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April 7, 2025

Reimagining the *Joshi-Mane*:
Japan's Shifting Gender Roles in Sports Anime and Manga

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Abstract

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By Holly Christine Middlebrooks

The “*joshi-manējā*” (abbreviated to *joshi-mane*) is a concept exclusive to Japan and refers to the female students who take upon the duty of supporting a sports team at the high school or college level. As a result of numerous iconic media portrayals of *joshi-mane* in 1980s and 1990s media, the *joshi-mane* trope was popularized to the point where it continues to be a staple in Japanese media revolving around sports. While heavily romanticized, the *joshi-mane* has simultaneously been subject to various criticism throughout the years, highlighting the traditional enforcement of problematic gender roles in Japanese society. Previous media portrayals of *joshi-mane* have contributed to this issue by painting *joshi-mane* as submissive “idol” characters who have more emphasis placed on their physical attributes over their sense of identity and servitude to the team.

However, with the turn of the 21st century, Japan has witnessed the gradual emergence of a new variety of *joshi-mane* characters in media. This thesis aims to explore the shifts in anime and manga portrayals of *joshi-mane* from the “heyday” of the *joshi-mane* character in the 1980s and 1990s to more modern depictions of the 21st century. Additionally, this thesis will examine broader revelations regarding gender roles in the realm of high school and college sports in Japan, such as the Japan Baseball High School Federation’s rulings regarding *joshi-mane* in the famous *Kōshien* tournament. Overall, by analyzing recent portrayals of *joshi-mane* in Japanese anime and manga in the context of shifting expectations regarding the manager role and gender in actual Japanese sports, I argue for the present state of the *joshi-mane* not as one of forced subjugation, but in fact, a modern Japan success story with distinctly feminist undertones.

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Introduction:

If you ever have the privilege to attend a match at *Kōshien*, Japan's iconic high school baseball tournament, you will no doubt be greeted with a grand spectacle bordering on sensory overload; perfectly synchronized student cheer squads, players carefully scooping the "hallowed" *Kōshien* soil into glass vials as keepsakes, and if you're particularly lucky, you might catch a glimpse of one of Japan's up-and-coming-breakout stars, such as global phenomenon Shohei Ohtani, who experienced his first taste of fame at *Kōshien*. However, in the midst of all of this euphoric chaos, you might notice a lone girl darting back and forth among the sea of male players in the dugout or on the field. She will likely be sporting a baggy tracksuit with the high school's name branded across the back, or perhaps even a uniform identical to the players. Perched upon her head is the team's official baseball cap, worn with evident pride. Although she is clearly associated with the team, this girl is not a player. This sight might strike some foreign spectators, in particular, as unusual; just who is this girl? The answer can be found in the midst of Japan's male-dominated sporting world, in which a supporting role has been carved out in high school and college sports for students wishing to assist their school's athletic clubs (most frequently team sports such as baseball, soccer, and rugby).

This is the *joshi manējā*, a role that has been uniquely shaped by Japanese culture and history. The term *joshi-manējā* (女子マネージャー) literally translates to "female/girl manager" and is frequently shortened to the term "*joshi-mane*." While the inclusion of the word "manager" in this term might imply the role to have a certain authoritative status, akin to a coach or advisor, the Japanese interpretation of the word in this context is slightly different.¹ Rather than a manager, the tasks and footing of the *joshi-mane* have historically been more akin to that of a batboy in American baseball culture, with the *joshi-mane* performing a similar, albeit slightly

more involved supportive service to the team: preparing water bottles and *onigiri* snacks, washing player's uniforms, operating the scoreboards, tidying up after practice, and a countless number of additional tasks.

Another key aspect to note regarding the term “*manējā*” is that it has come to be associated almost entirely with female students. For this reason, although the formal designation of “*joshi-manējā*” is occasionally used, the expectation that the manager is female (the “*joshi*” part) is implicit and therefore often unverballed, leading to the more frequent usage of just “*manējā*” or “*mane*.” While there is no set rule that the manager must be a female student, there are a set of gendered expectations that have co-opted the term. Such preconceived notions regarding the innately “feminine” (and therefore insignificant) status of manager role are widespread in the Japanese sporting world, as displayed in the following anecdote from 2022:

This summer, while covering a regional high school baseball tournament, I spotted some male team members in uniform packing their bags and serving tea to alumni at a powerful school, among the female managers. "I used to be a player, but I gave up because of injuries and lack of ability," the member told me. When I asked him, "Are you a manager now?" He flatly denied it, saying, "No, I'm a staff member." Even though the work he was doing was the same as a manager's... As I puzzled over this, a male member of the team frankly told me, "When I think of a manager, I imagine a girl who does odd jobs and menial tasks. So I don't want to think of myself as a manager."²

The irony of this statement lies in the fact that, until the mid 1960s, the manager role was exclusively occupied by male students,³ to the extent where the emergence of the first *joshi-mane* was considered a ludicrous concept. Just as women have been disenfranchised in other realms (politics, the workforce, etc.) of Japanese society, Japan has a long history of actively barring women from entering the realm of sports, as well.⁴

One of the proposed reasons behind this discrimination is the longtime characterization of the sporting world being “too masculine” of a place for women to set foot in. Robin Kietlinski builds upon this concept in *Japanese Women and Sport: Beyond Baseball and Sumo* (2011), stating that:

The consideration of masculinity is important for historical studies of women in sport, as athletic endeavours have long been associated not only with masculinity but also with the masculinization of women.⁵

Perhaps it is this fear of the “masculinization of women” that led Japanese society to dissuade women from becoming too involved with the sporting world, much less actively participating in sports for much of its history. Such discrimination is evident during the early years of the Meiji era (1868–1912), whereas male students were engaging in more vigorous physical activity, such as team sports, in preparation for war,⁶ the concept of girl’s physical education was essentially “synonymous” with dance.⁷

Naturally, this desire to maintain the masculinity of male-dominated spaces extended beyond the physical education curriculum and into matters regarding team sports as well. As previously stated, the role of the manager was initially one performed exclusively by male students. This wasn’t the result of any explicit prohibition on women occupying the role, however. As the manager role emerged during pre-war Japan, a period in which schools were entirely single-sex, athletic teams were compelled to utilize the readily available male students. That being said, this explanation only applies to pre-war Japan— even following the post-war switch to a co-educational school system in 1947, it would take over a decade for the first female managers to finally emerge in the 1960s.⁸ In attempting to explain why the emergence of the

joshi-mane role occurred in the 1960s, as opposed to immediately following the implementation of the mixed-sex education system, *joshi-mane* scholar Masahiro Takai proposes the following:

It is often pointed out that this was due to the gender role division of labor that had taken root in the period of rapid economic growth, where "men work and women do housework," and this was reflected in club activities. However, I believe that another major factor was that, as the rate of boys going on to university increased, they began to avoid sports clubs in order to focus on studying for their entrance exams, creating a need for female managers as manpower.⁹

However, it is important to note that the number of *joshi-mane* did not increase quickly.

According to a survey done by the *Asahi Shimbun*, only around 10 percent of the member schools of the Tokyo High School Baseball Federation had female managers in 1968,¹⁰ almost ten years removed from their initial emergence. This slow increase is almost certainly a direct consequence of the societal barriers previously discussed, particularly regarding the desire to maintain the masculinity of male-dominated spaces (This topic will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 1).

Nevertheless, more female students continued to find intrigue in the manager role, and the 1970s and 1980s proved to be much more fruitful than the 1960s in producing *joshi-mane*.¹¹ By the 1990s, the *joshi-mane* had solidified itself as a staple in the Japanese high school (and college, to a lesser extent) school system, having been popularized by the development of the heroine *joshi-mane* trope in 1980s media. One of the most important portrayals of a *joshi-mane* to emerge from this period is undoubtedly the character of Minami Asakura from Mitsuru Adachi's iconic baseball manga, *Touch* (1981–1986). The bright and bubbly Minami became touted as the gold standard *joshi-mane*, and even to this day, is cited by real-life *joshi-mane* as a major inspiration for their work.¹² For this reason, characters such as Minami are often credited

for popularizing the *joshi-mane* role among women, which would lead to the role being completely associated with and dominated by women by the end of the 1990s.

While the rapid increase in the number of *joshi-mane* within the Japanese sports world can be viewed as a victory for women's involvement in a realm that previously sought to exclude them, it also marked a distinct shift in the nature of the "manager" role—one which had the tendency to reinforce potentially harmful gender roles for women. This difference becomes particularly evident when comparing the perceived value of male managers in the past with that of *joshi-mane* in more recent years. For example, in examining attitudes towards the pre-war male managers, Takai dissects the following quote sourced from the Osaka branch of the *Asahi Shimbun* in 1938, which expands on the structure of men's athletic teams:

The director of the club must first do his utmost to find a teacher who is experienced in the field and appoint him as the director of the club. In other words, the director should take care in selecting the captain and manager, and should guide the members of the club in order to establish a healthy club.¹³

What Takai found enlightening about this description was its emphasis on the role of the manager as key to the team, positioning it alongside the captain in terms of importance.¹⁴ I strongly concur with Takai's assessment of this quote; in this context, the manager clearly holds an authoritative, assertive position among the team. Another important characteristic of past male managers was the diversity of their expected tasks and responsibilities. While they did assist with tasks more commonly associated with today's manager position, such as preparing water bottles, they were also frequently responsible for negotiating external matches and administering the team's budget.¹⁵

In contrast to these pre-war male managers, the role of the *joshi-mane* as solidified in the 1990s was adjusted to align with qualities traditionally associated with femininity. In other

words, the manager position was relegated to a “supporting role” akin to that of a housewife working to create a calming atmosphere for her husband to return home to; banished to the realm of laundry, cleaning, and meal preparation. This reflects the societal shifts that occurred during Japan’s high growth period, which Takai previously described in terms of “the gender role division of labor that had taken root in the period of rapid economic growth, where ‘men work and women do housework.’”¹⁶ On this basis, no longer were managers viewed as one of the leaders of the team alongside the captain—it would be more fitting to compare them to idol figures, whose value was judged on the basis of their perceived “refreshing-ness” to the players and ability to create a bright atmosphere.

The perception of *joshi-mane* as girls who perform odd tasks has persisted to a certain extent over the years, as evidenced by the previous statement in which the male baseball “staff member” refused to refer to himself as a “manager” due to his view of a manager being “a girl who does odd jobs and menial tasks.”¹⁷ Indeed, this was the prevailing view of many newspaper outlets in the 1990s, who protested against the newly derived “sexist” implications of the *joshi-mane* position.¹⁸ However, an examination of more recent Japanese newspapers (primarily the *Asahi Shimbun*, *Mainichi Shimbun*, and *Yomiuri Shimbun*) revealed a notable absence of any criticism regarding the “sexist” nature of the role. This raises several questions: Have the generalizations surrounding the manager role shifted over the past couple of decades? Has the role itself acquired a new set of associations? And what implications does this hold for the evolution of gender roles in Japan as a whole?

To investigate these questions, I decided on portrayals of *joshi-mane* in manga and anime franchises as the medium for analysis. Several factors informed this decision to focus on sports manga and anime as the optimal medium for analyzing the evolution of the *joshi-mane* role and

its implications for traditional gender roles in Japan. First and foremost, as most *joshi-mane* are high school students and therefore minors, it proved extremely difficult to locate and interview these individuals in a society which emphasizes privacy to the extent that Japan does. Therefore, the collection of data through direct interviews became an unfeasible option. This had little impact on the overall approach for this thesis, however, as a significant portion had already been designated for an investigation into the evolution of *joshi-mane* in the media. Consequently, I opted to expand my analysis of manga and anime portrayals of *joshi-mane* in greater depth, which ultimately proved to be a wise choice. As exemplified by Minami Asakura from baseball manga *Touch*, fictional portrayals of *joshi-mane* have historically held an immense amount of influence in shifting the Japanese public's perception of the role. It is for this reason that most existing studies on *joshi-mane* and media, such as the work of Masahiro Takai, revolve around the portrayal of the *joshi-mane* in franchises from the mid 1980s to the early 1990s, which established what I will be referring to as the "classic" *joshi-mane* trope. While this thesis will also include an analysis of characters originating from this period, it will primarily be for the sake of comparison rather than providing any new, critical insight. The central focus of this study lies in the portrayal of *joshi-mane* characters in the 21st century, especially those that have emerged in the last 15 years. If the roles associated with the manager position are indeed evolving, this should be reflected to a certain extent in Japanese media, as media has historically proven to be a critical driver of social transformation.¹⁹

Additionally, the fact that *joshi-mane* operate within the realm of sports is crucial to this analysis. As explored by Kietlinski, sports have been closely linked to political and social changes in modern Japan since around the Meiji Restoration.²⁰ This is particularly relevant to women's issues, as Kietlinski notes:

Over the years, opinions on what sports were or were not ‘acceptable’ for women has evolved considerably, and much can be said about concurrent changes in society by analysing the contemporary discourse.²¹

The same concept applies to the presence of *joshi-mane* in the male-dominated spaces that are athletic clubs— what roles continue to be considered too “masculine” for them? Are certain tasks even framed in such a definitively gendered manner anymore?

With all of these questions in mind, alongside months of analyzing the role of the *joshi-mane* in both past and present media, I now use this thesis to present the following arguments: There has been a distinct shift in the portrayal of *joshi-mane* characters between those in manga and anime of the 1980s-1990s and those that have emerged in the late 2000s and 2010s. These changes suggest that the role of the manager has become one which now centers significantly less around gender and “feminine” work, and contrary to sentiment popularized in the 1990s by mainstream media, it is no longer accurate to characterize the position of *joshi-mane* as one of subjugation. If anything, the *joshi-mane* has blossomed into a narrative with an underlying feminist nature, in the sense that *joshi-mane* characters have assumed a significantly more involved role, challenging traditional gender norms and offering a more nuanced, empowering representation of women in sports. Furthermore, the changes that have occurred regarding gender conformity among women are not limited to the realm of sports but are indicative of broader societal shifts within Japan as a whole.

Literature Review

The research for this thesis represents a highly interdisciplinary approach, integrating gender studies, media studies, and sports studies and history—the latter of which I would designate as best encompassing the specific examination of *joshi-mane* (outside of the context of Japanese studies). The common thread uniting these disciplines is their connection to gender, particularly in how they portray and communicate societal gender roles. These fields are deeply intertwined, with some sources fitting seamlessly into all three categories. Robin Kielinski's *Japanese Women and Sport: Beyond Baseball and Sumo* (2011) serves as an instance of such a text, as it offers insights that bridge gender, media, and sports studies, demonstrating the links between these areas of scholarship.

Additionally, as the *joshi-mane* is a concept uniquely situated within Japanese history and culture, I framed my research primarily using works either written explicitly about Japan or authored by Japanese scholars. This approach was particularly necessary given the complete lack of English publications on the topic of the *joshi-mane*. Therefore, I relied completely on Japanese scholarship for any texts specifically engaging with the *joshi-mane*. Inevitably, my research incorporates certain foreign perspectives and theories, particularly due to the influence of prominent, non-Japanese gender scholars such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, whose work on topics like homosociality has shaped the approaches of *joshi-mane* specialists whose scholarship I rely on extensively. As such foreign scholarship becomes relevant throughout the literature review, I will further elaborate on their work and why their contributions are essential to this decidedly “Japanese” topic. This literature review will be comprised of three sections: Masahiro Takai's works on the *joshi-mane* (specifically in relation to the media), a description of Japanese

femininity and traditional gender roles as applied to the *joshi-mane*, and a review of women's involvement in Japan's sporting realm.

TAKAI'S WORK ON *JOSHI-MANE* AND THE MEDIA

As the leading scholar of *joshi-mane* studies in Japan, Masahiro Takai's publications on the emergence, evolution, and portrayal of *joshi-mane* formed the initial foundation of my research. There are two texts, in particular, which were extremely relevant to this thesis. The first, and primary text I utilized was Takai's most well-known publication, *The Birth of Female Managers and the Media* (2005). This book serves multiple purposes: not only does it provide an exceptionally detailed timeline of the development of the manager role from pre-war Japan to the early 2000s, but it also applies various theories from American gender scholar Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick to analyze the psyche of the *joshi-mane* within the context of Japan's male-dominated sporting domain. It is for this reason that Takai introduces Sedgwick's ideas of homosociality,²² particularly in the glorification of male bonds, into the equation of the *joshi-mane* experience, as with each generation of *joshi-mane* emerges a changing perspective on the acceptability of femininity within the sporting realm. Building upon the idea of the *joshi-mane* as a feminine presence in a homosocial male group, Takai presents the framework of the "boundary":

In this book, the schematic of "male groups and women" is used, with the point of contact between male sports teams and women being designated as the "boundary." Here, the boundary refers to the psychological and physical points of contact between male groups and women. At times, it serves as a space where women create communication and a sense of unity with the men, while at other times, it exists as a wall that prevents understanding of the athlete's emotions.²³

It is through this understanding that Takai situates the experience of the *joshi-mane* in both real life and fictional portrayals, which have significantly influenced the public perception of the role.

While Takai's analysis is exceptionally comprehensive and insightful, it must be noted that this discourse is now over 20 years old, and I find that the *joshi-mane* role has evolved significantly since then. The age of this study, coupled with the lack of work on the *joshi-mane* since around 2010, significantly influenced the decision to focus this thesis on more recent *joshi-mane* portrayals from the past 15 years. Therefore, while this thesis utilizes topics emphasized by Takai, such as the nature of male bonds and the "boundary" concept, it will conversely be using them to argue for the more recent minimization of gender roles, as displayed by the *joshi-mane*.

The second text, Takai's 2004 publication, "A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge About Disputations of Sexism in Media– About the Case of Female Managers in High School Baseball," offers a focused sociological analysis of the media controversy regarding the "sexist" nature of the *joshi-mane* position that occurred from late 1980 to mid 1990s. Takai draws upon the reports of the *Asahi Shimbun*, which played a key role in this public debate regarding *joshi-mane*. Although Takai does emphasize the importance of such major media outlets in influencing how concepts such as how *joshi-mane* are perceived, he also argues for the importance of considering a range of other factors which can shape gender roles and sexist ideologies. Given that this thesis is grounded in the analysis of fictional media portrayals, such insights were particularly relevant to the development of its intended narrative. Additionally, it must be acknowledged that this publication was invaluable to my research not only for the thoughtful analysis it offered, but for its inclusion of numerous examples of older Japanese headlines on *joshi-mane* that would otherwise be difficult to access digitally due to their age. Therefore, I would like to state that many of the older newspaper excerpts featured in this thesis (such as those which emerge in Chapter 2) are sourced from Takai's journal article.

DESCRIBING JAPANESE FEMININITY AND TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES AS APPLIED TO THE *JOSHI-MANE*

While embarking on this research, particular attention was given to establishing parameters of what femininity refers to in a Japanese context, given that the *joshi-mane* role has been said to be the “epitome” of feminine work.²⁴ Therefore, I utilized multiple works regarding Japanese women and gender to inform my designation of Japanese femininity. Starting on a chronological basis, there are certain deeply rooted concepts in Japanese society that continue to have an effect on modern-day perceptions of gender that require careful review. I therefore began this review with Kathleen Uno’s “The Death of “Good Wife, Wise Mother”?” (1993), which explores the transformations that the traditional *ryōsai kenbo* (“good wife, wise mother”) ideal underwent in the aftermath of World War II. The concept of *ryōsai kenbō* emerged at the end of the nineteenth century during Japan’s Meiji era, when it was strongly promoted by the Japanese government. Uno explains that “*ryōsai kenbō* defined women as managers of domestic affairs in households and nurturers of children.”²⁵ Although the *ryōsai kenbō* ideal is no longer as central to the identity of Japanese women as it once was, it has continued to play a role in shaping expectations of women's roles as caretakers. Regarding this point, Uno argues that despite the post-war increase of societal opportunities for women, the “good wife, wise mother” perception of women as being in service to others continued to influence various aspects of Japanese society, (such as state policies, education, and employment) well into the late 1980s. This is relevant to the issue of *joshi-mane* for several reasons: not only has a large portion of the criticism regarding the *joshi-mane* role been centered around its maternalistic nature, but additionally, if the “good wife, wise mother” ideal continued to exert such a strong influence on Japanese society until the late 1980s, this overlaps with both the period in which *joshi-mane* initially emerged (1960s), and the

period when the “classic” *joshi-mane* trope was popularized in Japanese media (1980s–1990s). This would therefore suggest that *ryōsai kenbō* might have played a role in the foundation of the *joshi-mane* role.

In describing a more “modern day” designation of femininity as it relates to the *joshi-mane* role, I relied heavily on “Feminine Work and Female Managers,” which is Tomomi Tsunagawa’s 2008 study on traditional notions of femininity and how they manifest in workplaces typically associated with femininity, such as the *joshi-mane* role. In this study, Tsunagawa employs the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI), which is American psychologist Sandra Bem’s 1974 attempt to categorize certain personality traits into distinct realms of masculinity and femininity. The BSRI has been widely used as a well-established tool for categorizing gender-based characteristics of personality for studies in social psychology. Tsunagawa takes the categorization one step further, as she dissects the “feminine” qualities into three sub-categories associated with specific types of roles Japanese women are expected to fulfill throughout their life: the Care Role (which emphasizes maternalistic qualities such as “nurturing”), the Support Role (which refers to “wifely” qualities such as obedience to a “superior” figure), and the Idol Role (which is defined by a charming appearance and social appeal).²⁶ Tsunagawa provides examples professions align with each “feminine” role (and are also primarily taken upon by women): the Care Role is evident in professions such as nursing, the Support Role in positions such as dental assistants, and the Idol Role as exemplified by flight attendants.²⁷

Although at its core, the position of a *joshi-mane* is simply an extracurricular activity for high school and college students, most of the participants approach it with the same sincerity as one would a paying job. For this reason, these three roles hold great relevance to this analysis of portrayals of *joshi-mane*, as they provided a set guideline on how femininity manifests in anime

and manga. Utilizing these roles allowed for the identification of multiple patterns of the attitudes and expectations regarding the *joshi-mane* position, especially in older portrayals.

A REVIEW OF WOMEN IN JAPAN'S WORLD OF SPORTS

Japanese Women and Sport: Beyond Baseball and Sumo (2011) by Robin Kietlinski served as the primary source for a comprehensive account on the history of Japan's sporting world, particularly as it pertains to women. Kietlinski provides a nuanced narrative, acknowledging that while Japan has historically restricted the activity of women in many spheres, the participation of Japanese women in sports has ultimately provided a space that allows women to challenge narratives of female oppression. As mentioned in the introduction, one of Kietlinski's key points, which is also central to this thesis, is the intrinsic connection between the development of modern Japanese sports and the broader political and social changes occurring in the nation.²⁸ Another aspect of *Japanese Women and Sport: Beyond Baseball and Sumo* that is important to this thesis is exploration into the intersection of gender and sports, particularly in the tendency for involvement with sports to be associated with masculinity (which relates to Takai's discussion of homosocial groups). For this reason, although Kietlinski's research tends to revolve primarily around female athletes, Japanese society's past marginalization of female athletes in the sporting world due to its explicit association with masculinity mirrors certain hardships faced by *joshi-mane* similarly seeking recognition in the sporting world. Finally, Kietlinski examines various media portrayals of women in the sporting world, as she argues that the way in which female athletes—both real and fictional—are represented (regarding issues such as appearance, for example) reflects Japan's broader societal views and expectations of women. Notably, she acknowledges the presence of sports manga (which she refers to as *supokon manga*) as a “major

constituent of Japan's literature on sport,"²⁹ further reinforcing the decision to center this thesis on portrayals found in anime and manga.

Chapter 1: The Glorification of Male Bonds and Expulsion of Femininity in Japan's Sports

The first noticeable dimension of change is the shifting emphasis on bonds between male characters compared to those between female characters in sports-related anime and manga. Within this genre, the deep and unwavering connections between teammates are frequently romanticized. However, this romanticization has not been distributed equally across genders, with the glorification of male bonds receiving a disproportionate emphasis.

Such an emphasis on relations between men is seen consistently throughout Japanese history, with an early example manifesting in the conduct among the decidedly homosocial sphere of the samurai class.³⁰ Male homosociality, as theorized by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, refers to the social relationships between men that are characterized by deep emotional or social bonds, while simultaneously being shaped by anxieties regarding homosexuality.³¹ This homosocial “samurai model” has been argued to have been inherited by other male-dominated movements and organizations in later periods of Japanese history, most notably exemplified by the “*bankara*”³² movement that gained traction among Meiji era youth during the 1910s and 1920s. This movement stemmed from a desire to return to the “primal” roots of masculinity, as a direct response to the apparent “feminization” of Japanese men brought about by Westernization and “civilization.”³³ *Bankara* youth were known for their rowdy behavior, rejection of orderly conduct, and most importantly, their deep pride in their unbreakable brotherhood. Many aspects originating from both the samurai model and the chaotic *Bankara*-inspired celebrations of manhood carried over to the realm of high school sports, particularly in the unconditionally supportive, almost sacred bond that existed between men’s athletic teams and the male cheerleading squad.³⁴ The relationship between these two groups exemplifies how homosocial

tendencies have not only come to define Japan's sporting culture, but also have served as a strong foundation for the deep bonds between its participants.

While a strong sense of support certainly existed between the men's athletic teams and the cheering squads, there is nothing that is glorified more than the bonds among teammates themselves. In a distinctly Japanese manner, such bonds were prioritized for the team's smooth functioning, but also served the valuable purpose of uniting past and present players, which in turn fostered a shared sense of history and purpose, perpetuating a cycle of motivation.³⁵

The importance of the bonds between teammates is consistently highlighted in the 50th Year Anniversary Publication of the Yao City High School's Rugby Club, in which a statement from a 1956 player likens the bonds between his teammates to "treasure."³⁶

Sedgwick's concept of homosociality is critical to understanding how femininity has historically been regarded in male-dominated spaces, as Takai asserts that "male bonding is always found in the exclusion of women."³⁷ Therefore, not only are bonds with or between women extremely undervalued, but the mere presence of women is discouraged within decidedly masculine spaces, such as sports teams. These misogynistic viewpoints were particularly prevalent during the period in which *joshi-mane* initially emerged, in a manner closely mirroring the scorn for femininity during the height of the *bankara* movement. The prevailing consensus of the 1960s was that women had absolutely no place in male sports,³⁸ which ran parallel to the belief that the presence of women would provoke impure thoughts and actions in the male players. As a result of this widespread misogyny in the sporting world, public coverage on *joshi-mane* was overwhelmingly negative for the first several years, with the only occasion in which they would be reported on favorably being whenever a *joshi-mane* actively sought to cast aside her femininity in order to "become a man."³⁹

This attack against femininity inevitably led to the strong internalization of misogyny among many women who operated in close proximity to or within male-dominated spaces, subsequently fostering a strong desire to conceal one's femininity. Due to such sentiment, it was common practice for *joshi-mane* to downplay their outwardly female appearance until the early 1970s, making the determination to forego makeup and other cosmetic treatments for the sake of their *joshi-mane* role. Such is demonstrated by a college-aged female manager interviewed by the *Asahi Shimbun* in 1969:

“I made the decision to never wear makeup at the training camp. For someone like me who loves to dress up, not wearing lipstick is very difficult. But for the remainder of my college life, I have the task of being a manager. I'll make them forget the fact that I'm a woman.”⁴⁰

While the tide would eventually turn to the point where it conversely became *expected* of *joshi-mane* to maintain a presentable (in other words, feminine) appearance, the misogynistic attitude had deeply rooted itself within the *joshi-mane* movement, and began to manifest in different ways which, although subtle, are still visible today. In stark contrast to the heavily glorified bonds between men, there is a noticeable trend among *joshi-mane* (and other women in male-dominated spaces) of harboring feelings of strong disdain for other women. This was noted by Tsunagawa in her 2011 study on the *joshi-mane* identity, where she observed that while the *joshi-mane* she interviewed seemed to idolize the relationships between male teammates, many displayed tendencies of distancing themselves from their fellow *joshi-mane* and female classmates.⁴¹ This sentiment is displayed particularly by “Girl B,” who stated the following in her interview:

“I can't enter a place full of women. Maybe it's because I've been among boys all my life? I just can't keep up with a group of girls acting all cutesy with one another. It's out of the question for me (to be in a group of girls).”⁴²

Alongside the clear glorification of male bonds, the internalized misogyny of *joshi-mane* has received a fair amount of coverage in Japanese media, with it occurring at a higher rate in sports franchises of the 1980s and 1990s, which of course, is the era in which the “classic” *joshi-mane* trope had begun to solidify itself in Japanese pop culture. There are three primary aspects that define the internalized misogynist *joshi-mane* trope as depicted in previous anime and manga from this period. First, the amount of time that the *joshi-mane* is shown to spend with other female characters must be taken into consideration. Of course, in stories that focus primarily on the sport itself, there is a higher likelihood that there won’t be as many opportunities to establish the *joshi-mane* character as somebody with valued relationships outside the team (such as her role as a friend, or classmate). However, there are numerous examples of *joshi-mane* from this period who, despite receiving narrative coverage outside the practice grounds, still find themselves surrounded by men (or, at the very least, are rarely seen interacting with women).

A prime example of this character type is Kazumi Endo from Tsukasa Ōshima’s *Shoot!* (1990–2003), which is a manga series revolving around an up-and-coming high school soccer team. As the singular manager of the Kakegawa High School soccer team, Kazumi naturally spends a large amount of time with the players during practice. However, she is depicted as consistently associated with men, even outside the team’s activities—frequently spending time at protagonist Toshihiko’s home or catching motorcycle rides with the local biker gang. There is only one instance, occurring in Chapter 32, where she is shown to briefly greet two friends, neither of whom appear for the remainder of the manga. While a part of her tendency to gravitate toward male-dominated spaces can be attributed to her reputation as a “delinquent,” this

explanation does not fully account for her aggressive attitude towards other female characters later in the story.

This brings us to the second aspect commonly associated with this trope: a clear dislike, or even hatred, for other female characters. Until Chapter 34 of the *Shoot!* manga, Kazumi is rarely seen interacting with any of her female classmates. However, Chapter 34 features an aggravated Kazumi verbally berating her female teammates in gym class; a complete change in demeanor from the slightly abrasive, yet generally enthusiastic girl that has been established up to that point. In addition to seizing and monopolizing the ball from her teammates, Kazumi harshly reprimands them, shouting phrases such as “You’re too slow!” “Don’t block my way!” and “You want me to hit you?! ”⁴³ Although author Tsukasa Ōshima likely included this for comedic effect, actions like this contribute to Kazumi’s overall characterization as somebody completely indifferent to her female peers. Such behavior is further exemplified in Kazumi’s interactions with the character of Minako Kitahara, who is the girlfriend of soccer team captain Yoshiharu Kubo. Upon their first meeting in Chapter 33, Kazumi’s disregard for other women is starkly evident by her cold response to Minako. Despite Minako approaching Kazumi with a friendly demeanor, Kazumi immediately snaps at her not to use her first name freely, undermines her status as Kubo’s girlfriend, and eventually proceeds to degrade Minako on a physical basis, stating that “If you don’t put on any makeup, you’ll definitely look different. [...] Anyway, your makeup is thick, like an old lady.”⁴⁴

Kazumi’s unilateral hostility towards Minako connects to the final aspect commonly seen in the internalized misogynist trope: a strong infatuation with a certain male character (typically a player), an idealization of the “masculine bond” between players, or even more frequently, a combination of the two in which admiration for a specific player is intrinsically linked to the

nature of their relationship with the other players. This is specifically identified by Takai as a defining characteristic of many *joshi-mane* (as of 2005) in *The Birth of Female Managers and the Media*, as he again alludes to the *joshi-mane*'s fascination with the "boundary" between them and the homosocial male group:

"However, the attraction they feel toward men is more related to the 'masculinity of men belonging to a male group' or 'the relationships between men,' rather than the individual charm of the men themselves."⁴⁵

Initially, it seems that Kazumi might simply be a very outspoken fan of the team captain, Kubo, as she is extremely territorial of him, which is implied to be the reason why she dislikes his girlfriend, Minako. Kazumi will therefore take any opportunity she can to paint Minako as an incapable girlfriend, such as in Chapter 36, when she discovers protagonist Toshihiko Tanaka and Minako together at a cafe. Kazumi flies into a rage, accusing Minako of "two-timing" Kubo. In reality, the pair had encountered each other while Kubo was being flocked by fans after a game and decided to wait for him together—a completely platonic meeting. In this moment, however, Kazumi's possessive nature expands past Kubo to include Toshihiko as well, as she aggressively orders Minako to leave. In this sense, while Kazumi may indeed harbor a special admiration for Kubo, her underlying desire lies in preserving the homosocial environment of the team that she has come to romanticize, with the female attention that Kubo tends to attract serving as the biggest threat to this goal. Therefore, to Kazumi, all other women—except for herself—are perceived as enemies who could disrupt the precious atmosphere of masculinity in "her" soccer team. Taken together, these characters present Kazumi as the epitome of a *joshi-mane* character with a strong sense of internalized misogyny and a persistent habit of idolizing the relationships of the men around her.

While this internalized misogyny and romanticization of male bonds may have been characteristic of *joshi-mane* portrayals from the 1980s to the early 2000s, there has been a noticeable shift in focus towards female bonds in sports anime and manga over the past 15 years. A prominent example of this shift is illustrated by Natsumi Iwasaki's 2009 publication, *Moshi Kōkō Yakyū no Joshi Manager ga Drucker no "Management" wo Yondara* (English title: *What If the Female Manager of a High School Baseball Team Read Drucker's "Management"?*), which has been affectionately abbreviated to "*Moshidora*." This baseball manga functions in a dramatically different manner than its preceding sports franchises in the way that the story hinges on the extremely close relationship between two of the female managers: main protagonist Minami Kawashima (not to be confused with Minami Asakura from *Touch*) and her terminally ill best friend, Yuki. Whereas most previous *joshi-mane* were depicted as a team out of admiration for or a connection to a specific player, Minami joins solely with the goal of fulfilling Yuki's dream of leading the Hodokubo baseball team to *Kōshien*. This is made abundantly clear from the first episode of the anime, where one of the opening scenes depicts Minami diligently searching for a book on management, as she mutters "I must endure! This is for Yuki's sake! For Nationals!"⁴⁶ Minami's willingness to shoulder such a significant responsibility for her friend becomes even more poignant when considering that Minami *despises* baseball due to a past negative experience. This profound sense of loyalty and affection isn't one-sided, however; just as Minami treasures her friendship with Yuki, Yuki demonstrates an immense amount of respect for Minami. This mutual regard for one another is yet again, explicitly established in the first episode, where Yuki is moved to tears when recalling a childhood home run hit by Minami, which has remained a significant source of inspiration for her: "Something I hadn't experienced

since I was born grew within me... That impression, that excitement... I remember every detail.”⁴⁷

Although *Moshidora*’s story primarily revolves around the intimate relationship between Minami and Yuki, several supplementary plotlines further underscore the significance of female bonds as a core motif. In the second episode, it is revealed that another manager, the soft-spoken Ayano, also pursued the role of manager due to Yuki’s influence. In an emotional moment, Ayano tearfully confesses to Yuki: “I like you! I’ve always admired you. I want to help others like you do,”⁴⁸ when asked about her motivations for joining the team. Following this revelation, Yuki remains Ayano’s primary source of motivation throughout the series, with Ayano responding most effectively to feedback and suggestions offered by Yuki, over those from the players and even the coach.

Moshidora occasionally portrays conflict between the *joshi-mane*, yet nothing implies that these conflicts stem from a place of internalized misogyny. A notable example occurs during the initial interaction between the outgoing, assertive Minami and the more reserved Ayano. Minami eventually becomes frustrated with Ayano’s inability to clearly state her opinions, which prompts Ayano’s tearful confession of her admiration for Yuki serving as her motivation to become a manager. From this point onward, Minami becomes more mindful of Ayano’s boundaries, while Ayano makes a concerted effort to be more proactive in her *joshi-mane* duties.

Another instance of conflict between the girls arises with the introduction of Hanae. Initially presented as an antagonistic force, Hanae is described by Ayano as a girl with a “bad reputation” and is subsequently portrayed as a siren-like figure who utilizes her charms to lure male player Yunosuke away from the baseball team. Hanae’s cold demeanor regarding the baseball team coupled with the rumor provided by Ayano, leads the viewer to anticipate that Hanae will further

develop as an antagonist. However, *Moshidora* completely subverts these expectations by offering a more nuanced portrayal of Hanae, revealing her to be someone who simply does not comprehend the level of devotion required for the baseball team. In a reversal of expectations, the episode concludes with Hanae becoming the fourth manager of the Hodokubo baseball team, as she is eager to try devoting herself to a shared cause.

Overall, the four *joshi-mane* of the Hodokubo baseball team share a close-knit relationship, devoid of the possessive dynamics exhibited by earlier *joshi-mane* characters, such as Kazumi. Each of the four girls acknowledges her distinct role within the team and are never shown to harbor competitive feelings towards one another. This harmonious relationship is illustrated particularly well in episode 8, where Minami is shown sitting in the bleachers during a game alongside the cheering squad. When asked why she isn't in the dugout—typically reserved for the “main” manager who handles the scorebook—Minami smiles and replies, “Unlike Yuki and Ayano, I have no place in the dugout.”⁴⁹ Minami demonstrates no jealousy towards Ayano, exuding a strong level of security in her identity as a *joshi-mane*.

While undeniably an idealized portrayal of the *joshi-mane* experience, *Moshidora* contains many aspects which reflect the reality of the relationships between modern *joshi-mane* in Japan. One such aspect is seen in the motivations behind becoming a *joshi-mane*. Whereas older franchises, such as *Touch* and *Shoot!* tend to link the motivations of their respective *joshi-mane* characters for joining the team to a particular male character (in Kazumi's case, this would be Kubo), this typically isn't the case in real life Japanese sports. One of the questions that Tsunagawa posed to her *joshi-mane* interviewees was the question of “Why did you decide to become a manager?”. Of the five participants, three (Girls A, D, and E), stated that their decision to become a *joshi-mane* was influenced by female upperclassmen and friends, either being

directly invited to join the team, or admiring their work from afar. In contrast, the remaining two participants (Girls B and C) did not attribute their motivations to any admiration for the male players, thereby challenging the common assumption that motivations for joining tend to correlate with an interest in the players.⁵⁰

To conclude, this section offers a more contemporary perspective in response to Takai's emphasis on identity of the *joshi-mane* as wrapped up in a fascination of *joshi-mane* with homosocial male bonds and the boundary concept. While such concepts of internalized misogyny certainly appear to have characterized previous generations of *joshi-mane* and exercised strong influence even into the mid 2000s, there seems to be a growing effort to depict female characters as capable of forming deep and meaningful relations, particularly in the context of a male-dominated environment such as a men's athletic team. As a result, when examining a series like *Moshidora* which juxtaposes the female bonds exemplified by the *joshi-mane* alongside the male bonds exemplified by the male players, the notion that men are inherently better suited to forming and maintaining relationships, or that the "male connection" has an innately deeper quality, is diminished significantly. Consequently, not only are newer *joshi-mane* characters portrayed with greater nuance, but the fact that male bonds and female bonds are being treated with equal care indicates a shift in patriarchal values that traditionally position men as the priority in media narratives.

Chapter 2: Expectations of the Joshi-Mane's Responsibilities and Value

One of the most critical ways in which the nature of the *joshi-mane* has shifted in recent years is through the changing tasks they are expected to undertake, as well as the shifting attitudes exhibited by male players and other administrative bodies (such as the Japan High School Baseball Federation). These two topics have been central to nearly every “scandal” surrounding the *joshi-mane* role, from the early attacks made on women who dared to set foot into the male-dominated sports realm of the 1960s, to the fallout regarding the inherently sexist nature of the *joshi-mane* position pushed by outlets such as the *Asahi Shimbun* in the 1980s.⁵¹ As previously discussed, the emergence of female managers in the 1960s was initially regarded as an absurd concept, with one of the primary concerns of Japan’s more conservative circles (in the sense that such circles wished to maintain traditional gender roles and division) being that women wouldn’t be able to handle the important work expected of a manager. Such sentiment is reflected in the morning edition of Tokyo’s *Asahi Shimbun* in June of 1968 by an unnamed contact of the Japan High School Baseball Federation:

“Baseball is, after all, a man's sport, and it is impossible to expect girls to be managers in the true sense of the word.”⁵²

Over time, as the *joshi-mane* role became a fixture of high school and college sports in Japan, these concerns regarding the appropriateness of women operating in a male-dominated space died down significantly. There was a temporary lull in discourse, until concerns regarding the *joshi-mane* position resurfaced on the completely opposite side of the spectrum. Now, the media was pushing the narrative that the *joshi-mane* role was inherently discriminatory against women. These concerns were deliberated through a series of publications originating primarily from the *Asahi Shimbun*, which directly questioned the nature of the *joshi-mane* role, while accusing it of perpetuating harmful stereotypes against women during the late 1980s and 1990s.⁵³

The following headlines are examples of topics printed in the *Asahi Shimbun* during the early 1990s: “Female Managers of Athletic Clubs Play 'Housewife Role,' Public High School Teachers Surveyed” (November, 1992), “A Form Of Sexism? An Important Role? Various Reactions to the 'Female Manager Controversy’” (December, 1992), “The Social Inequality of ‘Female Managers’” (June 1994).⁵⁴ Many of these complaints hinged on the fact that the idea of the *joshi-mane* popularized in the 1980s had essentially become a perfect combination of submissive femininity as outlined by Japanese society at the time. Tsunagawa asserts a similar view in “Feminine Work and Female Managers”:

“In general, a female manager in an athletic department is the epitome of a feminine job. In club activities, female managers take care of the health and lifestyle of the athletes so that they can devote themselves to their sport, and they play a "care role". They also play a "support role" by performing various chores within the club activities to serve the athletes. At times, they become "idols" within the club and the object of male admiration. It is fair to say that they have all the elements of a womanly job.”⁵⁵

Based on this thesis’s analysis of classic *joshi-mane* portrayals in anime and manga, it’s understandable why Tsunagawa would assert this, as the vast majority of the *joshi-mane* characters examined displayed a combination of the Care Role, Support Role, and Idol Role she discusses in her study.⁵⁶

With it being established that the *joshi-mane* role embodies several defining qualities of “feminine work,” Tsunagawa was also interested in which specific tasks were the most valued by players. To answer this question, Tsunagawa utilizes findings by Inada (first name unknown), who conducted a survey in 1990 in order to gauge the perceived value of *joshi-mane* in different areas, according to the male team members. Tsunagawa divides the results of this survey into tasks associated with the Care Role (preparing tea, cleaning the club room, washing the uniform), the Support Role (recording match results, the administration of club funds, assisting with practice) and the Idol Role (creating a positive team atmosphere). In Inada’s original study,

players and *joshi-mane* were both expected to rate each task from a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 meaning “not helpful,” 2 being “not very helpful,” 3 being “fairly helpful” and 4 being “very helpful.”

While the players tended to rate the necessity of each of the manager’s tasks quite low across the board, certain roles received a noticeably larger portion of “3’s” and “4’s” than others. The answer that was consistently rated as being the most important to the players was the ability to “consult the *joshi-mane* about worries and concerns” (falling under “Idol Role”) with around 72% of players answering either a 3 (“fairly helpful”) or 4 (“very helpful”). The task that received the second most of 3s and 4s was the role of “helping with practice” (falling under “Support Role”), with around 61% being 3s and 4s and then “prepping equipment/cleaning up after practice,” (falling under “Support Role”) with around 58% answering 3s and 4s. The difference between the most valued and second most valued tasks is evident; there is nearly an 11% difference between the two, suggesting that “Idol Role” tasks such as cheering up players were considered to be the *joshi-mane*’s primary service to the team.

These findings align closely with my analysis regarding classic *joshi-mane* portrayals in anime and manga from the 1980s and 1990s both in terms of what variety of jobs the *joshi-mane* are seen doing most frequently, alongside how the perceived usefulness of these jobs are by the surrounding male team members. In the following section, Tsunagawa’s “Role” framework will be employed to analyze two classic *joshi-mane* characters in this context: Minami Asakura from *Touch* and Kazumi Endo from *Shoot!*.

Kazumi is a clear example of a *joshi-mane* character which is kept around mainly for moral support and emotional consultation— in other words, as a cheerleader with therapeutic properties. Despite her prickly attitude towards women, Kazumi tends to serve as a healing presence to the

male players of the Kakegawa soccer team, as she is frequently consulted by players who are struggling mentally. While an important role to fulfill, it is ultimately the *only* role that Kazumi provides to the team as manager; in every other regard, she is consistently portrayed as comically hopeless. Due to this, the team rarely seems to expect any other meaningful contributions from her. An example of this can be seen in Chapter 20 of the manga, when Kazumi takes a trio of first-year boys out to eat and the following interaction occurs:

Toshihiko: Wow, Kazumi is treating us! What a surprise this is!

Kazumi: It's alright! It's the club's money! So eat as much as you can!

Kenji: Who's the one that gave her responsibility as a manager?

Toshihiko: Beats me.⁵⁷

Such dwindling expectations of Kazumi's capabilities are reiterated once again in Chapter 18, as protagonist Toshihiko describes Kazumi to a non-team member:

Non-Team Member: So what is she like, your manager?

Toshihiko: Hmm... Callous, long skirt, never brings her book. Also a delinquent, likes fighting, has a rough attitude.

Kazuhiro: Hey, she's not that bad.

Non-Team Member: You should just fire a girl like that!

Toshihiko: Umm... Even though she's like that... She's quite cute.⁵⁸

Kazumi's true value in the mind of the Kakegawa soccer players can be gleaned from Toshihiko's words: she is a conventionally attractive girl who acts as their personal cheerleader and therapist. In these terms, it would be the most accurate to assign Tsunagawa's "Idol Role" to Kazumi's character, although she also displays certain characteristics of the "Support Role" as well.

Minami Asakura from *Touch* is another example of a *joshi-mane* who fully embodies the "Idol Role" for the Meisei High School Baseball Team. While unlike Kazumi, she is occasionally displayed carrying out miscellaneous tasks such as polishing balls or preparing snacks, her value from the team's perspective very clearly lies in her cheerleader-esque attitude

and refreshing appearance. Minami is frequently pictured faithfully cheering on the team from the sidelines, serving as a source of motivation for the players. Minami herself seems to place an enormous amount of value on her “duty” of cheering on the team, as seen by Chapter 47 of the manga when she thinks the following to herself: “*Kōshien*... That’s all I’m thinking about right now... To root for Ka-chan with all of my heart.”⁵⁹ Minami takes this role so seriously that in Chapter 49, she even expresses guilt when briefly thinking about Tatsuya, despite Kazuya being the twin who is currently pitching in an important match. To Minami, this is a serious betrayal of her role as a *joshi-mane*; how can she think about another issue when she is supposed to be “cheering with all of her heart” for the Meisei Baseball Team?

In addition to the “Idol Role,” Minami checks many of the boxes associated with Tsunagawa’s “Care Role.” Minami is an extremely maternalistic person—routinely conducting herself in a manner that makes her appear as if she’s Kazuya and Tatsuya’s mother rather than childhood friend. She is frequently shown to make the boys dinner, do their laundry, and clean their shared clubhouse. These actions extend to Minami’s *joshi-mane* role as well, although she largely focuses her efforts upon Kazuya. Minami is dedicated to performing her role as Kazuya’s caretaker to the point where she takes complete control of his food preparation in Chapter 34, stating that “From tomorrow, Minami will prepare something for you! Caring for the ace’s health is also a part of a manager’s job!”⁶⁰ Minami’s mother-like dedication to Kazuya as his “personal manager” is so exaggerated that it becomes a subject the pair are frequently mocked for, with an emphasis on the borderline erotic nature of Minami’s servitude. Such sentiment is displayed by Tatsuya in Chapter 42, when he bitterly tells Kazuya to “Hurry up and get in the bath, so you can get massaged... By the cute, obedient manager...”⁶¹

In this way, it is clear to see that portrayals of *joshi-mane* in the 1980s and 1990s were frequently defined by perky, mascot-like girls who despite not having a wealth of knowledge on the sport, redeem themselves through their emotional services to the team. By itself, the fact that the *joshi-mane* have an important role in providing emotional support to the team isn't necessarily a negative thing. However, when considering the way in which male managers of the past operated, on a similar level to other key figures such as the team captain, it raises certain questions about why the role evolved in this manner. With the notable exception of *joshi-mane* character Ayako from Takehiko Inoue's basketball manga *Slam Dunk* (1990–1996)⁶², it was a rarity for any *joshi-mane* character of this era to perform any analytical work requiring sports knowledge, weigh in on any executive or strategic decisions, or assist with practice in any way requiring physical exertion.

It is both the nature of tasks expected of a *joshi-mane* and the attitude that the team holds towards the *joshi-mane*'s efforts that differentiates more recent sports manga and anime from those of previous decades which laid the foundations for what a *joshi-mane* should be. While previous franchises often paraded the *joshi-mane* as a team mascot, sports anime and manga of the last 15 years have adopted a new variety of *joshi-mane*. This new *joshi-mane* tends to have a wider variety of roles which she is expected to take on, many of which require a high level of sports knowledge and analytical thinking. She is also valued by her team not only as a mood maker, but as a member who is indispensable to the operation of the team.

When it comes to the diversification of tasks and a return to the manager as a critical figure in analytical matters, Satsuki Momoi from Tadatoshi Fujimaki's basketball manga, *Kuroko no Basket* (2008–2014) is a primary example. Despite falling in accordance with certain *joshi-mane* tropes (such as her getting involved with basketball due to her male childhood friend), Momoi is

a groundbreaking *joshi-mane* character due to her role as the central strategist of the teams which she is a part of. While occasionally shown to carry out small errands associated with the classic *joshi-mane* trope, Momoi's main strength lies in her polished scouting abilities, which she uses to generate reports on opposing teams. Momoi's analytical ability and knowledge of basketball excels to the point where she can not only prepare flawless reports on how to counter most opponents but can also accurately predict how their skillset will evolve over time. For this reason, she is central to the operation of any team she serves and is acknowledged as a tricky opponent to deal with. This is demonstrated for the first time when her school, Touou High School, first faces off against Seirin, the protagonist's team, and Momoi's flawless analysis is immediately identified as the primary obstacle to victory (they would continue to lose to Touou by a significant margin).

Momoi's importance to Touou is made abundantly clear by the way in which the surrounding men respond to her commands and advice. Rather than sitting in the stands among the cheer squad, Momoi has a designated position on the bench, alongside Touou's coach, who frequently consults her for strategizing advice. Additionally, Momoi is allocated just as much speaking time as the coach during halftime—a crucial time in which the players receive vital information about the next quarter. This conveys the command that Momoi has over the team, where she is viewed as a figure of equal importance to the coach himself. Momoi's former middle school teammates display a similar level of respect for her strategical work, with one of them remarking that “During middle school, she helped us many times. In other words, if she's your opponent, she becomes especially hard to deal with.”⁶³ She is also frequently compared to the players on the court: “Her role may be different, but her attitude towards basketball is no different from an athlete's.”⁶⁴

In addition to her critical role to the team, Momoi rarely falls victim to the “Idol Role” trope, as she is never portrayed in a way that implies her main contribution to the team is her cheerful presence. Conversely, it is implied that her absence during the team’s practice actually functions as assurance that she’s taking her job as an intelligence agent seriously. Such an instance takes place in episode 14 of the anime, when one of the Touou players mentions that Momoi is absent from practice. In response to this, the Touou captain smiles, remarking “Yeah, that’s fine. If anything, that’s her job.”⁶⁵

Another progressive portrayal of the varied roles a *joshi-mane* can play is conveyed by the actions of the manager team in the 2011 baseball anime, *Moshidora*. This team of four *joshi-mane* (and one male manager) resembles Momoi in the sense that they are relied upon heavily by both the coach and players for analytical manners and executive decisions, with a primary example being the issue of the starting lineup. As *Moshidora*’s Hodokubo baseball team is aiming for *Kōshien*, an extremely competitive tournament which is considered to be the pinnacle of high school baseball in Japan, a large portion of the anime revolves around the question of which players will make the starting lineup. Ultimately, the coach places this critical decision largely in the hands of the manager team, with *joshi-mane* protagonist Minami Kawashima (not to be confused with Minami Asakura from *Touch*) taking charge on deciding accompanying crucial matters such as who will serve as team captain.

In being placed at the center of decision-making for the team, Minami, in particular, is repeatedly portrayed as an exceptional asset to Hodokubo. In fact, she is characterized as the driving force behind the overall success of the team on multiple occasions; as her radical approach of utilizing famous management consultant Peter Drucker’s strategies on business management to her own work leads to alterations in the club structure, a new member

recruitment and tryout process, and even leads to the development of a new core strategy for the team to reach *Kōshien*. Minami's capability as a team leader gains her the respect of both her fellow managers, as well as the male players themselves, who frequently communicate their gratitude to her. An example of this can be seen through the character development of Hodokubo's catcher, Jiro Kashiwagi, who was initially skeptical of Minami's involvement with the team as manager. However, by the fifth episode of the anime, Jiro credits Minami for the revitalization of the formerly struggling team and refuses to let her downplay her achievements:

Jiro: I don't know what's going on in your head, or how you view the past, but what you're doing right now is incredible. Ever since you showed up, our baseball team has changed beyond recognition.

Minami: It hasn't changed just because I joined, though. The players are the ones who do the actual playing and even among the management team, it's Coach and Nikai who are central to its operation.

Jiro: But what I'm saying is that because of you, they've been pushed to act. Well, I guess I should say "thanks to you" in this case. Thanks to you, the players and the coaching staff were all able to improve.⁶⁶

With these multiple examples of *joshi-mane* taking more central roles to the team's operation in recent sports manga and anime, this would imply that the roles that Japan's real life *joshi-mane* adopt are evolving in a similar way. Upon a quick examination of recent Japanese headlines referencing *joshi-mane*, it is clear to see that this is the case. The most notable development within the last couple of years takes form in the landmark ruling that allowed *joshi-mane* to officially serve as "knockers" for their team at tournaments which was implemented in 2023.⁶⁷ "Knocking" refers to a popular practice method in which one person stands at the batter's plate, and hits as many balls as possible across the field to drill the agility of the fielders. Historically, the Japan High School Baseball Federation has strictly policed the involvement of *joshi-mane* in tournaments, including a ban on *joshi-mane* stepping on the field, rendering it impossible for a *joshi-mane* to assist her team through knocking. The existence of

this ban would gain national attention in 2016, when a *joshi-mane* aiding with knocking during a practice session held at the Hanshin Kōshien Stadium was stopped and escorted off the field by tournament officials.⁶⁸ The Japan High School Baseball Federation drew a substantial amount of public criticism for this action, especially given that the tournament hadn't even officially commenced at the time of the incident.

It is likely due to this continued criticism that nearly 7 years later, in a landmark ruling for Japanese baseball, the Japan High School Baseball Federation made the executive decision to allow the participation of female knockers during the 2023 National High School Baseball Invitational Tournament (also known as *Senbatsu*; the precursor to *Kōshien*). It's unclear as to who holds the “official” title of being the first sanctioned *joshi-mane* to perform the role of knocker during *Senbatsu*, as different news outlets have reported conflicting stories, but Haruna Nagano from Tokushima Prefecture's Joto High School seems to be the most frequently identified contender. The *Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai* (NHK) reported on Nagano's road to becoming a knocker for *Kōshien* in a 2023 online publication titled “A Female Manager With Blisters on Her Palms.” The article identifies Nagano as a self-motivated *joshi-mane* who approached the coach of her own volition to request that he teach her how to knock. Not only did the coach immediately agree, but he credits Nagano's hard work as a knocker with a noticeable increase in effort from the rest of the team as well:

But she practiced more than the other members. She worked hard every day, to the point where it looks like the other team members started thinking “We need to work hard too.”⁶⁹

The *Yomiuri Shimbun* reports on a similar story regarding the positive influence that their *joshi-mane*, Yuina Fukushi, had on the Kuroishi High School Baseball Team upon becoming a knocker in preparation for the 2023 *Kōshien* series. In the article, Fukushi is described by her

teammates as an “indispensable member of the team,” which the Kuroishi coach supports by providing evidence that Fukushi’s knocking has led to a rapid improvement in defensive ability:

"We used to make seven or eight errors in a game, but recently we've had more games with no errors."⁷⁰

The increase in acceptance of *joshi-mane* performing the role of knocker is not only key to the diversification of the tasks expected of a manager but is also critical in terms of providing opportunities that rely more on physical strength and therefore tend to be associated with masculinity. This is especially due to the fact that this change is occurring in Japan’s high school baseball world, which has historically been a stalwart of conservatism regarding the separation of men and women, with the Japan High School Baseball Federation being at the forefront of the anti-*joshi-mane* movement in the 1960s.⁷¹ Therefore, this shift away from the ideology that as women, *joshi-mane* are innately vulnerable and must operate in a separate realm, is indicative of a lessening of emphasis placed on gender roles which have contributed to the lack of women’s involvement in more physically rigorous sports.

While the emergence of *joshi-mane* knockers certainly serves as a key example for a way in which the *joshi-mane* role has taken on a new significance, there are just as many ways in which *joshi-mane* have been successful in taking initiative off the field as well. According to a survey conducted by the *Asahi Shimbun* from April to June 2024, which gathered responses from around 3,800 schools associated with Japan’s National High School Baseball Federation, the number of managers who are getting involved with the operation and administration of their teams has been on the rise.⁷² One of the respondents from this survey, a coach from Wakayama Prefecture, stated the following regarding their desired direction for the manager position:

I am looking to transition from “assistant” type work, such as assisting with knocking and cleaning the club room, to management work, where [the managers will] manage player

conditions and team data, and consider strategies for strengthening the team and public relations.⁷³

In line with such thoughts, many schools have already implemented a system which allows their *joshi-mane* to take initiative with more strategic work, such as the analysis and gathering of data, as seen by multiple recent newspaper articles which have praised the efforts of *joshi-mane* who take on the task. For example, the manager team of the Kawaguchi Municipal High School baseball team was identified by the *Asahi Shimbun* in 2024 as a pioneering group in regards to their thorough work with data, including batting average, the direction of hit balls, and the pitcher's strike rate.⁷⁴ Among this competent manager team, lead manager Miho Suga is identified as a particularly vital presence, as she joined with the intent of strengthening the team through her skills in data analysis. In similar manner to Momoi from *Kuroko no Basket*, Suga's strategic input is noted to be deeply valued by both the players and coach, to the point where it's commonplace for her to sit alongside the coach during games in order to voice her data-informed opinions.

Aichi Prefecture's Asahigaoka High School baseball team has received similar attention for the way in which their two *joshi-mane*, Yumiko Mase and Marin Saito, have adapted the usage of various technologies to assist the team, which has resulted in them being termed as "digital managers."⁷⁵ Together, the two girls devised a system in which they could easily distribute reviewed game footage to the many players with ease, alongside implementing the usage of a smartphone app to make documented data more accessible to the entire team. As a powerhouse school with a long history of *Kōshien* appearances, the two *joshi-mane* have received much praise from the players, who appreciate the revolutionization of the way in which the club utilizes technology:

Teammate Hiroki Yamaoka enthusiastically states that, “The two of them have taken on a new challenge by using their brains and incorporating digital technology. I want to repay them with the results of their hard work.”⁷⁶

From these numerous examples appearing in just the past couple of years, it is clear to see that the established trope of the *joshi-mane* as a glorified errand girl whose utility lies primarily in her charm is severely outdated and has the unfortunate tendency of reinforcing the role of women in sports as one that can only align with certain “feminine” attributes. In reality, since the turn of the century, the expectations of the *joshi-mane*, especially in high school baseball, have undergone a large transition centered around a new significance on sports knowledge and critical thinking.

With this in mind, let us revisit the previous BSRI list from the beginning of this section. Of course, there are countless *joshi-mane* who embody qualities associated with femininity, such as those who utilize their cheerfulness to create a positive team atmosphere or are willing to work long hours or take upon undesirable tasks due to their strong devotion to the team. However, there are just as many whose work as a *joshi-mane* is driven by qualities the BSRI associates with masculinity. Recent *joshi-mane* featured in this section, such as Kawaguchi Municipal High School’s Miho Suga or the Asahigaoka High School’s “digital manager” pair, have proven their excellence in analytical matters and have demonstrated the key ability to advocate for their opinions, while the trailblazing *joshi-mane* knockers embody a strong sense of conviction, individuality, and clear athletic ability.

For the reasons above, Tsunagawa's 2011 designation of the *joshi-mane* as the “epitome of feminine work” seems to be a rather outdated characterization, no longer applicable to the diversified variety of *joshi-mane* that have been emerging within the past 15 years. While this designation might have held true for the *joshi-mane* trope popularized during the 1980s and

1990s by iconic characters such as *Touch*'s Minami Asakura, which carved out a separate "duty" for women to perform in the sporting world, this is simply no longer the case in modern-day Japan. As gender continually decreases in importance when deciding on suitability for certain roles, such as knocking, the manager role is undergoing a reversion to its pre-war state in terms of granting the manager a greater deal of authority and opportunities to contribute to the team in multiple ways.

Chapter 3: Media Narratives Surrounding Joshi-Mane Purpose and Fulfillment

Another important tool in tracking the current expectations and associations with the *joshi-mane* role is examining the manner in which Japan's media frames the efforts of the era's *joshi-mane*. For decades, the main trope associated with the *joshi-mane* was the token phrase of the "heroine working from the sidelines." This phrasing began to emerge in the 1970s, when the role of the *joshi-mane* was transitioning into a position of societal acceptance, and was frequently featured in the headlines of newspapers such as "Our Koshien: Women Managers Fighting in the Shadows."⁷⁷ While this seems fairly innocuous, Takai argues that this phrasing of the manager as "supporting from the shadows" is heavily informed by *ryōsai kenbo* ideology, which emerged during Japan's Meiji era and promoted the idea of a woman's primary role being both a "good wife" and "wise mother."⁷⁸ According to the framework that *ryōsai kenbo* outlines, the woman's primary role is in acting as a supporting role to others according to what stage of life she is in; a "good wife" is responsible for creating a positive atmosphere for her husband, while a "wise mother" is tasked with raising children fit to contribute to Japanese society.⁷⁹

One effect of Japan's emphasis on women's role in providing service to others is the erosion of a woman's identity and personhood: particularly in the "mother" stage. For this reason, a common lament voiced by Japanese feminists is the complete recentering of the Japanese woman's identity and social life to revolve around her children upon becoming a mother, which is frequently noted to be at the expense of her own personal life and professional career.⁸⁰ Although it would be exceedingly rare for a *joshi-mane* to be married, given that the role is found in high school and university settings, a similar occurrence was illustrated with the *joshi-mane* in several of the older sports anime and manga examined within this study. Primarily, this would manifest in the apparent prerequisite that every single *joshi-mane* character had to

become romantically involved with a male player. For example, in *Touch*, Minami is romantically linked to team members Kazuya and Tatsuya, while upperclassman manager Sachiko Nishio is dating the team captain. In basketball manga *Slam Dunk*, Haruko Akagi (who becomes a *joshi-mane* near the conclusion of the series) serves as the love interest of protagonist Sakuragi Hanamichi, while the current *joshi-mane*, Ayako, is the subject of infatuation of supporting character Ryota Miyagi. In *Shoot!*, Kazumi is the love interest of protagonist Toshihiko Tanaka (among many others...). For this reason, when the *joshi-mane* receives attention in one of these series, it is almost always for reasons linking her to a man.

An unfortunate result of the prioritized focus on the *joshi-mane*'s blossoming romance is the suffocation of any potential expansion on her individual character. When she is on screen, her presence is likely to aid in the character development of another character rather than provide her with any depth. This tendency leads to the construction of a narrative which points to the *joshi-mane* as not only relegated to a supporting role in her on-field work, but also in her personal life, reducing her to the precursor of a *ryōsai-kenbo*-esque wife.

Truthfully, any of the “classic” *joshi-mane* characters analyzed for this study would have sufficed in illustrating this point, but *Touch*'s Minami Asakura was the obvious choice, as she is the undeniable epitome of the *ryōsai kenbo*-influenced “background heroine” trope that was initially popularized in the 80s. Although Minami is a main character who appears in nearly every chapter of the manga, the majority of her motivations and actions are centered solely around the next door twin brothers, Kazuya and Tatsuya. Consequently, Minami demonstrates an astounding lack of direction and passion in matters unrelated to the twins. Even the series-driving objective of winning *Kōshien*, initially proposed by Minami, can be interpreted as a mere extension of Kazuya's own desire, given that he is the ace pitcher of the Meisei baseball

team. Even if *Kōshien* did indeed function as a personal goal for Minami, *Touch* invalidates this passion by introducing her “real” dream, which is implied to trump all others. Minami hints at this “other dream” throughout the series, informing Tatsuya that he can be the one to “make [her] other dream come true.”⁸¹ A confused Tatsuya seeks clarification from his mother regarding the meaning of Minami’s words, resulting in the following interaction in Chapter 59 of the manga:

Tatsuya: An ordinary dream... What could it be?

Mother: A dream?

Tatsuya: Of a girl around high-school age...

Mother: Ahh. Something like that is obvious. It means marrying the one she loves.⁸²

This is not the first instance in which author Mitsuru Adachi has alluded to Minami’s seemingly predetermined future as a wife. As early as Chapter 2 of the manga, the direction of Minami’s future—specifically her destined role as “belonging” to one of the twins—is conveyed through her father’s apparent desire for her to marry Kazuya. This is not presented subtly; Minami’s father frequently makes declarations such as “I can rest easy, giving my daughter away in marriage,”⁸³ when observing Minami’s interactions with Kazuya. In this manner, Minami is reduced to a mere possession; a girl devoid of agency who can easily be “given away.” A similar objectification is displayed in Chapter 52, where while betting on a card game with Tatsuya, Kazuya proposes that “The side that wins can have Minami for his bride.”⁸⁴ This casual treatment of Minami as a prize to be won reinforces her lack of agency, positioning her even more overtly as a future wife.

While it is not innately negative to have a female character engage in a romantic relationship, issues emerge when said relationship becomes the entire basis of her character, as in the case of Minami. This is particularly frustrating, given that Adachi hints at other parts of Minami’s identity that could be utilized to deepen her character. For instance, *Touch* briefly touches upon the fact that Minami’s mother passed away while she was still young. However, the

trauma this event might have inflicted on Minami or her internal struggles regarding her mother's absence are never divulged, contributing to her view as an extremely surface-level character. This lack of depth is particularly notable when pitting Minami against another main character, Tatsuya, whose character arc frequently revolves around his debilitating feelings of inferiority to his younger twin, Kazuya. Ultimately, Minami's role in the storyline of *Touch* seldom exceeds that of a plot device, serving primarily as a love interest and point of conflict for the other two main characters, Tatsuya and Kazuya, which reinforces traditional notions of a woman's value being intrinsically tied to her status as either a "good wife" or "wise mother."

Ironically, the position of the *joshi-mane* provides an ideal set-up for character growth, especially in terms of fostering confidence and assertiveness. It is safe to say that for most individuals, joining a new social circle can be a daunting experience, let alone trying to find one's footing in a space dominated by the opposite gender. The ways in which participation as a *joshi-mane* can fuel character growth are a hallmark of more recent portrayals of *joshi-mane*, such as in Haruichi Furudate's *Haikyuu!!* (2012–2020), a manga and anime franchise which follows Karasuno High School's male volleyball team's road to glory. *Haikyuu!!* features two *joshi-mane*, each of whom is given entire episodes dedicated to their individual struggles and eventual growth.

Most notably, there is the introduction of first-year student Hitoka Yachi, who is scouted to become Karasuno's next manager at the beginning of the anime's second season. While Yachi is intrigued by the opportunity, she is simultaneously depicted as a timid girl severely lacking in confidence to the point where she automatically assumes that her presence will inconvenience others. It is soon revealed that this behavior stems from Yachi's belief that she is incapable of acting decisively due to her passive personality, a trait which has been a frequent target of

criticism by her mother. Yachi's inhibited mindset is exhibited when she attempts to communicate her interest in joining the volleyball team to her skeptical mother, who scathingly responds that: "You can do whatever you want. But joining a group of people who are passionate with your indecisive attitude is extremely impolite."⁸⁵ Unable to piece together a response, Yachi falters and drops the subject.

A frequently recurring metaphor that author Haruichi Furudate employs throughout Yachi's character arc is "Villager B," referring to an insignificant role that Yachi was once assigned during a school play. Viewing herself as eternally confined to the role of "Villager B," Yachi eventually decides to decline the offer of becoming Karasuno's manager, with the logic that "Everyone is so amazing and I'm just a Villager B without any sports foundation. I'll only be a burden."⁸⁶ However, realizing that the manager position is something she genuinely wishes to pursue, Yachi resolves to challenge herself by acting assertively and clearly communicating her intentions. This determination culminates in Yachi's bold confrontation with her mother in the midst of a crowded station, when the usually meek Yachi loudly declares to her mother that "Villager B can fight too! I've decided that I want to be the manager for the volleyball club!"⁸⁷ Yachi's mother is overjoyed by her daughter's newfound assertiveness, breaking into tears of pride on the spot. Yachi's character arc reaches its conclusion with her first independent action as Karasuno's manager, when in response to overhearing a discussion regarding the team's dire financial situation, Yachi draws on her graphic design experience to create a poster requesting donations. The poster is successful in attracting donors, resulting in Karasuno accumulating enough funds to attend a special training camp, and solidifying Yachi's value as an essential asset to the team.

The internal struggles and character development of *Haikyuu!!*'s other manager, graduating senior Kiyoko Shimizu, are given a similar level of attention by Furudate. As a beacon of competence and logic, Kiyoko is frequently portrayed as one of the team's main anchors, as well as a recurring mentor figure to Yachi. However, after seasons of alluding to Kiyoko's past hardships, episode ten of season four finally takes place from Kiyoko's point of view, as she reflects on her fulfilling career as a *joshi-mane*. It is revealed Kiyoko initially became manager upon receiving an injury that ended her successful hurdling career, leading her to harbor lukewarm feelings towards the position she never desired. However, as time passes and Kiyoko immerses herself in learning about volleyball while growing closer to the players, she is ultimately able to find value and purpose in her role as manager.

Furudate yet again utilizes metaphorical imagery to illustrate Kiyoko's internal growth, this time using the motif of a physical hurdle. The episode opens with a flashback to Kiyoko's injury, showing her splayed out on the track after failing to clear a hurdle. As the episode returns to present day, Kiyoko contemplates the value that she was eventually able to find in the *joshi-mane* role. Becoming a *joshi-mane* not only restored Kiyoko's sense of purpose, but additionally provided an outlet for her to grieve and eventually come to terms with the devastating consequences of her injury. This acceptance is symbolized in a pivotal scene of Kiyoko daringly leaping over a traffic divider while rushing to deliver her teammate's sneakers for an important match. As Kiyoko is able to clear the divider, which is clearly meant to resemble a track-and-field hurdle, she has the following thought:

I'm not going to be standing on the court, nor am I going to be wearing a uniform. But right now... I have to take on this challenge [...] This is my battle line right now.⁸⁸

This moment of personal growth for Kiyoko is reflective of a broader shift in the portrayal of *joshi-mane* characters; while Kiyoko is shown to care deeply for her teammates, she comes to

appreciate her role not in terms of how she can support others, but as a way for her to take on new challenges and continue growing.

A key detail to note about these two *joshi-mane* is that neither is ever relegated to the status of a “sidekick,” a role frequently assumed by *joshi-mane* in earlier sports manga and anime. This distinction is particularly evident in terms of romantic relationships; it is only until the conclusion of the story, following a five-year time skip, in which it is revealed that Kiyoko later marries fellow teammate Ryūnosuke Tanaka. While Tanaka’s feelings for Kiyoko are slightly hinted at throughout the series, they never overshadow her personal narrative, and Kiyoko never showers Tanaka with any sort of “special attention” in the way that Minami does with Kazuya in *Touch*. If anything, Kiyoko functions as somewhat of a foil to the “idol-type” *joshi-mane* popularized by characters like Minami. She is a taciturn girl who is extremely disciplined with rules and responsibilities and rarely outwardly cheers for the team. In this sense, *Haikyuu!!* sets itself apart from sports franchises of the past by not only deeming its *joshi-mane* worthy of developing as individual characters but providing them with relatable storylines that center around complex topics such as self-confidence, sense of purpose, and coping with grief.

Despite the fact that the conventional image of *joshi-mane* as the “supporting heroine of the shadows” has remained present in Japanese pop culture to an extent, there has been a noticeable increase of news stories which frame their reports on *joshi-mane* in a way that emphasizes their role as a team leader, alongside discussions on how the *joshi-mane* role can foster assertiveness. An example of a recent article which prioritizes the portrayal of the *joshi-mane* as a “leader” rather than a “supporter” is an *Asahi Shimbun* article from 2020,⁸⁹ which reports on the strong-willed nature of Sakura Nishikawa, the third-year manager of Mizuguchi High School’s baseball team. Nishikawa, inspired by the bold actions of Minami Kawashima from *Moshidora*,

took it upon herself to initiate a reconstruction of the team's practices following a disappointing tournament showing. Although the article discusses the efforts of other players and coaches as well, Nishikawa is the most frequently mentioned figure, as the article is structured around the various decisions she made for the team, such as implementing a feedback system for parents and setting up collaboration with a nutritionist. The language utilized to describe Nishikawa and her actions is particularly important to this framing, as the article opts for more decisive descriptors, such as "*sekkyokuteki ni toriireta*," which translates to "actively incorporated (with *sekkyokuteki* also having the possibility to mean "aggressively" or "assertively").⁹⁰ From such choices, it is clear to see that the article is emphasizing Nishikawa as a proactive leader who initiated change.

In examining the evolving media narratives surrounding the *joshi-mane* role, a significant shift has evidently occurred regarding the portrayal of these characters. Although formerly defined by its status as a passive, supporting role akin to qualities of femininity encouraged by *ryōsai kenbo* ideology, *joshi-mane* are now becoming increasingly depicted as nuanced, assertive figures with strong capabilities in leadership and personal agency. With this in mind, although ideas of *ryōsai kenbo* may have initially served as a foundation for the *joshi-mane* model upon its emergence and further solidification in the Japanese mainstream, the remnants of "good wife, wise mother" are eroding from the role with each passing day. This change in narrative suggests a broader societal shift occurring in Japan regarding traditional gender roles, which will likely continue to be conveyed to Japanese audiences through mediums such as manga and anime.

Chapter 4: Sexualization and Objectification of the Joshi-Mane

This section will discuss an issue pertaining to the portrayal of *joshi-mane* that, comparatively speaking, has not made as much progress as the other topics covered in Chapters 1-3: the issue of the significance attached to a woman's physical appearance, particularly in terms of sexualization and objectification. While the idea that a woman has an innate duty to appeal physically to those around her is not one exclusive to Japan, Japanese media is under frequent attack for its blatant prioritization of physical appearance for women. Of course, this issue extends to Japan's sporting world as well, providing countless examples of the extreme double standards regarding appearance between men and women. These double standards run so deep that even the original introduction of physical education and certain Western sports to modern Japan during the Meiji era was justified by completely different reasons for men and women; whereas the men's physical education curriculum was intended to prepare Japan's young men for war,⁹¹ the popular consensus was that women should engage in exercise with the goal of aesthetic improvement.⁹² For a more modern instance, one can look to the stardom of conventionally attractive athletes, with early 2000s figure skater Arakawa Shizuka serving as a chief example. It goes without stating that Arakawa was a capable athlete with multiple significant achievements under her belt, but it is undeniable that her graceful and feminine appearance provided an enormous boost to her popularity to the point where she is one of the most publicized athletes, male or female, that Japan has ever seen.⁹³

It is also essential to delve into the problematic tendencies of Japanese media in regard to sexualization—particularly in manga and anime. The sexualization and objectification of female characters (which male characters rarely receive the same level of) has become widely known as a defining characteristic of anime and manga (especially *shōnen* manga).⁹⁴ This objectification

can manifest in a variety of ways, although the following examples serve as frequent offenders: the introduction of a female character beginning with a pan across her chest or rear, the tendency for female characters to be sporting exceedingly skimpy attire (especially in situations in which this would be considered inconvenient), or shots of private or intimate locations, such as the shower, which showcase the typically naked female character in a vulnerable state. While such inclusions, frequently termed by anime fans as “fanservice”⁹⁵ are most certainly for the enjoyment of the viewers themselves (the majority of whom are typically men), they also affect the way in which the other characters of the said franchise view and interact with its female characters.

One of the most common tropes is the “accidental peeping,” in which a male character catches a glimpse of a typically sexualized part of a female character (such as breasts, buttocks, or thighs), finding immense pleasure in it. It has been noted by multiple scholars that this practice is innately rooted in the idea of the male gaze, which is described by Anne Allison as “a process of looking that, like scopophilia (pleasure derived from viewing, often in a voyeuristic manner), is sexualized and based in a relationship of dominance and inequality.”⁹⁶ The bottom line that should be gleaned from the application of the male gaze in this context is that the men are the ones looking, while the women are being looked at.⁹⁷ This is a deep-rooted concept in Japanese society in a variety of contexts outside of anime and manga, with Allison providing the example of hostess clubs in which white collar men frequently gather as a “bonding event” to comment on the hostess’s bodies in a similar manner to the way in which one would comment on a baseball game. Yet again, the men are doing the looking (as a recreational activity), while the women are being looked at (and frequently demeaned in the process). Using this same logic,

Allison states the following about such dynamics in manga (and anime, by extension) in how it can inform certain perspectives on gender:

“Encoded in scenes of boys gazing at female body parts there are thus messages that children's manga transmit about gender. Males and females are different, and this difference assigns social role and place.”⁹⁸

Combining the high levels of masculinity associated with the sporting world, the fact that anime and manga as a medium have a long-spanning history of sexualizing and objectifying women, and the fact that sports manga are typically garnered towards a male audience, a perfect recipe for the sexualization and objectification of the *joshi-mane* is born. Although I previously mentioned that this is an ongoing issue, it should be clarified that the problem is not as overt as it was around the 1990s, in which peeping jokes were a staple of comedy used in most anime and manga (including those aimed primarily at children).⁹⁹ In contrast, the objectification present in contemporary sports anime and manga tends to be more subtle in nature compared to its predecessors. For the purpose of this thesis, the types of objectification frequently encountered will be divided into two categories: “pretty privilege,” and “pure sexualization.” In illustrating the differences between the two of these, the next section will provide a couple examples of how the cast of *Touch* regards Minami Asakura, who is a near-perfect example of how the male gaze can manifest in a *joshi-mane* character.

Rather than prioritize the idiosyncrasies of her personality, Adachi immediately communicates the fact that Minami is extremely attractive as key to her character. Her beauty is conveyed through various means, although most notably, the first volume of the *Touch* manga introduces the “Miss Meisei” popularity poll— a contest in which the male students vote on the most beautiful female student. Each time this competition is referenced, it is reiterated that Minami has been the reigning champion for three consecutive years, building upon her

reputation of exceptional looks. With the constant inclusion of such details, Minami's character becomes increasingly diluted to the point where it frequently appears as if her one and only value in the eyes of others is as a pretty face. This notion is confirmed by the way in which the other characters of *Touch* perceive and interact with her, which is conveyed particularly well in Chapter 40, when the male students are outraged upon learning that Tatsuya struck Minami in the heat of an argument:

Male Classmate #1: Is it true you hit Minami-chan!?

Tatsuya: Yeah, I did.

Male Classmate #2: You jerk! You had the nerve! Anyway, to think you would hit a girl! As a guy, I can't forgive you for that! Besides, it might be okay if she was ugly, but it was Minami-chan of all girls!¹⁰⁰

Although it initially seems as if these male classmates are defending Minami, their statements have an objectifying effect, as it is implied that if a girl is struck, "it might be okay if she was ugly," placing an extraordinary amount of value on a girl's physical appearance. It is in this way that the "pretty privilege" variety of objectification can be defined; although it might lack a glaring sexual undertone, it reinforces the idea that a woman's primary value is derived from her appearance (as opposed to her character or abilities).

On the other end of the spectrum of objectification lies "pure sexualization," a portrayal of women which arguably has even more of a dehumanizing effect than that of "pretty privilege." This variety of objectification falls more in line with typical images of "fanservice" previously discussed, in which parts of the female body are deliberately emphasized, often through suggestive framing. *Touch* contains countless instances of this sexualization, usually involving Tatsuya peeking up Minami's skirt or watching her change. However, a particularly drawn-out example can be seen by the sequence of panels which introduce Sachiko Nishio, the upperclassmen *joshi-mane*, in Chapter 4. It should be noted that even prior to Sachiko's

introduction, the chapter is littered with close-up shots of Minami's exposed body, as she lounges at the pool with Tatsuya. However, the sexualization becomes painfully blatant when Sachiko approaches the two. The manga deliberately fragments Sachiko's body into a series of "teases": first showing a panel of her long legs, then panning up to her bikini-clad chest, and at last, ending with a panel of her face next to a full illustration of her overwhelmingly exposed body. Interspersed throughout the sequence are panels of an enthralled Tatsuya, who is visibly ogling her chest. When laid out in this segmented manner, Adachi fails to present Sachiko as a complete person; rather, she has been broken down to her "most important" parts according to the male gaze. Allison makes the critical point that in scenarios like this, which center around a male character leering at a female character; there are actually three male parties involved in the demeaning practice of "looking": the in-universe character (in this case, Tatsuya), the artist who makes the intentional choice to portray his female characters in this manner (Adachi), and finally, the viewer themselves (as sports manga are typically oriented towards men).¹⁰¹ As a result of this structure, the association with men being the "dominant" party is strengthened even further, as these three parties are linked together through the decidedly male experience of objectifying the "passive" female character.

When it comes to more recent portrayals of *joshi-mane*, it is evident that the level of blatant sexualization has decreased a fair amount. Despite glaringly inappropriate portrayals defining a significant part of the "classic" *joshi-mane* trope, there were multiple anime and manga franchises, which despite being *shōnen* series aimed at men, contained absolutely no "pretty privilege" objectification or "pure sexualization." The most notable of these series would be Yuji Terajima's baseball manga *Daiya no Ace* (2006–2015), which follows the powerhouse Seidō High School baseball team as they aim for *Kōshien*. As is characteristic of a strong team, Seidō

boasts a sizable manager team of four female students. Although the narrative tends not to focus on the manager team, in the instances that they do receive the spotlight, they are never sexualized or objectified in any manner; all of them wear a concealing tracksuit, are never shown changing or otherwise exposed, and are never referred to by the male players in a demeaning way. With this said, with the exception of Haruno Yoshikawa (who becomes relevant to the narrative by befriending the protagonist), the identities of the other *joshi-mane* aren't expanded on nearly as much as other series of the 2000s.

On the other end of the spectrum, *Moshidora*, a series centered mainly around the experiences of the *joshi-mane* rather than the players, also contains absolutely no sexualization or objectification of its *joshi-mane*. However, it should be noted that *Moshidora* sets itself apart from most Japanese sports franchises in multiple ways; not only does the story take place from the female perspective of Minami Kawashima, but the original 2009 light novel was written by Natsumi Iwasaki, a female author.

A series which starts to blur the lines with regard to the subtle objectification of its *joshi-mane* is *Haikyuu!!* by Haruichi Furudate. Although *Haikyuu!!* presents some of the most comprehensive, realistic depictions of the *joshi-mane* experience, there are a few scenes that, while nowhere near as explicit as those in *Touch* or *Shoot!*, carry an undertone of objectification. The main scene often flagged as problematic is the introduction of senior *joshi-mane*, Kiyoko Shimizu, which bears a significant resemblance to the previously discussed introduction of Sachiko Nishio from *Touch*. When Kiyoko first appears on screen, she is framed by sparkles and gradually revealed in the following sequence: a shot of her chest, a shot of her buttocks, and finally, her face. Unlike Sachiko, Kiyoko is fully clothed, but the issue persists in that this is a demeaning way of introducing a female character. However, unlike *Touch*, *Haikyuu!!* takes the

time to develop Kiyoko as a complex and multifaceted character, who is never reduced just to her conventionally attractive appearance. It is also worth noting that these scenes tended to occur more frequently in the earlier publications of *Haikyuu!!*; as the storyline progressed and both *joshi-mane* continued to be fleshed out as characters, the fanservice became notably less frequent.

Finally, we come to a series that, despite featuring groundbreaking *joshi-mane* characters in other regards, is consistently guilty of sexualizing and objectifying them. This series is Tadatoshii Fujimaki's basketball manga, *Kuroko no Basket* (2008–2014). The two primary victims of this sexualization are *joshi-mane* Satsuki Momoi (previously discussed in Chapter 2) and Riko Aida, the female coach of the protagonist's team (Riko's coaching position will be revisited in the next chapter). Of the two girls, Momoi tends to receive more attention, as she is constantly noted to have exceptionally large breasts. This is particularly emphasized during her introduction in episode 14, when in a manner again bearing a striking resemblance to the introduction of *Touch's* Sachiko, Momoi emerges in a revealing bikini while the Seirin team is performing swim exercises. The camera first pans to Momoi's bouncing chest, then to a shot of her adjusting her bikini bottom, followed by the immediate, flustered reaction of the entire basketball team upon her entrance. Even after her initial introduction, the show continues to draw attention to Momoi's chest, by including effects such as a “*boing*” sound that plays when her chest bounces, or a red, flashing arrow pointing to her chest to emphasize Riko's jealousy of Momoi having larger breasts than her. While it's heavily implied that Momoi is purposely flaunting her figure to distract Seirin from her true intention—collecting information to use against them in the next match—this blatant sexualization has the tendency to overwrite her primary role as an informant.

Although it's easy to dismiss this sort of "fanservice" as harmless fiction, it is important to recognize that it mirrors real issues for women in Japan.

The subject of sexualization and objectification is a particularly relevant issue for real life *joshi-mane*, as they have a long spanning history of being subjected to sexual harassment and other inappropriate types of treatment by male teammates, coaches, and other staff members. The earliest mention I could find of a sexual harassment incident involving a *joshi-mane* was from a 1997 publication from *The Japan Times*, which raises the concern of sexual harassment in high school baseball following news of multiple staff members being reprimanded for inappropriate advances towards their *joshi-mane*.¹⁰²

Even with Japan's increased awareness of sexual harassment in recent years, with efforts focused on curbing its occurrence on public transportation¹⁰³ and the workplace¹⁰⁴ in particular, sexual harassment continues to be an issue that a non-insignificant amount of women are subjected to during their *joshi-mane* career. In a 2022 survey conducted by Japan's *Huffington Post* which targeted the experiences of *joshi-mane*, it was reported that nearly one third (approximately 28%) of respondents had experienced sexual harassment during their *joshi-mane* careers.¹⁰⁵ Interestingly enough, these results mirrored a previous survey conducted by the Japanese government which garnered international attention due to the fact that it reported that nearly one third of Japanese women have been subject to sexual harassment in the workplace,¹⁰⁶ underscoring the broader nature of the issue.

A large portion of the sexual harassment faced by *joshi-mane* revolves around their physical appearance. One of the *Huffington Post* respondents provides the following example of how she was subjected to humiliating comments about her "ugly" appearance as a *joshi-mane* in high school:

When I joined the club, people talked behind my back, saying, 'We don't need an ugly manager.' There were also times when I was compared to managers from other schools, with discussions about which team “won” or “lost” in terms of appearance.¹⁰⁷

While this example seems to be contained to the male students, there are a disturbing number of reports of similar actions by adult staff members, such as coaches and club advisors. In a shocking article published by the *Yomiuri Shimbun* in 2018, a training assistant at an unnamed high school in Hyogo Prefecture was exposed for making predatory remarks to a pair of prospective first-year *joshi-mane*, telling them that, “You can't join unless you kiss the advisor or the club members.”¹⁰⁸ What makes this case particularly abhorrent is that the staff member wasn't dismissed from his job; rather, the Prefectural Board of Education deemed that a 10% decrease on his salary for three-months was sufficient.¹⁰⁹

Although this section challenges the overall argument crafted up to this point, I am nonetheless compelled to highlight the ongoing barriers that Japan's women face in fully participating in society due to such issues. As demonstrated throughout this segment, the sexualization, objectification, and sexual harassment faced by a significant ratio of Japan's women has infiltrated Japan's sports realms, as well, as exemplified by the degrading treatment of many students in the manager role. Therefore, despite the overall progress achieved in dismantling harmful gender stereotypes and associations regarding the *joshi-mane*, the sexualization of both fictional and real life *joshi-mane* likely remains one of the largest obstacles to the *joshi-mane* role from being widely regarded as an empowering position for young Japanese women. To conclude, it should be reiterated that there has, indeed, been progress in manga and anime depictions of *joshi-mane* in diminishing blatant sexualization and objectification, as seen by franchises such as *Daiya no Ace* and *Moshidora*. However, the extent of these changes is insufficient; until completely non-sexualized portrayals of *joshi-mane*

become the standard path, Japanese media such as manga and anime will continue to play a counterproductive role in shaping expectations surrounding the *joshi-mane*.

Chapter 5: Beyond the Joshi-Mane: A General Decentering of Gender in the Japanese Sporting World

Although this thesis prioritizes exploring the changes specific to the *joshi-mane* role, it also aims to map these changes in the context of a broader movement to lessen emphasis on gendered roles in high school and college sports in Japan as a whole, a trend which has been reflected in sports anime and manga of the past decade.

This trend can be seen in the impending shift towards a gender-neutral connotation of the term “manager”—although it continues to be associated mainly with women, media portrayals no longer restrict the role exclusively to female students. In particular, many recent sports manga and anime have defied the established *joshi-mane* trope by making the team’s manager a male student, instead. *Moshidora* (2011) was one of the earliest franchises to implement this change, as in addition to their four *joshi-mane*, former position player Masayoshi Nikai makes the decision to join the manager team. Nikai’s storyline in *Moshidora* holds a particular significance in this regard, as this was a decision Nikai came to completely by himself, setting him apart from most other male manager representation in anime and manga. This is due to the fact that the vast majority of male managers in anime and manga start out as position players of their sport but are “tragically” forced into the manager role by injuries (an example being wheelchair-bound male manager Nao Matsubara from *Daiya no Ace*). Nikai, however, simply found the nature of the manager’s role more rewarding and better suited to his analytical personality and as a result, is depicted as a much brighter character after transitioning to the manager position in episode 5 of the anime. Additionally, Nikai doesn’t view himself as inferior in any way for making this

switch, affirming his belief in the decision by stating the following: “For me to have found a job that is so worthwhile, I am truly thankful.”¹¹⁰ Nikai’s fellow teammates also continue to regard Nikai highly, to the point where Nikai is elected as the team captain even following his switch to manager, placing him in an extremely unique position.

For a more subtle instance of how the manager position has gradually come to embody a more gender-neutral meaning, I raise the attitude surrounding the manager position in the *Haikyuu!!* anime as an example. In episode 2 of season 2, while manager Kiyoko Shimizu is searching for an additional manager for the volleyball club, she is shown to give out flyers to both male and female students. Although her offer is rejected by everyone she hands out flyers to (for reasons not expanded on), the male students offer no sign of shock or offense at being offered the manager position, implying the existence of male managers to be accepted at Karasuno High School. Additionally, in the same episode, when protagonist Shoyo Hinata is mistaken as a manager by Yachi (due to his short height uncharacteristic of volleyball players), he isn’t offended by the prospect of being a manager, but instead showing displeasure at the mention of his small stature, his greatest insecurity.

In recent years, this increased acceptance and awareness of male managers has been displayed at actual high schools and colleges throughout Japan, as well. This is especially the case in regard to men who willingly become managers (rather than as a last resort following injury), who aren’t shy in expressing their satisfaction with the manager position. A recent example can be seen by the willing transition of former baseball player Kei Murakami to the manager position upon his enrollment in Doshisha Kori High School (Osaka Prefecture) in 2024. Up to this point, Murakami had been an active player on field, even serving as the vice-captain of his team throughout junior high. Despite this, Murakami decided to change paths due to his

desire to support the team from the “bottom up” by working with data, stating that “I want to be the one to push the players instead of leading them.”¹¹¹ At the time of the article's publication, it had only been three months since Murakami started as manager, but the article reports that he had already experienced a sense of fulfillment from his new role.

Another notable subversion of the manager trope in media can be found in *Cross Manage*, a lacrosse manga which was serialized in Shueisha's *Weekly Shōnen Jump* magazine from 2012 to 2013. Although the series wasn't deemed successful enough to continue publication, it's important for providing one of the first manga narratives about a male manager serving a female sports team, compared to the established norm of female managers working with a male team. It should be noted that while combing through Japan's news outlets and online forums, I was unable to find a reported instance of a female athletic team with a male manager, although this doesn't necessarily mean that it hasn't occurred in the past. This lack of publication might be connected to a recurring theme of *Cross Manage*, in which the male protagonist is frequently accused of being a pervert for his involvement with the girl's lacrosse team, and therefore tries to keep the fact that he is the team's manager a secret to avoid judgement.

Departing from the specific topic of managers, there has also been a push in recent sports anime and manga to portray more women in coaching and staff roles, as well as including adult women characters who are visibly well-versed in the sports world. *Kuroko no Basket* and *Daiya no Ace* are both examples of contemporary sports series which feature women as both coaches and as professionals in Japan's sporting world. *Kuroko no Basket*, in particular, distinguishes itself through the character of Riko Aida. Not only is Riko the head coach of the Seirin High School basketball team, the central focus of the story, but she is also a fellow student, known among her peers for having an exceptionally high sports IQ. Riko isn't the only prominent

female coach in *Kuroko no Basket*, either; one of the nation's strongest teams, Yōsen High, is led by 33-year-old female coach Masako Araki. Additionally, Taiga Kagami, one of the protagonists who is widely considered to be one of the strongest players in the league, is mentored by retired WNBA player Alexandra Garcia, whom he wholly credits with his resounding success.

Daiya no Ace features multiple female characters who hold similarly pivotal roles in Japan's high school baseball league, such as Rei Takashima, who holds dual roles as both assistant coach and main scout of the powerhouse Seidō High School baseball team. Rei is an accomplished recruiter with a sharp eye for talent and is responsible for scouting many of Seidō's most gifted players, including the series's protagonist, Eijun Sawamura. *Daiya no Ace* also provides a fascinating lens into the media side of Japan's sporting world, as baseball reporter Akiko Ōwada is a recurring character who also boasts an extremely high understanding of the sport.

This increase of Japanese women ascending the ranks and achieving positions of greater prestige and authority in the sporting world has been mirrored in real life, as well. A notable example of such progress is the Japan High School Baseball Federation's historic appointment of two women to its leading board of directors, with Chiyono Terada and Atsuko Ogasawara assuming office in 2017. Given that the Japan High School Baseball Federation was one of the most vocal critics of women's involvement in baseball upon the initial emergence of *joshi-mane*, the fact that women are now serving at the highest echelon of the organization is representative of the major progress that has been made regarding the minimization of gender divisions in sports. Additionally, according to the *Nikkei Shimbun*, federation president Eiji Hatta made the decision to allow women on the board directly in response to the surging numbers of *joshi-mane* in high school baseball.¹¹² Hatta expands on his reasoning behind the change in a separate *Yomiuri Shimbun* article, stating that:

“It is part of the reform. High school baseball cannot be managed without the power of women. It was strange that there were no women on the board of directors.”¹¹³

The Japan High School Baseball Federation has continued to implement reforms in the wake of this groundbreaking decision, which have further minimized gender as a defining factor of importance in high school baseball. In the 2022 *Kōshien*, the “ball boy” (*bōru bōi*), the person who provides the home plate umpire with balls, was renamed to the “ball person” (*bōru pāson*). In the following year, significant changes were made to the elaborate opening ceremony of *Kōshien*, in which since 1949, female students have been responsible for introducing the participating schools by marching around the field with placards. However, for the 2023 *Kōshien* cycle, the role was opened up for application to both female and male students, with 123 girls and 6 boys selected for the honor.¹¹⁴ Although the boy-girl ratio significantly favored the female students, the federation’s willingness to bend rules that have governed high school baseball for over 75 years is an encouraging sign regarding the increasing importance of equal opportunity for both sexes in Japanese sports. Yoshiko Okuda, a professor at Kinki University specializing in the relationship between gender and sports, certainly seems to think so, citing the attention that high school baseball receives as a potential catalyst for more widespread social change:

“Roles in high school baseball have tended to be defined by gender, but it is commendable that opportunities are expanding for both men and women to play an active part in the sport. If progress continues in the high-profile realm of high school baseball, it could lead to a fostering of social awareness.”¹¹⁵

Okuda’s statement aligns with Kietlinski’s thoughts on the historical importance of Japan’s sporting realm as a general reflection of the current social state of a nation, pointing to a bright future regarding the equal involvement of women in Japan’s sporting realm.

CONCLUSION

Japan undeniably has a long history of assigning labor roles based on rigid interpretations of gender, reinforcing a clear division between the sexes of its citizens. As explored throughout this thesis, this has applied to Japan's sporting realm as well, from the education system's blatant ushering of Meiji era women into more "appropriate" physical activities, to the deliberate efforts made by organizations such as the Japan High School Baseball Federation in the 1960s to exclude *joshi-mane* from the male-dominated realm of baseball. However, in the more than 60 years since the initial emergence of *joshi-mane*, the manager role has been subjected to a vast variety of changes revolving around the shifting significance that Japanese society places on gender.

In this thesis, I set out to map the evolution in Japanese thought on gender roles and division of gender in society, through a comparative analysis of the Japan-specific *joshi-mane* position as portrayed in manga and anime, due to its status as a key media medium for communicating societal expectations. I argue that in comparing trope-defining works of the mid 1980s and early 1990s to more recent landmark works of the 2010s, I have been able to track a noticeable shift in the ways in which the *joshi-mane*/manager role is associated with certain gender-driven beliefs and conventions, pointing to a diminishing emphasis on gender roles in the Japanese sports world. This can be gleaned from three key changes in the ways in which the narrative surrounding the *joshi-mane* trope has been portrayed in both media and real life: an increasing emphasis on female collaboration (compared to the historical glorification of male bonds and internalized female misogyny), the normalization of *joshi-mane* as an authoritative force with a

variety of possible responsibilities (rather than a team mascot primarily burdened by the task of emotional support), and the propagation of the *joshi-mane* role as a challenging position which can serve as a valuable opportunity to instill confidence and a sense of purpose in its participants (as opposed to its previous romanticization of it as a purely supportive role in which quiet sacrifices are not only expected, but praised).

Although the *joshi-mane* may constitute only one aspect of Japan's admittedly intricate sporting world, and therefore may seem too narrow a subject to offer any broader societal insights, I argue that this thesis's observed trends—namely, the decreasing societal importance of gender in the division of work, alongside an increased subversion of gender roles—are far from exclusive to just the circles surrounding Japan's sports. There have been similar subversions of gender roles in other realms of Japanese society, particularly in regard to media productions of the last several years. Kosuke Ōno's *Way of the Househusband* (2018–present), a manga which follows the life of an ex-*yakuza* member who serves as the primary caretaker of the house, is a recent example. *Way of the Househusband* reverses traditional Japanese expectations of the domestic sphere belonging to the wife by having protagonist Tatsu take upon the role of househusband, while his career-oriented wife, Miku, serves as the family's primary breadwinner. This manga has found great success with the Japanese public; first being adapted into a live-action television drama (2020), then into a net animation licensed by Netflix (2021–2023) and receiving yet another live-action adaptation in the form of a movie (2022).

Clearly, this reverse gender-role narrative struck a chord with Japanese audiences, which isn't particularly surprising in the context of a nation which has been experiencing a gradual decline in traditional gender roles for many years now. This is particularly regarding certain subpopulations, such as Japan's young men, who have been increasingly identifying with the

“herbivore man” terminology. First coined in 2006 by magazine author Maki Fukasawa, the term “herbivore man” (*sōshoku danshi*) refers to a man lacking in assertiveness when it comes to relationships and sex, going against the established norm that men chase, while women are pursued.¹¹⁶ By 2010, the term had gained significant traction, soon establishing itself as a widely used term in Japanese, particularly on online platforms. Although some older generations have criticized Japan’s young men for these passive tendencies, a large portion of the new generation is comfortable with their “herbivore” identity, as demonstrated by the results of a 2009 survey, which reported that 60.5% of young men (aged 20-34) in the Greater Tokyo Area identified as “herbivore men.”¹¹⁷

With the popularity of franchises displaying unconventional family structures such as *Way of the Househusband*, alongside the increasing visibility of the “herbivore man,” it is evident that a larger cultural shift has been occurring in Japanese society regarding the enforcement of traditional gender roles. These developments align with the changes that I have observed in the *joshi-mane* role, where there has been a diminished emphasis on conventional expectations of femininity in both sports media and real life. As the *joshi-mane* role continues to evolve, moving away from its formerly media-enforced status as a symbol of idealized femininity into a more ambiguous position, it can be viewed as a microcosm of Japan’s widespread re-examination of gender roles. This isn’t to say that the manager role has already achieved the status of a perfect emblem of gender equality; there are still multiple issues pertaining to the role, such as the previously explored instances of objectification and sexual harassment. However, this too, reflects the reality of current-day Japan—there is still progress to be made on all levels of society in dismantling outdated practices informed by gender norms. Nevertheless, it has been proven by

the significant evolution of roles such as the *joshi-mane* that change is indeed possible—even more so when the influence of media is involved.

With all of this in mind, let us return to the image of the bustling *joshi-mane* dashing around the fields of *Kōshien* from the introduction of this thesis. Are her efforts being noticed by the spectators in the stands? What are they thinking when they see her standing alongside the male players while briefing them on the opponent pitchers strike rate, or while conducting the final knocking warm-up before the game commences? The past may be different, but this modern-day *joshi-mane* is far from an unfortunate byproduct of Japan's patriarchy or dismissed by others as nothing but a mere errand girl. If anything, the *joshi-mane* is a beacon of opportunity for capable women to continue establishing themselves in male-dominated spaces and should therefore be viewed as nothing less than a success story with distinctly feminist undertones.

Endnotes:

1. Masashiro Takai, *The Birth of Female Managers and the Media: Gender Formation in Sports Culture* (Tokyo: Minerva Shobo, 2005), 2.
2. 「変わる『女子マネ』『下に見られる』はおかしい...ジェンダー平等へ一歩 『支える』から『ともに戦う』へ」 ("Changing 'Female Managers': 'Being Looked Down Upon' Is Strange... A Step Toward Gender Equality, From 'Supporting' to 'Fighting Together'"), *Tokyo Shimbun*, September 23, 2023.
3. Takai, *The Birth of Female Managers and the Media: Gender Formation in Sports Culture*, 2.
4. Robin Kietlinski, *Japanese Women and Sport: Beyond Baseball and Sumo* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), 8-9.
5. Kietlinski 7.
6. Kietlinski 21.
7. Kietlinski 34.
8. Takai, *The Birth of Female Managers and the Media: Gender Formation in Sports Culture*, 2.
9. 黒田早織. "マネジャー=女子マネはなぜ? 昔は男子マネが主流." 朝日新聞 (*Asahi Shimbun*), Dec. 9, 2021. Web.
10. Takai, *The Birth of Female Managers and the Media: Gender Formation in Sports Culture*, 33.
11. Takai, *The Birth of Female Managers and the Media: Gender Formation in Sports Culture*, 13.
12. Takai, *The Birth of Female Managers and the Media: Gender Formation in Sports Culture*, 165.
13. Takai, *The Birth of Female Managers and the Media: Gender Formation in Sports Culture*, 32.
14. Takai, *The Birth of Female Managers and the Media: Gender Formation in Sports Culture*, 32.
15. See note 9.
16. See note 9.
17. See note 2.
18. Masashiro Takai, "A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge About Disputations of Sexism in Media: About the Case of Female Managers in High School Baseball," *Journal of Sport and Gender Studies* 2 (2004): 4-16, 5, Kansai University Graduate School, 11.
19. Masashiro Takai, "A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge About Disputations of Sexism in Media: About the Case of Female Managers in High School Baseball," *Journal of Sport and Gender Studies* 2 (2004): 4-16, 5, Kansai University Graduate School.
20. Kietlinski 1.
21. Kietlinski 3.
22. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 1.
23. Takai, *The Birth of Female Managers and the Media: Gender Formation in Sports Culture*, 12.
24. Tsunagawa Tomomi, "女性らしい仕事と女子マネージャー" (*Feminine Work and Female Managers*), Utsunomiya University, 2009, [一般的に、運動部における女子マネージャーは女性らしい仕事の典型であると言える。]
25. Kathleen S. Uno, "The Death of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother'?" in *Postwar Japan as History*, ed. Andrew Gordon, 293-322 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 294.
26. Tsunagawa, 7-8.
27. Tsunagawa, 9.

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28. "University students were growing more interested in sport not only as a fun recreational activity but also as a symbol of 'the collectivist ideal and fighting spirit of the nation as it prepared for war'. This was, again, in line with the Social Darwinist thought of the day in which the strongest nations would flourish and the weak would be destroyed"(Kietlinski 22). This is an instance of the direct relationship between the development of sports in Japan and development in the Japanese political sphere. Baseball, in particular, is frequently theorized to have risen in popularity during the early 1900s due to Meiji Japan's emphasis on collectivism and teamwork, which baseball was thought to foster.
 29. Kietlinski, 12.
 30. Takai, *The Birth of Female Managers and the Media: Gender Formation in Sports Culture*, 35.
 31. Sedgwick, 1.
 32. *Bankara* is written in Japanese as「蛮カラ」, as a direct response to the word「ハイカラ」(*Haikara*), which was used to refer to Japanese people who followed Western trends. As the *Bankara* movement rebuked this Western sense of "civilization," the「ハイ」was replaced with the「蛮」character, which means "barbarian."
 33. Jason G. Karlin, "The Gender of Nationalism: Competing Masculinities in Meiji Japan," *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2002), 68.
 34. Takai, *The Birth of Female Managers and the Media: Gender Formation in Sports Culture*, 34-35.
 35. Takai, *The Birth of Female Managers and the Media: Gender Formation in Sports Culture*, 36.
 36. Takai, *The Birth of Female Managers and the Media: Gender Formation in Sports Culture*, 36.
 37. Takai, *The Birth of Female Managers and the Media: Gender Formation in Sports Culture*, 11.
 38. Takai, "A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge About Disputations of Sexism in Media: About the Case of Female Managers in High School Baseball," 8.
 39. Takai, *The Birth of Female Managers and the Media: Gender Formation in Sports Culture*, 99.
 40. Takai, *The Birth of Female Managers and the Media: Gender Formation in Sports Culture*, 99.
 41. Tsunagawa, 26.
 42. Tsunagawa, 26.
 43. Tsukasa Ōshima, *Shoot!* (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1994), Chapter 34.
 44. Tsukasa Ōshima, *Shoot!* (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1994), Chapter 33.
 45. Takai, *The Birth of Female Managers and the Media: Gender Formation in Sports Culture*, 168.
 46. "Minami Meets 'Management,'" *Moshidora* (Tokyo: Production I.G, 2011), directed by Tomohiko Ito, aired on April 7, 2011, 3:05.
 47. "Minami Meets 'Management,'" *Moshidora* (Tokyo: Production I.G, 2011), directed by Tomohiko Ito, aired on April 7, 2011, 21:08.
 48. "Minami Ventures into Marketing," *Moshidora* (Tokyo: Production I.G, 2011), directed by Tomohiko Ito, aired on April 14, 2011, 8:40.
 49. "Minami Thinks About How Management Should Be," *Moshidora* (Tokyo: Production I.G, 2011), directed by Tomohiko Ito, aired on April 21, 2011, 3:40.
 50. Tsunagawa, 19.
 51. Takai, "A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge About Disputations of Sexism in Media: About the Case of Female Managers in High School Baseball," 7.
 52. Takai, "A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge About Disputations of Sexism in Media: About the Case of Female Managers in High School Baseball," 8.
 53. Takai, "A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge About Disputations of Sexism in Media: About the Case of Female Managers in High School Baseball," 4.

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54. Takai, "A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge About Disputations of Sexism in Media: About the Case of Female Managers in High School Baseball," 11. The original Japanese titles in the *Asahi Shimbun* are as follows: 「運動部の女子マネ、すっかり『主婦役』に 公立高の教師たちが調査」 (November 12, 1992, Morning Edition, Page 17.), 「性差別の一つ？大切な役目？『女子マネジャー論争』に反響さまざま」 (December 11, 1992, Morning Edition Page 19), 「『女子マネ』は社会的不平等(声)」 (June 3, 1994, Morning Edition, Opinion, Page 5).
 55. Tsunagawa, 11.
 56. Tsunagawa, 9.
 57. Tsukasa Ōshima, *Shoot!* (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1994), Chapter 20.
 58. Tsukasa Ōshima, *Shoot!* (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1994), Chapter 18.
 59. Mitsuru Adachi, *Touch*, (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1981–1986), Chapter 47.
 60. Mitsuru Adachi, *Touch*, (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1981–1986), Chapter 34.
 61. Mitsuru Adachi, *Touch*, (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1981–1986), Chapter 42.
 62. Ayako from Takehiko Inoue's basketball manga *Slam Dunk* (1990-1996) teaches new players basic basketball skills in addition to "typical" *joshi-mane* work.
 63. "Let's Go," *Kuroko no Basuke*, directed by Shunsuke Tada, aired on February 12, 2013, 9:25, Crunchyroll.
 64. "Let's Go," *Kuroko no Basuke*, directed by Shunsuke Tada, aired on February 12, 2013, 10:15, Crunchyroll.
 65. "You Look Just Like Him," *Kuroko no Basuke*, directed by Shunsuke Tada, aired on January 29, 2013, 20:40, Crunchyroll.
 66. "Minami Abandons Traditional High School Baseball," Moshidora (Tokyo: Production I.G, 2011), directed by Tomohiko Ito, aired on April 28, 2011, 10:32.
 67. "手のひらにまめを作った女子マネージャー" [A Female Manager With Blisters on Her Palm], *NHK News*, March 23, 2023.
 68. See note 67.
 69. See note 67.
 70. "夏・高校野球県大会 女子マネ 初ノッカー 黒石3年 福士さん＝青森" [Summer High School Baseball Prefectural Tournament: Female Manager Becomes First Kicker, Kuroishi 3rd Year Student Fukushima], *Yomiuri Shimbun*, Tokyo morning edition, July 12, 2023.
 71. Takai, "A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge About Disputations of Sexism in Media: About the Case of Female Managers in High School Baseball," 8.
 72. "マネジャー、「お手伝い」じゃない データ分析・動画撮影・栄養目配り... 第106回全国高校野球" [Managers Are Not Just 'Helpers': Data Analysis, Video Recording, and Nutritional Monitoring... 106th National High School Baseball Championship], *Asahi Shimbun*, August 7, 2024.
 73. See note 72.
 74. See note 72.
 75. Written in Japanese as 「デジタル担当」(*dejitaru tantō*). *Tantō* can also be translated as "manager," but this usage implies more of an authority over a specific area.
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 80. McLelland, Mark, and Romit Dasgupta, eds. *Genders, Transgenders, and Sexualities in Japan*. New York: Routledge, 2005. 195.
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81. Adachi, Mitsuru. *Touch*. Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1981–1986. Chapter 49.
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 84. Adachi, Mitsuru. *Touch*. Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1981–1986. Chapter 52.
 85. *Haikyuu!!*, "Villager B," directed by Susumu Mitsunaka, Tokyo: Production I.G, 2014, Crunchyroll, 4:52.
 86. *Haikyuu!!*, "Villager B," directed by Susumu Mitsunaka, Tokyo: Production I.G, 2014, Crunchyroll, 13:31
 87. *Haikyuu!!*, "Villager B," directed by Susumu Mitsunaka, Tokyo: Production I.G, 2014, Crunchyroll, 18:32.
 88. *Haikyuu!!*, "Battle Lines," directed by Susumu Mitsunaka, Tokyo: Production I.G, 2014, Crunchyroll, 10:53.
 89. *Asahi Shimbun*, "それぞれのゴールへ 夏を戦う3年生たち:6) 水口 'もしドラ'読んだ女子マネの秘策 高校野球／滋賀県," *Asahi Shimbun*, July 16, 2020. ("To Each Their Own Goal: 6) Mizuguchi's 'Moshidora' Strategy of Female Managers in High School Baseball, Shiga Prefecture.")
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