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Talking about non-no: (Re)fashioning Race and Gender in Global Magazines

Fashion, movies, music, we’re influenced from everything in Japan. We might have our own opinion or own identity, but still, we are influenced one way or another by these things.
—— Chieko, 23

Things are fast now. Now the world has become small. . . . now with the mass media, everyone knows about the new styles immediately.
—— Takako, 48

Comparing to when I was young, there are many more opportunities now to be exposed to the media, to get information from the media. So the young tend to follow the ideas promoted in the media.
—— Horie-san, 47

The last time we went to Harajuku to go shopping, most of the people around there were from the countryside. They all had magazines and maps and were looking for the shops. . . . I think that magazines have a strong effect on the young, like “I want this” when they're looking at magazines.
—— Oda-san, 52

[When I was young] there were magazines with white models but they were the magazines that were from foreign countries, like Elle or Vogue that were imported to Japan and I read those.
—— Takako, 48

The quotes above illustrate the extent to which global media have entered individuals’ daily lives in an increasingly fast-paced world that “has become small.” We have seen, however, that the hybrid cultural forms that emerge from our coincident engagement with the global, national, and local are frequently contentious and permeated with power struggles, particularly as they intersect with the dynamics of race both locally and globally. This chapter turns to Japan as a site of reception to investigate how the global dynamics of
race and culture intersect with a local context frequently positioned as a cultural/racial “other” in relationship to Europe and the United States. It considers both how the global/national/local is discursively negotiated in Japanese textual representations and how this global imaginary might shape local subjectivities. Focusing on the highly gendered and consumer-oriented medium of fashion magazines, it also reflects on the gendered and class dimensions of this negotiation.

After a brief description of the history and continuing influence of fashion magazines in a global context, the chapter turns to a more specific exploration of the multiple ways in which culture, race, gender, and the global are articulated in Japanese texts. It then moves beyond textual constructions to explore how Japanese women negotiate these representations in their media consumption. The conclusions drawn in this chapter are based on insights gathered throughout my 18-year engagement with the small Shikoku community described earlier in this book, and particularly through ethnographic research specifically focused on women’s engagement with mediated representations of beauty and fashion conducted over an 8-month period in 1998–99 and followed up with additional series of formal interviews and participant observation in 2009 and 2011.

Fashion Magazines as Global Texts

By 1915, the American *Vogue* already had a British edition. Its French edition followed ten years later and, aside from a brief interruption in production due to Nazi occupation (Peterson, 1964), has been published ever since. *Elle*, created in 1945 by French journalists and writers Hélène Gordon Lazareff and Macelle Auclair, now counts 42 international editions in more than 60 countries, including Slovenia, Turkey, India, and Thailand, and reaches some 23 million readers around the globe (*Elle: About Us*, n.d.). Its Japanese edition started in 1969 (Hafstrand, 1995). *Cosmopolitan*’s 58 international editions published in 34 languages are distributed today in more than 100 countries (*Cosmopolitan*, n.d.). It first appeared in France in 1973 and was exported to Japan in 1980.

Scholars have demonstrated the historical and cultural significance of such magazines in various cultural contexts, pointing, in particular, to their role in constructing and perpetuating cultural ideals of womanhood and in establishing a female cultural space readers are encouraged to engage in through consumption (see, for example, Kitch, 2000; Dollase, 2003, 2008; Sakamoto, 1999). Magazines’ function as global texts has not, however, yet been as fully explored.

This is in part due to the fact that, as Australian media scholar Jinna Tay
contents, “Fashion magazines are one of the most successfully ‘glocalized’ or adapted media in the world” (2009, p. 245)—a fact that to some extent serves to veil their global status. Indeed, in a manner reminiscent of reality television programs (but with a much longer history), globally successful fashion magazines heavily rely on formatted content and editorial formulae applied transnationally to different international editions in order to “conform to certain structural rules which allow their target readership to find them” even if their actual content “may be textually different around the globe” (Tay, 2009, p. 245). Like reality television, their content is, in turn, carefully localized. Hamid Mowlana points, for instance, to “a growing demand for editorial and financial control over imported publications” in such places as Japan or Mexico, adding that “Japanese publishers may not only press for greater financial control of the imported U.S. . . . magazines, but insist that only 50 percent of the content of such magazines be of original U.S. copy” (1986/1997, p. 56).

As a result, fashion magazines’ cultural origins easily dissolve into the global scape of fashion, glamour, and beauty. As global media scholars David Machin and Theo Van Leeuwen note in their comparative study of international editions of Cosmopolitan, despite differences in language and style between localized versions, the magazine ultimately “clearly contributes to increased global cultural homogeneity” (2005, p. 588). As they conclude, “Although local versions adopt [the Cosmo style] in their own specific ways, overall it is a global style. The local languages may differ, but the identities and values conveyed by the style do not” (2005, p. 598, emphasis in original). While the status of fashion magazines as heavily “glocalized” texts has long been recognized, the practical implications of this global homogenization of style—the significance of fashion magazines as global texts—are more difficult to assess. The fact that the global style promoted in magazines is influenced by many magazines’ European and North American origins is particularly significant, as a closer look at the Japanese context illustrates.

White Models and Hybridity in Japanese Fashion Magazines

Whenever I accompany students from the United States to Japan, their surprise at seeing Caucasian faces on billboards or the covers of magazines reminds me of my own reaction in early January 1995 when I first stepped out of the ferry in the small Shikoku village that was to later become my field site. At the time, the face of the white woman advertising facial cream on a small rusted metal sign hanging, probably since sometime in the 1950s, outside a long-gone general store, or that of Harrison Ford on the window of the local liquor distributor, seemed oddly out of place. Now that I have developed a
greater familiarity with the many Japanese celebrities used in advertising and spent years studying different aspects of the Japanese media, foreign faces seem to naturally fit into the hybrid mix that constitutes Japanese popular culture. Their presence, however, is not devoid of implications.

Of course, the large number of non-Asian models and celebrities on the Japanese media market can be explained in part by the global nature of fashion magazines and of the advertising they carry, which constitutes a large portion of their content. Thus, advertising scholars Mariko Morimoto and Susan Chang’s discovery, in their analysis of four magazines published in Japan, of a congruency “between the use of models from different cultural backgrounds and the origins of the publications and the advertisers” (2009, p. 184) is not particularly surprising. What is more interesting is their finding that while the Japanese editions of the French Marie-Claire (Marie-Claire Japon) and of the American Harper’s Bazaar (Harper’s Bazaar Japan) exhibited a higher percentage difference in their use of “Western” vs. “Asian” models (94 percent and 6 percent respectively) than the “domestic” Japanese fashion magazines included in their study, the latter still featured a much higher percentage of “Western” models than “Asian” ones (63 percent vs. 37 percent).

I had reached a similar conclusion when I first turned to the study of Japanese magazines in the late 1990s (Darling-Wolf, 2000a). At the time, I found that 41 percent of the models featured in advertising in the bi-monthly non-no—one of the oldest and most influential Japanese women’s magazines, launched in 1971 by the prominent publisher Shueisha (Sakamoto, 1999)—and 33 percent of those found in editorial content were white. The numbers for the equally popular an-an were 31 percent and 33 percent respectively. This despite the fact that both magazines, as suggested in the quotes opening this chapter, are generally perceived as employing fewer non-Japanese models than their counterparts of foreign origin.

A more recent unpublished analysis of the French, U.S., and Japanese editions of Elle conducted in 2009 revealed an even more striking pattern. Only about 8 percent of the models featured in the Japanese edition appeared to be of Asian descent, while almost 89 percent were Caucasian. These percentages remained higher, however, than in the other two editions of the magazine, where only 3 percent and 1 percent of the models appearing respectively in the U.S. and French versions of the magazine were of Asian descent. In other words, the transnational culture of beauty, fashion, and upper-class consumption represented in the pages of global fashion magazines still remains white dominated. In addition, while Elle Japan tended to be more inclusive toward the rest of Asia than its U.S. and French counterparts—it included, for instance, a spread on fashion in Paris, London, New York, Milan, and Seoul—these different geographic environments were all visually integrated into one
detrimentalized urban context lacking cultural specificity. Whether in Paris or Seoul, models were posed in similar urban scenes, consuming the same kinds of globally distributed products.

The equation of white “Westerners” with physical attractiveness and luxury is further accentuated by the fact that “Western models tend to be featured more frequently in ads for product categories associated with appearances, while Asian models tend to be featured more in ads for services or practical products” (Morimoto and Chang, 2009, p. 180). This points to a situation in which Japanese producers and consumers find themselves negotiating their position as racial and cultural minorities on the global fashion scene. As cultural anthropologist Dorinne Kondo suggests, “fashion provides us with an exemplary site for examining the constitutive contradictions of Japanese identity at a moment when Japan has assumed an acknowledged place as a global economic power” (1997, p. 55).

Even Japanese magazines employing relatively fewer non-Asian models engage in the construction of an imagined global landscape that intersects with racial and gendered representations. The hybrid deterritorialized consumer culture they promote draws from a wide array of cultural influences. In a comparative study of non-no and Men’s non-no (its counterpart targeted at men launched in 1986) I found that Men’s non-no’s representations of masculinity drew from a seemingly limitless variety of (mostly “Western”) cultural contexts (Darling-Wolf, 2006). Cowboys appeared in numerous fashion spreads and in ads (of both Japanese and U.S./European origin) for whiskey, jeans, cigarettes, and beauty products. (Presumably) “European” dandies were depicted as ideals of sophistication in Japanese advertising for French and Italian products—a recurring ad promoting the beauty salon “Dandy House” juxtaposed a clean-shaven Asian man in a tailored suit with photographs of a Caucasian model getting a facial. Androgynous (racially Asian) British punks posed against the Union Jack and posters of popular British bands. Hip-hop-inspired spreads shot in gritty urban environments featured gangster-like Asian models and popular Japanese DJs photographed from a low angle to make them look more intimidating.

Furthermore, as the same models took on multiple racial identifications—a black “gangsta” on one page might turn into a Latino lover on the next—racial and cultural identities were not only deterritorialized but also disembodied in the magazine’s discourse. This process is facilitated by the fact that several of the models Men’s non-no regularly employs (they are identified by name and familiar to frequent readers) are of mixed racial heritage. Posed alongside less familiar Caucasian or black models in “culturally neutral” urban environments they serve to further integrate Japanese and gaijin (the term used to refer to foreigners, literally meaning “outsider”) into the same global
environment of capitalist consumption. This strategic integration of racially hybrid “Japanese” models into a symbolically constructed global fashion scene ultimately reduces race, ethnicity, and culture to a series of playful identifications for Japanese consumers to enjoy (Darling-Wolf, 2006).

While such racial representations disturbingly fail to acknowledge the global implications of the politics of race/culture by reducing them to things one wears or consumes they also help to complicate racial identification. In particular, by positioning racially hybrid models as culturally Japanese, Men’s non-no underscores the constructed nature of race in Japan. In a nation where discourses about racial purity have often historically intersected with constructions of national identity (Iwabuchi, 2006), this is a potentially destabilizing discourse.

When Gender and Race Intersect

Interestingly, and in sharp contrast to U.S. publications targeted at a male readership, Men’s non-no also displays a rather playful and irreverent attitude toward constructions of gender. In keeping with representations of masculinity found throughout the Japanese popular cultural environment (Darling-Wolf, 2004) Men’s non-no’s models and the celebrities it features—Gackt, Takuya Kimura, Yôsuke Kubozuka, Jun Matsumoto—are frequently highly androgynous. The magazine further minimizes gender distinctions through a process of “masculinization” of its female models included in fashion spreads, who often appear dressed in androgynous attire and posed in similar poses as their male counterparts (for specific examples, see Darling-Wolf, 2006—or browse the magazine online at http://www.mensnonno.jp). Again, such representations serve to complicate and deconstruct fixed and essentializing constructions of gender by pointing to its socially determined and artificial nature. Just as with race, ethnicity, and culture, however, the magazine’s equation of gender-bending with consumption mitigates the potentially empowering elements of its representations, as expensive fashion becomes the ultimate gender equalizer.

Furthermore, Men’s non-no’s fluid constructions of race, ethnicity, and gender powerfully contrast with those found in non-no, its sister publication targeted at a female readership. Unlike Men’s non-no’s almost exclusively visual discourse (the men’s magazine offers very little textual contextualization to its fashion spreads) of multiple and ambiguous gendered, racial, and cultural identifications, non-no’s discourse is highly gendered. While men are occasionally mentioned or quoted in non-no’s editorial content, they are almost completely visually excluded from its pages—male models never seem to appear, for instance, in fashion spreads—resulting in a discourse that, despite
a good amount of talk about love, sex, and boyfriends, privileges female-to-female relationships.

The fantasy non-no constructs is one of exclusive female friendship forged through the sharing of beauty, fashion, and dieting advice, or through dressing up for parties or excursions in the park. This friendship is presented as highly pleasurable, as evidenced by the body language of the female models laughing, holding hands, or grabbing each other’s neck (Darling-Wolf, 2006). Noting that magazines such as non-no or an-an emerged in the 1970s as new kinds of publications that promoted a single lifestyle—by assuming, for instance, that women had a room of their own to decorate—focused on female pleasure, Japanese media scholar Kazue Sakamoto points to the subversive potential of such representations at a time when the idea of “young women living alone in Tokyo . . .” was quite revolutionary” (1999, p. 181).

The gender identities emerging from this discourse are, however, overall far less fluid than those found in the men’s magazine. In contrast to Men’s non-no’s vast array of possible “masculinities,” non-no’s constructions of femininity draw exclusively from the “cute” (kawaii) ideal of mixed innocence and (sexual) maturity evident throughout the Japanese popular cultural environment (McVeigh, 2000). In the issues I examined, for instance, the ideal woman was described as doll-like (oningyou), girly (gâri), thin (hosoi), yet mature/adult-like (otona-ppoi) and attractive/popular (moteru).

Body monitoring is also a significant subtext of the “girl culture” non-no constructs for its readers. In the summer months, women in bathing suits posed to accentuate their extreme slenderness appear in almost every spread. Articles offer dieting advice or toning exercises. Ads for weight loss programs full of “before and after” pictures are a recurring feature both in non-no and in other Japanese women’s magazines (Darling-Wolf, 2000a). Finally, while Men’s non-no’s discourse is mostly descriptive, non-no’s is highly prescriptive—readers are told exactly what to do to achieve the ideal look (for examples, see Darling-Wolf, 2006). These findings are in keeping with linguist and anthropologist Miyako Inoue’s identification of early Japanese women’s magazines, and the advertising they carry, as instrumental in developing a “chatty” and “personable” speech that “came to be normalized as a generic speech style of modern Japanese women” and inaugurated “the birth of a new consumer body disciplined corporeally to respond to advertisement’s hailing” (2007, pp. 537, 544; see also Horioka, 1993).

Most significantly, non-no’s racial and cultural representations are much less diverse than those found in Men’s non-no. All models featured in non-no’s editorial content in the issues I examined appeared to be Asian and were positioned as culturally Japanese—even if they were frequently subtly “whitened” through makeup and lighting in a process commonly used in Japanese pub-
Talking about non-no (Darling-Wolf, 2000a). While female readers are encouraged to embrace their Japanese-ness in the magazine, physical features typically associated with a Caucasian racial identity are clearly emphasized—as evidenced by the numerous articles explaining how to create the illusion of rounder eyes and whiter skin and the ads for eye glue or cosmetic surgery. All models adhere to the same standard of beauty: light skin, round eyes, straight nose, ultra-slim body. While other possible identifications can certainly be found elsewhere in Japanese popular culture—particularly since hip-hop gained popularity among young Japanese women—and while white skin has long been a standard of beauty in Japan, non-no’s representations of race and culture powerfully contrast in their limited scope with the racial diversity and cultural hybridity of Men’s non-no’s male models.

Furthermore, whereas Men’s non-no’s hybridity rests both on the racial ambiguity of well-known models and the assimilation of outsiders of varied ethnicities into its overall visual discourse, the latter strategy is missing from non-no. Models of different races/cultures (mostly white) are present, yet clearly separated from the magazine’s cast of familiar (presumably) Japanese models. The complexity of this simultaneous process of racial/cultural dichotomizing and integration is particularly striking in non-no’s representations of female sexuality. Ideals of childlike/innocent but sexy/knowing Japanese sexuality (non-no’s readers are clearly assumed to be sexually active) most powerfully contrast with the magazine’s more sexually aggressive representations of gaijin (foreigners/outsiders). It is also evident in non-no’s frequent portrayal of kimono-clad Japanese models enjoying “traditional” Japanese activities. While, arguably, the yukata (summer kimonos) sold today as popular fashion items in Tokyo’s trendiest department stores have relatively little to do with their original incarnation, these representations again contrast with Men’s non-no’s complete lack of direct references to more “traditional” elements of Japanese culture (despite the fact that men do frequently wear yukata to summer festivals).

Thus, while encouraging readers to engage in globalized consumption, non-no’s gender representations also link femininity to nostalgic definitions of Japanese cultural/national identity that serve “to establish national identity-building binaries: our cultural heritage/your practical things . . . Japan/the West; and the Japanese/the rest” (McVeigh, 2000, p. 4, emphasis in original). More generally, non-no’s discourse illustrates gender’s powerful intersection with the negotiation of the global/national/local. As feminist anthropologist Susan Ossman puts it, “As women alter their skirts in synch with international fashion, their sartorial choices are also asked to stand for national or ethnic or religious identities” (2011, p. 21).

In her analysis of former Miss World and Bollywood superstar Rai Aish-
warya, Parameswaran suggests that Rai’s hybrid form of Whitened/Westernized beauty merged with ethnic/traditional upper-class femininity serves to “absorb the West in a new transnational economic order” (2011, p. 78). The “Westernized” Japanese models in non-no are similarly portrayed as managing to “exceed Western standards of beauty” while simultaneously protecting their “native” cultural identities from “the contaminating influences of Western commodity and entertainment culture” (Parameswaran, 2011, p. 80). Cast in the role of “keepers of tradition,” expected to strive for an impossible-to-attain “Westernized” physical look, yet encouraged to remain “behaviorally” Japanese, non-no’s female readers face a particularly complex set of expectations.

Contextualizing Magazine Reading: Negotiating the Global in Everyday Life

Japanese fashion magazines demonstrate how the negotiation of the local/national in relationship to the global intersects with the politics of both race and gender in popular culture. Scholars have warned, however, that focusing solely on magazines’ discursive elements does not fully do justice to the medium’s complex intertextual connection to diverse aspects of consumer culture. They have called for more contextualized considerations of magazine reading taking into account “other modes of the subject’s relation with media texts” (Inoue, 2007, p. 525)—for a more complete analysis, in other words, of the “circuit of culture” (Du Gay, 2013, p. xxxi) shaping this cultural form and of the ways in which it is articulated. My countless conversations on the subject with Japanese women validate the need for such an analysis.

First, we must keep in mind that, as numerous studies of media audiences have demonstrated, the act of consuming popular culture is often as important as the content of the texts itself. In the three-generational families that have participated in my research I have often found that mothers, daughters, and sisters enjoy the opportunity to sit down with a magazine together, discuss fashion and beauty choices, or go shopping for the perfect outfit. Using magazines as a connecting tool, mothers might leaf through the publications brought home by their daughters—as Izumi, the then-39-year-old mother of two high school girls, explained in 1999, “I wouldn’t buy those by myself, but my daughters buy them so I read them sometimes”—or enjoy reminiscing about their own engagement with global fashion trends: “When I look back at when I was young we did the same things,” she added.

Furthermore, while the younger women that constitute fashion magazines’ main target audience often express feelings of alienation toward the glamorous culture of global consumption portrayed in their favorite publications they nevertheless display a very practical attitude toward them. They
might purchase a specific issue because it features a style they want to imitate or a particularly appetizing diet, or use them for inspiration before getting a haircut, or buying or making a new outfit. The publications young women frequently spontaneously brought to interviews were often missing photographs here and there, where hair or clothing styles had been cut out. When recalling why they had avidly read fashion magazines in their high school years, two women in their 20s noted that they did it “to find out the clothes I wanted to wear, or for the hairstyles, I imitated the hairstyles,” or “for the small things, accessories, to know what I wanted.” When asked why they read magazines more frequently in the past, one of them responded: “I didn’t know much then!” The other explained: “before, I was reading them for research.” This conception of magazines as practical sources of information—common throughout the Japanese media where “how to” guides range from specific descriptions of how to perform dance steps in hip-hop magazines to the detailing of which boots and goggles are needed to become a biker (and which stores to find them at)—often creates frustration toward the relatively less prescriptive style of the Japanese editions of U.S. and European publications. As one reader in her 20s put it, “Western magazines don’t give us much information. In Japanese magazines, they have a lot of information. They have just regular people and give us information about them. Maybe that’s why there are so many people wearing these clothes, they say where to find these clothes in the magazines and how to wear them.”

Young rural women of relatively lower socio-economic status tend to be particularly resourceful in their attempts to create a fashionable identity at a fraction of the price of that sold in the magazines they read. After identifying a style they like, their next step is to try to find clothes that are similar to those featured in the magazine but that they “can buy.” If that proves impossible, they might resort to sewing or knitting the outfit or accessory they are longing for—or, in the case of the youngest informants, to having their mothers do it for them. Their favorite kinds of clothes are, as a 16-year-old explained to me one day, “Clothes that are cheap, but look expensive.” Women old enough to have a credit card might employ it to make clothing purchases—as a woman in her 20s explained: “If it’s too expensive, I just give up, but if I feel that I can save the money in about two or three months, then I charge it and pay later.”

Thus, as Oda-san’s quote opening this chapter illustrates, fashion magazines serve as cultural maps guiding their young readers through the complex maze of physical self-definition—“I don’t want to be a dope about fashion, or many other things, so [magazines are] my information source” explained one reader. Also illustrated in the quotes above is the fact that these guides are particularly precious to young rural women who otherwise feel removed from the urban culture of beauty and fashion promoted throughout the Japa-
inese media: “The young in the countryside often imitate the fashions in the magazines,” noted Oda-san who was 52 years old when I interviewed her in 1999. As an older women recalled, “When I was young, only the young who lived in the city, in Tokyo, would have that kind of fashion. So the only way I could know about new fashion was by seeing people from Tokyo when they came back here. Otherwise, I couldn’t know what was popular in urban areas,” to which her daughter-in-law added, “When I was young, for example, it took one or two years for the fashion and clothing from Tokyo to reach this area.” In other words, for rural readers, fashion magazines serve as a source of global cultural capital that helps reduce the cultural gap they experience toward more urban settings where forms of globalized consumption are more readily available.

But if this increased and faster access to globalized information is often appreciated—especially by younger readers of relatively higher socio-economic status who feel particularly pressured to conform to the upper-class ideals of urban sophistication promoted in the magazines—it can also be interpreted as encouraging young rural women to engage in homogenized less-than-desirable cultural practices: “the young in the countryside start to imitate [urban fashion styles] all at once,” noted one older woman “Now, it seems that most of the women on television have the same personality,” commented another. Deeming urbanites “entirely different,” her friend concluded: “They’re scary!”

In either case, while they may still occasionally consult magazines when needing a haircut or a special outfit (or in an effort to bond with their daughters), older women tend to exhibit a much more detached attitude toward the culture of fashion and luxury they promote. As Izumi explained, “If I were younger I might be interested in these . . . but now I can’t find anything I would really wear.” Or, as 44-year-old Abe-san more forcefully put it, “I don’t like to read these kinds of magazines. . . . They’re all about diets or fortune telling and all about what celebrities wear, so I’m fed up with them. That’s all they have in there, diets!” Similarly, while Izumi’s daughter Mie and her best friend Madoka avidly read Cutie or Zipper (Japanese fashion magazines targeted at a younger audience) when they first started participating in my research as high school students, the two young women, now mothers themselves and in their late 20s, told me in a 2009 interview that they read Orange Page—a cooking and homemaking magazine that, incidentally, they had deemed a publication for “obaasan” (slightly pejorative term used to refer to middle-aged women) when 16. They still cared about fashion, however, and displayed the same kind of ingenuity in finding alternative ways to engage in the global culture of consumption promoted in magazines that they had 10 years earlier. When I commented in 2009 on the small Louis Vuitton bag Mie
carried around (which I knew she could not afford on her salary as an “office lady”), she responded, clearly admiringly, that her mother-in-law had managed to find a used one and given it to her as a gift. It is also important to note that despite the rise of the Internet in this 10 year period, these young women still read print magazines, even if different ones (the continuing strength of the Japanese magazine industry suggests that they are not the only ones).

These examples illustrate the importance of keeping in mind the ways in which media consumption intersects with various aspects of the socio-cultural context—class, geography, age, race, gender—in which it takes place. This does not mean, however, that media consumers’ negotiation of global and/or globalized cultural forms is impervious to the realities of global power dynamics. In the case of fashion magazines, their racial and class-specific subtexts are particularly crucial elements of this negotiation.

**White Models Just Look Better in the Picture**

When asked about the evolution of cultural perceptions of female attractiveness in Japan, the women I interviewed quickly identified globalization as a significant factor in their construction (Takako’s “the world has become small”). They pointed to a shift in cultural ideals of beauty coinciding with “the time when women changed from kimono to Western clothing” (Izumi, 39). As 81-year-old Toyoda-san explained, “Before the war there weren’t any white models, but after the war we started to think that American things were better than Japanese things, we got the media, these kinds of things.” They generally recognized and critiqued the historical legacy of “Western” media influence on contemporary Japanese culture—a legacy 24-year-old Mako characterized as “the Western thing” still haunting the Japanese and resulting in a situation in which, as she put it, “Western movies, Western culture, Western anything, it’s all good.”

Older women reminisced about the postwar invasion of “Western” actors (Audrey Hepburn, Gregory Peck, Grace Kelly, Alain Delon, Danielle Darrieux, John Wayne), movies (*Casablanca, King Kong, Planet of the Apes, Roman Holiday*), singers (Elvis Presley, The Beatles, Paul Anka), and models on the Japanese popular culture scene: “When I was young ‘Twiggy,’ do you know? the model ... Twiggy, she had come to Japan, she wore a mini skirt, that kind of thing ... This Twiggy, this model was very popular among young people. She was very thin and I wanted to be like that” (Takako, 48). Forty-seven-year-old Horie-san fondly recalled watching French and American films on television as a child “because of the different lifestyles, the different clothes, and because people admire the way of thought of Westerners.” Toyoda-san remembered the time when “a teacher told us students that it was OK to have a
hairstyle like Audrey Hepburn,” adding that “the hairstyles and makeup styles were very popular.”

Younger women admitted not having given much thought to the presence of white models in Japanese publications, which, as a group of 16-year-olds put it, they were “accustomed to seeing” and found “natural.” As 23-year-old Chieko explained, “For us, we’ve always seen these things, it’s been natural to see Western movies and listen to Western music since we were children.” The global nature of magazines outlined above combined with the popularity of “Western styles” were frequently offered as a possible explanation for U.S. and European models’ popularity: “I think some magazines are originally made in Paris or New York. Like Frau, Elle, that’s originally in France, that’s one reason. The other reason is like I said before . . . we want to be like Western people,” explained 24-year-old Mako.

Japanese media consumers also pointed to the exoticized subtext of representations such as those found in non-no, which they often found pleasurable: “I can enjoy a different world without leaving Japan, a different culture” (Takako, 48), “We can see people in a different world” (Kiyomi, 23), “They are people living in a different world” (Mako, 24). As 68-year-old Tanaka-san concluded, “Maybe we admire foreign culture or foreign ways of thought because we are different from that in Japan.” They recognized, in other words, that such imagery was part of the broader process of imagining the global in Japan—a pleasurable fantasy of globalized engagement readers could “long for” and “dream about”: “There is a kind of admiration. Maybe these are not about being close or familiar, these are a little ‘high class’ [in English]. They represent the kind of image of what we want to be, it’s a kind of admiration” (Kiyomi, 23). Or, as Mako put it:

Things like this magazine [picking up the Japanese magazine Spring], this is not real life. We want to be like this stuff, but this is actually not our life, it’s kind of apart from our real life. In that kind of thing, we don’t want to see real life, like, you know, some short fat girl wearing these clothes, that doesn’t look good, right? And we keep thinking that . . . and then . . . we are not Western people but it’s OK, because this is not our real life.

The women I interviewed nevertheless expressed ambiguous feelings of combined distancing and yearning toward exoticized representations of (mostly white) “Western”3 models. Comments such as “They look good, but they are difficult to be close to, to marry, or to be good friends with. . . . it’s difficult to be good friends with them, but we want to be good friends” (Miko, 24) and “They look so good, but they are not . . . maybe close in feelings. They are just out there. They are the people who are living in a different world, but they look good. We don’t feel familiar with them” (Mako, 24) illustrate the
mixture of admiration, longing, and alienation this imagery generated. Partly as a result of such feelings, young women often strongly asserted their personal preference for Japanese models they could feel “closer to”—“there are too many Westerners in the Japanese media” (Emiko, 28)—and noted that they did not “like the way the society is [admiring Westerners]” (Takie, 28).

Deeming efforts to imitate Caucasian models a painful exercise in futility—as 44-year-old Abe-san noted, “Japanese women might think that they can look nice in these kinds of things, but they can’t”—they rebelled against the alienating nature of their presence in Japanese publications: “If I wear the same clothes, I’m not going to be like them!” (Mako, 24); “I personally think that it’s funny that they would have white models in [Japanese magazines]. It is Japanese women who read these magazines, and Japanese women try to wear those clothes. . . . Mostly they don’t give me good advice about fashion or makeup” (Horie-san, 47); “Westerners and Japanese have completely different [body] styles, so if I try to wear these kinds of clothes, they generally don’t fit me, so I feel angry. I feel like I’m being deceived” (Chieko, 23). As a result, they frequently called for the inclusion of easier-to-emulate Japanese models in Japanese magazines. As 23-year-old Kumiko put it, “[White models] look nice and they have good styles, so they’re beautiful. But I want the magazines to have Japanese models. Japanese models have a different style from these white models. I just can’t imagine myself wearing these kinds of clothes.”

If they frequently disapproved of the use of Caucasian models, the women who participated in my research also ultimately argued, however, that their presence in Japanese publications made business sense because they are more beautiful than their Japanese counterparts. As Horie-san explained: “They have good appearance, good [body] style. They are nicer than Japanese, they are more beautiful than Japanese, they have better styles than Japanese, so they look nice in the new fashion and makeup.”

In interview after interview they expressed their admiration for “Western bodies”—that is, physical traits most commonly associated in Japan with a Caucasian racial identity: “Westerners have a very nice [body] style, they look good, their fashion is neat. So basically, many Japanese people admire Western styles of fashion. Westerners look better, they have longer legs, they are taller” (Takako, 48); “They have a good [body] style, they’re pretty” (Sachiko, 68); “They are tall, so they look good” (Fujida-san, 64); “They have good appearance, big eyes, high noses” (Reiko, 16); “Westerners are more beautiful, they are tall, have high noses, big eyes, and a good sense of style” (Nishimura-san, 46); “Compared to Japanese women, they are more elegant, they look more excellent than the Japanese” (Chieko, 23); “We admire Western people, it’s true, I think. The one reason is that they are tall, they are taller than we are” (Aya, 16); “They have good [body] style, you know, compared to Japanese models, they have nice breasts, nice hips, longer legs” (Abe-san, 44); “Compared to
the Japanese, they have better style and better appearance, they have smaller faces, they’re taller” (Takako, in a different interview); “They have good body styles, good proportions of the body. Maybe we like the way white people look” (Miko, 24); “They represent the kind of image that we want to be, it’s a kind of admiration” (Chieko); “They have everything that Japanese people want to have” (Madoka, 16); “They’re beautiful, that’s the kind of beauty we pursue” (Toyoda-san, 81). Or, as Izumi (39) concluded, “When we were young, we admired [white Westerners], because they have what we don’t have.”

Some ultimately came up with a racial taxonomy placing whites at the top, Japanese at the bottom, and “halves”—individuals of mixed Asian and Caucasian ethnicity—in between. For instance, talking about the evolution of models’ racial origin in Japanese women’s magazines, Horie-san explained in 1999: “When I was young, an-an used lots of halves. Non-no had only Japanese models. Maybe at the beginning, when they started to be published, these magazines, like an-an or non-no, they couldn’t get many white models, so they used halves instead. They were more beautiful than the Japanese so they were used as models.” Attempting to explain the popularity of Hollywood in Japan, Abe-san similarly noted, “The Japanese feel inferior to the white, so Japanese tend to follow or imitate what is popular in America.” And the Japanese feel superiority to the blacks and to the South East Asians, so even though there are black or Asian movies, they don’t become popular in Japan.

Hip-hop’s spread through mainstream Japanese popular culture has since then further complicated this racial hierarchy and raised the status of blackness as an object of admiration—hence the greater racial diversity in Men’s non-no’s more recent issues. However, as the comparison with non-no demonstrated, hip-hop has generally had a stronger impact on mainstream representations of masculinity than femininity. If hip-hop-inspired magazines such as Woofin’ Girl have started to tap the female market and stars like Amuro Namie have made identification with blackness more popular among women, mainstream Japanese women’s magazines remain, as Morimoto and Chang (2009) have recently shown, largely white-dominated.

Furthermore while informants interviewed both in 1999 and in 2009–11 recognized hip-hop’s influence on Japanese popular culture and often expressed admiration for African American stars—Mariah Carey frequently came up—their dichotomized categorization of Japanese/Asian vs. Western/White-Black and the combined feeling of admiration and alienation occasioned by representations of “Westerners” (be they white or black) in the Japanese media remained largely unchanged. Asked about her image of “Westerners,” Mie commented in a 2009 interview, “I feel admiration,” to which Madoka immediately added, “it’s an unknown world.”
Gender and Race and Female Beauty in a Global Order

The ambiguities in readers’ reactions to the (omni)presence of white (and, to a lesser extent, black) models in Japanese fashion magazines point to the complexity of individuals’ local engagement with a patriarchal, white-dominated, global capitalist order. Constructions of feminine beauty in Japan are caught in the multifaceted interplay between gender, globalization, nationalism, race, and class to a greater extent than constructions of male attractiveness.

Women around the globe confront the difficult task of negotiating their gendered identities in the face of media standards of attractiveness increasingly removed from the biological realities of actual female bodies (for a detailed discussion of this process see Darling-Wolf, 2000b). This task, however, takes on an additional dimension for “non-white” (please pardon the short-cut in this description) media consumers as they contend with “beauty’s asymmetrical relations with differently raced bodies” (Parameswaran, 2011, p. 75).

Despite their frequent rebellion against the presence of “Westerners” in Japanese magazines, despite their requests for more racially appropriate models, and despite the feelings of alienation this imagery frequently occasioned, the Japanese media consumers that I interviewed did not challenge the validity of global standards of feminine beauty modeled—at least initially (Leslie, 1995)—after a Caucasian ideal. While they generally recognized the potentially harmful nature of admiring physical attributes characteristic of a different race and forcefully called for healthier representations, they did not question whether such traits were actually worthy of admiration. Despite their insightful critiques of U.S. and European media’s historical influence on their own popular cultural environment, they failed to identify the equation of “Western/white” (and, occasionally, black) femininity with globalized glamour, beauty, and success as a racist legacy (Moeran, 2010). As Mako—whose assessment of such representations as a pleasurable fantasy was quoted earlier—concluded shortly after deeming the presence of white models in Japanese magazines problematic: “I just think that white people are greatly beautiful. Just to see the white women, they are so beautiful. Not just the face, but the [body] style. We are short, our legs are short. But they have long legs and . . . that’s much better in the picture.”

The Japanese women who participate in my research are no more cultural dopes than their counterparts in other parts of the world—who resort to cosmetic surgery, dieting, and other painful practices to fit media ideals of beauty at an equally disturbing rate (Worldwide Plastic Surgery Statistics, 2010). Their specific situation, however, provides a valuable illustration of the multidimensional ways in which dynamics of race, gender, class, geography,
and national identity formation interlock with the awareness of the global that characterizes globalization. My informants’ engagement with “global culture” shapes not only how they imagine the “Other,” but also how they imagine what it means to be Japanese-rural-lower/upper-class-Asian-female (and vice versa)—how they experience, in other words, their own locality. For them, the process of imagining the global is mired in particularly complex identity politics. It illustrates how, in a globalized world, the production of locality is “more than ever shot through with contradictions” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 198). While this process is not unique to women in their position, their experience does significantly differ from that of individuals whose (white) racial identity is more easily “naturalized” in a global context or that of individuals whose experience of race is shaped by their status as “minorities” at the local/national level. It also differs from that of their male counterparts. It demonstrates how the local/national/global are mutually constituted not only in globalized popular cultural forms but also in individuals’ media consumption. It points to the extent to which the imagination has become “a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 31).

The different empirical examples examined so far in this book illustrate the complex interplay of “the global” with various local and national dynamics. They point to the often-political nature of processes of representation and positioning against the backdrop of an imagined global community and to their possible consequences on individuals’ daily lives. The similarities and differences between the ways in which these processes take shape in the French, Japanese, and U.S. media also point to the need to develop new theoretical models that move beyond essentialized characterizations of large areas of the world to more carefully tease out globalization’s intersecting and constantly shifting power lines. Developing such a model is made difficult, however, by the fact that a myopic process of positioning similar to that found in reality television, news, or magazines permeates much academic work on globalized cultural forms. The next two chapters address the problematic consequences of this positioning in intellectual discourses, which, just like popular cultural texts, “are never insulated from the national and global environment in which they develop” (Kraidy, 2005, p. 17).

Having established the centrality of dynamics of gender, race, and class in the negotiation of the local/national/global nexus, we now turn to a genre in which these dynamics are particularly contentious. The next chapter explores what turning a translocal lens to hip-hop as a global phenomenon can teach us about the politics of representation of race, class, and gender not only in hip-hop itself but also in the heated scholarly debates surrounding it.