Sweep *chauqeta* (Z) Hands, as if holding a broom, make sweeping action.

Talk *ringa* (Is) Fingers and thumb open and close in front of the mouth.

Thin (She or he is thin) *O slindza* (Is) Arms are held straight down in front of the body with hands extended and palms facing each other and held close together.

Thought *Umbungu* (Z) First finger moves in and out against side of head.

Tie (Little tie) *Ntunjana* (Is) One hand makes grasping action as if holding a tie at the front of the neck.

Time *iskhathi* (Z) First finger or first and second finger tap top of wrist.

Tomorrow *kusasa* (Z) Hand, at head height, in front of the gesturer makes a small arc toward the front.

Toughie *Mathafane* or *Tougho* (Is) Hands, slightly curved and fingers splayed, are held over the chest.

Trouble (You're in trouble) *G'thing* (Is) Hands, fingers loosely splayed and palms toward gesturer, are held at chest level and moved up and down.

True (It's true) *Shutu* (Is) Arms are crossed over each other and first fingers linked at about face level.

Two *tse* First and second finger held up in V shape. Palm faces inward to gesturer.

Unity *hlangenani* (Z) Hands, with fingers splayed and palms toward gesturer, move toward each other so that fingers cross over and go out again.

Urinate *siquane* (Is) First finger is waved sideways in front of crotch.

Volume (Turn down or up the volume) *Hfuna* or *phamise* (S) Hand as if holding dial is turned counterclockwise or clockwise.

Vomit *gobu* (Z) First and second fingers move in and out toward mouth.

Waltz *ona* (S) Hand is held up at face height with palm away from gesturer and fingers splayed.

Walk or go *hamba* (Z) *tanda* (S) First and second fingers imitate walking action.

Wash [oneself] *splata* (Is) Hands imitate action of splashing water on face.

Wash [clothes] *tasha* (Z) Fists, one facing up and the other facing down, are rubbed together.

Wristwatch *tashi* (Z) Second finger and thumb grasp wrist.

Write or pen *skipja* or *pen* (Is) Hand, with first finger and thumb as if holding a pen, imitates action of writing.

Yes *ya* (Z) Head nods.

You see *uuna* (Z/S) First finger points outward.

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Those Naughty Teenage Girls: Japanese Kogals, Slang, and Media Assessments

This article examines Kogals, young Japanese women who challenge dominant models of gendered language and behavior through linguistic and cultural innovation. The article describes the linguistic resources Kogals use to construct female-centered subcultural identities and the condemnation and fetishistic interest they provoke in mainstream media. Media focus on these “misbehaving” girls places them at the center of an ongoing struggle over female self-definition and autonomy. The study of Kogals contributes to scholarly analysis of youth subcultures and to understanding of linguistic diversity and cultural heterogeneity in Japan. [adolescent subculture, gender, slang, representations, Japan]

Introduction

Among the many subcultural identities available to Japanese youth, perhaps none has become the focus of such mainstream anxiety and voyeuristic interest as the young women known as Kogals (kogaru). This article examines critiques and displays of the Kogal, with a particular focus on the way her gender-transgressing identity and language style challenge longstanding norms of adolescent femininity. In addition to providing evidence of Japanese heterogeneity and documenting the current struggle for female self-definition, I argue that Kogal subculture is significant as an unusual case of female-centered coolness at the forefront of cultural and linguistic trend setting.

A few years ago, a Japanese journalist decided to work against the model he characterized as “girls created by the old-guy press” by documenting, from her own perspective, the everyday life of a 17-year-old high-school student named Asuka. He asked Asuka to write down her activities and thoughts during a one-week period and subsequently published her unfiltered journal as the “diary of a kogaru” (Yoshidō 1998). Kogaru, which is not a term that belongs to those it describes, is usually rendered in English as Kogal. It is the mainstream media label used to describe young women between the ages of 14 and 22 who project new types of fashion, behavior, and language. Asuka writes about meeting friends in the hip Shibuya section of Tokyo, going to restaurants, spending time in karaoke boxes (private rooms for rent by the hour for karaoke singing), getting photos taken, and shopping. Asuka also expresses hatred of her teacher and school and worries about how to juggle two boyfriends, one of whom she accompanies to a “love hotel” for sex. The journalist’s effort to unpack the behavior and philosophy of the Kogal is one of many attempts by the media to make sense of Japan’s vibrant new female subcultures. In this article I approach the Kogal from two directions—as an identifiable subcultural group with distinctive

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heterogeneity. In Japan, the notion of a singular women's language was a longstanding ideological construct stemming from Meiji-era social and educational reforms (Endo 1997; Inoue 2002). The examination of adolescent girls' subcultural language and behavior contributes to an expanding investigation of diversity, a trend marked by two recent volumes on Japanese language and gender (Okamoto and Shimamoto-Smith 2004; Shimp and Smith 2003). The role of language in identity-making is also a primary area of interest for linguistic anthropologists, and yet the part played by language in East Asian subcultural identity-making has received little scholarly attention. Today, the Japanese media and adolescents whose marginalized voices are heard through a combination of behavior, attitude, and language therefore complements studies of Western youth and their linguistic practices (Eckert 1989; Mendoza-Denton 1996). Kogals also provide an opportunity to think about the gendered implications of the identities of ogal-produced microcultures. They offer an entry into the complex relationship to the great cultural and linguistic innovation usually attributed to male subcultures elsewhere.

Kogals are ushering into Japanese cultural history new ideas about femininity and gender, and their linguistic innovations seep into mainstream speech, contributing to general changes in the Japanese language. Kogals are a convincing example of how speakers might interrogate cultural forms and social relations through language. Their critique of gender conformity is expressed through language and other original and provocative cultural products, including fashion, comics, and new script styles. These endeavors provoke mainstream censure, and Kogals have been the objects of intense scrutiny and social commentary. This article tracks how cultural processes are at work in the representation and self-representation of these "misbehaving" teenagers.

Girl Typologies

The English word girl, transliterated as either gau or garu, is a vintage loanword in Japan. In addition to the prewar Moga, during the 1920s there were Kiss Girls and Boa Girls who exchanged Kisses for a modest fee (Nakayama 1995), as well as movie theater ushers called Cinema Girls (gineu gura) and female clerks known as Shop Girls (shopyu gura, Kitazawa 1925). As the 1950s drew to an end, independent and pleasure-seeking postwar young women were called Mambo Girls (mambo gura) (Time 1959:24). By 1956, as Jan Bardsley (2000) notes, there were types of Salary Girls (saruori gura), women who focused on their work lives instead of making plans for marriage. Salary Girls prefigured the postwar Business Girls (hitonesu gura), later renamed Office Ladies or OL (oru) in the 1980s when women's magazine editors realized there might be an unintended negative meaning for the earlier term. They discovered that Business Girl was used in American slang to refer to prostitutes and were concerned that foreigners and Japanese men involved in sex tourism might confuse an office worker with a sex worker. Other Girls of the era were the Body-Conscious Girls (tokidokon gura), young women who worked hard at creating sexy and fit bodies, and the flamboyant Stage Girls (ottachidai gura) who danced in nightclubs. By the 1950s there was the Three Negatives Girl (san nai gura), who did not work, did not get married, and did not bear children (hatarakasan, kokon shinai, kodomo o umararan). The Old Guy Girls (oajii gura) were young women who affected middle-aged male pastimes such as playing golf and going to pachinko parlors and race tracks. Akihiko Yonemura (1996:151–155) also lists the 1986 term Three-Beru Girl (san beru gura), derived from the word for three combined with the verbal ending beru, for girls who think only about eating, talking, and getting into trouble (taberu, shaberu, toneru), and the 1997 term Old Bag Girl (otokuro gura), which refers to a young woman who is totally dependent on her mother. A recent type is the Pajamas Girl (jimbei gura), a young woman who lazes around the house wearing old-fashioned old-men's-style pajamas.

The unrestricted and creative hybridity of Kogal language and fashion, in which diverse global elements are freely incorporated, is viewed as irreversibly toxic by some Japanese observers. Catherine Driscoll (2002:293) suggests that Kogal is derived from
English cool girl, with the "inflation of 'colored girl' as well," but this does not accord with Japanese phonology. If the source were cool girl, the form would be kūru gururi; if colored girl, it would be karajo gururi. It has also been suggested that Kogal is derived from the morpheme ko('small') (Jolivet 2001; Watrous 2000). I prefer another candidate etymology—that it was coined around 1990 by workers at discos and music clubs, who called the under-18 crowd kōkōsei gururi ('High School Girls'), a term that was later clipped to kogurui.

The label Kogal is most often elicited because of a girl's appearance and consumption patterns, which may overshadow her linguistic construction of a subcultural identity. The Kogal aesthetic (see Figure 1) is not straightforward, for it often combines elements of calculated cuteness and studied ugliness. The style began in the early 1990s when high-school girls developed a look made up of "loose socks" (knee-length socks worn hanging around the ankles), bleached hair, distinct makeup, and short school-uniform skirts. Kogal fashion emphasizes fakeness and kitsch through playful appropriation of the elegant and the awful. Kogal tacksiness is also egalitarian because girls from any economic background or with any natural endowment may acquire the look, which is not true of the conservative, cute style favored by girls who conform to normative femininity.

Kogal taken to an extravagant limit yields the ganguro ('blackface') style. The deeper saddle-brown tan of this style accentuates the use of thick, garish white lipstick and eye shadow. The ganguro presupposes that blackness is normative. A few examples are used to ('wow!') (tsukuri), ítai ('ouch!') (<-.<), hakusho ('applause') 'Y!', and kikonetsu ('I can't hear you') '<<(-.-)>>'.

Kogals are also credited with creating a unique text message code for their cell phones, now referred to as gururi moji ('Gal characters'). It is a basic substitution system, in which parts or combinations of characters, mathematical symbols, or Cyrillic letters are replaced in place of the Japanese syllabic characters; there are several in place of the Japanese katakana or hiragana syllables, the syllable ni, normally written as a in hiragana or に in katakana, is written as (נה), Le., in (ל), the following chart lists three expressions in standard script and in gururi moji versions:
One of the more noteworthy examples of Kogal consumption is the phenomenon of purikura booths, from puri ‘club’ and kuruma ‘car’.

According to the dominant ideological model, girls’ speech should reflect qualities of innocence, modesty, docility, and deference. Kogals’ disdain for these societal expectations of language use is manifested in the use of nonstandard forms, novel coinages, and explicit reference to sexual or taboo topics. Of course, young women do not materialize as prepackaged types, but select from a menu of possibilities from which they craft their own self-presentation. Age-based styles, cultures, and identities are achieved at the local level through language, interaction, and context (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992). Kogal is not just a fashion but a performance that encapsulates various forms of resistance, from language use and behavior to body display. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) note that linguistic resources are called on to construct styles in order to place individuals within their social worlds. In looking at the features usually associated with Kogal speech, I am not suggesting that there is a strict correlation of Kogal identity with bits of language. Categories such as Kogal do not simply reflect a priori social locations but are socially constructed through a combination of showy style and consciously selected language. The playwright Ai Nagai allows her Kogal character to explain her choice of language: “My identity is to use contemporary speech that I’ve finally attained after stripping things and making adjustments. These words signify my lifestyle. They express my humanity” (2000:116). Susan Gal has written that “Resistance to a dominant cultural order occurs in two ways: first, when devalued linguistic forms and practices…are practiced and treated as exotic, and second, when such forms are resuscitated and reconstituted as a self-definition” (1995:175). Japan’s Kogals are a good example of exactly these processes of resistance. They maintain their own language forms in the face of negative sanctions and openly endorse a denigrated philosophy that celebrates the self above any other social concern, rejecting the premium put on female self-sacrifice in mainstream Japanese culture. An interesting feature of Kogal speech is their practices of self-reference. In a manner similar to how the Riot Girl network in the United States appropriated punk style for confrontational feminist ends in the 1970s, adopting the denigrating label Girl and reinventing it with new power, Kogals usually refer to themselves and others in their subculture as gyaru (‘Girl’). In a graffiti photo, two Kogals with orange hair confront the camera with impudent poses; over the top of the photo is written gyaru desu! (‘We are Girls!’) in pink ink. Kogals also use gyaru as a prefix, suffix, and all-purpose descriptor that celebrates their positive energy. A few of these are gyaru-kō (‘Girl Kid’), used as a sort of endearing diminutive; the plural form gyaru-tachi, used in the sense of ‘Girl Buddies’; Nanai gyaru (Osaka Girl); and oné gyaru (‘Older Sister-Like Girl’), usually used for someone over 20 years old. There are increasingly large numbers of young women who decide to have children on their own, and those with new babies are termed gyaru mama (‘Girl Mom’). Others are gyaru yōin (‘Girl Friend’) and shōjiki gyaru (‘Authentic Girl’). A sangyaru is a Girl who likes Yankii-style men instead of kemon (‘cool dudes’), Yankii (‘Yankie’) being the derogatory term for belligerent female or male subcultural types who are said to emulate brash Americans. Gyaru
is also used as a modifier, as in gyaru-kei shoppu (‘Girl-style shop’), gyaru-fuku (‘Girl clothes’), and ohare gyaru na onna no ko (‘trendy Girl type of girl’). Gyaru also appears in other constructions, such as gyaru do-appu no tame ni (‘in order to increase the degree of Girliness’) and gyaru yatté (‘do the Girl thing’). These examples illustrate that Kogals have a sense of themselves as different from others. Some Kogals also use the term sakura (‘circle’) to describe a small group of Kogals who frequently interact with one another. There is no symmetric male counterpart to the Kogal. A boyfriend of the Kogal may have dyed hair, tanned skin, and trendy clothing, but the common label used for the Kogal partner is ikemen (‘cool dude’), which may also be applied to young men not part of the Kogal’s orbit. Although the term gyaru etoko (‘Girl Man’) originally meant a feminine man (Yonekawa 1996:73), I have sometimes heard it used to refer to the young men who hang out with and date Kogals.

Kogals and other young Japanese are accused of destroying their language or of having forgotten how to speak it (Sakurai 1985). Linguists, however, believe that it is not linguistic decay but new dialect formation that is under way. They believe that lexical, grammatical, and phonological changes are evidence of emergent shintōgen (‘new dialects’) and pidginlike sociolects generated among the younger generation (Inoue 1986a, 1986b; Mather 1997). Kogal speech, as one of these new dialects, is a style of speaking that overlaps with youth language in general, but is still marked as different with its own notable lexical forms.

**Enduring Youth Slang and New Kogalisms**

Although much of the Kogal lexis is tossed aside as quickly as last year’s Hello Kitty keychain, it also includes slang dating back several decades and used by most youth. The reliable dassai, along with its variations dassō and dasshā, has been in steady use since the 1970s with the meaning ‘uncloot’, ‘frumpy’, or ‘decidedly nerdy’ (Yonekawa 1996:1051). A word from 1979, wampatha (‘one pattern’), meaning ‘repetitive’ or ‘boring’, used to describe a drag ne (‘He’s a real drag’), is still around and surfaces in Kogal speech, but not in the clipped form wampa. Other popular words and expressions are mukatsuku (‘nauseating’ or ‘disagreeable’), used as a qualifier in many sentences and often suggesting an underlying note of disgust or discontentment, and yahui (‘stupid, no good’). Asuka’s diary published by the journalist Hiro Yoshida (1995) is overflowing with common youth slang as well as Kogal-specific words such as bakkure (‘play innocent’), uzzaitai (‘fussy, strict’), and katarai (‘wiped out’).

A characteristic feature of Kogal speech is the liberal use of emphatic prefixes and other intensifiers. One is maji, the clipped form of majime (‘serious’), to mean ‘really’, ‘honestly’, or ‘no shit’, in circulation since 1983. Another is the prefix meccha, used in constructions such as meccha kyo na (‘awesomely cute’). There is also the unavoidable chō, an emphatic prefix used since 1985 to mean ‘super’ or ‘ultra’, found in phrases like honō chō yahui (‘really ultra-idiotic’), chō maji de mukatsuku (‘really super nauseating’), and chō gyaru hisha ko (‘a girl really into the Girl thing’). When chō is combined with abbreviations, it becomes especially opaque to older Japanese. An example is the expression chō5W (‘super bad personality’), formed with the initial Roman letters for the words isekaku (‘personality’) and nani (‘bad’). The English loanword sīpā (‘super’) used as a prefix is also quite common, but the infectious chō remains the preeminent Kogal intensifier.

In addition to novel words, Kogals are known for widespread lexical truncation. Some forms are created by clipping the initial syllable, such as pion from kompanion (‘companion’) and riman from sarariiman (‘salaryman’). Place names for areas of Tokyo are often shortened: Bukuro for Ikebukuro (see Figure 2), and Bisha for Shibuya. There is also clipping of back syllables, as in lazai from hazakushii (‘embarrassing’), urai from uraai (‘noisy, fussy, picky’), musui from musukskii (‘difficult’), mendoi from mendokasai (‘pain in the ass’), and kimo from kimochi uraii (‘creepy, repellant, gross’), with the Kansai region variant kishōi.

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**Figure 2**

Compounding is thought to be one of the most productive word-formation processes in Japanese. An example of a new compound used by Kogals is shibukata, formed from the name Shibuya and the term for the public lottery, tabaku. The term emerged when a new outlet selling lottery tickets opened in 2001 at the east exit of Shibuya Station, and Kogals began buying tickets there with dreams of winning it big. Another new compound, kinuta ko (‘Kimutaku Kid’), is used to refer to young men who imitate the appearance of handsome celebrity Takuya Kimura, known by his nickname Kimutaku.

Kogals and others also create new words through affixation of the Japanese verbal class suffix -ru. Everyday nouns are changed into verbs by attaching -ru, found at the end of the dictionary form of many verbs. In these cases, the first two syllables of the
noun are used with the -ru suffix, eliminating the object marker or the locative particle ni. Examples given by Yonekawa (1996) are taku-ru (‘eat octopus fritters’), goto-ru (‘go to McDonald’s’), oka-ru (‘do karaoke singing’), rame-ru (‘eat ramen noodles’), and denri-ru (‘go to Denny’s’). Yuki Hayami (2000) also mentions kydoru, a clipped form of kyodai fushin (‘act suspiciously’).

Such a form is also used to refer to a particularly distinctive Kogal behavior that goes against the cultural model of women as cute and dainty, a sort of self-parody in which Kogal make ugly, screw-up faces for the camera. This behavior is called uni-ru, for kao ga uni no yu gocha gocha ni naru (‘make your face scrunch up like a sea urchin’). Yonekawa (1996:63) notes that there are precedents for the constructions of earlier girl’s lexicons and gives the example of enhi-ru (‘to envy’), found in Meiji-era (1868-1912) schoolgirl speech.2

A new derivation process in Japanese is to attach the suffix -d, transliterated from the English morpheme -er ‘doer of’, as in player or drinker, in order to create new words for types of people. For example, a common term used to describe a slacker who casually works at a low-level temporary or part-time job after graduation from high school or college is furutaii (‘freelancer’). New Kogal forms based on this process include gasai (‘gamer, player of video games’), messhi (‘one who has a messii [streaked] hair fashion’), kurashi (‘club-goer’), and chin (‘team member’ or ‘teammate’), the latter referring to boys who hang out on the street in areas such as Shibuya. Japanese, however, is not an obligatory category and sentences do not require an indication of whether nouns are plural. However, plural forms for some human nouns and pronouns may be created with the suffixes -tachi and -na. For example, gakusei, which may be understood as either ‘student’ or ‘students’ can be marked as plural with either suffix: gakusei-na or gakusei-tachi (‘the students’). Although analysts believe some new coinages for human nouns derive from the agentive suffix described above, there are cases that may also be derived from the -ta suffix.3 A few that above all are cases that may also be derived from the -ta suffix.4

Kogals have used are nurari (‘narcissists’); kiri (‘those who love Hello Kitty goods’); and semari (‘Seimai followers’), that is, fans of the historical figures known as yin-yang monk and eremite. Seimai recently popularized young women among Kogals after a crop of books, comics, and movies about him were released. Similarly, an agoraphobic condition of young Japanese, in which they shut themselves up in their rooms for weeks or years, is termed hitokomori (‘shut-in’). New type of affixation is to attach the English suffix -ing, rendered as -ingo, to the base form of a Japanese verb, creating a new hybrid verb. An early and rare instance of this was the 1960s verb kaminguru (‘to do running, to cheat’). In 1979 I occasionally heard the verb okarin, which is being fashionable today, from oshure (‘trendy, fashionable’). Yonekawa (1996:66) documents many of these new verbs used among young women. A few are komaringu (‘being troubled’), nemaringu (‘going to sleep’), bentoringu (‘eating a box lunch’), and ukinaringu (‘understanding’). In addition to making up their own vocabulary, Kogals and other young women are said to violate language structure itself. Shigekoko Okamoto and Shie Sato (Okamoto 1995; Okamoto and Sato 1992) describe the parent culture’s distaste for words composed of morphemes used putatively ‘masculine’ language forms and who also fail to use correct honorific speech. However, unlike the college-age women they studied, Kogals do not qualify their use of ‘strongly masculine’ forms by giggling or using hedges or approximates in order to indicate a lingering discomfort in breaking gendered language. Kogals are not attempting to be masculine; they are changing the definition of masculinity, a point Yoshiko Matsumoto (1996) has made about women’s changing speech in general.

An example of Kogals’ structural changes to Japanese is found in the avoidance of certain infixes. In prestige dialects, the potential form of a verb is sometimes coarse in the way they use putatively ‘masculine’ language forms and who also fail to use correct honorific speech. However, unlike the college-age women they studied, Kogals do not qualify their use of ‘strongly masculine’ forms by giggling or using hedges or approximates in order to indicate a lingering discomfort in breaking gendered language. Kogals are not attempting to be masculine; they are changing the definition of masculinity, a point Yoshiko Matsumoto (1996) has made about women’s changing speech in general.

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Models of “crossing” (Rampton 1995). Although Kogals similarly treat ethnicity as a performance, seen in their manipulation of “racy” markers such as hair, skin, and eye color.
or shape, they do not consider the English-based Japanese they use as something that belongs to another group of people. They and their parents grew up with Japan-made English. Leo Loveday writes that, with few exceptions, words of Japanese origin are generally considered to be "native" in Japan because of their long-established and sanctioned status in the language. This may have been true once, but in Kogal speech, English-derived words now follow native inflectional patterns and manifest a new level of linguistic integration. Due to the pressure of the external English-speaking influence, some Kogals' parents, especially older ones, are often unaware of the change and continue to use the older style of speech. This is an interesting phenomenon because it shows how language can change over time and how it can be influenced by external factors.

Kogals defy contemporary demands of adolescent femininity by speaking in raw, outspoken, and unexpected ways. They usurp male privilege by exercising the freedom to use language in any way they please. Their novel speech style and cultural production enable them to simultaneously express their own focal concerns while contesting compulsory femininity.

Asserting Selfhood

Kogal discourse reflects an ideology that runs counter to mainstream prescriptive norms of gendered talk. Instead of restraint, there is self-assertion; in place of modesty, there is self-confidence. Kogal is a relational category established through comparison with others. In this case, it is the well-bred, well-mannered daughters of the middle class who are the counterpart, since many Kogals are of working-class backgrounds. Kogals often attend less prestigious schools or are dropouts who work as slackers, convenience store clerks, tailors, barmaids, or low-paid office temps.

Kogals talk about karibiy de dru sora (‘doing an all-nighter at a club’), something middle-class girls find hard to pull off. Drinking with a group of Kogals in a bar, I asked them about their late hours. (Even though the legal drinking age in Japan is 20, clubs and bars do not check identification.) What did their parents say when they got home after 5:00 a.m.? One said she had left home and was living with an older brother who did not care another said her mother often was not home herself because she was working in the omo (misusobori or ‘water trade’, the euphemism for nigh-life that ranges from homey drinking establishments to seedy sexual-service venues). Others said their parents did not care as long as they were with friends and did not get involved in any naughtiness. There are some ‘weekend Kogals’, middle-class girls who aspire to the cool rebellious life of the Kogal, but they usually confine their emulation to fashion. Kogals occasionally travel from outside Tokyo or from the far suburbs, hang out on the streets and in the clubs for a few days at a time, a behavior that is known as puchi (‘petite runaway’). They are not actually runaways, however, and have every intention of returning home as soon as the fun stops.

Kogals’ hedonic energy surfaces in language that holds nothing back and freely expresses feelings and desires. This is especially apparent in the ways they openly talk about and critique sexuality. It is not only heterosexes that interests them; their conversations and writings are filled with descriptions and longings of all types. A favorite Kogal celebrity is Hiromi, a well-known Oosan nyu (new half), the transsexual and transgender and transsexual individuals. Hiromi tells all about her affairs and sexual history in regular interviews and feature articles in magazines, where Girl interviewers grill her for gory details.

Kogals have claimed taboo words such as manko (‘cunt’) as their own, using it in new forms such as mimi man, which combines the English me with man to mean ‘my (very own) pussy’. Mimi also shows up in mimi fuchi (‘my own fetish’), used to describe

special likes and obsessions, not necessarily just sexual ones. Kogals casually use the term tenen, which combines the word for hand (te), with man to mean ‘male masturbation’. The morpheme man in tenen could be from manko (‘pussy’), or it is derived from mansuri, another word for female masturbation which means ‘to rub one thousand times’.

In popular conduct literature, women are told that expressing their ideas too directly is bad etiquette. For instance, one manual suggests that bland generalities be produced in place of one’s actual opinions (Tanaka 1998). But Kogals like to read about one another’s opinions. Egg magazine carries monthly mail-in surveys asking opinion questions such as ‘What goes through your mind when you are getting oral sex?’ ‘What is your own obsession?’ and ‘Where have you had sex?’ (Among the last question included school, cars, shrines, temples, hospitals, parks, elevators, and public restrooms.) A question in the August 2000 issue was ‘When you are having sex with a guy who has a really small penis and he asks, “It isn’t small, is it?” what do you say?’ Respondents wrote or e-mailed their answers. One reader sent her print-clab photo with a note saying, ‘If it were me, I’d say “Yeah, it really is. I mean, that’s what the service here is all about.”’ Over ten percent of the poll’s respondents thought this was a good response.

In a similar fashion, Kogals openly denigrate older men whom they often find repellent. Some Kogals refuse to have their clothing washed with their father’s soiled clothes and will not sit on a subway seat recently vacated by a salaryman. In conversations and writing, men are often referred to as kichi jiji (‘cheap old sod’), kuro jiji (‘shitty old gozer’), maru-kari no dasai okoto (‘shabby pervert guy’), and chibe dele no kimochi warui jiji (‘short fat creepy old fart’). Chibe dele is a new Kogal term combining chibi (‘shrinking’) with dele (‘fatty’). Describing her teacher, our diary-keeper Asuka says:

And then there’s that Mr. Pain-in-the-Asse teacher at my school. Why is it that even though everyone has gum and stuff, like, he only gets angry at me for sex reason, I can, like, understand it if he accuses me once, but day after day he says the same thing. Seriously, what’s with that?! I feel like telling him, “Stop pestering me, you jerk!” Seriously, no shu, when it comes to my school, it’s pitiful. It’s the worst. [Yoshida 1997:40]

Although Kogals are not the only women who disparage the postwar salaryman image (Flett 1988), they seem much more open and vibrant in their expressions of disdain.

Similar to the Bedouin women studied by Lila Abu-Lughod, who participate in “sexually irreverent discourse” (1990:45), Kogals are also expert lampoonists of male behavior and sexual skill. While both Bedouin women and other Japanese women do this behind the scenes, Kogals reveal in open explicitness. In a magazine targeted at high school and college-age men, Kogals display their artistic contributions to the “penis art gallery” (Men’s Egg 2000). Kogals are photographed holding the amateur drawings they have made, showing penises decorated with hair, bows, eyes, and written sound effects. Each artist’s entry is accompanied by commentary, one of which reads, “If the balls are too big, the penis is too scrawny! I definitely hate that kind of penis!” (Tama deka sugeta shi, chiku hosoagi! Konna chinku zettai yado). Similarly, in the Kogals’ Egg magazine (2000b:38), readers are asked, “If you compared your boyfriend’s penis to something, what other thing would it be?” The answers Kogals contributed do not necessarily demonstrate a respectful attitude. Among the responses: “An overgrilled pink frankfurter” (Ozisugita pinku fururiko). “When the skin is pulled back, it’s exactly like a turtle” (Kawa muku toki kame ni sookuri). “A lileless caterpillar” (Shiri ni soto ni immamushi). “My boyfriend’s penis is definitely a zombie” (Kareshi no chinku wa zettai zombie da ne). “A ten-thousand yen bill. Recently, I have been either a ten-thousand yen bill or his penis” (Ichinen satsu. Chinku no ichimen satsu mo saikin mirenai kara). The Kogals’ Hello Kitty bags contain both condoms and chewing gum. The incongruence of their “innocent” age and their adult behavior and language simultaneously
Kogals in Mainstream Media

Media pundits are fascinated yet disturbed by the way Kogals talk, and exposures of their language have appeared in weekly magazines such as Josei Shukan and the national newspaper Mainichi Shimbun. Some commentators have placed Kogal speech in the same exotic category as other derogated dialects. For example, although it is not the case at all, some bold the theory that Kogal intonation is very much like that of some northeastern dialects (Kurata 1998:42). The term shirai, or ‘rising intonation’, is also used to describe their pitch pattern. The media’s metalinguistic objectification of Kogal speech reached a peak when newspapers, magazines, and television programs latched onto the term chôberba (‘ultra bad!’), formed with the intensifier prefix chô, English-derived beri (‘very’), and clipped from habde (‘bad’). Newscaster Jet-suya Chikushi, in puzzlement, once shared the term with his audience as a perfect specimen of kogaru-go (‘Kogal speech’). According to Yonekawa (1996:217), however, it is debatable if chôberba was ever a real Kogal word. Instead, it seems to have been born among college-age girls and then spread among youth in general. Although the Roppongi Kogals I spent time with never used it, I received numerous e-mails from friends in Japan asking if I knew the “Kogal word chôberba.” In an article first published in the New York Times, journalist Nicolas Kristoff asserts that Kogals’ speech is most characterized by its use of English “loanwords” and says that their language is a secret code by which they can bond and evade surveillance by hostile forces, like parents” (1997:3). Ignoring at least four decades of domestication and reworking of English (see Stanlaw 2004), he attributes the popularity of Kogal speech to a simple fascination with American popular culture. Japanese linguists and pundits including Yoshisato Suzuki (2002) also bemoan the use of too much borrowing. However, made-in-Japanese English has little to do with cultural imperialism because it is more likely to index the cool or the modern rather than the foreign.

Kogals are the focus of intense public concern, and media discourses reflect an ongoing obsession with locating and delegitimizing them. Of course, this sort of surveillance of women is longstanding. Today’s tensions about women’s roles and aspirations, expressed through satire or heated polemic over Kogals, are not really new at all but have antecedents in prewar and postwar media, in which women have been debated, stereotyped, fetishized, and caricatured. Common descriptions of Kogal are that they are impertinent, vulgar or indecent, egocentric, lacking manners, absurd or de void of common sense, garish, and without perseverance. They are said to have breath, self-assured, and loud voices that can slice through tofo. Men complain that they are doing abuse to the “heart” (dokoro) or spirit of language. Kogals can be found sitting on the street pavement and on the floors of trains, actions viewed as slovenly and dirty. The increase in this behavior has led to the coinage of a new term to describe the groups of squattting or sitting youth, jibetaran, a combination of jibeta (‘squat on the ground’) and English batters.

On the other hand, in some media depictions, Kogals are grudgingly applauded. One male commentator makes it clear that he does not find their style attractive but applauds that Kogals are nevertheless to be admired for creating their own category of identity (Murakami 2001:169-170). In an episode of the animation series “Super Gals Kotobuki Ran” (Chô Gyaruzu Kotobuki Ran), there are amusing scenes in which a pseudoteacher decodes Kogal words by writing them on a chalkboard and “translating” them. Viewers are taught Kogal terms such as iken (‘cool dudes’) and chômuha (‘really annoying’). The anime Kogals get into physical and verbal fights with rival gang Gals, bonk clueless boys on the head, and throw things at them. The main heroine, Kan, also offers up various “Gal rules,” such as “Gals never back down from a challenge”; “Gals need eight hours’ sleep for good skin, so they may sleep in class if necessary”; “Whatever Gals want, they must get it”; and “Gals never let go of their pride.” Kogals work at appearing brainless and insipid when talking to older men and foreign reporters, producing repetitive inanities and truncated answers to such pithy interview questions as “Until what age will you be a Girl?”, “How many times have you been to a love hotel?”, and “How much money is in your wallet?” (Klippenstein and Brown 2001). They are, however, capable of extended rants concerning older men and the state of their nation. This is what Asuka says:

“I wish they’d [old men] all die at once. Seriously, today’s corporations are truly no good. To live in such a world as this, where people are so corrupt. What on earth is the Prime Minister doing? Instead of worrying about what other nations are doing, he should be thinking about his own political situation. Seriously, if I were the Emperor, I’d fire all these bureaucrats. Fired!!! Really, I just don’t get it.” [Yoshidô 1998:48]

The media exhibits an odd mixture of anxiety and voyeuristic interest in Kogals. One reason for their appeal is that they are frequently associated with a practice known as enjo kôri (‘subsidized companionship’). It is the label used for young women who agree to meet strange men for dates, sometimes involving sex, in exchange for money or gifts. In the majority of cases, the pattern is that a group of Kogals go with a few dusty salarymen to a karaoke box for several hours and are paid for their time. They essentially replace the much more expensive bar hostess, who likewise puts up with fumbléd grapes and juvenile utterances but for a much higher price. What the media finds most irritating about the phenomenon is that the young women involved feel no shame or remorse at all. According to a 1996 police report on more than 5,000 girls involved in subsidized dating, 39 percent gave “monetary gain” and 34 percent offered “cupidity” as their motivations (Iwao 1997:45). The young women often express disdain, pity, or contempt for the men they see themselves as exploiting, rather than the other way around. Kogals like to have sex with boyfriends of their own age, but if they have sex as part of enjo kôri, they say that they “lay there like a fish” (nani ni nara, literally ‘become a tuma’).

The subsidized dating trend is supported by several related industries, including terkura (‘telephone clubs’). These clubs provide a space for men who have paid a fee to sit and wait for phone calls from girls who want to arrange dates. Because the call is at no charge, this is the most common way that enjo kôri operates. Beginning in 1992, programs and documentaries that “exposed” the so-called dark side of Girl culture became regular television fare. Some bore attention-getting titles such as “Is Your Daughter Okay?; Subsidized Dating in Japan.” Masato Harada’s (1997) commercial film Bounce Kogals focused on subsidized dating and featured sordid scenes of Kogals selling preworn underwear to specialty sex shops. Those days, many older male Japanese writers simply translate Kogal into English as “prostitute,” a practice mimicked by Western journalists such as Richard Havis (1998). Kogals often complain that men on the street walk up to them and offer money for sex, assuming that they have no agenda other than prostituting themselves. Kogals at times attempt to parody this assumption: “The theme of staged and conspicuous flashiness in Kogal culture makes a mimcricy of the media image of the makintosh high-school girl prostituting herself for money” (Kinsella 2002:216).

Male fascination with the Kogal has yielded numerous films, comics, animation, novels, and pornography that focus not only on her supposed carnality, but also on variations in her high school uniform, her most desired brand-name goods, or her favorite hangouts and pastimes. One writer conducted a Kogal survey and presented his findings with a map of their localities in the Tokyo area (Ozaki 1998). He also lists the Kogal “types” (such as surfer or gangster) one would most likely find at each spot, what kind of activity forms are common there (such as game centers, shops, and beer gardens), and the percentage who are thought to engage in forms of amateur prostitution. Although Kogals do indeed have preferred hangouts and like to identify other Kogals with reference to them, such as Bakuro no Tanaka-chan (‘Miss Tanaka..."
at kebukuro), there really is no such clear demarcation of Kogal life in Tokyo. One wonders if Ozaki’s “guide” was intended to explain Kogal life or to provide a road map for heated salarymen.

Part of the construction over Kogals is that they are assumed to be preparatory Office Ladies and salaryman cohorts who are being corrupted by the Kogal lifestyle and mentality (Kuronuma 1996). Moral panics about transgressive women in prior decades were partly based on the assumption that it was “pure” middle-class women who were involved. For example, Karen Kelisky (1994) describes the intense media attention devoted to affluent young women who seek erotic adventures in foreign lands, branded “Yellow Cabs” because they are “as easy to ride as a bicycle.” The idea that Kogals participating in enjo kaisetsu are “normal girls” from “ordinary homes” (Iwanaga 1977:45) stems partly from the fact that Japanese orient to a model of society in which everyone is thought to be middle-class (Kelly 1986). Although Kogals are not generally destined for lives filled with Parent-Teacher Association meetings and women’s volunteer organizations, they nevertheless share in the same cultural ideals for female modesty and virtue. Because there is no strong working-class consciousness, Kogals are judged by the same criteria as middle-class “good” girls.

Similar to the derogatory labeling seen in the case of Yellow Cabs, a method to discredit and deny the power of Girl culture is by calling ganguro types with very dark tans and white-rimmed eyes yambusa (“mountain ogre”), a figure from Japanese folklore who lives deep in the mountains and is often described as having sparkling or flashing eyes. I suspect that the label as applied to Kogals is in reference to the way yambusa was depicted in Noh plays, where she is very tall with disheveled hair and big round eyes. The use of such negative labels and descriptors is meant to tarnish the cool allure of the Kogal. Speaking of the media treatment of a different Japanese subcultural youth group, but just as apt in this case, William Kelly says “social en- gagement through prescriptive response has been a major preoccupation of postwar institutions” (1991:566). However, ganguro girls have cynically adopted the term yambusa and use it to refer to themselves, often in the cheeky form yambusa. The popularity of the Kogal as enacting a female-centered and gender-breaching culture is significant for its being overlooked or misinterpreted by the mainstream media and by the parent culture. English-language journalists and writers in particular fail to see Kogals as exhibiting a distinctly Japanese-Girl-centered aesthetic or sensibility. In New Yorker magazine, Rebecca Mead (2002) interprets their style as being more than a failed American or faux Western imitation consumption pattern; Pico Iyer claims their stylistic anarchy is “hardly more subversive than the miniskirts that were popular in the Tokyo in the 70s” (2000:60). This attitude is also seen in descriptions of other Japanese youth subcultures, Spice Girls and B-Boys, as well as the inappropriate treatment of Kogals, one U.S. scholar simply dismissed them, saying “misguided Yellow Negroses are foolish, childish consumers” (Wood 1997:63).

Popular media representations of Kogals began around 1992, but the pivotal moment of definition was in 1993 with the airing of Asahi’s television special Za kogara nai (The Kogal Night). It is difficult to separate Kogals from their media representations, since multiple processes contribute to their identity construction. Kogals are agents in the creation of their own subculture as well as it is formed in response to the media that is meant to distinguish them from the mainstream even as they depend on the media for desired notoriety. Blinds have freaked peaked in the early 1980s, but they remain one of many contemporary youth subcultures. Blinds and Kogals and many other kinds of subcultural identity as simple occupying a transitional and delinquent life stage they seem to place with maturity. Much of a rhetoric about shocked stigmatizes the is class that will eventually blow over once they “grow up.” Labels such as Kogal, which has come to denote greedy, will-less, shop-aholic or “scared” girls who are going to be “recaptured” it through education (Blair 1959:34). When famous Kogals do abandon the fashion associated with the subculture, the media celebates this as proof that the trend is only a transitional adolescent stage. For example, when well-known Egg magazine model Buri resist a more conservative look when she turned 20, giving up the ganguro’s extreme tan and eye makeup, the weekly scandal magazine Shukan Bunshun published an interview with her about the transformation (Connel 2001). Buri prize that she changed her style mainly because she was fed up with the negative responses she got from strangers on the street, such as being called a cockroach or folk she was disgusting. That Buri is still active in underground and even produced an adult video, however, suggests that she has not in fact deflected into the ranks of aspiring Office Ladies or工资-be salaryman women. The revealing term datsa guara (’give up being a Girl’ or ‘Girl culture drop out’) indicates that being a Kogal is a lifestyle and an identity and is not simply fashion.

Most Japanese and foreign critics reject the suggestion that Kogals are seriously challenging prescribed ways of enacting gender. They claim that Kogal is only a fashion trend of nonsensical, self-centered youth. Gordon Mathews and Bruce White (2004) note that gender conflict in Japan can be seen as a problem of either history or lifestyle. If it is only a lifestyle issue, the tension between young and old is similar to that in all societies and will not result in any real social change. If it is a matter of history, young people are indeed different from their parents in ways that will produce a changed Japan in the future. The lifestyle approach to generational friction has dominated the field of Japanese studies, and scholars often point to the fact that 1960s student radicals eventually became proper salarymen and salaryman wives. Yet even as generations of middle-class Japanese move into approved age-based categories, they carry new ways of thinking with them (Miller 1998b). Kogals may give up their extreme subcultural identities, but when they enter their adult years they still have identities, giving only for the sake of their husband’s and children, as women in Japan have always been taught to do. I believe that Kogals will continue to have a strong sense of self, as Kogals say, iba jibun (‘Viva the self!’).

Conclusion

As a response to a stagnated male-centered society, Kogal have been effective in making ripples on the surface representation of Japanese homogeneity and consensuality. As an example of resistant socialization, I believe that Kogal language and behavior undermine patriarchal models of propriety used to evaluate and control women. This is not to say that Kogals subscribe to radical or feminist politics, to which they seem rather indifferent. Yet, to borrow from Abu-Lughod (1990:47), not having any feminist or political agenda nevertheless does not strip Kogal transgressions of value. As members of Japanese society they are enmeshed in the same cultural gender system and its code of sexualized femininity as other women, and regardless of their nature, their rebellions point to a struggle over self-identity and sexual autonomy; resistance “is never in a position of extremity in relation to power” (Foucault 1978:95-96). Yet as Kogals use language, fashion, and behavior to set themselves apart from the parent culture, they increasingly entangle themselves in a culture of escalating consumerism and materialism. Their particular forms of resistance tie them to beauty work that requires increased consumption (Miller 2000).

This article has presented an unusual example of the centrality of young women in the Japanese youth culture trend setting, highlighting assumptions about the particular nature of subcultural coolness. Describing Euro-American male-dominated youth subcultures, Michael Brake (1980:141) notes that “no distinct models of femininity, which have broken from tradition, have evolved.” Even Lauren Leblanc’s (1990) recent study of punk girls’ gender resistance places its occurrence firmly within a male
subcultural context. According to linguists such as J. K. Chambers (1995:102), cross-culturally women rarely use stigmatized and nonstandard forms. In contrast, Japanese Kogal art forms, styles, and linguistic creations all arise from a female-centered milieu. The material presented here offers a needed counterpoint to Western gelasa fixation and popular linguistic science as found in textbooks in which Japanese women are usually depicted as well-behaved custodians of honorific and indirect speech.

One reason for Kogals’ cultural power is that they present a sort of “symbolic inversion” (Babcock 1978), behavior that inverts cultural models or presents an alternative to them. Perhaps more than young men, Kogals have great flexibility in generating risky behavior and in manipulating images that will contrast with the one cultural category celebrated by salarymen. Their force in part derives from their negation of what they have publicly come to symbolize during the postwar decades of economic influence; the uncontrolled category of the “typical” Japanese person. A collapse of faith in Japan’s male-centered economy and government during the 1990s deflected cultural interest onto women and young people. Although rejection of the salaryman also characterizes young men’s styles (Miller 2003b), envy and anger over the economic and cultural power of youth in contemporary Japan is most often channeled into censure of the Kogal and other young women.

Abu-Lughod (1990:46) reminds us that male privilege often operates through codes of sexual propriety and an ideology of natural female modesty and restraint. Male and female language use often serve as a cover for other obsessions, particularly moral and social. As a result, women’s supposed sensitivity and propriety are interpreted by those who view them as pandering to sexual desires. Women are supposed to be more sensitive to the effects of language and more susceptible to its use as a tool of manipulation. This is particularly true of Kogal, who are seen as being more susceptible to manipulation than other groups. This is because they are seen as being more passive and less able to defend their interests. They are also seen as being more likely to be influenced by the media and other external pressures.

Abu-Lughod, Lila

Asahi Shimbun

Babcock, Barbara, ed.

Barley, Simon

Brake, Michael

Cameron, Deborah

Chambers, J. K.

Chow, Cheryl

Connell, Ronal

Czarnecki, Melanie

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1. A related but older term is Yanmase, for young mothers considered part of the Yankee (‘yankee’) subculture.

2. Long (1996) provides an example from gay slang, rihau (‘manipulate someone to get gifts from them’).

3. In 1995, a term arose to describe young women who emulated the distinctive appearance of techno-dance artist Amuro Namie; they were dubbed amurai. Initially I identified this as deriving from the -ru suffix to mean ‘Amuro-ese’, but now I think that it is an plural suffix, so that the form means ‘Amuros’ (Miller 2000:201 n. 7).

4. Kogals are just one of many types of disobedient women who have become the focus of media attention (Miller 1996a).


6. The term magura (‘branch’) is also used as a nickname for a female porn star, as well as to mean ‘a lousy lay’.

7. Artists in the Edo period (1600–1888) loved to use the yamabu as a motif but represented her as a younger, sexy widow with black hair and pale skin.
Driscoll, Catherine  

Eckert, Penelope  

Eckert, Penelope, and Sally McConnell-Ginet  


Egg Magazine  


Endo, Ori  

Foucault, Michel  

Fujii, Mihona  

Gal, Susan  

Giddens, Anthony  

Harada, Masato, dir.  

Havis, Richard J.  

Hayama, Yukiko  

Hebdige, Dick  

Hill, June  

Horie, Kaoru, and Debra J. Occhi  

Horiuchi, Katsuaki  

Ide, Seiko  

Inoue, Fumito  


Inoue, Miyako  

Ishino, Hiroshi  

Iwasaki, Koichi  

Iwao, Sumiko  

Iyer, Pico  

Jolivet, Muriel  

Katouka, Kunio  


Kelsky, Karen  

Kelly, William  


Kinsella, Sharon  

Kizawa, Shūichi  

Klippenstein, Kate, and Everett Brown  

Kristoff, Nicolas  

Kurata, Masumi  

Kunuma, Katashi  

Leblanc, Lauraine  

Long, Daniel  

Lovejoy, Leo J.  

Maher, John  

Mathews, Gordon, and Bruce White  

Matsumoto, Yoshiko  