Otaku

Quite differently from all of the above, the *otaku* represents what might be called a protest masculinity. Ian Condry describes *otaku* as such:

In some ways, the image of the Japanese otaku as a geeky, obsessive, socially inept, technologically fluent nerd represents the polar opposite of the image of the gregarious, socializing breadwinner, the salaryman. If the salaryman is measured by his productivity, then the loner otaku, with his comic book collections, expensive figurines, and encyclopaedic knowledge of trivia, can be viewed as a puzzle of rampant, asocial consumerism.<sup>43</sup>

Interestingly there is a link between *otaku* and the herbivore on the aspect of consumerism, which is positioned as an opposite to the productivity of the salaryman. While the herbivore might be described as reluctant to enter relationships, the *otaku* are perhaps more so denied access to them by their lack of social skills or looks. Condry notes that there is a distinction between the ‘bad *otaku*’ and a ‘good *otaku*’, and that there are both positive and negative discourses associated with the image of *otaku*. On the one end anti-social behaviour of the *otaku* results in consumption of transgressive erotica or acts of violence, such as the ‘otaku murders’ of 1989. Azuma Hiroki in his book titled *Otaku* examines the otaku form of consumption and the resultant reality, claiming that these ‘database animals’ have ceased to

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<sup>42</sup> Hannah Vassallo, 2017.

<sup>43</sup> Ian Condry, 2011 p. 207

be interested in works of fiction themselves and are more interested in the categories and mixing thereof, resulting in a final breakdown of ‘grand narratives’ which has been associated with postmodernism in general<sup>44</sup>. Susan Napier in her article examines the television series *Densha Otoko*, which is based on a 2003 hit-manga on a heroic *otaku* character, in this series the salarymen are framed as drunken and distant, whereas the softer, more human *otaku* characters linked to each other via the imageboard *2channel* form the main characters<sup>45</sup>. On the institutional level Japan has recently leaned heavily on its soft power exports, which consists mainly of cultural products aimed for otaku type consumption, thus the technological and cultural atmosphere are ripe for a masculinity formed around technological aptitude and cultural consumption rather than labour<sup>46</sup>. While historically *otaku* have usually been discussed through the negative connotations such as withdrawal from society, some discourses also note that *otaku* could be a fulfilling *ikigai* of its own. This is especially true in a society where people tend to shun romantic relationships, and rather commit that time to their hobbies.

### 3.4 Not so new men: Salaryman reconfigured

The models I have discussed here might not be representative of reality, but rather serve to offer some context into how masculinity in Japan has been discussed and conceptualized since the salaryman’s suggested fall from centrality. Another answer here could be that the salaryman has simply been reconfigured. Christopher Tso and Shirota Nanase in their research on self-help books aimed at businessmen discuss the image of *oyaji* (親父) – an aging, un-attentive, bad smelling old man who does not take sufficient care of his appearance. Increasingly it seems that to be a successful businessman you have to in addition to maintaining productivity, also engage in beauty work as well as hone your listening skills.<sup>47</sup> The image of *oyaji* reminiscent of the old salaryman is contrasted with the new youthful businessman, which is in fact a reconfiguration of the same hegemonic ideal. This is an interesting notion in that the resistance to a previously hegemonic type of masculinity seems to have created an updated version of the same hegemonic ideal. While components from the

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<sup>44</sup> Hiroki Azuma, 2009

<sup>45</sup> Susan Napier, 2011

<sup>46</sup> Sabine Frühstück & Anne Walthall, 2011

<sup>47</sup> Brigitte Steger & Angelika Koch, 2017

stereotypically feminine sphere have been appropriated as a part of this identity, underneath the actual power-relations remain the same. What is different here though is the new dimension of discipline imposed on the hegemonic male, that of body-control through necessity of beauty work. This shift might however also be a result of top-down changed institutional demands on part of globalizing business environments, rather than that of resistance from down-up. Desirability and likeability are tools of persuasive power that is employed in the claim for hegemony. Thus, while they are new tools in this context, they serve to project reliability and capability which are same values as before and do not upset the prior power dynamic. This revitalized corporate male still holds his position as the hegemon through his institutional position, that of wealth and access.

This emergent type also differs from the prior types in the fact that it is potentially transnational, mirroring technological advances in business travel and communication. Referred to as global hypermasculinity, this type is on surface similar to the salaryman but more individualistic and focused on upward-mobility. A key difference compared to salaryman-type of masculinity lies in the leaving out of heterosexual marriage, which in the traditional type is one of the benchmarks of success. While it has been suggested that the breakdown of hegemonic masculinity would result from liberalizing of values in a given society, -a theme on which I will elaborate in the next part- modern cut-throat, high-speed capitalism seems to conversely result in the distillation of masculine traits of violence, competitiveness and individualism in global corporate settings.<sup>48</sup> Situating this type as the hegemon posits that the historical trajectories of capitalism and masculinity are one and the same, a perspective that risks overlooking facets of life outside labour and consumption. It also contains the same exclusivity that is commonly taken to be the root cause for the salarymans loss of hegemonic status. Given the upper middle-class aesthetic of Terrace House I hypothesize this type to have certain prevalence for the purposes of this thesis.

### **3.5 Hegemony or inclusion**

Other answer to the question of hegemony could be to claim that the ‘core’ values of masculinity have been getting more relaxed, making the hegemonic ideal less exclusive and

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<sup>48</sup> L. H. M. Ling, 1999

thus resulting in a situation where there is no longer a clear correspondence between a “cultural ideal and institutional power”<sup>49</sup>. This on the other hand would result in a need to re-tune the concept of hegemonic masculinity in Japanese context. Eric Anderson has argued that the once stringent policing systems in place in regard to what constitutes masculinity have been erased in many western societies, and thus a more inclusive category of masculinity has emerged, tellingly Anderson describes a part of this shift in adopting practises from the stereotypically feminine sphere as discussed in the prior section. Relaxing of permissible practices for men follows from the reduction of homophobia and inclusion of homosexuality within the masculine framework in a given society, suggesting that there would be a historical continuum from hegemonic masculinity to what Anderson coins as *inclusive masculinity*<sup>50</sup>. When men and especially young men are free to engage in a wider range of practices, dress, and display of emotion without the risk of ridicule and appearing gay or effeminate, the vertical stratification of different masculinities breaks down, effectively decoupling societal power from a certain type of masculinity - although not necessarily from masculinity in general. While building on Connell’s theory, Anderson goes as far as to dispute the claim that hegemonic masculinity would have a part in reproduction of patriarchy. Anderson rather posits that the social dynamics of men and the reproduction of inequality i.e., patriarchy are separate processes capable of being decoupled from each other.<sup>51</sup> While undoing structures that constitute gender inequality is and should be at the root of the gender studies project, for the purposes of this thesis it also makes sense to take Anderson’s claim into account.

Anderson’s theory does not mean however that all masculinities would enjoy the same level of acceptance in the society that follows, just that the range of what is acceptable has widened. A potential strength in terms of my examination here is in that Anderson’s theory does not suppose a power-dynamic between different men due to their different interpretations of masculinity, resulting in a possibility of recognizing multiple types of maleness without drawing links to societal standing. It has been questioned however, whether this theory is applicable outside western societies, and it has not been tested in the Japanese context. Co-opting practices from stereotypically feminine sphere does not automatically mean that norms of masculinity are relaxing, just that they are not constant. Also, the idea that

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<sup>49</sup> R.W Connell, 1996

<sup>50</sup> Eric Anderson, 2009

<sup>51</sup> Eric Anderson, Mike McCormack, 2018

reducing homophobia would be the root of relaxing standards of masculinity seems to suppose a society with long tradition of homoerotic or -phobia, a proposition suited particularly well to Christian societies. Japan does not have a similar history of persecution regarding homosexuality, for instance, implementing a very short-lived anti-sodomy law in early Meiji period and generally adopting anti-gay ideas from the western discourses. Still, in the contemporary Japanese context homosexuality is often hidden out of normative pressure so similar tensions definitely do exist, even while both attitudes as well as legislation continue to steadily improve.<sup>52</sup> Even for my reservations, inclusive masculinity theory will form a key tool of examination in this thesis just for the virtue of being the most prevalent alternative suggested for hegemonic masculinity.

### 3.6 Becomings

Before moving on to the next chapter, we should discuss the lived realities of masculinity in a bit more detail. Masculinity, as any part of one's identity is in constant flux and never fully finished. Some distinctions can be made however, in how each male interacts with the hegemonic discourse. Dasgupta writes about this process:

‘coming into’ masculinity is not just a simple process of learning to conform to the hegemonic discourse, but is fraught with contradictions, confusion, negotiations, and even (sometimes) subversions.<sup>53</sup>

Types I have discussed in the prior parts all come to be through a process of negotiation, rejection, or conformity with the expectations the individual faces. Before any negotiation can feasibly take place however, Japanese youths are already beset with ways of policing the gender. Systems of division and enforcement begin when children enter kindergarten and continue through their formal education. Dasgupta finds that these systems tend to be more powerful in inscribing gender roles than the lessons they receive at home. In the institutions of

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<sup>52</sup> Tianqi Zhang, 2021

<sup>53</sup> Romit Dasgupta, 2012 p. 46

education these systems often take very concrete forms such as separation of physical education classes or different school uniforms, but equally important are the processes of comparison to one's peers and to the opposite sex. More interesting for the scope of this thesis however, is the way masculinity is made and maintained or as Dasgupta coins it, 'crafted' and 'recrafted' in the homosocial relationships of early adulthood both in education as well as the workplace. While children and adolescents are beset by demands of how gender should be done, it is the *shakaijin*, in a sense the finished product of these demands that is ultimately responsible, indeed there is a wealth of literature in the form of self-help books aimed at fresh graduates to ease them into the roles that they have to take up at the workplace relatively suddenly. Youth can be a safe, leisurely period of experimental identity, but the sudden crush of expectations faced by the man graduating from university comes for everyone, this is the point where masculinity really becomes a group effort.

Homosocial interactions of the workplace include the *senpai-kōhai* (lit. senior-junior) relation based on seniority and things such as company drinking parties or outings such as golf-sessions, these friendships according to Dasgupta are important sites where *shakaijin* identity and by extension masculinity is crafted. In Dasgupta's writing this process of crafting results in the traditional salaryman-type of masculinity, but even if the hegemonic standard were relaxing, I expect to see similar processes in work. Victor Turner writes about 'liminal personae' or threshold people as entities that are neither here nor there.<sup>54</sup> Examples of such people could be neophytes or company workers in their training period, such transitional identities will be discarded after the ending of such rite of passage. Furthermore, Turner says that such people are bound to each other by a certain type of relations which would be transgressive outside the liminal space, this *communitas* a set of specially made rules for a moment outside normal flow of life where norms are dissolved. For the purposes of this thesis, I will be employing both of these concepts in looking at how masculinity is being crafted within the liminal, transitional space of the show. It should be noted however, that in comparison to Turner's *communitas* which was created especially initiation rites in mind, the space of the show is not completely detached from regular society and does not see similar complete dissolving of norm structures.

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<sup>54</sup> Victor Turner, 1969 P. 94-95

### 3.7 A note on language

Language use is a site of distinction in any culture, but especially so in Japanese, where the use of honorifics, mode of address and style are consistently applied to establish and maintain power-relations between two talkers. This is an inherent part of everyday communication, of which anyone who uses the language would have awareness, so much so that it is a common cause of distress if the talker finds it difficult to establish what mode of address they should use. There exist also immediately recognizable modes of male and female speech with distinct sentence enders and terms of self-address. As in any language, such norms are also a site of negotiation, play and subversion. An example of this could be a homosexual person using the female modes of address for themselves or a woman defaulting to the masculine mode in order to downplay her femininity, but obviously such strategic use, or sometimes play reaches also much more intricate forms. Much like masculinity or femininity, such normative categories exist and exert power regardless of how individuals orient themselves towards them.<sup>55</sup> While language is not the explicit focus of this study, it is worth noting when the guests of Terrace House apply or deviate from such norms. That being said, people who don't know each other so well tend to default to the safe, inexpressive standard Japanese, shedding any embellishments that their gender or dialect might bring, a tendency of which we can clearly see also in *Terrace House: Opening New Doors*.

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<sup>55</sup> Okamoto Shigeiko, and Janet S Shibamoto Smith, 2004

## 4 WHY TERRACE HOUSE?

In Terrace House its sleek style and mundane story arcs were the things that first captured my attention. In terms of reality television authenticity is often juxtaposed with the fake and the sensationalist, neither of which we can immediately perceive in *Terrace House*. It is a relatively recent show of immense popularity both domestically and internationally which showcases a multitude of different masculinities and their interactions. In the span of *Terrace House: Opening New Doors* there are 10 different men among the guests, which I felt will provide enough distinct story arcs and personalities for my analysis. There seems to be a rotation of certain archetypes in the series, and while the individuals change, certain types of typecast personalities are always present (such as the professional athlete or the model). This results in the quality of the show being simultaneously scripted and not scripted. As the actions of the guests are further interpreted for the viewers by the cast, there is a highly predetermined quality to what is the final message conveyed to the viewer even if the guests themselves enjoy total freedom to do as they will in front of the cameras. This to me seemed to provide multiple different levels on which the production of gender could be examined. We have to, however, make note that this is a show created to engage and entertain its audiences, which means that the men chosen for the show are chosen with these values in mind rather than for creating an even-handed presentation of what kind Japanese masculinity might be. Keeping this in mind, however it is my firm belief that examining production of gender in a reality television show of such wide popularity can yield knowledge about gender in the wider society.

### 4.1 Questions

With the reasons of my interest for the show and the reasons of its choosing explained it's time to introduce the questions that this thesis seeks to answer. I have created the following questions and theoretical framework with this show in mind. This thesis seeks to answer the following questions and from these answers provide a discussion where new angles into understanding Japanese masculinities could be created.

- How do the guests in Terrace House perform their masculinities?
- How does the series participate in the production of masculinity?
- What is the relation of these findings to the earlier theoretical constructions and norms of masculinity in Japan?
- How do these findings relate to lived realities in Japanese society?

I will further elaborate on theories of production and performance on the conceptual framework -section of this paper, and here seek to merely provide a point of departure. This thesis is situated in the intersection of social sciences and humanities in that its theories are informed by feminist critique and queer-theory stemming from Foucauldian tradition of examining gender as a power structure. Foucault's ideas of surveillance find suitable resonance also in the reality tv setting, where the sense of being watched imposes restrictions on the guests' performance, and indeed forces them to 'police themselves'. These ideas stem from his writing on the penal system in *Discipline/Punish: The Birth of the Prison*<sup>56</sup>, and while it is a somewhat distant work for our purposes here, it is regardless worth recognition due to the common root that both Judith Butler's work as well as reality television studies have in it. Both gender as well as reality television shows such as *Big Brother* are, in Foucauldian vein, panoptic systems, where discipline is self-imposed through the perceived constant surveillance. Additionally, if possible, this thesis seeks to produce a position on whether hegemonic masculinity theory is still applicable in Japanese context, or whether shift towards inclusive masculinity theory should be discussed.

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<sup>56</sup> Michel Foucault, 1975

## 5 ON PERFORMANCE AND REPRESENTATION

As stated above, most of the theoretical departures of this paper find a common root in the ideas of Michel Foucault. Foucault himself already coined the idea that sexuality is a social construction in his *History of Sexuality*<sup>57</sup>, but for the purposes of this thesis we will be focusing more on the feminist tradition that has expanded on his thinking<sup>58</sup>. Judith Butler, one of the founders of queer-theory proposed that gender is in its entirety performative and rather than defining who we intrinsically are, it is just something we are doing at any given moment<sup>59</sup>. Employing Butler's theory, we can then say that gender is being produced and reproduced through acts of repetition, through which we participate in the discourse of making it. With gender performances on screen, we are dealing with performances of heightened capacity to participate in this process due to their increased visibility. Certain types of masculinities are being performed on screen both wilfully and unwittingly to the other guests and the viewers and it is my belief that through observing these performances we can learn something about the gender norms and the values contained within them not only in the scope of this particular show, but also in the wider society. There is also an interesting, layered quality to discussing performativity in reality television, as we can simultaneously observe two distinct levels of participation in the production of gender, that is the discourse of individual 'natural' social interaction, and the discourse contained within the media product itself. These two levels are going to have at times different ideological messages, which will provide distinct avenues for analysis.

Performance as a term presupposes an audience, which in turn evaluates whether one is 'doing gender' in the correct way, this audience, which can also consist of just the performer themselves is then here the technology of surveillance, or the panoptic system which imposes the policing of self. Here the ideas of Foucault are again particularly visible. With performativity there comes also the capacity of the individual to assume and shed certain gender roles at will and use them to their advantage in 'gender transgressions' as in trespassing outside correct ways of doing one's gender, or on the other hand 'flaunting' gender, where gender is wilfully made visible while remaining within the boundaries of what

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<sup>57</sup> Michel Foucault, 1977

<sup>58</sup> Rosalind Gill, 2007

<sup>59</sup> Judith Butler, 1990

is accepted within the hegemony and thus reinforcing it.<sup>60</sup> It should be noted that while the word performance denotes activity, more than often doing gender is passive, something that has been internalized and is done as a second nature. Performance here does not then mean performing in the sense of acting, but rather serves to convey the idea that gender only exists in ‘doing’ it. There are then multiple qualities of performance present in this analysis and due caution needs to be taken in the usage of the word. Hillevi Ganetz argues that in the media these performances are often flattened into ‘gender routines’. In Ganetz’s words they are “habitual, instinctive, unreflecting and iterated accounts of masculinity and femininity”.<sup>61</sup> These notions are derived from Butler’s idea that gender identity is created through iteration of gender role according to the heterosexual hegemony.<sup>62</sup> Already addressed R.W Connell has written more in depth on the concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity’, which we could call the default male gender routine.

### **5.1 Gender on screen: Typecasting and stereotyping**

Expanding on the Ganetz’s notion of ‘gender routine’ as a purely ready-made, and outside imposed process, it becomes apparent that representation of gender on screen often happens through typecasting characters into specific gender roles. Rather than a conspiracy, what happens is the execution of a routine on the level of media production, resulting in a regulated performance. This gender performance, then is again recycled as material for the creation of gender stereotypes which influence us also outside the realm of media production. Examining this process of stereotyping and recycling thereof can then yield information about gender roles in wider society. Furthermore, both in- and outside of realm of gender, typecasting characters is a way of scripting the show and creating interesting television that is in sync with audience sensibilities. Stereotypes are then convenient vessels of meaning for sending and receiving messages in a foreseeable and risk-free way, which in their application reiterate and reinforce our understanding of whatever is being portrayed. APA dictionary of psychology defines stereotype as such:

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<sup>60</sup> Misha Kavka, 2014

<sup>61</sup> Hillevi Ganetz, 2004

<sup>62</sup> Judith Butler, 1993

n. a set of cognitive generalizations (e.g., beliefs, expectations) about the qualities and characteristics of the members of a group or social category. Stereotypes, like schemas, simplify and expedite perceptions and judgments, but they are often exaggerated, negative rather than positive, and resistant to revision even when perceivers encounter individuals with qualities that are not congruent with the stereotype.<sup>63</sup>

While this definition has emphasis on the negative, uncritical aspect of the concept, it has to be noted that as convenient and widely agreed upon bundles of meaning they are often necessary for our daily communication, especially when it becomes mediated. This sort of stereotyping is also particularly convenient for discussing something equally pervasive and abstract as gender. An interesting point about stereotypes as well as Ganetz's gender routines is that they are employed both actively in attempt to reinforce them as well as passively out of their convenience. When gender is done transgressively, it is done against such commonly understood categories. In the context of reality television, Alison Hearn discusses this process of typecasting as providing the outlines of personality, in which the "real people" then willingly step in.<sup>64</sup> This also ties in to the physical-emotional performative context, where the space of the show heightens the likelihood of certain kinds of behaviour.

As noted previously *Terrace House: Opening New Doors* is a highly produced series, in that each 30-40min episode is created from a full week of raw footage. If we consider then the representative power of the cast members versus the production, it must be noted that this particular iteration of reality-television has particularly little reality in it. I have in the prior chapters discussed stereotypes of Japanese masculinity and through the discussion of these types or possible other emergent types, am hoping to uncover how masculinity production takes place in *Terrace House: Opening New Doors*.

## 5.2 Merging performances

Until this point the words 'performance' or 'performativity' have been used in at least two different senses in this thesis. As noted above the performative nature of gender denotes

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<sup>63</sup> American Psychological Association Dictionary, 2022 <https://dictionary.apa.org/stereotype>

<sup>64</sup> Allison Hearn, 2006

passivity, internalized performance of a rote, a second nature. This performative of masculinity is also the key object of examination in this thesis. Performance on the other hand is relevant here as the guests of the show will from time to time attempt to market their products or present themselves in a more favourable light, such performing on the stage of the house might not always have a gender component. On the cases that it does, I discuss this active performance of gender through referencing Kavka's 'flaunting of gender' which means just that, the act of purposefully assuming a more forceful version of one's gender, either in jest or to achieve some other end<sup>65</sup>. Proceeding from here the words 'performance' and 'performativity' will be reserved for discussing gender, and other words will be used to denote whatever theatrics the guests of the house might be engaging in.

### 5.3 Researcher position and justification

While the approach I discuss here might be used in examining many different phenomena, I have chosen masculinities due to a gap in research in discussing Japanese masculinities both in reality television, as well as in general. As a white male I also felt more comfortable on voicing my opinions from a position that is only once removed, than twice had I been studying Japanese femininities. Whether such a distinction is important at all, I believe that equipped with a wealth of background theory a careful examination of gender in Japanese context should be possible from my position. I realize that the theories I employ here have been mainly developed in the west, and we have to be cautious of their application in non-western settings. The shifting relations of gender practices and their contents makes their study continuously relevant. When we discuss hegemonic masculinity, we discuss what kind of strategies and signifiers are used by males whose cultural, social and body capital provide the best claim for institutional and financial power. Understanding who has these affordances and who does not, and what are the reasons for this can potentially provide us deep understanding of the power-relations functioning in wider society. Connell and Messerschmidt have noted that gender practices shift under the influence of social, political and economic structures, and thus perceiving a shift in these practices can inform us of shifts on wider systems of the society<sup>66</sup>. Additionally understanding the dynamics of masculinity in

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<sup>65</sup> Misha Kavka, 2014

<sup>66</sup> R.W Connell, James Messerschmidt, 2005

a given society adds also into understanding of international relations as shown by David Duriesmith who has examined the role of masculinity in constructing wars<sup>67</sup>, as well as Erik Melander who has written on the East Asian peace process with an emphasis on masculine ‘honor’<sup>68</sup>. *Terrace House* on the other hand provides a contemporary window of examining different men and their strategies in a setting that presents itself as natural as possible. While this is obviously just a one show, it does exert power over development of masculinity and on the other hand in its representations reflects the values of the society in which it was produced in.

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<sup>67</sup> David Duriesmith, 2016

<sup>68</sup> Erik Melander, 2017

## 6 METHODS & DATA

Through examining the production of gender on three levels, namely, individual performance, celebrity commentary and the ideological superstructure, I aim to create a two-pronged approach. Firstly, a quantitative content analysis aiming to outline masculine stereotypes by counting utterances in relevant categories and later based on its findings a qualitative close reading aimed at explaining these stereotypes and their relevance to the research questions posed by this paper. This part will be accomplished by choosing and writing open few select passages of the series and accompanying them with analysis.

Because masculinity as shown above is a fluid phenomenon touching on many different facets of being, I am going to limit my focus here into looking at value judgements and strategies of these men relating to dating and work. I have chosen these two particular categories for three reasons, firstly they form main components in constructing categories of masculinity outlined in prior writing such as the salaryman or the herbivore. Secondly these two categories have a wealth of material present on screen partly because Terrace House has a dating show component to it and partly because the career aspirations of the guests of the show are often highlighted due to the show having a focus on the personal growth of the characters. A third reason is that the scope of this thesis would grow to be too large should I attempt to access categories such as dress, speech or mannerisms in depth.

For the purposes of my quantitative content analysis, I am going to first create some relevant coding categories addressing masculinity traits found in prior writing. Using this framework, I intend to watch the show while simultaneously engaging in abductive content analysis, adding categories while watching, paying attention to what kind of masculinities might be omitted in the show, or on the other hand prior writing. On the basis of these observations, I am going to establish a qualitative content analysis aimed at explaining thusly outlined stereotyped masculinities. In the initial phase I am going to attempt to access the categories of work and dating from simple evaluations such as whether the guest appears active/passive, ambitious/disinterested on the matter, and then how the cast evaluated these utterances. Dasgupta discusses this project of masculinity, in which boys are made socially responsible *shakaijin* through ‘crafting’ which happens through mostly homosocial relationships of the workplace. *Shakaijin* is the producer and the reproducer of the society, a main unit which is

very much made to fit a certain time and place<sup>69</sup>. Similar process can perhaps be seen in Terrace House, which is also framed as a transitional experience for the guests, examining this homosociality especially in giving and receiving advice should provide an interesting point to observe. In the next part I will move on to presenting the data and further explaining the process of its collection.

## 6.1 Starting off

For the purpose of data collection, I closely watched the series, after which I chose 24 episodes on the grounds of having most different men receive screen time. In this span of 24 episodes, which represents roughly half of total 49 episodes, I was able to assess all but one of the male appearances in the show. This means that my analysis will touch on total of 9 different performances. The omitted one, Ishikura Noah, was left out here mainly due to reasons of convenience as the episodes where he featured most prominently were situated at a point in the series that made most sense to be omitted. The episodes included in the coding were 1-8, 11-13, 27-29, 33-37 and 42-48. While the coding touches only on these episodes, some points are included also from outside them. In watching these episodes, I created a coding framework which assessed their value judgements towards work and dating. Categories I created sought to assess attitude, activity and strategy the men had towards the two, these categories came about abductively, and were based on my personal assessment of what sort of utterances could shed the most light into masculine type of engagement. In addition, there was a category that counted whenever the person offered advice to another guest pertaining to the matter. In work related assessments one category counted acts of self-promotion through the show. This category had more weight with guests that had something that they could easily promote, such as clothing lines or music groups. To support this framework, I created a memo in which I wrote a brief overview of each episode and any key points I came across, resulting in a mixed-methods approach. I have inserted the coding table here.

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<sup>69</sup> Romit Dasgupta, 2004, p. 294

	Takayuki	Yuudai	Shion	Shohei	Shunsuke	Kaito	Sota	Masao	Aio
<b>Work</b>									
Positive	7	2		2	1	3		1	
Negative									
Passive		1							
Active	3	4	2	4	2	3	1		3
Ambitious	7	1	1	4		4			
Disinterested		1							
Advising	5		1				1	1	
Self Brand	7		1	5		5		1	
<b>Dating</b>									
Positive	4		3	1	3	4	1	4	2
Negative		2							
Passive	1	1	1				1		
Assertive	1	6	5	4	3	1		8	3
Interested	9	7	5	3	3	6		8	3
Disinterested							1		
Cautious	8	1	1					1	
Advising	7		6	5	1				

Figure 1 Coding Scheme where numbers represent occasions of utterances

While the table alone might not give us much to go on, I hope with this to provide a background through which I can choose passages for and to proceed with a close reading aimed at identifying and examining the technologies of masculinity production in Terrace House. Close reading as explained by Ruiz De Castilla is a method of close textual analysis aimed at examining the persuasive power of a given text. Here my aim then is to apply this method in order to examine how *Terrace House: Opening New Doors* participates in meaning-making of masculinity. Close reading as method takes its shape case by case from relevant theory and from its objects of examination, meaning that each use of the method will vary according to its targets. Because the target of my examination is masculinity, or more widely gender, the target of analysis is an ideological structure, and therefore a close reading takes its shape from the tradition of critique of ideology. Mike Cormack has outlined five distinct avenues of emphasis when carrying out a critical analysis of ideology: content, structure, absence, style and mode of address<sup>70</sup>. My focus will be in the discussions carried out by the members, and their evaluations by the commentators. Taking Cormack's categorization as the basis of my analysis, I am hoping to lift more distinct units of analysis

<sup>70</sup> Mike Cormack, 1995

from the text as I proceed in a similar manner to the abductive coding I carried out before and to provide descriptive accounts of the types of masculinity present on screen. I have listed additional possible points of examination as follows:

- Typecasted, stereotyped masculinities and their interrelations
- Their relation towards categories of work and dating
- Their cooperative creation of masculinity in the space of the show

When looking at this coding table it has to be noted that not all men received equal amounts of screen time in the show, and for example Nakamura Takayuki was in the show for a much longer time than other men. Additionally, the episodes that I've chosen have not sought to balance this out but were rather chosen for having representative events for each of the guests. For these reasons, in this table it is more important to look at the relative weights of the different categories, rather than their weights between guests. Again, this table alone is not particularly meaningful, but can serve to visualize certain tendencies, especially how assertive these men were in initiating courtship or how often they were shown engaged in work as well as how they thought about these things. While I created categories for disinterested/passive in both dating and work, these did not prove particularly useful, and these factors are better tracked in the absence of their counterpart features interested/active. Negative attitude towards either category was not really seen at all in the show or at least it could not be tracked with this framework, which might be because the show does not really seek to deal with negative emotions at all. There were certain overarching tendencies that seemed to hold true for all the men in the show, as well as certain values that were required of the guests in the house. From here I will begin with the introduction of the male cast of the series after which I will move on to discuss the aforementioned tendencies.

## 7 ANALYSIS

This chapter contains the excerpts of the show that I have picked for close reading and analysis. I will begin with introducing the cast of the show, moving on to offer some preliminary notes on the content, before moving on to the actual excerpts from the show. Each of the excerpts is accompanied by a short preface and followed by a brief analysis which ties into the wider discussion which follows in chapter 8. I have limited my analysis to the scenes of the cast members, offering the comments of the cast commentators where I felt that they added to something of value to my data. The cast commentary of these scenes is not transcribed in full because the amount of text produced vis-à-vis its value for the purposes of this thesis seemed to be lacking. The contents of the cast commentator dialogue are sometimes telling of the phenomena they are discussing, but more often they tend to focus on joking on topics which had less relevance for the purposes of this thesis. I settled on six for the number of scenes, feeling that it produced an adequate mass of data for my analysis while keeping the parts of the paper in good balance with each other.

### 7.1 Meeting the cast

In this part I will provide a brief introduction of each of the male cast members of the show listed in order of appearance. Attached is a chart showing a breakdown of all the cast appearances in the show.

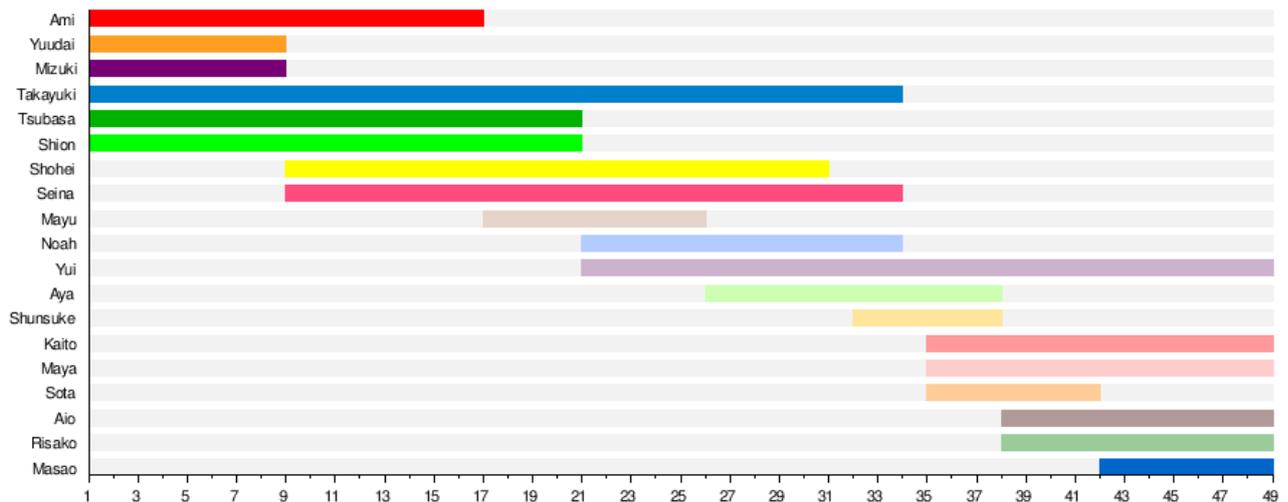


Figure 2 Breakdown of the cast appearances in Terrace House: Opening New Doors. Wikipedia

Arai Yuudai:

Youngest of the cast at 19, Arai Yuudai is an aspiring chef who can't seem to finish what he starts. He is one of the original six that enter the house and one that seems to struggle the most in finding a comfortable role within the group. He states that his reason for joining the series is to become more independent, a goal which is ideal fodder for a story arc focused on personal progression.

Nakamura Takayuki:

A 30-year-old professional snowboarder and oldest of the cast at any point of the season. Also the person to remain in the series for the longest period in the season. A sort of big brother character with a laid-back attitude and a lot of advice to give. From a promotion point of view Nakamura's snowboarding career is given a lot of screen time, he also consistently wears clothes from his own clothing line. He states that his career was the main reason of entering *Terrace House*, but there is an obvious romantic interest coupled with this.

Okamoto Shion:

A runway model, at 23 years old Half-American-half-Japanese Okamoto Shion is witty, soft spoken and quiet yet obviously confident and adept in social situations. He states that he entered the house "for the frivolous reason of wanting to be swooned over."

Uemura Shohei:

A professional musician, 28-year-old Uemura Shohei is particularly honest, upfront and easy to tear up. He is described by both cast members and commentators as a passionate man of Kyushu. He states finding inspiration for song writing as his reason to enter house.

Ishikura Noah:

A half-Austrian-half-Japanese heir to an airline company, 21 years old Ishikura Noah is an aspiring pilot and a part time model of considerable fortune. Similarly to Yuudai the other guests in the house take issue with his lack of work ethic and reckless attitude resulting from his wealth.

Ikezoe Shunsuke:

Soft-spoken and effeminate 21-year-old Ikezoe Shunsuke is an aspiring make-up artist who states their reason for entering the show as to figure out their sexual identity. He mingles with the women of the show effortlessly, seemingly finding friendships with the opposite sex easier to form. Somewhat an outlier, Shunsukes appearance explicitly focuses on problematics of sexuality.

Nakata Kaito:

A 20-year-old professional skateboarder states their reason for entering the house as to make Japanese skateboarding scene more widely known. A sporty, relaxed type who seems to get along well with everyone.

Sota Kono:

A divorcee and a father of one, albeit without custody, Sota Kono is a 25-year-old application developer who states his reason for entry as to find out how young people think and what kinds of outlooks they have to get ideas for new applications. To stick an easy label on him, he most resembles a traditional salaryman out of all the men of the show.

Fukuda Aio:

A 23-year-old semi-professional footballer, Fukuda Aio is a half-American half Japanese. He says that he has just given up on his footballer career and wants to focus on the next thing he is going to do.

Wada Masao:

A 31-year old professional musician, Wada Masao is has come to the show for the sole reason of finding love. Perhaps due to his age or his clearly set goals Wada gets right to it.

Based on the earlier coding and its accompanying memo I was able to outline typecast categories that are always present in the series. Three emergent categories were named after the professions of the men incorporated in the categories. These categories were “the athlete”, “the model” and “the musician”. All men of the show except Shunsuke and Yuudai fell neatly within such categories which might resemble something that was also drawn up at the casting meetings of this show.

- Athlete: Takayuki, Kaito, Aio: SPORTY, RELAXED, UNCONFRONTATIONAL, IDEALISTIC
- Model: Shion, Noah, Sota: COOL, ASSERTIVE, GOOD LOOKING
- Musician: Shohei, Masao: PASSIONATE, ROMANTIC, LOOKING FOR LOVE

## 7.2 In plain sight

In this part I aim to outline the immediately apparent things that I were able to notice prior to engaging in the close reading. There are a lot of dates in Terrace House, to the extent that at times it is difficult to know whether the guests are particularly willing to go on them, or if they are pressured by the production to do so. Another consideration is whether they sometimes go on these dates to receive more screen time in order to fuel whatever careers they have planned for future. This being said, there is also some of what appears to be earnest interest. Of the male guests in *Terrace House: Opening New Doors* only Wada Masao explicitly says that they are on the show to find love, and others indeed appear to have more hybrid reasons. When it comes to dating, it is overwhelmingly the men who initiate dates,

being the one's to ask and to plan out the contents of the date. Even if the men ranked low on assertiveness in the coding scheme such as Nakamura Takayuki or Nakata Kaito, they were still the initiators over their partners.

A central value in the show is personal growth and progression. For this reason, there is a wealth of work or other goal related talk in the show. Here also it is at times difficult to tell apart whether its participants are as goal oriented as they present themselves as or whether they just manage to match the shows values well or even whether their progression is something completely constructed by the production. What is clear however, is that whenever someone fails to appear forward going or lacking in life goals, they receive a negative evaluation from both the other guests as well as the commentator cast. Particular examples of this are Arai Yuudai who cannot seem to take his nascent career as a cook seriously enough<sup>71</sup> or Fukuda Aio who after ending his career as a professional football player can't seem to decide on what to do next and spends his days lounging about in the house<sup>72</sup>, this is also true of Ishikura Noah, who as a rich heir to an airline company does not have to do much at all<sup>73</sup>. This same narrative is present here regardless of gender however, and hard work or at least some sort of progression seems to be an equally desirable trait in both men and women. Unlike in similar western shows here a lot of the characters content is created by what they do for a living and, in this context, not doing or at least trying to do is a cardinal sin. Here of course the needs of the show and the individual are in parallel, as progression is required for both personal growth as well as production of interesting television. One interesting sequence is seen when Fukuda Aio is admonished by both the cast commentators and a potential partner Tanaka Yui for not working part time while figuring out what to do next on his career. Here it seems that working has an inherent value divorced from personal advancement or making ends meet.<sup>74</sup> One thing then that seems to remain from salaryman masculinity seems to be the high valuation of work regardless of its contents or purpose. Then again if we consider masculinity to be created solely by the demands of surrounding society, this would be the expected outcome of the intensification and risen competitiveness of work-life. Here

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<sup>71</sup> This is a key feature in Yuudais story arc, but a particular example can be seen in: Terrace House: Opening New Doors. "Cocky Kid" Episode 5, Netflix, 23.01.2018

<sup>72</sup> For example: Terrace House: Opening New Doors. "Booger Boy and the Snoring Boy" Episode 43, Netflix, 25.12.2018

<sup>73</sup> For example: Terrace House: Opening New Doors. "Confessing Love at the Chapel" Episode 29, Netflix, 21.08.2018

<sup>74</sup> Terrace House: Opening New Doors. "Booger Boy and the Snoring Boy" Episode 43, Netflix, 25.12.2018

these things are particularly in sync, as Aio taking it easy at the house also makes for terrible television.

Dasgupta writes about the markers that delineate the boundaries of acceptable life-course, transgressing of risks failure as both a *shakaijin* and by extension as a man. Examples of such life-course markers could be various graduations and passing of examinations, and importantly for this discussion, timely entry into the workforce as well as timely career progression.<sup>75</sup> Failing, and perhaps even worse, complacency about this failure is a constant cause of distress for both the cast members as well as the commentators. This valuation of hard work is rather interesting in a reality television setting, as western shows tend to value experiences or “life well-lived” over hard work, only really paying attention to work when it is either a detriment to something else, or when it is an explicit focus of the show. Rachel Dubrofsky<sup>76</sup> writes in their examination of *The Bachelorette* about the tensions between love and career and arrives at the conclusion that the choice of hard work over emotional life is effectively pathologized. This is something of which there are absolutely no signs in *Terrace House: Opening New Doors*, where the concept of working too hard does not seem to exist. Again, high valuation of work is also something that seems to apply equally to both genders, which is striking when considering the comparatively weak work-life status of women in Japan. Considering also that women tend to historically be the homemakers in the Japanese setting, it could be safe to expect that there would in the narrative exist a link between a woman’s hard work and emotional unavailability, of this however, there are no signs. Of course, a successful career can also be just one of the intermediary goal posts in the value system where the ultimate goal for women is marriage and children, in such a system career- and other personal aspirations are just positive personality traits that facilitate courtship.

One way to create distinctions is to look at the occupations of the guests, of the men in the house three are professional athletes, two musicians, one model, one make-up artist, one software developer, one aspiring cook and an aspiring pilot. Here we are again dealing with a particularly trendy and well-off segment of what is Japanese masculinity. Between men there is very little conflict in the span of the show. Only moderate tensions arise on a few occasions when men show interest in a same girl at the same time, but in each of these cases it is resolved with little difficulty. Indeed, instead there is a wealth of wet male-to-male bonding

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<sup>75</sup> Romit Dasgupta, 2012 p. 58

<sup>76</sup> Rachel. E. Dubrofsky, 2014

moments in the show in the form of beer drinking, bathing and crying. Terrace House has been described as *Models Inc. Japan*, and while the guests in this season also tend to be on the side of ripped and beautiful, there is also some variation to this norm such as Ikezoe Shunsuke in their softer, more feminine appearance, or Wada Masao in their slight overweight and unreserved love of food and cooking. As noted earlier, the show obviously strives to be inclusive in its treatment of different sexualities or body types, it would be difficult to say however that these choices were made with inclusivity in mind, and it seems more likely that a degree of diversity has been added to create more variety for the sake of interesting programming. Same inclusivity can be seen in including many guests that are of mixed heritage, as of the male guests three are what are in Japanese called *haafu*, or half-Japanese. In Japan racism towards individuals of mixed descent is a pervasive problem even in the cases where these people speak perfect Japanese and have spent their whole lives in the country<sup>77</sup>. In media and especially advertising people of mixed heritage tend to be well represented in Japan, even if in such cases there is a thin line between even-handed representation and racializing<sup>78</sup>. Terrace House has a stake in normalizing such people, and while its reasons for initially casting these people might have been in order to offer interesting and exotic variety, in action there are no exoticizing components in the show and these guests stand out for reasons completely other than their race. More widely Japanese reality-television lacks the same preoccupation with race that is distinct in US reality television, and thus in a lot of the academic writing on the subject.

Same thing seems to hold true for including different sexualities and body-types. Of this it has to be noted however that everything seen here falls within a decidedly middle-class sensibility, and for instance where the male body is sexualized, its buff and polish is cunningly related to results of beauty work, rather than to that of working-class toil. Sensible commodification of the male body is always a delicate task that risks animalizing of the object, especially so in reality television, which tends to focus on classic iterations of hegemonic masculinity due to their easily recognizable features<sup>79</sup>. In *Terrace House* this is accomplished through only showing the male body sexualized within certain frames where it does not relinquish control over itself, such as the work-out, sports or bathing.

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<sup>77</sup> On mixed ethnicity for example: Kamada, L. D. (2009). Mixed-ethnic girls and boys as similarly powerless and powerful: embodiment of attractiveness and grotesqueness. *Discourse Studies*, 11(3), 329–352.

<sup>78</sup> On haafu models: Watarai Tamaki, 2014

<sup>79</sup> Gareth Palmer, 2014

In the next part I will move on with the qualitative analysis beginning with work-related passages of the series followed by scenes which focus on the romantic pursuits of the guests. In total I've chosen six scenes for closer analysis, three from each category. I attempted to include as many of the male members as possible in these scenes, but ultimately, I prioritized the contents of these scenes resulting in the exclusion of Fukuda Aio, Nakata Kaito and Wada Masao from the close reading part of this thesis.

### 7.3 Pursuing My True Self

In these excerpts the translation is provided by Netflix with additional notes written in by the author. Everything outside the original translation is marked in parentheses. Any contextual information to help the reader is provided in box-parentheses. In the beginning of each excerpt there is a short description of the style of speech used by the speakers, which I have attempted to make accessible also for those who have no knowledge of Japanese.

#### 7.3.1 Excerpt 1: Episode 5. "Cocky Kid" 26:30 – 29:40

This scene<sup>80</sup> takes place from some time in the morning up until noon. In the scene Ami is helping Takayuki with preparing the shipments of his clothing line. They are situated at a table in an open garage, filled with cardboard boxes. Takayuki uses a masculine self-address and short-tense suitable for speech to a younger person that you already know. Ami answers with similar level of familiarity speaking short-tense standard Japanese.

(Both working.)

Takayuki: "I feel bad for having you help."

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<sup>80</sup> *Terrace House: Opening New Doors* "Cocky Kid" 23.1.2018 Ep. 5 Netflix, Fuji Television, Viewed on Netflix. Translated by Emily Noguchi for Netflix.

Ami: "I was free anyway."

Takayuki: "This is a part-time job."

Ami: "I'll take a bottle of milk as payment."

Takayuki: "A bottle per hour?"

(Ami laughing.)

Takayuki: "What a generous employee."

Ami: "Well then instead, will you tell me how you decided to do what you do for living?"

Ami: "When you were 20, did you just work part-time and snowboard and train?"

Takayuki: "Yeah"

Ami: "What did you do in your mid-twenties?"

Takayuki: "I worked part-time in the summer and snowboarded in the winter."

Ami: "What was your source of income?"

Takayuki: "My summer job and a few sponsorships"

Ami: "I haven't found a job or anything I really want to pursue."

Takayuki: "For work?"

(Ami nodding.)

Ami: "But I'll finish my fourth year of college, I'll get the credits I need. That's what I've been doing. And I'll be able to graduate."

Takayuki: "So, you're not ready to jump into the entertainment industry just yet?"  
[Ami is considering a career in modelling]

Ami: "Yeah, not 100%."

Takayuki: "Not 100%."

Takayuki: "But I think that's fine. I know Yuudai said things about it and made you cry."

Takayuki: “Being forced into a path ... No one likes that.”

Ami: “No.”

Takayuki: “I don’t think its too late to start job hunting at 25, for example. I think there are lots of different paths to take.”

Takayuki: “It’s the same for me. If another opportunity presents itself, I’m willing to take it.”

Takayuki: “Everything at 80%, I feel like 80% is enough.”

Takayuki: “For everything. Eating too. I want to do that for drinking too.”

(Ami laughing.)

Takayuki: “Giving 100% all the time gets exhausting. But by giving 80%, I feel like you can go pretty far. Don’t you think? Am I being naïve?”

(Ami shaking her head.)

Takayuki: “So that’s what I think.”

(Lunch bell ringing in the distance. The two talk briefly about what is on the menu and the scene ends.)

In this scene Nakamura Takayuki (31), a professional snowboarder explains his work ethic while simultaneously consoling Komuro Ami (20) a younger member of the show. There is a slight romantic spark between the two at this point, but it ultimately remains at a friendly level. From Takayuki's explanation we can extract few interesting points; namely that he rejects the typical Japanese life-course progression from education to employment and emphasizes instead doing things at your own phase and not being afraid to shift course should things go awry. The other interesting point is his notion of rebalancing life and work, noted earlier to be typical of the herbivore stereotype<sup>81</sup>. Notion of doing everything at 80% seems to

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<sup>81</sup> Steven Chen, 2012

ring a bit hollow however, seeing that both of his ventures -pro-snowboarding and the apparel brand- are rather successful and most definitely a result of hard work. Ami in this scene is the passive recipient of Takayuki wisdom, a dynamic that we get to see many times during the series between him and many others. This scene makes one wonder whether what he says applies to himself however or whether all we are seeing is an elaborate application of an appealing philosophy to the Takayuki brand. While it seems more likely that he is just saying what he thinks, it makes for an uncannily good commercial for a laid-back sort of apparel line<sup>82</sup>. Relating this to Dasgupta's writing on the boundaries of acceptable life-course, this sort of speech seems to be a conscious effort to move those boundaries. The cast commentators also don't seem to take his speech that seriously, rather regarding it as an attempt to make moves on Ami than any sincere declaration of values. In the following excerpt I'll provide an opposite example.

### 7.3.2 Excerpt 2: Episode 27. "On the Night of the Camp..." 32:30 – 35:40

This scene<sup>83</sup> takes place in the evening. In this scene the members are out camping. Yui and Noah are sitting on a swing separate from the rest of the group and Yui pulls out a list of questions that she has been meaning to ask Noah. They are huddled close near an electric lantern and are wearing warm clothes. Noah uses a masculine style of self-address but otherwise speaks in as standard Japanese as his Kobe dialect permits. Yui on the other hand seems to take the most care of all guests to speak clearly and correctly.

Yui: [Pulling out a handwritten list] "I have some questions for you."

(Both laughing)

Noah: "You wrote them down?"

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<sup>82</sup> Nakamura Takayuki's clothing line BREW are beer themed casual mens clothing. Examples can be seen on their website: <https://brewclothes.net/>

<sup>83</sup> *Terrace House: Opening New Doors* "On the Night of Camp..." 31.7.2018 Ep. 27. Netflix, Fuji Television, Viewed on Netflix. Translated by Emily Noguchi for Netflix.

Yui: “Yes, while I thought of them.”

Noah: “Sure, ask me anything”

Yui: “You often go to clubs with Shohei, right?”

Noah: “Me?”

Yui: “Yeah.”

Noah: “I really don’t go that often...”

Yui: “Is that something you do often?”

Noah: “Go out drinking?”

Yui: “Yeah.”

Noah: “Hmm, well I do enjoy drinking, so I go out from time to time.”

Yui: “It seems extreme to me.”

Noah: “Extreme? It’s not extreme.”

(Both joking for a bit.)

Yui: “When you came to Terrace House you said you wanted to become a pilot. By what age are looking to accomplish that?”

Noah: “I haven’t chosen an exact age, yet, but sooner or later I’m looking to take over my parents’ company and become a pilot. Sooner or later.”

Yui: “Have you already saved up for it?” [Pilot licence, which is rather expensive.]

Noah: “I’m saving little by little. I can save a little with the job at Wakadori that Taka got for me.” [Earlier Takayuki recommended Noah to a yakitori restaurant where he also works part-time.]

(Yui nodding.)

Noah: “It’s been working for me. Little by little I’ve been moving in the right direction.”

Yui: “You have.”

Noah: "I have."

Yui: "So, you do think about it."

Noah: "I try to."

Yui: "I see."

...

Noah: "You've got more questions?"

Yui: "I've been saving the best for last. Do you mind? I'm also getting tired of this."

Yui: "What would you do with a billion yen?"

Noah: "A million?"

Yui: "A billion."

Noah: "A billion huh. Well, I want to be a pilot, So I'd get my licence."

Yui: "Would you still work if you had a billion yen?"

Noah: "I think so."

Yui: "Do you like to work?"

Noah: "I do enjoy it."

Noah: "Was that it?" [End of the questions.]

Yui: "Yeah that was it."

(Scene carries on a little bit more with them flirting and making date plans and ends with them heading back to the main camp where others are.)

In this scene we have Tanaka Yui (20) grilling Ishikura Noah (21) about his career plans. Noah, -heir to an airline company and set to succeed his father- himself does not at any point seem too troubled by career advancement. At this point of the series the two are going on dates and here Yui -much in the style of vetting a marriage candidate- is trying to figure out the kinds of values her date might have. In her questions she is also conveying her more traditional ideas of how a life-course should be and trying to affirm Noah's position in

relation to these goal posts. To the distress of other guests, a recurring theme in the series is Noah having a headache from drinking too much and missing his part-time job. Two episodes after this Yui confronts Noah about this and it is around this time that they stop going on dates.

Working a part-time job is an interesting signifier here, since a pilot license is probably not something you can save up for by working part-time in a yakitori restaurant. Working has an inherent value, and it is important to be doing something even if it yields little concrete results. Same thing is further underlined by Yui's last question, to which Noah answers -quite possibly to please Yui- that he would work even if he had the money not to. Ishikura Noah is bit of an outlier in terms of the show due to his class background, being of a super wealthy family means that not quite the same rules apply to him, and what is necessary for his life-course differs from the other men of the show at least where work is concerned. The cast commentators also note that Noah's work style does not seem to be suitable for someone trying to save up for a pilot license, but otherwise focus on the hard-line vetting process that Yui is engaging in here.

The fact that the guests worry over each-others work ethic is a proof for a certain kind of emergent *communitas* within the house. Being aware of the history of the show the guests are also keenly aware of the visibility and thus opportunities their time in the show provides, which if not properly utilized is seen as problematic. While in terms of the show same rules apply to Noah it is obvious that he can afford a degree of indifference towards these goalposts due to his wealth, even if him making this apparent is a flagrant exhibition of bad taste.

### 7.3.3 Excerpt 3: Episode 8. "A Man with Different Values" 35:15 - 35:50

In this scene<sup>84</sup> Nakamura Takayuki (31) admonishes Arai Yuudai (19) for his attitude towards both work as well as love-life. Takayuki has called Yuudai to the boys dormitory and is waiting there for him. Takayuki speaks in short-tense masculine self-address as is usual to

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<sup>84</sup> *Terrace House: Opening New Doors* "A Man with Different Values" 13.2.2018 Ep. 8. Netflix, Fuji Television, Viewed on Netflix. Translated by Emily Noguchi for Netflix.

him, but also suitable for the situation of admonishing someone considerably younger than you.

(Yuudai entering)

Yuudai: "I'm scared. I'm scared."

Takayuki: "Mhm, yeah, well."

Takayuki: "You came here aspiring to be a chef. That's why you came here right?"

Takayuki: "But, if you're not engaging that side of you... what are you doing?"

Takayuki: "I'm wondering if you really have that passion. You said your friend found a job, that he's training on the job. I remember you mentioning that. You said it made you feel pressured."

(Yuudai nodding)

Takayuki: "You said that, but it doesn't seem that way at all. You should be doing more."

Takayuki: "As for your ex... You broke up with her because you left to be on Terrace House."

Takayuki: "Right?"

Yuudai: "Yeah."

Takayuki: "You were together for four years, right? She said she wouldn't see or contact you anymore."

Takayuki: "Have you ever thought about how she must have felt?"

Takayuki: "Then you appear out of nowhere and say, 'Let's hang out on Christmas.'" [It is typical for couples to go out on Christmas.]

Takayuki: "How must that make her feel? It would confuse her and cause turmoil. Don't you feel bad for her?"

Takayuki: "You should be more considerate of others. Isn't that what being a chef is about? Being conscious of what the customer wants, what foods to serve and what drinks to pair them with. A chef considers how people are feeling."

Takayuki: “It’s just disappointing. Your reasons for coming here and your goals, you need to re-evaluate them.”

(Takayuki standing up, giving Yuudai a pat on the back and exiting the room.  
Shot of Yuudai crying. Scene ends.)

In this passage of the series, we can see a prime example of a homosocial dynamic through which ‘crafting’ of masculinity takes place. A dynamic of an older, already relatively successful *senpai* advising and admonishing a younger *kōhai*, who in this case has transgressed from the values of the community. As the oldest member of the cast Takayuki assumes this advisor role time and time again during his stay in the series. Here his exasperation seems to spill over the brim a little bit, as he moves to also question Yuudai’s romantic choices. Situating this discussion in the context of different types of masculinity, it is readily apparent that Takayuki is conveying ideas that are more in sync with the traditional salaryman masculinity than what he mused in his discussion with Ami in excerpt 1. Perhaps a heavier hand is required when the *kōhai*’s mismatch with the normative structure is this apparent and flexibility is something that is reserved for people who better understand their normative restraints. In this scene also the emergent *communitas* of the house is particularly apparent as otherwise it would be easier to disregard Yuudai’s exploits. It is interesting also when relating this to the context of Finnish or even Anglo-American reality television, where such a scene probably would not take place as the contestants would simply regard values relating to work a private enough domain to disregard.

Crafting of masculinity is always a collaborative effort of the community and the individual, requiring transferral and inscribing of the normative structure. On the part of the individual, it is a negotiation which results in either embodiment or rejection of the set of values. Here, interestingly in the following scene Arai Yuudai meeting with his friends from outside the show laments that his values are too different from the other members of the show and announces ‘graduation’. Takayuki’s effort at crafting results in a failure as the normative structure is rejected and the *kōhai* chooses rather to exile themselves. The cast commentators are also thoroughly exasperated by the scene and Yuudai’s later announcement Yamasato Ryota passing it by with a “So your values don’t match with other guests? Well, that’s quite obvious”. This is a style of engagement in Japan that any foreigner who has visited would certainly know about, where the unwillingness or incapability to match the necessary norms is

met with silence and ignorance. Yuudai has passed onto an area where he can't even properly be joked about so discussions about him are ceased altogether. Ehara Yukiko muses the words that became the title of this paper 「あたしの息子だったら本当に土下座。」 literally were that my son I'd have to bow to the ground.

In the next part I will be moving on to excerpts having to do with dating or love-life. Rather than dates themselves, I opted for scenes in which the men discuss their past exploits and/or current interests between each other or other members of the show, feeling these scenes to be more revealing.

## 7.4 Heartbeat, Heartbreak

### 7.4.1 Excerpt 4: Episode 35. "Young Faces" 38:00 – 41:05

In this scene<sup>85</sup> Tanaka Yui (19) questions the freshly arrived Kono Sota (26) about his past. Both are seated in the living room of the house in the evening. Sota talks in short-tense standard Japanese without any signifiers of gender.

Sota: "Did you have work today?"

Yui: "I had the day off."

(Yui coming from the kitchen and sitting down laughing.)

Yui: "Maybe I'll come to talk to you a bit."

Sota: (Jokingly.) "Maybe?"

Yui: "I was kind of scared of you at first."

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<sup>85</sup> *Terrace House: Opening New Doors* "Young Faces" 9.10.2018 Ep. 35. Netflix, Fuji Television, Viewed on Netflix. Translated by Emily Noguchi for Netflix.

Sota: "I get that a lot."

Yui: "Really? There are moments when your expression is a bit "

(Yui making an indifferent, condescending face)

Yui: "A bit like that."

(Both laughing)

Sota: "What was that?"

Yui: "You get this scowl on your face."

Sota: "My dark side came out?"

Yui: "Yeah."

Yui: "Maybe I'll ask you about your relationship experiences."

Sota: "Maybe?"

Yui: "What kind of relationships have you had?"

Sota: "When I was your age, I had a kid."

Yui: "What, really?"

Sota: "Yeah. I got married at 20."

Yui: "And you had a child?"

Sota: "Yeah."

Yui: "I see how old is..."

Sota: "Five years old."

Yui: "Oh, five. So, your ex has custody?"

Sota: "Yes. We got divorced before the kid turned two. Over three years ago now. That's when we separated."

Yui: "Are you still friendly with her? Do you see her?"

Sota: “No, I haven’t seen her. Because she doesn’t live near Tokyo. Her hometown isn’t near Tokyo, that is.”

Yui: “Oh, I see. So, you haven’t seen her at all?”

Sota: “Not at all.”

Yui: “I’ve never met my father before, either.”

Sota: “At five years old, they become self-aware. They really start to show their personalities. So, for me to show up now and say “Hey, I’m your dad!” might be more confusing.”

Yui: “I see.”

Sota: “Which is why, when we divorced, I agreed not to see the kid.”

Yui: “At 20, huh? How old was your wife?”

Sota: “Same as me.”

Yui: “I see, I don’t know if I should ask, but why did you break up?”

Sota: “We got married at 20 and had a child. So, you know we weren’t prepared at all. We were 20, but we were still kids ourselves. “

Sota: “I’m sure there are couples who have successful marriage at that age. This may be a bad way to put it, but your life becomes very constrained. You become limited in what you can do. It was tough. All of that led to misunderstandings between the two of us and it wasn’t working. But because we had a child, we continued to try to make things work until he was about two.”

Yui: I see.

(Sota nodding, the scene ends.)

In this solemn toned passage Sota reveals to Yui his marriage history and the fact that he has a child that he has not met in three years. Sota is another outlier in the men of the series as no one else has a prior marriage or children. Sota gets multiple reveals of this fact to the other members, and he seems to wear it as a sort of badge of accomplishment or a fun fact about himself. As he states in the excerpt here, he has resigned custody and all connections to the child. Single-father households continue to be very rare in Japan and so their arrangement is rather close to norm, in 2018 85% of the family court cases where custody was contested it

ended up going to the mother<sup>86</sup>. This number would be even higher were we to factor in cases where custody was not contested. Unlike most of other OECD countries, Japan does not have a legal system of joint custody after divorce, however the family law requires for the divorcing parents to draw up an agreement stipulating a visitation plan and payment of child support. There are no legal consequences for not adhering to these terms. While from the Finnish perspective it seems that the family law is in dire need of revision, the low divorce rate of 1,8% in 2019<sup>87</sup> means that such revision will probably evade urgency.

Sota is an interesting character in the sense that he most closely resembles the hegemonic ideal of the salaryman. He is work oriented and seems to take pride in his position as an application developer for a midsized company. Comparing his presence to that of the salaryman masculinity, it becomes obvious however that his dress and hairdo are vastly more important than these points would have been in the earlier decades. Being on tv, it makes sense that beauty work would take certain prevalence, but it is also a telling example of the adoption of historically effeminate practices discussed in the inclusive masculinity theory. This also makes sense because Sota has a history as a girl-magazine model. This point is further accentuated by the way the commentators analyse Sota when he first arrives in the same episode from which prior excerpt is taken from, where he is deemed as the image of a modern capable employee.

#### 7.4.2 Excerpt 5: Episode 37. "First and Last Date" 18:00 – 20:50

In this scene<sup>88</sup> Ikezoe Shunsuke (21) comes to visit the girls dormitory to report Tanaka Yui (21) and Matarai Aya (24) about how their date went with Kono Sota. The scene starts with Shunsuke entering the room. Shunsuke has earlier stated as his reason to enter to show as to figure out his sexual identity. Shunsuke speaks carefully and correctly, without any gender signifiers.

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<sup>86</sup> Takeshi Hamano, 2018

<sup>87</sup> Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, 2020

<sup>88</sup> *Terrace House: Opening New Doors* "First and Last Date" 30.10.2018 Ep. 37. Netflix, Fuji Television, Viewed on Netflix. Translated by Emily Noguchi for Netflix.

(Shunsuke knocking, entering the room.)

Aya and Yui: "Welcome back!"

Shunsuke: "I'm back. Can I come in?"

Aya: "Of course, you're already in."

Yui: "Is this your first time here?"

Shunsuke: "No, it's not."

Yui: "Right, you did Aya's makeup the other day."

Aya: "How did it go today?"

Shunsuke: "It was super fun."

Aya: "No way! That's great."

Yui: "I'm jealous."

Shunsuke: "We went out as just friends, but I thought of it as a date. It made me think: 'So this is what it would be like if I had a boyfriend'"

Aya: "Ooh so that's how you felt? Really?"

Shunsuke: "It made me realize I'd like to date someone like this. It wasn't about gender; I didn't see him just as that."

Yui: "I get it. You were feeling things a girl would feel."

Shunsuke: "Yeah, something like that. To put it simply, it made me realize I'm definitely a bisexual."

Aya: "It did?"

Shunsuke: "Yeah. I was able to get my answer. That was my goal. That was what I came here to find out. I feel like I was really able to settle that for myself. So, I'm thinking of leaving *Terrace House*."

Aya: "Isn't it too soon?"

Yui: "Seriously."

Aya: "It's too soon."

Shunsuke: “But for me, the fact that it was quick is a positive thing. I was lucky in that respect. I came here looking for an answer. I didn’t think I would figure things out for myself so quickly.”

Shunsuke: “It wasn’t something I would tell people before. But since living here and telling everyone ... you all accepted me for who I was. No one said anything to deny my sexuality.”

Shunsuke: “I got to be in an environment that made it easier to accept myself. I think that’s why I was able to figure it out so quickly.”

Yui: (Holding back tears.) “So, you’ve fallen for Sota a little?”

Shunsuke: “Yeah.”

Yui: “But you’re still leaving?”

Shunsuke: Sota is straight.

Yui: “So, you understand it’d be impossible. But now that you know your own feelings, you’re leaving.”

Shunsuke: “Right.”

(Everyone crying, the scene ends.)

Firstly, in this scene we have an example of the ritual ending of a members *Terrace House* visit in which they reiterate their goals and declare their completion, upon which they announce departure. Really the only structuring element in the series, the goal, and its completion -or sometimes failure-delineate a member’s passage through the space of the show. Shunsuke’s example is particularly interesting because his stated goal was to figure out his sexual identity, an answer to which he arrives after a date with another male member of the cast, Sota. Throughout his visit to the show Shunsuke seemingly feels more affinity with the female members of the show, and tellingly also reports this first to them. This scene too is serious in tone, and stylistically like any other ritual departure seen in the series.

Now, in this scene Shunsuke comes out as a bisexual, which obviously from an identity perspective is a completely different thing than homosexuality. From the perspective of media representation however, it is decidedly less so and they do get conflated with each other, which I would argue is also happening in Shunsuke’s case. In Japanese media the representation of homosexuality tends to get flattened into few stereotypes, such as the

effeminate “woman’s best friend”, the cross-dressing *okama* or the hyper-masculine leather clad sex-maniac, many of which draw further from the imagery of kabuki theatre<sup>89</sup>. While one might be inclined to think that all kinds of LGBT self-representation on television is good, the sensationalizing of homosexuality runs the risk of drowning out the real voices of such people. In always portraying a sexual orientation through nonconformity and the outrageous, the possibility of a conforming homosexuality ends up being pushed further away. Lifestyle programming has often defaulted to exhibiting non-conforming sexualities as an easy shortcut to drama and outrage.<sup>90</sup>

In how Shunsuke’s arc in the show is handled we can see echoes of all of abovementioned stereotypes, finishing in the final episode of the series with a visit to a gay bar where the two *okama* hosts discuss Shunsuke’s current goings on<sup>91</sup>. My source here is a bit dated however and were a qualitative study of the male-homosexual or bisexual representations in Japanese media to be conducted today, I’d expect the representations to have departed somewhat from such gross stereotyping. All in all Shunsuke’s more feminine appearance and behaviour receives only little special scrutiny within the series, regardless placing him within the “woman’s best friend” trope. This also serves as an example of a typecast character, as here it is perfectly transparent what the production had in mind with Shunsuke. Still, it has to be said that the show deals with Shunsuke with considerable tact, so much so that the cast commentators seem to tiptoe around any degrading comments that the other guests might well receive, this scene too and the date that preceded it the commentators discuss in a way that there is no way of knowing that they are discussing a date between two boys. This point is in keeping with a wider truth about the show, as it is overwhelmingly conforming, safe and uncontroversial. *Terrace House: Opening New Doors* never seeks to upset or undermine the veneer of upper middle-class bourgeois respectability, one which presumably also homosexual -or at least bisexual- men can be part of.

#### 7.4.3 Excerpt 6: Episode 18. “Flower Bouquet for my Valentine” 14:10 – 15:45

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<sup>89</sup> Mark McLelland, 2005

<sup>90</sup> Joshua Gamson, 2014

<sup>91</sup> *Terrace House: Opening New Doors* “Departure Whistle” 12.12.2019 Ep, 49, Netflix, Fuji Television, Viewed on Netflix. Translated by Emily Noguchi for Netflix.

In this scene<sup>92</sup> Okamoto Shion (23) and Uemura Shohei (28) visit Nakamura Takayuki (31) at a tradeshow where he has a stand set up for his clothing brand. They discuss the appearance of the newest member Koseta Mayu, whom Takayuki has not yet had the chance to meet. Mayu works as a gravure model. As is well suited to the scene their speech short-tense, boorish and overwhelmingly male.

(Shohei and Shion walking up to the stand.)

Shion: "There he is."

Shohei: "That's our guy."

Everyone: "Hey!"

Takayuki: "You came."

Shion: "You're working at it!"

Shohei: "You're working hard! This is amazing!"

(Shots of the booth and merchandize.)

Shion: "It's "BREW" right?"

Takayuki: "Nice, right?"

Shion: "By the way..."

Takayuki: "What is it?"

Shion: "We have news."

Takayuki: "Oh, I know what it is!"

Shion: "You can guess?"

Takayuki: "The new member came?"

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<sup>92</sup> *Terrace House: Opening New Doors* "A Man with Different Values" 13.2.2018 Ep. 8. Netflix, Fuji Television, Viewed on Netflix. Translated by Emily Noguchi for Netflix.

Shohei and Shion: “She came.”

Shohei: “We got pretty excited.”

Takayuki: “The guys?”

Shohei: “Yeah, the two of us. We couldn’t stop smiling.”

(Shion pulling up a photo on his phone.)

Takayuki: “Seriously? Oh, are you pulling up a picture?”

Shion: “Here it is.”

Shohei: “Of her parts. Here it is.”

Shion: “Take a look.”

(Boys staring the screen.)

Takayuki: “Whoa! Eh?”

Takayuki: “Wow! What a bounty. She’s bountiful.”

Shion: “She’s probably your type.”

Takayuki: “Seriously?”

Shohei: “She’s pretty hot.”

Takayuki: “Will I need to keep my apron on at all the times?” [Takayuki is wearing an apron in this scene due to his booth being pub themed.]

Shion: “In the house? I think it will make it worse actually.”

(Takayuki laughing.)

Shohei: “She’s right up your alley, Taka.”

Takayuki: “Seriously? That’s crazy.”

Shion: “She’s your type.”

(Takayuki turning to the other employee at the booth, presumably a friend.)

Takayuki: “What’s my type?”

Friend: “What? Huge breasts.”

(Everyone laughing.)

Takayuki: “That’s not true. That’s not true at all!”

Shion: “This is no time to be working.”

Takayuki: “No, it’s no time to be working.”

(The scene ends with a cut back to the house.)

In this scene we have a case of all the three current male members being by themselves engaging in boyish bonding over pictures of the gravure model Koseta Mayu who has recently entered the show. A gender routine classic and a ritualistic collective affirmation of heterosexuality, bonding over objects of carnal desire can probably be found in every culture. Here it is particularly striking because no-one of the men present acts or speaks in a particularly crass way during any other scenes and would probably situate on the side of the herbivore were we to look their other scenes. Here the performative nature of gender is made visible in a particular way due to the fact that the performance is in obvious mismatch to the personalities that perform it. It is also an example of Kavka’s flaunting of gender<sup>93</sup>, where a more forceful display of gender is performed in either jest or to affirm others (and possibly the self) of the masculinity present. Here the jest component is important, as the whole weight of what is done here is contained within play. As a collective affirmation of heterosexuality there is also a quality of negotiation here, where a picture is taken as the object of negotiation followed by each of the men voicing their affirmation, thus enforcing the boundaries of

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<sup>93</sup> Misha Kavka, 2014

heterosexual desire, a key component of masculinity. In this Foucauldian scene everyone is both the police and the subject of being policed all the while enjoying themselves. This too ties back to Dasgupta's theory on crafting masculinity<sup>94</sup>, as this is one of sites where masculinity is collectively maintained.

With these six scenes and their accompanying notes I will be moving on to the next chapter, in which I will provide a more in-depth analysis of what has been seen here and what kinds of overarching tendencies might be found.

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<sup>94</sup> Romit Dasgupta, 2004

## 8 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Departing from Cormack's formulation on categories of analysis for qualitative close reading, we can with confidence say a few things about the show. Now as I've said before, *Terrace House: Opening New Doors* is purposely mundane and uncontroversial. It seeks the positive participation of its viewer, offering no ugliness or dirtiness. Its nested structure exists to provide the viewer a frame of interpretation to further ease the experience. Stylistically sleek, trimmed and beautiful, it is tuned for easy consumption, addressing the viewer as a member of this family. Now what does this mean when looking at masculinity specifically? What is immediately obvious, is that portrayals of masculinity in this show would be conforming and uncontroversial. While the show might offer something divergent as a talking point, it seeks to ultimately tie such things back into a neat narrative. Through such lens the most interesting things might then be the kinds of traits which are desirable in its narrative, obvious, taken for granted or conversely the things which are absent from it altogether. Because *Terrace House: Opening New Doors* occupies a decisively middle-class space, my data here does not extend to working class masculinities. If we are to discuss the kinds of masculinity that are desirable, they would in any case fall outside the working class.

What about typecasting? What were the categories of masculinity casted for this show? Let us depart from the traits they all had in common. First, physical attractiveness and sexual activeness. There were no asexuals in the show as romantic tension is a key plot-device in the show. Second, emotional availability and skill. These men were all ready and capable to discuss their emotions and relate to their peers' feelings. Third, a trajectory of personal progression. This is again a plot-device, but also a thing of inherent value as shown in excerpts 2 and 3. As suggested by Steger and Koch these purposefully casted attractive men all share the capability of personal beauty work and intrapersonal emotional work, coupled with willingness and ability to engage in the regular kind of work<sup>95</sup>. In the show there were three apparent typecast categories: An idealistic, individualistic sportsman; the passionate, looking-for-love musician; and the calm and collected hot-guy model. In addition to these obvious categories, there were outliers such as the strikingly effeminate Shunsuke<sup>96</sup> and the good-for-nothing Yuudai. Just looking at the typecast categories, it is quite apparent that the

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<sup>95</sup> Brigitte Steger, Angelina Koch, 2017

<sup>96</sup> Maybe surprisingly, this is not a bad thing in the narrative of the show.

cast is akin something out of *Cosmopolitan* and thus reflective of what the shows production perceived as favourable, successful masculinity. From my data, limited and snapshot as it is, I was able to outline some changes in values when compared to the salaryman masculinity. These might not be universally applicable, but they could provide a starting point for future examinations or at the very least help frame the following chapter.

Constant: Importance of work

Rising: Importance of individual happiness, personal accomplishment

Falling: Importance of family, sexuality

All of these tie back to the rising importance of individual sense of accomplishment over societal restrictions. With looking at such tendencies we have to note that reality television in general, as well as *Terrace House: Opening New Doors* is preoccupied with individual realization. Attainment of personal accomplishment is something that sits very neatly within a narrative arc, and thus such tendencies might not be well generalizable outside this setting. As I've mentioned before, the series focuses on the mundane, domestic, repeated activities. While masculinity has historically been defined by what happens outside the home, this series shows us male bodies engaging in the drudgery of maintaining the household. This includes cooking, cleaning, doing the dishes and maintaining of relations within the house. In the system of the show these actions are a collective responsibility without any notions of masculine and feminine. In portraying a share-house, the show is without much ado portraying a strikingly genderless labour economy. It would seem that the salaryman is an archaic enough image that it cannot properly even exist in a household setting beyond eating, drinking and sitting its back against the *daikokubashira*. Furthermore, there is no reluctance on the part of the men to participate, but rather this is normalized to a degree that it is not even discussed.

This analysis section is divided to parts corresponding to whether the components of masculinity have been disrupted and changed or whether they've maintained their shape from their pre-bubble economy state. When I began writing this thesis, from the outset my hypothesis was that the social contract that made salaryman masculinity widely attainable had

been broken down and thus had to be replaced or retuned. However, this idea does not stand closer examination as this supposed ideal has not even at the peak economic growth been the reality for the majority of the male population. If there is not -or indeed has never been- a link between the attainability of the hegemonic masculinity and its hegemonic position, the more important question becomes whether the hegemonic masculinity is still perceived as *desirable*. It has to be noted however that while an ideal might be desirable as such, it being impossible to attain makes it decidedly less desirable.

To this question, there would seem to be a few possible answers, all of which presuppose an upset or fragmentation of this ideal. From a state perspective the duties of a family unit have changed very little. What has changed, however is the fact that the male has ceased to be the sole provider of the family unit, resulting in the mixing of the female- and male spheres of work -in and outside of the house. This process is gradual, but nonetheless constant as well as in keeping with other OECD countries and manifests in things such as the prevalence of dual-working households and availability and utilization of paternity leaves. An alarming trend, however, is the apparent mismatch in state needs and individual perceptions of an attainable life-course. This manifests in falling marriage rates, and the free-falling replacement rate. Intensification of work-life and lack of societal safety-nets and incentives for childbearing make these things less attainable, while they might still be equally desirable on an individual level. This is a point that also came up in my data, as singlehood appears to be a problem that needs solving<sup>97</sup>, no-one of the guests is willingly single, even if such a lifestyle has also become acceptable. Were it possible to decelerate work-life or perhaps to shorten the work-week, we might then also see an upshot in marriage and birth-rates. Debating the feasibility of such measures is however beyond this thesis.

In my data the guests of the show value hard work and thorough career planning highly time and time again, regardless of their gender (Excerpts 1-3). Japan has a particularly strong sense of the normative contents of *shakaijin*, the adult citizen, and this category might be absorbing contents of what has been traditionally perceived as either masculine or feminine in terms of the duties of a citizen. This perspective however limits us to defining masculinity from the point of state needs, while there are also other components to the hegemonic, or otherwise desirable configurations of masculinity. In 1996 R.W. Connell formulized the hegemonic masculinity from the departure point that it would be a phenomenon different in each time and

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<sup>97</sup> Laura Dales, 2015

place, an idea that seems ill-suited to the terminally online world of 2020s. When we consider for instance the Euro-American global hypermasculinity, a configuration born out of high-income, transnational corporate culture it becomes obvious that something inherently transnational can occupy the same space as the hegemon. It seems then not to be particularly fruitful to limit the analysis of masculinity to the viewpoint of a single state or its needs. If we consider the hegemonic masculinity to be defined by work, its barriers have become even more prohibitive, as the trends of intensification of labour, harsher division of wealth and fiercer competition are true also in Japan, as they are in the other OECD countries.<sup>98</sup> Due to the proliferation of communication platforms successful lifestyles are also more visible than ever before. On the flipside, this has also resulted in fragmenting of audiences and thus the fragmenting of role-models. Plummer has argued that each generation has a unique context in which they construct their gender identities and sexualities. The emergence and prevalence of digital communications is also in the case of gender identity a generation defining factor, allowing not only for fragmented realities, but also play, mixing and matching, and new kinds of shows of affection<sup>99</sup>.

But does it make sense to talk about hegemonic masculinity at all when there exists such obvious blending of categories? I would contend that in keeping with Andersons inclusive masculinity theory, that the category of hegemonic masculinity has ceased to be important or applicable at all. This follows from few key factors:

1. Expectations applied to acceptable masculinity have relaxed.
2. Expectations applied to gender have become more fluid amongst each other.
3. Homosexuality has become more societally acceptable.

In Andersons formulation, inclusive masculinity follows from the wide-spread acceptability of homosexuality and thus the lessened conflation of male femininity with homosexuality<sup>100</sup>. The thinking goes that as *homohysteria* declines, behaviours priorly coded as homosexual

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<sup>98</sup> World Inequality Database, 2022

<sup>99</sup> Plummer, 2010

<sup>100</sup> Max Morris, Eric Anderson, 2015

become available as natural male behaviour, allowing greater adoption of behaviours from the feminine sphere without the risk of being labelled deviant. In the Japanese setting partly a result and partly a parallel process is the breakdown of division of labour between genders. This does not mean that such changes would immediately reflect on the most prevalent ways of doing gender, just that other kinds of configurations have become equally acceptable. As shown in excerpt 5, *Terrace House: Opening New Doors* for its part showcases bisexuality (which becomes conflated with and thus representative of homosexuality) as a natural part of its middle-class fantasy, addressing it but not fussing over it, thus participating in the process of naturalizing such masculinities in a way that could only be called healthy.

While the breakdown in division labour between genders is a good thing for everyone, it carries with it the emergence of nigh-impossible gender categories, an example of which could be a man who successfully combines child-rearing and a profitable career. The bar for successful gender practice can be consequently set ridiculously high, resulting in malaise. Somewhat paradoxically it would then seem that successful masculinity has simultaneously become more inclusive and even less attainable. Both of which are developments that result in the decreased importance of such ideal. This does not mean that any post-gender state would be emerging, but rather that the meanings contained within the category of gender have shifted and it no longer is as important of a marker from which people draw their desired life-courses. Masculinity is slowly being drained of its normative contents. This does not mean that it would stop existing, on the contrary it is more available for playful engagement and subversive use than before. It has become less important and thus less serious. I would contend that successful gender practice is still an object of desire, but failure to live up to it has a lessened impact to individual value than it had before. Now, this does not mean that the individual is free to do completely as they please, as shown in excerpt 3, acceptable masculinity can still be a source of worry for one's peers, this excerpt also showcases Dasgupta's idea of how masculinity is always a group effort, crafted together<sup>101</sup>. This group project is also maintained collectively, a part of which is shown in excerpt 6. Here I called it, 'acceptable masculinity', a passing grade rather than a resoundingly successful performance. I would contend that today 'acceptable' is wider and 'successful' narrower than they were when the hegemonic category of salaryman was first formulized.

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<sup>101</sup> Romit Dasgupta, 2004

Then what about performativity? In the course of this paper, I have suffered the difficulty of differentiating between gender performed and gender represented in a setting that is as carefully maintained as reality television. While we are dealing with decidedly separate phenomena, the viewer tends to receive only the latter and my toolbox has been found wanting in this regard. However, because we are dealing with a mediated ideological message, it is exactly this representation that wields the persuasive power that came to be the object of my examination, and while I initially wanted to observe these processes in parallel, I believe that this too has yielded a worthy examination.

On the outset of this thesis, I examined different categories of masculinity in Japan, such categorizations are interesting and provide us with tools of identifying tendencies of masculinity that might be unique to Japanese context. However, ultimately such categorizations cannot be readily applied to lived realities of gender and what appeared before me on the screen was rather a mixing and matching of those neat categories, tied together only by the wider phenomenon of attributing the traditionally feminine. We can however say with confidence that hegemonic masculinity is a sort of grand narrative that cannot survive in the fragmented cultures of today. Even if a singular hegemon were displaced, similar requirements still apply to successful masculinity. On the other hand, successful masculinity on its part covers much of the same ground as successful femininity. The notion of success, however, has drifted further away, but the ground covered by acceptable masculine practice has widened. This is in keeping with the wider understanding about the post-modern condition, in the Japanese case the hegemonic masculinity of salaryman was intimately coupled with the great project of post-war rebuilding and consequent raise in standards of living, another example of a narrative that probably would not be feasible today. We should, however, avoid deluding ourselves with the idea that gender had ceased to be an important category of examination, but also acknowledge that this is the direction where Japan is also heading. A further point of caution is that while gender categories might be becoming more fluid amongst each other, there is nothing in this development that would automatically sprout equity.

## 9 CLOSING WORDS

With this it is time to offer some final reflections. As I feared, it was often difficult to differentiate between masculinity performed and masculinity represented, which led me to focus more on the representation and the relation of this representation on lived realities. Such shift in approach was not a weakness per se, just a little different from what I initially set out to do. As I had not worked with gender studies before this thesis, everything was a learning experience, a fact which has greatly reflected on this paper. At times this resulted in foggy application of theory, and hopefully other times in off-field insight. In the course of writing this paper, I have in passing discussed many different things tangential to masculinity, while such an outline might look like an undisciplined hodgepodge, I hope that they together form the cohesive image of Japanese masculinity that I have attempted to create. At any rate I've learned a lot about masculinity and while not an explicit research goal, about myself.

When we consider further avenues of research, it is apparent that the intimacy of reality television as a medium has further intensified in amateur and semi-professional contexts of direct streaming services such as Twitch.com and Youtube. Fielded in these longform participatory windows into people's lives, an examination of masculinity could provide us with an even more up-to-date-on-the-skin understanding. Streaming services have been adopted particularly by young people, which means that examining masculinity in such settings could provide us with knowledge of an online co-creative process of masculinities particular to this generation. Of course, because masculinity is such a pervasive phenomenon that is so poorly understood, there remain countless other feasible avenues of examination.

In the upper middle-class fairy-tale of *Terrace House: Opening New Doors* the parts that were the most interesting were also the one's least interesting, where domestic and emotionally available masculinity is performed in a kitchen on a Sunday afternoon. It is sipping black tea, vacuuming the rugs, adding shellfish broth to a signature curry. Sometimes it is composing songs and yet other times, doing makeup. Of course, sometimes its drunk and belligerent or making unsavoury comments about a girl it knows, it is masculinity after all, and all that will not be shed overnight. I have in the preceding chapter suggested that while successful masculinity has become unfeasibly difficult to attain it has also become less important and simultaneously a sort of acceptable, within boundaries masculinity has come to include all kinds of men. It has ceased to be a grand societal project, but it has continued to be a process

in flux, co-negotiated with your peers, requiring engagement from everyone and as hopefully shown here, rebuilt with each generation.

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