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LAUGHING UNTIL IT HURTS: CHILDREN, MOTHERS AND CONCERNS ABOUT COMEDIC TELEVISION IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN

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WILLIAM JOHN FEENEY

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Introduction:

Laughing Until It Hurts: Children, Mothers and Concerns about Comedic Television in Contemporary Japan

"Then [the expanse of high heaven] shook as the eight-hundred myriad deities laughed at once."

- *Kojiki (The Record of Ancient Matters)*

This dissertation considers the social entanglements of critical (mediatized) discourses concerning comedic television in contemporary Japan. Comedy (*owarai*) and comedic variety (*baraeti*) television programming have become a mainstay format on Japanese television since the 1980s. Compressed production schedules and low costs have helped sustain the appeal of comedic formats for broadcasters in an era of diminishing advertising revenue and tightening budgets. However, popular commentators have noted that these constraints, coupled with ceaseless demands to fill air-time, have led to a profusion of low-brow (*teizoku*) programs that increasingly compete to corner the market on cheap laughs. Such programs are both popular—according to industry ratings research—and subject to frequent criticism within public discussions mediated by newspapers, magazines, talk television and, more recently, social media. These 'problematic' programs regularly feature coarse speech and crude behavior which become salient foci within mediatized expressions of concern that find such rough (*ranbō*) interactional displays unsavory, meaningless, and potentially harmful.

As one might expect, children overwhelming figure as the explicit locus of concern. Rigorously institutionalized ideologies of childhood dependence invest children with potentials

to be developed and cast them as unequipped to operate as fully responsible social actors. These convictions normatively defer responsibility for the problematic behavior, speech, or study habits, of children onto other, more legitimately responsible, agents. The public discussions considered here entangle three principle agents as suspect figures that can fail to live up to their mature responsibility to appropriately care for, or at least consider, children. They are comedic producers—as creators of a problematic communicative contagion, schools and educational institutions—as ratified custodians of the social and academic development of children, and parents—as personally responsible for their own child's personal growth and development. Elementary school and junior high school children figure most prominently in these critical discussions, however high-school students and pre-schoolers (*yōchien*, *hōikuen*) also occasionally feature as vulnerable and in need of protection from comic television's presumed viral vulgarity.

While each of these figurated agents become targets of criticism at times, parents regularly appear as most often subject to criticism and blame. Mothers in particular serve as regular targets of criticism in sensational mediatized cases involving deviant acts by children. The stark division of labor associated with postwar Japan's 'maternal society' (*bosei shakai*) lays the responsibilities of childcare (as well as other forms of domestic labor) on mothers, thus freeing up fathers to engross themselves in economic labor to sustain the household as well as serve corporate and national interests (Yoda 2000b). Maternal ideologies materialize institutionally in workplaces in the form of recruitment and promotion practices that channel women towards positions with limited avenues for advancement (Ueno 1989; Brinton 1994; Edwards 1992). The implicit logic being that female employees will eventually leave their jobs to focus on the important work of childcare. This gendered formation hangs in large part on the

ideological linchpin of maternal love (*bosei ai*), which casts mothers as naturally inclined, and instinctually equipped, for child rearing (Akkiko and Yoda 1993; Bardsley 1999). In this light, the explicit focus on the potential dangers and distractions to children presented by comic television within these mundane public discussions obscures a profusion of more situated stakes for those tasked with caring for children.

This dissertation approaches these mundane public discussions concerning the social entailments television comedy as generative communicative (interdiscursive) process. The analysis builds on relatively recent approaches to circulation (Silverstein 2011, 2013; Gal 2018), as a form of interdiscursive process (See Silverstein 2005), and 'mediatization' (Agha 2011, Nakassis 2016) as a specific mode of semiotic mediation that selectively obscures and erases (Gal & Irvine 2000) social processes that participate in 'mass media'(ted) communication. Individual chapters emphasize the ways that critical accounts, and their rebuttals, unfold in regular (mediatized) ways as they traverse an institutional landscape composed of diverse constraints and interests. In working to advance arguments and mobilize support, such public discussions regularly conjure ideological formulations of Japanese society and index consequential figures of maternal personhood that become salient within the manifold social encounters that compose everyday experience.

The Ambivalent Social Power of Laughter

There is a longstanding appreciation for the power of laughter in Japan. For example, laughter holds a storied place in the oldest extent Japanese text, the Record of Ancient Matters (*Kojiki*). The key episode begins with a visit by the storm-god Susano to his sister, the Sun-Goddess Amaterasu. Susano had a great proclivity for mischief which regularly tested

Amaterasu's patience. On this visit, Susano's antics became more than his sister could bear and drove the exhausted Sun-Goddess to hide herself in a rocky cave and pulled a great boulder to seal the entrance. His sister gone, Susano departed, leaving Amaterasu to the solitude of the cave. With the heavens in darkness, the deities of the heavenly plane assembled with great concern and set about finding some way to coax the Sun-Goddess out of hiding. Only the sound of raucous laughter, wrung from the assembled deities by a bawdy dance, had the power to draw Amaterasu from her self-imposed solitude. Her curiosity piqued by the laughter, Amaterasu shifted the boulder from the entrance of the cave, eager to see what she was missing, and light was restored to the world (Phillipe 1987).

Of course, the social power of laughter has holds more than mythological significance. In stark contrast to American depictions of the fanatical humorlessness of the Japanese (Kushner 2004: 300-301), the continued prevalence and social power of laughter was not lost on the administrators of the wartime Japanese state. Keenly aware of the double-edged potentials of laughter to both boost and undercut the ideological foundations of the imperial project, Japanese authorities actively recruited the comedy industry to assist in the ideological mobilization of the nation. The conscription of comedy emerged through a convergence of interests between state aims and the more profit-oriented incentives that motivated purveyors of comic entertainment. The effort sought to adapt comic entertainment from a diverse set of resources for seeking individual relief to a set of coordinated enjoyments that might serve the propaganda aims of the wartime state (Kushner 2004, 2006).

The purposeful decoupling of media and entertainment industries from overt governmental control in postwar Japan ended the use of comedic performances for direct mass mobilization by the state, however, the business of comic entertainment continued. The

introduction of television in 1953 opened a new commercial market for mass entertainment and paved the way for a new set of anxieties around the sensory impact and expansive reach afforded by broadcast television. Cultural critics initially expressed optimism towards television and saw promise in the new broadcast medium for public education and cultural uplift. However, these expressions of hope soon turned to expressions of concern that market forces impelled program producers to draw audiences by any means necessary. As a result, according to critics, the powerful audio-visual allure of television was increasingly applied to pursue absurdity and spectacle. A role that comic television would grow to embrace.

Historical Interdiscursivities: From the Yose (Theater) to Television

While the history of comic television stretches back to the introduction of the medium to Japan in 1953, the comic formats that motivate the critical discussions examined in this dissertation emerged following lasting transformations in comedic programming that began in the 1980's. The period began with a wave of popular enthusiasm for the comedic performance genre *manzai* in the opening years of the 1980's. Often glossed into English as 'crosstalk,' manzai focuses on the antagonistic on-stage interactions between a *boke*, or funny man, and *tsukkomi*, the straight man (Stocker 2002, 2006; Ōta 2002). The comic kernels (*neta*) of manzai routines lie in the interactional struggle the *boke's* habitual misunderstandings and divergent contributions and the *tsukkomi's* efforts to correct, cajole and guide the *boke* back to an appropriate understanding of the unfolding interactional situation.[1]

[1] In this respect the genre resembles vaudeville acts such as Laurel and Hardy and Abbot and Costello that were popular in 1940s and 50s America. The many similarities between popular American vaudeville acts and Japanese manzai speak to the influence of the America form. However, it would be a mistake to presume that manzai is entirely derived from its American counterpart. The roots of manzai extend back much further as a practice pursued by itinerant festival performers (Tsurumi 1987, Stocker 2006).

Prior to television, this expressive form developed in to a robust form of popular entertainment within vaudeville theaters. Manzai routines were developed as live performances that took place on stage before paying audiences. However, the advent of the 'manzai boom' (manzai būmu) of the early 1980's saw broadcasters eager to cash in on the sudden popularity of the form. Fuji Television led the way with a program aptly titled, '*The Manzai*' (*Za Manzai*). *The Manzai* tapped a pool of established *manzai* performers and televised them as they performed acts drawn from repertoires developed for use in theatres. The program ran for roughly three years. Though broadcasts were infrequent, the initial production strategy of bringing cameras into the theatres, soon ran into trouble as a gap grew between the need for content and the limited volume this form of craft comedy could provide.

Manzai performers (*manzai-shi*) regularly require weeks to script the comedic kernels (*neta*) of comic dialogs and further rehearse and refine them over the course of many performances. This investment of time presented no problem when performed in theaters as the limited reach live performances meant that routines could be performed many times before having to worry that they had become stale or overexposed. However, the expansive reach of television meant that performances could not be recycled as was customary in the theater. With television, routines could only realistically be performed once on camera before another would have to be developed and rehearsed. Television dramatically broadened audiences which fostered an emerging tension that called into question the sustained viability of manzai performances as a televisually mediatized commodity. The elaborately scripted and rehearsed performances simply required too much time and effort to craft as their value would be exhausted in a single performance.[2] This ultimately made manzai unsuitable to fill the growing demand for broadcast

[2] Of course, the tension between the effort required to craft comic schemes and their one-shot use, is not limited to *manzai*. Former Fuji television producer Yoshida Masaki, for example, notes that sketch comedy (*konto*)

comic content and the 'manzai boom' soon gave way to a series of 'comedy booms' (*owarai būmu*) that erupted periodically throughout the 1980's and into the 90's.[3]

Industry insiders often narrate this moment in the history of television comedy as a period marked by innovations in format to overcome production constraints and satisfy the demand for comic programming (Yoshida 2010). In the place of the comedic craft, a profusion of comic formats emerged that serve the market for comic and variety television (cf. Ishii 2008). An emphasis on flexible formats and talent fostered the broader circulation of comic forms.

Innovations in recording and broadcast technology, particularly video recording technologies, led producers to move beyond the yose and embrace more flexible formats. A series of reality style programs, perhaps best exemplified by the program *Denpa Shonen*, tasked junior comedians with tackling ridiculous challenges while being documented by a camera crew. For example, famed 'poison tongue' (*dokuzetsu*) Ariyoshi Hiroyuki first rose to popular prominence with his comedic partner, Kazunari Moriwaki, by hitchhiking from Hong Kong to London with no money. A camera crew followed the duo and reports of the trip featured on *Denpa Shonen* for six months.

programming faces a similar tension between the effort required to produce skits capable of drawing laughs and the rapid turnover of material (Yoshida 2010). In addition to their historical relevance, I emphasize the issues that emerged with manzai to emphasize the broader tensions around production for comic television that impelled producers to develop and seek out formats more suitable to the production requirements of television.programming faces a similar tension between the effort required to produce skits capable of drawing laughs and the rapid turnover of material (Yoshida 2010). In addition to their historical relevance, I emphasize the issues that emerged with manzai to emphasize the broader tensions around production for comic television that impelled producers to develop and seek out formats more suitable to the production requirements of television.

[3] The saturation of parodic comic television during this period also precipitated a broad social shift in comic sensibilities of comic norms. Many have pointed to this period as a watershed moment that seeded comic and parodic sensibilities that persist to this day. For example, Kitada Akihiro (2005) argues that the sustained popularity for (parodic) comic programming emerged in response to the political activism of prior eras. Comic television provided an outlet for satirizing earnest activism. However, gradually the capacity to read comic television in relation to political forms dissipated, leaving behind well entrenched parodic sensibilities that had grown ideologically detached, and ripe for later recuperation by the right.

In addition to new formats, new modes of expressive artistry also emerged to satisfy the surging demand for humor programming in the late 80's and early 90's. The 'one-shot' entertainer (*ippatsu geinin*) emerged to prominence during this era, and took off in earnest in the mid-1990's. These comic one-hit-wonders took the form of characters fashioned around a single memorable gag that served as the punchline of every performance. The gag is the *ippatsu geinin's* brand and performers aspiring to break into comedy through such comic characters take great care to craft their gags in ways that promise to circulate socially and be reanimated by viewers for laughs. This put the citationality of gags at the center of a large segment of comic television as the longevity of the *ippatsu* comic is directly connected to, and limited by, the popularity of the gag. The typical lifespan runs anywhere between six months at the short end and two years at the long. A steady supply of aspirants, eager for their own brief moment in the spotlight, ensures that broadcasters have stream of new 'talent' at hand.

The Mediatized Focus on Comic Forms

Capable of inflicting hurt and alienation as easily as intimacy and social integration, laughter inspired by comic forms continues to cut multiple ways. The transgressive acts that aspire to comic status on television regularly run the risk of entailing humiliation, anger and offense when cited in everyday settings. The status form's comic quality is something that is interdiscursively worked out ex-post-facto through uptake in relation to metapragmatic models that not afford regular channels for regimenting indexicality in the process of entextualization (Silverstein & Urban 1996), but also charting the interdiscursive course for next order indexical uptakes capable of characterizing and typifying participants within interactions yet to come (Silverstein 2003). Whether callous and spiteful, feigned or convivial, shared laughter draws

social boundaries and renders matters of group membership interactionally salient. The things that individuals laugh at, regularly serve as equality salient moral markers of who they laugh with (Kramer 2011).

Rather than directly tracing the social entailments of these comic innovations directly, this dissertation focuses the discursive struggles provoked by the double-edged potentials of such comic forms in relation to children, conceived as beings of limited agency, and mothers, as the principal agents tasked with safeguarding children. My interest in the public discussions that emerge around comic television are informed by a set of theoretical concerns that concern the ways that conceptions of mass media circulation shape the regulatory discussions that follow.

Asif Agha (2011) defines 'mediatization' as a practice that reflexively draw together processes of communication with processes of commodification. These prevalent reflexive models of mass mediated communication shape and constrain the critical perspectives brought to bear on comic television. Seen through the ideological lens mediatization, the performances exhibited on comic television appear foremost as media commodities. That is, they appear as discrete media commodities that have been fashioned for use in the economy of attention that drives commercial television. Channeling attention to the commodity fragment of mediatized comic forms models circulation as a process consisting of the transportation or transmission of stable comic texts along technologically mediated infrastructural channels that stretch from the animating bodies of professionalized comic performers into the eyes and ears of consuming audiences.

One consequence of mediatization is that media process and social process come be formulated as separate and distinct domains of action. The gags and routines that regularly appear on comic television take on the appearance of such media commodities. Seen through

their commodity fraction, the comic forms exhibited on television traverse regular routes of commercial entertainment. Cash payments curate the specific circulatory trajectories of media commodities that incorporate comic forms. As with any branded commodity, institutional labor goes into maintaining clear links between gags, games and routines and the comic personas presumed to have authored them. As a result, the circulation of comic forms is largely taken as a movement or transmission of discrete mediatized texts, placing the presumptively stable media text at the center of attention (under such folk models) and project clear lines of responsibility extending to comic performers.

At the same time, comic television traffics in citational resources. As developed by Nakassis (2016) citational acts always exhibit such a tension in the materialization of a form. Echoing Bakhtin's (1982) formulation of double-voiced utterances, citational acts index figures drawn from elsewhere, at the same time, they figurate difference in their here and now enaction. The comic forms that appear on comedy television regularly serve as interactional resources that become incorporated into everyday sociality. Citations of popular gags and punchlines drawn from comic television regularly facilitate engaging sociality by laypeople (*ippanjin*). In this way, the comic performances that animate Japanese comic television circulate not only as humorous forms to be consumed directly by audiences, but also as citational resources regularly deployed by nonprofessionals to pursue convivial social engagements in everyday settings.

As comic forms are taken up and deployed within everyday interactions, they simultaneously invoke both fractions. On the one hand, the comic forms that appear on television are formulated to be consumed and laughed at as performances, on the other, they are crafted to be taken-up and reanimated as interactional resources for mediating personal social relationships. The reproduction of gags within everyday sociality appear as citational acts

The citational practices by which these comic forms materialize in the course of everyday sociality point back to their commodity fractions as mediatized forms. People (re)presence and (re)animate comic gags, routines and enregistered speech styles to pursue their own interactional aims, however, the powerful commodization of comic forms maintains them as citational communicative forms that have been authored elsewhere, by professional comics who know how to handle them with appropriate care.

In this way, ideologies of mediatization inform the anxieties and regulatory impulses in relation to the potential for the broadcast circulation of comic forms to infiltrate everyday sociality and shift broader interactional norms. Reflexive models cast comic gags, persona and routines as stable commodity texts associated with the corporate entities that constitute the Japanese comedy industry. As gags and routines overwhelmingly take the form of embodied performances that have poetically crafted for easy reanimation, they circulate through the citational acts of everyday folk (*ippanjin*) well beyond the material reach of the media infrastructures associated with the world of professionalized entertainment (*geinōkai*).

This is to say, despite the widespread citational use of comic forms with everyday life, mediatized ideologies shape and channel critical attention directly towards comic media objects as commodity forms. The concerted focus on the commodity fraction of comic forms, their conspicuous participation in the comic entertainment economy, directs attention to them as stable media(tized) objects. The work to commodify these communicative forms as comic commodities renders them focal points for forensic attention. By cleaving media process from broader social process, mediatized models of circulation focus attention on the circulation of comic forms themselves and renders them a powerful locus of concern as a source of mimetic contagion.

Circulatory Anxieties: Children as a Motivating Concern

The figure of the child lies at the center of the concerns that organize this dissertation. To be sure, the social entanglements of comic television in Japan stretch well beyond the topical boundaries established within this study. However, I suggest that these boundaries are also not simply arbitrary or artificial. The regulatory concerns that entangle comic television, children and mothers represent a prevalent, prominent and potent domain of public discourse in Japan. Children motivate concern in large part due to a presumed lack of self-regulatory agency that reflects ideological perspectives on their status as unfinished, and underdeveloped, social actors. This motivates a set of anxieties in relation to the potential for the comic forms developed for television to misfire in the hands of children seeking to reanimate them.

Another source of concern lies in the developmental promise of children that is also presumed through their unfinished status. Prevalent developmental ideologies suggest that adequate support and guidance, children promise to develop into self-sufficient, productive and contributing members of Japanese society. To be sure, formulations that render children into human capital are a distinctly modern phenomenon that followed the introduction of ideological technologies of the modern nation state (cf. Ai 2004). However, though the explicit campaigns aimed at developing the bodies and minds of children to raise a labor force suited to carrying out projects of the state (cf. Frühstück 2003) have been left behind, the conceptual formulation of children as a human resource that requires dedicated support to develop has endured. The most institutionally entrenched manifestation of the contemporary formulation of children and human capital lies in the competitive structures of Japan's educational system.

The progression of a child through the education system takes place in distinctly segmented phases. Compulsory education (*gimu kyoiku*) lasts a total of nine years. Students

spend six years in elementary school, running between the ages of five and eleven. The remaining three years of compulsory education are spent in junior high school. School enrollments for elementary and junior-high schools are normatively determined by geographical boundaries. Children usually attend the school that services their neighborhood. Enrollment in high school or college require applicants to apply directly to each school and to pass a rigorous entrance examination for each school to which they apply. As such, the third year of junior high is often fraught with anxiety as concerning the impending entrance examinations that will sort students into high schools of differential quality depending on their examination scores. Better, more elite high schools, regularly lead to better performance when the entire examination process repeats for matriculation into universities. Matriculation into university appears as a consequential decision that charts the professional prospects of young people. Annual recruitment events at universities channel graduates into companies as new recruits. These institutionalized connections are highly formalized and matriculation into a prestigious university boosts the future professional prospects of students as the payoff for time invested in solitary diligence.

Finally, it is crucial to note that the anxieties that emerge around children provoke related anxieties concerning the agents responsible for both protecting children from harm and shepherding them towards bright, successful, and productive futures. Mothers overwhelmingly serve as the focal figure for both monitoring their child's wellbeing and managing the installation of skills and knowledge that promise to lead them to future success. As such, talk about children regularly transmutes into talk about the mothers who care for them. Accordingly, anxieties that emerge in relation to children, in turn, regularly direct critical attention towards mothers. The marked tendency for concerns over the wellbeing and development children to become concerns

over the skill and effort of mothers means that public discussions concerning children inevitably invoke formulations of maternal virtue and vice in ways that can ultimately limit the capacities of mothers to support their children.

Notes on Individual Chapters

Each of the four content chapters focuses on a set of concerns that entangle television comedy with broader social concerns that discursively orbit children and mothers. Taken collectively, the chapters trace a progressive shift from a focus on the concrete threats posed to children to the ways that expressions of concern about comic forms entangle mothers through the presumed vulnerability of children. The opening chapters focus on formulations that characterize comic television as a potential source of danger to children: first directly to their minds, hearts and bodies and then towards their academic achievement and professional futures. At the midpoint the analytic focus shifts to consider the ways that such expressions of concern extend further to incite concerns that call into question the fitness of mothers as the most important caregivers for children.

Chapter 1, entitled 'Smiles and Scars,' takes up the robustly developed link between the rough behavior displayed on comedic television and bullying in elementary and junior-high schools. The chapter opens with an examination the 'voluntary' withdrawal (*jishuku*) of a popular 'punishment game' (*batsu gemu*) segment from the comedy program *Mecha Mecha Ike* ('We are so Cool') in 2000. The withdrawal came as a newly constituted independent broadcast regulatory body (The Committee on Youth / *Seishonen iinkai*) added their institutional voice to amplify a regular litany of viewer complaints that the segment might encourage (*kotei*) bullying (*ijime*) in schools. Complaints identified a structural tension between efforts by television

producers to profitably fill air-time with cheap, questionable, content and the presumed imitative propensities of schoolchildren. This chapter focuses on the communicative norms, social formations and ideological grounds that converge to plausibly constitute the interdiscursive connection between television and *ijime*. *Ijime* (bullying) emerged as a social concern in the 1980's following successful interventions to mitigate prevalent outbreaks of physical violence by Japanese students, particularly in middle-schools (*konai boryoku*). As the physically violent incidents in schools declined, attention turned to a less obvious forms of social violence, *ijime* (bullying). One consequence of this historical order is that the category *ijime* (bullying) emerged in contrast to the physical violence that provoked prior interventions. This has tended to deemphasize physical violence as a constitutive component of *ijime*. Indeed, authoritative and informal definitions of *ijime* emphasize communicative, psychological and social forms of violence precisely to emphasize that it can be difficult to detect. (This stands in stark contrast with American definitions of 'bullying' that often highlight physical violence as a core concern.) I argue that the anxiety motivating concern over connections between *ijime* in schools and the rough interactional forms of comedic television turns largely on the difficulty of pragmatically distinguishing between inclusive teasing among intimates (*karakai; ijiri)* and alienating *ijime* (bullying). The interpretive challenge is magnified because the interactional forms gleaned from television serve broadly as communicative resources, deployed by children and youth, to negotiate social relationships in both modalities (as both intimate teasing and as *ijime*). The transgressive roughness of these comedic forms appear pragmatically double-edged. Such forms invite interlocutors (especially peers) to intimacy through co-aligning participants towards transgressions of social/communicative norms and niceties. At the same time, in cases of asymmetry and dis-alignment, they can serve to invade, besmirch or negate a participant's public

self and standing. The chapter closes with a consideration of the ways in which mediatized accounts of bullying (*ijime*) regularly elide and erase this rich processual complexity in ways that formulate potentially counter-productive definitions of ijime (especially at an abstract policy level) at the same time they regularly cast blame on the usual suspects: 'media', schools and mothers.

Chapter 2, entitled 'Institutional Complainers' focuses on one oft articulated concern that identifies comedic television as meaningless distraction from more important tasks such as diligent study. These concerns align with the emphasis on academic success as the normative institutional channels to professional success and future financial stability and class ascendancy. The chapter focuses on the circulation of an annual parent survey report produced by the Japanese PTA (Parent Teacher Association) National Convention (*PTA Zenkokukyogikai*) concerning 'media and children' as an emblem of class ascendant parental concern. Though very few people read the actual text of the report, news of the report circulates widely with particular attention given to one section of the report, the list of 'Television Programs that Parents don't want their Children to See' ('*hogosha ga kodomo ni misetakunai bangumi'*). Analysis of these serial reports about the survey report reveals a regular metadiscursive process that circulated news of the survey report in ways that durably characterize the PTA, and thus 'parents,' as an organization composed of overbearing 'complainers' (*'kurema').*

Chapter 3, entitled 'Boon and Bane: The Intimate Pleasures and Playful Hazards of Vulgar Imitation' considers the tensions that parents negotiate around comic forms as affordance for intimate play, and stigmatizing sign of parental irresponsibility. The chapter takes up the ambivalence expressed by parents towards outbursts of imitation of televised vulgarities by their children to argue that childish imitation of television vulgarity can appear as both social 'boon'

and stigmatizing ‘bane’ for mothers. Within domestic settings childish imitative vulgarity can become a resource for intimate play between parents and children. At the same time, the vulgar behavior of children can also provoke deep embarrassment for parents—particularly mothers—in spaces where children are likely to be overheard and observed by non-intimate others. The tensions that emerge around comic forms demonstrated the ways that mothers find themselves caught between multiple formulations of maternal virtue. In this case, one perspective compels mothers to instill a practiced solitary diligence in children, another perspective values gregarious play as signs of affection and intimacy between parent and child. While mothers often claim to desire balance, these alternative sources of classed maternal virtue regularly project a double bind that captures mothers between exhorting children to diligent study and letting them ‘be children.’ I suggest that this tension helps motivate the routine production and circulation of ‘routine complaints’ about comedic television within neighborhood social encounters between mothers as non-intimate, yet familiar and often seen, acquaintances.

Chapter 4, entitled ‘Managing Monstrousness,’ turns an ethnographic lens on the participation of the mediatized parental stereotypes within the everyday social life of mothers in a middle-class Yokohama neighborhood. The anxieties that emerge in relation to children as beings of limited agency regularly cast doubt on the responsible adults charged with ensuring their safety and normative development. Figures of parental dysfunction abound. This chapter focuses on the mediatized figure of the intrusively irresponsible ‘monster parent’ and traces the ways this figure of parental alterity participates in and shapes the everyday experience of mothers. ‘Monster Parents’ are unsavory figures that have eschewed their proper parental responsibilities. They complain obsessively and make excessive demands on teachers on behalf of their children. One particular feature that sets ‘monster parents’ apart from prior pejorative

figures of complaining mothers lies in the site of struggle and tension. Stories of monster parents emphasize parental struggles with schools and in this way reflect a set of parallel discussions that detail the progressive unraveling of Japanese society as well as the established institutional resources for social reproduction. For example, the monster parent 'problem' (*mondai*) regularly folds into these discussions as evidence of progressively deteriorating respect for, and trust in, teachers. Prior figurations of overbearing motherly alterity, such as the '*mamagon*' ('Mother Dragon') of the 1970's, regularly cited an excessive alignment with academic success and educational programs. While prior figures excessively pressured their children for academic achievement (conforming to the educational order and hierarchy), 'monster parents' excessively criticize and make unreasonably personal demands on educational intuitions (echoing discussions that contemporary parents 'do not respect teachers'). Self-absorbed 'monster parents' are thus characterized as transgressing the normative and appropriate institutional boundary between school life and personal/familial/neighborhood life. Wide-spread mediatized accounts (appearing in weekly magazines, television dramas, and even comedy programs themselves) regularly characterize monster parents as incessant complainers about small and inconsequential things. In this way, complaints and demands leveled by parents on teachers appear as the principle, but far from only, sign of monstrousness. These same mediatized dramatizations characterize the volume (both in terms of amplitude and quantity) of monstrous complaints as a very real impediment to the smooth functioning of schools. Complaints about monster parents describe them forcefully intruding into school matters and disrupting their, presumably, smooth organizational operation. Though I often heard reports of monster parents and observed countless dramatizations of their monstrous antics, I never caught sight of such monstrous activity myself. It may be that the school in my middle-class Yokohama neighborhood was particularly fortunate

and free of the epidemic. However, I would suggest that rather than reflecting a sudden shift in parental behavior grounded in sociological reality, the prevalence and evident popularity of the figure reflects the ways it compellingly taps broader anxieties about the disintegration of organizational hierarchies in an ongoing age of recession and restructuring (Yoda 2000a; Arai 2000, 2016). While this discussion affords many productive avenues for development, my focus here is on the ways in which these mediatized figures, backed by questionable sociological veracity, overshadow and loom into the everyday experience in ways that push mothers to carefully manage encounters with teachers and neighborly acquaintances or risk being stigmatized as 'monstrous.' I trace the ways that these mediatized figures of alterity exerted pressure on mothers to regulate their interactions with teachers, school officials and others in the neighborhood in ways that potentially threaten to curtail their efforts to support and advocate for their children.

Chapter 1:

Smiles, Scars and Suicide: Forensic Anxieties and the Limited Interactional Agency of Children

"[Ijime is] a type of aggressive behavior by which someone who holds a dominant position in a group-interaction process, by intentional or collective acts, causes mental and/or physical suffering to another inside a group."
- (Morita Yōji 1985)

An Arrival Story

My introduction to the transgressive spectacle of Japanese comedy television took place on my first visit to Japan in the summer of 2000. On this trip I stayed at the family home of a close friend. I understood nothing in Japanese and my hosts, with the sole exception of my friend, had very little command of English. After dinner one Saturday evening I found myself sitting on the living room floor amidst a flurry of family conversation that I had no hope of comprehending. Not wanting to burden my friend by asking for repeated translations, my attention drifted absently to the television set which had been quietly left on throughout the meal. Though all speech remained utterly unintelligible, I found myself increasingly entranced by the slapstick antics on display. The program was a comedy variety program called '*Mecha Mecha Ike*' (*'We are so cool!'*). The segment that had caught my attention took the form of a 'punishment game' (*batsu gēmu*) which focuses on a silly or trivial game as a mechanism for distributing harsh punishments to participants. In this popular variety television genre, there are usually no prizes to win, only painful and humiliating punishments to be meted out. Entitled

'Seven Shiritori Samurai' (*shichi nin no shiritori samurai*), this particular segment troped on the Akira Kurosawa film of nearly the same name. Regular cast members and celebrity guests dressed as characters in the Kurosawa film and sat in a circle within what appeared to be a village hut and played the children's word game shiritori.[1] Players took turns uttering contributions interspersed within a rhythmic chant. The loud clap of a *mokugyō*, a wooden slit drum, registered the occurrence of an error and signaled a pause in turn-taking. This was commonly followed by a brief verbal squabble as players identified the error and pointed fingers at the responsible party. Everyone except the offender then stood and moved to the edge of the room, leaving the offender to await punishment in the center. The lights dimmed and flashed, and the sound of thunder played as if a storm raged outside. Punishment then materialized in the form of ten screaming men—garbed as bandit warriors—who rushed in and beat the solitary player with padded swords for roughly ten seconds before rushing out. Quiet restored, the duly punished player, now prone, gave an account of the experience to the rest of the group, usually with wide eyes and a haggard expression. This developed into a familiar teasing exchange between participants that lasted a few minutes and was frequently punctuated by shared laughter even. Following this post-punishment banter, the participants returned to their cushions to begin the cycle again.

At the time I had never seen anything like this before. Needless to say, my utter lack of cultural and linguistic competence impeded my efforts to comprehend, let alone contextualize, the spectacle. Who were these people? Were such punishments a common feature of Japanese

[1] The game requires that players transpose the final syllable of immediately prior contributions to the beginning of their own contribution. The game proceeds until a player fails to make a valid contribution, duplicates another's contribution, or provides a contribution that ends in an isolated nasal consonant 'n', as there are no words that begin with the sound.

play? Was this good television in Japan? Did the beatings 'really' hurt? I had never seen anything like this and the segment left a deep and lasting impression on me.

I returned to Japan several times in following years and each time I hoped to catch the segment again. On these visits I took up watching *Mecha Mecha Ike* every Saturday. While I saw countless similar punishment games, involving childish games and harsh physical punishments, I never managed to catch the 'Seven Shiritori Samurai' on television again. It was not until several years later—as I began to formulate this research—that I learned that the segment had been discontinued shortly after my first visit in 2000. Accounts of the incident narrated the decision to discontinue the Shiritori Samurai as an expression of voluntary 'self-restraint' (*jishuku*) by program producers in response to expressions of concern, let force by a newly constituted independent broadcast advisory body, that the 'Shiritori Samurai' segment might 'affirm' (*kōtei*) *ijime* (bullying).

Unravelling the Concern

At first glance the Shiritori Samurai incident likely appears mundane and unremarkable. To be sure, the discursive struggle around the Shiritori Samurai is not a unique or isolated incident. Such expressions of concern over the potential social and psychological 'influence' (*eikyō*) exerted by television programming are a longstanding and well-known feature of public discussion within Japan and beyond. However, the mundane familiarity of such public discussions often works to obscure the potent social work they regularly perform and downplays the powerful influence exerted by the metapragmatic models they precipitate and circulate. The dispute over the Shiritori Samurai is representative of one prominent strain of regulatory discussion that questions the appropriateness of comic television for presumably impressionable

viewers. Such concerns appear overwhelmingly motivated by the figure of the still developing child and the understood potential for their yet underdeveloped critical, communicative and social capacities to lead them into danger.

From the outset it is important to note that the anxieties provoked by the rough interactional forms regularly exhibited on comic television do not necessarily indicate a broad discomfort with coarse or rough behavior in general.[2] Indeed, the same forms of rough behavior and vulgar speech that potentially scar victims as ijime (bullying) also serve as interactional resources for forging intimate bonds of friendship between close-companions, particularly amongst boys. The anxieties that motivate critics of comedic television emerge in response to the double-edged ambiguity of such forms—their capacity to elicit smiles or scars—and the challenge they present to those seeking to discriminate teasing play from alienating ijime.

Adopting the 'sign's-eye view' (Silverstein 2004) on discussions of comic rough behavior and ijime highlights the forensic perspectives that stakeholders bring to bear on pragmatically ambiguous instances of rough behavior. Linguistic anthropologists have long detailed the metapragmatic regimentation exerted through the poetic organization (metricalization) of message form as a crucial tool for empirically tracing ways in which socially consequential action unfolds (Silverstein 2003). The metrical organization of stretches of semiotic activity serving to iconically-index cosmological forms in ways that dynamically figurate performances in the here and now as particular tokens of general types. However, such dynamic figurations often require complex semiotic coordination and are always contingent and defeasible in practice. This opens space for a struggle over the forensic semiotics of rough

[2] I use the term 'rough behavior' to denote encounters that appear available for recognition as ijime (or, alternatively, as intimate teasing or some other captionable speech act) but has not yet been so named. In this way I hope to emphasize both the processual and perspectival aspects of claims that identify ijime or its interactional components.

behavior as a struggle to metapragmatically regiment the manifold iconic and indexical potentials afforded within in any particular (sinsign) manifestation of rough behavior into recognizably coherent discrimination of (legisign) form.

Contrary to the tightly condensed account that regularly circulates today, the withdrawal of the Shiritori Samurai materialized as contingent and contested unfolding of interdiscursive process through time. Following a rich linage of scholarship (cf. Briggs 1996), I approach disputes, such as this one, as interdiscursively pivotal (ritual) moments for formulating, materializing and disseminating powerfully consequential distinctions that differentially organize participation within social life. A consideration of the discursive struggle in this case draws attention to the regular (metapragmatic) models brought to bear by interested actors that seek to fashion—or unravel—connections between television comedy and ijime. The discursive struggle that culminated in the discontinuation of Shiritori Samurai serves as an effective point of entry to consider the social, ideological and communicative tensions that motivate the forensic anxieties that interdiscursively entangle television comedy, ijime and schoolchildren.

Critical concerns about potential links between comic TV and ijime gain force in relation to the presumed communicative inexpertise of children and the dangerously high-stakes associated with ijime. Fully formulated, the cited concern motivating critics of the Shiritori Samurai focused on the potential for children to be drawn to (re)animate, potentially dangerous, rough comic forms even as they lack the mature communicative capacities to appropriately integrate them into their own social encounters. In this way, the expressions of concern levelled at the Shiritori Samurai rely in large part on the presumed inability of children to appropriately manage the delicate interactional work necessary to appropriately wield such transgressive interactional forms as a form of play. Critical accounts cast the ‘imitation’ (mane) of comic

forms by children as an unreflective and habitual process by which children reproduce comedic gags and routines without applying the reflexive awareness and discretion to ensure they are recontextualized safely. As such, childish efforts to reproduce comic interactions drawn from television may, ‘inadvertently,’ enact ijime. In this way, the regulatory dispute mobilizes an anxiety concerning the potential pragmatic dangers of rough comic forms as they circulate within classrooms and become broadly incorporated into the social practice of children.

Critical perspectives tap prominent public concerns regarding the danger that ijime presents to children's mental and emotional health. Importantly, ijime gained urgency as a prominent social concern in contemporary Japan in connection to widely discussed incidents of suicide by children who had suffered at the hands of their peers. Though often glossed as 'bullying' in English, Japanese accounts of ijime emphasize mental and emotional suffering inflicted within peer groups through communicative and social means. Ijime is primarily associated with schools and the regular organizational units of school life, such as the classroom group (*gakkyū*) and after-school clubs (*bukatsudō*), serve as prototypical settings for accounts of ijime.

Historical shifts in the conceptualization of ijime have intensified the meta-pragmatic ambiguity in relation to contemporary forms of rough behavior. Recent definitions of ijime stipulate that the difference between the smiles produced by teasing (ijiri) and scars inflicted by ijime lies in the way such rough speech and behavior are taken up by targeted individuals. This has entailed a shift from a semiotic forensics of ijime that focuses on signs of bodily behavior—as observable manifestations of typifiably problematic behavior—and towards a semiotic forensics that locates evaluative certainty in the internal mental and emotional states of children. As such, contemporary efforts to mitigate ijime do not claim to identify ijime through a

(symbolic) process of typifiying behavior. A process that correlates manifest token instances of observable behavior with identifiable proscribed types or classes. Rather, current approaches discriminate ijime from teasing by seeking signs of anguished uptakes by likely victims as indices of mental or emotional pain that precipitate within the indexical and iconic realms of unfolding semiotic process.

As subsequent chapters discuss, though public discussions over ijime and media focus topically on children, the consequential stakes of such discussions primarily impact those tasked with safeguarding and caring for children. As a result, these public discussions invoke and compose rich formulations of Japanese society, define figures of personhood and allocate to them responsibilities in relation to children as unfinished and incomplete social participants. While the Shiritori Samurai dispute evokes a striking contrast between a pair of conflicting perspectives on the potential threat posed by televised displays of coarse comedic behavior, both tap common understandings of child development and the interactional agency of children. No one involved in the public discussion of the Shiritori Samurai disputes the manifest problem posed by ijime, its horrific consequences, or the practical challenges that confront institutional efforts to mitigate it. Neither do disputants contest the evident reciprocal influence (eikyō) that entangle entertainment media and social practice more broadly. Rather, disputants argue about the degree of danger posed by exposure of children to coarse comic forms and the appropriate means to regulate the circulation of such forms within the social experience of school children. In this way, the regulatory dispute over the Shiritori Samurai engages a complex politics of responsibility that emerges around children conceived as beings of limited communicative agency.

Within this discursive framework, the presumed social and communicative inexpertise of children puts them at risk of becoming both misguided perpetrators, and vulnerable victims of ijime. The presumption that children lack the ability to maturely monitor and regulate their behavior shifts responsibility and blame onto other agents such as media producers, schools and parents (meaning mothers). As will become evident in later chapters, the formulations that precipitate from such mundane regulatory discussions entail demands and expectations that impose socially consequential entailments on those faulted for failing to responsibly safeguard children.

Situating 'Media Influence'

The dispute over the Shiritori Samurai emerged in relation to longstanding generalized concerns over the potential influences of new media technologies on the libidinal impulses, moral sensibilities and social habits of audiences that consume them.[3] The ascription of a potential link to ijime mobilizes a historical discursive formation of concerns over television that extend back to the introduction of television to Japan in 1953 (Chun 2007, Kim 2017).[4] Television, like radio before it, has been approached ambivalently, as a media technology that affords both promise and peril. Initially, the capacity of television to broadcast to crowds gathered in public spaces and reach into living rooms was heralded as a powerful means to inform and educate the populace. Early, optimistic, commentators suggested that television's

[3] Not restricted to Japan, discourses on 'media effects' regularly formulate relationships between media entertainment the social/cultural development of children. George Gerbner's Cultural Indicators project is an early influential example (see Gerbner 1970; Gerbner and Gross 1976). The project casts television as an 'enculturating force' and aims to track the social influences that television content precipitate. The presumed universality of media effects models, such as Gerbner's, seem to confront a challenge in Japan given the contrast between the remarkably low rate of violence and the famously prolific Japanese market for graphically violent media. For examples of critical responses to media effects research Felson (1996) and Barker and Petley (2001); in the Japanese context see Schodt (1983).

[4] See Partner 1999 for more on the introduction of television to Japan.

simultaneous engagement of two sensory modalities more fully captured the attention of viewers which promised to enhance the speed at which viewers could perceive and absorb information when compared with radio or reading. As the number of receivers in homes grew, so too would the potential for television to facilitate public education and cultural refinement through informational programming and broadcasts of high cultural forms.

Of course, these optimistic hopes for television were soon overtaken by concerns that creeping commercialism might turn the far-reaching and stimulating potentials of the form towards more profitable, and problematic, ends. Flurries of public discussion heralded the arrival of the 'television child' (*terebikko*) which emblematized the presumed intrusion of television into a presumably natural process of social development. Some of the earliest expressions of concern over the impact of television on children in Japan focused on the future bodily consequences of inactive of children passively sitting in front of television sets instead of actively exercising and gaining strength through play (Chun 2007). Concerns over bodily passivity were soon supplanted by fears that consumption of commercial television might stunt the appropriate development of the mental and social capacities of children, as well as the public more broadly. The emphasis on physically underdeveloped passive bodies before the receiver box prefiguring subsequent concerns that absorption in the audio-visually mediated world of television also rendered children socially passive by distracting them from developing healthy social sensibilities through engagements in (and with) the 'real world.' Prominent social critic Ōya Sōichi gave voice to this tension when he famously remarked that television was producing 'a nation of a hundred million idiots' (*ichioku sō hakuchi ka*) and argued that the competitive pressures on commercial broadcasting to capture audience ratings resulted in programming that turned television's

impressive audio-visual power towards shock, sensation and absurd spectacle rather than educational uplift and cultural enrichment (Ōya 1981).

The continuing development and proliferation of communication technologies has only intensified as have discourses that describe a progressive fragmentation of the social order at the hands of market pressures that fragment society into a growing profusion of increasingly narrow niches to serve and desires to satisfy (Ivy 1993). In recent decades, the crossing of these two trends have fostered regular and repeated expressions concern over the solitary absorption of children in 'virtual' worlds. Such discussions regularly incorporate tropes of social unravelling at the hands of the presumably atrophied social capacities of recent generations raised in a densely mediatized environment. This familiar strain of concern theorizes a correlation between progressive social atomization and technological developments in mobile communications, video games and a proliferation of sub/pop-cultural products. Such concerns are perhaps best exemplified by the figure of the 'otaku,' shut within his room and obsessively lost in mediatized virtual worlds. The sensational 1989 case of serial child murderer Miyazaki Tsutomu precipitated a manifold expressions of concern over potential social consequences related to advances in media technologies and the intense appeal of pop-cultural products, such as animation and *manga* comics (Kinsella 2000). The widely circulated image of Miyazaki's room, densely packed with videotapes and comics (*manga)*, rapidly developed into a powerful emblem of social retreat facilitated by a self-satisfying masturbatory indulgence in pop-cultural forms (Galbraith 2009).

However, expressions of concern related to comedic television, such as the Shiritori Samurai, differ from these prevalent models of media-motivated social atrophy, maladaptation and withdrawal. The concern over exhibitions of comic rough behavior isn't that children who

consume comedic television will orient towards mediatized products and platforms as a substitute for participating in real world social life. Rather, concerns over the Shiritori Samurai resonate with a related history of complaint within Japanese television criticism that targets 'vulgar' (*geihin*) programming as a negative social influence, particularly as one that models ambiguously problematic behavior.

Concerns over the potential for interactional forms exhibited on broadcast television to become incorporated into everyday interactional repertoires or entail broader social shifts go well beyond the television comedy of the present. For example, television historian Shiga Nobuo (1990) commented on the potential role of television in fostering the popularity of Rockabilly in 1950's Japan by pointing to television as a 'reaction media' that exhibited both staged performances and the excited reactions of fans. The implication being that early broadcasts of rockabilly circulated more than performances, they also circulated uptake formulations that modelled both the popularity of rockabilly and the means to participate as a consumer. Similarly, the Taiyōzoku (Sun Tribe) panic in the 1960's pointed to popular entertainment, especially film, as modelling behavior that threatened to turn Japanese youth into delinquent beach-going wastrels (Raine 2000, 2002). Such panics appear marked by clear anxieties over the presumably corrupting behavior and values expressed through the media content as well as their adoption by relatively mature actors.

Expressions of concern over potential connections between comic television and ijime diverge also from these prior concerns in that the transgressive comic interactions that motivate concerns are not necessarily seen as problematic in themselves. While comedic content may be disvalued as stupid and meaningless, it has rarely been described as a corrosive social influence in the same way. Rather than representing a threat to values in the symbolic realm, the oft cited

problems with comedic content emerge within the realm of practice. Indeed, the elicitation of laughter through a familiar gag poached from a popular comedian is a common social practice, not limited to children. In fact, the reanimation of gags and routines drawn from television comedy within everyday situations often appears as a highly valued form of performance when re-contextualized with sufficient care and attention. This has motivated an outpouring of instructional books penned by major and minor comedic celebrities who promise to help readers develop the skills to enliven their everyday interactions and forge stronger relationship through the careful application of principals developed on television comedy (Tanaka 2010). In this way comedians are often held up as model communicators who apply their discerning reflexive awareness to carefully ensure that comic contributions fit the emergent context to elicit laughs and avoid inciting offense.

In coming to understand the concerns over TV comedy, I regularly asked parents if they harbored concern that exposure to vulgar (*teizoku*) television comedy might disrupt the social or moral development of their children. Parents expressed very little to no concern about any durable impact of comic television on the moral development of their children. Rather, I was often told that while children regularly imitate coarse gags or otherwise act in vulgar ways, such habits are a temporary, yet normal, feature of childhood. Children were said to grow out of such mimetic habits as they advanced through increasingly demanding stages of schooling. In these accounts the final years of junior-high and high-school stood out as key, if incremental, moments of development and maturation. Children were understood to become more socially mature and communicatively adept as they adapted their behavior and speech to suit the increasingly stringent surroundings at each step. Rather than a concern over values, expressions of parental concern focused on the potential impacts of comic imitation on their children's social lives in the

here and now. In the accounts of my interlocutors, the problematic consequences of vulgar childish imitation focused not on TV effecting transformations within children themselves, but rather on the role of TV in shaping on the social interactions that surrounded them. The problem with vulgar television was not necessarily vulgarity itself, but the ambivalent potentials lurking in the popular comedic uses of coarse speech and vulgar gags.

In this way, I suggest that expressions of concern over comic segments like the Shiritori Samurai emerge out of a nexus that draws together understandings of the engaging enticement and pragmatic ambiguity of comic forms with the presumed inability of children to appropriately negotiate these forms. The underlying concern here appears to lie in the potential for the familiarity and engaging promise with the game to lead children to also perform related, more mature, aspects of such segments and subsequently find themselves in mature situations for which they are unprepared.[5]

The Exchange between Fuji TV and the Committee on Youth

Contemporary references to the withdrawal of the Shiritori Samurai segment regularly appear in a tightly captioned form that retroactively erases the discursive complexity with which the dispute actually played-out over time in public view. These subsequent tellings collapse the temporal discursive unfolding of the dispute to portray once contingent and uncertain outcomes as fated consequences. For critics, the withdrawal of the segment by program producers confirmed the substance of their concerns and the specific incident has long since faded from

[5] An earlier example with striking formal similarities to the Shiritroi Samurai cast comes from the late 1960's. The broadcast of strip rock-paper-scissors (*yakyūken*) sparked outcry amongst organizations concerned that children would be led astray by the game. Similar to the Shiritori Samurai, this segment also conjoined a common children's game with adult consequences. It pitted female volunteers against comedian Hagimoto Kinichi in several rounds of rock-paper-scissors (*jyanken*) and required players who lost a round to remove a piece of clothing each time.

view. On the other side, producers and fans of the program have been particularly effective in fashioning the incident into a citable emblem of regulatory overreach driven by an overbearing regulatory zeal (a process more thoroughly explored in Chapter 2 *Institutional Complainers*). These contemporary accounts narrate the withdrawal of Shiritori Samurai from the 'Mecha Ike' lineup as a single pair-part exchange between program producers and critical voices articulated by the Committee on Youth.[6] Such formulations diagram a hierarchical scheme that casts comedic producers as subject to (potentially unreasonable) complaints and demands of powerful institutions and the constraining interests they represent. 'They'—the Committee on Youth and those it represents—complained and producers withdrew the segment. This common characterization also retroactively collapses the dialogic exchange of responses in which disputants marshalled models and made claims about the potential for segment to provoke actual instances of ijime.

The 'Seven Shiritori' Samurai appeared 13 times as a segment (*kōnā*) on the comedy variety program *Mecha Ike* from March 11, 2000 to February 2, 2001.[7] The process by which the Seven Shiritori Samurai eventually disappeared from *Mecha Ike* began in April 2000 when the newly constituted 'Committee on Youth' communicated to Fuji Television the content of a viewer complaint submitted to the organization. The message provided no information on the author's identity other than to characterize the writer as a woman residing in Tokyo.

"しりとり侍"のコーナー。しりとりに負けたタレントに対する罰が暴力的。いじめを肯定するような内	[Concerning] the segment 'Shiritori Samurai.' The punishment given to entertainers who lose the game is violent. [The] content affirms (encourage) ijime.

[6] In this chapter I refer to this advisory body as the 'Committee on Youth' as a direct translation of the common reference in Japan (*Seishonen Iinkai*). However, the full title of the body is the 'Committee on Relations between Broadcasting and Youth' (*Hoso to Seishounen ni kansuru iinkai*) http://www.bpo.gr.jp/?page_id=1092; https://www.bpo.gr.jp/?page_id=958

[7] This does not include on additional reference to the segment during Fuji television's annual 27 hour live summer special (FNS27) in July of 2001.

容。4 月 8 日には過去放送したきわどい部分をネタに番組を作り、出演者が番組への批判に「見なきゃいいじゃん」と発言。	On April 8th, in reference to criticisms concerning prior broadcasts of this questionable segment, a cast member replied to complaints with, "[they/complainers] should just not watch [the segment]."

This original complaint leveled two criticisms at the content of the April 8th episode which featured the segment. The first line of criticism characterized the punishment in the game as 'violent' (*bōryokuteki*) before making a second claim that the content 'affirms' or 'encourages' (*kōtei suru*) ijime. The contextual proximity of the two claims may suggest the 'violent' quality of the punishment as a key sign that the segment is likely to foster *ijime*. However, it is important to qualify the relationship between ijime and physical violence, as well as the well-developed role of harsh physical treatment in comedic television. To be sure, the conspicuous bodily violence in the performance stands out due to its deliberately sensational excess. However, the imposition of such absurdly excessive physical abuse is a well-established and long-lived generic feature of Japanese television comedy. Moreover, the abuse on display conforms to the generic norms and expectations for a 'punishment game' like this. Though not stated explicitly, the formal structure of the segment, which combines a child's game with a spectacularly excessive punishment, likely played a role in both heightening the humor and inspiring critical anxieties. The incongruity between the normative banality of the children's game and the amplified slapstick stakes of the punishment serve as a familiar—and generically expected— comic affordance for show producers. The humorous aspirations of the segment are recognizable in the sudden chaotic eruption and apparent intensity of the beatings which serve as a comic crescendo in stark contrast to the smoothly metrical rhythmic structure of utterances that compose the game portion of the routine.

At the same time, it is important to note that a concern over physical abuse does not necessarily link to concerns over ijime as manifestations of physical violence alone do not index the presence of ijime. The acts and threats of overt physical violence that have long defined bullying in the 'United States'[8] are not a necessary or defining feature of ijime in Japan. While routinely translated as 'bullying,' contemporary invocations of 'ijime' in Japan regularly leverage cultural resources in ways that differ from similar phenomena in other parts of the world (Smith et.al. 1999). Many have cited this difference to note the imperfect equivalence between the 'ijime*'* and similar phenomena elsewhere even as they push back on accounts that anchor the phenomena to presumably unique cultural features (Morita 1999; Yoneyama 2015).

Even in cases where physical violence plays a significant role, accounts overwhelmingly describe a pathological social phenomenon that inflicts harm on the mental and emotional wellbeing of individuals. Discussions of ijime regularly cast the process as a social or communicative form of abuse within which physical violence can play a role (Ogura et al. 2012: 69). These narratives identify ijime as a process whereby a targeted individual becomes alienated from a group in which they are a putative member. This separation is often achieved through harsh and/or humiliating treatment by the broader group.[9] As such, potential connections between ijime and the violent aspects of the punishment in the Shiritori Samurai rest on more than the manifestation of physical intimidation or bodily abuse. As we will see, the fact that the Shiritori Samurai punishments take place at the hands of *a group* is a key feature capable of evoking ijime.

[8] It should be noted that the recent emergence of cyber-bullying as a public concern has also shifted concept of bullying in the United States. In recent years, national coverage of cases of suicides by bullied youth have motivated an incorporation of social and emotional forms of violence into American notions of bullying in ways that more closely echo formulations of ijime in Japan.

[9] Thinking about theorizing this as a form of ritual liminality without re-incorporation. However, this may not be necessary.

Ijime works on individuals by rendering them into targets of sustained ridicule, personal denigration, or other actions that alienate targets of ijime from a group in which they are a putative member. Often this takes the form of active assaults on the public face of selected targets through violations and transgressive forms of 'speech violence' (*kotoba no bōryoku*) that may be conflated with other normative forms of behavior. However, accounts of ijime also cite efforts to socially isolate and communicative negate targeted individuals through a deliberate failure to fulfill normative face expectations. These familiar narratives describe sustained refusals acknowledge a targeted individual's presence (*mushi*) by not responding to their questions, greetings or other interactional contributions as well as accounts that describe more aggressive threats to face. As will be discussed later, concerns over ijime emphasize the mental and emotional pain incurred through social and communicative modes of persecution and dislocation over and above physical abuse. Accordingly, the pernicious effects of ijime are principally described as socially inflicted in ways that 'wound the heart' (*kokoro wo kizutsukeru*) and reflect the concern over children being socially, mentally and emotionally broken and scarred, potentially beyond the limits of their endurance.

As will be discussed later, the dispute is powerfully motivated by the figure of the unfinished child, still socially suggestible and vulnerable to media influence. The claim that the Shiritori Samurai segment 'affirms' or 'encourages' (*kōtei suru*) ijime points to the idea that the segment presents potentially dangerous interactional forms in an invitingly entertaining light. Beyond the violence of the beatings, the complaint taps an anxiety that children may be enticed to wield such transgressive forms in a brash and careless fashion that risks enacting significant, if accidental, social harm. The dueling statements issued by Fuji Television and the Committee on Youth diagram a pair of contesting frameworks for understanding the degree of threat to the

children posed by comic displays of rough behavior. Comedic producers frame their transgressive performances as recognizably staged and animated by comedic professionals. They point to specific on-screen and staged features of the segment to argue that audiences understand such performances as taking place in a recognizably professionalized comedic space that is clearly distinct from everyday contexts. As such, comedic producers characterize the concerns of critics as overblown and frame complaints as asserting that youthful viewers are unable distinguish between such performances and everyday social encounters. Critics, in turn, cast doubt on the socially insulated quality of comedic performances asserted by producers. Rather than misrecognitions of fiction and reality, critical statements imply that performances can be decomposed into interactional resources and circulated socially in ways that may provoke considerable, if often accidental, social harm. A related concern is that rough comedic routines come to serve as interactional models that in turn orient children to approach moments of 'rough behavior' as performances for an audience, in ways that resemble the comic performances from which they are drawn. As a result, children may fail to monitor the uptake of their interlocutors to attend to and align with the feelings. Instead they may learn to align with performers, or perpetrators (*kagaisha*) and focus on fostering the collective levity of the group at the expense of one of its number.

Notably, the idea that children naturally lack a mature capacity to appropriately monitor signs of uptake in context undergirds both sides of this dispute and, for critics, motivates anxieties about the ability of children to safely joke with rough forms, but also, fosters 'forensic anxieties' for responsible adults tasked with accurately evaluating commonplace occurrences of rough behavior between children. The first complaint cited by the Committee on Youth also invoked a second familiar line of criticism that cast doubt on the commitment of program

producers to responsibly safeguard the wellbeing of children.[10] The complaint suggests a link between the prevalence of coarse and vulgar spectacle in comedic programming and the worldly incentives of commercial broadcasters to draw ratings by any means.

For their part, content producers do not dispute the incentivizing influence of ratings and revenue on programming, however, they regularly push back on criticism by casting ratings as a standard metric of viewer satisfaction. Accordingly, biographical accounts of workers in the variety television industry often narrate the historical turn towards comic spectacle in variety programming as a story of innovation to successfully serve an incessant market demand to productively fill airtime within the strictures of condensed production schedules and tight budgets set by stations. Such narratives regularly evoke the perspective of a company worker, like any other, focused on developing and marketing a product.[11] To be sure, programs that feature absurd slapstick, rough spectacle and sexually risqué content (*shimo neta*) draw complaints concerning their 'vulgar' (*geihin*) and 'lowbrow' (*teizoku*) content. However, as producers often point out, such content makes good business sense. Such meaningless performances afford a broad addressee design that can reach across regional, class and generational divides to potentially draw a larger—and thus more profitable—potential audience.

[10] The issue of responsibility became particularly salient during the incident and in particular following Fuji Television's decision to discontinue the segment. Both sides of the struggle received complaints that included accusations of evading responsibility. Program producers were accused of not being sincere in their reflection of the potential for the segment to become a harmful influence on youth; The Youth Committee (*Seishonen Iinkai*), by contrast, came under fire for shifting responsibility from parents and educators onto program producers.

[11] In but one example, former Fuji Television producer Yoshida Masaki (2010) recounts his role in the development and proliferation of gaudy and absurd games as a standard variety format. Yoshida narrates his first use of the game format as an effort to facilitate the guest appearance of a Hong Kong musical group on his program. Yoshida explains that the members of the group spoke little Japanese and therefore could not participate in the usual light banter without relying on an interpreter. Fearing that such an arrangement might become stilted and fall-flat with audiences, Yoshida devised a plan to pit the guests and hosts against each other in a series of games which would not require conversation. According to Yoshida's memoire, the success of the segment led him to incorporate the game form more broadly into his future work. He noted that the game format also reduced production costs and preparation time by required less writing and rehearsal. Engaging segments could be produced by recording for as long as required and stitching together the most entertaining moments of the games during editing.

It may come as no surprise then that individual viewer complaints appear to have little effect on programming decisions by broadcasters, at least as long as audience ratings remain sufficiently high.[12] Indeed, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, viewer complaints can be profitably reframed into emblems of comic success.

Following the first message, representatives at Fuji Television issued a formal response to push back on the opening message by first casting doubt on the representativeness of the complaint by noting that viewers of *Mecha Ike* often express a broad range of opinions on the program, and the Shiritori Samurai segment in particular. The implication being that critical voices like those collected and conveyed by the Committee on Youth represent only a subset of viewer perspectives, and perhaps a minority at that. The statement goes on to address implied accusation that producers neglect their obligations to safeguard the public good by emphasizing the care and attention that went into crafting the Shiritori Samurai segment as a common, well-established and normative comedic performance genre, specifically a 'punishment game' (*batsu gēmu*). In this way, producers cast the segment as but one instance of a familiar type, rather than an idiosyncratic threat.

The Fuji statement then went on to argue that segment has been carefully produced as a professional comic play (*konto*) in order to highlight the professionalized character of the performance and distinguish it from everyday contexts. The response specifically cites the parodic staging as historical drama (*jidaigeki*), and use of safe props, such as the padded faux swords wielded by the bandits, as clear signs that the spectacular on-screen antics could not possibly be mistaken by viewers for anything but a comic fiction suitable only for stage and

[12] Though major broadcast stations regularly record and compile data on complaints they receive from viewers, the degree to which received complaints actually influence decision-making about programming remains far from clear, and rarely discussed publically.

screen. The implication being that concerns about any effect on the interactional sensibilities of children were misplaced and overblown[13] as viewers would clearly understand the game as a performance and not an everyday happening.

Despite this strong appeal to established norms of comedic professionalism, the Fuji television statement conceded the possibility that some youth (*seishonen*) might nevertheless be drawn to playfully imitate (*mane*) the violent/rough (*ranbo*) antics of the Shiritori Samurai. Reflecting on this possibility, the statement reported, producers decided to preface the segment with spoken narration to ensure that childish propensities to imitate were channeled towards less severe, pragmatically 'safer,' forms of punishment.[14]

〈例〉「三文字の戦は大人気だけど、侍たちのお仕事だった。皆はしりとりで遊ぶだけで、乱暴なマネはしてはならない。」「野武士ＶＳ侍はあくまでコントの世界。皆はしっぺ・くすぐり等で、戦を楽しもう！」	<Example> "The [Shiritori] battle is very popular, but this was the job of the samurai. Everyone play shiritori, but do not let it become a violent (*ranbo*) imitation." "Let's not forget that bandits versus samurai is in the world of comedic skits (*konto*). Everyone [else] battle for fun with [punishments] like finger snaps or tickles.

The Fuji statement also includes a brief response to the complaint that a *Mecha Ike* cast member disregarded concerns about ijime by suggesting that viewers who found the segment unsavory should simply not watch it. Fuji's response strives to recalibrate the addressivity of the cited utterance, "Don't watch it then!" (*minakya ii jyan*), by shifting the co-textual indexicality of the remark to embed it in an entirely separate thread of conversation. The Fuji statement suggests

[13] The casting of complainers as overbearing and out of touch is a regular feature of pushback by comic producers against complaints. Struggles to frame regulatory pressure will be discussed in greater depth in chapter 2 Institutional Complainers.

[14] The disclaimer is a familiar tactic for eschewing responsibility for any future interdiscursivity that may follow broadcasts, however, what is noteworthy here is the way that the disclaimer seeks to achieve this by suggesting less severe alternative punishments. Such an approach does not contest the presumption of childish inexpertise and projects a 'recognition' that children are likely to imitate the content.

that this particular utterance had been misinterpreted and was not intended to reference the criticisms directed at the Shiritori segment. Rather, the statement claims that the performer made the utterance as a comic response to a prior comment informing him that viewers had identified him as the number-one performer that people don't want to see on television. As such, the statement frames the performer's outburst as a normative humorous comic rebuke (a *tsukkomi*) in response to a planned comic setup within the show. This reframing claims that the April complaint fundamentally misunderstood the addressivity of the onscreen rebuke. It suggests that viewers who 'got' the joke understood that the performer's outburst addressed viewers who had impugned his professional value and not viewers who had expressed genuine concern over the segment. This reframing nicely captures the broader rhetorical strategy deployed by supporters of the program which seek to cast critical viewers as too serious and out of touch—too elite—to recognize everyday comedic norms.

This initial exchange did not appear in news reports as it took place directly between the Committee on Youth and Fuji Television. However, subsequent criticisms of the Shiritori Samurai segment and reports of its withdrawal were covered by mainstream media outlets, such as weekly magazines (*shūkanshi)* national newspapers.[15] Reports concerning the dispute circulated the positions of the disputants as well as the related forensic frameworks they deploy for drawing and dissolving such connections. The eventual incorporation of the incident into the broader news cycle made the case available as a potential topic for discussion (*wadai*). Such social circulations (Spitulnik 1996) task interlocutors with situating and framing such events within everyday conversations in ways that also draw on and disseminate the ideological models

[15] *Yomiuri Shinbun*, *Asahi Shinbun* and *Mainichi Shinbun* printed between three to five articles concerning the dispute between November 2000 and March 2001. Subsequent references to the withdrawal of the Shiritori Samurai segment have since taken place during periods of renewed concern about ijime and potential influences of variety television.

and chronotopic formulations that undergird the contesting perspectives brought to bear in the dispute. The central tension that animates the longer discursive struggle can be clearly seen in this opening exchange. The first portion of the complaint asserts the potential for particular forms of televised comedic play to cast extreme forms of rough behavior as fun and invited a formal textual replication in non-staged, everyday, settings. The second part of the complaint builds on this potential by characterizing show producers as failing to responsibly consider the potential influence of their product on youthful viewers and implying that producers are more concerned with making profit through cheap laughs. The response issued by Fuji television strives to counter these charges by emphasizing features of the performance that presumably mark the segment as an obviously fabrication and fictional parody. This included the obvious foam swords that were used in the punishment. They suggest that no viewers, not even children, would mistake the performance as anything other than a comedic play (‘*konto’*) animated by card-carrying professional purveyors of humor. In this way the contention links the excess and harshness of the segment to a professionalized intent on the part of performers and producers to create a transgressive spectacle as entertainment commodity. Audiences that consume the slapstick spectacle as a commoditized performance (cf. Agha 2011a) and know better than to fully reproduce its features. They may cite or playfully animate the segment without including the extreme punishment. Going one step further, the statement by Fuji Television cites the decision to add narration directing viewers not to imitate the routine as evidence of deliberate consideration by producers to ensure that youthful viewers appreciate the gap between screen and school by toning down the punishments to suit everyday social contexts.

This initial exchange of statements did not motivate any change in the format of the segment beyond the addition of the opening narration.[16] However, five months after this initial exchange, on November 29, 2000, the Committee on Youth held a press conference and presented a second statement entitled 'Perspectives on Variety Programs' ('*Baraetī kei bangumi ni taisuru kenkai'*). The report focused on specific segments from two shows as exemplars of two problematic types of segments in variety television. Mecha Ike's Shiritori Samurai exemplified the problem of rough behavior while a segment entitled *Nepu Nage* (Nep[tune] Throw) from the program *Onepu* exemplified the problem of sexualized segments in variety television.

The *Nepu Nage* segment involved members of the comedic trio '*Nepuchūn*' (Neptune) repeatedly performing a judo throw with female audience members. The male members of Neptune wore judo uniforms while the young women wore street clothes. Cast members stood face to face with the young women and performed the judo throw *tomoe nage* by rolling onto their backs and pushing up with their feet to flip female volunteers over their heads and onto a large foam pad behind them. Cameras were positioned to capture images up the skirts of the young women as they landed. The Committee on Youth report cited *Nepu nage* as a blatant instance of 'sexual harassment' (*sekusharu harasumento*) and 'female discrimination' (*josei besshi*) and identified the segment as a worrying influence on junior-high and high school students in particular. While this chapter focuses specifically on discussions of ijime and rough behavior, it is important to note that taken together these two programs formed a normative

[16] The opening exchange also sheds light on the ways that these organizations mobilize useful ideologies in their claims and counter claims. The Broadcast Youth Committee strives to project itself as an organizational apparatus for amplifying and relaying the concerns of 'the public.' By emphasizing the reported speech of a complaint in the first message the Youth Committee frames its message as a conduit for conveying, curating and exhibiting the utterances the public. This topic will be covered more fully in Chapter 3, Institutional Complainers.

gendered pair with concerns over rough behavior seen as exerting a problematic influence on boys and sexually suggestive play taken as exerting a problematic influence on girls.

Unlike the earlier message sent to Fuji television, the November statement directly employed the institutional voice of the Committee on Youth as a body of independent experts tasked with applying their expertise to weigh the merit of public concerns they received. Evaluative language was rendered explicitly in the voice of the institution and the statement diagrammatically projected the Committee on Youth as amplifying the voice of an aggregated public. In this way, the shift to a single institutional voice lent the greater force to the collection of excerpts of reported speech cited from critical viewers—like the one that appeared in the first communication—by aligning the Committee on Youth's authoritative expertise with individual viewer complaints.

This second Committee on Youth statement also explicitly linked Shiritori Samurai to ijime however, it provided greater detail and emphasized the resemblance between the group dynamics depicted within the television segment and well-known features of ijime

画面の中での行動が一種の袋叩きであることは間違いなく、その演出方法に必然性は感じられない。大勢で一人を叩き、仲間で笑いものにする場面はいじめの形にきわめて近いものがあり、こうしたシーンを繰り返し放送することは、暴力やいじめを肯定しているとのメッセージを子どもたちに伝える結果につながると判断せざるを得ない。また、失敗した者がリンチまがいの罰を受けるのは当然だというメッセージが伝わることも考えられる。

There is no doubt that the on-screen behavior is a type gang/group beating (*fukurotataki*). [We] cannot feel that such performances are necessary. The scene of an individual being struck by many as the butt of a joke amongst companions (*nakama*) is exceedingly close to ijime. [We] cannot but judge that the repeated broadcast of this scene sends a message to children that affirms violence (*bōryoku*) and ijime. Additionally, [the scene] sends the message that it is natural that losers should receive lynch-like punishments.

The report identifies a troubling formal similarity between the punishment scenes and ijime, whereby a group of companions (*nakama*) target a single member for laughs. Mentions of violence in the statement also link the segment to ijime as they both evoke a collective assault by many directed at a few. The use of the term '*fukurotataki*' to characterize the on-screen beatings as problematic similarly qualifies the relationship between ijime and violence. '*Fukrotataki*' denotes more than simply a beating. The compound joins '*fukuro'* denoting 'sack' or 'bag' and '*tataki'* denoting 'hit' or 'strike,' to incorporate the sense of a select few being beaten while encircled or surrounded by a larger group. Diagrammatic resemblances to formulations of ijime that similarly evoke an individual victim subjected to harsh treatment by members of a group, usually a group to which the target also belongs. The concerns expressed by the Committee on Youth focus attention on the ambivalent potential entailments that follow from moments of making humor out of the hardship of a close companion (*nakama*). As will be further elaborated below, this group dynamic has emerged as a defining feature of ijime.

Beyond direct modelling of rough behavior, the statement went on identify an additional 'indirect' influence on the metapragmatic sensibilities of children. The statement notes specifically that the overlaid subtitles send potentially conflicting messages to children that threaten to shape their meta-communicative habits in problematic, even dangerous, ways.

番組の中でテロップによって視聴者にさまざまな注意を喚起する方法も、弁解さえしておけば不適切な行為も許されるという、間接的メッセージを伝えることになりかねない。特にこの番組が幼児から中学生をコアの視聴者としていることから、その影響は大きいと考えられる。

The ways that the subtitles draw the viewer's attention in many directions may send an indirect message that inappropriate acts may be permissible with an excuse (justification). The impact is likely to be especially large as the core viewers of this program are preschoolers through junior high school students.

Approximately three weeks after this statement, Fuji television issued a statement announcing that after much internal deliberation the Shiritori Samurai segment would be discontinued. The specifics of that internal deliberation have not been disclosed, however, the statement made clear that the withdrawal was in response to pressure brought to bear by the Committee on Youth and the critics it represented. In this way, Fuji cast the withdrawal as submission to aggressive regulatory pressure by parents and their advocates.[17]

At this point it is useful to gain a sense of the regulatory landscape for broadcast television in Japan to contextualize the decision to withdraw the segment. It is very unlikely that Fuji television pulled the segment out of concern over regulatory action or legal consequences. The pressure placed on program producers emerges from a regulatory landscape that is often described as 'self-regulatory' (*jishukisei*). The Committee on Youth was established as an independent advisory body had no legal authority to compel action or impose consequences on Fuji television. The Committee on Youth Programming was established in 2000 in a joint effort by the national broadcaster NHK and the National Association of Commercial Broadcasters (later reorganized as the Japan Commercial Broadcasters Association in 2012). A number of such quasi-official independent advisory bodies, including the Committee on Youth, were consolidated under the organizational umbrella of the Broadcast Ethics and Program Improvement Organization (*Hōsō rinri bangumi kōjyō kikō* - BPO) when it was established in 2004 as an 'independent' advisory body to promote broadcast ethics and the improvement of programming. The stated objectives of the Committee on Youth have shifted little since 2000.

[17] Such regulatory pressure is often formulated as out of touch with common sensibilities. Following the statement that the segment would be discontinued, the Committee on Youth reported receiving many complaints from viewers who objected to the pressure applied on Fuji to pull the segment and complained that the concerns articulated by the Committee on Youth had been overstated. Many of these counter-complaints mobilized arguments that echoed assertions appearing the responses by Fuji Television that the segment was clearly fiction and questioned who should serve as the responsible agents for managing the influence of media on children.

From the BPO website: “The Broadcast Committee for Youth Programming aims to improve broadcasting programs for youth by conducting research on the relationship between youth and broadcasting, as well as the influence of broadcasting on youth.” Despite this, these organizations continue to lack any formal authority to sanction broadcasters or compel action to reform content and decisions issued by these regulatory organizations carry no formal weight or legally binding consequence.

Even so, broadcasters appear to take BPO pronouncements seriously and respond to concerns raised by the BPO. To be sure, organizational structure of the BPO incorporates both industry insiders and outside experts in an effort to maintain the ‘self-regulatory’ status-quo and ward-off more formally stringent stipulations that might follow from increased government involvement in broadcast regulation. An additional source of pressure on broadcasters lies in the potential for public discussions of ethical failures and broadcast scandals to tarnish the public image or brand of broadcasters and program producers.[18] This seems to have been the primary motive in the Shiritori Samurai case. It is important to note that the Committee on Youth crafted statements that project the organization as a manifestation of complaints and criticisms submitted by ‘the public.’ Such messages are designed to characterize such organizations as amplifiers of public voices, such as concerned parents (*oya*). The grave stakes and danger associated with ijime mean that a drawn out public discussion over potential links between television content and

[18] The concern here appears somewhat vague and generalized. For example, producers do not seem concerned about organized consumer action such as boycotts. Effective boycotts by consumer groups appear rare in Japan. Rather, corporations and entertainment professionals appear more concerned about scandal as a threat to their professional image or brand. Needless to say, reduced viewership appears threatening due to the corresponding reduction in advertising revenue. Entertainers appear particularly threatened by scandal. Those who become subjects of minor scandals often minimally suffer at least a temporary drop in opportunities for work. Larger scandals, such as those involving drugs or links to organized crime, often lead to forced withdrawal—euphemistically ‘retirement’ (*intai*)—from the entertainment world (*geinōkai*).

ijime poses a powerful threat to the public image or brand of the television station, program sponsors as well as participating entertainers and their talent management agencies.

Smiles, Scars and Suicide: The Problem of Ijime

Ijime emerged as a highly visible social concern in the 1980's by tapping a deep well-spring of robustly mediatized anxieties centered on the social, psychological and emotional well-being of children. To be sure, ijime is no laughing matter as concerns about ijime are powerfully intensified by associations with child suicide.[19] The strong association between ijime and suicide follows in large part due to the particular history of the category. Ijime researchers (Yoneyama 2008; Naito 2009; Morita 1999) and social commentators (see for example Moriguchi 2007; Ōgi 2013) regularly situate the emergence of 'ijime' as a prominent social concern in connection with a series of widely reported incidents of suicide by schoolchildren in the 1980s that were linked to ill treatment by classmates and occasionally teachers. For example, Ogura et al. (2012) connect the elevation of ijime to the status of major social problem to a series of 16 suicides by school children in 1984 and 1985. Media coverage of the suicides as well as a stream of publications by social commentators precipitated ijime into a legibly citable social pathology and linked it with often unseen, yet painfully dire, emotional consequences for young victims. Citing one prominent example, Naito and Gielen (2005) point to coverage of an oft cited 1986 suicide of a 13 year-old Tokyo schoolboy as particularly influential in developing and disseminating ijime as an urgent social concern. The case opened with the discovery of the body of a school boy hanging in a public restroom. A note suggested that he had been bullied and directed readers to consult his classmates about the reason for his death. In his note the boy explained that he did not

[19] While the focus here is on the link between ijime and suicide, it is important to note that ijime is also implicated in a host of other social problems such as school withdrawal (futōkō) (see Lock 1986).

want to die, but "continuing on like this, would be a 'living hell'" ("*kono mama jya, 'iki jigoku' ni nachau yo"*). The note went on to say that his death would be worthwhile if it stopped others from being subjected to the same treatment. News agencies seized on the incident as a series of reports began to narrate revelations concerning the harsh treatment that had led him to take his own life. In one egregious instance that came to define the case, his classmates had held a mock-funeral for the victim, complete with a memorial card signed by every member of his class, including some of his teachers.

Suicide by schoolchildren stands as both an indexical trace of ijime, as well as, its terminal danger. The emphasis on child suicide as a powerful sign of ijime in sensational news coverage also cast it as a pernicious form of social violence that leads to horrific consequences when allowed to go unrecognized. Subsequent incidents of ijime-suicide have interdiscursively linked the two phenomena in ways that raise the stakes of ijime and provoke public accountings of responsibility and blame when it is discovered. They also inspire calls for more effective forensic attention on the part of responsible agents and emphasize the importance of identifying and intervening in ijime before victims take drastic action. Expressions of surprise and shock by responsible adults regularly feature in reporting on cases of ijime suicide and fuel recriminations concerning the failure to detect the mental and emotional suffering of children. Teachers, school administrators and parents—overwhelmingly mothers[20]—become regular targets of suspicion, accusation and blame as reporting on cases develop along familiar narrative forms.

While indexical links between ijime and child suicide powerfully invigorate anxieties around the potential consequences of ijime, these links are often also traced in the reverse

[20] The suicide of a child often serves to cast doubt on the fitness of mothers. This can motivate a great deal of informal speculation concerning deficient and distant relationships between children who commit suicide and their parents. The painfully stigmatizing implication is that a 'good' mother would know.

direction such that suicide serves as an incontrovertible index of ijime. This retroactive reading has become a regular feature of public discussion such that child suicide dispels any categorical ambiguity around any prior instances of rough behavior by retrospectively indexing them as definitively ijime. These readings regularly motivate questions about how and why responsible adults failed to identify and intervene. In doing so reports of such incidents reinvigorate forensic anxieties with accounts of children suffering emotional wounds at the hands of teasing peers that persist undetected until a young victim manifests an irreversibly incontrovertible sign that the rough treatment was ijime all along.

Despite the evaluative certainty evoked in such retrospective accounts, the interpretive task is far from straightforward in the here-and-now of interactional performance. The challenge faced by responsible caregivers lies in determining the specific consequences in particular instances of rough treatment precisely evaluating signs of uptake by targeted children. In cases of child suicide teachers often account for apparent inaction by saying that they have misinterpreted rough encounters between students as simply teasing or fighting. Tellingly, the teachers who signed the memorial card in the 1986 case described above expressed shock that the mock funeral had contributed to the boy's suicide and reportedly explained their failure to intervene by saying that they understood it to be no more than a surprise practical joke (*dokkiri*).[21] Such claims of pragmatic confusion are common in the wake of instances of suicide and point to the challenge facing adults as they work to distinguish ijime from other normative entailments of rough behavior such as teasing play or fighting between peers. Such explanations routinely become framed in public discussions as self-interested efforts at self-exculpation as they enter broader circulation. In this way ascriptions of negligence and failures of responsible oversight

[21] It is worthwhile noting that this form of practical joke (dokkiri) serves as normative (named) sub-genre of comedic segment on television.

and care by adults also work to refresh anxieties concerning the interactional ambiguity of rough behavior.[22]

Inward Turnings: The Shifting Evaluative Focus of Ijime

The interpretive challenges facing efforts to identify ijime follow in large part from the way in which it has come to be defined. Currently, explicit metapragmatic formulations of ijime focus on the mental and emotional suffering of victims as a focal criterion which contributes to a forensic semiotics of ijime that renders it difficult to detect in comparison with other forms of abuse, such as physical violence. This follows in part from the fact that ijime emerged as a paramount social concern in contrast with earlier social concerns focused on reports of violent incidents in Japanese schools (*kōnai bōryoku*). The reported epidemic of violence in Japanese schools between the mid-1970's and early 1980's coincides with a period marked by public expressions of concern over 'no good' youth (*furyō*). A series of educational interventions in incident prone areas gradually gained traction and lowered incidents of student violence. Morita Yōji (2010) noted the formative influence of this historical contiguity on the development and crystallization of ijime into a coherent and citable social concern. As overt violence in schools abated, public scrutiny began to turn to ijime as a separate social problem connected with more subtle forms of violence lurking in schools. As noted by Morita (2010), the central emphasis on mental and emotional harm in definitions of ijime follows in part due to the historical contiguities of its emergence and consolidation as a social concern in the 1980's. Comparisons

[22] Compounding distrust are periodic reports of teachers and educational institutions attempting to cover up occurrences of ijime to avoid censure and blame. For example, a recent 2013 ijime suicide case at a junior-high school in Ōtsu City (大津市) precipitated a high-profile scandal over efforts to cover up ijime of the student by teachers, school administrators and the board of education initially asserting that a causal relationship (*inka kankei*) to ijime had not been established. (Kyodo News Osaka Bureau 2013).

with overt violence in schools of the prior era served as an organizing contrast that cast ijime a troubling social disorder that had previously hidden in plain sight. Commentators strove to distinguish ijime as a specific emergent problem in contrast with preceding concerns over physical violence in schools. This often meant emphasizing that the social and communicative violence of ijime went undetected because it was overshadowed and hidden by the more overt violence of the previous era.

While potentially containing a physical component, ijime emerged as more than physical abuse. It worked primarily through subtle social and interactional means. Initial formulations emphasized the challenges inherent in detecting and identifying ijime as the social and emotional scars left behind by ijime are much harder to detect until victims resort to incontrovertibly drastic measures such as suicide. Efforts to identify and mitigate ijime evoked the need for semiotic forensics capable of detecting the indexical traces of ijime within in the social activity of schoolchildren. Where the bruises and scrapes of physical abuse lingered visibly on the bodies of victims, the effects of ijime are said to 'scar the heart and mind' (*kokoro wo kizuku*) leaving invisible mental and emotional traces within victims.

This inward turn has continued to develop since the 1980's and public discussions of ijime have increasingly located evaluative authority within the mental and emotional experience of children. The shift inward can be clearly seen in the efforts of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (*Monbukagakushō*)—hereafter MEXT—to establish and refine a definition precise enough to facilitate accurate surveys and sociological research concerning ijime in schools. Early MEXT definitions of ijime focused on behavior as the site for forensic attention. These approaches directed educators to monitor and diagnose instances of rough behavior between children under their care and tasked observers with typifying specific

instances of behavior as problematic or not. In 1986 MEXT carried out survey research that sought to establish baseline sociological data on the scale of ijime as a social problem. The definition adopted by MEXT for use in the inaugural survey on ijime in 1986 tracked close to Morita Yōji's (1985) influential early definition (cited in the epigraph) by emphasizing certain formal criterial for identifying ijime as a classifiable type of social behavior. This early definition approached bullying from a perspective of its social forms and observable acts that gained an authoritative status through the judgement of teachers and school administrators.

> Within this survey, 'Ijime' is a phenomena of 1) arbitrarily directing at those weaker than oneself 2) continuous bodily (*shintaiteki*) and/or psychological (*shinriteki*) attacks 3) that cause them to feel severe pain/suffering (*kutsū*), and the reality (*jijitsu*) of which is recognized by schools (the juveniles (*jidōseito*) involved, the content of the ijime, etc.), regardless if the incident occurred inside or outside of school.

The emphasis on identifying harmful behavior as a determining criterion in evaluating rough behavior gradually gave way to increasingly nuanced models as researchers and educators applied themselves to ijime as an emergent social problem. The definitions deployed by MEXT over time chart a shift away from observations of student behavior by teachers and towards the feelings of students as the appropriate and effective evaluative agents for detecting ijime. In 1994 MEXT revised the definition by removing the stipulation that instances of ijime be recognized by schools and inserting the following section at the end.

> Within this survey, 'Ijime' is a phenomena of 1) arbitrarily directing at those weaker than oneself 2) continuous bodily and/or psychological attacks 3) that cause them to feel severe suffering, regardless if the incident occurred inside or outside of school. <u>Additionally, evaluations of individual acts as 'ijime' or not, are not judged through superficial or formal criteria [of the behavior]. The judgement should be done from the perspective of the juvenile subjected to the ijime.</u>

While much of the definition adopted in 1994 remained the same, the two changes work to specify the criteria for evaluating some specific behavior as ijime and shift the evaluative focus from observable features of the questionable behavior to the perspective of students

subjected to the behavior. This marks a broader shift that will increasingly focus on the feelings of targeted children in efforts to identify ijime. Over time the key source for signs that can link rough behavior to ijime, lie in the feelings of children.[23]

An acceleration in the shift towards children's feelings as the site of evaluative certainty is seen in a 2006 revision of the definition by MEXT. The change here includes the removal of key qualifiers that characterize the agentive application of power within interactions including 'arbitrarly' (*ippoteki ni*), 'continuous' (*keizokuteki ni*), 'severe' (*shinkoku na*) and the revision of the described features of ijime in ways that deemphasize the agency of individual perpetrators and focus attention on suffering of targets.

> Within this survey, evaluations of individual acts as 'ijime' or not, are not judged through superficial or formal criteria [of the behavior]. The judgement should be done from the perspective of the student who was subjected to the ijime. .
> 'Ijime' is 'a phenomena where a juvenile receives psychological and physical (*butsuriteki*) attacks from [a] person[s] within [institutionally] prescribed relationships (*itte no ningenkankei no aru sha*) from which they feel mental anguish (*seishinteki na kutsū*).
> Regardless if the incident occurred inside or outside of school.

The latest shift in the definition of ijime exhibits the increasing emphasis on the feelings of targets of rough behavior as the legitimate site for determining if specific instances of rough behavior constitute an 'attack' as a part of ijime. This definitional shift exemplifies broader trends and the increasing anxieties that motivated a forensic shift towards detecting signs of mental and emotional suffering.

Not confined to formal definitions, parents I came to know in Yokohama regularly offered similar formulations when asked to define ijime. In the accounts of my interlocutors, instances of rough behavior became teasing (*ijiri, karakai*) if the addressee or referent of the

[23] This aligns with broader language ideologies that characterize communicative maturity as thinking before speaking. These Japanese communicative norms lay responsibility on speakers for monitoring their communicative contributions in ways that promise not to offend or upset interlocutors.

speech/behavior takes took it up as inclusively playful. However, the same encounter took on the status of ijime the target found it alienating and disagreeable (*iya*). The difference was said to lie entirely with the way that targeted individuals felt about the speech and behavior directed towards them.

The internal focus of these definitions exhibit an awareness of the interactional challenge of metacommunicatively framing potentially comic rough behavior as non-serious play (Bateson 1987; Coates 2007). The coarse interactional forms that appear in accounts of ijime also serve as normatively transgressive interactional resources for forging intimate bonds, particularly amongst boys. Parents I spoke to often identified coarse language as a common feature of ijime and noted the apparent faddish popularity of such language among youth as well as the prevalence of such forms on comic and variety television. When asked to provide specific examples of problematic language, parents commonly cited bald rebukes such as 'disgusting' (*kimoi*), 'annoying' (*uzai*), 'stinky' (*kusai*) and 'go die' (*shine*). These specific forms regularly appear on comedic television where they are deployed to enact instances of comic teasing between professional comedians figurated as intimates. For example, the rebuke, '*uzai*' characterizes a prior utterance or action as disordered and intrusively tedious. Taken as a comic contribution, rather than a sincere evaluation, '*uzai*' retroactively indexes a previous (tediously boring) utterance by another participant as an intentional humorous contribution itself—a comic setup (*boke*) to which the rebuke responds. When taken together, the evaluative rebuke (a '*tsukkomi*') and its whimsical antecedent (a '*boke*'), form a familiar pair-part structure that figurates the production of a convivially teasing context that has been co-constructed by participants. The rebuke casts it co-textual target as an intentional comic setup, rather than embarrassing blunder. The structural interplay between these two roles overwhelmingly informs

both professional and everyday comic interactions in contemporary Japan. The expansive social influence of the presumably playful antagonistic dynamic between *boke* and *tsukkomi* contributions follows from the explosively rising popularity of the comedic genre *manzai* and comedic television more broadly in the 1980's.[24] A ratified *tsukkomi,* taken up as a comic contribution, casts the participants as engaged in mutually intended verbal play by ratifying the prior contribution as an intentionally offered *boke* first-pair part. That is to say that comically felicitous utterances of '*uzai*' ('annoying') work to project intimate and convivial relations between participants.

The interactional enticements of comedic routines thus present a potential danger in that such routines are robustly extextualized and poetically crafted to be transposable into everyday encounters and circulate 'virally' (Moore 2003). Seen from such a perspective, the vulgar comedic gags that saturate television programming offer themselves as citational (Nakassis 2016) resources for negotiating social relationships between schoolchildren. In this way, children appear drawn to the evident interactional power of rough comedic forms in negotiating social relationships with their peers, not because they admire or aspire to become professional comedians themselves. In the words of one mother explaining the evident enthusiasm of children for such forms, "they want to try them" ("*Yatte mitai"*). The imitation of comedic forms by children, much like adults, commonly represent an effort to conjure the convivial, intimate and engaging social contexts regularly on display within comedic television programming. Anxieties emerge around these segments not because rough behavior and teasing are taboo or aberrant in themselves, but rather because the exaggerated—industrial strength—forms exhibited by

[24] Often closed as 'crosstalk' (Stocker 2002; Tsurumi 1987) the relationship between *boke* and *tsukkomi* will be discussed more fully in later chapters. Here it is sufficient to note that the 'joking' utterance of such rough rebukes are a common feature of peer interactions between intimates, particularly among boys and young men.

professional comedians on television require special care to ensure that no lasting harm is inflicted. Specifically, they require a normatively mature discriminating communicative competence—or self-aware restraint—that children presumable have yet to develop. Given this understanding, prohibiting all instances of rough behavior might help to mitigate ijime, however, such a sweeping prohibition also appears excessively broad and intrusive. Foremost, such broad prohibitions on boyish vulgarity also threaten to impede socialization by foreclosing familiar modes of comic teasing and transgressive play that are normatively used to forge intimate friendships and foster solidarity amongst peers. Ultimately, one thing appears certain for those enmeshed in these public discussions, children lack the maturity to responsibly monitor, manage and respond to rough behavior when it threatens to get out of hand.

Language Ideologies and Appropriately Imperfect Children

Concerns over childish inexpertise are shaped by the normative language ideology. The guiding language ideology places the burden of responsibility on the speaking actor to read and evaluate *in situ* the potential effects of their behavior on interlocutors in order to avoid offense. It stipulates that speakers take responsibility for considering the perspective and feelings of their interlocutors so as to avoid causing situations of genuine embarrassment or discomfort. The emphasis on the contributions of speakers turns the appropriate performance of deference or esoteric forms of linguistic politeness into interactional resources for indexicality situating, one's social station and refinement (c.f. Errington 1988). However, at a baseline, even participants without such performative aspirations are obligated to monitor the interactional context and contribute in ways that do not threaten to offend or disrupt the smooth flow of a social

encounter.[25] A strong emphasis focus on avoiding communicative trouble is inculcated and maintained through a broad range of informal and institutional sites such as schools and corporate training for new employees. [26] As with explicit formulations of ijime, the prevalent language ideology faults speakers who offend and grants the addressee or targeted referent of an utterance or action the legitimate authority to evaluate the offensive character of a message. In this way, Japanese metapragmatic models of appropriate linguistic use diverge significantly from Western (American in particular) ideologies of communicative responsibility that privilege the intentions of speakers in evaluating the appropriateness of, and assigning principle responsibility for, communicative contributions. Under such intentionalist ideologies, it is possible for speakers to attempt to repair offense by characterizing it as a misunderstanding and claiming that a recipient's interpretation does not align with the speaker's intent.[27] In these cases, offending speakers may offer an account or explanation as a clarification of expressed intent in order to reframe a prior problematic contribution and defuse offense.

By contrast, the prevalent language ideology in Japan disprivilages intention in evaluating the appropriateness of interactions and allocating responsibility for instances of communicative trouble. This ideology holds speakers responsible for considering the appropriateness and likely consequences of their contribution in relation to the ongoing current interactional situation before contributing an utterance. In this way, mature and responsible

[25] Sachiko Ide's (1992; 2012) discussion of the importance of *wakimae* (discernment) exemplifies these kinds of ideological projects. She notes that Japanese obligates speakers to use honorifics to formulate interactional contributions in pragmatically appropriate ways as a matter of social expectation in ways that runs counter to theorizations of politeness as an intentional choice made by individuals in relation to an interactional calculus of face demands and threats (c.f. Brown & Levinson 1987).

[26] Note that the importance of considering others before speaking is explicitly taught in elementary schools. For example, see Cook (1999) for a discussion of how elementary school children are socialized to 'listen.'

[27] To be sure, linguistic anthropologists have developed a robust critique of such 'personalist' language ideologies that model communication as a transmission of speaker intent (see for example Duranti 1993; Rosaldo 1982; Hill 2008; Cole & Pellicer 2012).

speakers are said to 'read the atmosphere' (*kuki wo yomu*) of the ongoing interactional situation by attending to the thematic flow (*nagare*) of conversation, stipulated or established relationships among co-participating others, and prior uptake cues of interlocutors in order to appropriately formulate contributions.[28] The explicit model for evaluating some interaction as ijime rather than ijiri grant the addressee or targeted referent of an utterance or action the authority to evaluate the offensive character of the message. This ideology is inculcated and rendered manifest explicitly in institutional settings: from family to school to corporate training for new hires in ways that explicitly lay the responsibility on speakers to avoid the production of offense in social situations. Such formulations stipulate that before producing an utterance, speakers have considered the appropriateness of their contribution.

The stipulative power of language ideology is such that appeals to miscommunication or misunderstanding of a speaker's intent are not valid modes of interactional repair when offense materializes within an interaction. It is rarely effective to say, "That's not what I meant." To claim that one's intent was misunderstood when someone has taken offense displays the speaker's inability to maturely navigate social situations. One should know how to attend to the speech situation and contribute without causing offense. The guiding presumption is that the speaker should have better considered their words before opening their mouths.

This ideology of communicative responsibility plays in an important role in discussions that entangle children, comedic rough behavior and ijime, and provides a legible rationale for absolving children of citational misfires. Children appear as normative targets for indulgence by adults due to their presumed innocence and limited agency. As such, it appears unreasonable to expect children to behave according to the demanding interactional strictures imposed by mature

[28] See Tanaka (2008) for a representative popular rendering.

communicative norms as children are conceived as immature and under-socialized. The presumed communicative inexpertise of children is read in relation to broader Japanese language ideologies concerning the regulation of interactional decorum. Children are said to lack a sufficiently developed pragmatic awareness that would enable them to track the ongoing interaction and appropriately consider others—or appreciate the likely consequences of their actions—before speaking.[29]

Reflecting this, anti-ijime campaigns (*ijime taisaku*) overwhelmingly focus on instilling empathetic awareness in children (reflecting the dominate language ideology) and motivating targeted children to produce clear signs of displeasure for others to see. The idea being that if children who perpetrate ijime could clearly perceive the mental and emotional toll of their behavior, they will cease persecuting each other. In this way, discussions of ijime regularly presume an absence of genuine ill-intent or malice (*akui*) on the part of children who bully others. Rather, such hardships are cast as emerging as failures in the realm of performance. The (meta)pragmatic clumsiness of children serves as an explanation for the ways that ijime can emerge innocently and pressure victims to smile-along and camouflage the internal scars as they accrue.

Changing Children (Rising concern over the strangeness of kids).

Finally, a growing focus on increasingly complex formulations of the interiority of children in the 1990's has paralleled the inward turn around ijime and further intensified forensic anxieties over rough comic behavior. Scholars have identified such shifting conceptions of children as a focal site for working out a displaced concern over economic fragility and structural

[29] It is important to note that the veracity of these ideological presumptions is questionable (cf. Fukuda 2005)

reforms brought on by the bursting of the postwar Japanese bubble in the 1990's (Arai 2016). The particular social institutions and cultural affordances that had been previously mobilized to explain the economic miracle, now came under suspicion as broken and failing to perform. Accounts describing a rising generation of strange children rendered signs of economic stagnation into indices of cultural decay and social unravelling. The narrative of normal children 'gone strange' ('*kawatta*') crystalized following the case of Shonen A,[30] a fourteen year old middle school student who decapitated 11 year old Jun Hase and left his head at the gate of his Kobe school. In novel fashion, coverage of the emerging case avoided focusing on the potentially aberrant details of Shonen A's life and instead characterized him as a 'normal' child.[31] This framing inverted the usual optics brought to bear on cases of spectacular violence — transforming lenses into mirrors—by drawing attention to signs of the normalcy of Shonen A's school and home life rather than plumbing for indicators of lurking dysfunction and abnormality. In this way, the case reflected the impulses that culminated in such horrifying acts into all children in a general sense. In the public sphere, Shonen A's 'normalcy' came to index a broader social unraveling marked by systemic failure and cultural degeneration. It suggested that all children could become Shonen A (Arai 2003, 2016).

A growing focus on the hearts and minds (*kokoro*) of children clearly converges with concerns over ijime highlighting the need for a semiotic forensics capable of accurately perceiving social and emotional turmoil in the behavior of children. The discovery of the inner

[30] Coverage of the case referred to the fourteen-year-old perpetrator as 'Shonen A' ('Boy A') because of strict privacy protections that shield the identity of juvenile offenders and prohibit the circulation of their personal information.

[31] Like elsewhere, reporting on sensational accounts of violence in Japan regularly seek signs of abnormality in the biographical specifics of domestic situation and school environment. Such accountings tightly delimit the scope of inquiry around the individual perpetrator and any potential local influences. This mode of inquiry seeks particularity in an effort to explain abnormality. Accordingly, the domestic situation of perpetrators regularly come under suspicion—with the presence of fatherly abuse or motherly detachment serving as familiar key signs. Alternatively, the boy's broader social situation and school life also regularly become explanatory context.

frontiers within children from external behavior towards interior feelings.[32] Confidence eroded in the ability to detect problems or that internal pathologies would systematically manifest externally in familiar visible signs. There was an intense inward turn towards an epistemology of interior organizing feelings and thoughts of children as particular individuals. The danger was increasingly understood to lurk within children precipitating a turn away from structurally imposed discipline (and its rough outbursts) and towards the veiled interior life of children's *kokoro*.

[32] Andrea Arai (2016) has traced the ways that such abstract discussions of children increasingly developed into an anxious focal point. Objects of potential and promise as well as subjects of potential corruption and maladaptation, children came to stand in for the ills of the nation in a period of recession and neoliberal reform.

Chapter 2:

Institutional Complainers: The Emblematization of the Japanese PTA National Congress

I departed the Tokyo office of the Parent Teacher Association Japanese National Congress (*Nihon PTA Zenkoku Kyōgikai*) with a sense of dislocation and bewilderment. I had come to speak to representatives of the national PTA concerning a well-known annual report carried out by the organization that surveyed parental attitudes concerning children and media. I had seen repeated mention of the Survey Report on Media and Children (*Media to kodomo ni kansuru ishiki chōusa kekka*) upon its publication every spring and the report was often referenced by my fieldwork interlocutors as a clear example of a critical voice on comedy television. However, my meeting with four members of the National Congress sub-committee responsible for producing the annual survey report did not go the way I had anticipated.

I entered the small two-story building in central Tokyo expecting to hear a familiar set of complaints and concerns focused on the problematic influence of vulgar (*teizoku*), absurd (*bakabakashii*) and coarse (*geihin*) comic programming on the appropriate social development children and youth. Instead, members of the committee patiently explained that the survey report, in fact, showed attitudes towards television were mostly positive. They explained that other media forms, such as cell phones, were not so lucky. Moreover, committee members stated that they wished that coverage of the report focused on positive parental attitudes towards exemplary

programming rather than on the comparatively smaller number of responses that identified potentially problematic programming.

Dazed by this unexpected deviation, I inquired, perhaps too bluntly, what the committee hoped that the annual publication of the survey report might achieve. The senior member of the committee responded in clear terms that the PTA National Congress harbored no specific social or regulatory ambition for the report. Throughout the meeting, the committee members adamantly disavowed any guiding intent on behalf of the National Congress and categorically denied that the report was designed to address a broader public. Rather, they repeatedly characterized the report as a transparent effort to survey and reflect of the opinions of parents on questions of media and children. They characterized the circulatory design of the report as targeting parents themselves in an effort to facilitate the sharing of information (*jyōhō kōkan*) concerning attitudes and practices of dealing with media in the household. The committee members suggested that the report aimed to provide parents with a sense of how other parents managed the relationship between children and media in their homes. In this way, they cast the PTA National Congress as a transparent amplifier of parental attitudes rather than agentive advocate on behalf of parents.

While I took these responses as strategically calculated to respond to the targeted inquires of a foreign researcher, I remained uncomfortably surprised by their repeated staunch disavowals of any aspirations for any broader social or regulatory interventions. Indeed, I had structured my initial research plan around tracing the conflicting messaging work of the PTA National Congress and producers of television comedy. It was precisely here, at the PTA National Congress, that I had anticipated locating a prototypically critical voice. Much of my preliminary fieldwork and archival research had lead me to see the PTA as a vocal institutional actor that

sought to safeguard standards of public appropriateness. I had read a great deal of print and on-line discussion concerning the annual survey report and listened to many informal acquaintances and televised talking heads repeatedly describe the critical position of the PTA towards 'vulgar' (*geihin*/*teizoku*) comedic television. This perception of PTA as an institutional complainer was also reinforced through spectacular on-screen transmutations of survey report criticisms into markers of comedic success. Most prominently, I had seen the comedic variety program 'London Hearts' (*Rondon Hātsu*) greet the critical content within the survey report with smiles, cheers and confetti.

Looking back on my moment of post-meeting confusion, I see that I had been swept up in a circulatory process that this chapter now seeks to lay out. My surprise emerged precisely from stark contrast between the deeply entrenched understandings of the aims and values of 'PTA' and the survey report, and the disavowals made by PTA National Congress committee members responsible for producing the survey report. My naiveté had led me to overlook the complex, and contesting, interdiscursive tensions that shape the ways that discursive projects, such as the survey report, come to meaningfully unfold as they trace regular circulatory trajectories.

Introduction

This chapter takes up the question of how the meta-discursive struggles around this annual report—which is never read—has helped to precipitate 'PTA' into a publicly recognized institutional voice of complaint that is familiar to everyone. Specifically, this chapter will explore the interdiscursive processes surrounding the annual survey report in order to trace the ways they participate in discursively fashioning 'PTA' into a durable institutional emblem of reactionary criticism.

A crucial factor in this process of emblematization has been to discursively associate PTA with an excessive overinvestment in the sober and earnest (*majime*) values and solitary diligence that broadly characterize success in the rigorously competitive Japanese educational system as an established route to favorable future prospects and class ascendancy. The discursive production of 'PTA' as an emblem of upright and concerned parents may seem an obviously straightforward or trivially mundane matter. However, I suggest this is not the case, such essentializations are semiotically constituted and disseminated (Parmentier 1994).

To facilitate this analysis, I describe two frameworks of value that participate in organizing the meta-discursive struggle over the meaning of the annual survey report as well as the character of 'the PTA' more generally. I suggest that examining the interdiscursive struggle over the meaning of the 'PTA' as a general emblem presents a nexus—one among many—that sheds light on how these two frameworks align to conflicting orientations towards educational success, class ascendancy, friendly sociality and means for interpreting (homo-social male) rough behavior. The first evokes, often solitary, diligent and serious-minded pursuit by parents and progeny of academic and professional success. The second evokes a potentially vulgar joking sociality that is productive of solidarity and intimacy (cf. Dynel 2008). I use the Japanese descriptor '*majime*' meaning 'serious' or 'diligent' to indicate the first set and use '*omoshiroi*' meaning 'interesting' or 'funny' to point to the second. I do not wish to suggest these as structural opposites. They are not. Rather, they appear as conflicting, but also complementary, modes of social practice oriented towards different aspects of professional and social success. Importantly, both are valued within particular spheres of social life and few would advocate for an exclusive emphasis on one or the other.

It is primarily through the metadiscursive work performed by subsequent characterizing descriptions that follow in the circulatory chain, each selectively excerpting, capturing and reframing its meaning, that the 'PTA' has emerged as a durably citable emblem of overbearingly 'proper' parental concern.

The discursive figurations (Agha 2005) of 'PTA' that troubled my interviewees at the National Congress formally emerge out of a swirling maelstrom of meta-discourse surrounding the annual publication of the survey report. By meta-discourse I point to the ways that modes of reporting speech function as metapragmatic characterizing sketches that situate and frame their purported objects. To be sure, much of the content of everyday social life is occupied with the production and circulation of such characterizing meta-discourse (Silverstein 2011, Urban 2001). In this particular case the metadiscursive characterizations by which news of the report circulates exert a profound influence on its public meaning, in part because the report itself does not appear to circulate. Rather, it is through references to the report and excerpts of its content in other media forms—such as news reports, magazines and talk shows—that the broader public come to know something of the work and character of the PTA National Congress.

The National Congress committee members I interviewed appeared acutely aware of the limited influence they wielded over the characterization of the report upon its release every spring. They, in turn, characterized the reporting on the survey report by news and popular media outlets as misrepresenting the actual aims that motivate the PTA National Congress to publish the annual survey report. To be clear, these accounts cast prevalent understandings of the report as misunderstood in ways that privilege the authorial intent of the PTA committee responsible for creating the report. The point here is not to uncover or reveal 'true intentions' as a source of privileged authorial authority. Quite the opposite. The explicitly stated aims of the report, as well

its actual content, are overshadowed by the subsequent interdiscursive struggles to situate the report.

To be sure, the interdiscursive (Silverstein 2005) processes that constitute the focus of this chapter emerge as part of the strategic communicative work pursued by institutionally grounded interests. However, focusing on questions of institutional or organizational 'truth' and 'intention' of authorship miss the mark here, or at least strike a far less interesting one. An ethnographic account of the actual production of the report would ultimately produce limited insight into the processes that precipitate politically fraught emblematic characterizations of 'the PTA' as a collection of officious complainers and proxy for 'parents' more broadly. The expressed intentions claimed in statements by PTA National Congress representatives are only one of many discursive participants in the subsequent struggle to interdiscursively characterize the survey report and PTA.

Highlighting this fact, the PTA National Congress committee members I spoke to evoked a clear awareness that once the survey report is posted on the PTA National Congress website, it becomes subject to uptake and reframing in regular ways that contribute to the constitute and ascribe particular characteristics and associated values to the PTA. Their efforts to disavow ascriptions of critical intent by casting the survey report as transparent conduit for the ideas and opinions of parents throughout Japan demonstrates a keen discomfort with the way that report has come to characterize 'PTA' more broadly in an unflattering light. As with a focus on issues, rather than message, in political campaigning (Silverstein 2003, 2011; Lempert and Silverstein 2012), such explicitly formulated claims of authorial intent have much less influence on what this survey report, and by extension 'PTA,' come to publicly stand for when compared to the characterizing consequences that accrete over the circulatory twists and turns of subsequent

discussion about the report. From this perspective, explicit articulations of organizational objectives or authorial intentions might be setter seen as efforts at 'interactional repair.' That is, such statements appear might be best seen as attempts to bring the emergent public meaning of the annual report back into alignment with the broader institutional interests of the PTA National Congress.

However, the explicit claims of National Congress committee members disavowing an authorial intent on behalf of the PTA have utterly failed to counter the entrenched meta-discursive habits that effectively characterize the report as a reflecting the evaluations of the PTA. In this way, the report, and by extension the 'PTA' and the parents projected as its constitutive authors, come to stand for a particular type of social actor aligned with the values required to succeed in the educational—and later class ascendant professional—market. The actual, organization internal logics, interests and protocols that animate the annual production (materialization) of the report represent only a portion of the (meta)discursive process by which the concept of the 'PTA' coheres as a recognizable agent linked to recognizable institutional interests, perspectives and values. It is the circulation of meta-discourse about the report that both produces and disseminates this characterizing effect. The production of the report itself is only the first step in this interdiscursive process.

Invoking a 'Parental Public' in Japan's 'Self-Regulatory' System

The peculiar self-regulatory system that has governed broadcasters in postwar Japan in part shapes the surprising disavowals by National Congress committee members, as well as the format of annual survey report itself. Notably, there is no formal government authority resembling the Federal Communications Commission in the United States that is empowered to

determine explicit standards or prescriptive criteria for broadcast content, nor is there a government organization charged with evaluating and sanctioning questionable content. No similar institution currently exists in Japan which has the explicit legal authority to levy fines or other punishments on broadcasters for content that might deemed 'unethical', 'offensive' or 'discriminatory.' Rather, industry insiders largely describe the broader regulatory system as 'self-regulated' with government power over broadcasters limited to a formal requirement that stations obtain and renew broadcast licenses (*hōsō menkyo*) from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (*Sōmushō*) every five years.

The formal legal basis laying out the framework for governmental involvement in broadcast content appears article 4 of the Broadcast Law, introduced in 1950 and amended to add the relevant clause in 1959. Article 4 stipulates that broadcast content shall not be interfered with or regulated as long as it: is politically fair, does not make false claims, strives to represent opposing viewpoints on issues, and avoids compromising 'public safety' (*kōan*) and 'good morals' (*zenryō na fūzoku*).[1]

Taken together, the licensing requirement and the public morality clause in the broadcast law may seem to imply that broadcasters who violate the directives in the clause are likely to face non-renewal of their broadcast licenses. However, it is far from clear that the morality clause contained in Article 4 represents a clear regulatory threat to broadcasters. The nature and scope of the power granted by the Broadcast Law to regulate content based on potential for harm to public morals remains ambiguous and highly contested. Foremost, Articles 5 and 6 leaves the matter of establishing and disseminating program standards in the hands of broadcasters who are required to established internal deliberative bodies to ensure that programs meet internally

[1] The principle regulatory language in the Broadcast Law, as amended in 1959, specifies that broadcasters "shall not disturb public security or good morals or manners." (公安及び善良な風俗を害しないこと。)

developed standards of appropriateness. Notably, programs focused on 'current affairs of the market economy,' sports and natural events are formally exempted from this process under Article 8.

Prior eras of overt government censorship, under imperial rule, and later American occupation, continue to serve as powerful touchstones for industry push-back against direct government oversight and overt legal regulation of Japanese media industries. From its inception, the public security and good morals clause of the Broadcast Law has been normatively taken-up as a set of ethical guidelines to shape industry standards, rather than formal stipulations that require legal clarification and consequences.[2] While direct government control over the issuance of broadcast licenses may appear to afford considerable leverage for government intervention in the content of broadcasting, overt threats to renew licenses due to violations of the public safety and morals clause appear rare to the point of nonexistent.[3]

Lacking an overt state agency, the current regulatory landscape is dominated by 'independent' advisory organizations, such as the Broadcast Ethics and Program Improvement Organization (*Hōsōrinri bangumi kōjyō kikō* - BPO) which currently serves as the paramount organization for mediating broadcast regulatory issues in contemporary Japan. Such industry advisory organizations emerged incrementally over time in response to a series of broadcast

[2] Part of the resistance to a hard interpretation of article 4 emerges from the fact of its ultimate adoption by GHQ as a potential means to maintain control over broadcast industry amidst concern over the rise of communist sympathies (Seiichi 2007). However, in recent years, advocates have emerged for alternative interpretations that treat these clauses as stipulations and grant the government more enforcement power in relation to Article 4. Particularly in connection with stipulations on fair coverage of political parties. Most recently, there has been a push by Prime Minister Abe Shinzo to remove the stipulation on fair political coverage to place it on equal terms with online political coverage, which is not subject to the broadcast law.

[3] This does not necessarily mean that the threat of state intervention plays no role in regulating programming. Characterizations of the Japanese system as responsible and effective 'self-regulation' ultimately beholden to the public are contested by those that describe a system of industry 'self-censorship' in the name of the public (cf. Nagahara 2017). Many have pointed to the self-regulatory system in Japan as a form of self-imposed censorship and noted that the absence of explicit government intervention does not necessarily signal a genuine reluctance to allow government to intervene in broadcasting in the post-war. Rather, the lack of non-renewals may be taken a sign of the effectiveness of the implied threat itself.

scandals and ethics complaints that escaped the notice of the programming standards bodies at individual broadcasters. The BPO represents the latest collaboration between the government sponsored national broadcast organization and private broadcasters to maintain the regulatory status quo. Sustained by joint support from private broadcast stations and the state-sponsored broadcasting organization (*Nihon hōsō kyōkai* - NHK), the BPO is touted as an independent body that brings together industry professionals and media researchers to impartially mediate broadcast ethics disputes and evaluate concerns submitted on behalf of the public. Though some research is carried out under the auspices of the BPO, it largely functions as a reactive organization in the sense that the organization primarily responds to received complaints levelled against programming content.[4]

Notably, the BPO lacks any formal authority to level fines or compel broadcasters to change policies or program content. Rather it acts in an advisory capacity and mediates disputes between claimants and broadcasters in a case by case manner. The implicit threat of increased government oversight and direct involvement in broadcast regulation, should the industry prove unable to regulate itself, is often cited as a powerful incentive to comply with BPO guidance and determinations. In this chapter, I leave aside the question of whether, or to what degree, this 'self-regulatory' system might genuinely be said to be independent of the state in order to maintain a clear focus on the communicative strategies incentivized by the current system.

The lack of an overt government sponsored regulatory authority, combined with the absence of explicit polices governing the grey areas of broadcast content, renders the Japanese regulatory system particularly sensitive to complaints and claims that can be effectively cast as

[4] The BPO provides several means for organizations and individual viewers to register concerns and submit complaints. These include telephone and fax hotlines, a form directly on the BPO website or via physical letter.

emerging from a public—conceived as distinct from the interests of broadcasters and the state.[5] This is to say that the rarefied Japanese regulatory environment renders invocations of a dissatisfied 'public'[6] into strategic, and potentially effective, resources for those seeking to spur (self)regulatory action.[7] Accordingly, organizational actors seeking to produce broadcast regulatory effects have regularly sought to invoke the specter of public opinion to legitimize and lend popular authority to their criticisms. Such efforts often seek to erase the agency and the role of the organization in the communicative labor in order to displace responsibility for regulatory demands onto a productively unclear and diffuse figure of a 'public' (Warner 2002, Briggs 2003).

Whatever the veracity of the account provided by my National Congress interlocutors, the explicit disavowals of an independent organizational interest or motive on behalf of the PTA National Congress perform precisely this kind of semiotic work. National Congress disclaimers of disinterest work to frame the content of the survey report as representing not the determinations of the organization itself, but rather expressions of concern by a parental public spanning the breadth of the nation. In this way, the survey report appears semiotically well-adapted to the established 'self-regulatory' order. The format of the report, detailing the results of a survey, ascribes clear indexical links between the PTA produced report and projections of a parental public represented by the content. Evoking a parental public in this way aligns the

[5] Similarly, the emphasis laid on the 'independence' of the BPO resonates strongly with the idea that such regulatory organizations should properly be as uncontaminated as possible by the interests of any specific organization. The presumption being that only then might such regulatory institutions reflect a more essential public morality, untainted by both moneyed and political interest.

[6] A 'public,' as described here, is a discursive category rather than a sociological one. This critical perspective follows a long, and very well developed, line of scholarship that identifies a gap between the political utility and sociological veracity of talk about the public and public opinion (for example see Lippmann 1993, Bourdieu 1979).

[7] Though I have focused on the regulatory apparatus here, I should note that in there are multiple ways that organizations mobilize and leverage the specter of a public. For example, in addition to the fit with the regulatory framework, complaints (*kurēmu*; *kujyō*) leveled by organizations can also gain significant traction in the form of bad PR. This appears especially true for sponsors who might fear alienating consumers in the wake of a public scandal.

communicative work of organizations such as the PTA National Congress with the emphasis placed on public safety and morality by the self-regulatory system. In this way, the surveying work facilitated by the PTA National Congress promises to enhance the discursive effectiveness of any criticisms made on the basis of the report. Whatever the actual status of the report as an accurate metric of sociological reality—the degree to which it really reflects what parents may 'actually' think—the effort to frame its content as the expression of a 'parental public' affords an appropriate and effective mode of applying leverage within the emphases the safeguarding of public safety and morality in the current regulatory environment.[8]

Mutable Organizational Scale: Who, or what, is the PTA?

One of the first questions I asked my potential research participants was "Who complains about comedy television?" By far the most common response was simply, "PTA." The ubiquity of the response was reassuring, however, over time I became dissatisfied with the limited insight this answer provided. The response seemed obviously accurate, but also mundanely ambiguous to the point that it became denotationally opaque. Preliminary research had made me familiar enough with the term that I expected 'PTA,' wherever I found it, to vocally complain about displays of impropriety on television. As my research progressed it because increasingly apparent that 'PTA' could mean a great many things and it gradually became less clear to me who, specifically, my interlocutors intended to denote with the term.

In common usage, 'PTA' often evokes an institutional coherency that outpaces the sociological reality of the organization. Foremost, invocations of PTA regularly evoke a discreet

[8] By this I do not intend to suggest that coarse programming would not motivate concern by parents were it not for the efforts of the PTA National Congress. Rather, I intend to highlight the ways that disavowals of authorship on behalf of the PTA National Congress potentially enhance the strategic effectiveness of the report by casting the role of the organization as a transparent amplifier of (parental) public opinion.

highly integrated organization with expansive reach. Such usages regularly ascribe a common character and unified purpose to a diverse collection of PTA organizations and the broad range of individuals that constitute their membership. The repeated reference to PTA enables the collapse of different organizational scales and offers the impression of a single vast institution mobilizing a vast number of members. However, PTA organizations operate at multiple levels of scale and their work is not necessarily unified or standardized.

Closest to the survey report is the PTA National Congress which operates at the national level and thus represents the most expansive scale of PTA. Beyond the annual survey report, the national convention is discursively encountered through reporting on statements, endorsements of education related products—such as pencil boxes and school bags—and organizing national gatherings. The members that constitute the National Congress are recruited from regional level PTA organizations and are overwhelmingly male, a stark contrast with smallest scale, school-based, PTA organizations which consist almost wholly of mothers.

There are also regional PTA organizations that operate below the national level at a variety of scales. Regional organizations are regularly staffed by members of lower level organizations to facilitate links between them. For example, representatives in the Yokohama City organization draw their membership from ward-level or school level organizations. While it is often true that regional and national organizations regularly draw their members from lower level organizations, each discrete PTA organization preserves significant local autonomy and discretion. Regional level organizations regularly organize their own events and campaigns deemed appropriate to the communities they serve. This discretion extends to instances when coordinating efforts between higher level and local school PTAs to facilitate larger projects and programs such as the national survey report.

Finally, at the most local level, PTA organizations at local schools are overwhelmingly composed of mothers of children who attend the school. These school level PTA organizations serve primarily as an axillary labor pool dedicated to supporting school related activities such as sports-day, safety patrol and school newsletters. There is strong expectation that parents will serve in the PTA, in some capacity, for at least one year out of the six years their child attends elementary school. As will be discussed in greater detail later, participation in local school PTA organizations is often seen by parents as an undesirable burden (cf. Goldstein-Gidoni 2012: 109).

Contrary to the popular notion circulated by PTA critics, this is not a top down organization that effectively unifies and channels the labor of subordinate organizations in the pursuit of directed projects. Rather, the diverse activities carried out by PTA organizations appear loosely aligned primarily through performances that evoke a commitment to shared organizational values focused on fostering a supportive, nurturing and healthy environment for children. However, popular coverage of PTA sponsored projects and events often emphasize these shared values in ways that fail to highlight the differences between PTA organizations, even those at multiple levels of scale. Expressions of this shared ethos at local and national levels cast a unified image of 'PTA' even though the actual work performed differs greatly depending on the scale and location of particular organizations.

The Production Process of the Report on Media and Children

The first publication of what has become the 'Survey Report on Children and Media' took place in 2004[9]—with the actual survey conducted in 2003. It came in two parts entitled

[9] While this specific survey began in 2004, there are clear historical precedents of PTA organizations crafting public statements on the value of television programming (cf. Nagahara 2017; Kim 2017; Chun 2007). The 'Best 10' & 'Worst 10' program lists created by the PTA National Congress in the 1970s are particularly notable precedents as they share the list form.

'Survey on Television & Media in the Home Education' and 'A Survey Concerning Youth and the Internet.'[10] An additional subheading read "Initiative to examine the problem of the effects on children's hearts/minds (*kokoro*) from harmful information."[11] The initial iterations of the report focused on television to a much greater degree than later reports and it may be fair to speculate that other information technologies and platforms, now also subsumed under the term 'media,' did not exist or were not a part of children's lives in ways that provoked concern.

Importantly, the *misetakunai* ('do not want to show') and *misetai* ('want to show') lists that have figured so largely in broader coverage of the survey reports appeared in the survey reports from the very beginning. In 2006, the title of the report changed to a less television focused title, "Report on the results of the opinion survey concerning children and media."[12] This might be seen to reflect an increasing domestication or familiarity with television and its problems as new media technologies, such as personal computers, the Internet and mobile devices, became a new frontier of social concern.[13]

The actual production of the survey report follows a highly formalized process. The process begins with a meeting of committee members at the National Congress office to discuss and determine the specific questions to be included on the questionnaire form. According to my National Congress interlocutors, the committee begins with the survey from the previous year and modifies it based on emergent social concerns that appear in the news as well as direct

[10]家庭教育におけるテレビ・メディア調査　青少年とインターネット等に関する調査
[11]子供の心に影響を与える有害情報問題の取り組み
[12]子どもとメディアに関する意識調査
[13] New media fears tend to focus strong attention being paid to privacy issues, potentially illicit, corrupting or predatory communications with adults as well as concern over the enabling of circulation of insulting and offensive comments among peers. 'Media literacy' campaigns no longer appeared limited to learning how to read circulating texts in a broadcast mode. Rather, recent efforts at media literacy emphasize how to appropriately (and safely!) manage one's own mass mediated contributions. This reflects historical shifts of the participant roles in respect to media, particularly the shift from broadcast (as managed collective spectacles) to peer-to-peer (as direct contact between users without oversight and regulation).

expressions of concern from parents themselves. As a result, more recent survey reports cover an increasingly broad range of media forms and concerns in addition to television.[14]

Once the committee has decided on the content of the questionnaire they pass the material to a private research company hired by the National Congress to facilitate the survey process. The research company is responsible for printing survey forms and distributing them to a selection of prefectural-level PTA organizations throughout Japan. These regional PTA organizations in turn select a subset of PTA organizations at individual schools to receive surveys. The local school PTAs in turn select the families of 40 second-year and 40 fifth-year students to receive the questionnaires. According to my National Congress interlocutors the national organization does not set any guidelines stipulating how regional and local PTA organizations should distribute and collect survey forms. Committee members emphasized the fact that they were not involved in the selection of the specific schools asked to respond to the survey, let alone the actual classes of students, as a means to shift authorial responsibility. Such matters fell under the discretionary purview of regional and local PTA organizations. Similarly, the process of distributing questionnaires and gathering responses is entirely under the discretion of regional and local PTA organizations.

Once distributed, survey questionnaires are completed by parents and children of selected classes during the winter and returned directly to the research company, which gathers and compiles responses. The collected responses are then passed to Professor of Education Akashi Yoichi at Chiba University for analysis. Professor Akashi performs statistical analysis on the data and generates the various tables and graphs that constitute the bulk of the final published reports. While the specific format of the report has shifted over time, the compiled and finalized

[14] These include magazines and manga (comics), video games, cell and smart phones, social media and the Internet more broadly.

report, ready for publication, generally comes in at roughly 200 pages and includes the results of the survey as well as a sample of the questionnaire form. In addition to the results of the survey analysis, the report contains a brief account of its own production which casts it as an instrument to collect and amplify the voice of parents across the nation.

On the Meta-Discursive Circulatory Life of the Report

Despite the efforts to evoke a parental public with the survey report, the ultimate effectiveness of the textual strategies built into the survey report hinge on uptake by addressees. The broader uptake of the survey report is more powerfully shaped by other the effects of other institutional actors involved in the circulatory process.

The public circulation of the PTA survey report regularly begins in spring following the announcement of a press conference on the website of the PTA National Congress and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (*Monbukagakushō* - MEXT). While this press conference receives sparse coverage in the mainstream news media, it marks the formal announcement of the completion of the report and its public availability on the PTA National Congress website. Once made publicly available, the PTA National Congress necessarily relinquishes significant control over the future interdiscursive (indexical) significance of the survey report as it begins to become cited, and metadiscursively characterized, in a diverse array of media-commodities (see Agha 2011a, 2001b) produced by organizational actors motivated by separate interests. The subsequent impact of the circulatory interdiscursivity has a powerful effect on the public meaning of the report that far outstrips the explicitly described aims of the PTA National Congress described within the report itself. Except for those involved in its production, I never met a single person who claimed to have read the

actual survey report during my three years of fieldwork in Yokohama and Tokyo. At the same time, this report was widely known and frequently referenced by my interlocutors as an example of the complaints lodged by PTA. It is precisely due to regular circulatory processes, such as those described in the sections that follow, that a report that is never read has developed a recognized as a robust institutional voice that is familiar to everyone.

This requires a shift in the way that circulation is often conceived. Prevalent ideologies of circulation often model it after a mode of transmission or transportation. First, circulation is often taken to describe the dissemination of 'texts' as discrete, often identical, objects that address readers and viewers. Such a view of circulation takes 'texts' as objects that share some salient degree of formal composition[15] and denotational content. Second, these identical texts are presumed to be distributed to manifold potential readers through various channels of mediation made possible by technologies of replication and transmission.

In recent decades, linguistic anthropologists have focused on 'circulation' by tracing it closely as communitive process more rather than presuming transmission of specific and discrete 'texts.' From a semiotic perspective, 'circulation' points to an interdiscursive process composed of serial discrete communicative encounters whereby some aspect of that encounter is produced (and recognized), within the encounter, as similar, in some constitutive way, to some other prior instance. What appears as movement might be better seen as a virtual effect of a series of discrete communicative acts (Silverstein 2013: 335).

[15] At least recognizably sharing features within schemes of criteria that enable (re)productions of 'the text' to appear as the 'same text.' To provide just one example, the experience of watching a movie can differ along manifold dimensions (venue, viewing technology, audience, etc.) however, the textual object of the 'the movie' is recognizably entextualizable as a discrete object apart from other elements—which filter out as 'context'—within any specific instance of semiosis.

To understand circulation in this way is to include far more than the physical dissemination of textual materials or transmission of decontextualized 'information.' Rather, this perspective approaches circulation as serial, discretely punctuated, instances of communication. Asif Agha (2007) describes this iterative process as a speech chain. Each instantiation in the chain of participant frameworks requires interdiscursive work to draw together multiple discrete instances of communication and render them commensurate.[16]

Subsequent organizations, and individuals, take up the report, extract particular selections, and embed them into other text-artifacts of their own design. This process re-frames and situates the survey report in relation to the interests and aims of other organizations, such as news-papers and comedy programs. Uptake matters in determining the ultimate meaning of the report and the differential reach of circulatory infrastructures places the aspirational messaging by the producers of the report at a significant disadvantage when compared with other media industries. As mentioned above, very few people read the PTA report itself. Rather most come to understand the report, and by extension the PTA, through meta-discursive accounts made by others.

In this sense, we might re-envision 'circulation' as an active process where characterizations of circulated objects or texts are woven into the very communicative instances that constitute the circulatory process. Lee and LiPuma (2002) have described 'cultures of circulation' to emphasize the regular semiotic labor required to productively commensurate (see Gal 2015) instances of communicative process. Approached as communicative process, subsequent citations of the report necessarily incorporate metadiscursive framing that entails effects that contextualize and situate, or frame, the target object within some separate moment of

[16] See Gal (2015) for a through discussion of the semiotic process of commensuration and the political potentials of its consequential entailments.

semiosis (cf. Voloshinov 1986). Here it is important to recall that very few read the actual survey report itself. Rather, most become aware of the report through meta-discursive references encapsulated within other entextualizations. As such, the PTA survey report 'circulates' only in the sense that it serves as an object of repeated meta-discursive 'reports about the report.' These meta-discursive mentions largely constitute the perceived circulation of the report itself. The crucial insight is that the interdiscursivity of this meta-discourse that largely generates the circulatory life of the PTA survey report.

As media institutions unaffiliated with the PTA National Congress perform the actual communicative labor that constitutes this circulation, the meta-discursive interdiscursivity is completely beyond the control of the PTA National Congress. As a result, the survey report traces a regular circulatory trajectory each year that reforms its public meaning in ways that diverge significantly from the intent expressed by PTA committee members.

Meronymic Characterizations: Framing the Survey Report as the Misetakunai List

The regular circulatory channels through which the news of the report spreads play a powerful role in formulating PTA in an emblem that evokes it as an organization of complainers, particularly parental complainers. Once made available via the PTA National Congress website every May, the survey report receives significant, if selective, coverage in news media. However, most coverage overwhelmingly focuses on a small subsection of the report—consisting of just a few pages—that lists television programs according to the number of responses where parents identified shows that they wanted to prohibit, or allow, their children from seeing. These *misetakunai* ('do not want to show') and, to a lesser degree, *misetai* ('want to show') lists have become a focal feature in most subsequent mentions of the report. The emphasis on this section

is so strong that, until recently, news coverage of the survey report mentioned little to nothing about any of the other content in the roughly 200-page document. Year after year news of the report has effectually meant a partial reproduction of the misetai and misetakunai rankings with primary emphasis falling on the *misetakunai bangumi* list ('programs [that parents] don't want to show'). The following 2009 article in the *Asahi Shinbun* provides a representative example.

> **Programs [parents] don't want to show to kids, number one London hearts, PTA survey, Six years in a row**
>
> TV Asahi program "London hearts" was held up as the number one program [parents] don't want to show their kids six years in a row in a PTA National Congress survey. PTA think "Since the show has continued at the top for years, some parents are likely selecting it because this image [of the show] has imprinted onto its name.[17]
>
> This time the survey was conducted in November of last year. Of the 3610 parents who has fifth graders or eighth graders participated in the survey, a little less than 30% answered that they have programs which they don't want to show their kids. Of the respondents who entered specific names of shows, 127 answered "London hearts". The reasons provided were "the program is stupid/absurd" etc. Second place was Crayon Shin-chan with 108 responses.
>
> **Top 5 Don't Want to Show and Want to Show Programs**
>
> <Don't Want to Show>
>
> 1. London Hearts (Asahi Television)
> 2. Crayon Shin-chan (ibid)
> 3. Shimura Ken's Idiot Lord (Fuji Television)
> 4. Mecha mecha Ike! (ibid)
> 5. Hanerutobira (ibid)
>
> <Want to Show>
>
> 1. Sekai ichi uketai jyugyo (Nihon Television)
> 2. Dobutsu kisotengai! (TBS)
> 3. Q sama!! (Asahi Television)
> 3. Atsuhime (NHK)
> 5. Heisei Kyouiku iinkai (Fuji Television)
>
> (*Asahi Shinbun,* May 14, 2009)

The effective consequence of this emphasis has been that though only a small fraction of the total PTA report appears in newspapers and television programming, that small fraction has

[17] Note that the number one ranking for London Hearts on the *misetakunai* list has become an integral part of the program's brand.

largely come to represent the broader meaning and objective of the survey. Note that while the contemporary PTA National Congress committee responsible for the report insists on characterizing the *mistetakunai* list as a descriptive object, in the sense that it represents the opinions of a broad swath of Japanese parents, critics cast it as a prescriptive formulation and ascribe critical agency on the PTA. News of the survey report has effectively become news of the *misetakunai* and *misetai* lists; these nested meronymic links afford characterizations of the PTA National Congress as primarily focused on evaluating the television content for propriety and potential educational value.

Routine truncations of the list titles work to ambiguate the authorship of the lists and enable critics of the PTA to shift principal responsibility (Goffman 1981) for the critical character and content of lists firmly onto the PTA National Congress itself. The Both of the key terms in the lists titles derive from the verb '*miseru*' which can be glossed as 'to display or show.' Rendered into the desiderative, '*tai*' form, this utterance expresses a desire on behalf of subjects to perform the activity indicated by the verb root ('*mise-tai*' - to want to show). To obtain the negative requires the conjugation of the final 'tai' into '*ta|kuna|i*' ('*mise-takunai*' - to not want to show).[18] The full title printed in the report explicitly denotes parents or guardians as the desiring subjects who do not wish to the listed programs to be shown to children. In line with the stated hopes of committee members, these full titles explicitly indicate that readers should take survey respondents, parents across Japan, rather than the PTA National Congress, as the denoted desiring subjects.

[18] It is worthwhile noting the contrast between not wanting 'to show' ('*misetakunai*') and not wanting 'to see' ('*mitakunai*'). The former presumes that children desire to watch the program but should be kept from doing so. While the latter indicates a lack of desire to watch. A category powerfully legible through standard industry metrics in ways that routinely incentivize changes in programming format or cancellation. In this way, the term *misetakunai* itself diagrams a tension between the clear incentives that drive the television industry to engender desires to watch, and the efforts of other organizational actors to curate what should be watched.

Television programs parents do not want to show to children.
保護者が子供に見せたくないテレビ番組
Hogosha ga kodomo ni misetakunai terebi bangumi

However, subsequent references to these lists by others regularly drop the subject to create a more compact formulation. Such truncations are highly normative, however, doing so elides the explicit marking of ‘parents’ and renders the desiring subject ambiguous.

Programs not wanted to show children.
子供に見せたくない番組
Kodomo ni misetakunai bangumi

More compact formulations that drop ‘children’ as the explicit marked indirect object are just as common. Dropping the indirect object in this way erase the formerly explicit denotation of children as the presumable audience. This, in turn, also removes any computably implicit, yet legible, indication of what might motivate the desiring subject to not want to show these programs.

Programs not wanted shown
見せたくない番組
misetakunai bangumi

As a result, these prevalent truncated forms afford a great deal of indexical shift in the way that they characterize the *misetakunai* list—both in terms of identifying the desiring subject and defining a motivation. The regular use of these truncated forms within subsequent reports

that reference the survey report foster an ambiguity concerning who exactly harbors the denoted desire to show or not show these programs. What appears clearly marked within the survey report as reflective of parental concerns, becomes available for mis-recognition through news reports and subsequent discussions as reflecting institutionally formulated opinions of the PTA National Congress itself. This is the precisely moment in which efforts to conjure a public voice through the semiotic technology of the survey report, can be productively shifted on the PTA, formulated as a discrete organizational entity.

These circulatory processes engender ambiguities that afford opportunities for counter-critics, such as the hosts of the program London Hearts, to re-situate criticisms as overblown and characterize 'the PTA' as overbearing and overly serious complainers (*kurēma*). Specifically, the focus on the *misetakunai* list in coverage of the survey report affords those identified by the list a means to productively decouple critical remarks in the report from a parental public and reframe them as motivated and authored by the PTA as a specific organization; an organization that is overly focused on diligence and propriety.

London Hearts as Organizational Antagonist

Leading the way in the reframing of the PTA survey report, and its implied criticisms, is the weekly comedy program 'London Hearts'.[19] London Hearts has ranked number one on the *misetakunai* list every year since 2004 when the second survey report was produced. Comments drawn from the survey and incorporated into the report make clear that London Hearts inspires

[19] Comedy (*owarai*) in Japan is frequently described as divided by performance format. Live shows, even by regular television performers, tend to follow more formalized traditions (such as *manzai* and *rakugo*) and are understood to require more craft and artisan-ship. The relentless demands of television to fill air-time are said to have led to the endless production of comedic routines that are easier to produce in quantity and appeal to vulgar or low sensibilities for easy laughs. This is the comedic niche that London Hearts is regularly said to occupy.

concern because it regularly makes use of comedic schemes that rely on humiliation, deception and transgressive displays of verbal vulgarity. Importantly, the comic schemes on London Hearts aim to pierce surface performances associated with keeping appearances (*tatemae*) to embarrassingly expose the (presumably) genuine thoughts and feelings (*honne*) of celebrity guests.[20] As such London Hearts segments often, but not always, blur the boundaries between the professional and private personas of participants. The program regularly features vulgar and demeaning language in (presumably mock) mean-spirited exchanges and frequent scenes where a group of participants verbally attack an individual. London Hearts specializes in such segments and the program's emphasis on finding humor in the comic humiliation of guests is one strikingly clear reason it draws both complaints and comfortably high ratings. To provide a sense of the polarizing content of the program I will describe some of the material referenced in the survey report as objectionable.

One standard segment format on the program takes the form of a ranking survey. These segments involve sending program staff out into the city to survey a fixed number of participants of selected demographic and asking them to rank a group of guest comedians from best to worst along some scale. For example, one show surveyed one hundred female high-school students in the Tokyo area and asked them to rank ten male guest comedians in order from most to least attractive. Another segment asked female college students, "Which guest would you like to marry?" Another still asked, "Who would you most want as a member of your family?" The results will be tallied in secret and revealed to the guest comedians on the program. However, prior to revealing the results, the hosts will ask the cohort of guest comedians to anticipate where the response results will place them in the rankings. In these segments place an elaborately

[20] Though the current format of the program exclusively features professional entertainers as guests, the early seasons of the program featured regular people (*ippanjin*) and amateurs (*shirōto*) as guests.

decorated row of bleachers on the stage that have been divided into ten marked sections. Before the disclosure of each successive ranking, guests are asked to take a seat in the section that they believe represents their position on the survey ranking. Only when all of the comedians are seated do the hosts reveal the result for the next rank. After each revelation, the hosts read some comments collected from survey respondents and guests who guessed wrong, relocate as the available number of remaining ranks dwindles.

Inverting the broader generic norms of the countdown format—which regularly proceed from worst to best—the results of London Hearts surveys always proceed from best to worst. Reporting of the top and middle ranks is usually somewhat benign with comments from survey respondents eliciting expressions of gratitude by those ranked early. However, the incremental revelation of the rankings downward emphasizes the increasing embarrassment and humiliation of those yet unranked. Accordingly, harshly blunt comments from survey respondents always accompany the reporting of low ranks. While this affords some limited humor in itself, the comic appeal of the show lies primarily in the harsh informal banter of those being ranked between comedians who play themselves. These ranking games effectively tap a range of normative antagonistic comedic roles. On a basic level, the teasing banter draws on general participant frameworks that hold between *boke* and *tsukkomi*. However, the particularly harsh treatment regularly dished out on London Hearts also rely heavily on more extreme dynamics between more recent generic formulations of comedic roles—such as the *ijirare kyara*[21] who forges a career out of becoming the butt of the joke, and the poison-tongued *dokuzetsu*.[22]

[21] *Ijirare kyara* is compound formed by the passive conjugation of 'to tease' ('*ijiru*') and a clipped form the loan word for 'character' ('*kyarakutā*').
[22] *Dokuzetu* is a compound formed by joining the kanji for 'poison' ('*doku*') and tongue ('*zetsu*').

The rough banter between guests on London Hearts blurs the boundaries between their front-stage and back-stage identities. Comedians regularly direct embarrassing and humiliating comments and narratives about one another's purportedly 'real' life. The language deployed in these exchanges is extremely informal and intimately coarse. Using such low forms of speech indexes a complete lack of decorum, which in turn presumes an apparently genuine social closeness or intimacy between comedians who can—apparently—speak to each other (on stage) in such a manner without provoking offense. In this way, the extensive use of coarse speech appears as teasing (*ijiri*) associated with a particular register evocative of a youthful brand of sociality that seeks to flatten hierarchies within peer groups, especially amongst young men (cf. Nakassis 2016). This rough gregarious sociality contrasts strongly with the appropriately distant and formal (*katai*) sociality that marks those aligned towards hierarchy with aspirations to class ascendancy via success in the educational, and later professional, markets. From such a *majime* perspective, the rough transgressive gregariousness exhibited on comedic television can appear as presumptuously offensive and evocative of bullying (*ijime*).

Another London Hearts routine that attracts a great deal of criticism is the playing of surprise practical jokes (*dokkiri*) on guests without their knowledge. To be sure, the practical jokes carried out on London Hearts would seem quite extreme by the standards of American audiences. To illustrate I will describe one such game here. *Za Toraianguru* ('The Triangle') represents another standard London Hearts routine designed to contrive situations that provoke intense discomfort in unknowing participants for the sake of laughs. These routines are designed to deceive (*damasu*) a male target comedian in a long-term relationship by engineering situations to introduce a young female model who poses as a new potential romantic partner.[23] This role is

[23] This gendered division of labor is most common on London Hearts. However, there have also been a few instances where the program inverts these roles and employs the services of a 'trap boy.'

referred to as the ‘trap girl.’ Everyone, except the target comedian, knows about the setup. Hidden cameras document an increasing closeness developing between the target comedian and ‘trap girl’ over a series of dates that only the target comedian believes to be genuine. The comedic climax is recorded during a date between the comedian and his actual girlfriend, who has been in on the scheme from the beginning. Hidden cameras secreted about the table record the encounter from multiple angles. Both the ‘trap girl’ and the complicit partner wear an ear piece to take direction from the hosts of the show who watch from another room accompanied by two to three guest celebrities.

After some time has passed, often after drinks have arrived but before food is ordered, the ‘trap girl’ enters the restaurant and sits nearby but out of direct line of sight of the target comedian. A cat and mouse game ensues focused on getting the comedian to notice the presence of the ‘trap girl’ without her giving sign of having noticed him. The hosts direct her through her hidden ear-piece to cough, order a drink or speak on the phone loudly to make the comedian aware of her presence and her uncomfortably close-proximity to his date with his ‘real’ long-term girlfriend. In the hidden control room, the hosts and their guests comment on the target’s discomfort once he discovers the ‘trap girl’ sitting at a table behind him. They pick apart, complicate and mock the target’s attempts to hide or flee in order to avoid being noticed by the ‘trap girl.’ If contact does not take place organically, the hosts will often direct the target’s girlfriend to visit the bathroom, leaving the target comedian to squirm alone for a time at his table.

It is at this point that ‘the triangle’ begins in earnest. On the way back from the bathroom the girlfriend and trap-girl feign an encounter pretending to be acquainted with one another (co-workers, college friends, etc.). The ‘trap girl’ is then introduced as an acquaintance to the target

comedian by his girlfriend who then invites her to join them for dinner. This configuration of participants constitutes 'the triangle.' In the control room the hosts linger over and dissect the target's every uncomfortable twitch and utterance as they direct the complicit partner and 'trap girl' in ways contrived to provoke maximum discomfort in the target comedian. The entire segment is built on an effort to make it more and more difficult for guests to mask their desires. The segment comes to a climax when the hosts rush in to the restaurant to confront the target in person and reveal that his budding relationship with the 'trap girl' has been a deception from the beginning. The hosts and guests, including the target's, presumably real, long-term girlfriend, relocate to the hidden room before lining up to take turns ridiculing and chastising the unfaithful comedian with harsh words and, occasionally, slaps to the face.

As might be expected, these kinds of routines regularly draw complaints and expressions of concern from parents, both within the survey report as well as more broadly. Foremost, such segments are designed to deceive (*damasu*) subjects with the express purpose of luring them into compromising situations, presumably in the real world. For critics, the deception itself appears dangerously problematic, however, so does the broader interactional ambition. These comedic routines seek humor in provoking what appears to be genuine discomfort in participants by drawing unwitting targets to highly choreographed situations designed to provoke intense embarrassment and humiliation.[24] Worse still, the program makes such moments into broadly

[24] As discussed in Chapter 1, these kinds of comic schemes provoke a powerful strain of criticism that expresses concern over the potential for youthful viewers to incorporate such harsh behavior and practical jokes into their everyday social interactions. This mode of concern takes on increased salience in connection to the established normative hierarchical relationships between juniors and seniors (*jōgeikankei*) that bind both students in school settings and comedians who share the same talent management agency. Indeed, displays of powerful seniors exerting dominance over individual juniors in pursuit of humor through ritual humiliation powerfully evokes *ijime* (bullying), except when suffering such humiliation is legible as a professional requirement. These core concerns are expressed through the responses in the Survey Report and stand as frequently cited complaints that maintain London Hearts at the top spot on the list year after year.

disseminated public spectacle capable of being revisited, rehashed and discursively savored during each subsequent appearance on the program.[25]

Comedic Counters: '*Misetakunai*' Reframed as Comedic Honor

Without a doubt, the featured emphasis on comic humiliation in the comedic brand of London Hearts strongly factors into its regular top position on the *misetakunai* list. However, the emphasis on the show's spectacular schemes overshadows the more banal criticism that identifies all of the programs on the *misetakunai* list, including London Hearts, as an absurd (*bakabakashii*) waste of time. Even absent any specific objection to program content, sustained watching of such meaninglessly absurd television stands at odds with the rigorous demands of the established educational regime as normative requirements for the future social stability and financial security of children.[26] Time spent with comedic television is time that might have been better applied elsewhere, such as studying or even watching educational programming that appears on the *misetai* ('want to show') list. Comedic television offers no educational value and understood to distract from and diminish the capacity for diligent focus required for success in the academic market.

PTA organizations in Japan become entangled in educational classed concerns, to some degree, simply by virtue of their involvement with schools which have long served as the principle mechanism for rationalizing the class system in contemporary Japan (Thorsten 1996; Allison 2000; Yoda 2000). Class mobility in Japan has long been tied to academic achievement

[25] While privacy protections in Japan require that featured participants formally agree to the broadcast of these segments. That said, there are a host of enticements to obtain such consent from junior entertainers seeking to raise their profile, earn money and establish professional connections.
[26] This is particularly apparent when the list is contrasted with the 'want to show' ('*misetai*') list which heavily features programs such as quiz shows and infotainment programming that are considered at least informative if not educational.

in middle and secondary education through a formal system of entrance examinations that determine access to education beyond the middle-school level. The formal process of sorting students into class trajectories normatively begins in middle-school when students take high-school entrance examinations. Successful test-takers move on to academically rigorous high schools which can effectively prepare students for university entrance exams. Students seeking to matriculate into university are required to sit for entrance examination held by each institution to which they apply. The most desirable trajectory—holding the most promise for future security and social stability—is to enroll in an academically rigorous high school followed by matriculation into a prestigious university.[27]

The adjectival noun '*majime*' is regularly used to characterize an individual, or their actions, as earnest and diligent. Often *majime* indicates an orientation towards the pursuit of normative 'success' (evaluated according to different scopes and contexts) through conforming to the requirements of established educational structures. Relatedly, '*majime*' also evokes registers of appropriately sober forms of expressive demeanor as they index a diligent attitude towards study and work. These signs of a '*majime*' character also come in part through appropriate performances of formality that appropriately modulate social distance with interlocutors in ways that demonstrate deference to hierarchy and the capacity to navigate social relations within such formal institutions.

Counter-critics, such as London Hearts, have been successful in their efforts to characterize organizations like the PTA, and the parents presumed to fill its ranks, as compulsively aligned with the rigorous academic requirements of the educational regime and

[27] In recent decades, many prestigious private universities have turned to opening middle and high schools that exempt students from the rigorous entrance examination requirement to enter university as long as there is sufficient evidence of academic proficiency.

powerfully overinvested in instilling '*majime*' values in children. This interdiscursive re-valuation of the PTA effectively taps into prior concerns about the rigors of the Japanese educational system as a potentially socially alienating overemphasis on diligent study and academic achievement. These characterizations evoke well-entrenched public discussions concerning potentially harmful consequences, such as student exhaustion, emotional burnout and social alienation, that follow from taking an emphasis on '*majime*' to an extreme.

In this way, defenders of comedic programming strive to counter notions that programs on the *misetakunai* list merely represent dissipation and distraction and suggest that indulgence in such absurd programming provides a cathartic outlet for the stress accrued in everyday life. To be sure, serious-minded diligence clearly remains a desirable quality. However, the solitary and striving character of *majime* can entail a great deal of stress and constrain both the development of social skills and opportunity to put them into practice with one's peers. In stark contrast to the class ascendant concern for educational success, comedians regularly characterize themselves as class clowns in their school year, with few claiming to have has a successful educational trajectory.[28] The gregarious sociality associated with *omoshiroi* stands in stark contrast with the solitary diligence associated with *majime*. In so doing, they strive to recuperate '*omoshiroi*' as a positive value associated with skillful interactional engagement, intimate friendships and social integration.

As an evaluative utterance, *omoshiroi* takes the form of an aesthetic judgment on the humorous and engaging quality of some person, object or event. Often glossed as 'interesting,'

[28] This is not to say that comedians cast themselves as intellectually inferior to their legibly *majime* counterparts. In fact, skilled comedians such as Beat Takeshi and Matsumoto Hitoshi are regularly lauded as 'geniuses' (*tensai*) and pursue high-culture projects well beyond comedic television. This even extends to the hosts of London Hearts. Between 2010 and 2013, Tamura Atsushi, covered current events as an MC on the day time news program *Shiritagari*! in addition to hosting London Hearts.

the term necessarily contains a laugh or smile provoking aspect and cannot denote an evaluation that evokes mental stimulation without humor. In terms of usage, *omoshiroi* may be used to describe contexts, acts and a person's or people's character. Individuals gain a reputation for being *omoshiroi* based on their ability to regularly produce speech and acts that are taken up as *omoshiroi*. *Omoshiroi* uptakes of rough behavior turn them into socially engaging and potentially intimacy-producing interactions. Where *majime* projects social distance and erects hierarchies, *omoshiroi* often evokes intimate proximity and flattens hierarchies, as long as one is in on the joke.

Initially the hosts of London Hearts expressed discomfort with the 'Worst One' designation; however, it is a criticism they have since spun to powerful effect: first by ascribing authorship of the content of the report to the PTA, rather than a parental public, and second, by characterizing the *misetakunai* ranking as an expression of the PTA's overinvestment in *majime* values. This reframing of the authorship of the report appears most strikingly in 2008 when *London Hearts* host Tamura Atsushi invited the executive director of the PTA national convention to be a guest on a weekly radio show ('News Club') to discuss the number-one ranking. The encounter came as the result of challenge issued by Tamura on the London Hearts program. The issuing of this challenge metapragmatically characterized the ranking as an organizational expression of grievances and concerns by the PTA National Congress about the show. In light of the well-known controversy, the content of the radio show[29] discussion was reported in widely as a newsworthy meeting between two antagonistic organizations.

> The First Discussion between London Hearts (on Asahi Television) and PTA. "London Hearts" has been in the number one position for five years running on the '*misetakunai*' list in the opinion survey of parents carried out by the PTA National Congress of Japan. Tamura Atsushi, member of the comedic duo 'London Boots' and host of the show, was joined on his radio program by guest

[29] It is noteworthy that the challenge did not get taken up on the comedy show London Hearts, where nothing can be taken seriously, but rather on Atsushi's radio program focused on discussing news of the day.

> Kato Hidetsugu, executive director of the PTA National Congress of Japan for some verbal sparring. The radio program will be broadcast on the 11th at 9pm.
>
> The program was recorded on the 8th and on "News Club" the PTA had accepted the program's plan. The program was recorded on 8th. Mr.Tamura asked, "Even though there are lots of extreme programs why does this program [London Hearts] get selected as the one [people] don't want kids to see?" Mr. Kato answered by pointed out that there are many instances [on the program] where a group of people attack an individual [evoking ijime] and talk about sex often comes up. He said, "We want it to be known that the kind of program that often makes fathers suddenly cough and makes mothers leave to stand in the kitchen is a problem."
>
> The discussion bounced along with Mr. Tamura saying, "[Following their discussion] he had a different image of the PTA meaning of supervision. [Now] I would like to express my own ideas about 'children and media theory.' Mr. Kato kindly agreed by saying" We will be happy to have you as a panelist at the PTA national convention." At the completion of about one and half hours of recording, Mr. Tamura commented, "We felt that we understood each other's points: however, we did not go so far as to reach a 'compromise' sufficient to alter the TV program."
>
> (2008/12/11, *Asashi Shinbun*)

Note that the format of the on-air meeting projects the interaction as a discussion between high level representatives of London Hearts and the PTA National Congress as contesting organizational actors. The discussion format (*taidan*) casts participants as authoritative representatives seeking to express the contrasting intentions, aims and values of their respective organizations. It is important to note that this interpretation bolsters efforts to shift the authorship of the content of the survey report towards the PTA National Congress. London Hearts has encouraged such (mis)recognitions to effectively characterize any complaints within the report as arising from the PTA National Congress, rather than the figure of the public the producers of the survey report hoped to conjure.

The PTA National Congress committee members I interviewed in 2012 were clearly sensitive to such characterizations and claimed that they unfairly attributed a critical intention to the organization in ways that misrepresent the actual aims of the survey report. Where the PTA strives to cast their efforts as a mechanism for amplifying or giving a—statistically computable—collective voice to parents, London Hearts strives to characterize the survey report—and the complaints contained within—as constituting PTA efforts at regulatory

intervention. They identify 'PTA' as the agentive author of the concerns and cast the production and circulation of the survey report as a discursive strategy pursued to motivate regulatory pressure in the name of a relative minority.

National Congress efforts to push back on popular characterizations of PTA regulatory aspirations fail to gain much social traction in part because of its limited media reach and the limited appeal of PTA participation frameworks. However, PTA efforts to ascribe authorship to a parental public have also been sapped by memory of the history of efforts by PTA organizations to regulate and police programming deemed problematic for children and youth.[30]

For example, in 1978, and again in 1981, the PTA National Congress released clear forerunners to the *misetakunai* and *misetai* lists in the form of 'Best 10' and 'Worst 10' programs. Comedy sketch programs featured at the top of both of these lists as well.[31] Counter-critics, have been very successful in evoking these earlier precedents of direct complaint by PTA organizations to shape the interdiscursive contours of the circulatory trajectories through which news of the annual survey report spreads. The figure of PTA organizations operating as cultural critic is further reinforced by the work of scholars and public intellectuals in historical narratives that touch on postwar moral panics over youth. Such accounts regularly feature 'the PTA' or 'PTA groups' as long standing vocal critics of television vulgarity.

As part of the strategy to revalue the survey report, the hosts of London Hearts greet the announcement of their top spot on the misetakunai list each year with an on-air celebration complete with confetti and cheers. These celebratory receptions of the annual misetakunai list,

[30] Nagahara (2017) details the role of PTA organizations in campaigns against vulgar 'popular' music in the postwar era.

[31] The 1978 Worst 10 list put the long running, and now legendary, *Hachijidayo! Zenin Shūgō* ('It's 8 O'Clock Everyone Gather Up!') at the top spot. The 1981 list gave the top spot to *Oretachi Hyōkin Zoku* ('We are the funny tribe').

performativity question the grounds for the ranking, the representativeness of the findings and the motives of the organization responsible for them. They imply an alternative measure for interpreting their 'number one' (*ichiban*) position and by taking it as an emblem of comedic prowess. Would anyone want to watch a comedy program endorsed by PTA?

Read through the lens of the sustained popularity and relatively high ratings of London Hearts, on-air celebrations by the hosts of London Hearts also point to the disconnect between viewer ratings, as the effective market metrics that incentivize change in broadcast programming, and lack of leverage wielded by organizations, such as the PTA National Congress, that are unable to motive broad public uptake of their message.

Such on-air references to the top spot throughout the year have helped to transform the criticism of the program into a badge of comedic honor.[32] Program producers work to reframe the *misetakunai* list in ways that figurate PTA as out-of-touch and overbearing complainers (*kurema*). The regular viewership of the program relieves pressure on program producers and grants space for program producers to push back on the criticism.

To this end, the producers of London Hearts have worked to shift the grounds of the complaints in ways that also circulated more broadly. Foremost, the hosts of the program celebrate the announcement of the survey report each year to rejects the interpretation of their on-screen antics as meaningless or unnecessary by foregrounding alternative interpretations of the coarse behavior featured on the program as productively '*omoshiroi.*' In so doing, they question the presumption that one's time is best spent on diligent work and study. In doing so they ascribe this extreme position to the 'PTA' and reify the organization as an agentive institutional complainer. The on-screen celebrations in reaction the annual announcement of one

[32] The structure of list itself (placing the worst at the top number one position) affords this inversion. Counter-critics revalue the underlying criteria that rationalizes the ordering of the list.

position represent on way that London Hearts effectively reevaluates the significance of the misetakunai list, and, following the established meronymic indexical chain, the survey report, as well as, emblematizing the 'PTA' as a whole.

The producers of London Hearts have been so successful in revaluing the Survey Report as a sign of disapproval by 'PTA' that their regular top-spot on the mistakunai list has become an integral part of their comedic brand. The hosts periodically make sarcastic on-air references to the 'PTA' to cast the program as an organizational antagonist to the PTA. This notion manifests regularly across the popular press and social media. Pop-culture magazine articles discussing London Hearts invariably inspire references to the misetakunai list and 'PTA.' For example, when London Hearts began producing video for expansion on-line through a YouTube channel, Host Tamura Atsushi opened the inaugural episode by noting that there was no PTA on the Internet so they would be free to be funny.

Similarly, references to London Hearts in pop-culture magazines and promotional materials commonly cite their standing on the list as a measure of their comedic skill and success. For example, the August 2011 issue of monthly pop-cultural periodical *QuickJapan* featured London Hearts with the tag-line, "13 Years of continuously revealing the true thoughts and intentions of human beings" (*Ningen no honne wo abakituzuke 13 nen*).[33] The preface to the 50-page feature section introducing London Hearts foregrounds the program's top-ranking on the *misetakunai* list as a sign of comic achievement.

> 結果、PTA 全国協議会調査による"子供に見せたくない番組"において、八年連続一位の牙城を築くオマケまでついてきた。
>
> "In the end [developments in programming] came with the bonus that the show built a stronghold

[33] テレビの本懐

around the number one position of 'misetakunai programs' according to the PTA National Congress Survey." (2011, Quickjapan Vol. 97)

This reinforces the meta-discursive reframing of the report as the culmination of an annual ritual cycle of struggle between the PTA—as the representatives of *majime* class ascendant elites—and London Hearts—standing for the roughly sociable *omoshiroi* everyman. It is though this meta-discursive work that the PTA survey report begins to resonate with figure of a '*kurēmā*' or one who complains unnecessarily and is often motivated by an overbearing concern with the minute details of propriety. In doing so, the aggressive messaging by London Hearts has successfully turned the *Survey Report on Children and Media* into a compendium of complaints issued from 'PTA,' reframed as a recognizable institutional complainer overinvested in diligence and propriety. The representatives of the PTA National Congress strove to characterize the survey report as an effort to capture, compile and relay parental attitudes in order to foster a safe and nurturing environment for children. However, the broader reach of the media infrastructures associated with London Hearts meant that the report was effectively cast as the work of habitual complainers obsessively focused on diligence and propriety, or at least the appearance of such, in pursuit of status and class ascendancy.

Textual Adaptations

The differential semiotic reach of the media infrastructures associated with London Hearts and the PTA National Congress left the PTA to become a target for mockery and characterization at the hands of London Hearts. Given the differential scale and characteristic appeal of the participation frameworks associated with comedic programming, as against the PTA National Congress, it should not be surprising that most people—especially young

people—became aware of this annual meta-semiotic struggle via routes other than the publication of the survey report. To be sure, the position expressed on London Hearts, embracing crude transgressive humor and casting PTA as unsociably serious, has become entrenched as the dominant perspective, especially amongst younger people. The people I spoke with who were fans of these comedy programs all knew of the existence of the PTA report, at the same time no one claimed to have seen the actual survey report, let alone read it. Even so, the saturation of metadiscursive commentary aligned against the PTA led my interlocutors expressed confidence that they understood the PTA and its motives for criticizing these programs. The annual ritual cycle of reporting on London Hearts in the PTA report is so formalized that when I asked people below the age of 25 if they knew the program 'London Hearts', they would frequently respond that 'the PTA' doesn't want them to see it' (*PTA ga misetakunai.*). [34] Overwhelmingly, knowledge of the survey report itself comes directly from comedy shows like London Hearts and the young people I spoke with overwhelmingly aligned themselves with the program's stance that PTA is filled with out-of-touch, misguided and overbearing complainers.

PTA Responses to Stigmatizing Uptakes

The PTA National Congress members I interviewed were clearly sensitive to the prevalent portrayals of the organization as an overbearing institutional complainer. They were also keenly aware that they had little means to shift the interdiscursive struggle in their favor. The members of the committee repeatedly referred back to the report whenever possible before

[34] To be sure, many of these young people had been enmeshed in '*majime'* projects for years. Accordingly, they had a keen sense of the dual, perhaps dueling, values of serious minded work towards academic success and the capacity for social success. At the same time, pushed far enough to consider the position expressed in reports of the survey, many of these same people offered begrudging recognitions that the concerns in the survey report may have some validity. The capacity of young people to see both side here indicates the ways in which the dispute between the values associated with PTA and comic programming is one of degrees rather than absolutes.

responding to the questions I put to them. They would turn to a relevant section and interpret the statistics it contained to formulate a response. The repeated reference to the report took on a pedagogical quality as they demonstrated how to appropriately read the report. These references to the report performatively indexed the parental public contained within its pages. This discursive and embodied gesture cast the public as the principal responsible for the content of the report that had been merely carried out by the PTA committee. The aspiration was that the PTA National Congress might be seen as merely affording a capacity to amplify the voice of the parental public.

When I asked directly about the *misetakunai* list committee members responded by saying that the survey 'actually showed' that parental attitudes towards television were generally positive and that it was really a minority of parents with negative opinions towards television. As such, they reported that they would prefer to emphasize exemplary programming that parents enjoyed. To illustrate, they pointed me to—with a finger on the page—the list of programs that parents reportedly wanted their children to watch (*misetai*). The committee members expressed the hope that this page would receive more attention, as opposed to the page containing the *misetakunai* list. They suggested that this might facilitate cooperation and result in better programming. Notably, the *misetai* list consisted of informational and educational programming that resonated with studious sensibilities by promising to both inform and entertain.

Similarly, over the years the report has undergone several changes which also appear to reflect the shifting ambitions of the National PTA in the face of interdiscursive uncertainty and reframing. For example, over the last decade the content of survey reports has gradual shifted in ways that increasingly cast the report as a transparent accounting of parental opinions. Reflecting this, the report itself has grown increasingly focused on quantitatively assessing responses in the

survey. It has also reduced the amount of explanatory or descriptive verbiage framing the survey results and formulated what remains in ways that appear to eschew evaluative constructions—the kinds of constructions that might be quoted and attributed to the organization. Reports have increasingly pruned away the sections that recorded parents to provide descriptive content such as sections that included quotations of written responses submitted by parents on the survey form.

However, the most striking demonstration of PTA sensitivities to the counter messaging work of critics came in 2013 when the National Congress announced that they were removing the *misetakunai* ranking from the survey report. Notably, coverage of the announcement quoted the PTA National Congress as singled out of the emphasis given to the list as a primary reason for discontinuing this, most popular, part of the survey.

Shifting Scales of 'PTA' as an Institutional Complainer: Consequential Double Binds for Participants in 'PTA'

But, what does this ubiquitous term, 'PTA', actually denote? To be sure, this compact acronym belies significant denotational complexity, and flexibility. What exactly did these people mean when they identify 'PTA' as the primary critics of comedic television? Did 'PTA' stand for a highly organized advocacy group at a regional or national level? Did the term point to participants in smaller local school organizations? I began to follow up with the question "Who are the PTA? What kinds of people are the PTA?" To which my interlocutors, parents included, regularly responded, "Parents" (*oya*). Here I would like to gesture towards some of the broader interdiscursive entanglements afforded by the robust emblematization of PTA as an institutional complainer.

The scalar ambiguity around the term obscures the fact that ‘PTA’ does not represent a well-integrated hierarchically structured organization. There are many levels and scales of PTA organizations in Japan and people encounter the ‘PTA’ through with many organizational forms and participate in many diverse potential roles. Pejorative references to ‘PTA’ in popular media and public discussions converge around the image of a single nameable entity.

The conception of PTA as a highly unified organizational actor follows in part from efforts by the National Congress to blur organizational boundaries and attribute authorship of the survey report to a parental public. However, the fact that PTA organizations operate at multiple organizational and regional scales enables shifts in scale that make diverse organizational entities appear to speak with a unified ‘PTA’ voice. Pushback from comedic counter-critics often works to link PTA with stereotypical parental figures who are problematically obsessed with educational achievement and propriety. Importantly, these comic counters often elide the diversity amongst both PTA organizations, and the mothers who serve as rank and file members of local school-based PTA organizations.

The resultant indexical ambiguity—the capacity for PTA to serve as a shifter—enables unflattering characterizations of PTA’—that emerge in response to the survey report—to be shifted onto those associated with ‘PTA’ at the local level. This includes the more general figure of ‘mothers’ who participate in PTA organizations at local school levels. The responses of young people evoked a widespread presumption that the values of ‘parents’ are aligned with PTA were at odds with the actual feelings of parents themselves.

Parental perspectives on participation in PTA at the local school level are often marked by an apparent paradox that emerges between parental desires to align with broader goals of fostering supportive environments for children and frustration at the demands and obligations

that participating in the PTA lays on participants. In stark contrast to the ways that PTA is often conceived in the United States, Japanese PTA organizations at the schools largely maintain a clear hierarchy between parents and teachers that recruits the labor of PTA mothers in the service of established school projects. The PTA meetings I attended at Oshima Elementary did not invite an exchange of ideas between parents and teachers. Rather, parents, overwhelmingly mothers, are recruited to fill organizational clearly defined roles that harnessed the labor of parents in support school projects such as the PTA school newsletter, patrol the neighborhood for hazards and truant children and provide manual labor for various school events and festivals.

At Oshima, participation the local PTA evoked very little enthusiasm. Rather, participation in the PTA was usually seen as an undesirably burdensome obligation to be endured by the family of every student at least once over the six years of elementary school. Similar characterizations of PTA as an officious burden, cast as both truth and exaggeration, circulate broadly in entertainment media, news-reporting and popular books. Each class at Ōshima elementary was allocated three PTA members (*kaiin*) slots which corresponded to different sets of obligations within the school level PTA organization.

Participation in the PTA is voluntary, however, teachers regularly take the lead in recruiting and motivating mothers to sign on. At Oshima, the selection of three PTA representatives was on the formal agenda of the first parent teacher gathering of the year. Each time, filling these slots regularly required explicit cajoling by teachers as mothers were wary of the burden participation in the PTA would impose on their time and energy.[35] This was a long way from the overly majime figures regularly conjured by mention of 'PTA.'

[35] Participation in regional level PTA organizations indicates a much stronger level of individual investment (cf. Goldstein-Gidoni 2012: 108-110; LeBlanc 1999: 79).

Conclusions

The emblematization of 'PTA' as an organization composed of as overbearing (parental) complainers follows in large part from the metadiscursive reframing it receives as it traces an annually regular circulatory trajectory. In an extremely tight nutshell I argue that the PTA national convention mobilizes the survey report to project itself as representing a concerned and critical public. Comedic counter-critics, such as London Hearts, take up and strive to marginalize such complaints rendering them as the vocal outbursts of PTA as a collection of overbearing complainers.

Ultimately this characterization of PTA as 'overly serious' (*majime sugi*) has generated significant social traction, especially among young people whose knowledge of PTA largely comes through comedic push back on the annual survey report. Despite efforts by the National Congress to deny an organizational interest contemporary references to these historical precedents undergird and bolster efforts to meta-discursively ascribe a regulatory intent to PTA organizations and meta-discursively precipitate 'PTA' into an overly-earnest institutional complainer.

Chapter 3:

Boon and Bane: The Intimate Pleasures and Public Hazards of Childish Vulgarity

I sat anxiously amongst fellow parents of first-graders in room 102 at Oshima elementary school listening to the ritual round of self-introductions wind through the room. Apart from myself, the participants of the 'tea and talk party' (*sawakai*) consisted entirely of mothers who had come together in a disused lunchroom in a school annex building to formally introduce themselves to one another. They had been drawn together by the chance fact that their children had been placed in the same first-year class. Though everyone lived in the neighborhood, the assembled mothers were largely unknown to one another, though they may have met briefly a week earlier at the formal ceremonial induction of their children into the first grade. This informal gathering on school grounds provided an opportunity for mutual introductions as a way to begin establishing relationships with each other that paralleled the relationships we anticipated would develop between our children. We sat at long lunchroom tables and studiously ignored the large plastic bottles of tea, stacks of paper cups and small piles of chips, rice crackers and hard candy laid neatly at regular intervals before us. The assembled participants displayed visible signs of attention as each parent (mother) stood in-turn and introduced herself using a rigidly familiar formula. Trying my best to fit it, perhaps an impossible task given my large male foreign body, I listened attentively while waiting for the round of introductions to close so that I might

take up talking with the mothers seated near me. Halfway through the chain of introductions a woman in her early thirties stood and introduced herself:

> "Hello. I am Kenji's mother. I am called Hasegawa Akiko. I am from Fukuoka. I really enjoy [television] comedy so I am sorry if Kenji may have caused some problems by using rough language (*ranbo na kotoba*). He and his sister are always imitating comedy entertainers (*owarai geinin*). For example, he will get a coke out of the fridge take a sip and say "wild daro" or when playing on the monkey bars [he] will look up at his sister and say, "wild daro."[1] I am very sorry for any trouble that Kenji causes. Please treat me well (*yoroshiku onegai shimasu*)."

Hasegawa's introduction prodded me out of my anxious daze with a rush of surprised excitement. I had come to Japan intending to trace the formulation, circulation and situated social entanglements of regular complaints that identify 'violence' within television comedy. Hasegawa's assertion that she enjoyed comedic television appeared at odds with my understanding, gleaned during preliminary fieldwork and archival research, that Japanese parents were deeply concerned and critical of the potentially problematic influence of comedy (*owarai*) and variety television on children. Reports of complaints in newspapers, magazines, PTA reports and popular books penned by public intellectuals (*hyōronka*) had overwhelmingly given the impression that responsible parents took great care to monitor and curate their children's contact with all forms of entertainment media, including comedic television. Yet, Hasegawa stood before a room full of future acquaintances and declared that she enjoyed watching comedy television with her young children. Before I could scan the room to gauge what others made of this

[1] '*Wairudo da ze*' and '*wairudo daro*' were the familiar punchline catch-phrases of the comedic performer '*Sugichan*' who was reaching the height of his popularity at the time. Hasegawa's double-voiced citation (Bakhtin 1984) articulates a mocking imitation of her son's imitation of the original performer. In the context of her self-introduction, Hasegawa's citation of her son's citational practice serves as a normatively humble and self-deprecatory comment on her ability as a mother. Such self-deprecatory evaluations often appear as a regular feature of such self-introductions.

introduction, a ripple of smiling laughter livened up the room. Hasegawa's introduction had been a hit.

This experience stands out as a revelatory moment early in my fieldwork precisely because it appeared to contradict the prevalent commonsense understanding that parents—particularly young middle-class mothers—drive public concern over rough behavior and speech on television. Such stereotypical figures of motherly complainers coalesce around public discussions that depict and identify 'parents' (*oya, hogosha*) as vocally concerned about the potential social effects of coarse speech and base behavior regularly featured on Japanese comedic television. These characterizing accounts presented images of mothers committed to helping their children ascend the Japanese class system through the regular channels of educational achievement. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the one-dimensional and flat maternal figures animated by such discussions do not reflect the evident ambivalence that parents have about their children's consumption of comic television.

Indeed, Hasegawa's self-introduction, as well as its warm reception, exhibit a more complex parental ambivalence towards the often vulgar (*geihin*) and rough (*ranbō*) content of much comedic television, as well as childish imitation of it. Within this brief introduction, Hasegawa's complaints over the potentially pernicious influence of Sugichan appear as a double-voiced utterance (Bakhtin 1984; 1986) that animates two familiar figures of motherly concern. Even as she cites the potential for the imitative antics of her children to disrupt relations with classmates, her performance of these concerns drew the group together through a mutual recognition of the normative and expected character of such complaints. As such, Hasegawa's complaints appeared ambiguous and potentially parodic, playing with established figures of concerned mothers even as she performed them. At the time, the unexpected nature of

Hasegawa's self-introductory statement stood out to me a sign of someone I should try to get to know. In retrospect, I now recognize it as a richly interdiscursive text that playfully negotiates a complex bundle of institutional pressures, normative expectations and stereotypical characterizations concerning both relationships between parents and children and motherly sociality more broadly.

Hasegawa's brief introduction brings into relief several commonly expressed anxieties that discursively intertwine entertainment media, the social relations that orbit children, and the stipulative role of mothers in regulating such connections. Her introduction directs attention to a set of concerns separate than those that criticize comedic programming as stupid (*bakabakashii*), meaningless (*imi ga nai*) or a waste of time (*muda*). Rather than a concern over her children, her exemplary performance of motherly attention displays concern over the ways that her children's citational behavior might impact others. Hasegawa's performance cites a familiar propensity for her children to imitate (*mane*) speech and behavior modeled on television with potentially disruptive consequences. However, Hasegawa's self-introduction deftly traverses a middle ground between responsible maternal regulatory vigilance and indulgent inattention in ways that affords a playful space for her children to deploy socially engaging vulgarity (a praiseworthy balancing act). In this way, she deftly mediates her relationship with the others by playing with the figure of the concerned complaining mother and expressing a widespread, if implicit, recognition of vulgar comic entertainment as a potentially valuable resource for negotiating intimate social relations between parent and child.

Comedic Ambivalences: Childish Imitation as Social Boon and Bane

This chapter takes up the question of how the rough, and potentially problematic, interactional forms regularly exhibited on Japanese comic television meaningfully participate in the lives of families in a complex fashion. In particular, it explores the potential shifting valences of childish citations of televisual vulgarity as appreciated with situated contexts of practice. I suggest that childish imitation of vulgarity can be both boon and bane, particularly for mothers tasked with the work of childrearing.

Early in my fieldwork it became clear that parents attitudes towards television vulgarity did not fit into the neat, delimited categories regularly attributed to parents in recurrent mediatized accounts. It seems obvious, in retrospect, that parental perspectives on childish vulgarity would be nuanced and complex. However, as discussed in chapter 2, media institutions regularly marshal the figure of parents to voice complaint and circulate in shallowly consistent ways aligned with their interests. My experiences with parents in the middle-class Yokohama neighborhood where I pursued fieldwork shed light on pragmatically situated complexity with which they evaluated the rough behavior and speech circulated on television and (re)animated by their children.

On one level, the focus here is on a set of tensions orbiting the contradictory potentials for boyish vulgarity and comedic imitation to simultaneously operate as both resources for familial intimacy and defaming public hazard for mothers tasked with caring for children.[1] Specifically, coarse speech and transgressive antics that purposefully flout social norms and niceties in the pursuit of humor on Japanese television appear regularly taken up as interactional resources for intimate play between parents and children, at the same time, the valence of these vulgar displays by children threaten to become problematic signs of parental value when taken-

[1] Judith Irvine has noted that 'defamation is fundamentally an audience effect,' as it requires uptake by an evaluating audience (1992: 111).

up by non-intimate onlookers, especially in public spaces. Such public uptakes often provoke deep embarrassment as they run against norms of appropriate public manners have the potential to stigmatize mothers as uncommitted, irresponsible or unfit. Nevertheless, childish imitation and teasing play may persist within intimate domestic spaces with a modicum of motherly blessing even as they might move to complain about televisual vulgarity in contexts more overtly organized by motherly sociality in the neighborhood.

Crayon Shin-Chan

To be sure, comic television programming regularly participates within the actual lives of children and adults in manifold complex ways, but perhaps most visibly as a citational resource (Nakassis 2013a, 2013b). The interdiscursive reach of comic television goes well beyond the moment of reception as children and adults alike frequently orient toward and draw upon television programming as a public resource capable of coordinating their own activity one with another. Foremost, the obvious fact that broadcast programming regularly offers up as popular topics (*wadai*) for organizing interactions with others. However, it is also important to note that in addition to providing things to talk about, comedic television affords a cornucopia of things to talk with. Buzzwords, gags, games and routines regularly present themselves on screen as highly poetic entextualizations that are eminently reproducible and recontextualizable. The parents I grew to know in Yokohama often expressed concern to one another about the influence of comic programming even as they regularly allowed their children to watch it. In these motherly accounts, television often featured as a problematic as a source of contagious vulgarities in the form of gags, catch-phrases and rough speech. (To be sure, comedic producers invest great care in poetically crafting their gags and routines to circulate socially.) At the same time, this set of

concerns concedes the potential for these same interactional forms to serve as an effective resource for negotiating intimate relationships within every sociality.

One exemplary figure in this respect is found in the wildly popular and obsessively condemned protagonist in the long running manga (comic book) and anime (animation) serial 'Crayon Shin-chan.' The series focuses on the antics of Nohara Shinnosuke, or 'Shin-chan' for short; an unusual elementary school child living in Saitama, a suburb city just north of Tokyo. Since its first broadcast in 1992, the series has achieved monumental popular and commercial success. At the same time the series has drawn much vocal criticism that largely cites the propensity of elementary school-aged children to imitate (mane) the rude content of the program.[2]

During my fieldwork I often puzzled over the apparent contradiction between Shin-chan's obvious popularity, and the consistent criticism directed at him by parents.[2] This apparent contradiction points to a tension between differing ideal figures of motherhood in contemporary Japan and the differential relationships of these motherly aspects to broadly circulating comedic norms. Situating parental responses to childish imitation of Shin-chan's vulgar antics in relation to broader comedic norms suggests that the pervasive focus on parental complaints often erase the ways in which childish imitation of comic television can, and regularly do, serve as interactional resources for intimate play between parent and child.

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[2] Contrary to notions that describe imitative behavior (especially by children) as a straightforward manifestation of a human propensity. I argue elsewhere that childish imitation is not necessarily so straightforward. This is particularly true of the mediatized modes of imitation I draw attention to here. Indeed, imitation of Shin-chan appears configured in large part by prevalent social practices associated with Japanese comedic norms and forms, such as celebrity imitation (*monomane*).

[2] Though I have not yet had the opportunity to read it, Thomas Lamarre (2018) has recently published a chapter in his most recent book focused on polarizing figure of Crayon Shin-chan.

As a character, Shin-chan appears a strange child and frequently carries on with very odd behavior. He consistently misunderstands what is going on around him and commits frequent social blunders. For example, one signature blunder finds Shin-chan mismatching set phrases with their appropriate contexts. For example, he often announces his return home from school with 'welcome home' (*okaeri*) rather than 'I'm home' (*tadaima*). However, what sets Shin-chan apart from other similar anime series is his vulgarity. Signs of this come in a multitude of forms including his precociously adult (*eroi*) interest in twenty-something women, his penchant to speak using inappropriately informal registers of speech as well as his disturbing habit of calling his mother by her first name (like his father[4]) rather than more normative alternatives such as '*mama*' or '*okāsan*.'[5] However, most critical discussions concerning Shin-chan emphasize his signature gesture, '*oshiri dashi'*, or sticking one's butt out.

This signature gesture often combines a rocking of the rear-end side to side in time with the chanting of the phrase '*a buri buri!*' This careful poetic crafting of this gag, the crossing of bodily movement with a temporally regimenting catch phrase, helps to enable swift and easy recontextualization (Agha 2007). Indeed, Shin-chan's wiggling bottom is so well known that it adorns a diverse array character brand goods, including '*buri buri*' pudding (*Buri Buri Purin*) in the recognizable form of Shin-chan's (in)famous rear-end.

To be sure, hindquarters humor is a staple of the series and the numerous gags centered on Shin-chan's bouncing posterior[6] take center stage in critical statements as being particularly

[4] Indeed, many of Shin-chan's idiosyncrasies appear motivated by his own attempts to imitate his father.

[5] Note that these latter forms mark a normatively appropriate relationship of dependent intimacy between child and mother. For more on dependency (*amae*) conceived as a defining Japanese value, see Doi (1981) and Borovoy (2001, 2005, 2012)

[6] For example, many of Shin-chan''s gags involve inappropriately replacing terms in common idiomatic formulations to include reference to bottoms. For example, take Shin-chan's transformation of the idiomatic phrase "my back is touching my belly" used to indicate extreme hunger, into "my butt is touching my belly."

prone to problematic imitation. Such descriptions regularly characterize elementary schoolchildren as simply unable to restrain themselves from imitating Shin-chan's trademark dancing derriere.

Parental Talk Ambivalence Towards Shin-chan

Parents I spoke to during my fieldwork in Yokohama often expressed bemused exasperation over the apparent mimetic infectiousness of Shin-chan's vulgarities. Most informal discussions concerning Shin-chan that I witnessed focused on the propensity of children to imitate his vulgarities before comparing notes on effective means to thwart them. Many suggested that the most efficient way to regulate potentially embarrassing imitation of Shin-chan was to simply not allow their children to see the program in the first place. Others explained that they allowed their children to watch but took responsible care to manage the potentials for vulgar imitation by urging their children to restrain themselves. Despite these frequent discussions, imitation of Shin-chan remains a highly visible phenomenon.

'Mane shinai de!' ('Do not imitate!') stands as the common parental refrain when confronted by the specter of Shin-chan. Indeed, imitation of Shin-chan can reflect poorly on the ability of parents (especially mothers) to raise a diligent and conscientious child. Denotationally speaking, '*mane shinai de'*, formulates an unmistakable prohibition 'Do not imitate!' However, approaching the phrase from through the lens of emergent textuality (Silverstein and Urban 1996, Bauman and Briggs 1990) and comedic interdiscursivity (Silverstein 2005) reveals the possibility for significant ambiguity and play in situated utterances of the phrase. After all, this situation between irritated parent (or other adults) and silly children (including those who imitate Shin-chan) constitute the comedic kernel of the Shin-chan stories. In this we see that the

prohibitive phrase, itself, harbors the potential to pragmatically waver between serious disciplining rebuke and socially engaging comedic beat.

I observed such a moment while waiting for a train with Kurata-san, mother of 4-year-old Ken-kun.[3] We had brought our children together one summer day to take them to a park and let them play together. We stood talking on the platform waiting for the train with the children loosely collected around us when I brought up the topic of Shin-chan. Engaging in small talk, I asked Kurata-san if her son watches Shin-chan. She surprised me by telling me that he did. When I followed up by asking if he imitated Shin-chan, she first laughed and told me he did occasionally before continuing on with an explanation of how she worked to try and prevent such imitation by helping Ken-kun approach Shin-chan as a kind of negative role model. Kurata-san explained that in this way, Shin-chan's transgressive antics might serve a pedagogical function even as they entertained.

WF: Oh I see, does he imitiate shin-chan?
So desu ka. Shin-chan no mane shimasu ka?

K: [laughing] Yes, you mean sticking his butt out [of his pants]?
Hai, oshiridashi desu ka?

K: Yes. He does it sometimes. But we tell him that Shincan should be embarrassed by what
Un, tama ni shimasu kedo, Shin-chan ha hazukashiko,

he does and not to copy him.
mane shinai de to ittemasu.

K: We teach that Shin-chan is model of how not to be.
Shin-chan ha warui ko no mihon to oshiettemasu.

[3] Unfortunately, this incident occurred at a time and place that made recording unfeasible. What I present here is reconstructed from notes made immediately after the interaction.

At this point, her son, Ken-kun, catching mention of Shin-chan's name began swaying his rear end (inside his pants) and chanting the associated catch-phrase in time with his dance, "a-buri-buri!" Kurata-san, Kenkun's mother, turned to him exclaiming,

K: Heeey [come on], stop it.
Mooo, Ya me te.

Shin-chan is an embarrassed kid right?
Shin-chan ha hazukashi ko desho.

He's [showing you] bad behavior. He's not something to be imitated.
Warui koto suru desho! Mane shi nai de!

At this point my 5-year-old son, who yet to see the program, then began to imitate Ken-kun imitating Shin-chan.

This is precisely the kind of embarrassing situation that parents seize upon to echo critical positions that identify Shin-chan as a virulent source of vulgar imitative contagion. Indeed, discourses critical of Shin-chan regularly cite the childish propensity for inappropriate imitation (*mane*) of his odd, vulgar and disruptive behavior as a principle problem with the character.

And yet, Kurata-san's efforts to contain Ken-kun's imitative behavior seemed to hint at textual (interactional) potentials beyond straightforward parental exasperation. Despite the obvious embarrassment of this situation, Kurata-san did not appear particularly upset or stringent with her son for his defaming performance. Indeed, there was much in her own performance of parental reproach that resonated with the generic patterns found in television comedy. In contrast with the serious and sincere tone on display in her explanation to me (an associate and fellow parent), her expression of exasperation with her son appeared ambiguously parodic itself. Her initial utterance to Ken-kun was an elongated and exaggerated '*Moooo*' ('come on!') followed

by a familiarly metrical triple beat '*Ya-me-te*' ('stop it'). Even at the time, this utterance struck me as humorous and I smiled and let out a brief giggle. To which Kurata-san's tone then appeared to turn serious and flatten out as she repeated to her son the pedagogical formula she had reported to me only seconds before, '*Shin-chan ha Hazukashi ko desho!*' ('Shin-chan is an embarrassed kid, right?'). However, a comedic ambiguity appeared to return through a familiar rising and falling intonation contour by the final utterance, '*Mane shinai de!*'

Oyako-Combis: Childish (*Tennen*) *Boke* and Parental *Tsukkomi*

The resonance between the interaction on the train platform and the scenes of parental exasperation on episodes of Crayon Shin-chan are not a coincidence as they both draw on broadly disseminated comedic norms. Foremost, Shin-chan's regular blunders and even his odd vulgar outbursts bespeak a strong interdiscursive alignment with the normative comedic roles of the '*boke*,' or funnyman, in ways that anticipate his partner in comedic crime, the straight-man or '*tsukkomi*'. These well-established, and broadly available, comedic dynamics hinge on an antagonistic relationship between the unfocused boke, whose flights of absurd fancy serve as comedic raw material, and the more socially grounded tsukkomi, who struggles to diffuse, deflate or contain the boke's divergent fancies (Ōta 2002; Inoue 2003).[4]

The comedic relationship between boke and tsukkomi circulates broadly as a central organizing principle of the long dominant comedic genre in Japan (*manzai*) which has powerfully informed comic genres more broadly.[5] As discussed previously, a series of television comedy 'booms' (*owarai būmu*) since the early 1980's have made these concepts a broadly

[4] See Inoue (2003), Tsurumi (1987) and Stocker (2006) for more on the history of *manzai* as an expressive form.
[5] It is worthwhile noting that the clear majority of comedic performers in Japan get their start as one-half of a *manzai* duo (*conbi*).

distributed and robustly established interactional resource ready for deployment within diverse everyday interactions. Moreover, these are not roles that professional comedians use behind the scenes in crafting their acts. Reflexive talk concerning the interactional intricacies between boke and tsukkomi are extremely commonplace. Metadiscursive commentary concerning the means to skillfully engage in comic interactions—as well as evaluating the comic performances of others—have become regular topics for discussion in a wide range of mainstream media, including comedy and variety programming, as well as everyday conversation.

As such, it may come as no surprise that the funny (*omoshiroi*) moments within Shin-chan stories make effective use of these roles and often occur precisely when Misae (Shin-chan's mother) visibly, audibly, and often physically, exhibits her frustration and anger with Shin-chan's inappropriate and incomprehensible behavior. Moreover, the more emphatic and explosive her reaction the greater the humorous crescendo of the segment. The interactional dynamic between 'silly' children and a scolding frustrated parent line up expertly with established genres of comic interaction that cast parents as *tsukkomi* and children as ''natural' (*tennen*) *boke*.

And, of course, this comedic alignment is not a new development. Indeed, comedic producers have long transposed the roles of boke and tsukkomi into performances featuring relations between parents and children for professional comedic effect. Comedic professionals have many reasons for drawing on relations between parents and children as a source for comedic work. Beyond the clear alignments of role discussed above, the scene of a misbehaving kid receiving a parental scolding afford a very familiar and accessible situation that is legible to a sociologically diverse range of audiences. This promises to both broaden the available audience

for such routines and reduce the amount of background information that must be provided by performers (Gansobakushōou 2008).

Additionally, Japanese models of childhood development depict children as unfinished and naturally prone to blunders, particularly for children who have yet to reach the middle years of elementary school. The indulgence extended to young children renders them a very useful comic figure as they eminently forgivable for their socially comedic transgressions as they simply lack the psycho/physiological development and social experience to conform to mature social norms. Under this prevalent formulation it is unreasonable to expect young schoolchildren to be responsible. They are still under development as children. The difference in education, socialization and life experience provide a naturalized rationale for the absurd, inappropriate and vulgar behavior of children as boke.

In light of this broader comedic cosmology, scolding speech, such as 'mane shinai de,' have gradually accrued alternative heteroglossic (Bakhtin 1982) potentials that work against their denotational content. Comedic routines, such as those prominent in Crayon Shin-chan, regularly draw on the familiar domestic scenes of parental irritation with the bumbling tomfoolery of children and, at the same time, they invite parents and children to animate (Goffman 1981) such figures in order to add comedic color to their intimate interactions. This is to say, if such domestic contexts are useful for comedians, comedic transpositions into domestic interactions present themselves as useful resources for intimate play between parents and children.[6]

[6] Several potential entailments may be drawn out of this complex interdiscursive nexus. One consequence of the lamination of domestic relations with comedic play is that it normalizes in intimate domestic settings where boys tease mothers with vulgar behavior and mothers express (mock) exasperation about them. The mediatization of comic interactions between kids and parents installs a degree of playfully normative vulgarity (especially for boys) and casts parents (mothers in particular) as something to be teased by vulgar means. Additionally, such presumable playful interactions, invite mothers to inhabit stereotypical scolding figures as a means to mediate intimate relationships with their children. At the same time, they also animate unsavory and overbearing motherly figures. Ultimately, the transgressive back and forth that serves comedic intimacy also sustains negative figures of motherhood, such as the figure of the impatient complaining mother overly invested in public propriety.

Interactions read within this playful framework can potentially cast the utterances of prohibition or rebuke by parents as normative comic contributions. By shifting perspective on such interactions, interlocutors might see them as playful, but potentially contested, co-constructions, rather than the literal rebukes formulated by their denotational content.[7]

I suggest that the capacity of comic imitation to induce interactional ambiguity in part motivates the observable parental ambivalence towards comic television. Here aim to highlight the capacity for scolding itself to serve as a tropic domain available for intimate play between kids and parents, in addition to comic professionals. In this way, exhortations to behave appropriately can offer themselves for uptake as the utterances of a *tsukkomi*, playing at comedy, as opposed to a parent struggling to contain genuine frustration or irritation[8] (despite what participants may subjectively experience). At the same time, I do not wish to overstate the case and suggest that every disciplining utterance[9] between parent and child is always up for comedic

[7] In this light, the standard rebuke 'mane shinai de' can take on comedic casts. 'Mane-shinai de,' can be transfigured and taken up as a tsukkomi move and comedic response rather than a serious parental warning or rebuke. Indeed, proscribing some text with 'Mane-shinai-de' demarcates (bounds off) and prefigures it as a ripe object for imitation in the first place. The aspiration of prophylactic negation renders the imitation a conceivable possibility; indeed, such proscriptions appear to ensure an imitation, aspiring to comedic effect, will be forthcoming. Subsequent prohibitions (e.g. '*Dame! Dame!*') are also likely to fall flat as a comedic cynic might be tempted to see as an interactionally appropriate tsukkomi, a sign that one's boke was performed correctly.

[8] The roles of boke and tsukkomi afford significant asymmetry in their relative capacities to define emergent situations as silliness or scolding. The unfocused absurdities proffered by boke moves suggest a comedic frame awaiting culmination through a tsukkomi reaction. The boke leads the ways with first pair parts and the tsukkomi knocks them down (often with a sharp slap on the boke's head). Indeed, parents confronting obstinately determined kids, as Shin-chan's mother confronts Shin-chan, can struggle to have their interactional contributions recognized and interactionally ratified as scolding, as opposed to an interactional tick of a comedic clock. Signs of uptake of some act as playful teasing or stern scolding often appear to hinge on genred paralinguistic features and interactional timing. Put simply, the non-denotational specifics of 'how' a mother scolds take on renewed importance for distinguishing between genuine scolding and play. For example, the loudness, tone, rhythm, and duration of a scolding may serve as crucial indices of the seriousness and severity of the utterance based on knowledge of the scolding habits of individual parents.

[9] That said, I do wish to push the point. Regular joking can entail problematic ambiguities, as seen in the case of Tsuruguchi-san. How do kids know that mom is 'really' scolding and not simply playing along with the imitated joke? This is a register phenomenon (Agha 2007). The regimentation of the indexicality invoked within these interactions emerge over the entire course of the interaction and is always available to reformulation and recalibration as it continues to unfold. This can present a formidable pragmatic challenge as formulating a determinate construal on the basis of attention to discrete utterances alone is insufficient to definitively characterize some event as one or another type of emergent text in context (Silverstein 1996; Agha 2005).

grabs, however, I do wish to suggest that the potential for ambiguity I point to here is more than analytic 'play' on my part. Of course, this is not to say that vulgar imitation cannot, or does not, become irritating or offensive to parents even within intimate settings.

At the Limits of Boyish Vulgarity

I present a boundary case of childish vulgarity in order to exemplify the potential severity of the problem and highlight the specific responses they precipitate in contemporary Japan. Before going further, it is important to note that tolerance for vulgar outbursts by children and youth is highly gendered in Japan. Coarse rough expressions and transgressively inappropriate uses of low speech by girls regularly elicit stronger responses than do those made by boys. Indeed, expressions of vulgarity are often normative and expected from young boys to a degree with the use of low forms of speech and rough behavior amongst peers taken up as hearty signs of boyish masculinity (*otokorashisa*) (see Okamoto 1995). Reflecting a similar tension to the one explored here, I have often heard mothers express irritation and embarrassment over the use of crude informal speech by their sons directed towards them, such as low informal first person pronoun '*ore*' and second person '*omae*.' At the same time, they would evaluate the same forms of rough speech when overheard among boys playing with other boys as '*otokorashii*' ('manly' or 'like a male').[10]

Though a degree of boyish vulgarity is normatively expected, and often treated as healthy by the parents I knew, childish enthusiasm often carried behavior beyond the bounds of parental endurance. My own experience with children has shown me that parents and children can struggle to agree on the precise genre and status of an emergent interactional text. As will be

[10] Girls who deployed these forms, even in male dominated play groups, drew decidedly different evaluations and were regularly described as both vulgar (*geihin*) and terrifying (*kowai*) (cf. Miyazaki 2004).

reviewed more fully later, prevailing comedic norms in Japan afford resources for rendering antagonistic interactions between children and parents, such as scolding, interactionally ambiguous and potentially playful. In some situations, it can become difficult for parents to maintain interactional control sufficient to regiment the metapragmatic identity of an encounter. Is this interaction, by degrees, a scolding? Or is it parodic play? It is worth noting that wily children can work against the interactional aims of their parents by mobilizing broadly available comedic norms to metapragmatically cast emergent scolding interactions as comically playful rather than serious discipline.

Of the many instances of such evaluations in my fieldwork none appears more extreme than an experience during a car ride with Tsuruguchi-san and his son. I had come to know Tsuruguchi-san many years before. He had been an avid sportsman in both high school and college and by the time of this evening ride he spent his days working as a 'salaryman' for a large stationary supply company. He was also a self-professed fan of television comedy (*owarai*) and well-practiced in the amateur art of comic banter, which he suggested likely shaped his son's behavior. By the time of this interaction we had become very close acquaintances. On this specific occasion we were returning home from an afternoon excursion and my children rode in the back seat with Tsuruguchisan's 4-year-old son, Kenichi. Night had fallen and Tsuruguchi-san and I both expressed hope that the children would settle down and perhaps fall asleep. These hopes were dashed when Kenichi began potty-talking to the giggling delight of my son and daughter.

Unko! Gebo! Oshiko!	Poop! Barf! Pee!

Tsuruguchi-san let out a laugh[11] before cautioning (*chūi suru*) Kenichi by loudly calling his name in an effort to motivate him to behave. The warning, no doubt co-textually calibrated by the laugh that preceded it, precipitated the opposite effect and only served to spur Kenichi on. While Kenichi's scatological utterances did not appear to be direct imitations of any specific comic routine—at least as far as I was aware, the ensuing interaction unfolded in ways clearly aligned with transgressive sensibilities and routine participant structures modeled in comedic programming. The other children in the back giggled at the exchange between Kenichi and his father which cast Tsuruguchi's warning as a familiar comic rebuke. This participant structure, boke-tsukkomi-laughter from onlookers—retroactively afforded a reading of Kenichi's scatological outbursts as comedically well formed. After some repetitions on this initial interactional back and forth, Kenichi reformulated his boke and redoubled his efforts.

Obaasan no unko tabetai.	[I] want to eat grandma's poop.
Obassan no gebo tabetai.	[I] want to eat grandma's puke.

I was taken aback as Kenichi's utterance was perhaps the most viscerally revolting sentence I had ever contemplated in Japanese; as a nauseating image flashed in my mind[12] my smile withered, and the children erupted in laughter.

[11] This unfortunate slip likely served to initially key the interaction towards a comedic frame.

[12] I had failed to insulate Kenichi's disgusting verbal play from everyday realist modes of imagination. Kenichi's transgressive provocation could remain funny as long as one did not dwell too long on what it might actually entail. Here I cannot help making a speculative gesture toward the ways that the specific material forms that constitute media infrastructures may themselves afford, and participate in shaping, such (vulgar) aesthetic sensibilities. To be sure, visual and auditory characterizations of revolting bodily functions offer quite a different experience from smelling them. The particular sensorial modalities privileged by TV and film likely render 'poop' (*unko*) jokes much more palatable as their noxious qualities are not materialized and thus available for inclusion in, or imposed upon, uptake formulations.

My son began to join-in by echoing Kenichi's milder outbursts, "*Unko!*" ('Poop!') "*Oshiko!*" ('Pee!'). Striving to recognizably shatter the play frame, Tsuruguchi-san reacted by scolding Kenichi more forcefully, raising his voice. He told Kenichi that his speech was both vulgar (*gehin*) and disgusting (*kimochi warui*) before commanding him to stop with an imperative construction 'Do not say things like that!' (S*o iu koto iu na!*). However, Kenichi refused to be moved and continued to take up Tsuruguchi's strident rebukes, in combination with the frenzied laughter of his backseat companions, as a sign of his comedic genius and carried on.

Unable to force Kenichi to drop the play frame, Tsuruguchi-san and I withdrew from the scene into silence and hoped that Kenichi would calm down without a comedic foil. We sat in silence and tried to ignore his disgusting antics for a time as Kenichi persisted with his performance. Seeking distraction from Kenichi's unsettling utterances, I asked Tsuruguchi-san if he worried that such vulgar habits of speech (*kotobazukai*) would impact Kenichi's development (*seicho*) or signal his future character (*seikaku*). Tsuruguchi-san quickly responded he did not harbor such concerns (*so iu shinpai wa nai*). Like many parents I met, Tsuruguchi-san did not see his son's vulgar transgressions as a problematic sign of developmental deviance that placed his future character or self in jeopardy. He explained that Kenichi wouldn't say these kinds of things or talk like this by the time he reached middle or high school. Tsuruguchi-san explicitly cited his own rough behavior in the household as a cause of his son's vulgar propensities ('*ore no sei*') before explaining that his son would grow out of these impulsive habits and learn to appropriately regulate his behavior as he grew into normal (*futsu*) adulthood.[13]

[13] Many fathers I met approached vulgar childish outbursts with a similar lightness. For example, at a gathering for the children and parents of my son's daycare (*hōikuen*), I asked Hirai-san, father of another 5-year-old boy, if he let his son watch Shin-chan. He responded that he himself both watched Shin-chan and read the mange saying that it was very funny. When I followed up by asking if he worried about his son imitating the vulgar behavior of Shin-chan, he laughed and told me that Shin-chan didn't cause this kind of behavior, he is a reflection of it. In his assessment, children don't imitate Shin-chan, rather, Shin-chan's antics imitate the antics of real children.

According to Tsuruguchi-san, his young son's penchant for childish vulgarity was not a bad habit to be broken for fear that it might became a fixture of future identity. Rather, the locus of Tsuruguchi-san's concern were situated in the present. He explained that he worried most about how Kenichi's behavior might impact his ability to make friends at school. He worried that other children might not get along with Kenichi, even if they laughed at his antics. Tsuruguchi's explained that other children might find Kenichi's propensity for extreme vulgarity entertaining, but they also might find it alienating as Kenichi hasn't yet developed the tact and judgment to wield it in socially effective ways. As a consequence, he speculated that his son may have difficulty making friends and that, in-turn, might become 'very difficult' (*taihen*) for Kenichi, perhaps in ways that provoked a lasting impact.

The form of Tsuruguchi-san's concern sheds light on the ways that folk ideologies of child development in Japan are often calibrated to progression through the educational system. Tsuruguchi-san's apparent resignation to the extreme outbursts of his son reflected both a common indulgence normatively extended to young children, but also his faith that his son's behavior would be appropriately (re)formed by the increasingly rigorous strictures and demands that he would face as he progressed through the educational system.

At this point it is important to emphasize that the social stakes for Tsuruguchi-san as a father of such a vulgarly exuberant child appeared much less fraught than the stakes for Kenichi's mother, whose neighborly social interactions were informed by the behavior of her son as reflection of her motherly efforts. While both Kenichi's mother and father regularly expressed frustration with their son's unrestrained behavior, the social consequences they would experience differed significantly. Kenichi's father inhabited a social world consisting primarily of work, weekend family outings and manly leisure—such as sports and pachinko. His daily routine saw

him leave early in the morning, before his children awoke, and return home late in the evening as his children were preparing for bed. On the occasions that he spent time with his son, they often did so as a family. Their relationship appeared intimate and personal. Importantly, Kenichi's remarkable behavior did not appear to significantly play a role in his father's relationships with others beyond the domestic sphere.[14]

In stark contrast, Kenichi's mother, like Kurata-san on the train platform, could not afford to simply ignore his vulgar outbursts in public. As a mother, she not only bore the brunt of the childcare responsibilities—despite working full-time as an administrative assistant in a nearby hospital—but the public behavior of her son impinged directly on her status in the community and played a prominent role in shaping her relations with others, particularly other mothers. This points to a second source of motherly ambivalence towards comic television which reflects a tension lying at an interdiscursive crossroads of two particularly powerful discourses of motherhood in contemporary Japan.

Motherhood as Virtue and Constraint

Motherhood has long been formulated as a valued and virtuous vocation in Japan. In contrast to American formulations that undervalue the labor of childrearing, motherhood in Japan has been a reliable source of value and social capital (Bardsley 1999). Stay at home mothers in Japan occupy a social role that affords status and value for women that appears unsatisfactory and unfulfilling to their American counterparts (Borovoy 2005). Of course, these sources of value do not come without cost, however, as expectations on women to become

[14] Relations between children and fathers principally take place in intimate spaces and often beyond the reach of public evaluation. By contrast the evaluation and appraisal of mothers takes on a decidedly more public character and often ties a mother's social standing and reputation in-part to the public behavior of her child.

mothers impose constraints the agency of women that limit their ability to pursue a life without motherhood. However, neither is motherhood free of constraint. Even women who embrace motherhood feel the weight of maternal expectations that compel them to adapt and orient towards normative motherly ideals.

The first ideal tasks mothers successfully guiding their children through the demanding educational structures which serve as the regular means to future professional success. In this way, it hews closely to the rigorous requirements imposed by the Japanese education system. This motherly ideal tasks mothers with helping children learn diligent focus (*shūchūryoku*) as well as attendant forms of appropriate reserved public demeanor. A great deal of scholarship has emphasized the pressure placed on mothers to devote themselves to supporting the educational achievement of their children as a primary maternal responsibility and embrace a maternal role marked by diligence and discipline, often ambivalently captioned as the 'education mother' (*kyōiku mama*) (Thorsten 1996).

Scholars have noted the ways that this maternal aspect effectively channels the domestic labor of Japanese women, as wives and mothers, to serve the ends of the state and the demands of capital. For example, Tomiko Yoda (2000) describes how the maintenance of postwar notions of Japan as a 'maternal society' (*bōsei shakai*) have been leveraged to productively facilitate national post-war development projects. Despite repeated contemporary formulations of Japanese society that strive to trace maternalism in an unbroken chain back to antiquity, she demonstrates that the post-war family ideals that situate the mother at the head of the domestic realm diverge from Meiji and pre-Meiji era notions of household management and the mother's place within them. In doing so, she demonstrates how the emergence and strengthening of the concept of 'maternal society' correlates with capitalist reorganization and mobilization of the

enterprise society (*kigyō shakai*) in the 1960's and 1970's. Under the regime of the enterprise society, wives and mothers took the lead in managing household affairs which enabled men to devote their time and energy to the demands of workplace productivity. This starkly gendered division of labor also mobilized Japanese women as a flexible reserve workforce capable of both laboring in the workplace as demand required and the more important domestic duty of social reproduction permitted.

Under the academic credential society (*gakureiki shakai*) the work of childrearing became about the development of human capital (White 1987; Brinton 1994; Hao and Brinton 1997) in ways that link public and private concerns through the domestic labor of mothers in Japan. As many scholars have detailed, the labor required by mothers is demanding and highly regimented (cf. Allison 2000). The labor of mothers to nurture and support children to seek educational success. Such accounts detail diverse institutional projects that seek to capture the productive energies of Japanese women and tap their labor to serve the task of (social) reproduction. These macro-level accounts capture the social organization maternal labor; however, they remain quite abstract and can overlook both the way such state projects require the coordination and uptake of many actors (Gal and Kligman 2000) as well as the ways the processes understood to compose them materialize in the specific circumstances of family life (Brinton 1994: 71-76)

As argued by Merry While (2002) the practical realities and diverse conditions in which people find themselves rarely afford Japanese families the capacity to realize the idealized forms that circulate as exemplars of domestic stability and motherly virtue. White points to the obvious gaps between the abstractions that drive family policy in Japan and the diverse forms that actual families take as they pursue the practical ends of living. She reports that that while state projects

circulate and project certain ideals and images of family life, her research found few families with the resources to conform to or even pursue such idealized formulations. Rather she presented the articulations or resonances between social life and the state proclamations and publicity intended to mold and shape such life, as a complex and messy process.

Nevertheless, majime children require majime parents willing and capable of fostering the necessary training and discipline (*shitsuke*). The undergirding logic credits maternal care as an important factor in the development and outcomes of children. In doing so it forges a link between the child's observable character and capacities with the mother's (Hirao 2007, 2001).

In spaces beyond one's intimate circle, where rambunctious play is possible, this ideal of diligence and restraint serves as the default measure of motherly value. 'Well behaved' children, maintain (age-appropriate) public manners in shared public spaces occupied by unknown others, can serve as classed signs of motherly virtue and care.

In this aspect, the transgressive enticements of comic figures, such as Shin-chan, and comedic television in general, appear as little more than dissipating distraction. Childish imitations of Shin-chan in public spaces, where they might be overseen by non-intimate others, threaten to embarrassingly cast mothers as lacking maternal vigilance. Particularly when assessed from a perspective aligned with the educational order, such moments can provoke deep embarrassment as they can become available for uptake as signs of motherly overindulgence and neglect.

A second figure of motherly virtue focuses on intimate relationships between mother and child and thus provides an alternative to the relentless emphasis on the discipline and diligence imposed by the rigors of 'examination hell' (*jyuken jigoku*). Often referenced in relation to the work of psychoanalyst Takeo Doi (1981), this ideal of motherhood points to the intimate and

trusting relation between 'indulgent' mother and 'dependent' child as the prototypical template undergirds all relationships in Japan (Doi 1981: 28; Borovoy 2012). The loving indulgence of mothers enabling the child to fulfill desires for '*amae*,' which valorizes intimate relationships of indulgence and dependency as the socio-culturally specific force that gives Japanese society its specific character. According to Doi, the prototypical manifestation of *amae* is the desire of an infant to be close to its mother, where "the *amae* mentality could be defined as the desire to deny the fact of separation that is such an inseparable part of human existence and to obliterate the pain of separation." (Doi 1973: 75)

Amy Borovoy has looked at the ways that these values can lead wives and mothers into double-binds of codependence (Borovoy 2001; 2005). Drawn to fulfill the *amae* of husbands and children, the 'too good wife' may find herself surrendering agency, and enabling, problems within the family such as the alcoholism of husbands and the social withdrawal (*hikikomori*) of children.[15] At the same time, Borovoy's work deftly approaches these theorizations of Japanese interpersonal sensibilities by turn attention towards considering how they motivate women to step-into and inhabit this indulgently supportive role. In this present case, shared laughter, smiles and other signs of lightheartedness index a healthy relationship and intimate relationship between mother and child; one that is secure in its capacity to provide such loving indulgence. The playful interactions adapted from comic television provide resources for manifesting such relationships.

In this aspect, Shin-chan's vulgarities can become resources for such intimate teasing play between parents and children within private spaces. Though public displays of vulgar joking

[15] In a separate paper, Borovoy captures Doi's critique of western individualism, by noting that Doi argues that the modern western conception of freedom is too easily confused with autonomy—the absence of obligations that might impinge on one's individual agency. Doi argues that true freedom lies not in the achievement of independent and isolated autonomy, but in the power to be indebted and yet not feel confined by it (Borovoy 2012: 285).

still harbor a stigmatizing potential, socially-engaging teasing and joking play presume upon a sense of secure intimacy between mother and child to be felicitous. In contrast to the interactional reserve and solitary diligence emphasized by the first figure, the ability of children to engage in such transgressive intimate interactions with parents is understood to deepen their mutual attachment.

To be sure, these contrasting characterizations of parent child relations (*oyako kankei*) do not present a binary choice to be made so much as a tension to be negotiated. The staunchly middle-class parents I lived with in Yokohama regularly spoke of finding 'balance' (*baransu*) in childrearing as a means to negotiate the tension between the expectations laid upon them. Though these parents expressed disagreement on where to situate the fulcrum between these ideals, very few disagreed that too much emphasis on one or the other, through stifling over-attention or carefree neglect, was potentially harmful to children's social, moral and academic development and stable future prospects.

Classed Oyako Interdiscursivities

Finally, the ways that mothers discussed managing the relationship between children and television figured into their evaluations of motherly virtue in complex ways. Mundane discussions concerning how mothers chose to manage their children's consumption of comic television afforded well developed, if contrasting, discursive avenues for exhibiting a particular alignment to these figures of maternal value.

I saw a stark example of the different ways mothers invoked these motherly ideals during my first visit with a social group organized by Sugiyama-san. Sugiyama-san was an experienced mother with children attending Oshima Elementary in the second and fifth grades. We met at a

during a weekend children's basketball club that had been organized by parents at Oshima elementary. She was a mother of three and went to the basketball club to support her daughter. At the time, two of her children attended Oshima in the second and fifth grades. Her third child had already passed through Oshima and into Junior High School. Active in the community, Sugiyama-san established a social group for mothers to meet and talk in a loft space owned by her husband not far from the school. She regularly organized gatherings called 'tea-salons' which invited mothers from the neighborhood to visit for tea and talk with each other about raising children and the challenges that confronted them. Soon after meeting Sugiyama, she invited me to attend a tea-salon and ask my questions about comedic television to any mothers who decided to attend.

Following the ritual round of self-introductions, I put my first question to the group of seven mothers seated at the table with me. "Do your children watch television?" (*Jibun no okosan ha terebi wo mimasuka*?) Without any prompting, mothers took turns responding individually. The first to respond, Ishikawa-san, said that her two sons watched a lot of television and she thought it was a good thing. Not the fact of television watching itself, but the way that they could bond over watching a program together. She noted the value of variety and comedy in this respect as laughing together fostered feelings of closeness and helped to relieve the stress of the day. As Ishikawa-san spoke, the others listened and nodded, signaling understanding and approval with the sentiments just shared.

Susuzki-san was next to speak, however, she offered a radically different account of how she regulated her son's consumption of television. She began by saying that she strictly regulated how much television her child watched. She permitted her son to watch one program a day of about 30 minutes in length, and she had to approve the program he chose to watch. She

explained her reasoning for the practice by saying that television was meaningless (*iminai*) and distracted children from pursuing more valuable experiences and understandings that might be had by participating in real world activities. In this she noted that owarai and variety shows were particularly bad because they offered nothing of substance and modelled problematic manners and speech (*kotobazukai*).

At the time I was shocked to hear such a direct contrast between these two accounts. Not because of the contrast itself, but due to the fact that these accounts directly followed one another. In the moment I felt scandalized by the possibility that Suzuki's account or regulatory vigilance had been a direct repudiation of Ishikawa's indulgence. However, this turned out not to be the case. No one else at the table showed any signs of surprise or discomfort. The divergent views they expressed on television expressly indexed their alignment towards sources of motherly virtue that seemed to be in conflict.

I soon learned that many of the mothers present at the tea-salon, including Ishiwaka-san and Suzuki-san, had been acquainted for several years as their children had attended preschool together. The shared experience had helped to bind them together as a motherly cohort and made each aware of the others' alignments towards motherly values. The comfort they exhibited towards the contrast reflected, in part, their familiarity with each other and their clear awareness of the ways that each regularly aligned towards sources of motherly virtue.

At the same time, these different alignments are not wholly equivalent nor equally desirable. [16] Notably, though both responses effectively indexed drew on alternative motherly ideals, the difference between these responses also reflected their differential alignment with the

[16] Of course, this is not to suggest these discourses necessarily conflict. Nor do they necessarily emerge from competing sites. Indeed, as Yoda (2000) has argued, these two aspects of motherhood may be seen as deeply socio-historically entwined.

educational system and established class hierarchy in ways that colored projections of their child's future prospects, class position and social status. Alignment with the competitive educational regime, and the promise of class ascendancy and future stability it offered, were regularly valued more by those able to pursue it.

Conclusions

While regular mediatized circulations regularly ventriloquate 'parents' (*oya; hogosha*) as rejecting media vulgarity out of a moralizing parental sensibility, the ambivalences that surround parental treatment of childish vulgarity suggest that such characterizations find their manifest grounds in more locally situated social stakes. I have argued that the ambivalence that mothers exhibit in relation to the consumption of comedic television comes in large part from the pull of classed co-constitutive alternative figures of motherly virtue in contemporary Japan. One discourse identifies mothers as the responsible agents for instilling diligence and shepherding children through the established educational structures and turning them into productive members of society (White 2002, Allison 2000). The dedicated labor contributed by mothers to support and discipline children's study habits is understood to help set the future professional prospects and the class trajectory of their child (White 2002). Another emphasizes indulgently affectionate, intimate and playful bonds between mother and child. Within this discourse, joking, smiles and laughter between mothers and children become crucial signs of warm and healthy relationships that produce adults capable of weaving the social fabric.

Much scholarship has focused the ways that particular formulations of maternal ideologies come to be materialized in particular practices, artifacts and anxieties focused on

efforts to raise children able to succeed in the Japanese educational system and develop the future human capital necessary for Japan to compete in global markets (cf. Allison 2000).

The stakes in emphasizing educational and professional success for parents are manifold. To be sure there is an aspect that is concerned to ensure the financial well-being for offspring. However, as Geertz (1972) made clear in his discussion of 'deep play' around his famous cockfight, such a rationalizing account does little to exhaust the semiotic potentials that might be wrung from such activities. Nth order indexical potentials (Silverstein 2003) bristle and sprout within any encounter that focuses on the development and progress of children. Indexical signs of the success or failure of children regularly offer themselves as next-order indices of parental dedication and ability when taken up within subsequent discussions. To be sure, it would be a mistake to suggest that parents are unconcerned with the future financial security of their children. However, the ambivalence around comic television suggests that grasping this concern as the entirely, and perhaps even principal, motivating factor represents an essentializing overstatement. Privileging public complaints as representative of parental attitudes aligns the manifold complexities of everyday life within a family to a rational economic evaluation. This often captures mothers in a double-bind in relation to comic television. On the one hand vulgar forms adapted from comic television can, and often do, become valued resources for pursuing intimacy between parent and child in domestic spaces. At the same time, public displays of these forms threaten to stigmatize parents as less than committed to their childcare responsibilities in the eye of others.

Chapter 4:

Managing Monstrousness

"They're out there!"
- *Hasegawa-san on the existence of monster parents.*

Meet the '*MonPe*'

Beginning in the mid 2000's, accounts of a new form of aberrant parent began to circulate widely in Japan. These manifold accounts described a new species of selfish parent that eschewed their own parental responsibilities for raising children by shifting the burden onto others, most prominently teachers. These were the so-called *monster parents (monsutā pearento).* A regular stream of mediatized accounts tirelessly identified elementary and middle schools as the natural, though not exclusive, habitat of monster parents. In these educational institutions, they could be seen burdening teachers with incessant complaints about insignificant matters and issuing demands for special accommodation on behalf of their children, often at the expense of the children of others.

Stories of monster parents gradually developed into a marketable *wadai* or 'hot topic' and featured in an increasingly broad range of media-forms; such as news media, variety talk television and popular books penned by public intellectuals engaged in the important work of 'social commentary.' In 2008 Fuji Television definitively launched this figure of parental dysfunction into mainstream public visibility by airing an eleven-episode television drama aptly titled 'Monster Parent.' The drama revolved around the trials and tribulations of an unmarried,

but professionally successful, female lawyer who struggled to defend teachers and educators from the persistent misguided attacks of overbearing, and out-of-touch, parents, monster parents. And of course, given the deeply entrenched emphasis on motherhood in Japan, 'parents' really means mothers.

Historical Interdiscursivities

Let me begin by suggesting that the rise of the monster parent represents a new take on a familiar tension holding between schools and parents as key agents responsible for managing the social and academic development of children in Japan (Akiko and Yoda 1993, Yoda 2000). Previous specters of parental, meaning motherly, aberration, such as the '*mamagon*' ('Mother Dragon') of the 1970's, regularly faulted mothers for laying excessive pressure on their children to achieve academically. These previous formulations of maternal pathology regularly hinged-on a recognition of an unhealthy and excessive emphasis on academic success at the expense of the social aspects of school life. In this way, these earlier figures were regularly accused of *over-aligning* with the established hierarchies of the educational order in problematic ways (cf. Allison 2000).

In contrast to this, contemporary accounts of monster parents regularly report a confrontational stance towards educational institutions that rejects, and at times reverses, the established hierarchies between parents and teachers. The incessant complaints and unreasonable personal demands associated with 'monster parents' are depicted as dis-aligning with, intruding upon and disrupting the educational order. Self-absorbed 'monster parents' are thus characterized as disrupting the normative alignment between public and private realms and transgressing the

appropriate institutional boundaries separating school life from personal, familial, and/or neighborhood life.

The underlying presumption is that monster parents are socially maladapted themselves. Their monstrosity follows from their presumed inability to maturely 'read the atmosphere'[1] (*kūki wo yomu*) and participate appropriately within social encounters. Instead they are selfishly oblivious to social context which leads them to act in highly disruptive ways to pursue their personal aims and ambitions. In this way, unreasonable complaints and demands leveled by parents on teachers[2] appear as the principle, but far from only, sign of parental monstrousness. These same mediatized dramatizations characterize the volume, both in terms of amplitude and quantity, of monstrous complaints and requests as a heavy burden that imposes a very real impediment to the smooth functioning of schools.

At this point, I would like to register that though I listened to numerous accounts of monster parents and observed countless dramatizations of their monstrous activities, I never actually encountered such monstrousness myself.[3] It may be that the local elementary school in the middle-class Yokohama neighborhood where I lived was particular fortunate to be free of monster parents. However, I would suggest that rather than reflecting the sociological reality of a burgeoning social problem, the popularity of the monster parent figure has more to do with its capacity to compellingly tap broader anxieties about the disintegration of established

[1] This evokes the popular epithet '*KY*.' This abbreviation for '*kūki ga yomenai'* ('unable to read the atmosphere') indicates someone who lacks the reflexive awareness to follow and participate in social situations in an appropriate manner.

[2] Stories of monster parents emphasize parental disputes with teachers and schools and in this way, reflect a set of parallel discussions that detail the progressive unraveling of Japanese society as well as the established institutional resources for social reproduction. The monster parent 'problem' (*mondai*) regularly folds into these discussions as further evidence of progressively deteriorating respect for, and trust in, teachers, schools and the educational system more broadly.

[3] This is to say, I never encountered any instance of behavior that my research interlocutors would likely have ratified as a monstrous. To be sure, monstrousness is always an effect of uptake. It is always ascribed in retrospect and materialized interdiscursivity through discussions that evaluate incidents after the fact.

organizational hierarchies in an ongoing age of recession and restructuring; particularly in ways that profitably draw consumers to media-products in the form of news and social commentary.

Mediatized Maternal Teratologies

As with most monsters, monster parents are conjured and sustained primarily through stories that recount their 'abnormal' activity. Accounts detailing monstrous happenings materialize across a broad swath of media products and converge around the figure to articulate the phenomenon of the 'monster parent' as a *wadai*. '*Wadai*' literally denotes 'topic' or 'subject.' However, in broader usage the term is used to indicate a prominent concern or issue currently occupying public attention. Characterizing some topic as a *wadai* constitutes a recognition that serves as a contemporary focal point of public discussion.[4] This contains both an expectation that the figure or topic will appear across multiple media forms for a period of time, however, becoming a '*wadai*' also renders the subject into a presumably expectable topic for use in everyday conversation.

The circulatory processes that introduce and sustain *wadai* such as the monster parent rely on a convergence around the topic across multiple media forms and outlets. In this way, we might note that monster parents appear sustained as a mediatized figure through mediatized processes akin to what Steinberg (2012) has discussed as 'media mix' in Japan—with the intertextual processes that undergird it similarly discussed outside Japan through the idea of 'media convergence' (Jenkins 2008).

Loosely sketched, 'media mix' refers to a marketing strategy pioneered by Kadokawa Shoten in the 1960's that markets pop-cultural characters and narrative worlds through a

[4] This also points to the regular temporal cycles by which '*waidai*' profitably emerge and recede.

multitude of media forms. The marketing strategy strives to shift the motiving focus of consumption from discrete products, such as chocolates, to more abstract objects such as proprietary characters and narrative worlds that can be materialized in a many commodity forms.[5] Steinberg (2012) points to the cross-promotional campaign between Meiji Chocolates and the anime character *Tetsuwan Atomu* as the first exemplar of the media mix strategy. The promotion involved including a sheet of character stickers within packages of Meiji's Marble Chocolates.[6] The promotion became a great success with children plastering images of *Atomu* on objects in their environment. The materialization of the character across several media forms—such as broadcast anime and sticker sheet—constitute the core intertextual process of the media mix strategy.

Steinberg notes that media mixes depend on the ability of characters to be materialized in ways that are 'not inconsistent' (Steinberg 2012).[7] For example, Steinberg attributes the success of the marble chocolates campaign to a specific aesthetic quality that emerged from the cost conscious industrialized production process of 'limited animation' used to create *Tetsuwan Atomu*. Steinberg traces the ways that limited animation reduced the number of key frames and tweens used in the production process to reduce the amount of labor require to produce each episode. This reduction in the number of frame led animators to develop a style whereby dynamic action could be suggested by static poses. Steinberg terms this aesthetic effect 'immobile dynamism' and credits the style as the key affordance that made the marble chocolates media mix a success (Steinberg 2012). The convergence of images of the hero *atomu*

[5] See Ōtsuka (2010) for more on narrative consumption. Also see Nakassis (2013) on the para-s/cite in branding.
[6] The candy itself resembles M&M's and consists of a chocolate button coated in a colorful hard candy shell. Marble chocolates come packaged in a small cardboard tube that both protects the candy and leaves space for additional the inclusion of additional toys and prizes.
[7] See Nozawa (2013) for an exceptional theorization of 'characterization' as a specific semiotic modality.

around the suggestion of dynamism within a static image afforded the intertextuality that drove the media mix and made it possible to reproduce the character within multiple material forms.

The useful point in relation to the monster parent is not simply that such figures of personhood saturate 'the media' by taking on a multitude of material commodity forms. Though indeed they do. Rather the framework of the media mix appears useful because it affords a perspective on the practices of media institutions that foster precisely these kinds of interdiscursive convergences across diverse media commodities as *wadai* in order to capitalize on them. As such, we might, with a slight wink, approach the figure of the monster parent as just such a media commodity in its own right (Agha 2011a, 2011b). One that is 'media-mixed' through mediatized processes similar to those that animate proprietary characters, though taken up and used in ways that are distinct from them. While I am certainly taking the media-mix model beyond its design specifications, I suggest that it is useful to think with here as it helps to maintain a focus on the network of activity by media producers that converge around figures such as the monster parent capable of becoming marketable as a form of social commentary.

Enregistering the Monster

The enregisterment (Agha 2005) of the figure of the monster parent took place through the media infrastructures and circulatory channels afforded by established mediatizing commodities. The specific media products in which figure of the monster parent has been materialized and circulated represent a broad array of media commodities.

News Papers & Weekly Magazines (Shūkanshi):

References to monster parents regularly appeared in national newspapers and more sensational weekly magazines. Often owned by the same publishing companies, these two media

forms offer forms of journalism that are complementary. Newspapers overwhelmingly conform to rigorous editorial guidelines focused on maintaining impartiality and projecting a disinterested or objective viewpoint. This stringent editorial stance lends national papers significant authority and inspires public confidence that papers report the facts.[8] The editorial emphasis on striving for objective reporting meant that most of the mentions of monster parents within newspapers took place within editorials written by public experts and letters to the editor submitted by readers (Hashimoto 2014).

By contrast, weekly magazines (*shūkanshi*) regularly carried more detailed, and sensational, accounts of monster parent sightings. These large format magazines are commonly printed on newsprint with glossy front and back pages which regularly contain photographic features. These periodicals are afforded looser editorial constraints when compared with newspapers, on part because of the exclusion of their reporters from the established press-club system that mediates the transfer of information between institutions and mainstream newspaper reporters.

A major aspect of the appeal of s*hūkanshi* lies in their potentially speculative investigative articles, though, they vary widely in journalistic rigor and topical focus depending on the specific title. Weeklies such as *Shūkan Bunshun*, *Shūkan Asahi* and *Shūkan Shinchō*, amongst many others, regularly focus their reporting on supplying supplementary more detailed, and speculatively adventurous, 'scoops' concerning current stories in the news. Other titles, such as *Friday, Shūkan Geino* and others deal primarily in speculative and salacious celebrity gossip. Reports of monstrous sightings spanned the breadth of this cline and featured stories that cast the

[8] The authority extended to newspapers goes beyond simply faith in reporting. Newspaper reading commonly stands as a pedagogical practice more broadly with regular reading promising to improve one's general intelligence and facility with language.

emergence of monster parents as a reflection of a broader social problem as well as those that turned forensic attention on the potentially monstrous behavior of some celebrity mothers.

The Legitimizing Role of Public Intellectuals in Social Commentary

Public intellectuals (*hyōronka*) are profitably located at the intersections of these kinds of circulations. They derive their place and livelihood by pronouncing and parsing the complexities of current concerns for the general public. The work of public intellectuals renders complex processes in a navigable zone somewhere between overwhelming complexity and common-sense simplicity. Such public intellectuals play an important role in constituting and circulating information about current events by serving as experts who can break down the complex issues and concerns of the day into more understandable, but not oversimplified, accounts for public consumption.

Popular Current Issues Books:

Often published in a 17 x 11cm '*shinsho'* format, *bunko* are pocket paperbacks churned out by major publishing houses and written by prominent authors, experts and *hyōronka* to discuss current issues and social concerns. Bookstores stock these paperbacks on consignment from publishers and displays of the most recent crop of books regularly prominently displayed in bookstores.[9]

The figure of the monster parent regularly featured in popular paperbacks between 2007-2012. Early volumes regularly pointed to the emergence of the monster parent as a sign of more fundamental social ills. To provide but one example, in *The Collapse of Seriousness* (*majime no hōkai*) Assistant Professor of University of Tokyo Hospital Wada Hideki (2009) blamed the

[9] Adoption of electronic books has been slow in Japan due to push-back from publishers and the widespread availability of inexpensive paper copies.

interference of monster parents in the work of schooling for the diminishing academic abilities of Japanese children. Arguing that contemporary Japanese children were unable to become effective students (*seito ni narenai*) because the selfish complaints and demands leveled by parents interfered with the ability of teachers to assert discipline.

> 'Nowadays, it is not uncommon for parents to come to schools to complain (*monku wo ii ni iku koto*) when a child is scolded harshly by a teacher [for disrupting class]. It would be fine if it were just these kinds of complaints (*kurēmu*), but recently monster parents who make unreasonable demands (*murinandai*) on schools and teachers are increasing. It is terrible that these parents have not instilled sufficient discipline (*shitsuke*) in their own children, and yet, they make unbelievably unreasonable demands on schools and teachers. There is no doubt that the behavior of these non-serious (*fu-majime*) parents is driving the increase of children who cannot learn (*seito ni narenai kodomo*)' (Wada 2009; 103)

Others sought more nuanced positions capable of rendering the extreme actions of monster parents understandable, even if they remained unsympathetic. One salient example from this perspective comes from famed education critic Ogi Naoki, who served as one of the most active and visible *hyōronka* during the monster parent panic. Ogi is an outspoken, and highly visible, critic on a broad range of concerns related to child development and education. In his (2008) book *Don't say 'Stupid Parent'!* (*Baka oya wo iu na!*) Ogi pushed forcefully back on the term noting the potential for the term to inflict stigma and trivialize potentially legitimate parental concerns.

Infotainment Variety Programming:

In addition to penning books, *hyōronka* regularly appear as panelists and discussants on infotainment variety television programs to contribute their expertise on current events and social concerns. Infotainment variety programming regularly spans a broad continuum between

programs featuring a more journalistic approach to commentary on the one hand and others that approach commentary as a form of entertainment. In addition to experts, celebrity entertainers (*tarento, geinin*) regularly participate in panel discussions as a proxy for the general audience by asking obvious questions, cracking jokes and offering examples drawn from their own everyday experience.

Ogi Naoki himself made many guest appearances on infotainment variety programs to discuss the phenomenon of monster parents between 2007 and 2013. While his book took a clear stand against sensational stereotypes circulating at the time, Ogi's work more broadly clearly played to several audiences. During the mediatized life cycle of the monster parent, he appeared as a regular guest commentator on scores of news, talk and infotainment programming that discussed the phenomena of monster parents and provided detailed accounts of some of the worst excesses to be recorded.

To provide but one example, in Feburary 2011 Ogi appeared on two episodes of the talk variety program 'Honma dekka!?' to provide a lesson on the subject of monster parents. Hosted by comedian Akashia Sanma,[10] the program features a cast of regular hyōronka who provide information on research and commentary on topics under discussion. Sitting across from these experts are a group of guest entertainers who talk about their experience and provide the raw discursive material for discussion.

Underscoring the program's emphasis on entertainment, the program displayed a full screen disclaimer stating that the program should not be taken as authoritative source of information, so much as a source of enjoyment.

[10] [ホンマでっか!?：尾木ママでさえ驚いた！モンスターペアレント深刻度ランキング] ２０１１年２月１６日

この番組に登場する情報・見解はあくまでも一説であり、その真偽を確定するものではありません。「ホンマでっか!?」という姿勢でお楽しみ頂けると幸いです。	This information and opinions presented on this program represent only one perspective, and do not determine the truth or falsity of the content. We will be happy if the approach of 'Honma dekka!?' provides enjoyment [to viewers].

The February 2011 segment was titled, "Even Ogi Mama[11] is shocked! Ranking the degree of severity of monster parents." During these two appearances Ogi presented a series accounts of monster parents and classified them into five types which he ranked from least to most shocking. Other panelists commented on each of the accounts presented by Ogi, with female *tarento* in attendance often verifying the existence of the types described by Ogi and frequently responding that they had personally witnessed—in some cases even performed—such behavior.

Ogi's types presented 'real' examples to clarify the specific characteristics of each type. These example accounts laid out a host of semiotic forensics that might help to identify monster parents. Ogi labelled the first type the 'focus on my child type' (*wa ga ko chushin kei*), which he characterized as exhibiting an overbearing attachment towards their children. He exemplified with an example of parents who demanded to accompany their child on their middle school class trip. Ogi described the 'neglect type' (*negurekuto kei*) as abdicating responsibility for childcare and shifting the burden onto others. His example showed a mother telling her school aged son that he needed to stay home from school to care for his younger sister. The mother in the story

[11] Ogi regularly goes under the nickname, Ogi Mama. The nickname plays on his both his focal interest in child development and education as well as his small stature and soft demeanor.

was going out to play pachinko. Ogi's third type was the 'relying on the school type' (*gakkō izon kei*) which indicated parents who relied on the school in ways that were irresponsible. Ogi's example showed a mother calling her child's teacher late at night to request a wakeup call from the teacher for her child the following morning. The 'demanding rights type (*kenri shuchō kei*) seeks leverage through appeals to law and rights to make demands. Ogi exemplifies this type through an account where a teacher had confiscated a cell phone from a student during class and asked the mother to pick it up. When the mother arrived to claim the phone, she demanded that the teacher pay the portion of the bill that her child was without the phone. Finally, the most egregious type on Ogi's list was the 'no morals type' (*nō moraru kei*). This type lack the morals to restrain their selfish impulses and making requests wholly disconnected from educational concerns. Ogi exemplified the no morals type with a story of parents asking a teacher to lend them money. The request would normally be not only improper, it would also be deeply embarrassing.

Dramatic Renderings

The final mode of monster parent mediatization addressed in this chapter takes place through the packaging of fictionalized accounts of monster parents as dramatic entertainment. Accounts of monster parents featured in many television dramas, however, none more explicitly than Fuji Television's 2008 drama series, 'Monster Parent.' The story centered on Takamura Itsuki, a successful female lawyer of extraordinary talent. Reflecting the character's commitment to the path of a successful career women, she is impatient and generally dislikes children. On the cusp of being made a partner at her law firm, she is given one last assignment to overcome before the promotion is formalized. At the request of a former college acquaintance, the head of her law firm tasks Takamura with representing elementary schools confronting a rising tide of

parents making overbearing demands and threatening to sue the schools over the slightest complaint.

For the purposes of this chapter, the narrative arc of the story appears less important than the numerous characterizations of monster parents that feature within the drama. Of particular interest is the encounter in which the career woman heroine first encounters a monster parent while observing a meeting between the mother of a fifth-year elementary school student, the principal of the school and her teacher who hails from the Kansai region of Japan. The punchline of the scene focuses on a failure of an overbearing mother intent on her daughter's education in Japanese to recognize, let alone appreciate, prevalent comedic norms.

MP: 私は、娘の日本語教育には特に力をいれてきたんです。そのかいあって、四年生の時にはスピーチ大会で優勝もしたんです。	Monster Parent: I put special effort into my daughter's Japanese education. She even won the speech competition as a fourth-year student.
Education Rep: お嬢さんの優秀さは良く存じております。	Education Rep: We know of your daughter's victory very well.
MP: それが五年生になって関西弁の先生になったとたん、うちで「あほか」とか「あかん」とか言うようになってしまったんですよ。これは娘に対する洗脳です。	MP: Then she became a fifth-year student, and the moment her teacher became this Kansai dialect [speaking] teacher, at home she began to say things like 'Are you an idiot?' and 'your hopeless.' This is brainwashing my daughter.
Lawyer Protagonist: 洗脳？	Lawyer Protagonist: Brainwashing?

Daughter's Teacher: そんなつもりはありません。	Daughter's Teacher: I didn't mean to. [with hint of Kansai pronunciation]
MP: またなまっているじゃああありませんか。先生のせいで私の言葉まで汚染されてしまったじゃないですか。	MP: [to teacher] Again with your tainted speech? Isn't is your fault that my [daughter's] speech has become so polluted?
LP: 汚染？	LP: Polluted?
P: まぁ、お母さん落ち着いてください。	Principal: Ah, Ma'am. Please calm down.
MP: これが落ち着いてられますか？ 聞いて下さい校長先生。関西弁を真似するようになって娘は暴力をふるうようになったんです。	MP: How can I calm down? Please listen, Principal. My daughter is not just imitating Kansai Dialect, she has also become violent.
LP: 暴力？	LP: Violence?
MP: あの子、妹を叩くようになったんです。	MP: That child, she hit her younger sister.
P: 妹さんを！	P: Her younger sister!?
MP: あのお行儀の良かった娘があんな事をするなんて…「なんでやねん」って	MP: How could my well-behaved daughter do something like this?... 'nandeyanen' [slapping out to the side with the back of the hand]
DT: それ暴力やないですよ、あのそれは叩いたのではないと思います。関西では古来からツッコミという文化がございまして	DT: That is not violence. I don't think that is a hit. That's a tsukkomi, it is a part of Kansai culture.

MP: 文化ですか？人を叩く事が	MP: Culture? Hitting people is [culture]?
DT: 相手がボケたらツッコむ事がコミュニケーション、言わば愛情表現なんです。	DT: If your companion does a boke then a tsukkomi is communication, it's an expression of affection.
MP: 愛情表現？叩くのが？ 家庭内暴力の火種を愛情表現だとおっしゃるんですか？この学校は暴力を肯定なさるのですか？校長先生。	MP: An expression of affection? Hitting? You call the sparks of domestic violence an expression of affection? Principal, does this school support violence?
P: やっ、とっ、とんでもございません。	P: Ah, absolutely not!

This fictional monstrous mother exhibits a singular focus of educational achievement and refinement to the exclusion of all other values which resonate with the figures of the education mother and PTA. This class ascendant alignment is reinforced by the prodigious use of honorific speech deployed by the monster parent to evoke her outrage at the linguistic harm being inflicted on her daughter. This is further reinforced by the denigration of Kansai dialect as a pollution that threatens her daughter's acquisition of pure standard Japanese. However, the scene subverts the haughty power of such complaints by casting the monster parent as socially inept. The failure of the character to recognize these prevalent forms of comic play, let alone mistake them for violence, mark her as comically out of touch and retroactively trivialize her prior concerns about linguistic purity. Prevalent discursive accounts that cast the Kansai region as the sun source of comedic culture in Japan. The monster parent's misrecognition of her daughter's comic sensibility cross recast her complaints about Kansai dialect as a form of linguistic pollution as a

sign of her lack of understanding. The entire scene works to setup the monster parent as an object of laughter and ridicule.

Monster Parent as Moral Foil

For media producers, the value of the monster parent across all of these diverse media forms lies in the capacity of the figure to attract consumers. The specific attractions afforded by monster parents as *wadai* is one place where comparisons with the pop-cultural attractions that drive the media mix break down. Where the media-mix draws consumers through an engagement with fantasy, the attractions of monster parents are effective because they are presumed to be of this world. In this way, commodified figures of alterity (Manning and Hastings 2004), such as the monster parent, provide contrasts as moral foil against which affords parents the opportunity to performativity exhibit moral virtue through acts of repudiation.

Accordingly, manifestations of the monster parent appear most visibly as something presented to be laughed at and ridiculed. In this way, the figure of the monster parent does not circulate apart from the interests and interactional projects of parents themselves. Indeed, the figure is not simply imposed by ideologically motivated media producers. Rather, the mothers I grew to know in Yokohama often willingly took up the figure of the monster parent as a safe and familiar topic and deployed it to serve their own interactional projects.

My interlocutors made regular use of the affordances of the figure's alterity and gross excesses as a productive means to evoke one's motherly, or fatherly, virtue. In this way, figures of alterity such as the monster parent invite mothers to take up and deploy the figure themselves. Talking about the monstrousness of 'other' parents[12] can become a mode of bonding through a

[12] The tales of monster parents I witnessed never explicitly named perpetrators in the neighborhood. I never heard a parent explicitly call out another's actions as potentially monstrous.

mutual repudiation of the monster parents excess. However, like the formulations motherly virtue reviewed in previous chapters, such figures often capture those who would animate them double-binds that afford both fulfillment and constraint (Borovoy 2001, Inoue 2006, Miller 2004).

The Everyday Intrusions of Mediatized Figures of Alterity

This is to highlight the ways that the variable affordances of the monster parent can both help highlight one's parental value or call it into question. Here, I would like to focus on the ways in which fragments of the mediatized figure of the Monster parent overshadow and inform the semiotic calculus of everyday life in ways that push mothers to carefully manage encounters with teachers and neighborly acquaintances or risk potentially incurring stigma as 'monstrous.' Taken as a stigmatizing type, the figure of the monster parent can appear as its reverse image and become a figure that exerts control. That is, it can be seen as a semiotic resource for ascribing and situating responsibility for educational shortfalls on parents. While I never caught sight of a monster parent myself during my time in Yokohama, I have little doubt that monstrous acts take place, somewhere.[13] However, while in Yokohama I did catch sight of moments where these mediatized figures of alterity exerted pressure on mothers to regulate their interactions in ways that threatened to curtail their efforts to support and advocate for their children.

Yamada's Telling

One such occasion took place during a conversation with Yamada-san who had only moved to the neighborhood two years earlier. Her son and my son had been in the same first

[13] I recognize that this is exactly the form of logic that reifies the figure.

grade class at the neighborhood elementary school. On this particular occasion, we went to a nearby park to let the boys, now second graders, play together. As the boys played, Yamada and I sat and talked on a park bench. After about an hour, I turned the conversation to the question of monster parents and asked Yamada if she had any real-life experience with a monster parent. She replied that she did and began her telling by noting that her son had joined a local Boy Scout troop, in part, as a way to meet other children in the neighborhood. Her encounter with a monster parent took place during one of the many Boy Scout outings. Yamada said that the particular outing featured in her story was organized to let the scouts make cardboard forts and play in the outdoors. Yamada recalled that the mother of one boy asked that the activity be moved from the traditional dirt field to someplace paved so that her daughter's clothes would not get dirty. (The daughter was tagging along with the boys) Yamada, along with many of the other parents, expressed shock to the request (*'ha?'tte kanji*) To be sure, the request was turned down by the scout-leader, though Yamada made clear that it had put him in a difficult position.

ボーイスカウトでも外での活動がメインですよね、それを、あの汚れるから、ある日公園で、あの色々こう遊ぶゲームをしたりとかして遊ぶ日があったんですね砂ほこりが結構舞うところなんですよね。それで、あの汚れるからやめてほしいって言うクレームがある保護者からありまして。「はっ？」って感じだったんですよ。

Well, boy scout events are usually outdoor events. And they are dirty. One day they went to a park to play a bunch of games, it was day to play. There was a bunch of sand and dust flying everywhere. And so, there was a complaint by one of the parents who said, it was dirty, so she wanted to stop [cancel] the event. It was like, 'What?'

そういうのを望んで、いえたんじゃないのかなって。ちょっと本来の趣旨から離れているので、女の子のお子さんのお母さんなので子供たちの洋服が汚れるとか。そういうのを気にしたのか。そういうのをやめて欲しいっていうクレームがあったんですよね。だから私たちは「はっ？」って感じ

Isn't that what [you] wanted? That was a bit far off the original plan, the mother of a girl [accompanying her brother to the event] was worried about the children's' clothing. You're worried about that? There was this complaint asking to stop the event. So, we were like, 'What?' [I] thought the original plan was to get let the kids play and get dirty.

になったんですよ。泥んこになったって遊ばせるのが本来の趣旨でしょって思ったんですけど。

それはちょっとずれていると思うんですよ。むしろ、こういっぱい遊ばせるために、そこへ入れたわけであって、それを汚れないようにとかって無理ですよね。。。こういうところじゃなくて、コンクリートのところでできませんか？って言われたんですよ。そうだったらよごれないから。

I thought that was missing the point a little. Rather, the very reason we went there was to let them play [in the dirt]. It's impossible to say don't let them get dirty… 'Can't we do it some place with concrete instead of a place like this?' Was what [the complainer] said. 'Because then they won't get dirty.'

The monstrous character of the request is diagrammed in relation to the broader participation framework in which it takes place. Here, a single participant lodges a demand or complaint based on their individual preferences that requires some accommodation from the rest of the participants. Yamada noted that normally if you didn't want your child's clothes to get dirty you should just refrain from participating. After all, getting dirty was part of the point, wasn't it?

It is also important to note that Yamada and I interactionally aligned through our mutual disapproval towards the monstrously selfish request recounted in her telling. As discussed previously, this interactional affordance appears to be one of the principle ways in which parents are recruited to participate in the social circulation of the figure. Sharing these kinds of stories enables interlocutors to align with each other through a mutual repudiation of the clueless selfishness of the monster parents on discursive display. Moreover, our joint laughter and expressions of surprise served to index our own moral worth in comparison to the unthinkably ludicrous behavior of the parents ephemerally materialized by Yamada's account. This is one, perhaps the primary, way that the figure of the monster parent socially circulates within episodes of everyday motherly sociality.

Yamada next transitioned to another example by saying that within the school, another common monstrous sign was for parents to complain about the volume of homework. Both Yamada and I maintained our alignment to each other as proper parents by laughing at such a complaint. While children usually had an hour or so of homework every night, neither of us had felt that our respective children were overly taxed by the volume or complexity of the assignments.

Y：学校ではなんか、学校では宿題が多いっていうクレームがあったりとかも。	Yamada: Well, at school, at school there are often complaints like, ‘there is too much homework.’
B：ほんとに？全然だと思います.	Bill: Really? I don’t think so at all.
Y：そうですよね。一年生の時にそういうクレームがあったって言ってましたよ。	Y：That’s right. In first grade [people] said there was that kind of complaint.
Y：「えっ？」って思いますけどね。そうでもなかったですよね。だからそれはやっぱりその保護者の価値観があるので、	Y: I think ‘What?’ But it wasn’t [too much homework], was it. [There are] those [complaints] because, really those are the values of the parents.
Y：みんなやっぱり価値観違うんで、どこで、どこでそういう風に感じるか、ひとそれぞれですもんね。	Y: Actually, everyone’s values are different, where, where you feel it [that homework is too much], everyone perspective is different, right?

However, this time she offered a more understanding perspective on these complaints by noting that while such parental requests to reduce homework seemed unreasonable to her, different people had different standards for determining the appropriate volume of homework for their children. The implication being that such complaints might reflect ‘different’ values and should probably be seen in that light.

In response to this sign of moderation, I asked Yamada if the specific way one uttered (*iikata*) a complaint might play a role in whether one will be seen as monstrous. She responded strongly in the affirmative, saying that if you persistently and aggressively (*gāgā*) pursued a complaint, then you were very likely to be taken up as monstrous. However, monstrous uptakes were less likely if the interaction appeared to take the form of a discussion.

Y: 違いますよね。変わると思います、その言い方ひとつで、やっぱり一方的に「がぁがぁ」言っていくのがモンスターペアレンツなのかなって。相談っていう形にしらいいと思うんですよね。あの、こう思ったんですけどっていう形で。	Yamada: It is different, isn't it? I think it changes [depending on how you say it]. Depending on the way you say it, actually, if [you] unilaterally say 'ga ga' then it's like, 'Is [she] a monster parent?' I think it's good to make it like a discussion. Um, something like, 'This is what I think…'
クレームっていうのはやっぱり、結局、その言い方がきついですよね。	Complaints are really, in the end, the way you say them can be severe.
一方的で、相手の意見関係なく	Unilaterally, with no relation to your interlocutor's opinion…
言い過ぎるとモンスターペアレンツって言われちゃうんですよね。	Say too much and [unfortunately] you will be called a monster parent.

In looking back on the transcript, this moment served as a crucial pivot-point in the unfolding chain of conversational topics. Yamada's next contribution began to shift the topical focus from the potentially monstrous actions of parents to the potentially complaint-worthy actions of teachers, and specifically her son's first grade teacher, Tachibana sensei.

Yamada continued by noting that requests to reduce homework imposed on the work of teachers and such complaints must be a nuisance for them, but then went on to remark she knew that Tachibana-sensei often reacted very harshly to such complaints; even taking it out the children themselves. Yamada explained that Tachibana-sensei would sometimes respond by not

distributing homework to the children of such complaining parents and in class say to the child something like, “your mother says you have too much homework, so it’s fine if you don’t do it.” In this way, Yamada reported that Tachibana-sensei effectively picked out and disparaged children in front of the entire class in retaliation to critical comments leveled by their parents. This conversational turn with Yamada expanded the critical framing concerning tensions between teachers and parents through the suggestion that teachers could sometimes be source of trouble that should be called out.

それでそれで、その対応をどうしたかっていうと、T 先生はその子にだけ、なんか宿題を渡せなかったらしいですね。	And like that, that response, in some way, [I heard that] Tachibana sensei did things like not handing out homework to those children.
みんなの前で、何々君のお母さんは宿題が多いって言ったから、あんたやらなくていいからみたいな感じでいったらしい	In front of everyone [I heard that], she would be like, ‘So-and-so’s mother said that there’s a lot of homework, so it’s fine if [you] don’t do it.’
T 先生もまた凄いんですよね。	Tachibana sensei is scary, isn’t she?
きついんですよね。	It’s harsh, right?
一年生の担任にしてはちょっときついなーと思いますよ。	I think [it’s] a little harsh for a first-year teacher.

At this point in our conversation the topical focus further tightened around Tachibana sensei as Yamada explained that such harshness wasn’t limited to such reactions. Yamada said that Tachibana sensei’s demeanor appeared to differ greatly depending on the child. She explained that active and engaged children were treated well. However, slow, quiet and rowdy children regularly received harsh treatment from Tachibana sensei. When I responded that I had no idea that this had been the case, Yamada replied that Tachibana-sensei always seemed so kind

on parent visiting days—'a really good teacher,' but that she was quite severe when parents were absent. Yamada said that she had observed Tachbana-sensei's true, severe (*kitsui*) demeanor towards the children directly by visiting on 'regular' school days. She then confided that her own son had been singled out by Tachibana-sensei for harsh treatment because he was lax and passive (*nonbiri*). As a result, her son began to grumble about not wanting to go to school, and this was a sign that had greatly troubled Yamada.

自分の気に入っている子と気に入ってない子っていうのにすごい差をつけるみたいで、あの、はきはき、こう、なんだろう、発言力があって、あの、積極的な子に対しては、こう、ちゃんと接してくれるらしいですけど。ちょっとおとなしかったりとか、あの、ゆっくりな感じの子とか、後乱暴な子も、なんか、乱暴なタイプの子にも厳しく、いうみたいで。うちはのんびりしているところを厳しく言われて、余計こう固まちゃったですね。	It seems that there is a big difference between kids she likes and kids she doesn't, um, quick, well, what is it… she seems to properly treat kids who speak up and are active, but kids who are a little quiet, or, kids who seem slow, also rough kids, well, she also seems to treat the rowdy kids strictly. My [son] was harsh scolded the times he was lax, this excess froze him.
あの授業中とかに、こう、あの、見に行ったりしたことがあるんですけど、授業参観以外で。そうすると結構、子供に対してちょっときついんですよね。	In the middle of [a regular] class, um, well, I went to watch, outside of parent observation days. And doing that, she was quite severe to the children.
あの、授業参観のときは、凄い優しいですよね。あたしもその印象でいたんですけど、あの違う日に行くと、怖いです。うちは結構おびえちゃってて、	Um, during parent observation days she's super nice, right? I also had that impression, but, going on those other days, it was scary. I got quite scared [for my child/the children].
だからその、子どもによっては、あの、やっぱり学校に行きたくないっていう子も、毎回いるみたいで、	Well, because depending on the child, um, there are kids that don't want to go to school, it seems like it is every time [year]

今の一年生はもすでに何人かいるみたいですよ。うちも、その去年はそうでした。それでなんか教育相談とかも、したことあります。	Already, it seems like there are some amongst the current first year children. My son too, last year it was like that. Because of that we even did things like have a formal meeting with the school.
結構、ガミガミ言われると固まっちゃうんですよね。	If you often get yelled at then you freeze up.

Having said this much, Yamada may have recognized that her own telling could potentially be construed as monstrous in itself.

As with any shapeshifter, the signs that index parental monstrousness are manifold and unstable. The semiotic forensics that link tokens of behavior to the monstrous type can be evoked by the slightest of character fractions (Agha 2011). Conjuring the figure of the monster parent requires just enough semiotic material to afford the suggestion that tokens of behavior can be taken up as evidence of the monstrous type. These links are interdiscursively fashioned within tellings that retroactively ascribe formulations of selfish intent and communicative insensitivity as motivating parental requests and expressions of concern.

Parents are keenly aware that the subsequent characterizing talk is well beyond their control and that such talk will determine whether some token acts become interdiscursively crafted into potential signs of monstrousness. Yamada's next contributions pushed back on these a potential by working to show that these complaints were not hers alone, but part of a broader pattern of problems with Tachibana-sensei that also affected many others. Yamada reported that Tachibana-sensei had been at the center of problems like this in the past. She reported that another mother whose child had been in Tachibana-sensei's first grade class two years before

had told her that during her year, things had gotten so bad that several parents united together to confront Tachibana-sensei about her harsh treatment of their children.

Y：それでうちも何も知らないで入学したんでそういった事全然情報がなかったんで、それでおかしいなーって思うことが色々あったんですよ。それで他のお母さんに、もう、知らないお母さんに聞いたんですよ。そしたらなんか二年前もあったとかって言われて、一年生ときに二年前、今の四年生ですよね、今の四年生が、あの、やっぱり被害[inaudible]、あの、そういう目にあって、あの、保護者が団結して、なんかＴ先生といろいろこう揉めたときがあったっらしいです。	Yamada: So [my son] entered school and I didn't know anything, I didn't have any information, so there were a lot of things that made me think, 'this is strange.' So, another mother, I asked another mother that I didn't know at all. Then she told me that there were similar problems two year before, the first years two years ago, the current fourth years. The current fourth years, well, actually can we call it injury [inaudible] Well, [it seems that] they suffered this kind of thing, um, the parents united in a group, and fought with Tachibana sensei about many things.
B：そうですか？全然知らなかったです。	Bill: Really? I had no idea.
Y：そうですよね。一見そんなふうに見えないじゃないですか。あの、懇談会と、あの、授業参観で凄い印象いいですよね。結構裏あるんですよ。	Yamada: That's right. At first glance you can't see it, can you? Um, class meetings and, um, parent observation days, she leaves a really good impression, right? She really has two sides.

I again expressed shock, as I had been utterly clueless about these issues with Tachibana sensei. Yamada again explained that she understood my surprise. She also thought that Tachibana-sensei always seemed so kind on parent-visit days. However, Yamada continued, Tachibana-sensei is actually two-faced (*kekko ura omote arun desu*). To highlight the point, Yamada described an arduous parent-teacher meeting with Tachibana-sensei earlier in the year. Yamada summed up the meeting by saying that she took complaints from the teacher about her son for an hour and a half—inverting the regular flow for monstrousness. Yamada explained that, among the complaints she heard, Tachibana-sensei said that her son made it impossible to

get through class (*A-kun no sei de, jyugyo ga susumenai…*) and that the pictures he drew looked like they were made in pre-school.

個人面談でも凄い言われましたよ。あの、A のせいで授業が進まないと言われ。一時間半も、先生のクレームを受けました。	A lot was said in our individual parent teacher meeting too. [I] was told 'Because of [Yamada's son's name] we can't get through class. For an hour and a half, I listened to the teacher's complaints.
先生からクレームをそれでこのぐらい来て当たり前みたいな、絵もなんか、こう、幼稚園なみだとか、後、まぁ、色々言われましたね。一時間半も、言われましたもん。	It seemed like the teacher thought it was normal to complain like this. She said things like '[His] pictures look like a preschooler did them.' And after, a lot of things were said. For a whole hour and a half, I was told.
どうなんでしょうね。あたしも、あの、小学校の個人面談の印象ってもうちょっといいものだと思ってたんですよ。あたしは先生と協力して、その子どもの至らない点を改善して行ければいいなと思っていていったんですよ。あの、いってもらっていいんですけど。その言い方がそれこそも、クレーマーみたいな感じで、言われたんです。ガァーっていわれたんですよ。	How to think about this? I, um thought that elementary school parent teacher meetings were supposed to highlight the good things. I thought it would have been better if the teacher and I cooperated to help strengthen the weak points of my child. Um, it's fine to say [the problem areas]. But, that way of talking, it felt like complaining. [The teacher was] just letting it all out.

While there is much that can be discussed in relation to Yamada's telling. I describe this conversation primarily because it effectively captures the ways that the figure of the monster parent can lock mothers in a double bind that presents a difficult choice between voicing concerns to advocate on behalf of one's children and keeping one's concerns to oneself to avoid being seen as a monstrous intrusive obstruction into the important work of education.

While my discussion with Yamada opened by talking about monster parents in ways that enabled us to align through a mutual repudiation of monstrous excess, it ended up precipitating a potentially monstrous account from Yamada herself concerning Tachibana Sensei's harsh and

unfair classroom management. The figure of the monster parent looms especially large in the latter part of Yamada's telling and she appears caught between a desire to express her frustration and anger over Tachibana-sensei's treatment of her son, and an anxiety that her legitimate complaints might be taken up instead as signs of monstrousness.

Indeed, this silencing tension appears to be the primary semiotic affordance of the figure of the monster parent. To call into question and cast doubt on the legitimacy of parental concerns. Yamada explicitly articulated this double bind near the end of our conversation by explicitly noting that sometimes even when you do the right thing, you can be blamed as a monster parent.

だからある意味、こうモンスターペアレンツいるのも、学校に問題あるためにそういうふうにいう、あの、保護者が心配になって、言って、それは逆に学校からモンスターペアレンツと言われしまっている場合もあると思うんですよ。	So to some extent, there are problems at schools and these monster parents, um, I think there are also cases where parents get worried, speak up, and they are called monster parents by schools.
うるさい保護者だなって、学校からした迷惑なことで、でも、あの、正しいことこっちは言っていても、学校にそこを指摘されたくないから、モンスターペアレンツっということに。。。ほんとに、ほんとに悪いん。。。こう容赦ないこと言ってくるモンスターペアレンツも勿論いると思うんですけど、そうじゃない場合、前も言われているかなって思うんですけど。	From the schools, it looks like trouble, 'What annoying parents!', but, um, even when [parents] say the right [correct] things, they are held up as monster parents by schools. Really, really bad… I think there really are monster parents who come and say things relentlessly, but I think there are also cases were people get called [monster parents] when they aren't.
だから、その内容によるのかな、全部は全部こう「モンスターか？」なってちゃんとした、ちゃんとした保護者からの意見もモンスターペアレンツされている可能性もありますね。	So, it depends on the situation. Everything, everything can be like, 'Is this a monster?' Correctly, there is a possibility that even parents who offer their opinions correctly will be made into 'monster parents.'

結局内容によるっていうことですよね。ちゃんとした正論なのに、学校からしたら、こうは、またうるさいね、感じってしまったら、モンスターペアレンツと言われちゃうですよね。でもただしいこと言っている時もあるじゃないですか。	In the end, it depends on the situation. Even though you present a sound case, if the school goes like, 'Are [you] nagging again?', then you will be called a monster parent. But sometimes you're saying the right things.
言いたくないけど、言わずに負えないっていうこともありますよね。	You don't want to say anything, but sometimes you can't help but speak up.

In Yamada's telling, monstrousness looms as a constraint that pushes her towards restraint and silence. Yamada's account carefully notes the unequal (inter)discursive leverage afforded by the figure and the threat of stigma.

Hasegawa's Telling

Yamada was not alone in her concern about Tachibana-sensei or being seen as a monster parent. While talking about the challenges of telling ijime from ijiri over lunch, Hasesgawa-san also invoked the figure of the monster parent as she turned to speak about her son's hardships with Tachibana-sensei. However, in Hasegawa's account, monstrousness appears reconfigured as an agentive choice. Here, the decision to go monstrous appears as a potentially productive transformation in the defense of one's child. It is a move that might be embraced as the cost of speaking up, provided one is willing to endure the potential stigma.

H: 区別はねー。その時の空気ですよね。まず、私が思っているのは、顔・からだ・と名前。それは自分の親に教わった事なんですけど。なおせないじゃないですか、うーん。例えば、目が変、耳おかしいとか。直せない所はいじってはいけない。	Hasegawa: It depends on the situation. I think that, your face, body, name, those are things you get from your parents. You can't change those, right? For example, your eyes are weird, your ears are funny. You can't tease people about things they can't change.

H: 名前も、名前も変えられないじゃない。	H: Names too. You can't change your name.
H: あの子鼻おかしんだよ。鼻がちょっと曲がってたりとか、指が無かったりとかっていう子がいても、体の事は一切言ってはいけないっていうのを私は習ってきたから。	H: You shouldn't say things like 'That kid's nose is funny.' 'It bends a little to the side,' or '[He] is missing some fingers.' I was taught to not comment on people's bodies.

Hasegawa's response to my opening question sets about defining criteria for subjects that are off limits for teasing. Her focus on the problem of using things people cannot change as the content of teasing go beyond teasing to echo normative definitions of discrimination (*sabtsu*).

Hasegawa then makes an abrupt shift and provides an example that accuses Tachibana-sensei of doing just this kind of heinous teasing to her son. She reported that Tachibana-sensei had called him by an insulting nickname in class in front of the other children. Tachibana-sensei had constructed the nickname by adding a syllable to the front of her son's name which transformed it in a manner that called the boy's intelligence into question.[14] I did not catch the addition the first time Hasegawa-san said it. This prompted her to explain the situation more explicitly.

H: ただ T 先生に[son's name]が言われた時に、ビックリした。	H: I was shocked when my son was called that by Tachibana sensei.
H: T 先生に[son's name]が変なあだ名をつけられたんです。	H: My son was given a strange nickname by Tachibana-sensei.
B: I can't believe that.	B: [breaking into English] I can't believe that.
H: そう、もう私ビックリしちゃって。	H: That's right. I was so shocked.

[14] To maintain confidentiality, I refrain from reporting the specifics of the nickname.

B: しんじられない！	B: I can’t believe that.
H: でしょー、信じられないでしょう。	H: I know, it’s unbelievable, right?
H: 先生が、そんな事を言うっていうのが私はもう全く信じられなくて。教育者であるのに。	H: I truly can’t believe that a teacher could say something like that. She’s an educator after all.
ビックリして、だからもうそこでちょっともうモンスターペアレンツになろっかなって思ったくらい。	Shocking. At that time I thought I would go ‘monster parent.’
これは言わなきゃいけないと思って。で、本人が深く傷ついていたから。	I thought I should say something [to the teacher]. Because, my son had already been scarred.
だから、そう、そういう名前、体はまず言ってはいけないと思っています。	Because I believe you shouldn’t comment on people’s names, or bodies.

This draws out Hasesgawa’s admission that she almost turned into a monster-parent and confront Tachibana-sensei directly. This comment exhibits a reflexive awareness and direct engagement with the stigmatizing threat that overshadows instances of critical engagement with educators.

Similarly, Hasegawa’s account pushes back on the threat of a stigmatizing uptake. Her display of reflexive awareness—by naming the stigmatizing threat—itself pushes back on this possibility. Such a keen interactional awareness works to defy that category because a common constitutive aspect of being a monster parent is not knowing that you are being one. Additionally, the rest of her account takes care to foreground the egregious character of Tachibana-sensei’s transgression, which comes to resemble discrimination (*sabetsu*) in her account.

Conclusion

I have argued that the figure of the monster parent is a complex mediatized commodity that projects complex social entanglements for those who make use of its many affordances. Put simply, I suggest that diverse media producers were drawn to converge around the figure of the monster parent in large part due to its ability to draw consumers to media commodities—such as newspapers, infotainment programming, and so on—which materialized stories of their monstrous activity. The circulation of these forms of characters are authorized in part though the legitimating work of public intellectuals engaged in the putatively non-fiction work of 'social commentary.' The character fractions that facilitate the identification of monster parents circulate through several mediatized channels. The robust commodification of the monster parent as a marketable mediatized figure (Agha 2011a) follows from the efforts of a diverse array of media institutions seeking to push out media commodities that consumers will want to consume and discursively savor with others.[15]

The characterizations of monster parents alternatively as incessant complainers concerning small and inconsequential things and parents who seek special consideration for their own children at the cost of others offer more than simply a sensational tale. They afford a legible figure of alterity against which parents can collectively affirm their value and worth as parents. However, the figure cuts both ways as it reinforces expectations of parental compliance with an increasingly competitive educational order. An order that increasingly provokes anxieties as it no

[15] Here I wish to note the decline of the figure of the monster parent to highlight the spectral character of such figures. I returned to Yokohama for a few weeks in 2016 and visited several of the mothers that I had come to know over the course of my fieldwork. Hasegawa-san was the first tell me about the demise of the monster parent. After sitting down at a neighborhood coffee shop, she leaned across the table and brought me up to speed, "The monster parent has vanished (*kiemashita*). No one talks about them anymore." Like any other ghostly figure, the vitality of the monster parent depends wholly on the circulation of discourse. Once the tellings dissipated, supplanted by new *wadai*, monster parents similarly evaporated. Without the regular circulation of accounts and commentary to sustain them, the place of monster parents in the interdiscursive field waned until it was no longer generative enough to lend flesh to individual tellings.

longer appears capable of delivering on the promise of a safe and stable future for students. Under the shadow of the monster parents the voicing of concerns becomes a potentially risky act which intervenes in the efforts of some mothers to advocate on behalf of their children.

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