

Aspirational Labour, Performativity and Masculinities in the Making

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Introduction

1. Throughout the postwar period in Japan, normative (and national) ideals of masculinity have linked full-time labour productivity and masculinities, with men expected to be primary breadwinners and the pillar of the household (*daikokubashira*). This expectation is intimately interlinked to the post-World War II introduction of the 'living wage' and employment benefits for permanent employees, such as tax relief benefits for dependents, health care, and subsidised mortgages. Such benefits helped transform gender roles and relations after the war and were consolidated throughout the postwar economic expansion by companies and the Japanese nation state in the form of taxation and welfare systems that continue to privilege heterosexual marriage and the male breadwinner model.^[1] Crucially, however, companies were able to provide such benefits to a core of (male) permanent workers because they could draw on a flexible irregular labour market that was populated primarily by women.
2. Since the decline of the Japanese economy in the 1990s, and the periodic economic recessions that have followed, employment practices and ideals of workers have diversified as companies have attempted to remain afloat and globally competitive: Core workforces have shrunk,^[2] flexible irregular workers that can be hired and fired at need are increasingly employed, companies have moved factories offshore to cheaper places,^[3] and since the late 1980s women have increasingly been hired for permanent full-time positions in line with the Equal Employment Opportunity Law.^[4] Japan's irregular labour market has considerably expanded in the past twenty years, and although most of these workers continue to be women, male irregular worker numbers have risen from 2.4 per cent in 1982 to 21.8 per cent in 2014.^[5] In line with such shifts neoliberal capitalist discourses that urge individuals to be independent, self-aware, and self-responsible workers are increasingly prevalent, but also share space with older ideas that companies should look after their core workers as if they were family, in return for loyalty and (hopefully) permanent employment. These ideas are also present and drawn on in the construction of masculine subjectivities.
3. With an increasing number of men working in the irregular labour market without recourse to the kinds of employment protection that full-time workers receive, the ability to perform normative gendered ideals of labour and productivity is structurally limited.^[6] Such an expansion of the male irregular employment market consequently has repercussions for the lived experience (and understandings) of gender in daily life. Some authors in Japan have argued that irregular workers consequently represent a 'failed' masculinity.^[7] However, many of the men I worked with understood and lived their masculinities in the labour sphere not predominantly through the trope of failure, but through aspiration.^[8] With full-time permanent labour continuing to be tightly interlinked with normative ideals of masculinity, some men in the irregular labour market drew instead on neoliberal discourses of selfhood and labour, particularly on what I have dubbed 'aspirational labour,' as a means of making sense of their employment situation (to themselves and others).^[9] In this context, aspirational labour is understood as future-oriented work—the work these men wanted to be doing. Such labour aspirations are not necessarily entrepreneurial or creative, but are about finding work that had meaning to them and which fitted their values and interests.

By striving to achieve their labour aspirations they were, in the process, creating aspirational masculinities.

4. This does not mean, however, that they understood their masculinities only through the lens of aspiration, or that they were blind to their problematic structural position in the labour (and marriage) market. Indeed, many men balanced norms and ideals of masculinity that exist within the normative discourse of Japanese masculinities relating to characteristics of responsibility, loyalty, psychological 'strength' (*seishinteki ni tsuyoi*), and (future) family caregiving, with neoliberal ideas of selfhood that prioritise individual aspirations and self-making. Different ideas of manhood were drawn on in different spheres: aspirational masculinities and individualisation in the labour market, and older normative ideas of gender and gender roles in the domain of marriage and family creation. These different ideas often began to be experienced as contradictory as men reached their late twenties if they wanted to marry in the future, making this age a time of reconsideration about the labour sphere, and what they felt they should do, as men.^[10] In this article I explore how the pursuit of aspirational labour produces aspirational masculinities. However, these masculine subjectivities are not fixed and, for many of the men I worked with, were foregrounded for a limited period of time. Aspirational understandings of manhood begin to shift and change if men begin to think of marriage and family creation. In such cases men merge their aspirational understandings of masculinities—to a greater or lesser extent—with normative ideas of manhood, ultimately producing masculinities that speak to hegemonic norms and reinforce the link between labour productivity and masculinities.^[11] This does not, however, result in a fixed sense of masculinity that is unchangeable over time. I argue that this process is performative, and ideas and experiences of masculinities change and are negotiated over time and with significant others.

Aspirational labour and neoliberal subjectivities

5. Processes of neoliberal individualisation are at the heart of aspirational labour and the performativity of aspirational masculine subjectivities. Neoliberalism has been defined by David Harvey as 'a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade.'^[12] Aihwa Ong describes this as an ethic that has transformed relationships between those governing and those governed, where governance is no longer so much political as technical.^[13] As Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff put it: 'Neoliberalism is a mobile, calculated technology for governing subjects who are constituted as self-managing, autonomous and enterprising.'^[14] The irregular workers I worked with—known as *freeters*: a word that combines the English word 'free' with the German word 'arbeiter' (worker)—are located at the heart of neoliberal economic and employment changes that have been reshaping Japan's economic environment since the 1980s. Defined broadly as individuals between the ages of 15 and 34 who are neither students or (if female) married, the category of 'freeter' is itself an embodiment of neoliberal ideas.^[15]
6. In the late 1980s, the chief editor of a job magazine called *From A* created the category using imagery of the self-disciplined, autonomous subject making work-lives (and biographies) of meaning by tapping into notions of individualism, aspiration, entrepreneurialism, freedom, choice and self-determination to pursue work flexibly and according to individual goals and personality. Of course, such rhetoric conveniently obscures the precarity of such positions, offering what Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim have termed 'precarious freedoms.'^[16] Yet, as they have illustrated, individualisation is not something an individual chooses freely, but is a social condition which individuals have no choice but to do in order to adapt to new social conditions and realities of changing economic and employment markets and changing welfare structures.^[17] Individualisation also plays an important role in neoliberal governance, which operates to acknowledge and use individuals' 'capacity to act' for state objectives.^[18] Neoliberal policies 'individualise experiences of marginalisation'^[19] and obscure class and structural privilege, consequently creating particular kinds of neoliberal subjectivities. Practices of governance thus do not

operate outside of us, but instead get 'inside us' and through this they work to produce particular kinds of subjectivities.[\[20\]](#)

Methodology

7. This paper draws on ethnographic data gathered in Sapporo since 2013. However, the arguments are also based on material gathered between 2007 and 2013 with 56 male freeters in Hamamatsu city and in Tokyo. In 2006 and 2007 I conducted 13 months of fieldwork in Hamamatsu at a large cinema chain and at a non-profit organisation (NPO) working to help young people into employment. Since that initial fieldwork I have returned to Hamamatsu three times to conduct follow-ups: in the summer of 2009, during a Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) postdoctoral fellowship in 2010 and 2011, and in the summer of 2013. During 2010 and 2011 I also conducted interviews in the Tokyo area. Since moving to Sapporo in 2013 I have interviewed a further 11 men. This paper features three recent case studies collected among men working in the restaurant and café service industry in Sapporo.[\[21\]](#) To preserve anonymity all names are pseudonyms and some small details, such as job description and aspirations, have been changed.

Hegemonic ideals and performativity

8. One of the main ways to understand masculinities in different cultural contexts since the late 1990s has been to use the theory of hegemonic masculinity. R.W. Connell argued that hegemonic masculinity, whilst unattainable by most, is the masculinity that is culturally elevated, linked to social institutions (such as state and industry) and which operates normatively through persuasion. It is culturally striven for rather than forced.[\[22\]](#) In the Japanese context the figure of the 'salaryman,' a white-collar permanent employee, has come to stand for hegemonic masculinity throughout the postwar period.[\[23\]](#) 'He' is a complex representation of the ability to sustain a family as a primary breadwinner—the major tenet that lies at the heart of normative ideals of masculinity in Japan—as well as a beacon of perceived stability.[\[24\]](#) Focusing on the salaryman figure as the hegemonic masculinity, however, only takes us so far. Differentiating salaryman (hegemonic) masculinities from 'other' masculinities may work at the level of ideology and discourse, but it is a dichotomy that is problematic when we turn to lived experiences and individual understandings of masculinities, not least because of the diversity of lived experiences and understandings within the category of 'salarymen' by salarymen themselves.[\[25\]](#)
9. It has become so commonplace to think of the salaryman as hegemonic masculinity that we run the risk of creating a bounded typology of masculinity that oversimplifies and obscures lived experiences—both of people in salaried employment and people who do not work in such a way.[\[26\]](#) Whilst hegemonic masculinity is argued to be the 'culturally exalted' masculinity that men may strive for, my research suggests considerable ambivalence about the salaryman figure and the masculinity he represents, and about gendered norms and expectations. Indeed, masculinities vary according to time, place, age, feeling, peers, partners and families. This is as true for 'salarymen' as it is for irregular workers. At the same time, however, there are certain ideas, ideals, expectations and norms that are consistently drawn on in discussions—and lived experiences—of masculinities in Japan. I suggest therefore that by understanding our interlocutors engagement with gendered norms and expectations through defaulting to the theoretical frame of hegemonic masculinity we are perhaps unnecessarily limiting the questions and possibilities of research,[\[27\]](#) as well as restricting our analyses of men's experiences and understandings of manhood. In this article, I am interested in exploring why and how ideals and norms of masculinity are drawn on in experiences of masculinities in the Japanese context and how these produce certain kinds of masculine subjectivities.[\[28\]](#) Ideals and norms act as cultural tropes of what it means to be a 'man' and are negotiated in and through lived experiences of masculinities, but they are also performative.

10. I consequently draw on Judith Butler's ideas of gender performativity[29] to explore the ways that men frame and experience their masculinities differently in different spheres of their lives, looking specifically at labour and romance: two spheres that are intricately interrelated in the production, construction and lived experience of masculinities. Butler argues that:

Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts ... This formulation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of gender as a constituted social temporality.[30]

11. Men's understandings and experiences of masculinities change as they age, as their circumstances change, and through negotiation with others' expectations and understandings. The performative 'repetition of acts' and the 'social temporality' of gender can be seen when looking at how men negotiate and draw on both normative ideals of masculinities and neoliberal notions of the active individualised self in different spheres of their lives as they age. This is not, however, a choice per se. As Butler argues:

Gender practices [are] sites of critical agency ... If gender is not an artifice to be taken on or taken off at will and, hence, not an effect of choice, how are we to understand the constitutive and compelling status of gender norms without falling into the trap of cultural determinism? How precisely are we to understand the ritualized repetition by which such norms produce and stabilize ... the effects of gender?[31]

12. Following Butler's assertion that 'performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate "act," but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names.'[32] I argue that the discourse of neoliberal subjectivity that men in irregular labour draw on produces a particular kind of aspirational neoliberal subject—the self-responsible, self-made man seeking aspirations that transcend their current labour, but remain rooted in ideas of masculine productivity.[33] However, this production of aspirational masculine subjectivity is not a final definitive act, nor a permanent one. When men begin to draw on other discourses of gender that relate to and are rooted in normative ideals of familial breadwinning masculinity, their senses, experiences and understandings of their masculinities shifts, as do their lived experiences.

Individualised labour and aspirational masculinities

I never thought I would want to open a restaurant. I came to Hokkaido to learn art: I like to make things, pottery mostly. I really never imagined I would want to open a restaurant. I don't know when it happened really ... Timing, it's all about timing!

Interview with Hiroaki, Sapporo, May 2015

13. Hiroaki, a stylish, communicative and quietly confident 28-year-old had never envisaged himself working in a white-collar office job. At 18 he had moved to Hokkaido, the northernmost island of Japan, to study art at university. During the course of his studies he worked part-time in the service sector, and after graduating university had decided to do an extra year of study at a vocational college that specialised in training people to be chefs, sommeliers and baristas. It was whilst studying there that he decided to open a restaurant with his brother back in his hometown. When we met in January 2014 he had been working as a chef for three years and despite being offered a permanent contract had opted to remain part time:

I work almost everyday, usually six days a week and a minimum of nine hours a day.[34] I'm working part-time, not as a permanent employee, because I want to open my own restaurant and go independent (*dokuritsu shitai*). So this is really good experience for me. The owner knows my plans and I talk about it with him a lot, asking for advice about opening my own place. My brother will specialise in sweets/confectionary (*okashi*), so he is working part-time in a patisserie now. A few months ago he went to Italy for a month to study. Our plan is that I'm going to deal with the mains, and he'll be in charge of the sweets.[35]

14. Hiroaki and his brother had a clear business plan and they had managed to secure their parents'

support. In August 2015 he confided that the time had come: he and his brother had secured a small plot of land in their hometown and acquired a loan. He was leaving Hokkaido to return home to oversee the building works and to open the restaurant in spring 2016. I asked why he wanted to 'go independent' and he replied:

I think it's important to know yourself, to know what fits you. I never wanted to be an office worker. I like to create things, to be independent, to learn, experiment. Going independent is really scary (*hontō ni kowai*). I signed for the loan last week and it made it real. My father agreed to be the guarantor so my parents are involved, and they are supporting our plans. It's a lot of responsibility. I really feel it now. But, I think we can make something good. We have a good location. I want to make something ... make my own path. Before, it was my goal, but now it is happening! [36]

15. Hiroaki's self-determination, independence, continual growth and taking responsibility for making the kind of living that he feels suits his personality and interests is rooted in neoliberal ideals of selfhood and subjectivity. He (and his brother) want to be self-made independent proprietors—particular kinds of men. He rejects the subjectivity he imagines office work engenders, feeling that it would not suit who he feels he is. [37] Instead, he spent time and resources actively working towards his goals. All of his actions at work, the friendly networking he did among local restaurateurs, and his stylish self-presentation were geared towards making a success of his aspirations. This influenced, and was influenced by, what he thought of masculinity:

For me, well, it's about looking after people. I think masculinity is about supporting family. But at my age, I think it's about working hard doing what you think is right or working to achieve something. Now, I think I am being selfish, I am thinking only about myself, but I'm making something, something for the future. In the future I hope I will support a family, and partly that will happen through my work. I think it's important to do work that fits your personality. For me, that is about making things, being creative. So now I am focusing on that goal. I am learning as much as I can about running a restaurant from the people around me, from my experiences at work, from visiting lots of places in the city and making networks. [38]

16. Hiroaki's understandings of masculinity indicate that he feels that the ways men should be men varies according to age. In the future, masculinity is about supporting others, but now it is about making his aspirations a reality *for* the future. As such he feels that the pursuit of aspirational labour itself is incompatible with romantic relationships:

I am single at the moment and I plan to stay single for a while. I think it would be too hard to date when I was opening the shop. I need to focus all my attention on making it successful and I don't think a relationship would go well. [*Why, I ask*]. Well, I think if I was dating someone they would support me, but, how do I say, there are expectations. Like, men should pay on dates, and should look after women. Not all women think that, but I guess I want to focus on myself right now, on what I'm trying to achieve. The last couple of years I've been saving as much as I can, and I know I'm leaving [Hokkaido] so I prefer to be friends now. Also, if I was dating someone she would have ideas about how I should set up the restaurant, or she would worry about what might happen if it didn't go well, and I guess I just want to be selfish at the moment and enjoy what I'm doing. I want to focus. I have to focus now. [39]

17. Hiroaki provides an example of a man in his twenties in the midst of pursuing his aspirations. Focused primarily on achieving his objectives he produces a masculine subjectivity that is aspirational and single. He understands his labour aspirations and the pursuit of these goals to be incompatible with a romantic relationship. Whilst he may receive some support from a partner, he felt that this was outweighed by the potential distraction and pressure that being a boyfriend would entail. Gendered expectations of men in relationships were often understood by my interviewees to be incompatible with the pursuit of aspirational labour, [40] and therefore Hiroaki made a conscious choice to remain free, single and able to put all his energies into focusing on achieving his goals. Of course, not all men felt the same as Hiroaki, and indeed I met some who were dating whilst pursuing their aspirations, but in general men who were focused on their aspirations considered romance to be incompatible. [41] Typically, among men who wanted to marry in the future, aspirational masculinities and aspirational labour were the product of their twenties. Aspirational labour functions as a medium through which particular kinds of aspirational masculinities are produced. However, when men stop pursuing such aspirations alternative masculine

subjectivities are foregrounded. The following two cases explore two possibilities that men dealt with: the changing—or failure of—aspirational labour, and changing masculine demands related to family formation.

From aspirational labour to limbo

18. Eiji was a quiet 32-year-old. We met in March 2014 in Sapporo when he had just been hired to work in a specialist coffee shop. His route to part-time barista was the result of his pursuit of aspirational labour. He had started his working life as a full-time permanent employee for an agricultural machinery company. He worked there for four years before quitting to set up his own small café in Sapporo. Ultimately this closed three years later, and he subsequently shifted from being self-employed to a part-time barista, where he initially struggled to make sense of his age and where he had ended up:

After I graduated from university I took the usual route. I did job hunting (*shūshoku katsudō*) and found work in an agricultural company. The working conditions were good, it was quite relaxed and the people were good. I worked there for four years before I quit. I left to follow my own interests, I wanted to cook and I was interested in coffee. After studying for a year I opened my own small cafe specialising in home-style dishes (*katei ryōri*). I closed it last year though. I don't really know why it failed, perhaps I had a bad location, but it didn't go that well. Afterwards the manager of the coffee shop where I bought the coffee beans I served at my own place invited me to work for him. He said that maybe next year [2015] I'll get the chance to be a permanent employee, though he also said that it will depend on the situation and others' opinions. [42]

19. He was self-conscious about being the oldest worker at the coffee shop, stating self-deprecatingly: 'It's hard to imagine that I'm so new right, with this old face?! ... But it would be better to be permanent than part-time.' Eiji's ideas of aspirational labour and doing labour that fit his sense of self changed as a result of his experiences of achieving the aspirational labour of his twenties and ultimately being unable to sustain it:

When I was working full-time at the agricultural company I really wanted to do something that I enjoyed. The people were nice, it was fine, but I just felt that I wanted to do something that I loved doing. I still think it's good to do what you like, but I realised when I was running my café and cooking all day—which is really what I love doing—that sometimes having to do it every day, even if I did not feel like it, turned what I loved into 'work.' So, it's good to do what you love, but I realised that sometimes doing it as your work changes it. Now I look back and realise that I loved doing it, even when I was doing it. But I'm not doing it every day now, so maybe that's why I think that now! [43]

20. Achieving his aspirations to do what he loved was not everything he thought it would be. Cooking—his passion—became work, something he had to do no matter what he felt like. It became pressurised and linked to his survival as a self-employed café owner and chef. Yet it also became a key element of his sense of masculine selfhood as a self-employed independent proprietor who was struggling to make his dream of a successful café a reality. [44] With the closing of the shop, his sense of independent entrepreneurship disappeared. In 2014 he felt a strong sense of unease about his social positionality:

I'm thirty-two and am single. I spent a lot of time and energy setting up my café. I worked hard and occasionally dated, but mostly I just worked hard. All my energy went on it. It was hard, and I really worked hard to make it successful. Unfortunately, it didn't go so well. I mean, I had to close it ... And now, I'm thirty-two and working part-time, and single. That's, erm, not so good. [45]

21. Whilst Eiji was working to make his aspirations a reality he had no time or energy for serious romance. Indeed, like Hiroaki, this was not something that he thought was compatible with achieving his aspirations. He had envisaged making a success of himself and then turning his attentions to family creation, and he was worried about what it meant for him now that he's in his thirties, single, and working part-time. [46] For Eiji and Hiroaki, working towards aspirational labour was individualised and individualistic—a time to be selfish and self-determining. Their goals were prioritised and they sought to achieve them without the entanglements of romantic engagements or expectations. They drew on

neoliberal entrepreneurial discourses to make sense of their actions and in the process developed aspirational masculinities that were linked to achieving their goals. Yet, their ideas that romance were incompatible with their aspirations reveals a deep engagement with older ideas of men's roles within romance or family creation—that of stable male breadwinners able to look after the family and home. They sought to become successful first to be able to become the kinds of family men they thought they ought to (or needed to) be. Not all men, however, attempt to go it alone, as the next case illustrates.

Family responsibilities and aspirational masculinities

22. Masaru was married and a father of two by the age of twenty-five. He had moved from eastern Hokkaido to the city of Sapporo when he was eighteen to attend a vocational college. Although the oldest son of a farming family he had no desire to take over the farm, mostly, he confided, because of allergies. Not only was he allergic to the animals they had, but he also had severe hay fever and found it more comfortable living in the city. Although it remains possible for him to go back he was determined not to, feeling that it is not a life that fits him, nor the kind of job he wants to do. Unlike the other men I have worked with in Sapporo, Masaru was married whilst striving to achieve the labour aspiration of his early twenties—working full-time as an accomplished barista in a speciality coffee shop.^[47] His marriage was not planned, but happened at age 21 when his wife became unexpectedly pregnant.^[48] He initially continued to work part-time gaining knowledge and skills, and at the age of twenty-two was given a full-time permanent contract. Although finances were tight, Masaru was happy when we met in 2013. He had achieved his goal to work as a barista and he was employed at a well-known coffee shop. Masaru was enjoying the work, and he was able to provide stability for his family, though his wife also supplemented their income by working part-time. He thought it would be better if he could provide all the family income so his wife could stay at home while his son was small—a normative tenet of hegemonic masculinity—but he accepted that that was not their reality. With his family responsibilities he had also put his current aspiration of opening his own café on the backburner, but he continued to reference it as a possibility for the future. Masaru appeared to have reached a balance where he could fulfil his family responsibilities whilst doing a job that was meaningful to him. However, the balance shifted in 2015 when his wife became pregnant with their second child:

I've decided that I'm leaving the café. It's been a really hard decision but I need to earn more. I don't want to leave. I love my job and talking to customers, dealing with speciality coffees, running coffee seminars etc., but my wife will stop working next month and then have the child, and then she won't work for a few months. Through a friend I've found work at a good restaurant where the hourly pay is quite high, and hopefully after a few months they will offer me a permanent position.^[49]

23. Three months after he left the café to work at the restaurant he returned part-time to the café for weekend shifts. The manager needed an extra person to cover the busy afternoons on the weekends, so Masaru did the shifts before going out to his main job at the restaurant. As the months wore on he began to look exhausted from doing long hours six-days a week. After a year at the restaurant he continued to work for an hourly wage and to work at the café on the weekends. In February 2016 he was looking particularly worn down when we met after he had just recovered from a bout of the flu. Although Masaru had previously found a permanent position that he loved and that satisfied him, it did not pay him enough to support his growing family. Consequently he left to pursue labour that paid more (so long as he did not get sick), in order to be able to support his family. The birth of a second child meant that finances became more important than personal labour satisfaction or aspiration because an extra child in the house tipped the precarious balance of their finances. Initially optimistic that he could gain alternative benefits from shifting jobs, such as more time with his children, he now appears consumed by financial pressure. Rather than spending more time with his children he sees less of them, and actively tries to avoid them when they are sick in order not to get sick himself and jeopardise the family finances. The aspirational masculinity of his early twenties has given way to financial pressure, precarity and the demands of being the primary breadwinner providing for a family. Whilst he remains hopeful that he can

pursue future aspirations down the line he has no time, energy, or financial space in which to pursue them now, and therefore presently embodies a family-man subjectivity that prioritises the male breadwinner and family man aspects of masculinities. This was not, however, a choice, but one of necessity and circumstances. Changes in his masculine subjectivity were neither self-directed nor conscious per se but circumstantial and reactionary.

Conclusions: The limits of aspirational labour masculinities

24. In arguing that many of the men I worked with are constructing aspirational masculinities through aspirational labour I suggest that they are drawing on particular neoliberal subjectivities that are individualistic and individualised. By this I mean that men in irregular labour who focus on their aspirations draw on discourses that stress self-determined, self-responsible, entrepreneurial masculine subjectivities. However, this is not to say that drawing on such discourses entails a rejection of normative ideals of masculinity or gendered roles. Nor is it divorced from socio-economic conditions. The men I worked with who were working in the irregular labour force focused on their aspirations and created particular aspirational masculine subjectivities because of the very risks that are incurred by being in irregular labour. Not only are jobs unstable and wages low, but there are also social risks to working as a freeter, especially for men; male freeters are typically considered in a negative light unless they are actively trying to achieve particular goals. This has potential repercussions on their ability to marry and have a family life.[\[50\]](#) Aspirational masculine subjectivities are thus partly a response to the social and economic risks of irregular labour and not necessarily a radical move away from normative ideas of masculinity. Rather tension exists between the two. As Jens O. Zinn argues:

Sometimes the notion of individualization is misunderstood as pure positive liberation from traditional bonds or surmounting of social inequalities. But both are wrong. There is a strong tension between the sociocultural framing of individualization as self-fulfillment or 'liberation' and the 'new political economy of uncertainty and risk.' The individual's situation in the individualised society is rather one of precarious freedoms.[\[51\]](#)

25. Constructing aspirational masculine subjectivities is one way in which men attempt to engage with, cope with, and attempt to be successful in a vulnerable, precarious environment.[\[52\]](#) By linking masculinities to aspirational labour, they are managing the risk of their economic positions and the risk of how their masculinities are perceived by others. This is part of an individualisation process linked to neoliberal ideals of selfhood, which in the sphere of irregular labour is a necessary component of retaining hope for the future as well as a means to actively pursue aspirations. Such aspirational masculinities are performative but limited mainly to one sphere of their lives—the labour market—because ideas of aspirational masculinities are often not transferred (nor do men necessarily expect to transfer them) to the familial/romantic domain. Instead, the majority of the men that I worked with who wanted to marry were aware of the structural limitations of the labour market that continues to operate in a gendered format. Consequently, if they wanted to marry, they sought 'stable' work to improve their marital prospects.[\[53\]](#) This has knock-on effects for the possibilities of gender in daily life. Therefore the performativity of masculinities is not uniform or un-contradictory across different spheres of life. Instead, at different stages of life and in different spheres of life at the same time, the different demands of masculinities are performed and performative, often in contradictory ways that change over time.

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Notes

[1] This system built on a heteronormative gendered division of labour that encouraged women—through taxation and welfare systems—to look after the home and family whilst men went out to work. This is, however, a thoroughly middle-class ideal. Anthropological research illustrates that the gendered division of labour was less rigidly upheld by members of the working class, with women often working outside the home. This is also true in family businesses and agriculture etc. where such strongly delineated divisions of labour were not necessarily upheld. See Dorinne Kondo, *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Dolores Martinez, *Identity and Ritual in a Japanese Diving Village: The Making and Becoming of Place and Person* (Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press, 2004); Mari Miura, *Welfare Through Work: Conservative Ideas, Partisan Dynamics, and Social Protection in Japan* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2012), [DOI](#); Glenda Roberts, *Staying On The Line: Blue-Collar Women in Contemporary Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994); and Tomiko Yoda, 'The rise and fall of maternal society: Gender, labor, and capital in contemporary Japan,' *South Atlantic Quarterly* 99(4) (2000): 865–902 [DOI](#).

[2] In 2012 the proportion of regular employees in the workforce had shrunk to 64.8 per cent, compared to over 80 per cent in the 1980s. Meanwhile, non-regular employment accounts for 37.5 per cent as of 2015. See [JILPT](#), 'Labor situation in Japan and its analysis: Detailed exposition 2016/2017,' in *The Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training*, 2017. URL: <http://www.jil.go.jp/english/lj/detailed/2016-2017.html> (accessed 10 November 2017).

[3] See Mitchell W. Sedgwick, *Globalisation and Japanese Organisational Culture: An Ethnography of a Japanese Corporation in France* (London, New York: Routledge, 2007); [JILPT](#), 'Labor situation in Japan and its analysis.'

[4] A number of authors have discussed the difficulties that women have experienced—and continue to experience—in the full-time labour market. Moreover, although there are increasing calls for women to work full-time (e.g. Prime Minister Abe's Womenomics), the structural limitations that women deal with, with regards to durable gendered ideas of women's primary responsibilities to home and the rearing of children, continue to exert particular limitations on women's labour. See '[Parents protest over lack of child care facilities after Abe's weak response to blog post](#),' *The Mainichi* (March 2016). URL: <http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160307/p2a/00m/0na/011000c> (accessed 28 March 2016). See also Helen Macnaughtan, '[Womenomics for Japan: Is the Abe policy for gendered employment viable in an era of precarity?](#)' *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 13(12) (2015): 1–10. URL: <http://www.japanfocus.org/-Helen-Macnaughtan/4302/article.html> (24 November 2016).

[5] See [Centre of Business Development Ability Association](#) (Chūo Shokugyō Nōryoku Kaihatsu Kyōkai), 'Report of the experience ability appraisal study' (Keiken Nōryoku Hyōka Kijun (Kashō) Kentō Hōkokusho), 2007. URL: <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/houdou/2007/09/h0927-3a.html> (accessed 7 February 2010); [JILPT](#), 'Young people in transitional crisis: Interview survey for the young jobless and freeters (interim report),' 2004, URL: <http://www.jil.go.jp/english/reports/documents/jilpt-research/no6.pdf> (accessed 15 March 2015); [JILPT](#), 'Transition support policy for young people with low educational background,' 2007, URL: <http://www.jil.go.jp/english/reports/documents/jilpt-reports/no5.pdf> (accessed 6 May 2015); [JILPT](#), 'Japanese working life profile 2015/2016: Labor statistics,' 2016. URL: <http://www.jil.go.jp/english/jwl/2015-2016/all.pdf> (accessed 20 March 2016).

[6] Men in irregular labour typically earn low wages, are working in precarious positions, and find it difficult to transition to full-time permanent positions due to an employment market which privileges recent graduates and regards irregular labour experiences with scepticism. See Anne Allison, *Precarious Japan* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), [DOI](#); Mary Brinton, *Lost in Transition: Youth, Work, and Instability in Postindustrial Japan* (Cambridge University Press, 2010); Reiko Kosugi, *Furītā to Nīto (Freeters and NEETs)* (Keisou Shobou, 2005); Reiko Kosugi, *Wakamono to Shigoto (Youth and Work)* (Keisou Shobō, 2005); Reiko Kosugi, *Escape from Work: Freelancing Youth and the Challenge to Corporate Japan* (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2008).

[7] See Tomoko Hidaka, *Salaryman Masculinity: The Continuity and Change in Hegemonic Masculinity in Japan* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishing, 2010), [DOI](#).

[8] This was also the case for some of the men who had achieved their labour aspirations, but ultimately had been unable to sustain it, as Eiji's case later in this paper illustrates. Typically, after a period of adjustment, these men formed new labour aspirations to work towards, whether it be to formulate other business ideas to work towards or to find a permanent position in a company. See Emma E. Cook, *Reconstructing Adult Masculinities: Part-time Work in Contemporary Japan* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

[9] See Cook, *Reconstructing Adult Masculinities*, 7.

[10] See Emma E. Cook, 'Expectations of failure: Maturity and masculinity for freeters in contemporary Japan,' *Social Science Japan Journal* 16(1) (2013): 29 – 43 <https://doi.org/10.1093/ssjj/jys022>; Cook, 'Intimate expectation and practices: Freeter relationships and marriage in contemporary Japan,' *Asian Anthropology* 13(1) (2014): 36–51 [DOI](#); Cook, *Reconstructing Adult Masculinities*.

[11] For the few men I worked with who didn't want to marry, aspirational masculinities continue to be prioritised, experienced and lived. For the majority of men that did, however, they felt the need to shift into more secure labour in order to fulfil the demands of the breadwinner role. Such demands are not limited to masculinities in Japan, but can be seen where the provider ideal of masculinity is pervasive. See Penny Vera-Sanso, 'Taking the long view: Attaining and sustaining masculinity across the life course in South India,' in *Masculinities Under Neoliberalism*, ed. Andrea Cornwall, Frank. G. Karioris and Nancy Lindisfarne (London: Zed Books, 2016): 80–98; Andrea Cornwall, 'Introduction: Masculinities under neoliberalism,' in *Masculinities Under Neoliberalism*, ed. Andrea Cornwall, Frank. G. Karioris and Nancy Lindisfarne (London: Zed Books, 2016): 1–28 [DOI](#).

[12] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005): 2.

[13] Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), [DOI](#).

[14] Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff, 'Introduction,' in *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, ed. Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011): 1–20, p. 5, [DOI](#); Cornwall, *Introduction*, 8, argues that neoliberalism can be considered a form of Foucault's governmentality because of the pervasive and insidious ways that neoliberalism 'engages the production of accountable, entrepreneurial subjectivities.'

[15] In 2003, the official government definition included temporary, dispatched and part-time workers, as well as jobless people who wanted to work in any capacity. In 2004, jobless people were only included if they wanted to work as temporary, dispatched or part-time employees. In 2007, the government further narrowed the definition by removing temporary and dispatched workers. They restricted it to workers that employers hired directly and categorised as part-time. See [Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare](#) (MHLW), 'White paper on the labour economy 2003: Economic and social change and diversification of working styles,' 2003. URL: <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/english/wp/wp-l/> (accessed 12 August 2013); [Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare](#) (MHLW), 'White paper on the labour economy 2004: Trends and feature of the labour economy in 2003,' 2004. URL: <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/english/wp/l-economy/2004/index.html> (accessed 12 June 2008); Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW), 'White paper: Work-life balance and employment systems,' 2007, URL: <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/wp/hakusyo/roudou/07/index.html> (accessed 10 February 2010).

[16] Precarious freedoms are produced through institutional individualism or individualisation. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim argue that individuals must now be responsible for things that the nation-state, the employer or union, and the family used to provide. Moreover, we must take responsibility for our own lives to an unprecedented degree. We must 'think, calculate, plan, adjust, negotiate, define, [and] revoke (with everything constantly starting again from the beginning)' (*Individualization*, 2002, 6) and subsequently be responsible for the consequences of our actions. The compulsion to do this, they argue, transcends socio-economic, gender, or racial positioning: Individuals must make these choices and live with the outcomes. See Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and Its Social and Political Consequences* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2002); and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 'Individualization and precarious freedoms: Perspectives and controversies of a subject-oriented sociology,' in *Detraditionalization: Critical Reflections on Authority and Identity*, ed. Paul Heelas, Scott Lash and Paul Morris (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996): 23–48.

[17] Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*. Also see Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

[18] See Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: Technologies of Human Subjectivity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989); and Nikolas Rose, *The Powers of Freedom* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), [DOI](#)

[19] Penny J. Burke, 'Masculinity, subjectivity and neoliberalism in men's accounts of migration and higher educational participation,' in *Gender and Education* 23(2) (2011): 169–84, p. 171, [DOI](#).

[20] See Nancy Lindisfarne and Jonathan Neale, 'Masculinities and the lived experience of neoliberalism,' in *Masculinities Under Neoliberalism*, ed. Andrea Cornwall, Frank. G. Karioris and Nancy Lindisfarne (London: Zed Books, 2016): 29–50; Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, *The New Way of the World: On Neoliberal Society* (London: Verso, 2013); Carla Freeman,

'Neoliberalism: Embodying and affecting neoliberalism,' in *A Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiment*, ed. Frances E. Mascia-Lees (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011) pp. 353–69, [DOI](#); Derek Hook, *Foucault, Psychology and the Analytics of Power* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), [DOI](#); Rose, *Governing the Soul*; and Rose, *The Powers of Freedom*.

[21] For more extended case studies that focus on men of different ages in Hamamatsu who are working in jobs other than the restaurant and café sector see Cook, *Reconstructing Adult Masculinities*, 56–86.

[22] RW. Connell, *Masculinities* 2nd ed. Polity 2005 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

[23] For work that engages with this theory in the Japanese context to greater or lesser degrees see Cook, 'Expectations of failure'; Cook, *Reconstructing Adult Masculinities*; Romit Dasgupta, 'Performing masculinities: The salaryman at work and play,' *Japanese Studies* 20(2) (2000): 189–200, <https://doi.org/10.1080/713683779>; Dasgupta, 'Creating corporate warriors: The "salaryman" and masculinity in Japan,' in *Asian Masculinities: The Meaning and Practice of Manhood in China and Japan*, ed. Kim Louie and Morris Low (London and New York: Routledge, 2003): 118–34; Dasgupta, *Re-reading the Salaryman in Japan: Crafting Masculinities* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013); Sabine Frühstück, *Uneasy Warriors: Gender, Memory and Popular Culture in the Japanese Army* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007); Sabine Frühstück and Anne Walthall (eds), *Recreating Japanese Men* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011); Hidaka, *Salaryman Masculinity*; Tomoko Hidaka, 'Masculinity and the family system: The ideology of the "salaryman" across three generations,' in *Home and Family in Japan: Continuity and Transformation*, ed. Richard Ronald and Allison Alexy (London and New York: Routledge, 2011): 112–30; Kimio Itō, *Otokorashisa no Yukue (How Masculinity is Changing)* (Tokyo: Shin'yōsha, 1993); Itō, *Dansei-gaku Nyūmon (Introduction to Men's Studies)* (Tokyo: Sakuhinsha, 1996); Itō, *[Dekinai Otoko] kara [Dekiru Otoko] made (From [Cannot Do Man] to [Can Do Man])* (Shogakukan, 2002); Itō, *Otokorashisa toiu Shinwa The Myth of Manliness* (Tokyo: Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai Shuppankai, 2003); Mark McLelland, 'Salarymen doing queer: Gay men and the heterosexual public sphere in Japan,' in *Genders, Transgenders and Sexualities in Japan*, ed. Mark J. McLelland and Romit Dasgupta (London: Routledge, 2005): 96–110, [DOI](#); James E. Roberson and Nobue Suzuki (eds), *Men and Masculinities in Contemporary Japan: Dislocating the Salaryman Doxa* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003); Futoshi Taga, *Dansei no Jendā Keisei: Otokorashisa no Yuragi no Naka de (The Gender Formation of Men: Uncertain Masculinity)* (Tokyo: Tōyōkan Shuppansha, 2001); Taga, *Otokorashisa no Shakaigaku: Yuragu Otoko no Raifukōsu (Sociology of Masculinity: Life Course of Unstable Men)* (Sekai Shisōsha, 2006); Toshiyuki Tanaka, *Danseigaku no Shintenkai (New Developments in Masculinity Studies)* (Tokyo: Seikyusha, 2009); Tanaka, *Otoko ga Tsurai yo: Zetsubō no Jidai no Kibō no Danseigaku (It's Hard To Be A Man: Masculinity Studies of Hope in a Generation of Despair)* (Tokyo: Kadokawa, 2015).

[24] Roberson and Suzuki (eds), *Men and Masculinities in Contemporary Japan*; Cook, *Reconstructing Adult Masculinities*.

[25] See Dasgupta, *Re-reading the Salaryman*.

[26] See Douglas Schrock and Michael Schwalbe, 'Men, masculinity and manhood acts,' *Annual Review of Sociology* 35 (2009): 277–95, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-070308-115933>; Vera-Sanso, 'Taking the long view,' 80–98.

[27] See Michael Moller, 'Exploiting patterns: A critique of hegemonic masculinity,' *Journal of Gender Studies* 16(3) (2007): 263–76, [DOI](#); Tony Coles, 'Negotiating the field of masculinity: The production and reproduction of multiple dominant masculinities,' in *Men and Masculinities* 12(1) (2009): 30–44, [DOI](#).

[28] Normative definitions of masculinity are problematic in that most men don't meet the norms and they give us no way of understanding what is happening 'at the level of the personality' (Connell, *Masculinities*, 70). Both of these critiques have also been aimed at the theory of hegemonic masculinity. See for example, Moller, 'Exploiting patterns'; and Tony Jefferson, 'Subordinating hegemonic masculinity,' in *Theoretical Criminology* 6(1) (2002): 63–88, [DOI](#). However, men do engage with normative ideals of masculinity in various ways at the level of individual experience, as this paper also illustrates.

[29] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993); Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

[30] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 140–41.

[31] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, x.

[32] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 2.

[33] Akiko Takeyama, 'Intimacy for sale: Masculinity, entrepreneurship, and commodity self in Japan's neoliberal situation,' in *Japanese Studies* 30(2) (2010): 231–46, [DOI](#); and Takeyama, *Staged Seductions: Selling Dreams in a Tokyo Host Club* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), explores the ways in which male hosts in Japan produce a commodified

entrepreneurial subjecthood through drawing on neoliberal values of 'ideal subjecthood' centring on 'flexible lifestyle, individual freedom, and entrepreneurial creativity' (*Intimacy for Sale*, 232) whilst at the same time voluntarily submitting themselves to exploitative work conditions. Whilst some of the freeters I worked with sought to become entrepreneurs, they did not engage in self-commodification in the ways that Takeyama's hosts did. Instead they focused on the labour they *wanted* to do—their aspirations looking to the future—rather than the labour they were doing in the present moment as a means through which to produce particular kinds of aspirational masculine subjectivities.

[34] It is important to note that although the 1993 part-time labour law (*pā to taimu rōdō-hō*) indicated that part-time work is defined as fewer than 35 hours a week, amendments in 2007 indicate that part-time is understood as people working fewer hours than regular employees. See [Ministry of Justice](#), 'Tanjikan rōdōsha no koyō kanri no kaizen nado ni kan suru hōritsu: Heisei 19 nen hōritsu dai 72 gō' (Act on Improvement, etc. of Employment Management for Part-Time Workers: Amendment Act No. 72 of 2007), 2009. URL: <http://www.japaneselawtranslation.go.jp/law/detail/?id=84&vm=04&re=01> (accessed 24 November 2016). In practice, however, working part-time does not necessarily mean working fewer hours. Typically, part-timers are differentiated by the fact that they are paid by the hour, rather than having a monthly salary, and their contracts are primarily of a fixed term that is renewable rather than open-ended. See Daiji Kawaguchi, 'Introduction to wage statistics in Japan', in *Japan Labor Review* 10(4) (2013): 24–33.

[35] Interview with Hiroaki, Sapporo, 15 May 2015. Hiroaki was hesitant to take a permanent position when he knew that he was leaving because he felt that it would entail greater responsibilities and would leave him less time to prepare for opening his own restaurant. In addition, however, he did not want his boss to take the time organising a contract and enrolling him in the company-subsidised social insurance system when he knew he was going to leave quite soon. Furthermore, he felt that it would be better for an available permanent position to go to one of his colleagues who were planning to stay.

[36] Interview with Hiroaki, Sapporo, 22 August 2015.

[37] See Gordon Mathews, *Global Culture/Individual Identity: Searching for Home in the Cultural Supermarket* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002); Mathews, 'Seeking a career, finding a job: How young people enter and resist the Japanese world of work', in *Japan's Changing Generations: Are Young People Creating a New Society?*, ed. Gordon Mathews and Bruce White (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004): 121–36, [DOI](#).

[38] Interview with Hiroaki, Sapporo, 22 August 2015.

[39] Interview with Hiroaki, Sapporo, 22 August 2015.

[40] See Cook, *Reconstructing Adult Masculinities*.

[41] I have written elsewhere about the difficulties men in irregular labour face with regards to romance and getting married. See Cook, 'Intimate expectations and practices' and Cook, *Reconstructing Adult Masculinities*. It should be noted, however, that many of the men I worked with were socially adept and seemed to have no significant problem attracting romantic interest. Women I worked with did not consider *dating* a freeter to be particularly problematic (the issue they had was in marrying a freeter). The men's feeling of incompatibility with romance that I have described above was not because of their labour status per se, but was often more about having the space to develop and focus on themselves and their desires without having to cede to, or consider, others' wishes. This does not mean they did not have casual liaisons with others or were 'herbivorous.' It just meant they did not want the kinds of responsibilities and obligations they felt come with a steady romantic relationship. I thank the anonymous reviewer for their comment on this point.

[42] Interview with Eiji, Sapporo, 26 July 2014.

[43] Interview with Eiji, Sapporo, 26 July 2014.

[44] Cf. Everett Yuehong Zhang, 'Goudui and the state: Constructing entrepreneurial masculinity in two cosmopolitan areas in Southwest China,' in *Gendered Modernities: Ethnographic Perspectives*, ed. Dorothy L Hodgson (New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001): 235–65.

[45] Interview with Eiji, Sapporo, 26 July 2014.

[46] Eiji considered that being unmarried and part-time employed in his early thirties signified a problematic manhood. The average age of marriage for men in 2013 was 30.9 years, but it is well documented that men in irregular labour marry at much lower rates than men in permanent employment (See [Cabinet Office](#), 'Kekkon, kazoku keisei ni kan suru chōsa hōkokusho' (Studies on Marriage and Family), 2011. URL: http://www8.cao.go.jp/shoushi/shoushika/research/cyousa22/marriage_family/mokuji_pdf.html (accessed 7 March 2015);

[Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications](#) (MIAC): Statistics Bureau, 'Statistical handbook of Japan 2014', 2014. URL: <http://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/handbook/c0117.htm> (accessed 10 May 2015). Eiji felt that he should have been in a stable labour position by this point in his life, and he had been hopeful that he would have achieved his goal of opening and maintaining the café. He had consequently anticipated that he would be in a position to marry by his early thirties. With the closing of the café, however, Eiji was in a precarious position and he worried that if he were not able to find a permanent position he would become unmarried. This contributed to his desire to be made full-time at the coffee shop. See also Cook, 'Intimate expectations.'

[47] Coffee is now a serious business in Japan. The coffee shop Masaru worked for is well known and respected within the Japanese coffee scene. Each year some of the employees train and compete in national coffee-making and latte-art competitions, with the aim of scoring highly enough to go to international competitions. For more on the Japanese coffee scene see Merry White, *Coffee Life in Japan* (California: University of California Press, 2012).

[48] Having children outside of wedlock remains frowned upon, stigmatised and rare. See Ekaterina Hertog, *Tough Choices: Bearing an Illegitimate Child in Japan* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), [DOI](#).

[49] Interview with Masaru, Sapporo, 20 July 2015.

[50] See Cook, 'Intimate expectations and practices,' and Cook, *Reconstructing Adult Masculinities*.

[51] Jens O. Zinn, *Social Theories of Risk and Uncertainty: An Introduction* (Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 33, [DOI](#).

[52] See Allison, *Precarious Japan*.

[53] Despite increased calls in recent years for women to enter and remain in the full-time labour market—which could potentially lead to significant shifts in the dynamics of gender in daily life—the structural constraints on women to do so continue to be limiting, and consequently restrict the possibilities of alternative masculinities that do not include the demands of a future breadwinning role. Men who wanted to marry thus often ended up foregrounding labour productivity over individualised desires and aspirations. See also Vera-Sanso, 'Taking the long view,' 94–95, who argues that the prevalence of the provider role forces men in South India to seek work that will enable them to improve their marriage prospects, with many stuck in stalled transitions she calls 'waithood' or 'time pass.'

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