

Arguing for the girls of enjo kosai



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Although the United States is a western culture filled with various ideas of sexuality and intimacy, opinions on morality, and twisted forms of law and justice, its citizens have often presented expressions of horror and disdain toward the sexual practices of youth in Japan. Stereotypically, foreigners often imagine the teenage girls of Japan in skimpy schoolgirl outfits with extreme make-up and hairstyles, selling their frilly panties for souvenirs. Is this biased view of young Japanese womanhood even remotely accurate? Many would respond to this question with an unfortunate sigh, nodding their heads. But one must question the intentions behind these acts-- the driving forces of these girls. According to an article in the Journal of Japanese Studies, it seems that many girls do not sell themselves for the sex or intimacy, but rather cold, hard cash. One of the many practices in which these young women take part is known as enjo kosai, roughly translated to mean " dating assistance." This business is very similar to an escort service, and while it is often viewed as a means of childhood prostitution, rarely involves any form of sexual contact. The clients, usually middle class men in their forties or fifties, pay the girls to go on a sort of ' date,' with them in exchange for expensive designer goods or large sums of cash meant for their purchase. In the film Platonic Sex, the main character begins working as one of these women, earning herself handfuls of money, usually just by flirting with the customers. It is very important to understand, while attempting to make sense of the girls' intentions that the practice of Enjo Kosai began to quickly emerge postwar in an attempt to hold onto economic prosperity. The practice seems to be closely bound to a consumerist subculture centered on designer labels and expensive price tags. Financial independence for these girls, usually from middle class families themselves, means a world of new

<https://assignbuster.com/arguing-for-the-girls-of-enjo-kosai/>

opportunity. They are not selling themselves to men for survival or out of need, but rather out of want to be in a state of high society and to secure their place in a fast-paced world. Still, even after examining and pondering this idea, many foreigners would still question the legality, morality, and history behind Enjo Kosai. Couldn't this hurt the girls emotionally? How in the world is this legal? Why are the Japanese men so severely attracted to the image of these underage girls? Japanese society itself is very different from that of the west. A culture once known for their strict views on union and arranged marriages, Japan's views on sexuality can now be expressed on the streets through the selling of gang-rape manga and porn vending machines. The attraction of Enjo Kosai seems to largely be built of the "schoolgirl" fantasy of Japanese men. In their culture, men blame this desire on the idea of 'tamaranai,' a sense of uncontrollable attraction towards the school uniforms of young girls. The girls of Japan, looking to earn money, know this principle and can often be seen wearing sexed-up versions of this attire with their clichéd pleated mini-skirts, gleaming white knee socks, ribbons and 'cute' grinning expressions. A book on the subject by author Millie Creighton continues to delve into the questionable reason Japanese men find this look so attractive. While in western culture, such sexual attraction to the look of young girls would be viewed with scorn and remarks about pedophilia, Japanese men strictly brush off any notion of their ideas being wrong. They yet again turn toward another social theory, this one known as 'roricon.' Roricon is the basic belief in a Lolita complex; the schoolgirls image translates into a real-life fantasy for these men, something of a pornographic dream. Also known as Lolicon when used in manga (comics,) or any other pornographic material, this Lolita complex is a huge selling point for young,

<https://assignbuster.com/arguing-for-the-girls-of-enjo-kosai/>

(and usually underage,) girls. For some reason unknown, (and severely disliked in our culture,) 'young' and 'cute' are terms connected to 'sexual' in Japan. How is this possible? The International Journal of Law and Psychiatry states: "There is a "Child Welfare Law" in Japan which prohibits child prostitution. However, there are no specific child pornography laws either. The images of minors doing sexual acts is not illegal. (Uchiyama)." This principle of attraction to young girls does, in some ways, explain the appeal of Enjo Kosai to men. But what really makes the girls want to do this? As stated above, the girls of these services know that men find this look, and their age, sexually arousing. They use all of this information to their advantage in an attempt to earn money. Some may argue that their actions are produced solely as a means for buying into the consumerist culture. This point, while not completely, may explain the very reason that Enjo Kosai is such a financial success. The whole process is about consumerism.

Throughout cultural images of schoolgirls, the idea of the roricon and lolicon, and that uncontrollable attraction of men, the girls become a commodity in themselves. They are something to be purchased by men, and they embrace that chance for monetary gain by sexing up (and young-ing down,) their appearances. Basically, the men view the girls as a product and the girls let themselves be viewed that way to make money. The girls will often then use their profit to splurge and treat themselves in the seemingly consumer paradise that is Japan. The money is exchanged for the pleasure of being covered in names like Chanel, Versace, and Gucci. While the idea is slightly complicated, it's also exciting to think about. The girls are seen as something to be purchased, allow themselves to earn money, and then send it back into society. Sexual fetish feeds off the need for consumerism and the whole

cycle starts again. Others, promoting these practices argue that the girls do not only gain superficial, material possessions, but instead, a greater sense of self-esteem and self-awareness. The girls can feel confidence in their appearances and value in society, while actually learning about life in the process. In this respect, Enjo Kosai can be seen as a 'rite of passage,' or 'coming of age.' The girls are learning to support themselves at a young age while learning, what one internet 'blogger' refers to as "the rules of the game" (Strong). This practice could even be viewed as a real, hands-on kind of sexual education not possibly be taught in schools, and while it does seem to be an almost crude idea, young girls learn to separate their sexuality from their self-being, a skill that has unfortunately become a worthy trait for women seeking to gain power in society. Moral reasons and opinions aside, the question of legality still seems to resonate on this issue of an underage "dating service." The truth is, under Japanese law, this practice is completely legal. How can this be true? The answer is fairly simple- age of consent. Currently, in Japan, the point at which a girl can willingly say "yes" to any sexual practice is at the remarkably young age of thirteen. (Interpol). This shows Japan's leniency towards underage sexuality. Because of this twist in the law, pornographic magazines and materials are allowed to show girls young as 15, fully decked-out in their schoolgirl attire, flashing signs promising nudity once they have turned 18. [This, yet again, is another sign of how the roricon/lolicon culture controls a portion of the minds of some Japanese men. These young sailor-suited girls are everywhere!] In the United States and other western nations, the very idea of middle-aged men purchasing time with girls under legal age would clearly be viewed as outright pedophilia. Many Westerners argue that Enjo Kosai is nothing more

<https://assignbuster.com/arguing-for-the-girls-of-enjo-kosai/>

than a " gross form of teenage prostitution." (Japan Today). The Japanese men retort that this just not something meant for Westerners to understand. That being said, not every Japanese citizen completely supports the process. Many Japanese mothers were sent into a frenzy after one study reported that 5% of all high school girls took place in Enjo Kosai. Even more were sent into an uproar when another reported that the statistic was more of something like 13%. (Ho). When the same survey revealed that 75 % of schoolgirls admitted to being approached by older men for such acts, the government officials began to notice the raised red flags. They began to delve into studies, all with the goal of trying to understand their teenagers' behaviors, boasting all the while that despite this " crazy girl" image scarring the face of their society, their nation procured the lowest recorded teenage pregnancy rate in the world. (United Nations Population Division). In conclusion, the practice of Enjo Kosai in Japanese society can prove to be beneficial to teenage girls through the process of boosting their self-esteem while teaching them principles of consumerism and life skills that may further their positions in the workplace. If anyone was to blame for the rise of this process in Japan, they should look, not towards the girls themselves, who are simply taking advantage of the opportunity, but toward the hordes of middle-aged men looking for a piece of underage time. Better yet, maybe someone should tackle the source of the attraction-- the media, endlessly portraying the schoolgirl as a sex symbol and a walking fantasy. Works Cited:

Creighton, Millie. " Permitted and Prohibited Desires: Mothers, Comics, and Censorship in Japan". *Journal of Japanese Studies* (1998): 458-62. Diamond, Milton; Uchiyama, Ayako " Pornography, Rape and Sex Crimes in Japan". *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* (1990): 1-22. Ho, Josephine. "

<https://assignbuster.com/arguing-for-the-girls-of-enjo-kosai/>

From Spice Girls to Enjo-Kosai: Formations of Teenage Girls' Sexualities". National Central University, Chungli, Taiwan. 2005. Interpol. US criticizes Japan for teenage prostitution. " Legislation on Sexual Based Offences..." Interpol. 21 Sep. 2007 . Strong, Edward. " Japan: Sex, Teenage Girls and Consumerism." . 2006. 21 Sep. 2007 . United Nations Population Division, World Population Prospects: The 1994 Revision, 1994. unknown author " US criticizes Japan for teenage prostitution." Japan Today (). 21 Sep. 2007 .