



What's in a name? A lot of baggage and trauma unfortunately

## Description

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## [Banzai Japan](#) [Aoi Hoshi MV](#)

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Just over four years ago, Japanese morning television had a collective cry over the passing of Johnny Kitagawa. The 87-year-old founder of powerhouse talent agency Johnny & Associates died of a stroke on July 9, 2019, and TV was transformed into a string of memorial services.

This past week, the attention was back on Kitagawa — but for an aspect of his music career that was notably missing during those fervent tributes of 2019.

On Thursday, news shows, livestreams and thousands of users on X (formerly Twitter) watched as Julie Keiko Fujishima, Kitagawa's niece, acknowledged that the company founder had sexually abused agency employees for decades. (A [recently released report](#) by a third-party team concluded that Kitagawa started sexually abusing boys in the 1950s when he was in his 20s, and then young boy band members at his agency from the 1970s to the 2010s.) Fujishima then resigned as president of the company, passing control over to Johnny's talent Noriyuki Higashiyama ([who is also facing abuse allegations](#)).

The acknowledgement came in a [press conference](#) that lasted over four hours, with questions from reporters, discussions of the future and dashes of absurdity.

The controversial issue of Kitagawa's history of abuse has hovered around the company since the 1960s, but it became unavoidable for Johnny's to address as renewed media interest, both international and domestic, reached a tipping point this year after former trainee [Kauan Okamoto detailed being assaulted](#)

by the founder to weekly magazine Shukan Bunshun and the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan.

The events of this past week do not mark an end to the agency dealing with its ghosts, rather this is a starting point for how, exactly, things will change now that the allegations have been acknowledged. The full extent of the fallout remains to be seen — compensation for Kitagawa's victims is still unresolved and scrutiny may shift to the domestic media, which largely failed to report on the issue for decades. For Johnny's, one of the nation's leading entertainment agencies, it is now a matter of how to move forward — barring any more unpleasant discoveries.

Netizens have debated whether it was necessary for Fujishima to resign over her uncle's crimes, but the symbolism alone justifies it. As detailed by the third-party report released at the end of August, one of the major reasons Kitagawa's abuse remained unchecked for decades was the family nature of the company, with Kitagawa's sister, Mary Kitagawa, holding a prominent position of power there until 2020. While Fujishima (Mary's daughter) currently remains the company's primary stockholder, her stepping down from the position her uncle held at least ends the family's stranglehold on the agency, signaling the chance to create a new era.

When it comes to internal operations and general business practices, however, Johnny & Associates seemingly entered a new era as soon as its figurehead died. The time when a single person could control the entirety of Japanese entertainment — like Kitagawa did — had passed well before he did.

Johnny's has since morphed into a more modern entertainment agency. Though it used to be intensely wary of the internet, it now embraces YouTube and allows (even encourages) talent to have a social media presence.

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It has become less hostile toward the media, too. A question that came up frequently at Thursday's press conference was whether it would stop discouraging TV networks from featuring similar male-centric pop groups from competing companies, referring to the persistent idea that Johnny's would use its clout to keep its rivals sidelined. But, that hasn't been the reality for a while now; J-pop acts from agencies such as LDH earn plenty of screen time on the same shows as Johnny's groups these days.

However, Johnny's still needs to sever ties to its tainted past.

It's right there in its name — can a company that has now formally recognized that its founder sexually abused talent within its ranks still bear that abuser's name? Can the developmental roster where Kitagawa primarily preyed on young boys still be called "Johnny's Jr."? The answer is "absolutely not" if the company is serious about making amends and changing for the future.

The name issue came up multiple times at the press conference. At first, Higashiyama waffled on the suggestion that the company should rename itself and seemed to say it wouldn't — leading a reporter to compare this to a company being called "[Hitler Kabushiki Gaisha](#)" ("Hitler Corp."), which was the day's most out-of-pocket moment. Later on, however, Higashiyama indicated that [he was open to a change](#), and the new vice president, Yoshihiko Inohara, referred to "Johnny's" as having "the name of a criminal."

Johnny's simply can't be Johnny's anymore. While Kitagawa's contributions to the global entertainment industry are undeniable, his legacy can't be whitewashed. Changing the name and branding would signal a commitment to moving forward as a much better company.

The agency should instead place its focus and future on the people who have always made it a juggernaut in the entertainment industry — the performers. Despite this year's reckoning, the agency's groups remain a staple at the top of sales charts, with current flagship act Snow Man's latest single [selling over 665,000 copies on its first day](#). The fandoms around these groups have always been able to separate the art from the agency (and it's naive to think fans weren't well aware of the rumors over the years), because they are there for the talent — not the people in a corporate boardroom.

Johnny Kitagawa is dead and will never face consequences for his actions. The wealth of performers that he had a hand in nurturing into stars are still here, though, and their work, not Kitagawa, should be the driving force of the company's legacy.

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