

No guards left to defend the gender border

By MARK SCHREIBER

Dime (July 4)

Say, fellas, do you want a smooth and glowing *momo-hada* complexion, just like the skin of a peach? Then an "Ion Steamer," which is what National has



named its electronic skin moisturizer, may be just the thing. In February of this year the company followed up on its earlier steamer for women with a model for males, with a street price of about 18,000 yen. While you're at it, you might also want to pick up a National eyebrow shaver for 4,305 yen.

Dime, a biweekly magazine covering consumer trends, thinks it's got something here: Growing numbers of Japanese consumers are crossing the gender line to purchase goods normally associated with the opposite sex. In the trade, these are termed "no border" products.

One never knows where these no-border goods will pop up next. Gals tired of conventional step-in ladies' knickers now have the option of tying on *fundoshi*, the traditional G-string-type loincloths once commonly worn by Japanese men.

An outfit in Kyoto called Maaff Kobo entrusted Kyoto University of Art and Design to feminize the fundoshi, which they did with a vengeance. Among their efforts are a Tyrolean type fringed with embroidered wild flowers, a Fanny Hill-style with corset-type laces, one emblazoned with *monsho* (traditional Japanese family crests) and an international model sporting an essay in delightfully fractured English. ("How were you handed down in Japan from Fundoshi where?"). See them for yourself at www.maaff.com

Maaff's items are a bit more costly than conventional panties, but

that's the price you pay to be a trendsetter. They nevertheless seem to be catching on. Maaff claims sales this year at Ginza's Mitsukoshi department store are up tenfold from 2005.

And while we're on the subject, real men don't nibble diet foods; they swill beer and munch on skewers of *yakitori*, right?

Well, some of them sip diet beverages. In July 2005, Tokyo-based Global Co., Ltd. launched sales of its "Men's Slim Diet" lineup. And, meanwhile, Otokomae, a specialty tofu producer, has even developed a line of tofu just for men. The company operates an outlet at the Takashimaya shopping center at Futagotamagawa in Tokyo's Setagaya Ward. Its manic musical animated Web site (otokomae.heteml.jp/index--eng.html) has to be seen to be believed.

"It's not only a matter of these products being borderless with regard to gender distinctions," observes Masahiro Yotsumoto of the Dentsu Center for Consumer Studies. "They also carry the strong impression of being 'ageless' in terms of transcending any particular age group, and are also 'timeless' in that they transcend any era."

If anything, the no-border concept appears to lean more toward modesty than vanity. Like girly men who wear antiperspirant pads under their arms. Or -- if you can believe this -- adhesive-backed pads over their nipples, sold in a box of 10 for 300 yen. They are favored by some women when wearing tight garments, as a means of preserving female modesty.

"Before Livedoor CEO Takafumi 'Horiemon' Horie was arrested, he regularly appeared in a T-shirt from which his nipples protruded," Keita Takahashi, 23, tells Dime. "Women seemed to be repelled by the sight, which led me to start sticking them on."

"When I showed a girl what I was wearing, she was really turned off," Takahashi adds. "But it's better than having my nipples protrude through the shirt. It would be good to have these in a male version."

When guys calling at their lady friends' apartment had to visit the loo, they frequently left a mess in their wake. Scenting an opportunity, bathroom fixtures maker Toto last year introduced a special easier-to-clean flooring material called "Hydrocera Floor J" that facilitates mopping up any inadvertent splashes. But this may not be necessary much longer: a source at Cecile, a underwear specialty mail order firm, tells Dime that men's briefs without a front aperture are selling well.

"More men in their teens and 20s are in the habit of sitting down when they pee," she explains.

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