

Prefiguring the Otokonoko Genre:

A Comparative Trans Analysis of *Stop!! Hibari-Kun!* and *No Bra*

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Abstract: This article examines two manga, *Stop!! Hibari-Kun!* and *No Bra*, which prefigure the increasingly popular anime and manga genre of *otokonoko* from a queer studies perspective. *Otokonoko*, also known as *otoko no musume*, is a genre of manga in which persons assigned male at birth (AMAB) wear women's clothing and are perceived as attractive women. The term *otokonoko* (男の娘) is pronounced identically to the term 男の子, meaning boy-child; however, due to a pun in the kanji which replaces "child" (子) with "daughter"/"girl" (娘), it translates to "boy-girl", "boy-daughter", or sometimes "boy-princess". It is often translated into English as "cross-dresser". The genre emerged in the early 2000s and has since become a popular point of reference and conversation both within and outside of anime and manga communities. Both the genre, and its titular characters have become iconic within both Japanese and Western online culture. As with most genres, the *otokonoko* genre is trope heavy, so I decided to look at works that prefigure the genre to better understand the appeal without the weight of the traditions of the genre weighing too heavily on the content. Both *Stop!! Hibari-Kun!* and *No Bra* follow the story of a boy who becomes increasingly attracted to a gender ambiguous character assigned male at birth, but who appears female to most. Both manga are centrally about this conflict between the love interests' perceived maleness and the protagonists perceived heterosexuality. The article analyses the appeal of each work to both male and trans feminine readers, because what would later become the *otokonoko* genre is popular with both male and trans feminine readers. It also argues that these manga offer something unique from Western depictions of transgender lives, based on the popularity of manga and anime among Western trans feminine readers.

Keywords: *Otokonoko*, queer studies, *Stop!! Hibari-Kun!*, *No Bra*, manga

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Introduction:

Otokonoko, also known as *otoko no musume* is a genre of manga in which persons assigned male at birth (AMAB) wear women's clothing and are perceived as attractive women. The genre crystallized in the mid 2000s, with 2004 being a commonly accepted foundational date.¹ However, manga works involving AMAB persons wearing women's clothes, and being taken as women pre-exist the genre by at least 23 years. The term *otokonoko* itself sounds identical to the term *boy-child*; however, due to a pun in the kanji which replaces "child" (子) with "daughter"/"girl" (娘), it translates to "boy-girl", "boy-daughter", or sometimes "boy-princess", but is often translated into English as "cross-dresser". As the genre crystalized, tropes emerged, such as the commonality of maid outfits and characters with cat ears. It often includes the hyper-sexualization of gender-transient characters, including high amounts of 'fan service', the term used among English readers of manga to describe panels and actions that accentuate a gratuitous and sexual male gaze. The genre is unique among sexualized narrative depictions of gender variance in that its target audience is both fetishists of *otokonoko* and people who identify as *otokonoko*, an occurrence which itself spawned a small subgenre of self-identified *otokonoko* authors writing about their real-life experiences, most notably *Otokonoko Doushi Renai Chuu*.² Many *otokonoko* authors are AMAB and appear in official photos in women's clothes.

Most writing on the *otokonoko* genre in English identifies it as a genre concerned with "crossdressers". However, this is an oversimplification, and likely the result of a translational issue. Until the recent adoption of the term *toransujendā* from the English loanword *transgender*, the nomenclature around transgender persons was unclear.

Previously, the preferred term would have been *seidōitsusei shōgai*, a term which translates to “gender identity disorder”. Yoshiko Okuyama notes that this pathologizing term was previously the most politically correct, but also fairly rare, with a “low recognition rate” by the general Japanese public as late as 2006, and that “onabe (woman acting male), and nyu-hahu (shemale) are still incorrectly applied to trans people by the media, as well as in regular conversation.”³ Further, it may be that, as indicated by the emergence of the loanword, Japanese transgender people are distancing themselves from the pathological language of *seidōitsusei shōgai*, with *shōgai* translating roughly to disability.⁴ Another term which is applied to transgender persons is *okama*, which translates directly as “kettle” or “pot”, and took its current meaning because a pot is “considered to be shaped like a bottom”, and can be applied to gay men, effeminate men, gay sex workers, transgender sex workers, cross dressers, and trans women.⁵ It is considered derogatory. Lastly, there is the word for which our titular genre is named, *otokonoko*. When spelled with the kanji (娘) it generally refers to a man cross dressing as a woman.⁶ As such, until the recent adoption of the English loanword, *otokonoko* existed in manga as one of the most specific, non-pathologizing terms for a AMAB person wearing women’s clothes.

Further, *otokonoko* may represent to transgender audiences, both in Japan and internationally, a source of transgender representation. While understudied, it is clear to those within Western trans-feminine online spaces that anime and manga are exceptionally popular in these spaces compared to the general population. The use of *otokonoko* characters as Twitter profile pictures, and the proliferation of these characters in trans-feminine meme spaces, as well as a general presumed familiarity

with anime and manga within the written discourse of these spaces, suggests a strong community attachment. This has a long history, transgender video game design professor Naomi Clark has been producing games professionally since 1999. She cites having lived in Japan at age 11 and emersed herself in “local nerd subcultures” as allowing her to see anime that “featured outrageous and extravagant gender transitions.”⁷ The Instagram based anime-trans-philosophy meme account @autogyniphiles_anonymous write in one such meme that:

“I suspect that a lot of the appeal of trans-anime porn To TRANS WOMEN is two-fold. First and most obviously, we get a girl distant enough from a real human that we’re not comparing ourselves to her. She neither induces dysphoria nor accentuates our insecurities. Second, we get to engage in a fantasy of passing, and passing so well that only our genitals reveal what we are. Perhaps, third, when these genitals are revealed they are reveled in, not named freakish but a beautiful rarity. It allows us to imagine a world in which the differences we are so often insecure about are the source of our greatest beauty.”⁸

While it is unclear what constitutes “trans-anime porn”, it would seem that the more explicit of the otokonoko genre are included in this category. In an interview with critical theorist McKenzie Wark, one of the administrators of the meme account elaborates on why western trans women are so drawn to anime:

“Very few [historical depictions of trans women in manga and anime] would pass Western respectability standards or get called ‘good representation’, but that doesn’t really matter when Western alternatives during the same time period of say 1950 to 2000 were almost all villainously insane, with the odd ‘trans pityporn’ narrative like Boys Don’t Cry or The Crying Game thrown in. And we haven’t progressed much in Western depictions, trans women are almost always shown as miserable, and any beauty or eroticism they might have a tool to only further their tragedy. Trans girls want an escapist narrative, that is fun and exciting, or at very least not tense. We don’t really have a Western equivalent of the “slice of life” genre anime has. We have nowhere to turn to for low stake narratives that are simply pleasurable to watch.”⁹

Thus, it would appear that not only the otokonoko genre, but manga works which prefigure the genre, have played an outsized impact on the lives trans women in the western world. Therefore, both from an anime/manga studies, and a trans studies lens, it may prove fruitful to examine the works which preceded and informed the otokonoko genre to better understand why the genre emerged and solidified as it did, and why it became so popular among western transgender fans. In the remainder of this paper, two works which predate the solidification of the otokonoko genre around 2004, with titles like *Ai no Shintairiku*, *Maria†Holic*, and *Happiness!* among others, but are often considered to prefigure the genre will be examined. Both works will have trans-coded characters, instead of characters who might be said to be cross-dressing for other textual reasons. Specifically, this paper examines how characters relate to the world as otokonoko and as trans women, as well as how they express their identity. It will also suggest as to why trans women readers might be drawn to these depictions. The two works which will be examined are *Stop!! Hibari-Kun!*, an early 1980s manga published in a boys humour magazine, and *No Bra*, a shōnen manga published between 2002 and 2004. As such, we have two works for comparison which prefigure and predate the otokonoko genre.

Stop!! Hibari-Kun!

Let us begin chronologically. *Stop!! Hibari-Kun!* is not only the earliest example of the two chosen, but often cited as the first occurrence of “a male characters wearing ‘female’ clothes” in manga.¹⁰ The plot revolves around an audience surrogate character with whom readers, in particular teenage boys, will be able to identify, Sakamoto Kōsaku. Kōsaku is a teenage boy who upon his mother’s death has been sent to live with

the family of a yakuza boss who once courted her.¹¹ Upon arriving, he quickly discovers that the only “male” child and yakuza heir to the aforementioned patriarch is Hibari. Hibari is considered a male crossdresser by her family but passes herself off as a cis woman to the rest of the world.¹² Kōsaku quickly develops sexual and romantic feelings for Hibari and spends the remainder of the manga slowly coming to terms with this attraction.

Stop!! Hibari-Kun! appeared between 1981 and 1983 in *Weekly Shōnen Jump* and was written and illustrated by Eguchi Hisashi. Eguchi would go on to become one of Japan’s most noted illustrators of female characters, notable for their uniqueness and fashion sense. While this paper will primarily avoid biographical examination, it may be worth noting that in a 2017 interview with *Archipel*, Eguchi stated, “The ideal girl for me is the one I would have wanted to become if I was born a girl, it is not the girl I would dream to date, it is really the frustration of not being born a girl that fuels my drawings. But women are just so attractive that I will never be able to catch up.”¹³ This then, perhaps, raises the question of just who is Hibari?¹⁴

In the article “Transgender: Female Hermaphrodites and Male Androgynes” Hibari is characterized thus: “Hibari, who enjoys his successful impersonation of a girl, excels at his studies and in sports— and, as the son of a gang leader, he is more powerful than yakuza gangsters.”¹⁵ The article goes on to argue that the reason for Hibari’s skillset relies on respectability, writing that “for readers to readily accept (or even to admire) a male character who dresses in women's clothing or who uses female speech, it is necessary that he also fulfill certain conditions befitting an ideal man: a good family background, talent, good looks, and skill at fighting. Only then can the excessively

feminine man be allowed to become the lover of the heroine”.¹⁶ We will challenge this later with *No Bra*, however, for now let us simply propose a secondary reading of Hibari’s apparently masculine skills.

Instead of asserting Hibari’s strength and athleticism as a redeeming quality, perhaps instead, they represent a transgender fantasy of appearance. When faced with the realization that one wants to transition into womanhood, it is adjoined by a realization that one will be restricted. On feminizing hormone therapy muscles weaken and the possibility of being unable to protect oneself from transphobic assault becomes more real, but perhaps even more importantly, it no longer ‘looks good’ to be strong or athletic. I am here making a phenomenological claim, that the category of trans woman, and the pose one must assume to best ensure it is placed on oneself, requires not displaying masculine traits and behaviors even cis women are allowed. Thus, trans femme transition is one marked by the giving up of strength and of certain activities one might have once loved. Novelist Torrey Peters describes this as such:

“The girl down at the water’s edge throws the football in a beautiful spiral, so smooth and steady you could use it for a drill bit. I want to catch that football. I haven’t caught a football in three years. And normally, I’d be embarrassed—I’m self conscious about the way displays of athleticism curl my body into the old shape: arms lank, shoulder loose, hips solid and straight; shrugging off the balancing-a-book-on-my-head pose that I’ve cast my body into. But today is Trans Beach Pride [...] so who cares? No one here is going to think I’m manly”.¹⁷

Trans women then often feel restrained from physical activity by the need to display themselves as femininely as possible to be taken seriously as women. One potential appeal to the transgender reader, is then very likely that Hibari not only has retained the agency to compete in sports, and the muscle to fight off assaulters, but that while doing so she not only looks feminine, she looks “as cute as possible”.¹⁸ Whether you see her

with her boxing gloves ready to fight, spraying a machine gun wildly, pole jumping, fighting yakuza, or merely taking a bath, at no time does Hibari look anything less than cute. She is never shown with throbbing muscles, or a tense masculinized face. Instead, she retains a pose of feminine ease. Thus, one probable aspect of Hibari's appeal is that trans women can imagine a fantasy existence in which they are free to perform whatever athletic interests they once had, without risking the loss of their status as women in the eyes of others. Thus, in this aspect, Hibari truly is the "ideal girl" that "I would have wanted to become".¹⁹

This ideal girl, however, is not perfectly passable.²⁰ As previously mentioned Eguchi Hisashi is renowned for his sense of women's fashion, and he puts it to full effect to help Hibari. Not only is she fashionable, but all her outfits are ones that would naturally complement a skinny transgender woman's body. Tops both hint at a feminine shape, while being loose enough to not draw attention to a lack of cleavage, and bottoms are loose and often flair to give the impression of larger hips. Throughout the series Hibari is shown using inventive ways of feminizing her features, from stuffing her bra, to most notably, her swimsuit incident. In volume 2, chapter 23 of *Stop!! Hibari-Kun!* Hibari finds a clever way around outing herself during school swim class. The common female school swimsuit depicted in manga is a simple and conservative black one-piece swimsuit which would require a masterclass in tucking (the act of placing one's genitals back and firmly against the body to diminish their appearance) to not be outed by. We learn that last year Hibari avoided swim class by claiming to be on her period. As such, pulling the same stunt two years in a row might be suspicious. Kōsaku appears visibly nervous as the class waits for Hibari to arrive (she is late), and he wonders if she will be

okay. When she does arrive, it is not in the regulation swimsuit. Instead, she wears a red bikini top with matching dolphin shorts. In doing so she manages to give the impression of flaunting school dress code by scandalously showing too much, when in actuality she has chosen an outfit loose enough to hide what she needs to hide. Hibari is also shown throughout the series applying makeup and brushing her hair, and other acts of sustaining a feminine appearance. We can see these panels as indications of the lengths Hibari goes to so that she passes.

So far, we have established Hibari as a transition-fantasy, a trans girl who has retained her ability to physically protect herself, to take part in sports without appearing masculine, and with a creative and firm enough grasp of fashion and makeup to pass herself off as a cis woman. Thus, she already clearly appeals to the trans feminine reader, not as a fantasy other to sexualize or desire, but as a fantasy that one would wish to live. However, Hibari is not explicitly the audience surrogate. Indeed, her yakuza upbringing and fleshed-out family life provide her a depth of character that would prevent a depiction of her as such. Instead, Kōsaku is technically the audience surrogate (which makes sense as *Weekly Shōnen Jump* is a boys' magazine), and also Hibari's main love interest.

Let us look at Hibari and Kōsaku's relationship. Hiromi Tanaka refers to their relationship as a "pseudo-heterosexual romance between the cross-dresser and a main male character", where Hibari's "cross-dressing" symbolizes a "transgression beyond the existing gender binary, which manga rarely depict when it comes to a heterosexual relationship."²¹ It is true that Hibari and Kōsaku's relationship allows for a significant degree of flaunting of gender roles. Kōsaku rarely saves Hibari. Nearly all problems that

arise in the manga are solved by Hibari's cunning. This includes Kōsaku's problems, not just Hibari's. As such, Hibari coming to Kōsaku's rescue could easily be construed as a transgression of the gender binary. However, in terms of plot function, Hibari saving Kōsaku is rarely positioned as resulting from any form of latent masculinity. As mentioned earlier, she does everything while maintaining a clear femininity. Instead, these saving acts can usually be attributed to her yakuza upbringing or simply her wit. More often than not, Kōsaku provides Hibari problems to be solved, rather than save her, or her him. Instead, this saving appears primarily to function to further Kōsaku's awe of Hibari. Her saving him does not render her a man, or masculine, but a superhero. Indeed, the unofficial English translation (by Hachimitsu Scans) titles Volume 1, Chapter 5, as "She's!? Superman".

What of Kōsaku's feelings towards Hibari? Hiromi Tanaka called it "pseudo-heterosexual romance", and while this might not be how Hibari views it, as she at every opportunity refers to herself and insists that she is a woman, a daughter, and potential girlfriend, this descriptor is probably apt for how Kōsaku interprets his emotions. His feelings change throughout the series, however, the trajectory can largely be described as a change from amazement that Hibari is AMAB to acceptance of himself as *hentai*, or in translation, as "a pervert", rather than an acceptance of her as female. Thus, while it is a story of acceptance, it is not a story of Kōsaku accepting Hibari's womanhood so much as a story of him accepting his attraction to someone he does not logically recognize as a woman. In some fantasies he imagines marriage to her, or her becoming pregnant, which is to say, he imagines her as a woman. Likewise, he witnesses the rest of the world, and many male characters in it, sexualize and romanticize her as a woman.

Despite this, he remains insistent that she is male, and he is therefore a deviant. He goes as far as to horrify himself by imagining getting too close and discovering a hidden hyper-masculinity in her, or himself also becoming interested in wearing women's clothes due to his attraction to her. Thus, his plot is about overcoming these fears rather than accepting that he is not a pervert. In terms of his actual interactions with Hibari, both characters become more openly flirtatious as the story progresses. He begins to be more comfortable sexualizing and romanticizing her, and even accepts that he enjoys kissing her. She, on the other hand, is flirtatious from the beginning, and treats it as a matter of course that they will end up together, frequently claiming that he belongs to her. Further, she goes from only flirting with him at home to flirting with him publicly.

We can thus view this as providing a sexual power fantasy on behalf of the female trans reader. While it does not provide gender validation insofar as Kōsaku never acknowledges Hibari's womanhood, ultimately her trans-status no longer matters to Kōsaku. As such, the fantasy provided to the trans female reader is one of being so sexually alluring that gender and genitalia are rendered invalid. It is the power to make a man question his sexuality because he wants you badly. On the other hand, for cis male readers, the sexual fantasy provided is one of loss of control. It is about being rendered powerless, unable to not desire, not pursue a girl no matter what logic tells you. It is a fantasy of being unable to stop, of a girl (or maybe not a girl) sexually controlling you and making you question the most basic facts you thought you knew about yourself. It may even be a fantasy of being unapologetically "hentai" and yet accepted for it.

Thus, in summary, *Stop!! Hibari-Kun!* offers trans femme readers four central fantasies, and male readers one. Trans femme readers are offered fantasies of self-protection, athletic freedom, control over one's own appearance, and sexual power that defies gender perception. Male readers are provided a fantasy of helplessness in the face of taboo and the transgression of that taboo as morally acceptable. At no point in this early depiction of a girl, who Eguchi himself refers to as an otokonoko, is Kōsaku in a position of power, nor does he sexually assert his masculine dominance over the feminized Hibari. Thus, the story manages to break from heteronormativity while still displaying what today in the west would be increasingly considered a heterosexual relationship. Notably, however, while it does provide a character who self-conceives as a woman, and is widely perceived as a woman, it does not provide a character who can convince people who know her secret that she is a woman.

No Bra

No Bra represents the less famous of our manga, as well as the manga with the least scholarship written on it. At time of publication, I have been unable to find an academic article discussing the work. There may be good reason for this, as a review posted on the website, www.manga-news.com describes *No Bra* as full of “all kinds of more or less clichés”, a “manga without any real surprises”, and “Very far from revolutionizing the genre”.²² However, despite the this review being from 2012, thus after the founding of the otokonoko genre, the manga is referred to as “a classic *ecchi* manga” (*ecchi* here meaning sexually suggestive but not explicit), placing it not with other otokonoko works, but alongside titles like *Dominated By A Monster Boy*, *Dark Star Emperor* and *My Girlfriend Is A Zombie*. Whether this is because the review is

western, and by 2012 there still was not a familiarity among the foreign manga community with otokonoko as a genre, or because when *No Bra* was originally written, it pre-existed the genre and would likely have been considered an *ecchi* BL (Boys' Love) manga rather than more specifically an otokonoko manga, is unclear.

Despite its lack of scholarship and its admittedly cliché-ridden plot, *No Bra* deserves scholarship in regards both to the otokonoko genre it would prefigure and to trans identity within the genre. First, despite being clichéd, *No Bra* remains well read by English consumers, with 301,036 readers on the website manganelo alone (one of many western websites for free manga reading), and a detailed Wikipedia page. It received five volumes, between 2002 and 2004, and ended itself on its own terms, unlike *Stop!! Hibari-Kun!* which received three volumes and ended abruptly and unplanned. Second, the work received an unofficial English translation, indicating a sufficiently devoted English fandom wishing to render *No Bra* more accessible.²³ Third, *No Bra* is often featured prominently in online discussions and lists of precursors to the otokonoko genre.²⁴

Written and illustrated by Kawatsu Kenjiro, and published in *Weekly Shōnen Champion*, *No Bra* is the story of a love triangle. Kataoka Masato is a rather dumb and selfish student, with his own apartment, a charming best friend, and a crush on a girl named Ōzora Kaoru. All of this is thrown into disarray when his father sends Nomura Yūki (supposedly a childhood friend) to live with him. Masato has no recollection of being friends with Yūki, but supposes it was so long ago that he simply cannot remember, after all, he did move often as a child. When Yūki arrives, Masato finds Yūki is not the boy he imagined. Instead, Yūki dropped out of her last school because she

could not stand to attend it in a boy's uniform. She has thus been sent far from her home, where her secret is not known, and enrolled herself as a girl at Masato's school. Thus, much like *Stop!! Hibari-Kun!*, in *No Bra* we see an emerging trope where the male audience's perspective character is one of the few persons who knows the otokonoko's secret. However, this time Yūki has arrived in Masato's world, not the other way around.

The male love interest knowing the secret functions in several important ways. First, it removes the possibility of the otokonoko being perceived as cruel or a trickster. She may be keeping a secret from the rest of the world, but her love interests know exactly what she is. Their attraction to her is then under no false pretenses. Second, both Kōsaku in *Stop!! Hibari-Kun!*, and Masato in *No Bra* begin to worry about the otokonoko's secret coming out. Both boys are concerned what ramifications it would have for them should it ever come out, as both become increasingly perceived as the otokonoko's romantic partner. However, both boys also become increasingly concerned for their love interest's own sake. In fact, this desire to ensure that Yūki allowed to live her life as a woman becomes the driving force behind the last few chapters of *No Bra*.

As *No Bra* unfolds, it becomes increasingly clear to Masato that he is not the boy Yūki fondly remembers as "Maa-kun". Afraid that the love he has now accepted is based on false pretense, not on Yūki's side but on his own as a result of this case of mistaken identity, Kataoka goes to extreme lengths, including traveling to find kindergarten records to discover the truth. The truth he discovers is that the other girl he has been making sexual headway with, Kaoru, dressed as a boy for much of her childhood. She also changed her name upon her mother remarrying and moved from the town where all

three of them went to kindergarten to where they now all go to high school. It is Kaoru that Yūki remembers as “Maa-kun”. This revelation leaves Masato in emotional distress, as he has now confirmed that the romance he and Yūki have built was based on a memory of a person who was not him. He also comes to the idea that Yūki and Kaoru could not date, as both appear to be interested in men.²⁵ Eventually, it is revealed publicly that Yūki and Masato are cohabitating, and they are threatened with expulsion for this impropriety. To save Masato, Yūki reveals that she is AMAB, assuming punishment for this instead, and proceeds to force herself to live as a boy. The majority of Volume 5 Chapter 29 depicts how despite Yūki’s determination to live as a boy for Masato’s sake, she clearly is not one. Whether looking feminine while playing basketball, using a urinal, or merely walking around the school, students take note and express varying degrees of discomfort and confusion with her living as a man. Notably, after exiting the boy’s washroom Yūki is stopped by several of her female classmates, who ask “Are you okay?”, and offer “If you need to go to the toilet, you can go with us and use the girl’s toilet”.²⁶ After this, one of the girls clarifies “We don’t think of Nomura-san as a boy. Although your body might be of a man’s. Even if you wear a boy’s school uniform, we see you as a girl. Your heart is that of a girls’ ne?”²⁷ This parallels a moment in an early chapter of Vol 1. where Masato insists Yūki wear his clothes to help him overcome his gender confusion, however, the ugly Hawaiian shirt she dons does little to hide Yūki’s womanly appearance, and Masato quickly gives up. Just like in the earlier chapter, in this late chapter, Yūki wears boy’s clothes for Masato’s sake, rebuffing the girls who attempt to save Yūki from the boy’s washroom.

Finally, the guilt becomes too much for Masato, as he remembers how Yūki had dropped out of her last school rather than wear boy's clothes. He realizes that she is suffering, and she is suffering for "Maa-kun". He decides "I want to give Yūki the chance to wear a girl's school uniform once again".²⁸ First he attempts a petition signing campaign, but Yūki's own insistence that she is fine as a boy thwarts this. Eventually, he decides that the only way he can allow Yūki to live as a girl is by releasing her from her belief that he is "Maa-kun". He comes clean and explains that the boy she loved was actually Kaoru. Yūki is broken by the news, but by the next chapter is back to wearing women's clothes. She then, somewhat inexplicably, sets Masato up with Kaoru, who begin dating. Yūki returns to school once again as a girl, and is met not only with widespread acceptance, but a horde of boys asking her out.

Thus, in *No Bra* we are again provided a fantasy of perfect passing. Indeed, *No Bra* goes even farther than *Stop!! Hibari-Kun!* as Hibari was shown relying on fashion and makeup to feminize herself. Yūki appears as a woman even in men's clothes and without makeup. Her womanhood is simply undeniable to everyone but her. Further, once again we see trans feminine readers provided a fantasy of sexual appeal that defies gender perception and male readers provided a fantasy of helplessness in the face of taboo. Masato accepts that he cannot control his attraction to Yūki, despite believing she is a man, and in fact gets over it with less panic than Kōsaku in *Stop!! Hibari-Kun!*.

There are some notable differences between the two. For instance, in Hibari's case her sex-assigned-at-birth is positioned as a most-keep secret, a position that is never challenged. However, in *No Bra* Yūki's secret is found out, indeed revealed by her, and her capacity to be allowed to live as a girl is challenged by society, but ultimately

overcome. This may be due to progression in trans rights in Japan between 1981 and 2002, however, the relative ease with which Yūki accomplishes it suggests it is another fantasy, a fantasy of acceptance provided to trans femme readers. Hibari may be eventually accepted by Kōsaku, but societal acceptance is never provided to the reader.

A second distinction is in Yūki's interests and athleticism. While she is shown in the last few chapters playing basketball as a boy, and is drawn femininely doing so, there is no indication that she is good at basketball, and as long as her secret was still safe, she was not shown as athletic. Thus, we see that Yūki goes against the claim mentioned earlier that "for readers to readily accept (or even to admire) a male character who dresses in women's clothing or who uses female speech, it is necessary that he also fulfill certain conditions befitting an ideal man: a good family background, talent, good looks, and skill at fighting."²⁹ Yūki's family background is unclear, and she has no apparent skill at fighting or athletics. As for her talents, Yūki is a perfect housewife. She loves to cook and cleans diligently. There is no fantasy of self-protection or athleticism here. Kaoru is the one provided those traits. Thus, if Yūki is respected by the reader, she is not respected due to her masculine skills, but her femininity.

As such, while we can see a through line between Hibari and Yūki in the sexual fantasies they provide both male and female readers, as well as a shared non-sexualized fantasy of perfect passing, we see a divergence in their personalities, with one being a hyper feminine tomboy, and the other housewife material. Further, while *No Bra* does not provide a fantasy of trans feminine athletic agency or self-protection, it does provide one of radical acceptance by one's peers, and of living up to traditional feminine ideals.

Conclusion

This paper has examined two manga which predate and prefigure the 2004 founding of the otokonoko manga genre. It has asked what the appeal of each work was to both male and trans feminine readers, because what would later become the otokonoko genre is written and read by both male and trans feminine readers. It has also assumed that these manga offer something unique from Western depictions of transgender lives, based on the popularity of manga and anime among Western trans feminine readers. As with most genres, the otokonoko genre is full of tropes, so it was decided to look at works that prefigure the genre to better understand the appeal without the weight of the traditions of the genre weighing too heavily on the content.

This paper found that both *Stop!! Hibari-Kun!* and *No Bra* offered trans feminine readers fantasies of flawless passing, and of sexual desirability. It also found that the two offered male readers a fantasy of being powerless against their attraction to a person socially labeled as taboo or hentai. Additionally *Stop!! Hibari-Kun!* offered trans feminine readers a fantasy of maintaining the appearance of femininity in both combat and sport, as well as enough proficiency in combat to not be at risk of assault. Oppositely, in *No Bra* found Yūki representing a fantasy of attaining a perfect traditional femininity, including both a desire and skill at cooking and cleaning. This latter quality may help explain a phenomenon untouched by this paper's analysis, the popularity of *otokonoko* figures among right-wing American cis men, who have played a role in their popularity in English language online spaces and contributed both to their valorization and their degradation. For instance, the emergence of the term "trap" to identify an *otokonoko* character, and the increasing use of "trap trad wife" or "waifu" within these young, male, right wing online communities as an aspirational term of

“relationship goals”.³⁰ Further research remains to be done on both the intricacies of the genre itself, and its appeal to its audiences and sub-audiences, male and female, cis and trans. It is hoped that this paper contributed to this ongoing need for understanding a niche yet impactful anime and manga genre.

Notes

- ¹ Kinsella, Sharon. 2020. "Otoko No Ko Manga and New Wave Crossdressing in the 2000s: A Two-Dimensional to Three-Dimensional Male Subculture." *Mechademia: Second Arc* 13 (1): 40.
- ² Ōshima Kaoru and Fumi Fumiko. *Otokonoko Doushi Renai Chuu*. Tokyo: Takarajimasha, 2017.
- ³ Yoshiko Okuyama, *Reframing Disability in Manga* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020), 132.
- ⁴ Okuyama, *Reframing Disability*, 134.
- ⁵ James Valentine, "Pots and Pans: Identification of Queer Japanese in terms of discrimination," in *Queerly Phrased: Language, Gender, and Sexuality*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996): 101-102.
- ⁶ It is often incorrectly translated by western fans as "trap" a derogatory term which has emerged among western fans and critics alike of gender-transient characters in manga and anime. Trap has no linguistic ties to otokonoko and instead derives from the Star Wars character Admiral Ackbar loudly proclaiming "it's a trap", which became applied to characters who appeared attractive and female, but were considered male by the western consumer. The central idea behind the term is that the female presentation functioned as a trap or trick to get the male consumer aroused by a male character. The term is deeply homophobic and transphobic and has since been harshly applied to living transgender women. Whether the term trap derived from otokonoko fans seems dubious, as the trickery and sense of betrayal it implies seems an unlikely reaction from men who seek out the genre. Instead, it would seem more likely to have appeared due to the prevalence of otokonoko like characters outside of the otokonoko genre.
- ⁷ Michelle O'Brien, "Trans Work: Employment Trajectories, Labour Discipline and Gender Freedom," in *Transgender Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 2021), 51.
- ⁸ @autogyniphiles_anonymous. Accessed May 4, 2021. <https://www.instagram.com/p/B8essDMle5E/?igshid=1dh06owilossu>
- ⁹ Wark, McKenzie. "A Conversation with McKenzie Wark & Autogyniphiles_Anonymous" *Content Journal* 1, no (2021): 81-95.
- ¹⁰ Verena Maser, "Beautiful and Innocent: Female Same-Sex Intimacy in the Japanese Yuri Genre" (PhD diss, Universität Trier, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.25595/1250> (accessed May 4, 2021).
- ¹¹ Since Hibari and the other characters we will be discussing are trans coded, and often go by different pronouns depending on the situation, this paper will use the ones most likely to confirm to the character's desired gender.
- ¹² In modern, western trans terminology, this would be called being "stealth".
- ¹³ Eguchi Hisashi, "Hisashi Eguchi, Mangaka (Stop!! Hibari-kun!) - toco toco," Archipel, April 1, 2017, YouTube video, 12:10. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2a6Wqq4zifw>.
- ¹⁴ The above statements are included to provide context to the creation of one of the earliest "cross-dressing" manga, and is not intended as speculation as to the author's private life or gender identity.
- ¹⁵ Fujimoto Yukari, "Transgender: Female Hermaphrodites and Male Androgynes," *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal*, no. 27 (2004): 82.
- ¹⁶ Fujimoto, "Transgender," 82.
- ¹⁷ Torrey Peters, *Infect Your Friends and Loved Ones*, <https://www.torreypeters.com/book/infect-your-friends-and-loved-ones/> (accessed May 4, 2021).
- ¹⁸ Eguchi, "Hisashi Eguchi," at 7:52.
- ¹⁹ Eguchi, "Hisashi Eguchi," at 8:22-8:44.
- ²⁰ Passable and passing are terms used in both disability and trans communities to refer to the ability to not appear disabled or trans.
- ²¹ Hiromi Tanaka, "Japanese Manga" *The International Encyclopedia of Gender, Media, and Communication* (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2020): 4-5.
- ²² Kiraa7, "No Bra Vol. 1, Manga volume review," <https://www.manga-news.com/index.php/manga/critique/No-bra/vol-1> (accessed May 4, 2021).
- ²³ Many manga do not receive translation of any sort.
- ²⁴ NaomiOni, "Manga about Transgender people? (Mtf)" Reddit, 2016. https://www.reddit.com/r/asktransgender/comments/4v956b/manga_about_transgender_people_mtf/; Phantomslyker, "If "No Bra" Came Out Today, Would it Have Been More Popular?" Reddit, 2018. https://www.reddit.com/r/manga/comments/88q6tm/if_no_bra_came_out_today_would_it_have_been_more/; "Otokonoko Genre," TvTropes, <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/OtokonokoGenre>
- ²⁵ This seems to imply that Kataoka now views Yūki as a woman, although this is not made explicit.

²⁶ Kawatsu Kenjiro, *Nō Bura* (No Bra), Volume 5 Chapter 29 (Tokyo: *Weekly Shōnen Champion*, 2004): 109.

²⁷ Kawatsu, *No Bra*, Volume 5 Chapter 29: 109.

²⁸ Kawatsu, *No Bra*, Volume 5 Chapter 29: 124.

²⁹ Fujimoto, “Transgender,” 82.

³⁰ The Pedantic Romantic, ““Traps” Don’t Exist And Here’s Why” *The Pedantic Romantic*, November 26, 2018, YouTube video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nxeB2AXIG3E>; Natalie Wynn, “Are Traps Gay?” *Contrapoints*, January 16, 2019, YouTube video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PbBzhqJK3bg&t=99s>.

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