Gay subjectivities in the Japanese gay magazine Bádi: a discursive approach

Thomas Baudinette
Monash University
Social Science (Postgraduate)

Abstract

There has been a wealth of studies published in recent years which has sought to understand the lived experience of Japanese gay men, investigating how they construct their subjectivities and how they employ language within this process of construction. Very little research to date, however, has been conducted examining how Japanese gay men understand their own homosexual desires. Despite a plethora of studies investigating the role that Japanese gay media (in particular, magazines and Internet sites) play in ‘introducing’ Japanese gay men to their homosexual desires, very few empirical studies have explicitly examined what role language plays in formulating discourses of homosexual desire within these media.

This paper analyses the Japanese gay magazine Bádi, the most widely consumed gay magazine in Japan with a monthly circulation of 80,000 issues. A corpus of 24 issues of Bádi, published between 2010 and 2011, was examined through quantitative content analysis, with a further six issues selected for in-depth discourse analysis based upon the representativeness of their content with respect to the corpus.

Following Foucault, desire is theorised as a socially constructed system of knowledge which draws upon socially recognisable semiotics. Through theorising desire as discursive, this paper argues that certain gay subjectivities within Bádi are constructed through both language and through imagery. In particular, it is suggested that so-called ‘gendered language’ and the depiction of the male body act as semiotic resources which index various tropes of gay subjectivity. In particular, it is argued that the utilisation of language which is perceived to be highly masculine, as well as the depiction of muscular bodies, body and facial hair, and certain styles of clothing index a ‘hard’ masculinity. These trends are particularly visible in some manga featured in the magazine, and this paper draws upon these manga as a case study of the overall content of the magazine. It is argued that Bádi ultimately promotes a gay subjectivity based upon the desirability of this ‘hard’ masculinity.

Keywords: queer studies, gender studies, magazines