

**INTERRUPTING POLARITIES OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY:
CONSUMPTION OF SAME-SEX PORNOGRAPHY BY JAPANESE WOMEN**

by

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ABSTRACT

In Japanese sexual discourses produced by women, a cultural sphere exists in which females express sexual agency through intimacy in fantasy spaces that are homosocial and/or homoerotic. In this paper, I argue that such spaces constructed at the level of fantasy may create an alternative form of women's sexual subjectivity, agency and identity that radically links women in the fantasy sphere of homoeroticism in ways distinct from Euro-North American discourses of sexuality. By examining popular Japanese literature and women's magazines, I interpret some aspects of Japanese women's homosocial and homoerotic culture, addressing the ways that analytical attention to fantasy may invite discussion concerning a diversity of cross-cultural gender and sexual ideologies. My analysis explore Japanese discourses of women's gender and sexuality, queer and/or straight. My research has been conducted through, but not limited to, my original collection of literature, comic books, TV programs, popular women's magazines, counter-cultural newsletters, documentary films and pornographic movies. I analyze contemporary discourses of gender, sexuality and fantasy circulated in women's magazines, newsletters, comic books and pornography in Japanese culture. How do we make sense of conventional images of women's beauty alongside images of sexual practices that disrupt conventional patriarchal heterosexuality, including images of sex between women, or between men, transsexuals, dolls, animation characters or even cyborgs, that are created by and for women? I argue that Japanese women's gender and sexuality are represented and discussed ambiguously, and that rich, multilayered fantasies challenge strict gender and heterosexual norms in ways that may be seen as politicizing and empowering.

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I. Introduction

When visiting bookstores or corner convenience stores in Japan, one can see many pornographic comic books, displayed prominently at the front of the magazine racks. Many of these comic books are created by and for women, with their target audience being middle-class adult women. These comics depict primarily straight heterosexual sex, but each issue generally presents a few alternative sex stories, for example, portraying two women having sex. It is also common for a straight woman to bluntly say that she likes observing beautiful women, or that her hobby is collecting photo books of sexy female media idols.¹ Such comments are often made on TV, even by the idols themselves. Moreover, in Tokyo, in the neighborhood of Shinjuku, an area with hundreds of male gay bars and about 20 lesbian bars, I have often seen butch/femme couples, as well as femme/femme lesbian couples, both of whom sport long hair, makeup, and fancy dresses.² Many queer Japanese women have told me that when they visit North American lesbian bars they are surprised by the invisibility of femme/femme couples, compared to the situation in Japanese lesbian bars.² In fact, this is my

¹ These women (actors, TV talents, and idols) often say they want both men and women to look/buy their *gurabia shashinshû* (sexy photography books), which of course helps to increase their sales. One of the most popular *gurabia* idols, Megumi, is a 22 year old who works for the Yellow Cab Talent Agency, a place known for having many female idols with large breasts (the sexist phrase yellow cab was coined to refer to young Japanese women who travel abroad for quick sexual flings). Having published more than 15 very popular *gurabia shashinshû* emphasizing her 94 cm H cup breasts, Megumi is one of the most popular *gurabia* idols and claims her personal collection of female *gurabia shashinshû* is now up to 200, including those that have been given to her by her fans. See, Megumi's interview in "E! Ielôkyabu no aidolu zein ga hawaii ni daishûgô?! Megumi, Igarashi Risa mo shinbideo hatsubai" (What? The idols of Yellow Cab all get together in Hawaii?! Megumi and Igarashi Risa have brand new videos for sale), *Akiba 2 Go*, 28 May 2002: n. pag. Online, internet, Available: <http://akiba.ascii24.com/akiba/idol/event/2002/05/28/636094-001.html>.

² Shinjuku is a busy area in Tokyo, and has been home to the largest number of gay and lesbian bars in Japan for decades. Bars with Onabe (female-to-male transgender or transsexuals) working as hosts or Dansou no Reijin (female transvestites), are also popular there. A documentary film about them called *Shinjuku Boys*, directed by Kim Longinotto and Jano Williams in 1996, has been shown internationally at various queer film festivals.

³ In using the word queer, I acknowledge its historical meaning and political usage in North America (see Judith Butler's book, *Bodies That Matter; On the Discursive Limits of "Sex,"* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 226-230. But I also wish to encompass the varieties of non-heterosexual genders and sexualities available in Japan, and I find 'queer' to be the most inclusive term. Some of the names used are: *bian* (lesbian, coined in reaction of the derogatory term 'lezu'); *ribâsu* (one who enjoys being both a top and a bottom); *Onabe*, *Miss Dandy*, *boyish* (these three terms refer to transgender or transsexuals the terms differ depending on the geographical area); *tachi* (a top); *sukadachi* (a top who usually wears skirts); *neko* (a bottom); *zuboneko* (a bottom who usually wears pants); *yuri* (a lesbian, but it literally means lily, and is used as a companion term to the Japanese word for 'rose', (*bara*) which refers to homosexual men); *okama* (queeny homosexual male); and *gei* (homosexual man). There are many more words describing homosexual men's gender and sexuality than are noted here. Also, I recognize the significance of identifying the autonomy of each kind of gender and sexuality.

impression too: while there are femme/femme couples in North America, they appear far less common than in the Tokyo lesbian scene. The longer I stay in North America, the more I feel that there must be certain Japanese cultural specificities with regard to ideologies and practices of gender and sexuality.

For example, Japanese women's fantasies and desires towards women are openly discussed without reference to same-sex love relations. What is going on with gender and sexuality in Japanese women's culture? Since Michael Foucault's *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, was published in English in 1978, scholars have been influenced by his analysis. Lynn Hunt, a professor of History, summarizes Foucault's contribution: "subjectivity, gender, and sexuality are fundamentally shaped by discourse and representation" (Hunt 78-9). Anthropologist Gayle Rubin states, "*The History of Sexuality* has been the most influential and emblematic text of the new scholarship on sex" (qtd. in Hunt 79). In Foucault's book, discourses about sexuality in the West are discussed through the contexts of Christianity, law, prohibition, and literature in which "you will seek to transform your desire, your every desire, into discourse" (Foucault 21). Here I ask: how are discourses about Japanese women's gender and sexuality produced, consumed, and resisted in culturally specific ways?

In this paper, I analyze contemporary discourses of gender, sexuality and fantasy circulated in women's magazines, newsletters, comic books and pornography. How do we make sense of conventional images of women's beauty alongside images of sexual practices that disrupt conventional patriarchal heterosexuality, including images of sex between women, or between men, transsexuals, dolls, animated characters or even cyborgs, that are created by and for women? I argue that Japanese women's gender and sexuality are represented and discussed ambiguously, and that rich, multilayered fantasies challenge strict gender and heterosexual norms in ways that may be seen as politicizing and empowering.

In Japanese sexual discourses produced by women, female characters express sexual agency through intimacy in fantasy spaces that are homosocial and/or homoerotic. Indeed, I argue that such spaces constructed at the level of fantasy may create an alternative form of women's sexual subjectivity, agency and identity that radically links women in the fantasy sphere of homoeroticism in ways distinct from Euro-Canadian discourses of sexuality. By examining popular Japanese literature and women's

magazines, I will interpret some aspects of Japanese women's homosocial and homoerotic culture, addressing the ways that analytical attention to fantasy may invite discussion concerning a diversity of cross-cultural gender and sexual ideologies. My analysis will explore Japanese discourses of women's gender and sexuality, queer and straight. My research has been conducted through, but not limited to, my original collection of literature, comic books, TV programs, popular women's magazines, counter-cultural newsletters, documentary films and pornographic movies.⁴

I attempt to pay careful attention to complex cultural specificities. While I am reluctant to generalize concerning queer gender relations across cultures, it is also true that queer people within heteronormative societies across cultures face similar oppressions and struggles. My use of certain words, like butch, femme, andro(gynous) or queer thus does not indicate a belief that unique cultures can be subsumed under the terms of existing ideologies.

1.1 Review of Literature

Female sexuality has long been assumed to be passive, submissive, controlled by males and empty of agency. Anthropologist Ann Oakley explains in 1972:

The female's sexuality is supposed to lie in her receptiveness and this is not just a matter of her open vagina: it extends to the whole structure of feminine personality to involve long arousal and slow satisfaction, inferior sex drive, susceptibility to field dependence (a crying child distracts the attention) and romantic idealism rather than lustful reality. Women are psychologically, no less than anatomically incapable of rape. That these stereotypes persist can be seen from any woman's magazine and almost any fiction dealing with sexual relationships. (36)

In contrast, anthropologists have documented a diverse range of sexualities across cultures and time periods; they have challenged the culturally specific myths of biological and gendered determinism. Although early anthropologists' methods have been critically investigated by later scholars who questioned the biases of the researchers and the

⁴ Periodicals that target adults are categorized as *zasshi* (magazines, journals or periodicals) in Japanese bookstores. *Zasshi* can be fashion magazines, scholarly journals or pornographic photography periodicals including comics or *manga*. On the other hand, comic books that target 'minors' are categorized as *manga* (comic).

reliability of the findings, anthropologists have used cross-cultural analysis and comparison to raise questions about any kind of universality sexuality and gender, and they have used cross-cultural data to demonstrate how gender and sexuality are culturally constructed. Bronislaw Malinowski's research on the sexual behavior of female and male Trobriand Islanders in 1929 showed the sexuality of female children and adult women' is not passive; girls and women often took the sexual initiative. In 1935, Margaret Mead reported that among the Arapesh, sexual practices are defined through external stimuli rather than as a powerful spontaneous desire. Sexual feelings do not involve strong desires or emotions, and are treated merely as feelings of similar intensity as, for example, intimacy towards parents, children or siblings, but are just expressed differently, just as one treats a parent differently than one treats one's child. Margaret Mead later contributed to the cross-cultural analysis of gender and sexuality, in her demonstration that traits that had been considered to be universally the same across cultures and based on human biology, such as femininity, masculinity, and sexuality, actually take on different forms in different cultures.⁵

In 1965, William Davenport's research demonstrated that women have as much sexual pleasure as men.⁶ Ann Oakley published her "groundbreaking book"; *Sex, Gender and Society* in 1972. It is considered as "one of the earliest attempts to argue that femininity and masculinity are socially constructed and showed cross-cultural evidence to argue that differences between male and female (hetero)sexuality are products of culture, rather than nature" (Jackson and Scott 35). Women's Studies and Sociology researchers, Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott conclude:

Anthropologists have since begun to raise more fundamental questions about Western conceptualizations of gender and sexuality, suggesting that not all cultures regard gender as a set of binary opposites permanently embodied in men and women. Nor do other cultures necessarily see gender and sexuality as parts of our inner being: ... (M)ore recent work has suggested that there is no reliable way of deciding in advance what constitutes a sexual act. What counts as sexual

⁵ Mead's relationship with Ruth Benedict, first as protégé and mentor, later as colleagues and lovers, is explored in the book by Hilary Lapsley, *Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict: The Kinship of Women* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999).

⁶ Oakley 37.

depended on the meanings of specific acts in both their wider cultural and immediate interpersonal contexts. (8)

Queer feminist scholars are increasingly committed to probing gender and sexual discourses as they are produced and consumed in specific local and national contexts.

Before discussing Japanese culture as a "native" Japanese researcher, I would like to refer to Black feminist anthropologists' thought-provoking strategies that have enhanced the possibilities of anthropological research by and for feminist women of colour. Karla Slocum argues that:

(A)n important lesson for me has been the recognition that we can reconcile our "native politics" with field realities. That is, we can interrogate the local categories of identity construction in the places where we do our research, but we need not see the categories as obstacles. Rather, as we analyze how we differ from those we study and consider the impact of such difference on our research goals, we can still identify a set of responsibilities to which we will adhere in our work and which we hold toward the people who participate in our research. (146)

Then she adds that: "If our purpose as engaged Black feminist anthropologists is a political one (i.e. to challenge power and oppression), we can draw on our knowledge both as insiders and outsiders" so this way "we can better connect the field experience with our politics" (147). As a queer feminist Japanese woman, I also feel like both an insider and an outsider. However, given my belief in challenging power and the oppression of dominant discourses, I hope my cross-cultural research advances a critique of biological and cultural determinism. Like Black feminist anthropologist Carolyn Martin Shaw, I object to sexist and racist stereotypes of Japanese culture.⁷ Japanese male anthropologist Ayabe Tsuneo, who wrote the Introduction to *Onna no Bunkajinruigaku* (Cultural Anthropology of Women), opposes feminist and women's liberation movements in Japan. In Ayabe's discussion of the women's liberation movement in Japan, he relates it not to indigenous concerns but rather to Western colonialism:

In most social phenomena, we tend to forget that we fall into this a lot; in the shadow of "progress" there is "regress", when we "acquire"

⁷ See further discussions on these issues in "Disciplining the Black Female Body: Learning Feminism in Africa and the United States" in *Black Feminist Anthropology* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001) 102-125.

something we "lose" something irreplaceable as well. An example is how it is taken as a symbol of progress that defective Western-style foods have spread throughout the world. Perhaps there are many things that are acquired through women's movements. But, on the other hand, we have to be aware of the tremendous scale of what has been lost. The increase divorce, the disruption of families, the rapid increase in neurosis in children, violence at school, the horrifyingly high incidence of incest, the rapid increases in alcoholism and vicious crimes by women, identity confusion, homosexuality, isolation; -- these are obviously not unrelated to women's liberation. ... Can we really say that human civilization is in progress? (6)

I see his point that postmodern Japanese culture continuously takes Western ideas for granted, and that due to the influence of certain specific Western ideas, Japanese sometimes see themselves as inferior unless they adhere to those ideas (e.g., many people believe that homophobia in Japan is due to Western influence and Japanese reactions to outside ideas).⁸ However, the Japanese patriarchal and conservative attitudes and ideologies illustrated in his comments are powerful. By being an insider and an outsider in the field of Japanese anthropology and cultural studies, I aim to reflect critically upon Ayabe's caricature of feminism as a dangerous societal force.

II: Discourses of Gender and Sexuality among Japanese Women

2.1 Scholarly Debates

Sexuality and gender are constructed through values and behavioral tendencies that vary cross-culturally in ways that cannot be completely determined. Judith Butler explains that:

Sexuality is never fully expressed in a performance or practice; there will be passive and butchy femme, femme and aggressive butches, and both of those, and more, will turn out to describe more or less anatomically stable males and females. There are no direct expressive or causal links between sex, gender, gender presentation, sexual practice, fantasy and sexuality. (1991, 25)

Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, in their discussion of lesbian

⁸ Japanese names are written in the order of family name then given name, in the Japanese fashion.

community history, show that trends and customs differ over time. Before the 1970s, "butch-femme roles (in Buffalo, New York) established the parameters for love relationships and friendships within the community," and "two butches could be friends, but never lovers; the same was true for femmes" (1993:152). Recently, a number of studies demonstrate lesbian and bisexual women desiring women of various genders, including but not limited to butch and femme, androgynous and femme, femme and femme, androgynous and androgynous, and butch and butch (Halberstam 1998, Munt 1998, Nestle 1992).

Contrary to research that names genders and sexualities (e.g. femme, butch, androgynous), my research explores spheres where women are not clearly categorized by gender or sexuality. In Japanese women's popular culture, women who experience sexual relationships with other women, or who engage in lesbian fantasies without identifying as homosexual, will be analyzed. Just as queer Asian American lesbians claim that they are different from straight Asian women or non-Asian lesbians (Hanawa 1996, 461), so Japanese queer culture demonstrates characteristics that differ from those of other Asians and non-Asian lesbians. For instance, *onabe*, or female transvestites (FTM), share complex sexual identities, in that they are attracted to women but do not identify themselves as lesbians; instead, they consider themselves as engaging in cross-sex relationships (Hanawa 1997, 477; Robertson 1998). Anthropologist Jennifer Robertson describes female fans of cross-dressing female performers in Japan and their possible love relationships with women:

Same-sex sexual practices can be hinted at or even acknowledged, but most of the female fans with whom I have either corresponded or interacted, or about whom I have read, do not also claim, publicly at least, a lesbian identity or sexual orientation in their everyday lives. The practice may involve same-sex relations (in the broadest sense, which ranges from spiritual to physical connectedness), and the style may be butch-femme, but the identity is ... not necessarily as a lesbian, much less a lesbian feminist. (175)

Hiroko Kakefuda, a lesbian who first came out in the Japanese media, argues in 1992 that homosexuality is still treated as a psychological sickness in Japan. This fact caused her to deny her own lesbian desire for a long time "until a few years ago, I strongly believed

that I was absolutely not lesbian, even if others thought so" (83). These discussions show that the reluctance of Japanese women to admit their lesbian sexuality may derive from their social context, which institutionally discriminates against homosexuals.

However, as Japanese cultural anthropologist Ayabe Tsuneo argues, sexuality in Japan was influenced by patriarchal Confucianism during the Edo period (1603-1867). Those values have been internalized in Japanese culture during the past 100 years. Since the very last years of the Meiji period (1868-1912), Japanese sexuality has been much less free and open than many Euro-American cultures (5). And yet, male homosexuality was institutionalized in Japanese culture during the Edo period. According to Sabine Frühstück, a scholar specializing in Japan:

Books on sexual love such as *Saikaku nanshoku kagami* (The great mirror of male love, 1687), flourished in the seventeenth century in response to a demand from Japan emergent urban class of merchants and artisans, called "townsmen" (*chônin*). These books reflected the cultural assumption that romantic love was to be found not in the institution of marriage but in the realm of prostitution. Recreational sex with both female and young male prostitutes was a townsman's prerogative if he could afford their fees, and he chose between them without stigma. (Frühstück 62)

Scholars analyzing the post-Meiji era have shown that the importation of Western ideology through religion, morality, psychology and science changed the tolerant Japanese understanding of homosexuality into more discriminatory forms. Frühstück discusses that in 1911 there were many newspapers and women's magazines that introduced Japanese readers to various sexological themes in the West ranging from sexual inversion, sexual ethics, and the relationships between sexuality and religion (69). Such ideology influenced the decision of the Japanese Ministry of Education, which determines the school curriculum throughout Japan, to prohibit sex education in the school program in 1922; though there were researchers who resisted this trend from 1920 to 1930 (72). Clearly, sexual matters have been treated in contradictory ways in Japan. While no specific law prohibits homosexuality in Japan even nowadays, institutionalized heterosexism means that the existence of homosexuality has been ignored and excluded by the dominant culture.

A Japanese literature scholar, Komashaku Kimi, admitting that she has co-habitated with another woman for over 40 years, criticizes contemporary homosexual culture, which she believes overemphasizes sexual acts and sexual partners:

It seems that many people find this (living with a woman that long) unusual, and they ask me if I am a lesbian. ... I am so disappointed by this kind of response. What is a lesbian? Woman loving woman? If so, then don't bother asking. Can you live with somebody you don't like for this long? ... Being together with somebody for 40 years already means there is love. ... If lesbian is limited to sex play, that is really none of your business. ... In fact, making sex especially important in human relationships is a prejudice created by sexually discriminatory society. ... Because homosexuals are surrounded by such attitudes, they also accept this myth. ... Love and sex seem to be based on a mythic ideology that tells people they are lacking without a partner. ... I believe that being single is the greatest luxury. People should be independent financially, psychologically and sexually. (99-100)

Komashaku's expression of a form of homosexuality/lesbianism beyond sexuality is quite interesting. Of course, there are also lesbian feminists like Kakefuda, who have politicized the act of coming out in Japan.⁹

The more I study the subject the more I am convinced that Japanese women's sexuality cannot simply be defined in terms of established, Eurocentric homosexual norms. Sociocultural influences on homosexuality are so strong that any definition of lesbian sexuality constructed without rigorous attention to cultural specificities is dubious.

Examining an area crucial to this research, anthropologists Anne Allison and Jennifer Robertson discuss gender, and sexuality in the Japanese sociocultural environment, as reflected in pornographic comic books. Allison's analysis in *Permitted and Prohibited Desires* is based on a categorization of all pornographic comic books, both for men and women, as *ero manga* (erotic comic). In fact this term only connotes comics directed at men, and her analysis is dominated by a psychoanalytic discussion of

⁹ After being active to politicizing her lesbian agency in media, she has disappeared from public eye. People say that the treatment of media weakened her and unfortunately she has made no public appearances since around 1996.

men's comics. Her arguments concerning sex fantasies in *ero manga* are constructed in relation to the essentially Western notions of Freudian theory, according to which overt depiction's of genitals and taboo sexual practices are viewed as perversions: "(F)antasies of sex are often produced along lines of abnormal, illicit, transgressive, or dirty encounters that leave certain realities literally off the page and, figuratively, outside representation" (171). Robertson discusses how the system of having androgynous gendered roles of women playing male roles in Takarazuka theater was embedded within national politics during World War II.

On the other hand, social discrimination against homosexuals in Japan leads many to feel a need to politicize sexuality. However, some, like Komashaku feel the need to de-emphasize sexuality and depoliticize it in order to be treated equally. Indisputably, the wide variety of sexual diversions available within the cultural sphere of comic books, especially pornographic ones, suggests a clear visual emphasis on sexuality. Some critics assert that pornographic comics do not represent reality, while others say that they symbolically illustrate hidden desires.

In the Japanese context I find a significant difference between pornographic comic books in general and lesbian pornographic comic books. While the content of heterosexual pornographic comic books created by and for men supports Allison's analysis, with depiction of abnormal, extraordinary sexual relationships, the stories in *Misuto* (1997-1999), the lesbian pornographic comic made by and for women, depicted models of sexual relationships similar to those depicted in non-pornographic heterosexual comics commonly read by teen and adult women. I will show how, by focusing on female homosocial culture and illustrating its potential contribution to the development of women's same-sex desire, *Misuto* deconstructed the social prejudices against homosexuality, as well as the prevailing model of abnormal and oversexualized pornographic images. It is interesting from this point of view, that the description of abnormal or extraordinary forms of sexuality was generally omitted, while having lesbian relationships in regular lifestyles were represented instead. The politicization of homosexuality within a repressive culture was never overtly discussed. However, I believe that the homosexual expressions in *Misuto* had significant political effects, as I will show in the subsequent discussion of this issue.

2.2 Contemporary Gender and Sexual Politics in Japan: The Context

Providing cultural background to my research contextualizes the sociopolitical meanings of the gendered behavior and sexual situations I describe. The expressions of gender and sexuality among Japanese women function through the context of their current sociopolitical positionality. Behaviors that I describe Japanese women as practicing in my research, such as consuming pornographic comic books like *Misuto*, and talking about women's sexual fantasies that are outside the norms of their sexual identification, must be understood through the lens of the boundaries of social behavior in a given society. Although patriarchy, heteronormativity and sexism exist throughout cultures in the East and the West, each takes different forms historically and geographically, and evokes quite different images depending on which society is being explored. By revealing how the sociocultural environment that Japanese women live in functions, the significance of their resistance, exploration, and challenges to sexual norms can be better understood, and will enrich comprehension of my research.

To contextualize my investigation of female homoerotic imagery in Japanese popular culture that is produced by and for women, I would like to briefly discuss Japanese women's traditional gender roles and their positioning in Japanese society and culture. There are deeply institutionalized gender inequalities that are specific to Japan. While gender discrimination should be critically examined in terms of women's struggles to achieve equal rights, from another point of view, the fact that this inequality isolated Japanese women from men also provided them with a space in which to create a uniquely women's culture. Instead of striving to attain equal opportunities and choices in the heterosocial world, some women experienced greater freedom within a homosocial sphere where they fulfilled their desires unimpeded. Understanding women's agency in consuming homosocial culture is thus crucial to the subject of this research. A critical examination of differences in gender roles enables us to understand cultural trends that contributed to Japanese women's oppression, and the possibilities of their resistance.

In terms of paid employment, in 1997 women represented 40% of the entire workforce.¹⁰ Since 1965, the percentage of women workers has gradually increased from 31.7% to 40%. However, these figures include a large number of part-time workers, since the percentage of women part-timers increased from 9.6% in 1965 to 35.9% in

¹⁰ All the numbers, rates and survey results come from *Women's Data Book*, published in 1999, unless otherwise noted.

1997.¹¹ From the late 1990s, the number of full-time women workers decreased and the number of part-time and temporary workers increased, along with the number of married women workers in the 20-30 year-old age group. As Hattori Ryôko explains, technological developments in industry made simpler and safer work more readily available; also, "types of jobs that 'women may be able to do' or which are 'better for women to do' have emerged, leading to a big increase in job opportunities for women" (Inoue and Ehara; 1999, 90).

It is significant that, even though there are now more job opportunities for women, the availability of high-status jobs continues to be so much greater for men. Hattori also points out that the fact that women still face strong social expectations that they should look after housework, as well as provide care for children and aged family members, limits their ability to take advantage of full-time job opportunities. In fact, the reason that so many women accept only part-time employment is largely attributable to their responsibility for child-rearing and the care of aged or sick family members; their jobs and housework generally take second place to these activities.¹²

From 1908 until the early 1930s, the average age of marriage was 23 for women and 27 for men, though by 1997, the average age at marriage for women had risen to 26.6, and 28.5 for men.¹³ The same survey shows that the most important qualification for marriage among both men and women is personality; the second most important quality that men seek in women is personal appearance, while the second most important quality that women seek in men is economic status.

The survey also indicates that, despite having a steady partner, more women are choosing not to marry. The national census, taken in 2000, indicated that 54% of women between 25-29 years of age were single; in the 30 to 34 age group it was 26.6 per cent, and in the 35 to 39 age group it was 13.8 per cent.¹⁴ There has also been an increase in

¹¹ Inoue and Ehara 94. Here part-timer means workers who work less than 35 hours a week.

¹² Inoue and Ehara 40-1. 1996 survey.

¹³ From *Telebi Takkuru* (TV Tackle), Asahi TV, June 2002. 69.3 per cent of men in 25-29 age group were single, 42.9 per cent in 30-34 age group and 25.7 per cent in 35-39 age group.

¹⁴ Inoue and Ehara 11.

¹⁵ Nicholas D. Kristof, "Who Needs Love! In Japan, Many Couples Don't," *New York Times*, Feb. 11, 1996.

¹⁴ Inoue and Ehara 14. percentage who feel that being single is beneficial: women 88.5 %, men 82.7 %. percentage who feel that being married is beneficial: women 69.9 %, men 64.6%.

the number of women and men who do not even socialize with people of different genders. This latter fact may be explained by the existence of large numbers of people who are single not by choice, but rather due to their lack of social skills or satisfactory opportunities to meet others. During the 1990s, the media reported on women who remain celibate even within a long-term relationship, and in 1996 the New York Times dealt with the same phenomenon.¹⁵ According to Yoshizumi Kyôko:

In Japan, where women's economic independence was hardly established, marriage was considered as a place of secured life; therefore, marriage, child bearing and child rearing became women's entire way of life. Also, the style (institution) of marriage was valued more than the actual marriage relationship per se, so social and economical ties within marriage were deeper than love. Even if a couple's relationship cooled off, it was believed that they should avoid divorce, as long as their roles as parents needed to be maintained. However, as a result of women's social progress, now more women feel that marriage may not be necessary so the idea of marriage has moved from the compulsory to the optional. (Inoue and Ehara 1999, 12)

As we can see, the issues of marriage have become complex with women's increasing economic independence. While there are cultural aspects of marriage that need to be secured socially, many women do not feel marriage is necessary.¹⁶ As Yoshizumi explains, these facts reflect greater social and economic freedom and the increase in personal options that such freedom produces. More precisely, she says, "in Japan many single people continue living with parents, even after getting a stable job" and "(t)heir easy life of being taken care of by their parents is the main reason that prevents them from becoming independent and considering marriage" (14). Although young Japanese people actively experience sexual relationships at an early age, in comparison to Europe or North America their tendency to cohabit and rear children before marriage remains quite low. The connection between marriage and reproduction is strongly supported by prevailing ideological structures.¹⁷

During the Meiji period (1868-1912), under the prevailing government

¹⁷ Inoue and Ehara 12.

ideologies of "civilization and enlightenment" and "rich country, strong army," abortion was prohibited; later, during World War II, even contraception was banned. In order to rebuild the country after losing the war, the government Ministry of Population Control legalized abortion, as long as it resulted from a situation of financial hardship. Around the same time, under the equal rights amendment which emerged from political reforms introduced by the Allied (American) Occupation (1945-52), women achieved the right to vote and to be elected to public office (Robertson 1998, xii). However, the prohibition on abortion instituted during the Meiji period (1868-1912) still exists in criminal law; it thus may still be applied in the future, depending on possible changes in the government system (Inoue and Ehara, 1999; 78). Considering the fact that the birthrate has continued to drop during the last decade, reaching 1.39 in 1997, it is possible that political pressures may arise to enforce the prohibition on abortion; the legalization of abortion thus remains an important concern for feminists.¹⁸

As shown in a 1997 survey, although later marriages are increasingly common and more women prefer not to marry, most of the women who undergo abortions are married wives (62). However, the largest percentage of women who have abortions, 23.8% comes from the 20-24 age group (including those who are wives).¹⁹ While research data indicates that the 16-19 years old age group records the highest percentage of contraceptive use, women in this group have abortions at a later stage of pregnancy than those in other age groups. Ogino Miho explains that younger women tend to visit doctors later, due to their ignorance, fear and insecurity about pregnancy. Also, the late date at which the formal legalization of birth control pills took place, 1999, inevitably reduced women's choices with regard to contraception and thus led to an increase in abortion rates. In fact, while birth control pills are the most commonly used method of contraception in Holland, Germany, England, Sweden and the US, in Japan condoms have been most common, with a rate of use that exceeds those of other countries by more than three times.²⁰

It is also crucial to note that reliance on male partners for contraception (as with

¹⁸ Inoue and Ehara 5. This is the rate of females giving birth between the ages of 15-49 years old.

¹⁹ Inoue and Ehara 63.

²⁰ Inoue and Ehara 61. This graph shows the rate for contraception use in different countries with a representative year for each country. For birth control pills in Holland it is 59.5% in 1993, in Germany 54.6% in 1992, in England 40.6% in 1992, in Sweden 38.8% in 1994, in the U.S.A. 28.5% in 1991, and in Japan 1.2% in 1998. The rate for use of condoms in Holland is 10.1%, in Germany 13.4%, in England 21.9%, in Sweden 23.5%, in the U.S.A. 20.5% and in Japan 77.8%.

the use of condoms and ejaculation outside the vagina) means that heterosexual and bisexual women risk becoming pregnant or having an abortion because these practices depend on the behavior of men, and, according to Ogino, such behavior is often extremely unreliable. Ejaculation outside the vagina is taken as a way to prevent pregnancy in Japan much more than in other countries; while a survey states a frequency of this as: 1.0% in Germany and England, and 3.1% in Sweden, it is 7.4% in Japan (there is no data available for Holland and the US). In fact, among those Japanese female students in junior high school, high school and college who reported that they did not practice contraception during their first sexual intercourse, 36.3 % (junior high school), 21.6% (high school) and 33.3% (college) stated that they did this because they did not feel comfortable about raising the issue with their partners.²¹ As Ogino says, many young women in this situation end up relying on abortion to compensate for their contraceptive failures; moreover,

Because in Japan there is no strong religious opposition to abortion, as there is in Catholic countries, many people view abortion as a necessary evil or a realistic way to solve the problem of unwanted pregnancies. On the other hand, since the business of providing memorial services for aborted fetuses is also thriving, we cannot deny that many women experience a guilty conscience or are afraid that abortion will bring them under a curse. (62)

It is true that the survival of the aborted fetus remains a popular belief. A number of shrines and graveyards have been established for people who care about the fate of aborted fetuses. Historically, having a midwife assist with the birth of a child has also been a popular idea, and Japanese midwives have traditionally been thought to be gifted with psychic, spiritual and fortunetelling powers, or to be capable of controlling or protecting a child's viability; in the popular mind, they thus have often been both respected and feared (Kamata 1990, 68-76). The cultural causes of pregnancy and abortion rates thus cannot be determined by statistical methods. In spite of such existing culture-specific beliefs, however, we also need to consider the potential for institutional coercion and manipulation by the government, since this factor may have the most powerful affect on any changes in the status of Japanese abortion laws.

²¹ Inoue and Ehara 64.

The media in Japan have represented teenage girls as especially liable to engage in early sexual activities. News reports often show men being arrested for hiring teenage prostitutes. A particular term, *Enjo kôsai* (financially assisted dating), has even emerged to define a relationship in which adult men provide money or valuables to girls or young women, in order to receive their ongoing sexual services. Girls even sell their school uniforms and used, unwashed underwear to people who make use of them for their sexual desires. Telephone clubs, where girls meet men or engage in sexual conversations with them, are also popular. Many girls seem to feel themselves empowered by participating in such sexual acts. A chart showing the ages at which girls first engage in masturbation, kissing, petting and sexual intercourse, in terms of first incidence in junior high school (JH), high school (H) and college (C), also shows a dramatic decline in the age of their first experience. In 1987, 6.9 (JH), 10.0 (H) and 21.1 (C) per cent of female students were reported to have engaged in masturbation, and this increases to 10.1 (JH), 12.6 (H) and 25.8 (C) per cent by 1993.²² Interestingly, although the overall male rate of masturbation is much higher (reported as 33.0 (JH), 80.7 (H) and 91.5 (C) per cent in 1993), this rate remains quite stable and does not show any increase comparable to the girls.

In 1993, 7.6 (JH), 32.3 (H) and 63.1 (C) per cent of female students experienced kissing; 2.6 (JH), 16.5 (H), 42.8 (C) experienced petting; and 3.0 (JH), 15.7 (H), 43.4 (C) experienced sexual intercourse. At each year and age, males recorded higher percentages than females, except with regard to kissing (females at 25.5 per cent in 1987 and 32.3 in 1993; males at 23.1 per cent in 1987 and 28.3 in 1993) and sexual intercourse among high school students, where in 1993 the female rate was 15.7 per cent and that for males was 14.4. While since 1987 the rate of reported sexual intercourse among males rises by about three per cent, the female rate rises by seven per cent, and thus almost doubles the 1987 rate.

In recent years, support groups and clubs which specifically discuss masturbation or sexual experiences have been visibly introduced in the media.²³ While sexual reality and media coverage may affect each other, I would like to point out that

²² Inoue and Ehara 65.

²³ *Kemono Michi* (Animal Trail) is a newsletter that the feminist group Frog has published. This group was started by University students specifically to discuss masturbation a few years ago but in their newsletter of July 31, 1999 their discussion ranged from violence against women to lesbianism and sexual lives.

neither factor necessarily causes the other. Also, as mentioned earlier, women's agency in terms of their sexual encounters does not necessarily follow from their greater degree of control over contraception choices. Ogino explains that the large difference between males and females in relation to their rate of experience of masturbation shows that there is a strong tendency for females to experience kissing, petting and sexual intercourse, without knowing their bodies or genitals well (64). Even though females may be curious and interested in exploring their sexuality, a large gap remains between the genders in terms of their sexual knowledge, understanding and the degree of social control which they have over their actions.

For a long time, until the early 1990s, the depiction of homosexuality in the media was limited to the presentation of funny gay entertainers, gay bars and lesbian porno movies made for straight men. Nonetheless, an active underground scene of lesbians, bisexuals and female to male (FTM) transgendered people has also emerged over the past thirty years. In 1971, the very first lesbian club, called *Wakakusa no Kai* (Fresh Grass Club), appeared and continued for 15 years. An authentic FTM bar, *Kikoushi* (Young Nobleman), opened in 1973. Lesbians and bisexuals initiated self-published magazines, newsletters and books; women-only events and spaces also became available throughout this period. From the mid- to late-1980s, more lesbian bars and FTM bars opened and commercial lesbian magazines began to be published.

Even though the media's trend depicting members of the non-heterosexual population as unusual or funny still persists, more gay men and lesbians are coming out and expressing their political stance challenging heterosexism and homophobia in the media, especially since the 1990s. Gay, lesbian and bisexual film festivals are organized in big cities in Japan every year; much literature on homosexuality, coming out, lesbianism and queer studies including texts from Western countries, has been published; more weekly and monthly lesbian events are taking place in small towns; FTM transgendered people (*onabe*) appear more frequently on variety TV programs not only as objects of derision but as people who want the same dating opportunities as

others or the social support provided by the recognition of same-sex marriage.²⁴ During the period from 1995 to 1997, two commercial lesbian magazines were started. These magazines, *Phryne* and *Anîsu*, were both discontinued due to lack of sales, but *Anîsu* resumed publication in 2001 by taking direct subscriptions from readers. Just as *Queer Studies 96* and *Queer Studies 97* prove the popularity of using the English word queer within the context of Japanese homosexual culture, there is a lot of borrowing of western homosexual or queer culture by Japanese queers.

In Japanese society in a general sense, women's resistance and challenge to patriarchy requires extraordinary efforts which often means risking their lives, family, social status, and their future.²⁵ Thus, although a woman may possess a strong identity or agency that is unconventional, such as being a career woman, single mother, construction worker or feminist, as long as there is a possibility that asserting her identity may cause her problems, barriers to her full equality persist. My research suggests that there is a greater potential in a homosocial space for women to experience freedom and express their agency and identity. This is also key to increasing women's awareness in order to increase independence, self-confidence and autonomy.

Within the patriarchal heteronormative context of Japan, heterosexual pressure affects not only heterosexuals but homosexuals, bisexuals and all other people. However, when my friend from India was an exchange student at an all-girls high-school in Japan in late 1980s, she experienced a significant degree of same-gender play. She learned Japanese quite quickly but realized much later that she was referring to herself with a male first person pronoun *ore*, which is used virtually exclusively by males. It has a rougher and wilder connotation than the pronoun usually used by women, and may be rude if used when talking to elders.²⁶ She told me that all her friends at her school used it so she incorporated it into her language. It seems unique that Japanese high school girls expressed a masculine gender in their homosocial setting enough to turn "a female

²⁴ Among many variety TV programs which have shown *onabe* quite often in the last few years, *Kin Suma* on channel six TBS (Tokyo Broadcasting Station) broadcast a show with an *onabe* and his partner on June 14, 2002. This prime time TV program covered them for the entire show with the couple in wedding dress and tuxedo, problematizing their difficulties in marrying due to the unequal treatment of same sex couples and due to social pressure that made it hard for them to bring it up to their family members. They compared it with the struggles for legalized same-sex marriage in different countries including Canada, the U.S.A., Holland and Germany.

²⁵ I am inspired by Professor Sharalyn Orbaugh, in coming to realize the position of women in Japan in this way. I would like to thank her for this insight.

²⁶ According to the Japanese dictionary *Kôjien*, fifth edition, (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1999).

foreign student into a boy without her being aware!" As one can imagine, there are many feminists who refer to their female-only high school or college experience as the reason they developed their ability to be independent; and women loving women cite this same-sex atmosphere as a contributing factor to their same-sex desire. I believe that homosocial space greatly enlarges the possibilities for discovering and asserting one's gender and sexuality as different from those of hetero-feminine norms. Same-sex pornography by and for women similarly offers one venue of homosocial space for women.

III: Consumption of Pornographic Comic Books by and for Women

Sexual fantasies in Japanese culture are largely expressed in media and they are accessible for purchase at any convenience store. Japanese people often claim that they gain their sexual knowledge through TV, animation movies, magazines, and comic books. Scholars studying gender and sexuality in Japanese culture in the various disciplines such as Asian studies of literature, history and culture (Shigematsu 1999, Orbaugh 2002), sociology (Ueno Chizuko 19998) and anthropology (Allison 1997, Robertson 1998) refer to the excessive appearance of sexual images in the media. Media made specifically for Japanese women are increasingly popular. As I described above, rising levels of women's economic power have also enhanced their options for self-expression and consumption. As anthropologists Moeran and Skov suggest, "it is hardly surprising that the expansion of women's consumption in the 1980s has been paralleled by a growth in the porn industry" (Moeran and Skov 41). They continue:

The possibility that women will not even need a man has brought about endless concern and fascination on the part of media. ... Japanese women's increasing independence goes hand in hand with their increasing sexualization, and this ambivalent process is closely linked to their consumption as well. This applies not just to the types of consumption that are related to sexual experiences - from pornography to 'two shot' telephone sex, by way of love hotels where rooms are rented out for two hour sessions - but to women's consumer lifestyles in general, including the ways in which women are represented in women's magazines. (41)

By gaining some of the consumer power that men once monopolized, some women are

producing their own sexual images. Increasing consumer power creates new possibilities for women, enabling them to challenge the predominantly heterocentric patriarchal world-view. I ask: what fantasy images exemplify women's counter-hegemonic sexual explorations? As a crucial example that depicts alternative gender and sexuality fantasies, I introduce the pornographic genre of Lady's Comics made by and for adult women, and specifically, the magazine entitled, *Misuto*.

3.1 Femme/Femme Lesbian Fantasy

In North America, comics are for the most part a subculture -- the vast majority of the comic audience is boys up to the age of about 18, and by far the most popular genre of comics is super heroes -- Batman, Superman, Spiderman, Wonder Woman, etc. The comic's audience in Japan is much larger, more diverse, and has much more respectability, in the sense that the comic business targets men and women of all ages with topics of all kinds, such as Western and Japanese histories, the world stock market, elderly issues, family problems, affairs of married couples, and sexual fantasies. Anthropologist Anne Allison describes the Japanese comic consumption culture among commuters on buses or trains, where people spend significant time reading: "For such commuters, the consumption of printed media offers the promise of both a temporary diversion to ease the length and monotony of daily travels and a momentary escape into other worlds, whether they be created by romance novels and sex comics or history texts and newsmagazines" (1997 153). In a sense, comics are intended to be available for people with an interest in a wide range of topics.

"Lady's Comics" is a term mainly used to refer to Japanese pornographic comic books as a genre produced by and for women. It first appeared in 1980, but the basic genre emerged as early as 1969 (I will discuss this further later in this paper). Lady's Comics has provoked much discussion in Japan concerning sexual politics and the association between gender, class, sexual practice, popular culture and sexual identity. The situations depicted in Lady's Comics are varied, including masturbation, sadomasochism (S/M), rape, lesbian sex and multiple-partner sex. However, while the sexual practices are clear, the sexual identity of most of the women in these narratives is unclear. Lady's Comics were considered one of the biggest arms of the comic business in Japan until the late nineties with its fast growing market. One of these Lady's Comics,

Misuto, was published during that time in 1996.²⁷ It was sold monthly as a commercial pornographic comic by and for women. Most significantly, it was the first and only comic that exclusively portrayed woman-to-woman love making, targeting both heterosexual and homosexual female readers from their late teens to their thirties.²⁸ As the premier publication of the only lesbian commercial pornographic comic book created by and for women, *Misuto* continued to provide lesbian romance narratives and information about the lesbian community until it was unfortunately discontinued in February 1999.

In what follows, I examine the role of *Misuto* in contemporary Japanese culture, exploring the cultural ambiguity of attitudes toward gender and sexuality in the representation of lesbian sexual content. In *Lady's Comics*, women's sexual behavior is explicitly illustrated; yet a certain ambiguity concerning the gender and sexual orientation of the characters remains. As one reader described *Misuto*, "except for the intense sexual scenes, it shows the type of romance usually portrayed in the pure girls' comic (*shôjo manga*)" (*Misuto* July 1998, 255). This element of romance in *Misuto*, which rather resembles the type of romance portrayed in heterosexual pure love stories in comics, differs considerably from that in other *Lady's Comics*. It raises a number of questions concerning why heterosexual women would choose to read lesbian pornography nested in purely romantic stories. I will address the following question: How do we account for the social and cultural forces fueling women's consumption of sex between women? By studying *Misuto*, the only lesbian *Lady's Comics* by and for women, I believe we can arrive at significant insights into the complexities of Japanese women's gender and sexuality.

Misuto was a commercial monthly comic and although there is no clear number of its sales, the sales of lesbian pornographic images to a largely heterosexual audience is a compelling and unique cultural phenomenon. Feminist sociologist Dawn H. Currie

²⁷ *Misuto* had gone through several name changes; initially it was called *Sukure* for a short time, then *Misuto* written in Kanji (Chinese pictograms), then *Misuto* in Katakana (one of two native Japanese alphabets used to write words of foreign origin), although *Misuto* does not have any meaning. The comic's focus on women's same-sex pornography remained the same throughout their three year publication run.

²⁸ Japanese bookstores organize books and magazines according to the gender targeted, as well as by topic. Thus, *Lady's Comics* are shelved under adult comics for women, clearly separated from those marketed to men. While there may be male readers, it is very conspicuous when they purchase them or browse through them. It is considered to be rather embarrassing for men to buy *Lady's Comics* since the contents appear much more feminine than kinds targeted to men.

uses Marxist analysis of ideology in her feminist approach to studying girls' magazine culture in North America.

One advantage of theories of ideology therefore is the identification of women's magazines not as simply *social* texts, because they participate in popular discourse, but as *commercial* texts, because they are produced in the service of capitalist production. (57)

Lady's Comics were first marketed as a development of the very popular genre of *shôjo manga* or girls' comic books. These precursors to Lady's Comics targeted young women, and featured stories of teenaged women without any pornographic images. One such publication was a manga (comic) called *Funny*, published in 1969. It was intended to appeal to readers of an already existing girls' manga, *Com*; *Funny* and *Com* were published by Tezuka Osamu's company (Tezuka is sometimes referred to as "the Japanese Disney" for his influence and popularity in the field of animation. He created and/or presided over such internationally popular animated characters as *Astroboy* and *Kimba the white lion*). Five years later, in 1974, *Josei comic papillion* was published as a woman's version of *Manga action*, a comic for men. Both *Funny* and *Josei comic papillion* were discontinued within one year of their first issue because, according to a writer of Lady's Comics' stories, Saotome Miyako: "(unlike women nowadays,) women of the time probably were not used to manga media and manga tended to be degraded as lowbrow, so no matter how good the contents were, the magazines were not read" (22).

The current style of Lady's Comics, which includes pornographic images, first came out in 1980, when *Be love* was issued in October and *Big comic for ladies* was issued in December. By 1984, there were eight different titles and by 1985 there were eleven; the growth in the genre's popularity was evidenced by the fact that there were forty-eight titles by 1991. Most Lady's Comics featured serialized stories and were sold monthly or bimonthly, but there were and are also many other titles published irregularly. During the "publishing boom" period of women's magazines between 1980 and 1985, thirty-four more titles emerged, bringing the total number of Lady's Comics titles to fifty-five. During the same five-year period, sales of mainstream women's interest magazines increased 1.5 times; in contrast, sales of Lady's Comics increased by 48.5 times during that period (Morohashi 179-80). Lady's Comics then became one of the biggest comic businesses in Japan (Erino 1990, Hayashi 1991 256-7, Morohashi 1993, 179). Recently,

there has been a trend to distinguish between pornographic manga and non-pornographic manga, and the term Lady's Comics is now applied almost exclusively to the pornographic ones (*Telebi takkuru* 15 Nov. 1999).

Since 1990, obscenity laws have targeted comic books and in 1992 about 100 *manga* artists protested against this by creating the group "The Association for Protecting the Freedom of Comic Expressions" (*Komikku hyôgen no Jiyû wo mamoru kai*). The obscenity laws generally affect comic books if sexual illustrations cover more than one third of the contents; and more detailed and specific sexual views, such as showing genitals, sadomasochism, homosexual sex, incest, group sex or rape; access to these comics are strictly controlled for readers under 18 years old. However, according to the Association for Protecting the Freedom of Comic Expressions, "sexual illustrations are presumed regardless of their themes and qualities" and "since it is hard to judge the buyer's age, it may lead bookstores to avoid selling any sexually-related comics" (Sinoda 171). Recently, the political contest between manga artists and the government seems to have cooled down but still sexual expressions in comics linger as a target of control, due to their transgenerational popularity.

Misuto, the pornographic Lady's Comic that offered lesbian-only content, was published when Lady's Comics was already recognized as a big business. By the late 1980s, the pornographic genre of Lady's Comics started exploring the interests of their target readers more fully by diversifying its themes. However, all Lady's Comics except *Misuto* had narratives that were still basically heterosexual. They depicted such things as housewives' affairs, the sexual styles of business women, multiple-partner sex, incest, sadomasochism, rape, sex in mystery or horror narratives, and, occasionally, lesbian sex. In spite of this diversity of predominantly heterosexual portrayals in other Lady's Comics, the subtitle of each issue of *Misuto* from 1995 to 1999 proclaimed: "Love Paradise Periodical that Encourages Positive Encounters between Women." This demonstrated its uniquely lesbian themes. The introduction to *Misuto*'s website proclaimed: "*Misuto* is a magazine periodical that mainly offers lesbian love stories and provides information about Shinjuku 2--chome (an area where gays and lesbians gather) and interviews with wonderful women that can be enjoyed by either lesbian women or heterosexual women" (<http://www.ozora.com/mist/top.html>).

Misuto targeted both lesbian and heterosexual readers and chose lesbianism for

its central theme. It included not only lesbian comic stories, but also erotica, classified ads and interviews with bisexual women and lesbians. The components and characteristics of *Misuto* offer many topics for discussion, for example, its large numbers of ads for sex telephone lines, or its ethnic and racial images. Analyzing *Misuto* as a sociocultural phenomenon of commodified lesbian sexuality consumed primarily by heterosexual women will shed light on the shifting terrain of women's sexual choice, culture and empowerment. Of course, there are problems with the media making this commodity a phenomenon in the context of patriarchal and capitalist interests. Women are routinely sexualized on TV, in magazines and in literature and observed by women and men in patriarchal, heteronormative Japanese society. These images are often created to take advantage of women's increasing economic power. Similarly, whether or not sexual images are made by and for women, mainstream media (re)produces patriarchal female beauty values that idealize young, thin and scantily clad women's bodies. Jennifer Scanlon, in referring to Danae Clark's article "Commodity Lesbianism," summarizes:

The seamless connections that have traditionally been made between heterosexuality and consumerism are broken apart to allow straight and lesbian women alternative choices. ... The insider status that lesbians achieve through interaction with consumer culture may simply draw them in apolitical ways, but it may also politicize heterosexual women with more autonomous images of womanhood. (307)

While I fully support her arguments, I will present a *Misuto* as uniquely positioned publication where the depiction of lesbian sex was enjoyed by both straight and queer women intrigued by images of autonomous women.

I begin with a brief discussion of the contents of *Misuto*. The front cover always displayed two or more white women, smiling and posing as in a typical fashion magazine (see Appendix A: Figure 1). Upon opening the first pages, the reader discovers photos of two Japanese women making love. The women's naked body parts except genitals are clearly visible, and they are touching each other in the manner described in the erotic story accompanying the photo. These pictures continue with manga of women making love to women, accompanied by very detailed references to kissing, sucking and so on.

Because of the nature of the manga business, which uses questionnaires filled out by readers to tailor stories to their interests and thus boost sales, the narrative

structures of Lady's Comics gradually change during the course of publication. An editor and critic of Lady's Comics, Erino Miya, discusses the results of such a questionnaire. It shows that the readers of Lady's Comics are mostly between the ages of twenty and thirty-four and are mostly wives or single office workers/ business women (27). In terms of what the readers seek in sexual scenes, more than sixty per cent said that they want a reasonable justification for the presence of sex in a story. For instance, if a woman goes to a bar, meets someone and has sex at a hotel, there needs to be a reasonable explanation for her conduct: for instance, the woman has a broken heart and has abandoned herself to despair (Erino 84).

Misuto's stories, too, were no doubt modified in accordance with the results of such questionnaires. Most of these narratives illustrate love between women who must overcome some kind of obstacle, which might be an affair with another woman, a friend, a man, an ex-husband or even a sister's girlfriend. Some stories portray sexual encounters between two women at a movie theatre, a beauty-treatment clinic, a school, a lesbian website, a friend's wedding; or in the work environment. Other stories show women meeting at lesbian bars, or dealing with issues involving long-distance relationships or the daughter of a new partner. In earlier issues, stories depicting women's previous boyfriends or husbands, or women meeting by accident rather than on purpose, were common, while in later issues more characters were portrayed as purposely looking for other women or already engaged in a lesbian relationship (see Appendix A: Figure 2).

Misuto presents some unique features, in comparison with other Lady's Comics. As Erino says, most Lady's Comics portray women who are vulnerable within patriarchal society. The stories "give an illusion that women can go for a gorgeous date with a handsome man and can get married happily with a rich man as long as the women are willing to adapt to male society" (Erino 29). In contrast, female characters in *Misuto* are portrayed as financially independent. Many are professionals such as artists, teachers, business women, entertainers, doctors, or hostesses who may be from the upper middle-class, or may be part-timers and, of course, never housewives which commonly populate the rest of the Lady's Comics. Sex is used primarily as a necessary way of communicating intimacy; it is used to express love or jealousy between characters, but it is never used instrumentally, just for the sake of pleasure, as in other Lady's Comics.

Another manga critic, Fujimoto Yukari, asserts that, until the late 1980s, Lady's

Comics primarily offered "sex fantasies" describing women's transition from falling in love to engaging in sexual relationships. However, as the range of sexual themes expanded, Lady's Comics began to feature "masturbation fantasies" that directly evoked sexual desire and pleasure (139-40). Although visually explicit sex was always present, *Misuto* showed its uniqueness and differentiated itself from other Lady's Comics by making a connection between sexual desire and pleasure, lesbian sex and women's independent lives, lives that were resisting stereotypically patriarchal societal norms (see Appendix A: Figure 3 and 4). Women readers were thus led to the image of sex between women that appealed to both the uniqueness of their own sexuality and their desire for political and financial independence.

3.2 Ambiguous Gender and Sexuality

Several significant questions arise. Why do the heterosexual readers of *Misuto* choose to read about lesbian sex, and what are the sociocultural factors behind it? Do those women idealize lesbian sex? If so, does their appreciation for *Misuto* reflect their genuine sexual orientation? In the manga culture, many *shôjo* manga narratives display ambiguous gender and sexuality. As early as the 1950s, androgynous characters, usually daughters raised as sons, appeared in *Ribon no kishi* (Ribbon knight) by Tezuka Osamu, and, in the 1970s, in the very popular *Berusaiyu no bara* (The rose of versailles) by Ikeda Riyoko. Both of them were broadcast on prime time TV programs. There were scenes of sensual kissing and sex between the main character Oscar, a female whose gender was male, and her lover who was a man. These scenes were considered some of the best of the entire story. The images of flowers, privileged French upper class room decorations, the love making with both of the male gendered persons, (although Oscar looked more feminine with long eyelashes and pink lips) appeared quite romantic. The popularity of this cross-gender story is still on-going, as is one of the most popular theater plays of Takarazuka -- the all-female theater group known for having female-acting-male actors since 1913.

During 1970 to 1980 in Japan, same-sex love stories for boys appeared in *shôjo* manga and became popular for girls. *Shôjo* manga artists Hagio Moto, Takemiya Keiko, Yamagishi Ryoko and Ôshima Yumiko were called Hanano (*shôwa*) 24 nen gumi (the belles of 1949 born team) for their popularity and significant contribution to this

phenomenon.²⁹ In 1976, male homosexual characters were featured in many girls' comic books. Its pioneer was Takemiya Keiko's girls' comic book with only male characters in the story of a private boy's high school in England, *Kaze to ki no uta* (The song of the wind and the tree). As Takemiya recalls:

When *Kaze to ki no uta* was serialized, I was told that it was the very first time male homosexuality had appeared in manga. The homosexual sex scenes surprised people. In fact, at that time the Ministry of Education prohibited sexual scenes between men and women, but gay male sex was somehow okayed. (*Fujin kôron* 1058 22 April 2000, 41)

In 2002, the Commission for the Administration of the Motion Picture Code of Ethics in Japan permitted a lesbian sex scene in a lesbian movie to be broadcast for a cable TV program because it is not about sex between a man and a woman (*Anisu* 2002, 127).

This suggests that there is a significant linkage between prevailing cultural mores at a given historical moment and expressions of gender and sexuality. In this regard, Saotome argues that Lady's Comics has become popular because the cartoonists and their readers grew up reading or watching *shôjo* manga, and as adults they sought manga with themes, expressions and settings that matched their age and sensibilities (see Appendix A: Figure 5). Accordingly, Lady's Comics emerged from *shôjo* or *shônen* (boy) manga culture (Saotome 25). With such historical depiction of homosexual sex by and for girls, images of lesbian sex were spawned by the depiction of ambiguities in gender and sexuality in *shôjo* manga .

If the readers of Lady's Comic are between "the ages of twenty and thirty-four and are mostly wives or single office workers or business women" as Erino states in 1991, their generation parallels the age of women who were youths when *shôjo* manga became popular with its themes of cross-gender play and homosexuality. This age group resembles the women nowadays who prefer to live independent from men. The rate of single women has reportedly increased rapidly during the last ten years (*Dacapo* 1999, 6). As I noted earlier in this paper, a 1997 survey showed that the average age for women getting married was 26.6 and for men it was 28.5. However, the national census taken in 2000 indicated the rate of single women 25 to 29 years of age was 54 per cent, in the 30

²⁹ In Japan, there are different eras and they change every time when a new emperor is assigned. 1949 in Japanese era was the 24th Showa year.

to 34 age group it was 26.6 per cent, and in the 35 to 39 age group it was 13.8 per cent. A marriage consultant office called OMMG showed data compiled in 1998 targeting 400 single women in their 30's. Although, most of them expressed their wish to get married, about ninety per cent of women said "I can live without getting married," "I often think that I am glad that I am single," and "even if I get married, I don't want to lower my life sustainability" (*Dacapo* 6). What is notable is that 28.5 per cent prefer not to live with their husband even after getting married.

These data show Japanese women's growing autonomy and ambivalence towards the institution of heterosexual marriage. Some are openly admitting they prefer to have freedom and choices in matters of finances and sexual pleasure. This may be reflected in the increased sales of adult comics by and for women. Initially, the male editors of *Lady's Comics* believed that women only wanted to read about love and marriage. However, they were replaced by women editors who paid attention to readers' wide-ranging sexual interests as expressed in consumer surveys, and the sales of *Lady's Comics* soared. Through growing economic power, the ability to choose certain sexual images and pleasure including pornographic media, some women are arguably pursuing freedom and pleasure without wanting to limit their lives to heteronormative marriage and motherhood. As Karen Kelsky suggests, Japanese women dating foreign men may represent a form of resistance against Japanese patriarchy (Kelsky 1996). In my view, the phenomenon of Japanese heterosexual women consuming lesbian pornographic comics may also be read as a gesture of resistance. For this reason, I feel guardedly optimistic about the potential for women's consumerist self-expression to challenge the power of heterocentric patriarchy.

3.3 Cultural Acceptance of Women's Homoeroticism

In this section, I discuss *Misuto* as a means to examine the sociocultural context of femme/femme fantasies and images by women. In earlier issues of *Misuto*, while there were generally six or seven stories in each issue, only two of them had butch or androgynous characters. The rest portrayed femme/femme couples, both members of which exhibited distinctly feminine characteristics, e.g., long hair, use of stereotypically feminine language and emotional expressions, clothes, etc. (see Appendix: Figure 6). Romanticization of lesbian sex within the framework of a femme/femme relationship

helps to deconstruct and destabilize stereotypical images of butch/femme dynamics. Here I explore the gender relations of lesbianism and attempt to explain their complex relationships to the creation of fantasy in *Misuto*.

As previously mentioned, *Misuto* was the first and only lesbian pornographic comic made by and for women. While it had many heterosexual women readers, it was nonetheless full of lesbian community information. Although many magazines targeting lesbians or bisexual women predominantly showed butch and femme characters or androgynous and femme characters as couples (i.e. *Anîsu*), *Misuto* did not exclusively target lesbian readers. Its stories mainly portrayed femme/femme relationships, with less evidence of androgynous/femme and butch/femme relationships. *Misuto* emerged as an alternative Lady's Comics, which targeted predominantly straight readers curious about, or attracted to images of lesbian sex. I therefore believe that this gap between *Misuto*'s contents and its readership demonstrates the diversity of sexual practices that straight women readers wanted to explore. Comics which portray lesbian sex targeting both straight and queer women readers thus may face certain restrictions, or need to make unexpected allowances for the fact that portrayals of gender and sexuality have to be acceptable to both straight and queer readers. I think this is a significant factor to keep in mind, in order to analyze and understand the popularity of the femme/femme phenomenon.

What, then, is the significance of erasing male, butch or androgynous characters, and elevating femme/femme gendered couples to prominence? One might have imagined that the portrayal of butch characters would help especially straight readers fall into reading *Misuto* more naturally, because the existence of such characters at least preserves the binary framework which characterizes heterosexual gender roles. But in the broad context of heteronormative patriarchal depiction of women's gender and sexuality, two feminine women may appear more appealing to female readers than butch/femme characters. In fact, femme/femme relationships may challenge the construction of the conventional butch/femme duality model.

However, there appears to be no clear line demarcating butch and femme behavior or butch and feminine identities. As Judith Butler says, the butch/femme relationship is complicated, and thus these lesbian sexualities cannot be generalized in terms of specific roles (Butler 1991). There are couples that are butch/butch and androgynous/butch as

well, and they have their own struggles and desires. Butler experienced such ostracism herself: "I suffered for a long time from being told that what I am is a copy, an imitation, a derivative example, a shadow of the real"; however, after reading anthropologist Esther Newton's *Mother Camp*, a study of drag queens, Butler realized that drag is not an imitation or a copy of some true and prior gender; "according to Newton, drag enacts the very structure of impersonation by which a gender is assumed" (Butler qtd. in Halberstam 62). Moreover, concerning butch homosociality and homoeroticism, Judith Halberstam argues that:

Butch does not essentially and necessarily partake in the privileges assigned to masculinity in a male supremacist society. Butches also suffer sexism, butches also experience misogyny; butches may not be strictly women but they are not exempt from female trouble. Butches, I have proposed here, find solace in the revelations of other butches; it is as if the shame of inappropriate gendering can be rendered more benign when it is shared across other bodies and other lives. (64)

Participants in the butch and femme relationships possess their own concepts of gender and construct their own narratives with regard to their relationships, and these cannot be compared to, or theorized in terms of, heterosexual relationships. Since the elimination of male or male-like characters in *Misuto* was an editorial manipulation, which was preferred despite its negative effect on sales, I interpret this as resulting from an idealization of the feminine characters that are depicted in femme/femme relationships, rather than as reflecting any disdain for butch characters. Given the popularity of Takarazuka with women audiences and the familiarity of Japanese women with female-acting-male characters, it is not easy to claim that readers resist having butch characters. It makes more sense that femininity embodied in femme/femme characters worked to idealize traditional female beauty -- a tactic used to sell many other women's magazines.

Although *Misuto* was a 'By women, For Women, About Women' publication, it is appropriate to examine whether or not it really empowered women. In *Misuto*, femme/femme relationships were not portrayed as mere woman-to-woman relationships that represented the stereotypical submissiveness of women. Instead, women in these same-sex relationships were depicted as having jobs and partners, living independent lives, and taking the initiative in decision-making and sexual behavior. They were shown

as comfortable about changing roles and free to think and act, and they posed a direct challenge to the heteronormative binary of male/female relationships. In order to differentiate such femme/femme relationships from traditional, patriarchally classified, female gender depiction, which *Misuto's* femme/femme narratives implicitly challenged, I will call this relationship the Super Femme relationship.

Also, while I recognize the importance of differences in power structure regarding gender and sexuality in each sociocultural context, as Gayle Rubin argued in 1984, I nevertheless use culturally specific knowledge and analysis in attempting to understand the Super Femme relationship. I do not argue that the Super Femme relationship may work the same way in Western culture as it does in Japanese culture, or that it necessarily diminishes the patriarchal oppression faced by most Japanese women. Instead, I am interested in enriching the study of gender and sexuality by analyzing how the production and reproduction of Super Femme imagery in the Japanese pornography industry may function as a challenge to the prevailing patriarchal framework and how sexual fantasy plays a role in the lives of Japanese women readers. Next, I will discuss the politics of Japanese women's gender and sexuality in more sociocultural terms, focusing on what it means to fantasize not only in cross-gender and cross-sexual ways, but also in multi-gender and multi-sexual ways, and how this relates to how the fantasizers construct the genders and sexualities of themselves and those they fantasize about.

Homosocial culture in Japan is an established sphere that people can pursue in a different space from heterosocial culture. It is medically explained that even sexuality can be involved as part of homosociality. The director of the Japanese Sex Education Association, Kurokawa Yoshikazu, states in *Sei no Shidô Q&A* (Sexual guidance: Questions and answers) (1987): "There are two kinds of homosexuality. One is a pseudo-homosexuality that happens as a passing phenomenon during puberty and youth; the other is authentic homosexuality that continues into adulthood" (qtd. in Kakefuda 12). According to Kurokawa, Freud's libido theory works best to explain why homosexual-like emotions happen in specifically (Japanese) homosocial settings, which permit same sex children to be intimate. However, he says, in providing guidance, one does not need to worry about this very much, because this type of phenomenon naturally disappears later on (13). Indeed, some of my lesbian friends in Japan, both older and

younger, have told me that they thought romantic feelings toward other females were acceptable, because it said so in an elementary school textbook which explained that such feelings are a normal part of growing up.

In research done by the Ministry of Health and Welfare of Japan in 1999, a total of 5000 women and men between the ages of 18 and 59 were questioned. Twenty-two per cent of the women answered that they had had a lesbian experience (although the term lesbian experience was not specifically defined) and twenty-one per cent answered that they believed that lesbian sex is okay (*Josei seven* Nov. 29 2000, 70). On the other hand, a research study on Japanese sexual consciousness by *Tarzan* magazine that surveyed 82 women from their late teens to their fifties (average age 30.5), found only 3.3 per cent said that they had had a lesbian sexual experience (19). However, among those said they had not, 36.4 per cent said they were interested in having one. Although this research may have included non-heterosexual participants, these survey statistics show that a significant rate of women accept lesbian sex.

These statistics may relate to a particular form of culturally specific Japanese homosocialization, which is not influenced by religious taboos or other prejudicial factors. As I have shown, Japanese women are exposed to a variety of characters of ambiguous gender and sexuality through the media, including the theatre, magazines and comic books, such as *shôjo* manga. Japanese homosocial culture of *shôjo* manga constantly illustrates ambiguous gender and sexuality and is read by a large population of female readers who have consumed them since childhood. Another example here is dialogue from *Onnanoko ga suki* (I like girls), a comic published by a woman author, Aoki Mitsue. This was a serialized story of a cute and feminine office worker (OL) who repeatedly tells her co-workers that she is attracted to women. It goes:

I am Yumi Moritaka, a 22-year-old secretary, who likes girls. When I say this, this is how people respond:

(A man talks to her): That doesn't mean that you want to do it, right?

(Yumi): Yes, I do.

(A man): Oh... Really... (Reacts awkwardly).

Although she proudly responds that she wants to have sex with girls, when she is asked by a male co-worker: "Are you a lez (lesbian)?," she replies: "I don't think so ... Well, I have a boyfriend, but... Men's flat breasts are so boring" (16). Interestingly, according

to feminist writer and cultural critic Fujimoto Yukari, a history of comic books with various gender and sexual options may enable the development of lesbian sexual desires. When Fujimoto was a child, she was sexually aroused by reading about female/female sexual encounters. This made her think that she must be a male, but it never occurred to her to think that she was a lesbian (1995/ 92, 210). She continues:

the change happened suddenly. It was when I met a woman who identified herself as a lesbian. Since then, to me the word lesbian has not been part of the language of ideology but a realistic body. ... What a strange, misshapen thing a person's sexuality is. ... Until yesterday, it described somebody else, but then, as soon as I turn to face it, it transforms itself right away. (212)

Even though as a child she was aroused by women, Fujimoto conceptualized this as heterosexual desire by imagining that she was male, rather than accepting her identity as a lesbian.

In this case, the sexual identity of women practicing lesbian sex appears quite uncertain. Of course, heterocentrism is a factor in Fujimoto's case. The heterosexual framework has influenced her assumption of maleness as a default position. On the other hand, Fujimoto explains how a simple thing turned her desire from heterosexuality to lesbianism when she became aware of the existence of lesbianism. There are two things going on here: as the director of the Japanese Sex Education Association claims, within the context of the Japanese situation, there has been a cultural appropriation of homosexual acts into heterosexuals' identity construction. While Fujimoto's case seems to apply in this structure, her same-sex sexual desires are also understood rather naturally in a non-heterosexual context once the possibility is introduced, without much evidence of resistance on her part. If heteronormative society is affecting the gender and sexual identities of women, how can one explain gender and sexual desire outside of the heteronormative structure? While keeping this question in mind, I will introduce some of women's homosexual desires and experiences in the context of heterosexual magazines, a place where many women first encounter lesbian sex without homophobia or feelings of guilt.

One common current is that women are attracted to another woman's beauty, which they themselves yearn to possess. In the Japanese *Cosmopolitan* readers sex

survey, 1057 women responded in June 1997. For instance, a 27-year-old woman replied to the section of the questionnaire which asked about reaching multiple orgasm, with the subtitle "Because of invitation by a beautiful woman, by chance": "I was invited by a beautiful woman with a perfect body, so out of curiosity I had lesbian sex" (57). Also in *Josei seven*, a magazine targeting young women workers and housewives, a 35-year-old woman replied to their sex survey, under the title "The best of women should be taught by women!": "I went for the very first time to a gay bar and became friends with a beautiful woman; she said because I am pretty she wants to try sleeping with me, so I said Okay; we met by chance" (*Josei seven* Nov. 29 2000, 67).

Such fantasies and expressions of desire toward other women through conventional beauty values, without claims to homosexuality, are not exclusively Japanese phenomena. For example, a Western writer, Laurence O'Toole, discusses the attitudes of female viewers of pornography and suggests that women's magazines operate as tools for making women attracted to women:

Many heterosexual women tend to be fascinated by each other, and mostly are more open to expressing their same-sex fascinations than straight men. (It makes sense, because:) After all, it's women who buy all the glossy magazines like *Vogue*, *Marie Claire* and *Cosmopolitan*, filled with pictures of beautiful, barely clad women. (1999, 305)

Beauty norms maybe a factor for non-homosexually identified women who are curious about lesbian sex. In fact, the main character of the comic book *Yumi*, to whom I referred earlier, is extremely open about her emotional and sexual attraction to girls. Yet her attraction is limited to those who possess idealized femininity, cuteness and beauty, such as singers and TV idols. In a book called *Kanojo tachi no aishikata* (The way women love), two male journalists interviewed several women who have had queer sexual experiences, and while some identified as lesbian or bisexuals, many preferred not to identify. One of the women interviewed, Ôkawachi Kazuko, was always attracted to women but never thought that it was strange. In terms of her sexual identity, she says that "categories like lesbian or bisexual, either one is fine, I am just myself" (60). She describes her first lesbian sex encounter as occurring when she was 18 years old. This was with a Spanish woman who, in broken Japanese, invited Ôkawachi to have a cup of tea. Ôkawachi recounts her first impressions of this woman: "Her charming, Latin smile

and sexy figure, her casual sense of fashion - A stunning beauty" (1997, 56). This describes the Spanish woman in terms of her full femininity; Ôkawachi herself is described by the Journalist in similar terms: "her almost transparent white skin and gold coloured hair, appearing cool as if she were of quarter or half-Russian descent" (58). The beauty of these two women is thus presented as an important factor in bringing about their lesbian encounter. However, what is important to note here is that this first lesbian sexual encounter involves not only these women's beauty images, but also an entire Japanese ideology regarding white Western feminine beauty: indeed, the Japanese woman is described as of mixed Russian ancestry.

Another example in which we can see the intertwining of Western and lesbian images involves Japanese celebrity and TV talent, Kanô Kyôko. She was accused of having had a two-year relationship with a young woman self-identified as a lesbian sex-slave. A man named Mr. W, who knew Kanô Kyôko well, responded publicly in her defense, saying that this was a lie and asserting that instead this young woman was a stalker who idealized the beauty of Kanô Kyôko. It should perhaps be added that Kanô Kyôko and her sister, Kanô Mika were portrayed by the mainstream media as ideal examples of Western-styled Japanese beauty, exposing a lot of skin and large breasts. Together they were referred to as the gorgeous sisters (*Shûkan josei* 7 Dec. 1999). Mr. W explained that, when she confessed her lesbian sexuality to Kanô Kyôko, this young woman had misunderstood the situation:

In order to respond to this young woman, who expressed strong feelings of guilt about her lesbian relationship with her school friend, Kyôko, who lived abroad for a long time and has a deep understanding of homosexuality, encouraged her, saying: there may be many different forms of love; it is obviously difficult to live that way, but there is no need to be ashamed of it. (36)

The point here is that, while Kanô Kyôko provides symbolic images of the West and Western influences, when Mr. W recalls Kanô Kyôko's experience of living in a foreign country for a long time, this is supposed to suggest the reason for her understanding of homosexuality. The foreign country referred to here is not just any country, but a Western country because of the media's constant association of her and her sister with references to Hollywood stars and Western celebrities. While the Occidentalism in

Japanese beauty magazines has been widely discussed, we cannot deny the possibility that reader's attitudes toward beauty may link race, ethnicity and gender, and that this may include encounters with homosexuality.³⁰

Western beauty norms may be a factor that influences Japanese women's sexual desires, but there is no necessary correlation between Western beauty ideals and lesbian sex. Ayabe said that sexuality in Japan changed after the introduction of patriarchal Confucianism; and Western-influenced attitudes about sexuality, including homosexuality, are strong in Japan in modern times. However, commenting on the historical background of Japan before the importation of Confucianism, Ayabe remarks of Japanese attitudes towards sexuality: "although there are a variety of cultures in Europe and America, (sexuality in Japan) was much freer than in Europe and America" (Ayabe 5). Given the complicated overlap of cultures, I contend that idealized Western beauty is neither the main cause nor the only impetus to change of women's sexuality. When women are identified as not strictly heterosexual, and as open to exploring sex between women, idealized beauty norms, both Western and Japanese, may invite same-sex sexual experimentation. Fujimori accepted her pre-existing lesbian fantasy easily after meeting a lesbian. Ôkawachi was attracted to women and had lesbian sex with a Spanish woman as her first sexual experience when receiving an invitation on a first meeting. While she never identified as homosexual, the woman in the magazine survey first encountered lesbian sex at a gay bar by meeting a beautiful woman by accident. I have come to the realization that there is a shared acceptance of, and openness towards exploration of same-sex sexuality among these women. They share the capacity to express/explore sexual desires towards other women in advance of declaring a definitive lesbian identity.

This is common among many women in Japan who express desire toward women. "Not having clear sexual identification" seems to translate into expanding and enriching sexual possibilities. I refer to these women as multi-sexual women, meaning they have the possibility of being aroused by various sexualities in their sexual fantasies. Sexual interactions in the fantasies include, but are not limited to a straight woman, a bisexual woman, a lesbian, a straight man, a bisexual man, a gay man, FTM, MTF,

³⁰ See details in Karen Kelsky (1996), and Mille Creighton in her "Soto Others and Uchi Others: Imagining Racial Diversity, Imagining Homogenous Japan" in *Japan's Minorities: The Illusion of Homogeneity* (NY: Routledge, 1997) 211-238.

FTMbi, MTFbi, intersexuals, a cyborg, dolls and animals. In the discussion of cyborg subjectivity, a scholar of Japanese literature, Sharalyn Orbaugh explains how cyborg or "anomalous" existence can be recognized as part of Japanese culture. She says:

In the case of cultural production in Japan, cyborgs and other anomalous hybrid, not-two-embodiments perform the same function: that of marking the abject borders that serve to define normal subjectivity. But in Japan, ... the bodies of subjectivities marked as anomalous may simultaneously be identified as simply Japanese, since monstrosity is normal for those defined as Other by Western hegemonic discourse. (2002, 440).

In culturally specific discourses in Japan where various 'Others' are normalized and internalized, subjectivities may not be openly expressed, but internalized. Straight women who both consume and produce lesbian sexual fantasies can be described as ambiguous; their act of desiring suggests their active sexual agency. Anthropologist Harrietta Moore discusses agency:

resistance and complicity are not only types of agency, they are also forms or aspects of subjectivity; and as types of agency and as forms of subjectivity they are marked through with structures of difference based on gender, race, ethnicity and so on. ... From an analytical and a political point of view they must be specific in context rather than assumed in advance. (50)

In the makings of sexual fantasies and practices, there is much resistance and complicity in the context of Japanese discourses of gender and sexuality.

3.4 Appropriation, Challenge and Taboo Breaking

In *Onnna noko ga suki* (I like girls), the main character, Yumi, says that she feels sexually aroused when she sees a girl who has a certain cute, feminine look: "I want to bring her home by making her tiny, using a secret weapon or a drug, and dress her in various outfits and take photos..." (4). Yumi also feels happy when she can touch her female friends breasts in a friendly manner (11). Yumi's attraction to girls displays her internalization of the quality of 'cuteness' in Japanese *shôjo* culture that many scholars

refer to as an ideology unique to Japanese culture.³¹ As Japanese sociologist Sakuma Sato says: "(t)he same-sex intimacy expressed by mutual touching plays down the images of heterosexuality and contributes to a generally infantile impression" (1998, 31); the depiction of such images has not generally been regarded as lesbianism. In Yumi's case, her pleasure in physically touching women is seemingly interpreted as a part of heterosexual socialization by her co-workers.

One can argue that Yumi's expression of lesbian desire problematically takes advantage of an internalized feminine gender construction. But if a woman does not claim a lesbian identity, how can her lesbian desire help to change heteronormative society? This is not lesbian agency but another form of agency of a woman accepting lesbian desire.

Typically, heterosexual pornography emphasizes patriarchal values, and these may be internalized by female readers. This type of pornography has been available cross-culturally, and some women may have found it more accessible and thus a vehicle for stimulating their desire for women. In the U.K., O'Toole interviewed women who enact lesbian encounters for heterosexual men's magazines. As O'Toole explains:

Kate has never identified her sexuality as lesbian. She is a good example of a straight woman who has regularly turned for arousal to top-shelf material made for men, predominantly featuring photo sets of naked women, and without a male member, or even a male, in sight. ... Tuppy Owens says she gets turned on by the women in Penthouse, finding porn made for men more to her liking than the porn specifically angled at her own sex: "The magazines made in the UK for women are utterly dull. They are not like my sexuality at all. They're not funny enough and they're not dirty enough." (304-5)

One of the women, Tuppy Owens, was delighted when she discovered, while visiting Denmark, the existence of men's pornographic magazines that depict femme/femme relationships.

Reading the reaction of these women, it becomes clear that various kinds of pornography provide sexual stimulation. There are women who identify with women portrayed in pornography, and with men portrayed in gay men pornography. When

³¹ See Kinsella, Sharon, "Cuties in Japan," eds. Lise Skov & Brian Moeran, *Women Media and Consumption in Japan*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1995) 220-254.

women gaze sexually at the women displayed in heterosexual men's pornography, they are not simply internalizing patriarchal sexual dynamics. Femme/femme sexual images may enhance and improve women's possibilities. The construction of lesbian desire through femme/femme dynamics in both men's pornography and women's pornography suggests that feminine gender roles are continually modified. They are produced, reproduced and restructured, sometimes perpetuating and sometimes challenging patriarchal values. Constance Penley's analysis of fandom makes a similar point. In her study, *Slashers* is a group of women who create and explore homosexual imagery connected with the well-known Star Trek characters, Kirk and Spock. She concludes that:

We could look at fandom as an exemplary case of female appropriation of, resistance to, and negotiation with mass-produced culture; and we could embark on a continuing discussion of K/S (Kirk / Spock) to help dislodge the still rigid positions in the feminist sexuality debates around fantasy, pornography, and S & M. But if we are to do so, it must be within the recognition that the *Slashers* do not feel they can express their desires for a better, sexually liberated, and more egalitarian world through feminism; they do not feel they can speak as feminists; they do not feel that feminism speaks for them. (320-1)

The difference with the subjects in my study is that some do express their feminist ideologies. Sometimes they do so by clearly identifying as feminists and by expressing their independence; from the institution of marriage, or from a couple-oriented Japanese society. In effect, the very ambiguity of these women's sexual and feminist identification likely enables them to explore women's same-sex pornographic spaces more fully. However, when women are stressing their sexual desires, explorations and pleasure, they are enacting agency in a culture where women's sexual liberation is still seriously constrained. Challenging the boundaries of heterosexual normative life can be a powerful tool for deconstructing heteronormative society with respect to its structures of class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality.

IV. Resistance to Gender and Sexual Hegemony: Agency Beyond Monosexuality

4.1 Taboo Breaking Fantasy and Praxis

While consumer-trends suggest that women buy Lady's Comics and that predominantly heterosexual women read *Misuto*, the gender and sexuality of actual readers and how they actually make sense of stories, remains unknown. When attending junior high school in Tokyo, I remember being stunned by the common practice of male students sharing the same sexy magazines and adult videos with their friends. They recommended ones that would assure that their friends reached orgasm. Too young to buy or rent adult videos, they talked about stealing them and even went so far as hiding stolen videotapes in their jumpsuits. One time they lent some adult videos to me and my friends that were pornographic animation and one of them was about an incestuous relationship between an older brother and a younger sister. This video advertised Volume Two, showing scenes of lesbian sex at a girls' high school. I remember being shocked by the explicit images of girls my male classmates were watching and fantasizing about.

This reminds of the adult women's groups that read pornographic comic books by and for women in Tokyo.³² I have met some Japanese women in these groups who expressed intimacy and friendship through sharing the same masturbatory fantasies. The idea is similar to what Anne Allison illustrates in her ethnography of working at a Japanese hostess bar in Tokyo, that Japanese men celebrate homoeroticism through sharing the same women hostesses, to be served socially and/or sexually, to enjoy a sense of intimacy among friends.³³ It was also done to enhance good relationships between companies. These women whom I met were encouraged to masturbate and reach orgasm by fantasizing about somebody they were familiar with or whom they were not attracted to.³⁴ This was done, they said, because it was harder to fantasize about and feel sexual towards people who were totally not your type or, somebody who was close to you. Taboo-breaking fantasy was what they were challenging, to explore the limits of sexual

³² I cannot reveal the specific names of groups or individuals for their privacy but as far as I know, these groups of women are around in different styles in different cities. One is known for having gathering for sharing masturbation stories while sharing/eating Hot Pot (*onabe*), which is a popular food for a gathering. Another one consists of members of a study group.

³³ Anne Allison, *Night Work: Sexuality, Pleasure, and Corporate Masculinity in a Tokyo Hostess club* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

³⁴ I am inspired and fascinated by discussion held at a gathering in Tokyo in December 2002. Even for a stranger like me, women there have expressed their honest sexual experiences. I would like to thank for these women who are welcoming and supporting to such a stranger like me.

fantasy and beyond.

I believe various fantasy makings provide space outside of constructions of a heterosexual/homosexual binary. This involves many aspects of fantasy subjects, which forces the identification to be totally distressed. When sexual identities come from sexual practices, an identification of the gender or sex of self and the other person(s) that self is attracted to, will be an important point. If sexual desire is inspired by the murky, jumbled world of sexual fantasies, one's sexual identity may not be straightforward. Below, I discuss agencies, subjectivities, and anti-phallic structure, through multi-layered fantasies.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the average percentage of Japanese women in college who masturbated was 25.8 per cent in 1993. In 2002, Sugiyama Takashi, a gay high school health teacher in Japan, reported that he taught masturbation because, in order to think about sexual independence, there should be awareness of a body's sexual capabilities. He taught masturbation fantasies to students, not only using tools for it but also utilizing human subjects who could be someone of the same sex or a different sex. He believed that this led toward understanding of sexuality as a human right and also it helped understanding of the existence of various sexualities (Sugiyama 136-9). Fujimoto brought up "sex fantasy" from *Lady's Comics* for the purpose of engaging sexual encounters and "masturbation fantasy" for the purpose of mere masturbation. The pornographic comic, *Misuto*, was made for providing sexual fantasies for women.

However, masturbation was not always freely practiced historically. In the early twentieth century, when Christian-based Western sexological ideas were imported, masturbation was considered a moral vice alongside prostitution, sex education, sexual disease, and commercial sex in Japan. In 1908, there was the first public debate about sex education but masturbation was avoided because it was seen to cause "unnecessary exhaustion" since it would violate "the spreading belief in the need to strengthen the nation through intensified procreation after the Russo-Japanese War in 1904/1905" (Frühstück 68). Many educators and physicians were opposed to the view that sex education would increase sexual drive even after sex education was prohibited by the Ministry of Education in 1922. From 1920 to 1930, some researchers went public to "teach that masturbation was not pathological but a perfectly normal variant of sexual activity practiced by almost 90 per cent of Japanese males" (72). This demonstrates how

Japanese culture has a history of being affected by Christian religious taboos -- masturbation was one of these in the early twentieth century. What is significant is that there also seems to have been strong opposition to the control of masturbation, though there is no reference to girls'/women's masturbation. What do we know about women's masturbation in contemporary Japanese culture? I will show how masturbation and sexual fantasies are freely discussed in women's counter-culture.

After being inspired by a male writer who said "looking at a visual thing" is necessary when masturbating, Fujimori did a small survey in 1999. She asked her female friends about masturbation and the use of *okazu* (visuals or objects a person uses to masturbate, e.g. pornographic magazines and adult videos) and she collected interesting results. When she asked, "Do you look at *okazu* while masturbating?" most said they look away from it when masturbating. She then questioned, "What is the most stimulating *okazu* for you: texts, comics, pictures or adult videos?" The majority preferred either text or comics, summarizing that it is better if it departs from the realistic image (1999(5), 229). She says that the majority of men probably like images that are more realistic so there are significant gender differences at work (229).

I am not certain about Japanese men's most stimulating tool for masturbation, although adult video sales are very big in Japan.³⁵ However, women's claims that it is "better if images are far from realistic" helps to explain women's sexual fantasy culture. I have to add though that these unrealistic images are not just unreal because there are no actual humans presented in texts and comics, but unreal in the sense that some contexts are unreal, or impossible for women, biologically, situationally, financially and so on. There is a great deal of freedom in the sexual fantasy world for women. Sexual fantasy makings supply sometime challenging and unconventional models for women. For example, Fubuki Anna, a Japanese bisexual adult movie director and former porno actress, says that:

I don't read men's (porno) comics a lot, but if I were about to enjoy Eros

³⁵ In 1993, 4700 adult videos were registered and sold through *Video Rinri kyôkai* (Association of Video Ethics). According to Fujiki TDC's article "Jôhôshi niwa zettai noranai AV urabanashi" (The story behind adult videos, that will absolutely never appear in a magazine) in *Media de yokujô suru hon* (The book of sexually stimulating media) (Tokyo: Takarajima sha, 1994) 141. In 2002, according to Nakamura Atsuhiko, who interviewed 20 adult video women actors, in addition to the adult videos formally registered through *Video Rinri kyôkai*, there were 5000 independent adult movies that informally became available to consumers, and there were even more sold as bootlegs; *Namae no nai onnatachi* (Women without name), (Tokyo: Takarajima sha, 2002) 2.

during a long autumn night, I would prefer men's comics to Lady's Comics! ... As far as I'm concerned, I do not project myself into the female characters in Lady's Comics. So, instead of reading Lady's Comics, I feel sexually aroused by men's (porno) comics with illustrations of (sexually) easy girls. ... Lady's Comics ... dont provide me with enough sexual excitement. (*Shûkan josei* 1999, 59)

Fubuki seems to see herself more in men's porno comic book. Even though these comics are made by and for men, and often show sexist images of women who sexually serve men (and sexually easy girls like Fubuki says), they suit Fubuki better than Lady's Comics.

Moreover, Fushimi Noriaki, a gay male writer who came out in the Japanese media with his real name, critically looked at sexual fantasies of lesbians. He states:

It seems like lesbians are not yet at the stage of recognizing a variety of desires. For example, there are people who say never about being aroused by rape fantasy. Gay magazines offer all sorts of fantasies without leaving anything out but women seem to be distinguishing right from wrong. Their desire is varied, but it needs to be recognized. (*Anisu* 1997, 9)

Gay men and lesbians in Japan (and elsewhere) do not share an identical politics and culture. Rape is a crime that should not be trivialized, and many women in Japan are fighting to abolish it. However, Fushimi's example of rape fantasy, which he says is not accepted among (many) lesbians, interests me because rape fantasies are one of the most common scenes in Lady's Comics.

According to feminist scholar Shigematsu Setsu, the differences between rape and rape fantasy need to be recognized by analyzing those featured in Lady's Comics:

Rape fantasy (as distinct from rape) involves the performance of roles, through the allocation of a difference of power that simulates the lack of control, threat, and violence, but ultimately remains within the bounds of a set of elaborate conditions, created by the manga artist to please the reader. (1999, 150)

It is important to differentiate rape fantasy and actual rape. Interestingly, although rape fantasies are common in the texts targeting predominantly straight women, according to

Fushimi, lesbian readers do not like them. In fact, *Misuto* did not have images of rape. Rape in the context of fantasy texts in Japan is not the criminal kind that people may think of. Mizoguchi Akiko, a lesbian graduate student of Cultural Studies, analyzes rape in Yaoi comic books that show gay men's pornography made by and for women. The rape (fantasy) in Yaoi comics is symbolic rather than real, and it is structured within a love that is excessive and ultimate (2000, 204). Women who harbor rape fantasies may be redefining sexual power on women's terms, without confusing fantasy-based rape and actual, violent sexual assault.

Matsuura Rieko is an award winning woman writer who is known for her female homoerotic and sexually symbolic literature inspired by French feminism. Matsuura argues that unless women go beyond certain "tabooed" fantasies we will not deconstruct the patriarchal model. Going beyond fantasies that appear self-victimizing but qualitatively different from the phallic system, like Matsuura suggests, would mean resisting reproduction of the conventional patriarchal model leading to possibilities for radical change.

Fantasy makings are not only personal choices but can be feminist and phallic challenging tools. I add that women who masturbate in these contexts may lead to politicizing and challenging the conventional patriarchal model. One example is Yaoi, a manga text that depicts gay men's pornography created by and for women.

Yaoi is growing from fanzines to commercial success with an audience of 100,000 readers.³⁶ Yaoi studies is a growing area of scholarship in Japanese popular culture. Scholars of literature, sociology, psychology, and cultural studies analyze this unique phenomenon of contemporary Japanese women's culture from various perspectives (Watanabe 1989, Matsumoto 1991, Fujimori 1994, Kotani 1994, Kotani and Vincent 1996, Ueno 1999). Nagakubo Yôko analyzes the general contents of Yaoi stories that "actual romantic stories consist of familiar heterosexual love romances except that the characters are both men, ignoring the characteristics of male same-sex love, and it is based on the heterosexual romantic relation models" (79).

Generally speaking, Yaoi's audience is predominantly heterosexual girls and adult women, though lesbian and bisexual women are also readers. In *Josei dôseiaisha no laifu hisutori* (Life history of female same-sex lovers), one woman says that she used this

³⁶ It is said that more than 90 per cent of readers and creators are female (Ueno qtd. in Nagakubo 1998).

gay men's pornographic Yaoi literature to masturbate during her high school years in early 1980. Another woman was inspired to name her desire for women upon finding *Kaze to kino uta* (The Song of the Wind and the Tree), the first gay comic book from 1976. During the late 1980s when I was a high school student, I was in a music club-like counter-cultural group. There were teenagers and women in their early twenties who were sexually involved with each other and were the creators of Yaoi fanzines.

Reading through the reaction of these women, it becomes clear that various kinds of pornography provide or satisfy their sexual fantasies and can be interpreted as some of women's cultural characteristics. There is a woman like Fubuki who feels aroused by pornographic comic books made by and for straight men. There are women who come out about their homosexual desire through gay men's pornography. There are women gazing sexually at the women displayed in heterosexual men's pornography. These roles are continually modified by engendering and perpetuating feminine gender roles in lesbian desire; incorporating and contradicting gender roles in gay men's porno for multi-sexual women; resisting, self-critiquing and exploring women's positions in patriarchal structure through fantasies; and accepting and opening subjectivities of such multi-layered multi-sexuality, both constructed through men's porno and through women's porno such as *Misuto*. These roles are produced, reproduced, resisted and restructured -- they both perpetuate and undermine patriarchal values.

4.2 Multi-Sexual Identity Through Fantasy

Identification of gender and sexuality is quite complicated in the world of non-heteronormative Japanese popular culture. Some women fantasize by imagining having sex as a gay man, while heterosexually identified. A woman I know is a feminist sex worker who is proud of her work. She resists compromising her gender, i.e., using feminine language that is reminiscent of schoolgirls, smiling all the time, never being assertive. Some customers expect to see this as a part of sexual service and so workers

have no choice but to "act the part."³⁷ At the work place of feminist sex worker Minami Tomoko, women sexually serve men only by stimulating their prostate or being part of a threesome, keeping the ratio of two women to one man. There too, women sexually service women and men by resisting the conventional heteronormative sex work, though they do not necessarily claim queer identities. The women who masturbate and reach orgasm by fantasizing about somebody they are not attracted to, also participate in multi-sexual fantasy makings.

In my research, I have found instances of women who fantasize about being gay men, straight identified women who fantasize about being lesbian, women who share masturbatory fantasies and objects to bond and women who compare orgasms to show intimacy towards each other in a homosocial/homoerotic way. Fantasy is not mere expression of sexuality but a way to seek possibility, share experiences at levels that transcend individual identity, and the strictures of heteronormative Japanese culture.

Expressing one's sexual desires is often a political assertion of self-identity. It is a venue for politicizing sexual minorities, and challenging the hegemony of oppressive factors. Sexual minorities such as lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transsexuals as well as ethnic minorities who are African, Asian, or of indigenous descent have acquired many spaces by voicing their identities. At the same time, they have been aware of backlash. Some political attempts, including naming, certainly provoke controversy. For example, the medical term, "Gender Identity Disorder" (GID) (*Sei Dôitsusei Shôgai*) has been an issue in both North America and Japan -- some argue that it licenses the manipulation of humans in the medical world, as was done during World War II by Germans and Japanese. However, for people who want to be recognized as GID, this naming is necessary to receive medical support and financial help.³⁸ Particularly for Japanese, naming GID helps, though not 100 per cent, to change their birth certificate according to

³⁷ Facing the reality of inequality and discrimination towards sex workers in Japanese society, some women are often treated disrespectfully by people in media or customers. Feminist sex worker Minami Tomoko is also a writer and discusses about such her experiences. She has established a sex clinic called Dôgenzaka Clinic, where women serve people differently by gender; for men, they anally stimulate their prostate only and for women, they stimulate an erogenous zone. They also offer three-somes with a policy that never are there two men and a woman, but always two women and a man. Please see the discussion around agencies of women sex workers, *Baishun kôtei sengen: Uru uranai wa watashigakimeru* (An affirmative declaration of prostitution: I decide to sell or not), (Tokyo: Pot, 2000).

³⁸ There are more aspects for discussions on GID; see Matthew Rottnek, ed., *Sisters & Tomboys* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

their chosen gender identity.³⁹

However, I would like to also recognize those women who choose not to identify sexually for various reasons. Many wives and husbands are married to secure social status in Japan, while they pursue extra-marital affairs. For a straight married woman, naming her lesbian desire can be a political challenge and great risk-taking. Acknowledging the differences of naming and not naming, I would claim that mono-sexual identity cannot capture the diverse range of women's sexual desires, fantasies and practices in the context of Japanese Lady's Comics, *Misuto*, and Yaoi.⁴⁰

In my view, the assumption that those who seek homosexual activities but eschew a homosexual identity are homophobic, is culturally imperialistic. From my research on Japan, the story is more complicated. In the post Western construction of sexuality, identification does not have to be always "the only" empowering tool universally. Singular sexual identification excludes those who are ambivalent or sexually undecided; rigid identity politics divides people more than it unites them. Identifying as lesbian or gay may change parts of heteronormative society, while choosing sexual and gender ambiguity and refusing a stable identify may challenge heteronormativity in another way. I have discussed how some women in Japan play with their gender and sexuality through fantasy and behavior while not naming their sexual or gender identity clearly. Acknowledging the specificities of Japanese culture, I argue that some women's multi-layered multi-sexuality may contest gender and heterosexual norms in Japan.

Foucault discusses the relationship between sex and perversion and how it is constructed in the West historically. I will link his statement to the unconventionally constructed model of what I have discussed, though not necessarily seen as pervasive, for the purpose of critically looking at the model of multi-layered multi-sexuality that I have developed. According to Foucault;

The implantation of perversions is an instrument-effect: it is through the

³⁹ Torai Masae was the first person to come out to public in Japan and who made GID famous in the Japanese media, and influencing the society great deal. The issue of birth certificates is an on-going legal issue even to those who are medically identified as GID persons. See *Toransugendâ no nakamatachi* (Transgender mates), (Tokyo: Seikyûsha, 2000) 43-4, or any other publication of Torai on GID.

⁴⁰ Hashimoto Hideo, an intersexual activist, has appeared in the public media since the early to mid 1990. See the book *Intâsekusharu no Sakebi* (A shout of intersexual), (Kyoto: Kamogawa Shuppan, 1997). Morgan Holms is an out intersexual professor of Sociology and Anthropology who gives public talk cross-culturally and has given a great talk at the panel held for Vancouver Queer Film and Video Festival in August 2002. Also, the presence of intersexes or hermaphrodites is already discussed in my earlier section.

isolation, intensification, and consolidation of peripheral sexualities that relations of power to sex and pleasure branched out and multiplied, measure the body, and penetrated modes of conduct. And accompanying this encroachment of powers, scattered sexualities rigidified, became stuck to an age, a place, and a type of practice. A proliferation of sexualities through the extension of power; an optimization of the power to which each of these local sexualities gave a surface of intervention: this concatenation, particularly since the nineteenth century, has been ensured and relayed by the countless economic interests which, with the help of medicine, psychiatry, prostitution, and pornography, have tapped into both this analytical multiplication of pleasure and this optimization of the power that controls it. Pleasure and power do not cancel or turn back against one another; they seek out, overlap, and reinforce on another. They are linked together by complex mechanisms and devices of excitation and incitement. (48)

His discussion of sexual discourses is specific to Western societies. While Foucault discusses the dichotomy of 'perversion against the rest', my research illustrates that, for some Japanese women, desire, fantasies and pleasure emanate from and overlap both sides of the heterosexual/homosexual binary. In other words, perversion and non-perversion are mixed. In Japan, when taboos are broken, even at the fantasy level, heterosexual hegemony becomes troubled. These Japanese women access perversion in their lives, realizing it in the context of fantasy. Practices of sexuality and gender that I have shown are rather non-threatening and non-perversively constructed pleasures that probably do not hold as much power as Foucault wishes they did, in his analysis of sexual taboos in rigidly Christian-based culture. In Japanese culture where open fantasy space is understood and accepted consciously or subconsciously, and where fantasy incorporates various taboos or perversions that are "physically impossible," "unattractive," and non-heteronormative, it is impossible to think in dualistic terms. Flipping the subject to be feminine or masculine, top or bottom, sadist or masochist, or fantasizing about rape suggest much more fluidity than simple gender and sexual binaries can accommodate and explicate. My research demonstrates that some Japanese women enjoy gender and sexual fantasies where they can express power, manipulate

norms, and resist dominant patriarchal, heteronormative discourses.

V: Conclusion

In my research on Japanese sexual imagery, I found that some women internalize ideologically constructed images of beauty, including Eurocentric images, in ways that unsettle notions of stable heterosexual identity. Depictions of lesbian sex that circulate in heteronormative Japanese culture were and are appropriated for use in women's fantasies about other women, and thus reconstructed by them in interactive ways. I discovered that various kinds of pornography are widely available and consumed by Japanese women, whether made by and for women or not. I argue that pornographic images may serve as a tool for women to explore their sexuality through fantasizing about a variety of diverse sexualities, including the Super Femme relationship. Through freely exploring gender and sexual fantasies and challenging heteronormative patriarchal space, women can articulate what they imagine and what they want, in ways that enhance intimacy among women. The multi-layered multi-sexuality of Japanese women who consume lesbian and gay pornography is illustrative of a taboo-breaking phenomenon that is structured by fluidity rather than by gender/sex binaries. Complex expressions of women's sexual desire through fantasy should not be read as a lack of political challenge to heteronormativity but rather as the very possibility of resisting or deconstructing the hegemonic monosexual paradigm of patriarchal heteronormative and homonormative models.

Anthropologists have contributed to queer theory by showing how gender and sexuality are culturally constructed. In this paper, I have discussed how women's engagement with non-heterosexual pornography suggests resistance and accommodation to the patriarchal system in Japan. Sexual and gendered oppressions, freedom, and explorations, both textual and material, overlap, conflict and intertwine to reflect the specific historical, political, and cultural context within which they exist.

My study can be useful in demonstrating how an "insider" like myself can probe women-centered spaces, both symbolic and real, in order to gain access to quasi-private and intimate explorations of gender, sexuality and fantasy. Nevertheless, further research on Japanese women's struggles for economic equality, alternatives to the institution of marriage, the production of various media for women by women and risk-taking

challenges to rigid sex and gender polarities is recommended to strengthen critical cross-cultural perspectives. How might a cross-cultural analysis of the phenomena of Japanese Yaoi and North American Slashers contribute to our understanding of critical, anti-patriarchal discourse? Do they communicate in multi-layered and multi-sexual queer lives in similar ways? How might North American women's homosocial spaces empower women's independent lives? How are masturbation fantasies constructed in each culture? I conclude that careful attention to cultural specificities is a necessary tool to challenge ideas of universal, transcultural dominant discourses of gender (masculine versus feminine) and sexuality (heterosexual versus homosexual).

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APPENDIX A



Figure 1
Cover of *Misuto*.
Left: November 1997 issue. Right: December 1998 issue.

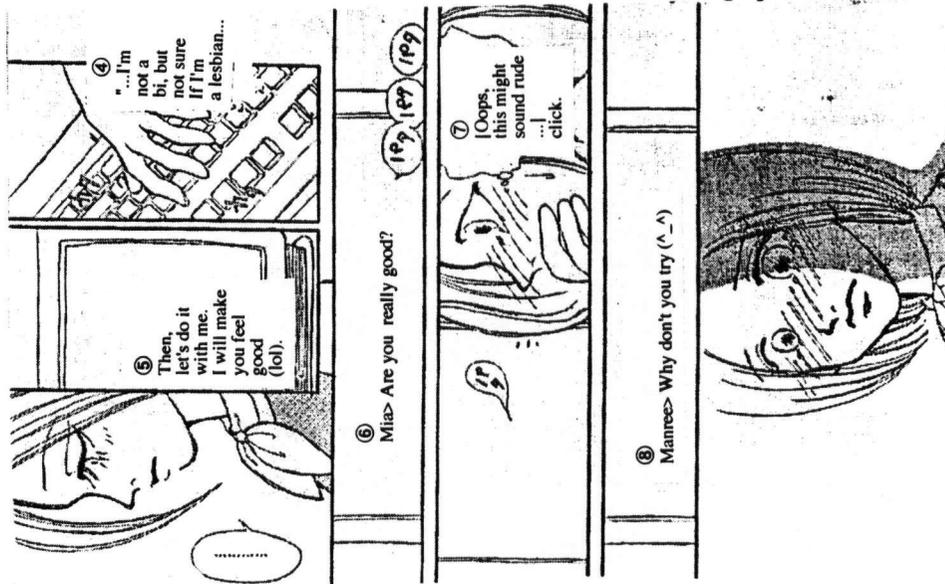
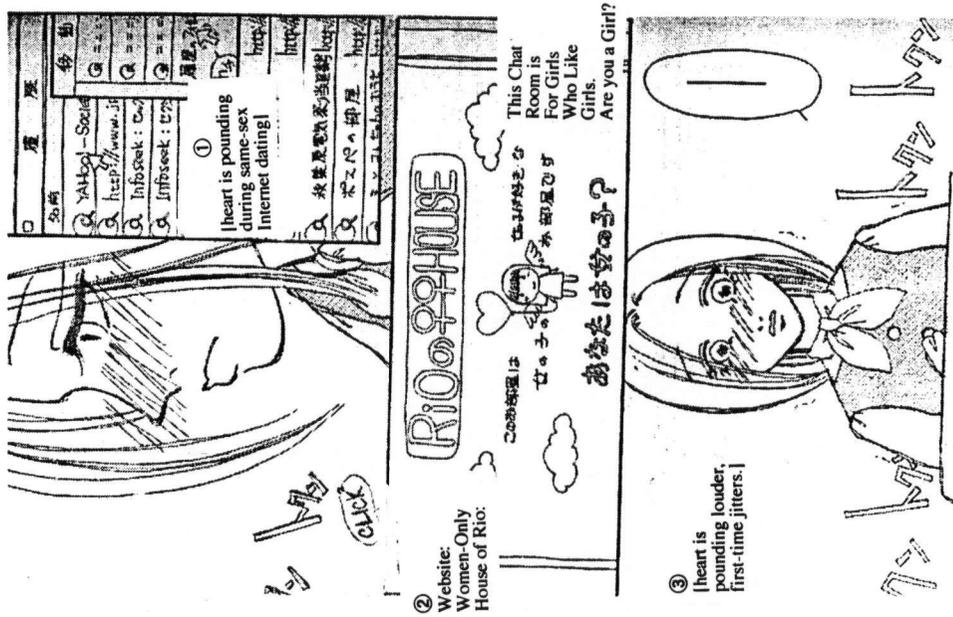


Figure 2

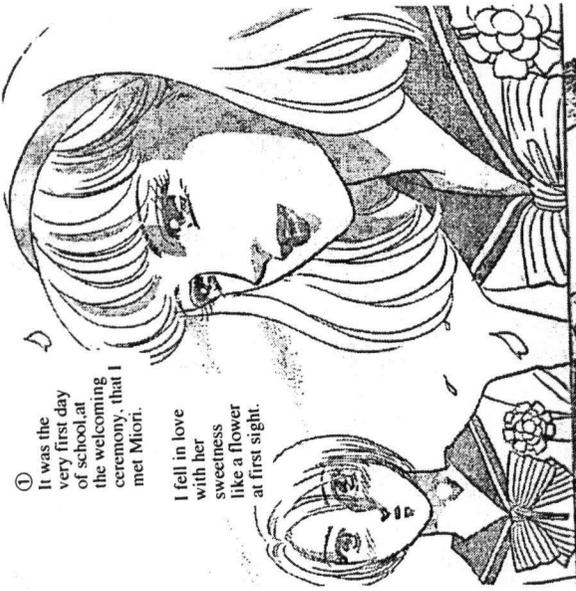
A woman trying on-line same-sex dating for the first time.
 Source: Keiko, Ishikawa, "Sugar," *Misuto* October, 1998: 115 and 118.



Figure 3
 The main character Sonoko is feeling vulnerable and powerless because of her infertility, the pressure from her husband and mother-in-law, and her husband forcing sex on her.
 Source: Asô, Natsuko. "Mother," *Misuto* November 1997: 26-7.



Figure 4
Sonoko is sexually involved with her friend Megumi,
who she met at the infertility treatment clinic (Asô 32).



① It was the very first day of school, at the welcoming ceremony, that I met Miori.

I fell in love with her sweetness like a flower at first sight.



② Sometimes she looked sad but

it gave her a mysterious aura and my feelings towards her became even deeper.

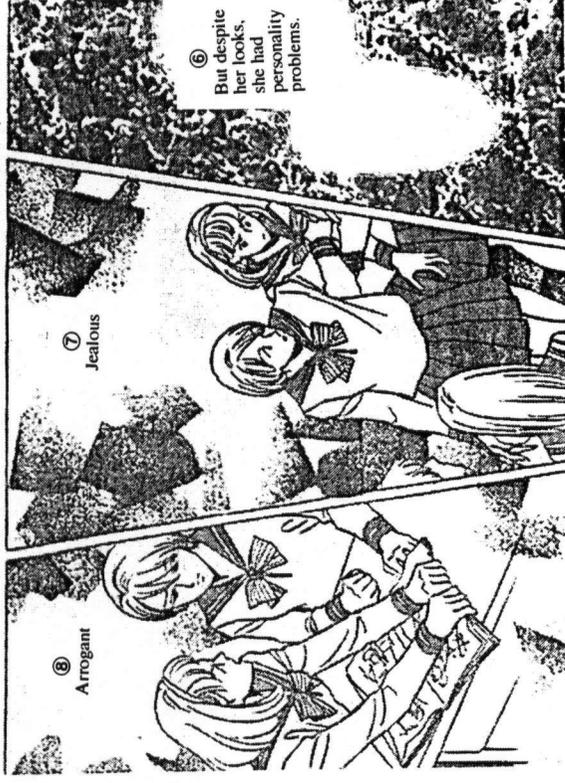


③ For a long time, I did not have the courage to confess my feelings. But Miori approached me. "Mochizuki, I heard you want to become a professional stylist."



⑤ Then we became lovers.

④ I was wondering how she knew about my career aspiration, but through our common interest in fashion, Miori and I became closer quickly.



⑧ Arrogant

⑦ Jealous

⑥ But despite her looks, she had personality problems.

Figure 5 The main character Mochizuki Asami remembers her intense relationship with Miori in high school. They run into each other at a fashion designers' meeting and become lovers again. Source: Wako, "Endless," *Misuto* May 1998: 22-3.

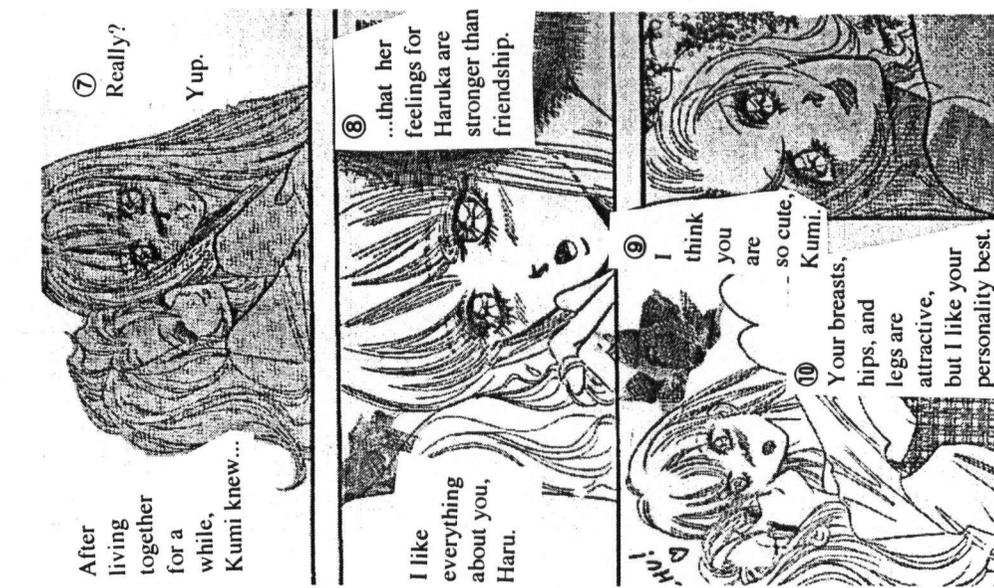
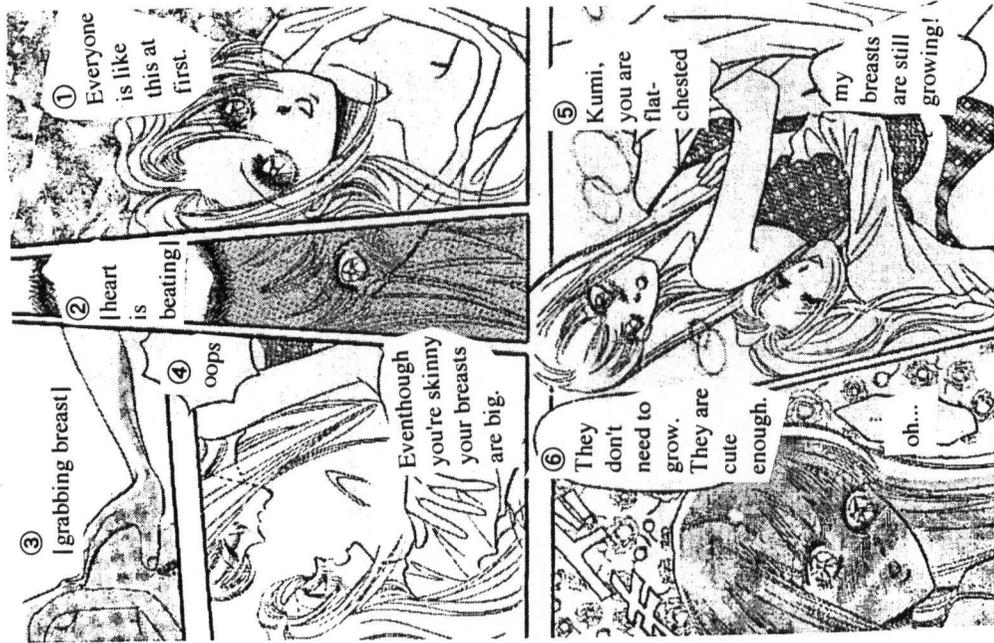


Figure 6
 Young women Kumi and Haruka work for circus and realize they are attracted to each other. Their language highlights their femininity, complementing their appearance and physical behavior.
 Source: Hatori, Nina, "Little Bird," *Misuto* July 1998: 150-1