A Translation and Analysis of Japan’s Seminal Lesbian Studies Work

Indiana Scarlet Brown
*University at Albany, State University of New York*

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A Translation and Analysis of Japan’s Seminal Lesbian Studies Work

An honors thesis presented to the
Department of Japanese Studies,
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and
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Indiana Scarlet Brown
Research Advisor: Susanna Fessler

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Abstract

I translated Kakefuda Hiroko’s seminal lesbian studies book “Rezubian’ de aru to iu koto” 「レズビアンである、ということ (On Being a ‘Lesbian’) in order to critically analyze her assertions and theories. This publication made a great impact in Japan during the 1990s by alleviating feelings of isolation and catalyzing the expansion of media specifically geared toward sexual minorities. I chose to analyze this text as well as Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble for each author’s nuanced interrogation of how their readers can reconsider and challenge the realities we may take for granted. In this project, I seek to add to my understanding of what it means to be queer in Japan and provide insights to other readers with an interest in queer studies based on both authors’ theories to catalyze the development of more complicated understandings of identity. We should not limit ourselves to the insights of people who can convey their ideas in English. While Kakefuda touched on a wide variety of topics in her book, I chose to primarily dissect her interrogation of the Japanese family system, her problematization of using heteronormative language to describe lesbians, and the intersections and dissimilarities with Butler’s arguments in Gender Trouble.
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# Table of Contents

Abstract........................................................................................................................................................................2

Acknowledgements........................................................................................................................................................3

Introduction.................................................................................................................................................................5-8

Interrogating the Family System................................................................................................................................9-18

The Limits of Heteronormative Language..............................................................................................................19-28

Parallels with Judith Butler........................................................................................................................................29-39

Analysis Conclusion................................................................................................................................................40-41

Translator’s Notes....................................................................................................................................................42-44

Title Page.................................................................................................................................................................45

[Kakefuda’s] Acknowledgements............................................................................................................................46

Chapter 1: Who Are “Lesbians”? (pg. 3-17) ........................................................................................................47-61

Chapter 2: Pornographic Lies and Feminist Misunderstandings (pg. 18-35).............................................62-79

Chapter 3: Marriage, Family and “Lesbians” (pg. 36-55) ................................................................................80-99

Chapter 4: A Curse Called “Motherhood” (pg. 56-69) ....................................................................................100-113

Chapter 5: The Reason “Lesbian” Discrimination is Invisible (pg. 70-79)..................................................114-123

Chapter 6: The Possibility of “Two Women” (pg. 80-96) ................................................................................124-140

Chapter 7: Homosexuals in the Classroom (pg. 97-115) .............................................................................141-159

Chapter 8: Not Just Looking For One “Pleasure” (pg. 116-129) .................................................................160-173

Chapter 9: Coming Out – Towards Unity (pg. 130-140) .............................................................................174-184

Chapter 10: On Being a Lesbian Today (pg. 141-155) ...............................................................................185-199

Afterword (pg. 156-158) ..................................................................................................................................200-202

References..............................................................................................................................................................203-205
Introduction

During the early 1990s, a handful of catalysts sparked the allocation of widespread mainstream liberal media attention to Japan’s first “gay boom.”¹ The women’s magazine CREA published a titillating special issue on homosexuality in 1991, commenting in particular on straight women’s interest in and attraction to gay men. This publication paved the way for other magazines to offer their own opinion pieces and cater to the newfound wave of mainstream gay intrigue.² That same year, Fushimi Noriaki 伏見憲明 (b. 1963) published his book Private Gay Life (Puraibetto gei raifu), a personal and introspective collection of writings on what it meant to be a gay man in Japan in which he disclosed his real name and a photo of himself.³ This text was the first bestseller in Japan to be entirely focused on homosexuality and coming out. With Fushimi’s text as an inspiration and a point of reference, Kakefuda Hiroko 掛札悠子 (b. 1964) published a text the following year called On Being a “Lesbian” (“Rezubian” de aru to iu koto), publicly outing herself. Kakefuda’s book is the seminal work to lesbian studies and activism in Japan, drawing on theories similar to the likes of those of Judith Butler, who revolutionized gender studies in the U.S. with her 1990 publication Gender Trouble (Routledge).

Popular figures in the Japanese media who had been outed before, such as the singer Sagara Naomi 佐良直美, often had their careers ruined by the negative attention and outcry.⁴ Kakefuda took a clearly calculated risk in publishing her book. For a few years following the publication of her book, Kakefuda was a very active spokesperson for Japanese lesbian issues and was often asked to speak in the media for her particular viewpoint. During this period of visibility, she frequently criticized the ideal

¹ Gei būmu is a set Japanese term used to describe this era. I specify that this is the first one here, as I believe advent of widespread internet use towards the end of the nineties and on complicated this era. Post-internet gay discourse could be argued to be Japan’s second gay boom.
³ McLelland, Mark, Katsuhioko Suganuma, and James Welker. Queer Voices from Japan: First Person Narratives from Japan’s Sexual Minorities (Lexington Books, 2007), 282.
of “tolerance” because of its failure to offer minorities anything more than partial inclusion within the dominant system.⁵ On Being a “Lesbian” further opened the door for an emerging genre of lesbian-oriented commercial magazines and inspired outspoken displays of pride and openness about one’s sexuality in such demonstrations as the first sizable lesbian and gay parade in Tokyo, 1994.⁶ Kakefuda’s publication made a great impact by creating visibility, alleviating feelings of isolation, and catalyzing the expansion of media specifically geared toward sexual minorities. These changes were particularly significant prior to the exponential growth in the public’s use of the internet towards the end of the decade.⁷ However, after a handful of years speaking under the ever-present gaze of mainstream media, Kakefuda grew weary of this lifestyle and withdrew from her status as an outspoken activist, spending far less time in the public eye.⁸

While I do not think Kakefuda had read Butler before she wrote her book, it’s worth comparatively analyzing Gender Trouble with On Being a “Lesbian.”⁹ Each book is a seminal work in gender and queer studies for each country, offering critiques of identity politics, the assumption of gender as essential, and expositions of how the production of gender and sexuality as normative upholds the existing hierarchy that molds society. The unique historical and cultural context of being a woman and a lesbian in Japan may complicate or add to the theories that scholars of gender studies consider critical to our modern understanding of gender. I chose to analyze and draw from both of these texts because of each author’s nuanced interrogation of how their readers can reconsider and challenge the realities we may take for granted. In beginning this project, I sought to add to my understanding of

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⁵ Sharon Chalmers. Emerging lesbian voices from Japan (RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 1.
⁷ Ibid., 40.
⁹ The earliest Japanese translation of Gender Trouble was published in 1999 by Seidosha (translated by Takemura Kazuko 竹村 和子). I doubt that Kakefuda had read it in English.
what it means to be queer in Japan. I also desire to provide insights to other readers with an interest in
queer studies based on both authors’ theories to catalyze the development of more complicated
understandings of identity. I think it is a shame to limit ourselves to the insights of people who can
convey their ideas in English.

*On Being a “Lesbian”* is by no means written in the same vein as *Gender Trouble*, or other
gender and sexuality theory commonly read in Gender Studies today. It is devoid of inaccessible
academic jargon and written in an erratic, personal style, almost like a collection of essays. Calling it the
seemingly seminal work for lesbian studies in Japan gives a false impression of intent; rather, it is merely a lesbian
woman relaying her personal experiences and asserting astute criticisms of how gender and sexuality
are enforced in Japanese society. In translating the text, I was tempted to edit some of her syntax and
replace certain phrasing with well-established terminology in academic circles such as
“heteronormativity,” but I chose not to do this, instead keeping the original voice and almost informal
style of the source text. Its accessibility to a wide audience is a large part of what makes the book so
important.

Kakefuda addresses a wide variety of topics in relation to being a lesbian in Japanese society –
how Japanese society institutionally robs women of their subjectivity to their own desire, how Japan’s
modern day family system excludes homosexuals and disenfranchises women, the association with the
term “lesbian” and pornography, the difficulties she has personally felt in identifying as a lesbian, the
question of whether one is truly a lesbian or simply has “lesbian qualities,” the limits of language in a
heteronormative society, the effect of the AIDS crisis on people’s health and perceptions of
homosexuality in Japan, the delayed experience of puberty in some homosexuals, criticisms of
prominent homophobic feminist figures in Japan such as Ueno Chizuko 上野千鶴子, criticisms of those
who choose to call themselves lesbians for the sole purpose of solidarity with feminist ideals, and
criticisms of conflating gender and sexuality. Kakefuda does not exhaust the discursive possibilities
within lesbian studies, but she certainly tries to touch on as many areas as possible within a scant two hundred pages. It would be a massive undertaking to try and dissect all her assertions, so for the scope of this project, I have chosen to analyze a few key areas following my translation of the text: Kakefuda’s interrogation of the Japanese family system, her problematization of using heteronormative language to describe lesbians, and the intersections and dissimilarities with Butler’s arguments in *Gender Trouble*. 
Interrogating the Family System

Gay marriage has been the quintessential Western gay rights issue for decades – until the Supreme Court federally legalized gay marriage in 2015, any conversation about homosexuality in the United States was bound to lead to a discussion about whether gay couples should have the right to be married. The issue continues to be debated today as many people, queer and straight alike, question why queer people would want to participate in such an oppressive institution in the first place, since it has normalized a family system of economic dependence on a single male provider and disparaged sexual minorities for centuries. Same-sex marriage has never been legally recognized in Japan, although some roundabout methods are available for a couple to achieve some of the rights awarded to legally married couples such as creating a will under the condition of a joint-living agreement that confers some rights to making certain health decisions for the other partner.10 Kakefuda belongs to the camp that would seek to dismantle the institution of marriage rather than amend it. However, to understand her unusual point of view, we need to understand how the history of marriage and the family system in Japan is quite a bit different from the American equivalent.

After the Meiji Restoration, the Japanese government sought to keep track and take control of the nation’s inhabitants and developed a family register system called the koseki 戸籍 to do so. The implementation of this system began in 1871, registering the koshu 戸主 (head of household) to act as the main provider and listing other members of the family unit as extensions of this individual. This method of record-keeping was essential for the development of a conscription-based army and the creation of stable taxation, public sanitation, and education systems.11 As the koseki became normalized, it also began to represent the construction of a model family. This was a convenient trend for the government. As prefectural governor Watanabe Kiyoshi 渡辺清 explained, “as the leader of a

house, the household head is responsible for that house. Supporting its elderly and its children, he protects the morals for the house. This is a fine custom for in this way poor people will still have food and clothing, even if there were no poorhouses." As this governor so bluntly puts it, developing the koseki system postponed the necessity of state mandated social security or public welfare. It also established who was responsible for morals in the household: the koshu.

To further mandate this sense of responsibility and power structure, the Meiji administration went on to enact the Meiji Civil Code in 1898, creating the ie 家 (household) system to build upon the koseki. This was organized by kazoku kokka 家族国家 (family state) ideology, wherein the members of the household mimicked the power structure of the nation (father as emperor, mother as empress, and children as citizens). With this sort of hierarchy established, the state could ensure a complacent household unit whose labor output, property ownership, and inheritance rights would be spoken for by the koshu. The ie system not only furthered the koshu’s feelings of purpose in his status as head of household, but the wife and children’s feelings of purpose in their position listed in the koseki. The Meiji government’s implementation of this family structuring was a legal codification of traditional Confucian hierarchy, placing a male head of household in power whose status would be passed onto any male offspring he may have produced.

This system remained in place for nearly fifty years until it underwent post-war reformation in 1946. While the hierarchical nature of the ie system was dismantled and equal individual rights for custody and inheritance were established, vestiges of the ie system’s psychological influence remained,

15 Ibid., 175.
and the *koseki* was left untouched. The registry recognizing a family to be a cohabiting unit containing a heterosexual couple and their offspring listed in relation to the *koshu* is still a system of organization based on hierarchy and common surname.\(^{17}\) While it is technically legal for a husband and wife to both take on the wife’s surname, as of 1987 this was only the case about 2% of the time, and regardless of whether the husband or wife’s name is chosen, one common surname links all parties listed in the *koseki*, which corroborates the notion of a family unit.\(^{18}\)

Evidence of the *ie* system’s persisting tradition of hierarchy and gender roles can be seen in female employment rates following its legal eradication. While employment opportunities for Japanese women grew steadily following the war, their actual employment rates shrank from 54.5% in 1960 to 45.7% in 1975, implying a palpable pressure for women to be assimilated into the reproductive realm of labor.\(^{19}\) Although employment rates have consistently increased since 1975 and the percentage of Japanese citizens who believed marital gender roles should align with the notion “men in the workplace, women in the home” fell from 49% in 1976 to 24% in 1990, the *ie* system and *koseki*’s psychological influence still remains.\(^{20}\) Wagatsuma Sakae 我妻 榮, renowned law professor at Tokyo Metropolitan University, explained that “when a system is operating for a long time it acquires a life of its own. And even when the society, which constituted the basis for the system, changes, it keeps operating and actually begins to influence that society in return. That is true for most legal systems... so it is in this sense that I say that the *koseki* system in return exerts a psychological influence on society and the people.”\(^{21}\) This theory is very much in line with Foucault’s idea that:

> Juridical systems of power produce the *subjects* they subsequently come to represent. Juridical notions of power appear to regulate political life in purely negative terms – that is, through the limitation, prohibition, regulation, control, and even ‘protection’ of individuals related to that political structure through the contingent and retractable operation of choice. But the subjects

\(^{17}\) Hoshino, Sumiko, and Minako Hara. “Married Couples,” 54.


\(^{19}\) Ibid., 77.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 78.

\(^{21}\) Chapman, David, and Karl Jakob Krogness. *Japan’s Household Registration*, 177.
regulated by such structures are, by virtue of being subjected to them, formed, defined, and reproduced in accordance with the requirements of those structures.\textsuperscript{22}

In others words, the psychology of citizens living within a particular juridical system is not formed discretely from the influence of that system – the law is intimately related to culture and sense of duty.

Archaic rhetoric of the original koseki system also continues to be used today. When a man and a woman submit their marriage registry to the state, they create a shin-koseki 新戸籍 (new koseki), but as one individual (typically the woman) gives up her surname, she symbolically enters the family of her husband and is said to enter his koseki, which is called nyūseki 入籍.\textsuperscript{23} The term nyūseki remains from the days of the ie system, where a woman would enter her husband’s household upon marrying him as a person of lower social status compared to his, with no recognized civil rights.\textsuperscript{24} This term in conjunction with the long-standing tradition of a woman taking on the husband’s name and effectively continuing his patrilineality indicates an existing mindset that the wife is an object to be transferred in and out of families.

When Kakefuda was beginning to conceive \textit{On Being a “Lesbian,”} the institution of marriage still maintained pressure on the wife to fill a certain role through a palpable hierarchy. Property allocation in cases of divorce by agreement rarely afforded the wife more than a fraction, many wives did not have assets of their own to afford defending themselves in divorce court battles or to allow some degree of economic independence from their husband, and caring for aging parents was a burden frequently taken on by the wife in a time where elderly facilities were still rare.\textsuperscript{25} While there are moments in the

\textsuperscript{22} Judith Butler. \textit{Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity} (Routledge, 1999), 4.
\textsuperscript{24} Naoko Takemaru. \textit{Women in the language and society of Japan: the linguistic roots of bias} (McFarland & Co., 2010), 161.
text when she admits to having her own fantasies about marriage, she problematizes the institution as one of the foundational oppressors of sexual minorities. Kakefuda’s proposed solution is to create a legal contract between partners outside of the current constructs of the Japanese marriage system and the *koseki* in order to legitimize homosexual relationships and make them visible.\(^{26}\) She argues that simply amending a system predicated on the discrimination of relationships that do not fit the traditional heteronormative, hierarchical family unit to include said relationships would not be sufficient cause for the heterosexual majority to question their privilege within this system.\(^{27}\) She explains that there still remain vestiges of the *ie* system today and how marriage contributes to the erasure of lesbians:

> Women’s acquisition of the right to decide whether to marry and with whom is a very recent change, and until then, they could not defy the wishes of their “home” on the matter. Women could not oppose this decision, and for a woman to be able decide on such a matter on her own was inconceivable. Thus, women were not even allowed to live on their own, let alone live as a lesbian, so it was not seen as possible for them to act in such a way.

> This sort of mindset is still in existence today. As before, people don’t believe women can live on their own, nor do they believe “lesbian” relationships exist. Disparagement of lesbians is not apparent in Japan because people believe that *lesbians don’t exist* (shouldn’t exist). “Lesbian” relationships do not enter the field of vision of the vast majority of people in this society. “The type of human relationship” that is “lesbian” has yet to even be “discovered” in this society.

> The idea that all “man/woman” relationships are special in every way and constitute a social unit is not only assumed by people who accept the marriage system and the traditional meaning of “family” as they are, but is also deep-seated within the people who criticize these institutions.\(^{28}\)

Kakefuda argues that because the relationship between a man and a woman (and the offspring they may have) is so rigidly viewed as the only viable family unit, the idea of two women having a relationship is not something those who subscribe to the value of the marriage system would find believable, let alone something that would cross the heterosexual mind. However, while she is

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\(^{27}\) Ibid., 89.

\(^{28}\) Ibid., 81.
specifically referring to the separate name movement (which takes issue with the requirement for both people in a marriage to share one surname) when mentioning the deep-seated conviction that “man/woman” relationships are the only valid social unit, it is important to reiterate that the influence of the ideal of marriage extends to sexual minorities as well. Many gay men interviewed in the late nineties reported that they did not rule out the possibility of getting married to a woman despite being cognizant of their sexuality. The appeal of higher social standing, forming a household, and being a part of a family took precedence over their sexuality, although some stated that they didn’t think they could give up seeing men completely.29 Full well knowing the appeal of marriage’s impact on her adolescent denial of her sexuality, Kakefuda explains:

The problems female homosexuals face and the problems male homosexuals face need to be differentiated carefully, especially those problems surrounding the heterosexual “institution of marriage.” As it stands now, not even homosexuals are free from the bonds of “marriage” and the “home.” The compulsion of “marriage” and the “home” coupled with the fateful weakness of homosexuals seeing their own “homosexuality” as taboo creates a binding force so strong it can crush the reality of the self as homosexual. At the same time, not only does the institution of marriage protect a contractual relationship between two (heterosexual) people, it maintains the “home.” When women are coerced into having children to ensure the survival of the “home,” we can’t ignore that “marriage” and the “home” make sexism compulsory within the social consciousness and power imbalance between married men and women. These factors naturally pervade homosexual relationships as well.30

Kakefuda also admits that she does not want to come down too hard on women who choose to get married to a man despite their sexuality because of how difficult it is for single women to secure an economically comfortable life for themselves in Japanese society.31 That 40% of companies failed to offer women any chance for promotion beyond auxiliary work at the time of her writing indicated to her that Japanese society’s heterosexist assumption that all women are potential mothers and not worth offering better employment opportunities leaves women with very little choice beyond the socially

31 Ibid., 50.
constructed pathway to marriage, let alone coming out as a lesbian.\textsuperscript{32} The problem only worsened as women grew older – in the late nineties, middle aged women were rarely afforded any work other than a minimum wage part-time job, giving them little resources to support themselves or any children they may have. Furthermore, married women were exempt from paying into the national retirement pension program if they make under roughly $12,000 per year, creating incentive to depend on their husband’s income rather than find full-time work themselves.\textsuperscript{33} The incentive for economic stability and marital benefits afforded by the state makes marriage an attractive choice for women while simultaneously enshrouding the inequality inherent to the system.

The blatant heterosexism that the marriage system and koseki are predicated on is exactly why Kakefuda disavows movements such as the separate names movement, which calls for legal recognition of spouses retaining their individual surnames. Simple revisions which do not actually call into question the fundamental problems with the marriage system do nothing but appease a handful of people while furthering the longevity of an outdated, sexist system.\textsuperscript{34} She also worries that by removing the possibility to refuse marriage because of the desire to keep one’s own surname, it would become harder for women to find socially acceptable, practical reasons to resist marriage.\textsuperscript{35} This worry exemplifies a frequently forgotten part of critically analyzing what we might call “progress” – while something may seem beneficial for a certain group (in this case, women) on the surface and seem like a clear step in the direction of bettering their lives, its ripple effects may in fact complicate this narrative of progress.

Reform does not always work in a linear path.

Kakefuda’s commentary on this topic predates and in many ways aligns with the criticisms of other scholars like Ninomiya Shūhei 二宮周平 and Horie Yūri 堀江有里 in regards to the koseki and

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 133.
\textsuperscript{34} Kakefuda Hiroko. “Rezubian,” 82.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 84.
integrating gay marriage into the existing marriage system. While Kakefuda problematizes family as something to value and strive for at least as it exists now, Ninomiya sees family as something that ought to be expanded to include gay couples and other groupings of people, but also that such a feat would not be possible under the *koseki* system. He calls for Japan to register its citizens as individual people rather than family units, specifically advocating a mimicry of the system South Korea established after abolishing the *hojuje* 호주제 system, its *koseki* equivalent. Furthermore, he criticizes the usage of the *koseki* as a public document containing significant detail of every family member’s personal information. This information can be very sensitive at times, including adoption status, suspension of parental or guardian rights, disinheritation, and the date anyone in the family was deleted from one *koseki* and entered into another. When a person changes their legally recognized gender, their *koseki* must be deleted if shared with other individuals and a new one produced with their new name and gender. Then, the other members can be re-added if they so choose. Therefore, it’s very easy for private organizations or employers to deduce sensitive information when requesting a partial or full copy of someone’s *koseki*, such as if they have legally changed their gender, leaving some transgender individuals at risk for discrimination. Since Ninomiya views this as an unnecessary invasion of privacy that only serves to perpetuate the hierarchical family unit that functions well within the state, he advocates for the abolishment of the *koseki* system. In this aspect of the argument, he and Kakefuda seem to align.

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36 Ibid., 158.
39 Ibid., 181.
40 This has only been legal since the enactment of the Law Concerning Special Rules Regarding Sex Status of a Person with Gender Identity Disorder in 2003 (Maree Un/State 296).
42 Ibid., 181.
While Ninomiya criticizes the *koseki*, he is of the camp that seeks to include gay people in the current marriage system. Horie Yūri disagrees, coming from a critical standpoint towards the marriage system itself rather than one of discrimination towards sexual minorities. She argues that the value placed on monogamous relationships (whether they are within legal marriage or attempts to include same-sex couples in civil unions or domestic partnerships) excludes any non-conforming relationships and creates a sexual hierarchy around these monogamous relationships.\(^{43}\) She also explains how state approval of certain relationships makes the individuals in those relationships unaware of their privileges and keeps the system implicitly compulsory, creating stigmas against social actors that do not try to assimilate and fit into the mold of marriage.\(^{44}\) Kakefuda shares a similar worry about whether the legalization of gay marriage might lead homosexual couples to seeing their relationships as more special than other types of relationships, just as society teaches us to think about heterosexual married couples.\(^{45}\) Horie and Kakefuda both see marriage as dangerously appealing, conferring certain rights and privileges to select couples whose continued participation consequently leads to prolonged survival of the institution. They are right to be suspicious of expanding an already exclusive institution to one extra group, as it would continue to bar relationships such as non-sexual or polyamorous relationships from being recognized as worthy of special privileges. The reformation of an existing system is not good enough.

Ultimately, what Kakefuda advocates for is a state-sanctified contract for same-sex couples to be afforded with all of the benefits and securities that come with legal marriage, but outside of the present day *koseki* and marriage system.\(^{46}\) She seeks a parallel system that performs the same positive function as marriage, but one that is not fundamentally based on hierarchy, sexism, and the traditional

\(^{43}\) Horie Yūri. “Dōseikan,” 42.
\(^{44}\) Ibid., 47.
\(^{45}\) Kakefuda Hiroko. “Rezubian,” 90.
\(^{46}\) Ibid., 85.
notion of family. However, it is interesting that while she fears that including homosexuals into the present marriage system might create a sense of superiority about their own relationships compared to others, she does not express a similar fear about this parallel contract system. It seems to me that regardless of whether it is based on the traditional system of marriage or a new, discrete system, it is still a system of exclusivity, and those who are not involved in sexual relationships will be seen as inferior nonetheless. And it is not as though Kakefuda does not see non-sexual relationships as inferior – indeed, she questions the heteronormative valuation of sexual love not only for its heterosexuality, but for necessitating sexual love as what defines a relationship and makes it important.\(^\text{47}\) Perhaps it is that she sees incremental steps taken to devalue the present conception of family in Japan as sufficient progress.

\(^{47}\text{Ibid., 172}\)
The Limits of Heteronormative Language

The Japanese language is vastly different from English in any number of ways, but its construction of hierarchy and gender is especially noteworthy. It is remarkably difficult to produce any sentence that does not clue the interlocutor in on the social context in which it is being uttered. Every available personal pronoun – I, he, she, we, they, you – can be gendered and turned polite or casual, with very little room available for neutrality. Sentence final forms found at the end of verbs often contain gendered and hierarchical nuance and particles found after the verb or copula act as indicators not only of gender but investment in the conversation, flirtation, aggression, and inquiry. Often, these notions of gender and hierarchy intersect – women are expected to use a softer, more polite affectation in their speech, and a person who uses such gentle and humble language will similarly be viewed as feminine.

But this gendered language has not emerged naturally or by accident – normative, standard language reflects dominant ideologies of the society in which it is formed, morphing and developing as power structures and moral expectations change with the times. A heteronormative society produces heteronormative language, and thus the expectation of gender expression is mutually constituted with the expectation of heterosexuality. Gender expression and sexuality contrary to these dominant assumptions and workings of society are a potential threat to the legitimacy of current power structures as an “other” that does not fit into the dominant narrative. However, they are also necessary to legitimate current power structures as original and natural by repudiating the existence of the unnatural.

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For a state of affairs to be deemed normal, there needs to be some contrast object. In Kakefuda’s writing, she identifies heteronormative language as one such method by which Japanese ostracizes that which does not fit into society’s ideal framework.

For her, one of the most salient aspects of being a lesbian in Japan is the intrusive and misleading nature of such heteronormative language, as well as the lack of linguistic resources available to lesbians and women in general to adequately express their sexuality and desires. On nearly every page of her book, Kakefuda uses quotation brackets around countless words and phrases – “lesbian,” “homosexual,” “heterosexual,” “woman,” “man,” “abnormal,” “sexual desire,” “pleasure,” and “mother,” to name a few – to encourage a constant critique of what these words imply and for whom their definition is working. This incessant reminder to be wary of language as a metonymy of heteronormative societal ideology is critical to the reading of her work. Kakefuda never outwardly explains her use of the brackets, but it is implied in her arguments and explanations about the implications of certain words. For example, she introduces the conflict involved in simply labeling herself as a “lesbian” very early on in the text:

Since I’ve begun thinking “I am a lesbian,” I think the word “lesbian” has at least two sides to it. One aspect involves the "I'm different from that kind of person" image that is ingrained in the word – the “lesbian” image formed and used in pornography which was created for the male gaze. I think it’s fair to say that in Japanese society, imagery of sexual acts permeates the word. The other aspect of the term “lesbian” is how women in certain circumstances utilize it for self-validation.

If these two words were used respectively in a society where they had no interaction with one another, there might not be any problem with them. In reality, this is simply not the case, and one definition is constantly encroaching upon the other. Specifically, the former encroaches upon the latter.

Because of this, if a woman chooses to employ the word “lesbian” as a label to express positive affirmation of a private aspect of her being, she may find herself feeling torn up about her identity due to the term’s implications. It causes a person to be hung up with the uncomfortable feeling of both being oneself and not being oneself at the same time. Your private domain gets horribly distorted and dragged out into broad daylight, creating the unshakable feeling of being stared down.53

The word rezubian レズビアン and its shortened version rezu レズ are not simply loanwords from the English “lesbian” with identical meaning. Since the 1960s, these Japanese terms have connoted women performing same-sex sexual acts in pornography, particularly targeting the male gaze. As Kakefuda describes, it is difficult for her and many other women to feel comfortable using this word to describe their desire towards other women because heterosexuals might assume certain things about her character or that her association with the word “lesbian” means nothing more than performing certain sex acts with women. She also argues that lesbians’ recognition of their own desire as women is especially difficult because women’s desire in Japanese society is viewed as nonexistent or secondary to that of men’s, a desire that does not develop without the guidance or presence of a man. Thus, heterosexuals tend to conflate lesbian desire with male desire, exacerbating assumptions about their gender identity and behavior. As Kakefuda considers herself to be a woman, this prevents the use of another term to signify her own desire – onabe おなべ. A parallel to the common, often derogatory term okama おかま (lit. “kettle”) to refer to very effeminate gay males, onabe (lit. “pot”) hints at a lesbian who is very butch and takes on a masculine role in sex, possibly even feeling that they have a masculine gender identity. Kakefuda is stuck between combating the transgender assumptions of onabe and the pornographic implications of rezubian, but she clearly finds the latter more suitable, as she does not once mention onabe in On Being a “Lesbian.”

In conjunction with the assumption that male desire is the original, predominant, and true form of desire, Kakefuda deconstructs the heteronormative requirement for a penis to be present in order for something to be constituted as sex. For her, society erases the possibility of sex between lesbians.

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56 Ibid., 53.
because it is not considered to be complete sex – without a penis or a phallic object involved, it cannot be equated with heterosexual sex, and is naturally inferior and different. The only way lesbians could have desire is if it imitates heterosexual desire. Either they act as a man and desire women through the lens of a heterosexual man, or they desire penetration by a phallus like a heterosexual woman – any interest in female genitalia implies that they are imitating or identifying with men.\(^58\) Adding an explanation for why pornography has co-opted sex between women for its products, she says:

The reason “sex between two women” is depicted for men is because it’s almost invariably easy to imagine a “man” (or, the appearance of the symbol of a man’s penis) thrusting himself into the picture – women don’t have penises (sic), so no matter how much two women try to emulate “sex,” it’s not “complete sex.” Only a man who has a penis can have “complete sex.” Men who consume this message receive the confirmation that “to women (the average woman, who is not a lesbian), the penis is superior.” However, for men who have a penis but can’t use it, it also confirms the message to women that if you can’t use your penis, you’re disqualified from the category of “men.”

According to the messages disseminated throughout this society, the sex lesbians have is “incomplete sex.” We also get the message that lesbians who use things like vibrators are trying to imitate the “complete sex” that occurs between men and women, as their sexual existence is inferior to that of a heterosexual. In opposing the commonly held beliefs in this society, however, I can’t personally express the individual identity and “sex” lesbians have at this point. By discussing heterosexuality’s ultimate definition of “sex” as “inserting a penis into a vagina” and using these words and expressions (in other words, the only words that are available in Japanese) as they are to express “that” which occurs between lesbians, it’s only natural that its translation into heterosexual “sex” becomes inadequate, as it transforms it into a subtype of heterosexual “sex.” This is how discussing this topic has always been.\(^59\)

In addition to a distrust in the phallocentric and heterosexual implications of the terms “sex” and “desire” and an inner conflict over labeling herself with the hyper-sexualized term “lesbian,” Kakefuda critiques the glorification of being a “mother.” She sees this word as implicating much more onto a woman’s identity than simply the experience of giving birth to a child. It implies a pre-requisite identity of being a man’s wife while also acting as society’s end-goal for all women. Women cannot simply not be mothers – they are perpetually treated as though they have not become mothers yet.\(^60\) As

\(^{58}\) Kakefuda Hiroko. “Rezubian,” 75.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 74.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 101.
Kakefuda sees it, the only way for women to gain patriarchal society’s recognition beyond the narrow scope of performing the function of motherhood in the parameters of a male-headed household is to be a prostitute; no other form of individuality or functionality is recognized.\(^{61}\) And then, for those women in the strange, liminal space of being mothers without a father in the picture or lesbian mothers, the definition of motherhood as society has molded it does not apply to them. Kakefuda uses this interpretation of glorified motherhood to implicitly attack all heteronormative constructions of overarching identity, even those that seem to be positive or beneficial to women. She explains:

> However, if you think about it, this worship and praise of the “mother” is not about each individual “woman” but rather seen as something that is naturally endowed to women and a function that they naturally exhibit despite being nothing more than a role forced upon them. Individual “women” are made to live with this function of “birthing and raising children” as a common denominator, their individuality stripped along the way. Originally, this act of worship was performed through affixing a certain image onto its target, an act that does not attempt to recognize the target’s specific individuality. It holds the prerequisite that “if you’re a woman, you will certainly bear and raise children, so this must be honored.” Because of this, realistically, “women” who do not exhibit the function of “birthing and raising children” are not objects of worship. Even in the case where a woman is worshipped as a “mother,” it is not she herself who is being worshipped and glorified, but her exhibition of the function associated with her designated role.\(^{62}\)

Thus, dominant ideology dictates that mothers are not really mothers unless their role exists in conjunction with the role of the father, lesbians do not really have sex unless a phallus is present, and lesbians are not really attracted to women unless they feel desire from a male vantage point. Language is used to enforce social constructions of what it means to be a man or a woman and erase non-conforming existences. Kakefuda takes these theories a step further when she asks her readers to consider what this forced imposition of normalcy and its seemingly arbitrary ideals means for the future of society, hinting that capitalism and the demand for constant improvement are connected to the erasure of people’s existences. After boldly writing off disability as a social construction,\(^ {63}\) she describes

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\(^{61}\) Ibid., 108.  
\(^{62}\) Ibid., 107.  
\(^{63}\) Ibid., 144.
how teenage girls were plagued with worries about their appearance when she was growing up as they are today, but the difference she notices between then and now are the ever-present advertisements that promise to cure and fix these sources of worry. She fears Japan’s path towards eugenics and erasure, imploring us to consider where we are headed:

[Boys] know that if they just put up the cash, they can acquire whatever “cool” facial features and hairless “clean-cut” legs they want. Girls know, too, that if they just put up the cash, they can have “ample” breasts, “beautiful” facial features and “shapely” figures. The only ones who “win” are the ones who have acquired all of this. Regardless of whether these technologies have a real effect, the ones who can use these technologies, or rather the ones who have the kind of money to use them, are the winners. Inevitably, a schema of a handful of winners and a mass of losers is created, with the losers only envying the winners. Thus, everyone continues to be spurred on in the competition to strive for the same “beauty.”

Do people try technologies because they’re there, or does technology progress because people demand it to? Do things that were never deemed as “abnormal” become “abnormal” because methods to “medically treat them” are made apparent? This is always a “chicken or the egg” matter. So, even if we try to argue about it, we’ll never find a conclusion. However, it keeps going round and round like a snake biting its tail, its speed growing by the day, and as a result the hurdles called “abnormality” Japanese society has been charmed by grow steadily taller. Don’t we need to think about what this means for all of us?

Certain capitalist corporations co-opt words like “beauty” and “abnormal” as a way to further people’s drive as consumers, which can create new meanings for the expectations of men and women as participants in the economy. Interestingly, this ever-expanding consumerism that worries Kakefuda also had a significant role in the development of modern Japanese women’s language as we know it. The gembun’itchi movement, a writer’s movement that emerged in the Meiji Period which sought to modernize the Japanese language, in part began investigating ways to create more convincing voices in their female characters. To create a more feminine voice, writers copied the speech pattern of schoolgirls attending prestigious secondary schools in the Tokyo area. As the printing press became more widely available and the government wanted to create a standardized Japanese language based

64 Ibid., 147.
65 Ibid., 148-149.
67 Ibid., 406.
on their perception of the Tokyo dialect (which, as a metropolitan area, realistically held a jumble of different dialects), both men and women’s language as purported by writers in the *gembun’itchi* movement began to spread into every corner of the nation the printing press could reach.68 Widespread dissemination of women’s language began in the form of newly emerging advertisements and government promotions of the concept of *ryōsai kenbo* (“good wife, wise mother”), weaving the essence of feminine language in with behavior that was convenient not only for businesses trying to implicate femininity in their products but for the government’s dissemination of a nationalistic identity directly connected to the changing perception of womanhood.69

Kakefuda clearly desires that such cornerstones of society’s configuration be radically altered. She seems to see this as a very long term goal, meanwhile prescribing a few actions be taken by everyone regardless of gender or sexuality to start recognizing these institutions for what they are. Reflecting on the virtual lack of classroom discussions of homosexuality when she was an adolescent, Kakefuda demands much more than the recent rhetoric of tolerance she has been seeing in her country. She likens the shallow acceptance of homosexuality as a fascinating novelty during the “gay boom” to the polite but wary nature of those observing a rare animal trapped in a cage.70 In reference to educators’ meager attempts to address homosexuality, she says:

First of all, even if we merely said “in our society, there are also people who like people of the same sex instead of the opposite sex. Calling them pejoratives like ‘fag’ is discrimination, and we mustn’t do that,” it wouldn’t mean anything. Saying “there are also people who...” makes it seem as though such people exist far-removed from ourselves. If this is all that’s said on the matter, we can’t create an environment where a child who worries that they might be a homosexual is able to express “that’s how I am” in a classroom. When I was a child, the influence of the mass media that ridicules homosexuality had an immeasurable impact on me, and it continues to even now. To oppose this and ensure that minorities in the classroom can grow up without self-denial, we must change all phrasing used in the place of education as well

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as non-homosexual teachers’ attitudes that “heterosexuality” can be assumed and dismantle the superstition that having an interest in the same sex is just part of a temporary period during psychological development in puberty.\textsuperscript{71}

The powerlessness that children who cannot relate to heterosexuality are left with when schools rob them of the opportunity to speak about different kinds of sexuality suspends their self-understanding and self-acceptance. Meanwhile, even those words that are used in biology and sexual education contain hints of repudiation and shame. Kakefuda cites the attempt made by the translators of the Japanese version of Our Bodies, Ourselves to rework Japanese kanji for genitalia tinged with negative connotations into a more neutral form as a laudable first step to allow people, women in particular, to think about their bodies without embarrassment.\textsuperscript{72} The kanji 隱 (pronounced ‘in’, meaning Yin in “Yin and Yang” or the shadows, the unseen, or private parts) is present in the Japanese words for “labia” and “vulva,” and the kanji 耻 (pronounced ‘chi’, meaning shame, embarrassment, or disgrace) is found in the words for “pubic hair,” “pubic bone,” and “mons pubis.” The translators replaced these kanji with 性 or 性器 (‘sei’ and ‘seiki’ meaning “sex” and “genital”, respectively).\textsuperscript{73} It seems that Kakefuda finds the reworking of standardized language seeped in heterosexist implications to be an important step towards giving women and lesbians more of a voice, both discursively and linguistically.

However, she does not propose any alternatives to those words like rezubian or dōseiaisha 同性愛者 that have negative connotations. Dōseiaisha is a rather clinical term comparable to the word “homosexual,” if that is not in fact its origin.\textsuperscript{74} When directly translated, the kanji for dōseiaisha literally mean “same-sex-love-person”. Others have proposed using terms like dōseishikōsha 同性指向者 (same-sex-oriented-person) to prevent subconscious conflation of homosexuality with sexual attraction, as

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 157.
\textsuperscript{72} Bosuton Onna No Kenkō No Hon Shūdan. 1988. Karada watakushitachi jishin.
\textsuperscript{73} Kakefuda Hiroko. “Rezubian,” 173.
\textsuperscript{74} Mark McLelland. Queer Japan from the Pacific War to the Internet Age. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005. 21
they feel that sexual feelings are not the only defining feature of homosexual relationships and identity. Kakefuda also expresses uncertainty about being able to define homosexuality herself, having grown up in a society where all sexuality she has known has been constructed and defined in terms of heterosexuality. This is the only time throughout the book that she puts brackets around “sexuality” within the terms “heterosexuality” and “homosexuality.” She says:

I also don’t know whether there is a clear difference between homosexuality and heterosexuality. The societal fact that heterosexuality bears no fault and homosexuality undergoes all sorts of hardships has a deep influence on the construction and quality of every relationship, so it’s easy to imagine the differences that may arise in both kinds of relationship. Furthermore, if we consider how the “sexual love” implied when we talk about hetero“sexuality” and homo“sexuality” has already become standardized through a heterosexual norm and how the highest measure of intimacy between people is based on physical contact, the first step we take in trying to probe the differences between heterosexuality and homosexuality has already been clouded by our own biases. Perhaps the act of trying to remember my earliest memory of touching a girl before puberty itself is meant to bog down my thought process on assessing “touching” as a measure of intimacy.

Because homosexuality can only be expressed in terms of heterosexuality, Kakefuda has trouble even determining whether the sexual aspect of a homosexual relationship is the most fundamental differentiator between it and heterosexual relationships. Perhaps it is this ambiguity that leads her away from creating any new term to describe her self-identified homosexuality. She does not see the intimacies and attractions between heterosexuals and homosexuals as starkly different, but rather imperfectly intertwining, impossible to cover under one category. That she does not propose some sort of strategic essentialist term to define lesbians or homosexuality demonstrates her belief in the drawbacks of linguistics to define such an individual aspect of personhood, and that such a prescription of terminology might in fact mimic the system that chooses to other homosexuality as discrete from heterosexuality. I also read this decision to use the term rezubian despite its pornographic connotations as an attempt to reclaim the word from the heterosexual male gaze. Reclaiming words that once

functioned as pejoratives is not an uncommon act in any linguistic history – re-appropriating the oppressors’ tools of objectification and altering their context is a method for empowerment not to be taken lightly.
Parallels with Judith Butler

A year before Kakefuda finished writing On Being a “Lesbian,” the American scholar Judith Butler published what is perhaps her best known work, Gender Trouble. The writing style and intended readership for each text are vastly different; the former wrote her book somewhat informally as she offered her thoughts, experiences, feelings and ideas to a very general audience, while the latter wrote in dense, theoretical language, targeting fellow academics and theorists. However, many of their conjectures about the workings of gender, sexuality and identity in heteronormative society coincide, illuminating a curious alignment in late 20th century gender theory between two very different cultural and political settings.

The most foundational assertion in each text is the author’s problematization of subjects and identities as we think we know them. In the very first pages of Gender Trouble, Butler criticizes the common feminist assumption that the term “women” can truly account for some sort of mutual identity because this usage fails to consider the transmutations of gender that exist along cultural and historical lines. Butler says that to believe in a constant and cross-cultural foundation of feminism hints at the questionable notion that there is also a constant and cross-cultural hegemonic masculinity that dominates all “women” in the same way. This line of thinking assumes the identity of “women” as essential and existing prior to societal influence rather than something that is created as a result of such influence. Assuming this narrative of a singular “woman” identity to be true makes it easier for Western feminists to project their experiences, identities and criticisms of patriarchy onto women of different cultures and countries. Thus, the assumption of a common “womanhood” conversely reifies and stabilizes the gender binary as something that is universal and natural.

This constant critique of how identity is conceived is imperative in queer studies, since the field is fundamentally based on a criticism of dominant narratives of gender and sexuality. It is especially

77 Judith Butler. Gender Trouble, 6.
critical when employing an international lens, as is it so easy for Western queer scholars to fall into the trap of projecting a linear narrative of progress onto queer communities of other countries. “Coming out” is not necessarily an end goal or the natural culmination of being a sexual minority. The idea of a stable, fixed identity beyond the influence of social context is not only antithetical to Butler’s theories about identity, but theories within Japanese gender and sexuality studies as well. Originally, Japan did not have any word that specifically indicated “identity” until the Westernized term made its way into the country. However, while Western influence has partially molded the modern Japanese understanding of identity, it still needs to be examined as constructed in a different socio-historical context. As previously noted about Japanese gendered and hierarchical language, it is near impossible to produce a sentence that gives no inkling as to the relationship of the speaker with the interlocutor, including the potentially momentary gendered position of either party. If we view language as metonymical to the social constructions and expectations of its setting, this aspect of Japanese reflects a strong link between the “identity” of the speaker in relation to the context in which they are speaking.78

Gender can certainly have a hand in constructing these temporal identities; a Japanese woman’s use of women’s language will fluctuate in its usage depending on the social context, including her potentially gendered and hierarchical relationships to others in the context – she may use it excessively, hardly at all, or verge into the realm of masculine language, and anywhere in between. 79

To be sure, Kakefuda indicates a suspicion of such universalizing categories as “women” in her writing. Her ever-present use of brackets around the terms “woman” and “lesbian” act as a caveat that she cannot speak for the lives and identities of everyone in those categories.80 These bracketed words also serve as a reminder to her readers not to assume the terms that seek to symbolize these identities

80 Kakefuda sometimes explicitly indicates this in the text, such as on pages 52, 85, 122, and 124.
are absolute. Kakefuda asserts that the identity of “woman” has been a learned one, a myth
perpetuated by men for their convenience, by no means “something we should refer to as ‘natural’”. 81
She explains that once women are able to create a dialogue with one another about these “identities”
they supposedly belong to, the myth of a universal, natural “woman” falls apart. She states:

When women begin to discuss themselves, the fact that age-old definitions for what a
“woman” or a “lesbian” is cannot be forcibly applied to all women and lesbians is instantly
revealed. Myths surrounding “growing up” and lies that “lesbians = women who have become
men” (although they may apply to some individual people) cannot be used when speaking on
the subject of all “women” and “lesbians.” Furthermore, the subjects of “woman” and “lesbian”
themselves are ineffective for a woman’s inner self. From the standpoint of people who aren’t
women, it’s incredibly easy and effective to use these subjects. 82

If this is the case, then what are we to do about representational terms such as “women”? Can
we abandon them altogether? Butler believes the obvious answer is no, explaining that:

The political task is not to refuse representational politics – as if we could. The juridical
structures of language and politics constitute the contemporary field of power; hence, there is
no position outside this field, but only a critical genealogy of its own legitimating practices...the
task is to formulate within this constituted frame a critique of the categories of identity that
contemporary juridical structures engender, naturalize, and immobilize. 83

She continues on to indicate the possibility of political strategy that is not based on a unified,
singular coalition, but rather one that creates opportunities for provisional unities that do not seek to
represent a singular identity. 84 The critical action that feminists need to take is not to pretend to exist
beyond the system and break it down from within a separate category of “women,” as it is futile to work
within the bonds of a representational category which has been created and constricted by the
dominant, masculinist system it exists in. 85 This “mimics the strategy of the oppressor” 86 by creating the
inevitable production of an exclusive system that expects identification with one “womanhood.” Such a

82 Ibid., 165-166.
83 Judith Butler. Gender Trouble, 8.
84 Ibid., 21.
85 Ibid., 7.
86 Ibid., 19.
category can never be completely fulfilled just as the femininities presently prescribed by the powers that be can never be totally achieved, since the performativity of gender is a constant process and never a completed product. Butler problematizes those prevailing feminisms which act to represent a “we” but organize themselves through the exclusion of certain members from that idealized “we.”

Similarly, Kakefuda is troubled by feminists who choose to call themselves and live as “lesbians” as a feminist political action, such as outspoken lesbian proponent Kawahara Karido. Kawahara claims that “we lesbians are women who have not had our recognition of our individual desires stolen from us,” which Kakefuda fundamentally disagrees with because Japanese lesbians are still raised as Japanese women, meaning that they are robbed of the linguistic and mental tools in their upbringing that would allow them to recognize their own sexuality. This glorification of sexual liberation as a definitional aspect of being a lesbian seems rather exclusionary and offensive to Kakefuda, as she also finds Kawahara’s assumption of the lesbian identity as a political action to confine lesbian sexuality within the realm of feminism. She sees this as nothing more than another unnecessary boundary line that prohibits certain women. It also doesn’t make logical sense to Kakefuda, as she explains the problem with intertwining politics and sexuality and essentializing them:

I was a lesbian prior to becoming aware of the advantages and disadvantages between “men” and “women” and the general implications of the conditions “women” are forced into. If just having sympathy towards the average woman made someone a lesbian, all feminists would have to be lesbians. Furthermore, every lesbian would have to have been a feminist since birth.

Butler also critiques being a lesbian as an elected lifestyle because of its exclusionary and thus counterproductive essence:

If to become a lesbian is an act, a leave-taking of heterosexuality, a self-naming that contests the compulsory meanings of heterosexuality’s women and men, what is to keep the

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87 Ibid., 22.
88 Ibid., 181.
90 Ibid., 70.
91 Ibid., 63-64.
name of lesbian from becoming an equally compulsory category? What qualifies as a lesbian? Does anyone know? If a lesbian refutes the radical disjunction between heterosexual and homosexual economies that Wittig promotes, is that lesbian no longer a lesbian? And if it is an 'act' that founds the identity as a performative accomplishment of sexuality, are there certain kinds of acts that qualify over others as foundational? Can one do the act with a 'straight mind'? Can one understand lesbian sexuality not only as a contestation of the category of 'sex', of 'women', of 'natural bodies', but also of 'lesbian'?92

Both thinkers problematize rallying around one fixed assertion of identity like “women” or “lesbian.” They critique the follies of identity politics, but they also understand that one cannot simply extract oneself from the system in which these labels are produced. Kakefuda expresses many concerns about categorizing different people under the labels of “homosexual” and “heterosexual,” asserting that the only reason these categories are made discrete in the first place is because of society’s compulsory heterosexuality and its hand in constructing pleasure and desire.93 To assume the label of “homosexual” is to resign oneself to the possibility of further discrimination and social isolation, but for Kakefuda, it is a necessary step if we want to end the “fabricated world” that has been constructed in othering and erasing that which does not fit into its narrative.94 The usage of the term “homosexual” to identify the “abnormal” and “other” will go on whether a queer person responds to this term or not, but by responding to it and reiterating it with different meanings, typical methods of usage can be disrupted and potentially subverted into a new context.95 Butler sees breaking links within the social continuum of sex-gender-desire (that one’s sex indicates one’s gender, which indicates one’s desire) that was built to reify a working system of heteronormativity as the method for changing our current context. She holds that a repetition of the terms that constitute identity in ways that disconnect the links in this continuum will work to alter the way gender can be interpreted.

92 Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble*, 162.
94 Ibid., 182.
The final component of desire in this false chain reaction of sex-gender-desire is, in following with the sequence, seen as gender-specific – the myth is that men desire women because of their gender, which is determined by the physical body. Butler denounces this connection between desire and the body, arguing that:

'Becoming' a gender is a laborious process of becoming naturalized, which requires a differentiation of bodily pleasures and parts on the basis of gendered meanings. Pleasures are said to reside in the penis, the vagina, and the breasts or to emanate from them, but such descriptions correspond to a body which has already been constructed or naturalized as gender-specific. In other words, some parts of the body become conceivable foci of pleasure precisely because they correspond to a normative ideal of a gender-specific body. Pleasures are in some sense determined by the melancholic structure of gender where by some organs are deadened to pleasure, and others brought to life. Which pleasures shall live and which shall die is often a matter of which serve the legitimating practices of identity formation that take place within the matrix of gender norms.96

Rather than desire being sourced from physical parts of the body, it is occasioned in the mind.97 Furthermore, it is clear that the interpretation of desire and the refrain that it is inherently (hetero)sexual are largely molded by heteronormative society. Almost nostalgically, Kakefuda describes the intimate touching and closeness girls share among one another during childhood before parents and teachers begin to criticize this as unnatural around the time of puberty.98 She wonders if there would be such a hard demarcation between heterosexual women and lesbians if this intimacy between girls was not labeled as childish or abnormal as soon as girls reach the age when adults tell them they are supposed to begin having an interest in boys. Without the enforcement of the linear heterosexual narrative that a girl will begin to develop sexual feelings for boys as she grows older, Kakefuda imagines that women would not feel the need to place themselves into rigid categories like heterosexual or homosexual.99 Their desires for intimacy with one another may flow more freely without the

97 Ibid., 90.  
99 Ibid., 161.
expectation for an inevitable shift into sexual desire.\textsuperscript{100} After all, Kakefuda sees the terms which are available to describe homosexuality as belonging to heterosexuality.\textsuperscript{101}

Kakefuda does not expect the subject of sexuality to be dropped from discussions with teachers and parents completely. Rather, she expects a more comprehensive and inclusive discussion about homosexuality in the classroom. Seeing as it is an institution that teaches and looks after children, the power relation between teacher and child is more than palpable. In this context, the child is very much subject to the teacher’s will and dictation of how the world works. Reflecting on her own childhood and the failure for her educators to adequately breach the topic of homosexuality, Kakefuda does not simply desire a brief side note that some people are homosexuals. A direct, inclusive and positive explanation is necessary for children who do not feel that they fit into the heterosexual narrative.\textsuperscript{102} She holds that admitting that one exists is not a legitimate validation of existence and does not provide any pathways for children to be positively curious about how they feel. Indeed, for Butler as well, power relations within feminist discourse need to be examined before a dialogue can occur, for “the very notion of ‘dialogue’ is culturally specific and historically bound, and while one speaker may feel secure that a conversation is happening, another may be sure it is not.”\textsuperscript{103} As schools are institutions based on stark power differences, Kakefuda warns that they are the primary places for the glorification of heterosexuality and the family because the child does not have the power to speak up and ask otherwise. This makes schools a breeding ground for instability and insecurity in sexual minorities. Indeed, it is unrealistic to expect open curiosity from a queer youth when both classmates and teachers leading the conversation write off sexual minorities as an annotation to the topic.

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 168.  
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 172.  
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 157.  
\textsuperscript{103} Judith Butler. \textit{Gender Trouble}, 20.
With all her explanations of the follies of mainstream feminism, a reader might expect more of a call to action from Butler to conclude her book. But, perhaps purposefully, she keeps her political prescriptions in vague terms in *Gender Trouble*. While it is an incredibly political work, Butler does not provide feminists looking to improve their activism with a laundry list of actions and organizing methods. It seems that to her, theory is very much praxis, and that developing one’s consciousness about the falsehood of essentialism and sex, gender and desire as social constructs is the path to weakening the functions of the heteronormative system we live in. This is not even necessarily a call to action for those who identify as cisgender and heterosexual to act contrarily to their current gender performance and desires. The simple recognition of one’s sex, gender and desire as realistically disconnected and free-floating attributes of the self calls into question the normalcy of maleness and femaleness.¹⁰⁴

For example, not everyone sees drag as subverting gender roles. The extreme, almost parodical femininity in the speech, dress and movement of who we might call men in drag and the similar masculinity of who we might call women in drag seems to be a recreation of stereotypical gender roles and thus a failure of progressive thought away from the idea of gender. However, Butler argues that this performativity of gender destabilizes that sex-gender-desire continuum. That someone whose physical attributes would typically signify the assumption of a certain gender identity is taking on the exact opposite role points to the idea that femininity is not owned by women, and masculinity is not owned by men.¹⁰⁵ In this way, drag does not act as a mere imitation of the gender roles that our social atmosphere prescribes, but a resignification of who they belong to and what their implications are.¹⁰⁶ This seems especially critical of the essentialism of gender when we consider that most of the time the act of drag is

¹⁰⁴ I say simple, yet it is quite difficult to consciously destabilize realities one may have assumed as uncontestable fact for so long.
¹⁰⁵ Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble*, 156.
¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 157.
temporary – gender can be produced in the context of a certain desire or period of time. It is only existent as a result of its performance.

In questioning the dynamics of gender roles in same-sex relationships, Kakefuda reflects on her past relationships with women and how they ended up dividing the household tasks. She found herself being the one doing the traditionally feminized labor of cooking and cleaning, but she clearly states that her choice in doing that labor was not because she felt pressure to do so as a “woman” – it was because she liked those roles and was good at them. While being raised as a woman may have had an influence on her opinions about these tasks, in the context of her same-sex relationship, there existed no link between her womanhood and the household labor she did. Therefore, she argues that while the division of these roles may be seen as a copy of the traditional “wife” and “husband” roles, the fact that this division did not stem from a sense of duty because of one’s gender signifies the disconnect between sex leading to gender roles in same-sex relationships, which may be subversive in and of itself. While Kakefuda argues that heterosexuals tend to have a harder time removing themselves from the notions of these roles in their relationships, she cautions the reader about the myth of same-sex relationships being perfectly egalitarian by nature, implying that gender is not the only aspect of being that lends or removes power in the relationships between two people. Again, her caveat harkens back to the critical idea that identity cannot be fully explained by one aspect of being, such as gender, and that the universalizing of such categories is a dangerous act. Using one aspect of identity as an explanation and defense for the whole has the risk of creating blinders to the other privileges (or disadvantages) that may influence one’s life. It bears repeating that a white lesbian from the United States does not experience an identical “womanhood” to a Japanese lesbian from Japan.

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108 Ibid., 128.
109 Ibid., 129.
It seems that the act of writing *On Being a “Lesbian”* was Kakefuda’s primary praxis for her theories. Near the text’s conclusion, she remarks on her writing process and that when she re-read the very first chapter of her book, she could still see the remnants of an inner turmoil about her sexuality, a lingering social hold on her mind that influenced her perceptions of identity and what it meant to be a lesbian.\(^{110}\) While articulating her process of reconsidering what it means to be a lesbian and a woman, she laid the groundwork in her head for a clearer understanding that the existence of an inherent link between sex, gender and desire is a fabrication. Like Butler, she is careful not to prescribe specific actions to lesbian readers like coming out of the closet. Kakefuda describes the positive and negative effects that openly expressing her sexuality to others has created in her life, but the crucial lesson of the text is her reiteration of the heteronormative categorization of people as arbitrary beyond its function to benefit the hegemony in place. She notes the impossibility of transcending this system, but emphasizes the understanding of its function and its false rigidity.\(^{111}\) Recognition is the first step to change.

*On Being a “Lesbian”* enacts the critical action Butler alludes to throughout *Gender Trouble*: the agency of subversive repetition to destabilize the power of binarism and essentialism.\(^{112}\) In the constant thought process about what it means to be a lesbian and why that has to signify anything at all over the course of several months to produce her book, Kakefuda carved new pathways of thinking for the massive readership who picked up her text. Her incessant use of scare quotes around the subjects of “heterosexual,” “homosexual,” “lesbian,” “man,” “woman,” and other identities used to keep a system of recognizing the normal vs. the abnormal surely discomfited her readers (as it did for me), providing them with a chance to reconsider the construction of identity and role that pervades every aspect of their being. All of this in conjunction with her uncomplicated jargon and informal writing style indicates

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\(^{110}\) Ibid., 193.

\(^{111}\) Ibid., 194.

\(^{112}\) Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble*, 185.
that a conviction that hegemonic influence extends to every reach of society. This hand of power does not just effect the erudite elite, so she works to prevent the gatekeeping of pedantic rhetoric from excluding the average reader from exposure to her explanations. We cannot rely on those profiting most from the system to be the ones to change it.
Conclusion:

The Japanese “gay boom” that began in the early nineties provided the initial grounds for *On Being a “Lesbian”* to be written and published, but Kakefuda created new pathways for thought beyond those meager boundaries of the aspects of homosexuality the mass media chose to represent. The dominant discourse during the nineties was brimming with very Western notions of visibility and the idea of coming out as the universal end goal for non-heterosexuals.113 While Kakefuda’s text can technically be considered one of the coming out narratives that were so popularized during this decade (and she does occasionally compare the status of Japan in terms of lagging behind the United States in progress for civils rights for sexual minorities), her prescriptions to deconstruct standard notions of identity and her caveats not to fall prey to the allure of absolutism indicate a mindset that is wary of the popular liberal media and the pretense of unadulterated progress with invisible strings attached.

Kakefuda criticizes the gay boom for encouraging the false idea that homosexuality is wholly recognized and that discrimination has begun to fall away in Japan by the media lavishing attention on gay narratives and glamorizing them.114 She knows that the dissemination of a single brand of gay identity and experience will only serve to comfort heterosexuals enough to be satisfied with their current position in society. In this way, while such discourse certainly produces more visibility in the public eye of gay experience than existed before, the media gains the power to construct and regulate certain sexual identities.115 Kakefuda’s concern is two-fold – she does not want the popularization of a single, mass-produced version of what homosexuality is meant to be another dictation of what it means to be a homosexual (such as the connotations of the limited, insufficient terminology available to her like *rezubian*, *onabe*, and *dōseiaisha*), nor does she want homosexuals to begin to see their relationships

as superior to other forms of human relationship through this glorification, playing a game of catch up with heteronormativity."116

Despite being cognizant of how sweeping and seemingly indomitable the system of heteronormativity that attempts to organize and underwrite all social relations is, Kakefuda leaves us in her afterword with a few hopeful paragraphs about the eventual possibility of dismantling the institution of heterosexuality:

I wish with all my heart that the day when the word “lesbian” means nothing to me might someday arrive – the day where people won’t be lumped into and tied down to categories of “heterosexual” and “homosexual,” the day where individual people can link themselves to relationships with the people they desire.

Naturally, “that day” won’t come so easily. It will surely only be a reality when heterosexual women, heterosexual men, homosexual women and homosexual men distanced from one another by a great rift do the difficult and ever-lasting labor of examining their own “sex” and “relationships” and questioning them. However, I believe “that day” will surely come eventually. I believe that there must be lesbians who can lead us to that day.

Because, no matter how much we are oppressed and discriminated against, no matter if some of us are even murdered, there exist women all throughout the world in every country who are attracted to and love other women, and they will not give up. They have never once given up.117

Perhaps she truly does see this as a possibility that will eventually come through a peaceful shift propelled by the constant labor of questioning what is natural and what is constructed. Or, perhaps she simply wants to leave her readers on an optimistic note so as not to discourage them from the toil of the wearisome work to never stay comfortable and faithful in the system. Regardless of her conclusion, the works speaks to our responsibility as social actors to think critically about what we perceive as a given.

117 Ibid., 201-202.
Translator's tale Notes:

Some subscribe to the idea that a good translation would be one that adheres as closely to possible to the literal meaning of the source text. However, I’m of the camp that supports a certain degree of artistic license and informed interpretation when it comes to creating a product that meshes with the target language. Details such as converting an awkward-sounding literal translation of a colloquial expression into an analogous, more natural one, the occasional omission of superfluous verbiage, or using a particular translation for a word in the source text and switching to a synonym when that word appears later on – these are simply a part of the job if you’re looking for a fluid translation. While surely fascinating to members of the translation community and linguists, these details are probably not worth noting to a general readership. However, some choices are deliberated over for hours in order to find compromise between localizing a text and keeping true to the specific cultural and temporal context in which the original author writes. With this in mind, I think there are a couple of choices that I made that require explanation.

First and most importantly is my near constant mimicry of Kakefuda’s use of scare quotes. While this stylistic choice may interrupt the flow of some of the sentences and appear a bit awkward (in both English and the original Japanese), its preservation is critical to the understanding of the author’s overarching message in the piece. Kakefuda wants the reader to interrogate their understanding of many concepts, but especially the term “lesbian” – she begins the book posing the question, “Who are ‘lesbians’?” Her intent is not to demonstrate skepticism of their existence or their experience, but rather to get the reader to reconsider their preconceived notions and potential misunderstandings of such pervasive terms and concepts. The first step to her deconstruction and critique of concepts we take for granted as absolutes is to emphasize the unreliability of its terminology. As the purpose of this text is not so much for artistic value as it is for reflecting on personal experiences and positing socio-political
arguments, the high frequency of scare quotes may be a bit bothersome to the eye, but I argue that it’s best to include them for a fuller understanding of the piece.

Related to this is my translation of the word “homosexual.” Today, the majority of women’s studies scholars and American sexual minorities would surely balk at the frequent use of this word to refer to a person with same-sex attraction. The term gives off vibes of pathologizing its referent, othering them in comparison to a standard of heterosexuality. It’s impersonal and clinical. However, in the source language, there are a wide variety of terms to refer to persons with same-sex attraction, many with historically and culturally specific implications that do not neatly align with the options available in English. For example, the loanword gei in Japanese is ostensibly congruent with the English “gay” for a homosexual person – likely a man, likely a neutral, commonplace term without any overt connections to gender expression or occupation. But to many adult Japanese people at the time Kakefuda published her book in 1992, the term gei still retained some of its older nuance signifying a homosexual man with transgender qualities, even implying involvement in sex work.118 Similarly, rezubian, the loanword for lesbian, did not just imply a woman with same-sex attraction – before prior to Kakefuda’s publication, the term almost exclusively implied women having sex with women in pornography.119 With the context of this word in mind, it’s easy to see why she puts scare quotes around the term from the very beginning.

In the source text, Kakefuda frequently uses the term dōseiha – literally, person who loves the same sex – which entered the Japanese vernacular as a term congruent with the English “homosexual.” It has similar pathologizing and impersonal connotations in Japanese, but at the time she wrote the piece, it was likely the best option to employ a fairly neutral term in putting her thoughts to paper. I retain the most direct translation for this word because I believe it adequately reflects the time

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in which the piece is written and aligns with the original nuance of the term. To use such verbose expressions like “person with same-sex attraction” or “member of the LGBT community,” or even terms like “sexual minority” or “gay person” would not accurately represent her usage.
On Being A “Lesbian”

Kakefuda Hiroko
I wrote this book for F,
with love in its creation and for the wonderful months that have gone by.
Who Are “Lesbians”?

Asking “Am I a Lesbian?”

Who are "lesbians"? This is the question that arose from asking myself over and over again for the past decade – "Who am I?" When I speak to someone about the particular feelings I bear, they infallibly think that these feelings make me a "lesbian" or a "homosexual." In my own case, however, I find that "I am a lesbian" and "I am a homosexual" are phrases that do not have an equal connection and are rather misaligned. I’m not warranted to think "I am a lesbian" just because someone thinks this part of me means "this person is a lesbian." On the contrary, until just a few years ago, I felt strongly that "if that's what someone else thinks of me, then I'm definitely not a lesbian, or anything like it." Even so, there were many people who thought I was a “lesbian,” and when they provided the components of what they thought being a lesbian meant, sure enough, it sounded like me.

The conflict over internally and externally labelling myself caused me a great deal of anxiety. This anxiety, stemming from the questions "Who am I?" and "Am I a lesbian?" made me ponder even further a question that serves as the basis for answering the others --- "What kind of person does 'lesbian' refer to?"

At present, I do consider myself a lesbian. The people around me seem to see me as such, too. You could say that, to some degree, my inner conflicting opinions have been resolved. However, even now, rarely do I ever put the phrase "I am a lesbian" into words myself. Actually, it might be more accurate to say that I’m not able to say it. Because of this, even though many people know that I’m a “lesbian,” they aren't necessarily aware of it from my own verbal expression. Furthermore, these people almost never ask me "Are you a lesbian?" If I were asked, I’d probably say "Yes, that’s right," but hardly anyone asks.

Clearly, I have some remaining inner conflict about this. The reason I still can’t go right out and say it is the same reason that caused me to previously think "I'm not a lesbian, or anything like it." Perhaps it’s even the same reason the people around me who think, "I wonder if she’s a lesbian?" can't seem to ask me directly.

Who are "lesbians"?

The reason that made me think "I'm not a lesbian or anything like it" for such a long time did not disappear from my surroundings. In fact, my external circumstances are largely the same as before. Because of this, I’m still not able to bring myself to put "I am a lesbian" into words. To ensure the clarity of this reasoning, I would like to consider the question "What kind of a person does 'lesbian' refer to?"
To put it simply, my reluctance to call myself a “lesbian” was because of my resistance towards the variety of images that trail behind words like "lesbian" or "homosexual." Basically, my feelings were along the lines of "What? A lesbian? I’m not that kind of a person." In Japanese society, terms like “lesbian” or “homosexual” are endowed with a certain kind of image. I was always made to think that I’m different from that kind of person because of the connotations of such imagery.

The warped image of “lesbians”

Since I’ve begun thinking “I am a lesbian,” I think the word “lesbian” has at least two sides to it. One aspect involves the "I'm different from that kind of person" image that is ingrained in the word – the “lesbian” image formed and used in pornography which was created for the male gaze. I think it’s fair to say that in Japanese society, imagery of sexual acts permeates the word. The other aspect of the term “lesbian” is how women in certain circumstances utilize it for self-validation.

If these two words were used respectively in a society where they had no interaction with one another, there might not be any problem with them. In reality, this is simply not the case, and one definition is constantly encroaching upon the other. Specifically, the former encroaches upon the latter.

Because of this, if a woman chooses to employ the word “lesbian” as a label to express positive affirmation of a private aspect of her being, she may find herself feeling torn up about her identity due to the term’s implications. It causes a person to be hung up with the uncomfortable feeling of both being oneself and not being oneself at the same time. Your private domain gets horribly distorted and dragged out into broad daylight, creating the unshakable feeling of being stared down.

When you dare to express to someone that you aren’t sure if you’re a lesbian or not, that awful feeling becomes all the more salient. There’s no need to declare, “I am a lesbian!” If a woman merely hints at it, the listener will get the point that she’s a “lesbian.” In many cases, this “lesbian” image that crosses people’s minds is similar to what a “lesbian” herself thinks about the term – the “lesbians” depicted in pornography, a fleeting image of a woman having sex with a woman just like how a man and a woman would, or the thought of a woman dominating another woman just like a man would. Nothing more. A woman who knows this is the case from the very beginning will experience the feeling of that part of her being detached from herself. She encounters the sensation of being scrutinized by pornography watchers. She encounters the sensation of being seen as “nothing more than a sexual being,” in accordance with what “lesbian” signifies to people. Feeling these sensations is horrible – horrible enough to make a person want never to admit that she is a “lesbian.”
Moreover, these images associated with “lesbians” keeps the person who wonders “Could she be a lesbian?” silent. If you overthink it, you might even come to believe that a woman labeled a “lesbian” has suffered a terrible insult. By the same token, there’s an undeniably vast number of people who think this sort of existence is so abhorrent that they can’t even utter the word “lesbian” themselves. In this way, women who are lesbians are suffocated by speculation and gossip. Were these people to ask a woman, “You’re a lesbian?” or say “That’s not normal” directly, there would at least be a means by which she could respond.

**Science that fosters “abnormality”**

While they’re up to their neck in the problems pornographic images cause them, lesbians are also “analyzed” and seen as “sexual deviants” with “hormone imbalances” who “weren’t brought up right.” When a woman tries to cast off these negative images forced upon her and seeks out descriptions of “lesbians” or “homosexuality” without negativity, opening a scientific book just takes a further toll on her. To give you an example, when I looked at the section titled “Homosexuality” in a book that I found through an informational magazine at the library, this is what I came upon –

Homosexuality:
An erotic reaction to a person of the same anatomical sex. Female homosexuals are also referred to as lesbians.

... There are genetic theories, acquired theories, and nativist theories regarding homosexuality. According to research on twins, genetic theory does not have the proper foundational evidence to sustain itself as an explanation for homosexuality. There are some things that simply can’t be clarified due to distortions within sexual psychological growth, but what has recently become the foundational theory for mainstream thought in this area is the concept of gestational sexual development theory. The first to break into this realm was East Germany’s Professor Dorner, who published the statistic that babies born during World War II were two to three times more likely to be homosexual. Evidently, the shock of war had an influence on the sexual development within the brains of these fetuses. This shock arrested the secretion of male hormones, and although these fetuses had male genitalia, their more feminine brains produced hormones akin to those of females. In gestation, the period in which
sexual development occurs in the brain is between the fourth and seventh month, so the mother should avoid stress during this period at all costs. 

...Male homosexuals and female homosexuals are fundamentally different. There is not a history of persecution among female homosexuals. Due to its low rate of occurrence and frequent restriction to a psychological level, female homosexuality does not necessarily warrant a sexual link, and it can last a very long time. As for male homosexuals, the compulsive nature to chase after carnal relationships sticks to men like glue, so it’s quite common for the target of such sexuality to change. The homosexual population generally exists at around 10% of the total population, and is usually made up of bisexuals. It is said that only 10% of that 10% consists of genuine homosexuals. In more advanced civilizations, there tends to be a rise in the homosexual population if the environment around the mothers’ bodies changes.

Ooshima Kiyoshi, “imidas 91” (Shueisha, 1991)

Homosexuality:
A type of abnormal sexuality characterized by perverse sexual desire in which the objects of desire for personal relationships are members of the same sex. The origin of such a manifestation does not yet have a decided theory, but there are many people who take the stance that this form of sexuality is acquired.

... During puberty, it seems there is a psychogenetic homosexual tendency characteristic of adolescents to have a profound feeling of yearning for members of the same sex. As this becomes a more serious problem, there are increasing cases of homosexual feelings causing love suicides. Additionally, when abnormal environmental culprits such as military life, prison, life at sea, and other situations of compulsory isolation from the oppose sex that span over long periods of time are in effect, sexual desire and profound relationships between members of the same sex stick fast and outbreaks of abnormal sexual acts out of lust occur. Some sort of emotional anomaly, constitutional abnormality, psychological illness or combination thereof are thought to be the cause.
Although we use homosexuality to refer to a fixed identity, it seems to be a transient sexuality from puberty until adolescence. For some, however, genuine homosexuality can continue into adulthood.

... The homosexuality that temporarily exists between puberty and adolescence is induced by psychological weaning from one’s parents and the strengthening of the pursuit to find a close same sex friend. As Freud says, because an adolescent’s libido (sexual energy) is suited to the same sex for a period of time, this factor joins forces with the former two to engender homosexual sentiments. This sort of phenomenon naturally disappears in the latter half of adolescence, so with a bit of guidance, one doesn’t have to worry too much. However, if the adolescent’s close friend teaches them about things like masturbation, the phenomenon becomes tied to physical pleasure and can trigger the transition towards genuine homosexuality.

Kurokawa Yoshikazu (Head of Kansai Sexual Education Conference, Director of Japanese Sexual Education Association Inc.) “Sexual Guidance Q&A” Compiled by Takahashi Tetsuo (Taisei Shuppansha, 1987)

The American Psychiatric Association has already recognized that “homosexuality is not an illness.” Despite this, Japan continues to treat it as such. For this reason, this schema of “being homosexual = send them to a mental hospital” produces ceaseless victims even today.

Of course, the biggest threat to a homosexual woman is not the power of her friends and family to admit her into a hospital in order to “resolve” her problem. The real threat is when she opens a book or listens to the words of those around her in attempt to find a positive perspective on “homosexuality,” (or at the very least an explanation that doesn’t pigeonhole it as abnormal) and the “conclusion” that she is “abnormal” is forced upon her. Whether it’s in a mental hospital or not, the ones who are regarded in the same light as “sexual deviants” (a term whose framework itself is arbitrary) are none other than homosexual people themselves.
Fleeing and accepting

My previous thought process that “I’m not a lesbian/homosexual or anything like it,” was a consequence of these images. Even now, when I say the word “lesbian,” for a moment I feel bewildered, and it’s because of those images. No matter the word, it represents the value system that exists within a society, and the images that are expressed by “lesbian/homosexual” are completely negative on the individual level. Thus, when people refer to others by these words, the associated images are definitive in such a way that, at the very least, they cause people to look down on their referents. A person recognizing herself as a “lesbian/homosexual” is simply affixing a negative label onto herself.

At the same time, however, it’s impossible for us to continue fleeing from words like “lesbian” or “homosexual.” The fact of the matter is we’re explicitly indicating to others that we’re lesbians. There is no other way to describe ourselves other than by using the term “lesbian.” This is just like how the term “gay” has been taken on by the homosexual civil rights movement in America. However, as long as the images stemming from the word “lesbian” that pervade pornography continue to exist, I will not be free from others seeing me through a lens of that imagery. Even if I started using a new term to refer to myself with, others would just see me as a “lesbian,” and I would be doing nothing but skirting around the problem in front of me.

So, this all being the case, I think I should go ahead and say “I am a lesbian” – so… I’m a lesbian. As you see me now, I wonder if you are continuing to confine the word “lesbian” to the realm of pornography. Of course, this is just a decision I’ve made for myself. The circumstances surrounding lesbians are not simple enough for me to be able to go as far as to tell other people “you should do this, too.”

In this kind of environment, asking “who are lesbians?” is very difficult. The women who say “I am a lesbian” are not the ones who make it hard. However, in relying on self-reporting, there are hardly any people in this world who dutifully call themselves lesbians. For example, it might be simple enough to say “a person with amorous feelings for the same sex,” but it’s not clear what exactly these “amorous feelings” signify in the first place. I certainly don’t think everybody ascribes to the same definition of “amorous feelings,” so we can’t use this to define lesbians.

Lesbians and sexual desire

Considering that, I wonder if it’s possible to construct the definition of a lesbian beginning with “sexual desire.” For example, in “imidas 91”, “an erotic reaction to a person of the same anatomical sex” refers to homosexuals. Additionally, in “The Intermediate Education Dictionary of Clinical Psychology,”
people for whom “a type of abnormal sexuality characterized by perverse sexual desire in which the objects of desire for personal relationships are members of the same sex” applies are homosexuals. In general, it seems what people are getting at is that “sexual desire” is an indispensable component to defining homosexuality.

In the case of women, however, it’s possible that prescribing this meaning behind being a lesbian onto a woman only gets to one part of the whole. My reasoning for this is that in Japanese society, irrespective of homosexuality or heterosexuality, the existence of women’s sexual desire itself is not recognized. In present day Japan, is it possible to apply this definition as it is to women? If “homosexual” is defined in this way, let’s also apply the reverse to heterosexuality. So, in present day Japan, can we define heterosexual women as “women with a sexual interest in members of the opposite sex”?

Male writers may not understand this fundamental difference. Because of this, in Ooshima’s eyes, “female homosexuality has a low rate of occurrence.” If we keep “sexual desire” at the heart of the definition of homosexuality, the number of lesbians becomes far fewer than realistically exist. What we call “sexual desire” itself has up until now only been referred to as “a man’s characteristic.”

In other words, this means we could also say that the desires men generally (have been thought to) harbor are viewed as the entirety of sexual desire. Even in the case of heterosexuality, women’s desire according to men’s desire is framed as little more than secondary (for example, it’s seen as being developed by men). Therefore, in the case of homosexuality, the “common knowledge” that “women have no sexual desire” concurrent with the warped image of “lesbian = a woman who has sexual desire like that of a man” makes it difficult for a woman when she becomes conscious of her own desire towards women to work on recognizing those desires without distorting them or denying them altogether (even for heterosexual women, the extreme difficulties in the labor of recognizing their own desire is made clear from the collection of experiences found in “The More Report” (More Report Data Collection Team, Shueisha, 1983).

I think I ought to make it vividly clear that descriptions of “women’s desire” and “women’s sexual desire” wholly lack correspondence with what is normally regarded as “male sexual desire.” It’s certainly a “desire” that exists, but what kind of desire it is and whether it even resembles “male sexual desire” is still largely not even understood by women themselves.

It has been regarded as natural for men to have sexual desire. To put it in uniform terms, it’s clearly defined as “male sexual desire.” Therefore, whether they’re heterosexual or homosexual, men’s desire can be perceived in terms of difference in the object of desire. Yet, women are thought not to
have any sexual desire from the start. For this reason, the means through which a woman would be able
to name that “something” she feels inside her is snatched away. In the situation where a woman cannot
identify herself or the situation in which her identification can’t be recognized, the existence of that
“something” is repressed and an environment in which a woman herself can’t help but think that she
has no sexual desire springs forth.

However, it seems this does not always produce negative results for women.

For homosexual women, connecting with their inner desire for other women through
recognition is no simple task. That which is initially difficult is interpreting what exactly this hazy
“something” within them is, and then how to drive that fact into their partner’s head. Naturally, this
society takes on an attitude of denial towards such behavior, consequently failing even to present an
example of it. On top of that, within the reproduction of the behavior that we call “sexual” – I’m not
sure whether this behavior is actually “sexual,” but I can’t help but perceive what is regarded as
common sense in accordance with acts and desires between “men and women” as “sexual” – exists a
compulsory morality towards sex which society continues to whisper into its people’s ears, perpetuating
the idea that “homosexuality” is a repugnant sickness.

Desire that isn’t a stereotype

On the other hand, there still remains the possibility for homosexual women to be free from the
sterotypes of sexual desire that society has thus far defined them by. Until now, society has only
recognized “sexual desire” to be something that men experience, and exclusively towards women. Thus,
it’s nearly impossible for the unique sexual desire that exists between women to be completely
liberated and recognized by society. But “the desire that develops between two women” exists in its
own category. Women who desire other women are raised in an environment in which all the
information they receive on desire refers to that which occurs between “men and women.” Even when
they internalize it (which is usually what happens), in the end, these women are not men, and the
objects of their desire are not men.*

Their desire, when it actually manifests, always ends up in an information vacuum. In this case,
there is nothing we can call a stereotype. There are many people who are keen on explaining
“woman/woman” desire in the context of “man/woman” desire, but all of that is meaningless. However
similar they may seem in symbolic meaning, it’s simply a desire that exists between women and women,
but not men and women.

To put this optimistically, the only thing a person can make of this is that there is nothing they
ought to imitate. As it stands now, at least, in a situation where the outside does not label something as
“sexual desire,” there still remains a possibility of recognizing that something as “my own desire.” In that case, “my own desire” becomes the only reliable thing. At the very least, this woman can know “her own desire.”

In any case, the existence of sexual desire is not the only thing that defines lesbians, and desire is not the only motive among lesbians for creating intimacies with other people. This may seem obvious, but it really isn’t. On one hand, this so called “sexual desire” (which is just like a man’s) leads to the fabrication of images of “lesbians” who are based solely on the existence of desire. Because of this, many women exist in a reality in which they cannot positively affirm their identity – this point needs to be made abundantly clear.

**Continuing to be a lesbian**

When wondering “Who are lesbians?”, another important question arises – “is being a lesbian the same as continuing to be a lesbian?”

As it stands now, when asking if someone is heterosexual or homosexual, there is an assumption that such a state is invariable. However, I do not take part in this way of thinking. I think that just as there are people who are homosexual from cradle to grave and there are people who are heterosexual from cradle to grave, there must also exist people who fluctuate between the two. Along the same lines, this would mean that there are also people who, as they go through life, transgress one of these boundaries and then do not return. Then again, in this situation, I wonder if the catalyst of the transgression doesn’t just ultimately come down to the particular individual’s personality. If you think about it, regardless of whether one is homosexual or heterosexual, the people for whom you really care over the course of your life are only going to be one or maybe a handful of special individuals. Of course, when you’re attracted to an individual, the characteristics of their gender (including those acquired both biologically and societally) hold a great deal of importance, as they play a big role in the formation of the individual.

However, what I’ve just said is completely different from simply asserting “people are bisexual at heart.” In the context of present day Japan, it’s not so easy to say this because there is a big difference between a heterosexual person saying “people are bisexual at heart” and a homosexual person saying the same thing.

More than anything else, I’m discussing my own opinion on the matter, but when a homosexual person says “people (in other words, the speaker) are bisexual at heart,” I think more often than not they say it with the intent to hide their own homosexuality from themselves (not from others). The
intent is to divert their attention from the various problems they have as a homosexual, and to focus on a different point of reference. The implication is – “I can (definitely) consider having sex with the opposite sex. I just don’t want to do it now.” This is the most effective way to flee from the homosexual person’s own reality.

**Sexual acts ≠ sexuality**

However, it should come as no surprise that who someone has “sex” with (putting aside the question of what we mean by “sex”) isn’t necessarily indicative of their sexuality. “Who do you have sex with?” might be a large part of the question, but that alone does not determine the boundary between “homosexual and heterosexual.” Homosexuals may not want to accept their reality and instead say “I can have sex with the opposite sex,” but the other consequence of this is that heterosexuals will mistake this for a new type of “preference” and possibly think “I wonder if I can have sex with the same sex – perhaps I’ll try it.” Obviously, I don’t deny the existence of “sex as preference.” It’s just that the homosexuality I’m discussing, namely “homosexual relationships,” is different. So, when a heterosexual says “I wonder if I can have sex with the same sex – perhaps I’ll try it,” and when a homosexual says “I can have sex with the opposite sex,” these utterances have completely different meanings under the present circumstances.

Let’s say this heterosexual does not merely exhibit “preference” but are really trying to say “I think I could have sex with the same sex” or rather “people are bisexual at heart.” The best possible implication of these phrases, in other words, would be “my heterosexuality is not an absolute thing,” a thought acquired from empathy towards the position homosexual people live in. Or, perhaps they’re thinking “it seems I have to question my relationships with other people who have lived peacefully without thinking of themselves as heterosexuals.” But even if that were the case, when the word “bisexual” is used towards homosexuals, it can’t help but induce a holier than thou stench of superiority. It’s not just the sense of superiority from the people who say it, but the word itself which reflects the disparity between both party’s standpoints. This odor rudely invades the nostrils of the homosexual who wants to avert their eyes from the legitimate problems they bear.

Just so there are no misunderstandings, I’m not telling you not to talk about bisexuality. I’m also not trying to say bisexuality doesn’t exist. What I’m trying to express is that as it stands now, there is a vast difference in thought between heterosexuals and homosexuals about the meaning of this word, and in portraying that difference, I’m trying to assert my opinion that we can’t ignore the problem of the advantages and disadvantages of these two groups. On top of these disparities existing, we can’t simply clear everything up with “human bisexuality theory.”
With this as a basis, I’m thinking that “being a lesbian” does not mean “continuing to be a lesbian.” Pointing to a person in the circumstances of a particular time, all we can say about a particular person in the particular circumstances of a particular time is “she is a lesbian.” If we use this definition, women who are lesbians from cradle to grave are obviously par for the course, but then there are also women who “were lesbians” who now use bisexuality as an escape route. Then there are the women who say they’re a lesbian now but have had intimate relationships with men in the past. The definition of the current label of lesbian (and I’m using my own positive implications of the word here) adversely represses one’s own past, making it so one can’t help but take on the sentiment that “having had a relationship with a man was a mistake.” Of course, bisexual people can still exist in this category.

Is it necessary to label a relationship between two people?

In the end, saying “I’m a lesbian” is the only way to indicate that “right now, I have a relationship (or I am trying to create a relationship) with so-and-so, who is a woman.” Thus, if individual people were to merely state their reality in that manner, the term “lesbian” as well as “homosexual” and “heterosexual” would cease to have much value. However, today, “I’m having a relationship with a woman” is not a simple matter. That one phrase can disrupt everything in your life.

For that reason, even when a woman gets the opportunity to start a relationship with another woman, many women will dismiss the experience as “a temporary delusion” or “a transitional period until they like men” and shelve it away. When this happens, the will and shared experiences that have cropped up in one’s past become dismissed as arbitrary, ignored, and denied as being true (even if this experience only occurred a few hours ago). In this society where intimate relationships between women are recognized as negative, we’re raised with the common understanding that we will end up marrying a man, and you could argue that the power of that common understanding works is obviously present.

This kind of attitude asserted by the majority of women is deeply damaging to women who recognize themselves as lesbians or not heterosexual. From here, a mistrust towards heterosexual women and women who claim themselves to be bisexual is produced. However, that’s not the only problem. It’s abundantly clear that creating a relationship under the assumption that “someday you will marry a man” from which you’re ready to flee from the very start is not going to go in a positive direction.

What kind of person am I?

To label the self as “something” is useful in understanding the position from which one stands (conversely, labeling other people as “something” is often used as a method of restraining them). If you
do this too much, however, you might get too attached and dependent on your own label. Still, saying “I am ____” does demonstrates what kind of position you hold in society.

Not only is labeling yourself a lesbian an unwise tack in today’s Japanese society, it also naturally makes you want to run away from the label. However, the intent to flee could be the result of living between the two oppositional acts of trying to bridge the gap between a label and the self and the suppression of the self. In other words, it’s as though you’ve already labeled yourself.

I myself have finally taken on this label of “lesbian.” Had I not done so, the images of lesbians encroached upon and monopolized by pornography would remain in my periphery and there would be no hope for freeing myself from being inundated with prejudice. However, in trying this label on for size, I’ve unexpectedly began worrying about the boundaries on the other side (albeit, they’re not very important boundaries) – for example, in what way do heterosexuals call themselves “heterosexuals”? It seems there are hardly any people who consciously call themselves “heterosexual.” On the contrary, all they seem to recognize through the conclusion that homosexuals are “abnormal” and “perverse” is that “not being a homosexual = normal.”

If you think about the word “heterosexual” itself, it was actually “homosexual” that started being intentionally used first. Heterosexuals don’t consciously call themselves “heterosexual,” as when they do, their viewpoint begins to waver. There are many “heterosexuals” I know who are empathetic towards discrimination against homosexuals, but all of them to some extent seem to tremble and get anxious when they hear “I used to be a heterosexual.”

This trembling occurs because these heterosexuals are beginning to question themselves. However, no matter what society it is, power holding categories are something relatively unnecessary for a person in the majority to label themselves. This applies to “white people” towards people of color as well – for a very long time, “I am a white person” was not a consciously recognized fact, and the same goes for even being a “man.” Feminism in America that fought against sexism called themselves “women,” but for a long time, the only women involved were “white, middle class, and heterosexual.” It stayed that way until women of color, lower income women, and homosexual women pointed it out.

The persecution of lesbians in the American women’s movement is recorded in “Introduction to Feminism” (“Bessatsu Takarajima” Volume 85, JICC Publishing Press, 1988) in the article “Feminist and Lesbian Ventures” (Asai Yoko), albeit brief.

According to this text, at the conference for a national group called National Organization for Women (NOW) held in October, 1968, a proposal stating that “lesbian members will be recognized with complete membership rights under a new clause” was dismissed. “NOW founder, Betty Friedan, who
was also conference leader at the time, said herself that lesbians in NOW ‘were a lavender menace’ (lavender being the country’s symbolic color of lesbians).” On top of that, “The New York chapter to which many active members belonged was even condemned as a lesbian ‘haven’.” Until NOW changed this policy at the fall 1971 conference by declaring, “NOW recognizes the oppression of lesbians as a due matter of concern within feminism,” lesbians had been explicitly oppressed, even in the realm of an organization based on fighting against sexism.

The “normal lifestyle” that binds heterosexuals

Pigeonholing others into categories while failing to ask yourself why you are the way you are or assigning a label to your being – at first glance, this behavior seems to secure the “freedom” of the people in the majority who don’t question who they are. However, labels used for constraining others surely also constrain yourself. That homosexuals are “abnormal” while heterosexuals are “commonplace” or “normal” – these words are already keeping heterosexuals in constraints.

Take the symbolism of the so called “AIDS panic” that assailed Japan between 1987 and 1988. At that time, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare fervently repeated the slogan “As long as you lead a normal life, you’ll be okay.” AIDS was publicized as a thoroughly “abnormal” homosexual disease (although, this statement was not meant to evoke caution in homosexuals, but rather to assuage heterosexual fear). However, it’s clear today that AIDS is not just a disease confined to homosexuals. In Japan, the number of heterosexual AIDS patients and infected persons is rising. Yet, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare will not blatantly speak out on it like they did in ’88. “AIDS is not just a homosexual disease” is the only occasional peep they make. This ignorance and apathy towards ourselves is quite simply causing the rise in heterosexual people being infected with AIDS.

By the same token, it’s likely that the slogan “normal life” brings about a negative influence by pushing people who lead furtive sexual relationships with the same sex (gay males in particular) further into hiding. In this society, legally marrying someone and having kids with them is acknowledged as perfectly “normal,” and for that reason society feigns ignorance of the married men who have sex outside of the home. Therefore, if a man who truly has no interest in women but gets married anyway and has children with his wife despite his reluctance then goes on to behave a certain way outside of the home, it’s condoned. He is permitted relief because he has acquired the authoritative stamp that “I’m normal.” Doesn’t it seem like the thorough emphasis during the AIDS panic that “male homosexuals” were the ones who were at risk conversely affected men who were having sex with other men by allowing them to cling to the idea that “I’m not a homosexual” and hide in this shroud of normalcy? Of
course, this “normal life” isn’t just a mask for homosexual men, but for heterosexual men who buy the services of prostitutes.

Thus, this usage of “a normal life” as a cover-up puts women at risk for AIDS as well. This is because no one married to a man would wonder if her husband is really a “homosexual.” However, the consequences produced by the previous emphasis on AIDS being a completely homosexual disease happened in the past, the still widely accepted “gay men at high risk for AIDS theory” and Japanese society’s superstition, “if you are not homosexual you’ll be fine” will become apparent as the years go on.

These are just a handful of examples. Still, what they illuminate for us is that whether homosexuals consciously try to flee their label or whether they accept this label, “homosexual” people are forced into circumstances where they have no choice but to relativize their position according to the “heterosexuality” that society deems as normal. “Homosexuals” come to know the problems and contradictions within this “heterosexual” modeled society through personal experience. However, the majority of people in this society who don’t relativize their heterosexuality as “heterosexuality” are not aware of this. If you don’t relativize your heterosexuality as “heterosexuality,” most people in this society don’t pay it any attention. Perhaps this is what makes the majority the majority.

*---- I know that in this society there are women that feel “I am a ‘man’” and conduct themselves as such. However, I would not consider her (or perhaps I should say ‘his’) relationships with other women to be “lesbian” relationships. Her reason for feeling “I am a man” is either because of a sense of discomfort towards her biologically “female” body, or because it’s a way to indicate her refusal to be coerced into the characteristics and roles of a biologically female body in this society (what is usually called “feminine”), or because of some other reason that I don’t understand – it’s a difficult thing to classify. At any rate, as long we’re discussing women, I don’t believe the relationships between women and a person who behaves in a certain way due to their feeling that “I am a man” can be called “lesbian” relationships.

However, this sensation “being a man” must be entirely based on a person’s recognition of themselves. It’s not something the people around them can define based on appearance and behavior. “Un-feminine” appearances and “un-feminine” behavior is not one and the same with men’s appearance and men’s behavior – though, especially for lesbians, there are plenty of misunderstandings and preconceived notions in this area. In this society, the tendency to want to arbitrarily point to a “lesbian” with an “un-feminine” appearance and behavior and interpret her as “a man” is very powerful.
Through this interpretation, it’s possible to think that lesbian women “do not exist.” Furthermore, there are many instances of heterosexual women who don’t exhibit “feminine” appearance and behavior being stuck with the label of “lesbian.” One could say this is a criticism of an inability to adhere to and master the “femininity” that men demand of women.

There exists a standardized “femininity” in this society. This “femininity” complicates women’s work towards self-affirmation. Under these circumstances, refusing so called “femininity” is one way for women to affirm themselves as “women” (conversely, taking on “femininity” as well as affirming oneself as a “woman” is an option as well). However, becoming a “man” and imitating a man are completely different from this. There is a huge difference between trying to be “a (so called) man” and denying that one is “a (so-called) woman.”
Do women desire sex with women?

To begin to answer this, let’s take a look at the “More Report.” In this report, there’s a section called “Things I want to try”. If you look at the answers to this question, you’ll notice that “sex with women” comes up.

Question – “Do you have any interest in trying new sex acts you haven’t done before?”
Answer – “Having sex with multiple people at once, S&M, sex with the same sex (lesbian)” – 21 year old
“I have more than a little interest in having sex with another woman” – 24 year old

Question – “Do you think you’d like to have a sexual relationship with a woman?”
Answer – “Yes, out of curiosity. She would probably understand me better, since women understand the sexual feelings of women very well, so she would surely touch me very lovingly” – 29 year old

The “More Report” collected its responses from 5,770 women, but the answers compiled and published in this book came from only 43 of these women. As for the questions I quoted above, the report included many responses to the first question but only one person’s answer for the second question, so it’s reasonable to assume that many other women offered a similar answer to hers.

On top of this, there is no shortage of heterosexual women I know who say things like “I think I have some lesbian qualities,” “I’m not opposed to sex with another woman, and were the opportunity to arise, I’d probably try it,” or “I have an interest in lesbians.”

What can we make of this?

In my case, what I kept on refusing for so long was that I knew there was some connection between the words “homosexual” and “lesbian” and myself. However, until many years after this time in my life, I did not have what is generally considered to be sex (like that which is depicted in pornography) with other women, nor did I think I ever would. For that reason, to this day I’m not really sure what “having sex with women” refers to. Furthermore, being a lesbian and having “sex” with women cannot be lumped together as perfect equivalents. Also, I have no idea what the “lesbian qualities” these women mention could possibly mean.
I think whether a woman has “sex” with another woman is not sufficient criteria for being a lesbian, nor a prerequisite. Just because you’ve had sex with a woman doesn’t mean you’re a lesbian, and not having had sex with a woman doesn’t mean you aren’t a lesbian.

There’s one statement which has made me do a double take in confusion at the words of the women in the “More Report” and the women I know – the strange instant where being a lesbian becomes something to be envied “because it’s a woman with another woman, so it’s likely easier for the two to understand each other than it is for a man and a woman.” It seems that this ‘understanding’ really signifies two different kinds of understand – emotional and sexual.

Are lesbians good at understanding “women”? 

First, consider the emotional part of this “understanding.” I’m not exactly your average woman and neither are the women I come face to face with, so there are more walls to overcome and gaps to bridge for us as “individuals” than there are points in common for us as “women.” The common denominators that exist on account of being a woman are to a certain extent drowned out by the differences between “individuals.”

In saying this, I don’t mean to ignore the influence that distinctions between “men” and “women” based on sex have on each group. For a long time, women were treated as second class citizens solely because they were women, and even today you can’t easily lump men and women together as the same type of human being. Society has invented an arbitrary system to differentiate and categorize “men” and “women” based on what kind of consciousness each man or woman has, what kind of relationship they have with the opposite sex, and what kind of authority a woman has (or, by what distance a man is kept from authority). It is absolutely undeniable that this system has an influence on the consciousness and behavior of men and women. In light of the fact that there is a huge difference between the experience of being raised as and living as a “woman” and the experience of being raised as and living as a “man,” that there is a difference between the experiences of “men” and “women” creates potential for the production a sense of sympathy between women who are pushed into societally inferior positions, especially through categorization.

However, the existence of such a “sympathy” has nothing to do with me being a lesbian. I don’t know the reason I’m interested in the same sex and not the opposite sex, nor do I know why heterosexuals are interested in the opposite sex. Although, I do at least think that the “sympathy towards women” generated from the low rank of “women’s” current social position is a distinct matter from sexuality. I was a lesbian prior to becoming aware of the advantages and disadvantages between
“men” and “women” and the general implications of the conditions “women” are forced into. If just having sympathy towards the average woman made someone a lesbian, all feminists would have to be lesbians. Furthermore, every lesbian would have to have been a feminist since birth.

“Lesbian” as an ideology

By asserting the thought that lesbian existence has a connection to women’s societally inferior position, my intention is not to make it seem as though being a lesbian is, say, the personification of feeling sympathy towards women. If viewed like this, I think that a great majority of men would respond to lesbian existence full of pity with such statements as “you ended up this way because you don’t know any men” or “this all must be because you suffered through unhappiness with a man in the past.”

Even so, there are also some lesbians who say this sort of thing:

“Some time ago in my twenties, I had a male lover, and I also got pregnant and had an abortion. I got to thinking about the problem of sexual discrimination as well as the women’s liberation movement’s hand in making abortion a possibility. It was for those reasons among others... that I became a lesbian as the ultimate feminist decision” (Kawahara Karido, imago 1990 issue 12, feature segment “Psychology of a Woman’s Body”, Seidosha).

I think the meaning of the term “lesbian” which she uses and the meaning of the term lesbian that I’m talking about are two completely different things. I am aware of the fact that, due to the influence of American feminism, there are women who became lesbians because of the notion that living alongside men in one’s everyday life makes it impossible to advance feminism. I also know that there are women from a particular generation in Japan who were influenced by this and similarly became lesbians. According to my own ideology, though, I don’t think that becoming a lesbian is possible. The word “lesbian” is distinct from referring women who show empathy for the conditions women are subjected to or women in general (and if it were to mean this, I suppose I would need to find a name to call myself other than “lesbian”).

This language of “becoming a lesbian as ideology” allows for pitfalls like in this way of speaking:

“My theory is that, and lesbians will surely become enraged when I say this, but lesbianism is a byproduct of the heterosexual world. Because of this, it only continues as the heterosexual world continues to exist. Basically, lesbianism is a counter ideology.”

(“Theater Under the Skirt” Ueno Chizuko, Kawade Shobo Shinsha, 1989)

The women referred to in this quote who opted to become lesbians surely would become enraged at Ueno’s words. However, for me, being enraged is out of the question. I’m merely dumfounded at the shallowness within this line of thought.
First of all, as for her casual use of the term “lesbianism” – what in the world does that even mean? Among the vast majority of lesbians who did not “ideologically become a lesbian,” our shared ideologies cannot be so easily defined by something like that of an “ism.” Being a lesbian simply refers to an orientation in our private domain. What sort of connection does “lesbianism” have with real, living “lesbians”? To ignore this fact and spread the image that “what lesbians think = lesbianism” (without knowing what lesbians might actually be thinking) causes lesbians to be regretfully seen as the personification of an ideology.*

This is a deep misunderstanding of lesbians, a malicious misunderstanding based on the denial of lesbian existence. She does not care to go into what sort of ideology of the “heterosexual world” makes up society, nor how the counter ideology of “lesbianism” (for which she argues) is constructed through that main ideology, and then she cuts away and omits the framework of these lesbians’ “lesbianism.” And, if she claims lesbians are attracted to the same sex because of their oppositional ideology to heterosexuality, what ideology could heterosexuals possibly be following that they are attracted to the opposite sex?

I have no idea what “lesbianism” means. But I have been, and still am, a lesbian. This does not mean I am doing a lesbian identity for purposes of ideology, nor does it mean I am doing a lesbian identity because heterosexuals exist. Moreover, I do not like women because I hate men, nor do I like women because I want to become a “man.”

Even though Ueno asserts such notions and I’m just brimming with questions for her, that doesn’t mean everything about what she wrote comes as a surprise to me. Similar to the women I mentioned earlier who “became lesbians,” the number of women who admire feminism and empathize with other women and the number women who hold the occasional ill will towards the general male-centrism in this society and use that as the initial construction of themselves as lesbians are far from few.

It’s undeniable that the “realm” of feminism has provided grounds for the possibility of many women to be lesbians. This has absolutely been the case in the past, and it is true even now as women are still fenced in by the “home,” subjugated by the “husband” and the “home,” and prevented from establishing equal relationships with other women as individuals. The voices from various sides who have protested a system in which “women” are fenced in have created a realm for women untethered to a singular interpretation of “feminism.” Within this realm, it would not be unusual for a woman (though there are many problems she could face), free from the barricades of the home, to become
acquainted with other women besides herself, become aware that she herself is a lesbian, and then be able to continue living her life.

**Just an encounter between “you” and “I”**

However, that’s the result of “something” born between one woman and another. This woman becomes conscious that “I am a lesbian,” but that does not mean she became a lesbian. Therefore, feminism only offers the “position” from which a woman can become aware of this. Before there can be empathy from one “woman” toward another “woman,” there has got to be “something” between one “individual” and another “individual.” This is a completely different matter from something like the following:

“Rape committed by men who want grab hold of, assault, and dominate women to fulfill their desires is beginning to be seen as a crime and spreading like wildfire… it’s very rare for women to establish an intimate and equal relationship that includes sex with a man who could commit rape (author’s note – in context, this seems to be referring to “men” in general)… if a woman tries to create an egalitarian relationship through intimacies that involve sex, bringing women into that relationship is none other than becoming a lesbian.” (Kawahara Karido, in the work previously cited).

In this quote, Kawahara also asserts that becoming a lesbian is the same as “the ultimate feminist decision.”

Why is it that she and I are saying completely different things? Consider it by taking another look at Ueno’s stance in the following quote:

“What can be called the intermediary that always exists within sisterhood needs a mirror. Perhaps this is acts as the evidence that women are affected by heterosexuality to their very core. But, if women were to eliminate this, they would not need men.

Sisterhood is love between a woman and another woman, but a heterosexual woman who loves women can only express this through the means of a male intermediary.” (Ueno Chizuko, in the work previously cited.)

Here, Ueno is writing about heterosexual women. However, this actually could apply quite well to women who quit being heterosexual and became lesbians as the “ultimate feminist decision.” Because they are lesbians, a dark environment of villainous men and a “society in which rape spreads like wildfire” is always necessary for these women. Therefore, although they are “lesbians,” a “man” who can be their “mirror” is always necessary, as Ueno puts it.

However, a mirror is not necessary for the “something” born from the relationship between an “individual” and another “individual.” Even if this same feminism is the catalyst and the place they’re
coming from is the same. Therefore, the ideology and women’s movements within feminism come from an entirely unrelated place than the vast majority of lesbians, so this is all the more reason that it’s not necessary for a woman to reject her relationships with “men” in general just because she is a lesbian.

Having an admiration for feminism or a hatred for “men” and male-dominated society may provide the catalyst and place to realize that you’re a lesbian, but it is in and of itself unrelated to being a lesbian. For this unrelated matter to construct the precursor to “the reason I am a lesbian” gives society the impression that “being a lesbian” has a single fixed cause – all this does is conversely benefit those who want to paint lesbians as “man-haters.”

Being a lesbian does not have a cause

Of course, there are certainly some lesbians who wonder deep down if this is the reason they’re attracted to women. But there are likely a varied number of reasons, and you can’t just definitively point to one and say “this is why.” There are so many reasons for a woman to be attracted to another woman that you could go as far as to say there are none. Furthermore, when a heterosexual poses the question “why are you attracted to women?” they are framing “heterosexuality” as a natural and absolute existence. To the odd person out, the nuance of the question makes it seem like “homosexuality” is a problem, and it is not necessary for a lesbian to answer this kind of question. It would be good for lesbians to talk about this among themselves.

Just for the record, Ueno’s statement that “heterosexual women” can’t express love for one another “without the means of a male intermediary” is nothing more than emulating the words of men who have wanted to fan the flames of hostility between women in the past. If I’m being frank, where exactly lies the problem in the statement “women will not need men”? While it may be true that women wouldn’t need men, it wouldn’t mean that all women would become lesbians. For example, the idea that the existence of men is necessary and the notion that a woman inherently wants to be with someone who is a man are entirely different matters, even if we just consider them on their own. Nevertheless, Ueno’s statement breeds fear in the hearts of women in this society towards “lesbian” existence and thereby creates the implicit message that not needing men and becoming a lesbian are the same thing. There is a big problem with this. But can’t Ueno see that heterosexual women are heterosexual without needing “men” and that women who have lover for other women (regardless of whether they’re homosexual or heterosexual) face diverse realities?

To get back to my original topic, advocating for the superiority of lesbians in a “male dominated society” is ultimately not positive for lesbians themselves. At best, women live in a situation where they can’t positively accept their lesbian identity. Under such circumstances, I have to admit the possibility of
hearing a voice that says “we are people who have made a better decision than heterosexuals” is very alluring. There is nothing as easy as looking down on other people to secure your own social status. However, this line of thinking obviously attracts women without even coming close to self-affirmation, so it becomes necessary to disparage other people (in this case, heterosexuals and heteronormative society) to actually affirm one’s own existence. I think this sort of self-confidence is dangerous.

Regardless, Ueno’s ideas that “[lesbianism] only continues as the heterosexual world continues to exist” and is a “counter ideology” also apply to the “lesbian” proposed by Kawahara because if this society in which “rape spreads like wildfire” collapses and men and women are truly able to face each other as equal “individuals,” the basis for lesbian existence will collapse like a house of cards. But… wouldn’t the women who try to reform this kind of a society be “feminists”?

**The lie that “women can’t understand other women”**

People who envy being a lesbian – those who are obsessed with the extreme illusions that two women can understand each other because they’re women – too often posit that “being a lesbian is the ultimate form of feminism,” and I wonder if this is meant to egg on “heterosexual feminists.” Whether this is the case or not, every time I hear that two women would be able to understand each other better, I begin to feel a nagging worry – “have these people just completely given up on understanding and empathizing with heterosexual women?” However, even these kinds of women roll their eyes at the following opinion:

“Having a relationship in which one shares a man is, from the woman’s point of view, the most extreme kind of intimacy. Sometimes a woman gets the feeling that she wants to share a mutual man with another very close female friend. She feels like she is lending out this man of whom she thinks so highly... for example, sometimes when a very close female friend is feeling incredibly sad, no matter how much I hug and console her, I can’t reach her heart because I’m just a woman. At times like this, I think, ‘what she needs is a good stiff cock--she just needs to be held by a man.’ In these moments, I want to lend her my man. I would lend him any number of times if that’s what it took. If that made her happy, I’m sure that it would be because I had given her the man who has also made me happy. That’s how I feel, because when a woman is really grieving, something there is nothing to do but put something inside her. As a woman, I can’t do anything, but if I were a man, I could” (Ueno Chizuko, in the work previously cited).

This section is ignorant of lesbians, but it also exposes her ignorant attitude toward the existence of empathy between heterosexual women, between heterosexual women and homosexual
women, and especially between homosexual women. She says that “as a woman, I can’t” reach the heart of “a woman who is really grieving.” To assert that women exist with something missing and that other women can’t fill that void is a male-oriented proclamation. Actually, this lie that “women exist with a missing part that only men can fill” is quite simply something that has been perpetuated by men for ages in order to force a condition of psychological weakness upon women. When placing this idea in relation to the previous quote about “lesbianism” being a counter ideology to heterosexuality, I get the definitive impression that not only does it refer to the incompleteness of the average relationship between “two women,” but also the incompleteness of relationships between lesbians. Above all, because there is no “man” in a lesbian relationship (who, Ueno says, is the only existence that can fill this void), it fortifies the impression that it is “a relationship with a missing element.”

By the same token, the sexual orientation people have and the empathy that emerges between humans become confused and substituted for one another. Why is consoling a wailing woman a sexual act, and why does that lead to putting a penis inside of her? The empathy for the position and circumstances a person is in is an entirely separate matter from sexual interest and desire. Therefore, the sadness, anger, sense of hopelessness and want that are produced by the position and circumstances a person endures are not things that can be plugged up by a sexual act, nor things that should be plugged up. On top of that, what is going on with Ueno’s absolute trust in the “penis”? If you were to say that “lending a man = lending a penis,” as long as this heterosexual woman has her favorite vibrator, she should be all set... not to mention the fact that men who can’t use their penises in this situation become useless.

No matter what Ueno thinks, continuing this line of reasoning for the subject of “women” is unreasonable. It seems to actually confirm women as the “harem” depicted in men’s desires. Thus, the history of women being made to mind their men and tempted to treat each other as enemies in the presence of a man is forgotten.

Breaking the curse of feminism

Isn’t overcoming this animosity between women and animosity in general the reason feminism was established in the first place? At the very least, there lies a deeply ingrained positive outlook that there’s absolutely the possibility that two women (whether they’re heterosexual or homosexual) could understand each other without the intermediary of a “man” within the likes of people in my generation who were born at the height of the accomplishments of decades of Japanese feminist history. Of course, this doesn’t mean it can happen effortlessly with a snap of the fingers, but I think there is certainly a determination to hold onto this optimism that “understanding each other is absolutely a possibility.”
This is all the more reason that I cannot nod in agreement at the schema in certain feminisms that states “lesbian = a type of empathy between women.” It’s possible that this construction has contributed to dismantling the negative images that follow “lesbian” around. However, it’s also capable of confining “lesbians” to feminism instead.

Being a lesbian is a private attribute belonging to individual people, and feminism is an ideology. Ideologies are things that individual people can freely pick of their own volition. Therefore, I don’t deny that there are people who choose to be a lesbian as a trend within feminist ideology, but they are not “lesbians.” Perhaps the women who choose this ideology of “lesbianism” should call themselves “lesbianists.”

No one can “become a lesbian” from any root cause other than meeting “a special person.” Lesbian existence means nothing more than “being a lesbian.” Moreover, what exactly does “becoming a lesbian” involve? Is it that you can have sex with women? Is it that you can lead a life with women?

Misunderstandings about lesbian sex

There’s another misconception in this area that might be easier to understand when we think about the question “because being a lesbian involves two women, doesn’t that make it easier to understand each other when having sex?”

As it stands now, “having sex with a woman” and “being a lesbian” are thought to be no different from one another (I won’t go into what I mean by “sex” when I say “have sex with a woman” here. I’ll continue on for now and let the readers’ various impressions remain as they are). Maybe it’s better to say that rather than there being no difference, one gets confused with the other. When I reflect on all that I’ve heard and seen, no one seems to say “if a woman has sex with another woman, it makes you a lesbian,” but it appears there is a requirement that “if you’re a lesbian, you have sex with women.”

On one hand, there are women who say “if the opportunity arose, I’d want to try sex with a woman.”

Then there are people who say “I have lesbian qualities” or “[although I’m a heterosexual now] I think the objects of my sexual desire could change fairly easily.”

When we add it all up, what does it mean?

First, one could argue that these confessions are favorable towards lesbian existence, or are at least not malicious. However, even though it’s favorable (or not malicious), it too simplistically ties together the existence “lesbians” with “having sex with women.” All the aforementioned statements are
based on the fact that the speaker is not a lesbian, and when they say “I want to try sex with a woman,” they take care to show that such a thing would not lead to lesbian behavior. This comes from an attitude that says “I want to try having sex with a woman, but I’m different from what you would call a lesbian.”

This statement unconsciously ties “lesbian” to a pillar of “sex.” Unfortunately, it leads people to believe that the intimacy between two women who are lesbians can only be expressed through sex, and moreover, that this is a sufficient representation of intimacy. I’m quite fed up with this – lesbians are always treated either as representatives of people who empathize with “women” and their inferior social status, or people who have sex that’s “better than that between a man and a woman.”

The idea that “two women would understand each other better” does not only show itself when one is directly told that “two women would understand each other better than a man and a woman.” It’s also implied in the background of saying “I want to try sex with a woman.” To put it maliciously, perhaps there is more to this background that implies “having sex with the man I’m currently with is boring.” But no matter the background of the statement, “sex between two women” is completely misunderstood. It’s basically only seen as what you find in pornography.

The idea that because I’m a woman, I have an easy time understanding another woman when having “sex” is nothing more than a second-hand opinion put forth by the men who create pornography. This is because actual lesbians still rarely speak out on the matter. Until now, women having sex without a man has been abhorred as a “form of perversion,” but on the other hand, it has also become an ingredient in the development of pornography. The same act is merely being restated in a more positive context rather than a negative context. According to this framing, heterosexual women are not recognizing the existence of “lesbian” people, but merely “lesbian acts” as a variation of “sex.” What pornography depicts is not “lesbian lifestyle” or “lesbian relationships”, but simply “lesbian acts.”

“Independent desire” and lesbians

On top of this, lesbian “sex” is also enshrouded by another grave misunderstanding. I’ve already written about it, but until now, women have not even been able to recognize their own sexual desire – they still can’t always recognize it. For this reason, lesbians do not always necessarily have “sex,” nor is this sex always “of their own volition,” Certainly, the lack of “men” convinced by society that women must take the initiative in the realm of sex would certainly mean that women have no choice but to be independent. However, just because they have to be take initiative doesn’t automatically mean they can. Independence in the context of women’s sexuality has been stolen away from the start. Failing to understand this leads to the risky conviction that lesbians “are women who take initiative in having sex.”
I want to take another look at the “More Report” I included in the beginning of the chapter. When asked, “do you think you’d like to have a sexual relationship with a woman?”, there are women who answer “Yes, out of curiosity. She would probably understand me better, since women understand the sexual feelings of women very well, so she would surely touch me very lovingly.” The number of women who would answer in the same way is far from few. However, wanting a sexual relationship on a basis of “curiosity” and hoping for “affectionate touching” and the like is erroneous from the start. Whether one’s partner is of the same sex or the opposite sex, having a sexual relationship in the context of some type human relationship with no foundation cannot be loving. Does she really think women who would offer to fulfill her “curiosity,” grant her wish to “know herself,” have sex with anybody because they think “I want to have a sexual relationship with a woman,” and “teach” this girl to have “sexual feelings” (which is exactly the kind of lesbian depicted in pornography!) really exist?

Maybe this is superfluous, but let me also say this – obviously, women know women’s bodies better than men do. However, this common belief ultimately leads to the commonly held belief that they understand women better than men do, which is nothing more than the result of believing that women’s sexual feelings come from their hearts and genitals, while men’s sexual feelings are set off by just about anyone, and they only feel them in their genitals. Whether you’re a heterosexual or a homosexual, you have to communicate to your partner “why you want that” based on your knowledge of the sensations of your own body. What kind of conviction is “women know other women’s sexual feelings well” or “men don’t understand women’s sexual feelings” without putting in this effort into communication in your relationship?

But, just like the examples of women who became lesbians I mentioned earlier, it’s also true that there are an exceeding number of women who find endless fault with “independent sex unique to lesbians.” What Kawahara passionately states in the previous excerpt is “how independent and egalitarian lesbian sex is.” She even says, “we lesbians are women who have not had our recognition of our individual desires stolen from us” (Kawahara Karido, in the work previously cited). However, just because we’re lesbians does not mean we haven’t also been robbed of the privilege to recognize our individual desires. In this society that conceals women’s desires, the method which allows women and even lesbians to connect the “something” that stirs within them with action is taken away. Nevertheless, we have no other choice but to put in the effort to acquire some way to express ourselves, so we try to discover methods for sexual feeling and desires. Furthermore, this mindset is gradually beginning to spread among heterosexual women as well. Although, Kawahara’s understanding of the term “lesbian”
is based only on the existence of feminism and independent “sex.” I get the feeling that women who aren’t lesbians can’t help but misunderstand this.

However, just as a heterosexual would get mad if you said “heterosexual existence is just based on power relationships and sex between men and women,” the same goes for lesbians when you say lesbian existence is just based on feminism and sex. It’s bizarre that this should have to be spelled out so carefully – this really should be obvious. Furthermore, heterosexual women and homosexual women do not share a common existence in all areas outside of the context of what we call “man/woman” relationships and “woman/woman” relationships. Living in present-day society, there is a huge everyday difference between being a homosexual and a heterosexual – a difference based on whether one must face discrimination for homosexuality.

When you only talk about lesbian existence in the context of feminism and sex, everyday differences get ignored. For this reason, you hear statements from a heterosexual person’s perspective such as, “I have lesbian qualities” or “[although I’m a heterosexual now] I think the objects of my sexual desire could change fairly easily.” However, to lesbians, “being a lesbian” is not a single part of one’s personality you can call a “quality,” and it’s not simply a matter of sexual preferences. In today’s society, “being a lesbian” is more of an everyday matter. You could even say it affects everything about the entire reality of one’s life.

Let’s put everyday life aside for a moment and take a look at the question of “what does sex refer to?” that I sidestepped before.

**Lesbians don’t have “sex”**

The usage of the word “sex” is based on heterosexuality. There’s no doubt about this. So, what does “sex” in the context of heterosexuality refer to? I dare say it varies depending on the person, but if we look at the most common usage, it would mean “inserting a penis into a vagina.” When heterosexuals say “sex,” aside from the difference in degree to which they value such an act, each person is invariably conscious of the meaning “inserting a penis into a vagina.” No matter the individual differences of whether a heterosexual likes or dislikes sex, can or can’t have sex, wants to or doesn’t want to have sex, does or doesn’t have sex, at the core of their consciousness, this act of “sex” occupies a central space.

So, what is lesbian “sex”? If we try to use the heterosexual conception of sex – “inserting a penis into a vagina” – the penis part of the equation is missing, so the full meaning of “sex” is not there.
Therefore, in this society where heterosexuality is made out to be “normal,” a complete definition for “sex” between lesbians does not exist.

To utilize a stereotypical example, take the pornography made for men. The motif of “lesbian” is used quite often. Of course, in this case, “lesbian” means “sex between two women = lesbian acts,” which is different from the term “lesbian” that I’ve been using, which basically refers to “lesbian relationships” and the everyday existence of women who are living as lesbians.

**The heterosexual sex that defines sexuality**

The reason “sex between two women” is depicted for men is because it’s almost invariably easy to imagine a “man” (or, the appearance of the symbol of a man’s penis) thrusting himself into the picture — women don’t have penises, so no matter how much two women try to emulate “sex,” it’s not “complete sex.” Only a man who has a penis can have “complete sex.” Men who consume this message receive the confirmation that “to women (the average woman, who is not a lesbian), the penis is superior.” However, for men who have a penis but can’t use it, it also confirms the message to women that if you can’t use your penis, you’re disqualified from the category of “men.”

According to the messages disseminated throughout this society, the sex lesbians have is “incomplete sex.” We also get the message that lesbians who use things like vibrators are trying to imitate the “complete sex” that occurs between men and women, as their sexual existence is inferior to that of a heterosexual. In opposing the commonly held beliefs in this society, however, I can’t personally express the individual identity and “sex” lesbians have at this point. By discussing heterosexuality’s ultimate definition of “sex” as “inserting a penis into a vagina” and using these words and expressions (in other words, the only words that are available in Japanese) as they are to express “that” which occurs between lesbians, it’s only natural that its translation into heterosexual “sex” becomes inadequate, as it transforms it into a subtype of heterosexual “sex.” This is how discussing this topic has always been.

For example, I often hear the interrogation about “whether lesbians use vibrators.” However, I can’t satisfactorily produce an answer to this query. There are people who use them and there are people who don’t, but simply saying “there are people who use them” leads to the statement being read as though lesbians are imitating “men.” On the other hand, saying “there are no lesbians who do that sort of thing” to strategically avoid such misconceptions about imitating “men” in the context of heterosexual sex only serves to arbitrarily discard a facet of reality.

Contrary to what has been believed up to now, many surveys have clarified the fact that many women achieve orgasm through their clitorises instead of their vaginas. However, there are actually
many women, both homosexual and heterosexual, who say that focusing on the vagina is better (not that inserting a penis into a vagina is better) for achieving orgasm. So, putting aside the matter of whether one can or can’t achieve orgasm, there are more women who say they the vagina is a steady source of pleasure for them. It’s not wise to devalue this fact and say “because women orgasm through their clitoris, the original source of their pleasure must be based on something other than men (penises)” in order to elevate the position of “that” which lesbians do from its perceived inferior status compared to heterosexual sex. This statement contrarily re-sanctifies the “vagina” as something that exists for men.

What I’m trying say is that the belief that the status of the vagina is devalued because penises continue to be inserted into vaginas is clearly misguided. We should alter the current assumption that “the vagina is something for a penis to be inserted into” to “the vagina have a penis inserted into it, but does not exist solely for that reason.” It’s too hasty to affix ourselves to this idea that the vagina is “an insensitive organ” because penis-derived pleasure doesn’t exist.

I’ve gotten a little off track here... at any rate, in our current circumstances where including a vibrator in heterosexual sex or homosexual sex is considered to be an act imitating the insertion of a penis into a vagina (and is subordinate to that act), lesbian interest in women’s “vaginas” is already read as an imitation of “men.” These implications mean that the “vagina” continues to be thought of as something for “men” to use, and furthermore, “women’s bodies” continue to be thought to exist for men.

Vibrators and other sex toys are ultimately just one example, but at this point, we can say that the discourse around “sex” in this society has created a means by which the word “sex” itself can warp the cause of “that” which occurs between lesbians. If we look through the lens of this society’s commonly held belief that “sex = inserting a penis into a vagina,” lesbian “sex” does not exist. Heterosexual men have symbolically imagined that lesbian “sex” exists in order to reinterpret it into a context that is convenient for them. Therefore, in this backdrop, not just lesbians, but “women” as a whole are prevented from finding pleasure without a man, and are taught to never recognize this; only glimpses of consciousness come through.

Although viewing lesbians as “incomplete men” and their acts as those of “incomplete men” is a deception, if we end up viewing this as a temporary act that occurs among women seeking out “complete men” with penises, men’s superiority to women (the superiority of the penis) and the superiority of placing absolute value on the penis within heterosexual “sex” become unchangeable. This
makes it possible for “lesbians” to not really exist. For two women to have an intimate relationship (not one with sexual acts) without a man is hard for men to understand, and when illuminated by the idea that men (penises) hold superiority over women, it becomes impossible to understand. It is for exactly this reason that “sex” between men and women is used as a symbol for the heterosexual subordination of lesbian existence and lesbian relationships. In reality, what occurs between two women and how, what kind of meaning this creates for these women, whether what they do resembles heterosexual “sex,” whether it’s completely different – all of this is completely ignored (or unknowable by men from the very start).

Of course, we can’t start by just denying the structures that exist. I suppose I ought to go into what “it” is that occurs between lesbians, little by little. I’ll keep on fleeing from the entrapment of “that” which lesbians do perpetrated by heterosexual “sex.”

**Speaking as a lesbian myself**

While perhaps insufficiently stated, I mentioned before that the term lesbian does not refer to people putting a certain wave of feminist ideology into practice, nor the “people who like unusual sex acts” depicted in pornography. However, in “being a lesbian” in this society, how does a woman begin to try to create an intimate relationship with a special person; someone who is not a man, but a woman?

I am keenly aware of the necessity and difficulty of explaining this.

When someone tells me “please talk about your sexuality,” I no doubt talk about what made me realize I was a “homosexual,” how troubled I was over that fact, how I overcame it, or even how I failed to overcome it. I have to sort out my identity as a homosexual so that I can talk about it with others, which usually results in these being the topics I end up speaking on.

But how might a heterosexual person respond to the same question? When a gay acquaintance asked a friend of mine to “please talk about your sexuality,” she had a great deal of trouble responding. She’s the same age as me and published a zine centered on “sexuality” in response to the available period of time to have an abortion being shortened by two weeks in 1990, so it’s not like she’s the kind of person who would have difficulty talking to someone about “sexuality.” After hearing the dialogues from a variety of gay respondents for the “Homosexuals Discuss Sexuality” piece she wrote, she was startled when the conversation was directed to her own sexuality.

Heterosexuals do not have the experience of at some point realizing that they are heterosexual. They do not have the experience of worrying about being a heterosexual. There were a mountain of things she would have liked to discuss about “her own sexuality” to a homosexual person, but she was
unable to talk about them in the same way as with a homosexual, so she couldn’t help but be troubled by this.

She told me her experience was that when homosexual people talk about their sexuality, they have good reason to follow an invariable pattern of repeating the same things. Because of their homosexuality, they can’t help but shoulder the burden of “a past comprised only of negativity” and need a chance to digest this past and level out their circumstances more than anything else. They keep themselves under control, and their minds eye seems to have taken on a self-denying form in every aspect of their social life while they fail to work on redeeming the “homosexual self” they have disavowed.

This is why homosexuals desperately want to meet other homosexuals (of the same sex). They create groups to expunge themselves of their shared (usually negative) experiences in both direct and indirect ways. This pattern of beginning their story with “when I realized” and continuing it with “how it troubled me” becomes an incessant refrain because of people who don’t yet know how to speak about their experience listen to these groups discussing their shared experiences. It becomes a valuable method value for people who had always thought of homosexuality as nothing more than a negative thing to reclaim a positive view of themselves.

However, when they eventually drag themselves out from this negativity and level out their state of mind, what is the best way for a homosexual person to discuss “their own sexuality”? This society will never be able to quantify the baggage they thrust upon homosexual people and criticize themselves for all the suffering they’ve caused us. Heterosexuals who have clearly never endured the experience caused by a society that views homosexuals as abnormal (who have been influenced by society in various ways because of this) have no other way to discuss “their own sexuality.” My friend is like this. Conversely, homosexuals still don’t have the method nor the words to discuss “their own sexuality.” This was, of course, robbed from them.

On top of recognizing that I’m a homosexual, I’m out to society as “a homosexual.” That in and of itself still does not comprise a large social movement in Japan. For that reason, we must express that “homosexuals actually live in this society.” But that’s not enough, either. Without simultaneously expressing what it means for somebody to live as a homosexual in this society, what it means to try to live as a homosexual in this society, homosexuals are nothing but shallow, meaningless, paper-mache spectacles.

After listening to my friend’s experience, what has until now been but vague feeling has evolved into a sense of impending danger. I still don’t know how to respond to it, though. However, there is one
thing I can say about myself – prejudice and discrimination towards lesbians continues to exist today as it did in the past, and I’m hurt nearly every day by it. Because of this, my “negative past” still remains unprocessed and I’m still far from leveling it all out. That is exactly what it means to “be a lesbian in this society” – to aim for the day that everything becomes a wash and I can just speak and live as “myself” rather than use the label of “lesbian” or “homosexual.”

Of course, this process is not just meant for me as a homosexual. It is also necessary for heterosexuals cloaked in “normalcy” who aren’t conscious of themselves as “heterosexuals” who can only say “a man does this kind of thing” and “a woman does this kind of thing” in regards to sex to ask themselves “what does it mean to be a heterosexual in this society?” If heterosexuals lose their absolutism in this society and are relativized one by one with their orientations, the dichotomy between the heterosexuality and homosexuality will collapse. The “homosexual” category itself was branded by society from the very start as a sign of heresy. When heterosexuals can ask this of themselves, we might finally be free from the “sexual” subdivisions of “heterosexual” and “homosexual” and simply become individuals.

* In “The Encyclopedia of Feminism” (Lisa Tuttle, supervising translator Watanabe Aiko, Akashi Shoten, 1991), which primarily recorded the general concepts and movements within English and American feminism until 1986, the topic of “Lesbianism” takes up about two pages. In addition to the author defining “Lesbianism” as “a word referring to homosexual love between women,” the book includes some of the various histories behind the term. Even though Ueno Chizuko defines the word to some extent, Japan is not in a state where the term lesbian, let alone lesbianism, (and the subsequent arguments about them) is positioned similarly to that which is established in this book. In this context, it may be self evident, but the word “lesbianism” is not adequately used.

Furthermore, in “The Encyclopedia of Feminism,” the ideological implications of “Lesbianism” are not defined. Perhaps the word ought to be used as such in Japan, too. However, when the suffix “-ism” is used in Japan, its implications are that of ideology or one’s principles and position. On top of that, it seems a definition like that found in “The Encyclopedia of Feminism” being used in Japan would, no matter what, have its limitations.

In the section on “Lesbianism” in “The Encyclopedia of Feminism”, lesbianism (as per the previously stated definition) in feminism still does not have one concrete meaning to this day, as indicated by the following passage:

“Lesbianism is still a problem causing division among feminists, whose meaning and importance are not met by unified agreement. To some feminists, lesbianism is a matter of sexual preference, so it is
an individual thing rather than something used to push society towards becoming a place without sexism or repression. Some women who are deeply affected by feminism ignore lesbianism’s erotic aspects and focusing on it as a political decision – for them, lesbianism is the only way to live while also being a feminist.”

As I have already stated myself, lesbianism as “homosexual love between women” is a matter of personal privacy and has no political meaning at all. However, I do think the fact that it’s ignored and repressed by society has political and societal implications concerning the infringement of lesbian rights in terms of their privacy. At the end of the day, ignorance and discrimination against lesbians boils down to ignorance and discrimination against women. The resilient myth that “lesbians don’t exist” ignores the autonomy and independence of women and makes society’s attitude of contempt for women abundantly clear – furthermore, the conscious degradation of lesbian “acts” is intimately connected to viewing all women as nothing more than “sexual objects.”

In these ways, the reality of ignorance and repression that lesbians must face goes hand in hand with the reality of discrimination that women must face, and they must be changed. Because the ignorance and repression of lesbians is also tied to heterosexual women, it is impossible for lesbian discrimination to be tackled only after the discrimination of heterosexual women has been eradicated.
Marriage, Family and “Lesbians”

**Being removed from the institution of “marriage”**

We cannot ignore the existence of the institution of “marriage,” as it greatly distances heterosexuality from homosexuality and explicitly divides the two groups. It is undeniable that the external construction of connections between people as “man/woman” relationships can be found in this institution which also casts a shadow upon and excludes “woman/woman” and “man/man” relationships.

However, I overlooked the fact that “marriage” and the subsequent formation of “family” comprise a very large part of the various matters tied to the existence of “lesbians” for a long time. I was ignorant of how taboo it is for lesbians, who are “women,” not to form a so-called “family,” not to have children to succeed the “family,” and not to take on the social role of a “wife” to a “husband.”

Denying my reality and saying “I’m not a lesbian” for such a long time was not the only background to this. I used to fantasize about the completely exclusive one-to-one relationship among two people even more than I do now, whether it was a relationship with a man or a woman. I was so unbelievably optimistic until only recently that, by virtue of being exclusive, lesbians should be able to obtain the social status and everything else that having a heterosexual “family” entails.

This is why I sought the origin of why society treats lesbians as taboo through pornographic imagery and nothing else. As demonstrated in the chapter titled “Who are ‘Lesbians’?”, I thought “sex” was the only taboo tied to lesbians. However, as time went on, I began to notice and consider the taboo of “homosexuality” found at the basis of the heterosexual standard of “marriage” and its subsequent formation of “family,” as this is the structural norm which binds relationships between people.

To someone who is a lesbian and a “woman,” it’s self-explanatory that being a “woman” and a “mother,” a “wife,” and “something belonging to a man” does not free us from the norm set by this society. Not following this standard – living beyond the field of vision of a man even before “marriage” – is not just an act reproached by men, but by women.

It is undeniable that there are privileged positions in this society for closed off relationships forms like “father/child/mother” or “man/woman,” whether these relationships are constituted by a “marriage” that is in line with the law or a so-called common law marriage. Of course, even a “man/woman” couple in a common law marriage who openly express that they are freed from the constraints of the system are seen as subverting the norm. It’s the same for “man/woman” couples who
are open about “not having children.” However, to the people who surround this kind of relationship, as long as it consists of a “man/woman” couple, this partnership has the possibility of becoming a “father/child/mother” unit, which is not a total betrayal to the system. To the people within the “father/child/mother” standard, the declaration that “I will not have children” is only interpreted as such – a “declaration.” The people around them will continue to withhold judgment and think things like “it’ll happen eventually” or “well, if you get pregnant, you’ll change your mind,” and the people within the relationships themselves can to some degree continue living in a state of suspended judgment. The people who choose to be in a “common law marriage” do so because they want to flee from the privileges of this kind of relationship, but conveying this intent to the people around them is easier said than done. This is because this “man/woman” relationship just looks the same as the traditional closed off “family” from the outside.

**Japanese society does not allow for lesbians**

However, “woman/woman” relationships (assuming they really exist) are the perfect act of defiance to this norm. I say “assuming they really exist” because they’ve basically been viewed as “non-existent.” Women’s acquisition of the right to decide whether to marry and with whom is a very recent change, and until then, they could not defy the wishes of their “home” on the matter. Women could not oppose this decision, and for a woman to be able decide on such a matter on her own was inconceivable. Thus, women were not even allowed to live on their own, let alone live as a lesbian, so it was not seen as possible for them to act in such a way.

This sort of mindset is still in existence today. As before, people don’t believe women can live on their own, nor do they believe “lesbian” relationships exist. Disparagement of lesbians is not apparent in Japan because people believe that *lesbians don’t exist* (shouldn’t exist). “Lesbian” relationships do not enter the field of vision of the vast majority of people in this society. “The type of human relationship” that is “lesbian” has yet to even be *discovered* in this society.

The idea that all “man/woman” relationships are special in every way and constitute a social unit is not only assumed by people who accept the marriage system and the traditional meaning of “family” as they are, but is also deep-seated within the people who criticize these institutions. I think one phenomena that indicates the strength of this kind of thinking is “the legalization of husbands and wives retaining separate names” movement. Using this problem as an introduction, I would like to consider the problems within with “marriage,” “the home” and “family.” This is a thread from which we can think about the “lesbian” form of human relationships.
The string of movements to legalize “husbands and wives retaining separate names” have become very active over the past several years, gaining the approval of a great many people. Although Article 750 of the civil law which establishes that husband and wives are to share the same name ostensibly states that there is no overt sexism “under the provision in the case of husband and wife wedding, either the husband or the wife must take on the other’s name,” the fact of the matter is that the husbands name is chosen in nearly 99% of marriages. Although the “family system,” the backbone of the pre-war civil law, has vanished in written law, it has not vanished from Japanese society. The numbers don’t lie.

I don’t know whether it’s due to the rise of these movements, but the government and amendments to the civil law seem to be moving towards a system of husbands and wives retaining separate names. I wasn’t aware of this because I haven’t been keeping up with it, but according to Professor Kinjou Kiyoko of Tsuda College, “The petition to amend the civil law and permit husbands and wives to retain separate names was first established in the 1970s” (Asahi Shimbun, 12 February 1991). If that’s the case, this movement has been carrying on for a very long time.

**Keeping separate names without questioning the family system**

Even if we put aside the issue of the unclear nature of the “family system,” the fact still remains that women who carry on their lives while sharing the same name as their husbands are hindered greatly. I’m not opposed to husbands and wives keeping separate names. It seems like a perfectly reasonable thing to do. The problem is not only that the movements pushing for legislation change allowing husbands and wives to keep their separate names fail to criticize the institution of marriage whatsoever. They also undeniably assist in guaranteeing the institution of marriage further longevity. In other words, by only constructing consanguinity and matrimony as “family” (something formed by blood relatives and in-laws) and failing to recognize other forms of family, the family registry system and the system of the “home” that remains as a consequence of this registry are preserved.

More than anything, the institution of “marriage” in Japan is a completely “heterosexual” construction. It excludes homosexuality from the start. Because of this, the movements that push for retaining separate names are terribly transparent, at least how I see it. Whenever I hear the line of thought that retaining separate names will topple the remaining “family system” within this country and people will then be able to have independent relationships based on two “individuals” rather than two “families,” one question comes to mind – are they only talking about heterosexuals?
If the institution of marriage is left as it is and retaining separate names becomes permissible, what will heterosexual women (and the occasional mean) get out of it? Perhaps it will have the effect of eliminating the psychological damage that comes from changing one’s surname – feeling that one has lost “oneself” and been absorbed into another family. Even if they have positive things to say about it on the surface, the fact that Japanese society and corporations are beginning to accept separate names isn’t because they are being considerate towards women’s identity, nor because they are taking the “independence of the individual” into account. This is also apparent in the fact that there are corporations which are beginning to recognize married women working under their maiden name, prior to any actual legislative change.

For example, in the September 1st 1991 issue of the Asahi Shimbun, there is an article that claims the number of corporations adopting a system where married women are allowed to work under their maiden names is increasing. The article offers a variety of accounts from businesses on women getting married and changing their name. IBM asserts that “this is a useful thing as it curbs talk of marriage during precious work time and protects the privacy of female employees.” One Fuji Xerox worker states, “The thought of making personal connections under a new name puts me off.” A human resources employee from the same company explains, “Women are becoming the face of corporations. For a woman to get married, change her name, and then start from scratch to re-create personal relationships is a waste of time.”

In the case of corporations, they simply want to avoid the trouble of “a single unit of labor” being affected by the intricate details of changing one’s surname. With this sense of fear permeating corporations about a growing labor force shortage, it’s easy to imagine companies (and therefore the government following suit shortly after) wanting to allow employees to retain separate names (and implementing this soon) due to profit and loss calculations taking precedence over traditionally keeping women at home to ensure a “male” workforce.

Confusing “common law marriage” with “retaining separate names”

I don’t think all the people trying to further the movement for legalizing the retention of separate names would necessarily agree with my speculations on corporate society. However, besides the lack of connection the separate name system has with homosexual people, if people are seeking something in this push for legalizing separate name retention, it has nothing to do with me. If the separate name system becomes recognized, people who had no criticisms about the institution of marriage besides the matter of name retention would undoubtedly adopt the stance to advocate for this institution. While many women have had to worry about vestiges of the “family system” and the
baggage it carries, the problem with the traditional system of “both taking on the same name” hardly comes into contact with the external framework of the “institution of marriage” itself. Even if you live without changing your name, at the end of the day you’re still in a “marriage,” which leads to nothing but the man or the woman (or perhaps sometimes both) coming under the jurisdiction of the “home.”

For example, in the special September 1990 “The Unfolding Future of the Maiden Name” issue of the magazine “The Science of Thought,” reporters consult Fukushima Mizuho, a lawyer who is furthering the cause for legalizing name retention and even has a book out on the subject. When asked “What do you think about the institution of ‘marriage,’ seeing as though you yourself are in a common law marriage?” Fukushima says, “There are two sides to the movement. With regard to separate names, at the level of civil law – in other words, this is an issue within legal marriage – isn’t it strange that separate names aren’t accepted in Japan even though they are abroad? That’s the issue at hand. On the other hand, as for ‘common law marriages,’ that there are hardly any of them in Japan means there are tremendous differences between ‘common law marriages’ and legal marriages. Legal marriage policy includes securing the status of housewives through annual pensions as well as plans to strengthen the foundation of the home, so because of preferential economic treatment and issues like inheritance and the handling of children, it’s quite different for someone inside of a legal marriage and someone outside of one. Therefore, I think we should go ahead with both sides, and I think we are doing so, but there is a fundamental difference between the problem of legalizing ‘name retention’ and the problem of ‘common law marriage’... In the case of ‘name retention’ movement, it’s a movement that relates to all people and can reach the majority, whether it’s women who have already legally married and changed their name, people in common law marriages, or people who aren’t marrying because they don’t want to change their name.”

Unlike Fukushima, I don’t think that people who choose to be in “common law marriages” by not submitting their marriage registration because they feel that there is a problem with the institution of marriage itself have any interest in the problem of “name retention” that exists for lawful marriages, but in any case, she recognizes that the “legalization of retaining separate names” does not affect the institution of marriage itself.

“Name retention” would have somewhat of an impact on changing the “family system” that remains as a custom and would likely slightly improve the “family matters” that come with one-on-one human relationships that have their basis in the “home” such as burials, assets and inheritance. But at the same time, won’t it make women who hesitate entering the institution of marriage who feel uncomfortable with its bonus baggage of the “home” do so anyway without resistance?
In this way, marriage itself – the institution that worms its way into the relationships between two people (in this case, heterosexual) – will not change whatsoever. This lack of change means that the stark differentiation of heterosexual and homosexual people caused by this “institution” will continue. In this case, the problem is not whether the institution of marriage is a good thing or a bad thing. More than anything, the grave problem at hand is that this institution continues to separate the two groups.

**Do homosexuals want to get married?**

If the institution of marriage doesn’t change, homosexuals will remain outside the scope of this institution – but, do homosexuals want to be included and harbored, or rather managed, by this institution in the first place? And do heterosexuals want to get rid of this system they’re implicated in?

The average homosexual... is someone I can’t speak for. Among homosexuals, the conflicting opinions about “marriage” are even more diverse than those of heterosexuals. There are homosexuals who want to expand the institution of marriage in Japan as it is now (even though it’s actually impossible to expand something while keeping it as it is), homosexuals who want the institution to include certain rights and duties, homosexuals who think it doesn’t need to include any obligatory rights or duties, and already “married” homosexuals who think marriage doesn’t have anything to do with homosexual exclusion.

Only this is clear – what homosexuals think about “marriage” can be mostly split into two different camps. One side views it as a system existing under the law, and the other side sees it as a matter of individual attitude and partnership. This is no different to the two sides of how the modern Japanese heterosexual “institution of marriage” are viewed.

**A contract for “that special someone”**

Putting heterosexual “institution of marriage” aside for a moment, I think it’s necessary for there to be a certain legal contractual relationship a homosexual can have with another person. The primary reason for this is that it would give an extra legal push in the direction of changing the situations of homosexuals who can’t freely have a relationship with another person because they are bound by “marriage” and the “home.” More than anything, the creation of a legal system that recognizes a contract between homosexuals implies that the national system would officially recognize the existence of “homosexual relationships.” This is one method for the acknowledgment of homosexuality on a societal level.
Furthermore, this system would naturally play a role in supporting these relationships. To put it bluntly, people feel comfortable with the idea of dying when they still have time to leave a will, but when a person dies suddenly and there’s no time to draw one up, there’s no way for a homosexual to leave anything behind for their partner. They cannot hope to be buried together. If they don’t live together, they might not even be able to discuss what might happen “when they die.” Even if one partner falls ill, the other is unable to care for them. These instabilities alone can burden a relationship with deep unease.

For example, according to the June 4th 1991 issue of “The Advocate” (an American gay/lesbian magazine that currently publishes ten thousand issues every other week that began in 1967), “the lawsuit filed by a lesbian requesting the right to care for her lover after she had suffered brain injury from an accident in 1983 was judicially rejected on April 2nd, 1991” (translated by OCCUR, the Japanese Association for the Lesbian and Gay Movement, published in their July 27th 1991 issue). In the reality that non-homosexual relationships (like those of blood relationships or through marriage) take precedence over homosexual ones, the right of homosexuals to form a “contract” is not guaranteed, and the thought of having to wage a several year court battle just to be able to care for one’s lover like the situation depicted in this article is not inconceivable to any homosexual person.

In regards to this matter, law professor Ninomiya Shuuhei at Ritsumeikan University states that “in the United States of America, not only are there movements advocating for the right to privacy about one’s homosexuality, but progressive movements working for the recognition of gay marriage... being officially married and acquiring legal social status would not only be useful in getting rid of the negative image that homosexuality carries and strengthening the societal position and emotional health within the concerned relationship, it would allow psychological benefit to the parties involved.”

Additionally, on the limitations of the minute details necessary in creating this kind of contract outside the scope of the institution of marriage, he says that “deciding everything beforehand is impossible and problems with the validity of such a contract naturally arise. The variety of benefits accompanying the formation of a husband and wife via the institution of marriage such as intestacy rights, the right to take legal action against illegal conduct, special taxing treatment, compensation for work related injuries or death, acquiring health insurance, extra retirement money, absence from work due to the sickness or death of a partner and so on would be of great advantage to homosexual couples, particularly due to the instability of processing some other contract.” (“Thinking about common law marriage – another choice” The Hyoronsha Company, 1991)
In July of 1989, San Francisco’s bylaw established in response to such appeals states “it has been decided that couples sharing a life together, regardless of whether they’re heterosexual or homosexual, may pay a 35 dollar registration fee to acquire registration akin to that of married couples.” It was similar for Denmark in May of 1989 – “A law was enacted recognizing the registration of cohabiting homosexual couples as married” (quoted from the aforementioned work). According “The Legal Studies of Sex” (Yuhikaku Publishing, 1991) by lawyer Kakuda Yuki, this law can be described as a “registered partnership law,” in which some of the standard components of marriage law are applied to homosexual couples who have a registered partnership. Although it’s not perfect, the establishment of a support base system including inheritance, tax benefits, annual pensions, assets and so forth is a great step forward in the name of progress.

Of course, the reformation of this system must also simultaneously work to eliminate societal prejudice. If the people surrounding us don’t recognize our rights even when a system to protect them is in place, not one homosexual person will be able to be with a partner on the brink of death, no matter how much the dying person may want them there.

Marriage-like laws that give the right to a contract between two people are indispensable, and so are laws protecting the rights of the homosexuals as a social minority. Even without the significant help offered by a legal push toward eliminating societal prejudice, there is no doubt that the possibility of a contract with one’s partner and the legislation of several rights (and duties) are necessary for homosexuals. Furthermore, “whether it’s necessary for” or “whether it’s desired by” one particular party involved is not proportional to the necessity of this legal protection. The mere fact that the legal system surrounding marriage is an assumed reality for heterosexuals while excluding homosexuals discrimination in and of itself.

Who does the system exist for?

Let’s say that from here on out, the current legal system upholding marriage is expanded and applied to homosexual people. If this were the case, there would naturally be a number of components to the legal system that could not be applied simply as they have existed until now. The foremost of these problems would be the importance of consanguinity in today’s family registration system and the traditional way of thinking in regards to the “home.” Thus, the “institution of marriage” itself would become problematized. However, that homosexual people have not been included in the framework of the “institution of marriage” does not mean that “homosexual” existence does not fit into the framework of this system. It also does not mean that a “homosexual person” does not fit into the system of Japanese society. Since homosexual existence has not been taken into consideration until
now, it’s more that the system doesn’t fit into homosexual existence. Therefore, it would be best to convert the laws and societal system to a form that takes homosexual existence into account. Without doing so, the exclusion of homosexuals simply because current laws don’t fit into their lives is nothing but typical discrimination.

I found an extremely interesting description of this in “The Legal Studies of Sex” that I mentioned before. It speaks to the enactment of a Swedish law in 1987 involving the “relationship of assets between partners in a common law marriage” and offers the theory that this law only applies to cohabiting heterosexuals because there was already a “married homosexual law” that includes homosexuals. Kakuda describes it as the following – “One clause of Sweden’s marital law states that ‘marriage is constructed through a man and a woman. It is through marriage that the man and the woman become husband and wife.’ According to this, a homosexual couple is not ‘married,’ and it is for that reason they think they aren’t provided with any legal protections.”

All systems and ways of thinking must be changed based on the existence of living people - including the law. When a person in a wheelchair says they want to enter a building that only has stairs, who could possibly argue that excluding this person “shouldn’t enter because the building doesn’t provide wheelchair accessibility” isn’t discrimination?

One of the introductory paragraphs in “Let’s Have Fun With Separate Names!” (Fukushima Mizuho, Sakakibara Fujiko and Fukuzawa Keiko. Akashi Shoten, 1989) states that “a name is a symbol of a person’s life. For a woman to get married and change her maiden name to her husband’s is to symbolically throw herself away and live according to her husband...deciding on one’s full name is symbolic of how one will live. If he holds your name as dear to him, he will also hold dear your desire to work and participate in society, and there is a great possibility that he will also share the hardships of raising children and doing housework with you.”

A later passage follows a similar vein – “The ranks of business women grew in the era of equality law. Not only do these women have to notify their companies of their name change, but their clients as well. There is often confusion regarding their old name and their new name after a name change, and having to reprint their business cards becomes an expense to the company... To throw away one’s name is to hold a funeral and bury a part of oneself. One’s history, the people one knows, one’s beliefs – all of those are precious things, and it’s difficult even for the average woman to change her name just because she got married.”
This seems like a wonderful appeal. However, while many of the people pushing for the retention of separate names may question the problems within Japan’s institution of marriage itself, but they do not try to settle the name retention reform by changing the institution at the same time. I don’t know if this was conscious or unconscious, but the authors overlook “feeling resistance towards the loss of identity associated with changing one’s name and entering the husband’s ‘home’” as reasons to disregard the institution of marriage, and only take to task the problems involved with the husband and wife both having the same name (and who on earth is this “average woman” they refer to?)

Aren’t these tactics a bit hard to swallow for most women and even corporations in Japanese society? And then there’s the matter of it actually being adopted. According to the public opinion poll administered by the Prime Minister’s Office in September of 1990, when asked “Do you think married couples should have the legal right to be able to decide whether to take on the same name?”, 30% of respondents answered “Yes, I think so” (the survey was administered to five thousand men and women above the age of twenty). At times of labor shortage, corporations need to start recruiting women for wage labor as well. Had the movement to recognize name retention worked toward problematizing the institution of marriage itself, they would likely not have received such widespread approval, nor would the government have been as active in the matter. Moreover, as the mass media ignites a sense of crisis about the rapidly declining birthrate, it’s hard to say that there’s no intent to soften women’s sense of opposition towards marriage in introducing a system of name retention.

The widespread progress towards legalizing name retention that only problematizes common surnames shared by husband and wife seems to reveal an aspect to the attitude of “normalcy” held by a brazen majority of people in modern Japanese society. “Name retention” is simply a revision to the system, keeping it alive and well for the benefit of heterosexuals (or the majority of them). In other words, whether this society that normalizes heterosexuality wants to actively protect the system of the conventional “home” and the unit of “father/child/mother” or not, it does not want it to be collapsed or reformed. The positioning of homosexuals within this societal system has been criticized long before this topic of discussion.

If relationships between homosexuals and relationships between heterosexuals were situated in equal standing, the significance of the “home” that has been protected since Meiji period civil law would lose all meaning. This is because one of the two pillars holding up the “home” is constructed by blood relation, which definitely does not apply to a homosexual relationship. Not being “blood relatives” leaves us with the other pillar, the significance of marriage – reproduction through marriage to guarantee the inheritance of the “home” – which is also not an option.
The movement to legalize surname retention should have been able to target Japan’s “family” system as well expose the problems burdening the Japanese societal, including the issues of “common law marriage” and contracts between homosexuals. However, the “surname retention” movement has failed to move in this direction.

“Marriage” within a collective

Regardless of whether a heterosexual “husband and wife” share the same surname or different ones, the fact of the matter is that they have ties to the foundation of the institution of marriage. Even if they make various attempts to be recognized as two connected “individuals” rather than two connected “homes,” at the end of they day, they’re two married heterosexuals living within the institution of marriage. But even if homosexuals also make up a pair of “individuals,” they absolutely do not live within the institution of marriage. Despite this, there are some homosexuals in today’s Japanese society that are “married.” Until recently, I found myself saying “I would like to get married (to someone of the same sex)”. Marriage is not just a legal thing, nor something that exists only on paper. It has a lot of significance in the mind of the individual and the mind of the collective.

Of course, the reality of “marriage” for homosexuals living in Japan is no simply “ceremony” without any legal significance, nor is it a shapeless “promise.” I say “ceremony,” but know that I do not mean tens of thousands of dollar “weddings” (it’s hard to believe, but there really are some people who go for this). Thus, if homosexuals want to have this kind of a “marriage” and get something out of it, it certainly won’t be social security. If anything, they may find themselves with a sense of relief in knowing that their relationship is secured under this promise of “marriage” and that they belong to one another and no one else. On the other hand, these “marriages” formed within such a consciousness may be becoming rarer among heterosexuals. The romantic implications of “marriage” even have a strong hold on my own consciousness.

The institution of “marriage” is nothing more than a “framework.” As a framework, it in no way guarantees the quality of its contents. In spite of this, the homosexuals outside of it are quite aware that heterosexuals make a huge fuss over this “framework.” We are taught a great deal by bad example.

However, once homosexuals have acquired this “framework,” the societal system would acknowledge it as a relationship between “two special people” even though it wouldn’t be a mutually secured relationship like that of a conventional “husband and wife” – furthermore, once homosexuals have obtained a system to view their contractual relationships as special, won’t our relationships surely become like the heterosexual “marriages” I see today? This thought makes me very uneasy. As a matter
of fact, regardless of whether the nation and those around would recognize it, it doesn’t mean I think
“wouldn’t it be nice if our relationships were tied to an external system?”, or “wouldn’t it be nice if we
had some ‘framework’ where we could easily back up the importance of our relationships by saying
‘we’re married’”? So, in my situation, mine is a fantasy of “imitating heterosexual marriage” without any
binding force attached to it. It’s exactly because I know this is something I can never have that the
attraction to this fantasy becomes stronger and stronger.

Be that as it may, “marriage” between homosexual people is actually pretty flimsy compared to
that between heterosexual people. Of course, since it’s just an imitation of the appearance of
heterosexual “marriage,” even if all of one’s friends applaud and cheer when they hear that “those two
got married,” in the end it’s simply a human relationship between two people. However, just because
they’re aware of this doesn’t mean all homosexuals throw their fantasies about “marriage” out the
window. I also have trouble abandoning my fantasies over what comes of two people living in a
contractual relationship called “marriage.”

But this doesn’t mean it wouldn’t be ridiculous to drop our demands to reform the legal status
of “homosexuals” and their right to form a contract with one another in this society to prevent human
relationships from taking on such a simple form. The argument that it’s exactly because this minority
group does not have its rights protected by the system that they understand the depravity of the
majority and live without spoiling it may seem sharp at a glance, but in the end I don’t think it’s anything
more than self-pity from the minority.

Then we have yet another pitfall related to this – amidst the recent “gay boom,” the media has
praised homosexuality as a “new form of love,” lavishing it as though it were recognized by Japanese
society. This kind of glorification happens because it’s clear that homosexuals living outside of the
protection of society’s system don’t threaten the lifestyle of the majority. Insofar as they understand
they can’t be bitten if they’re kept inside a cage (or outside the heterosexual cage, perhaps?),
heterosexuals can treat homosexuality (homosexuals) cordially, like a rare animal.

But this coexistence is clearly a sham. This is not the coexistence I’m looking for.

Homosexuals and fake marriages

I’ve pointed out that until now, homosexual existence in Japan has carried on outside of the
institution of marriage. However, while people who take thorough issue with the institution of marriage
may seem to be asserting this, it’s not actually the case that homosexuals have no contact with
marriage. Japan’s institution of “marriage” creates quite some divisiveness between homosexuals.
The problem is that it’s difficult to witness this friction. This is because “homosexuality” is taboo within the framework of “husband and wife” as well as our surrounding society, which successfully keeps the boundary line not only what constitutes “homosexuality” but what constitutes the “husband and wife” that make up the “home” vague and unclear by keeping “family shame” hush hush.

Knowing this, I was quite shocked after reading the following article. It was the first time I had seen this sort of thing discussed so openly.

My Husband Has Another Same Sex Lover

It seems my husband has found a new lover.

He’s been merrily singing his songs and playing his records. I said lover, but his lover is really a man. It seems like he’s someone with prestige and good social standing.

When I learned my husband was a homosexual ten years ago, I could hardly stand from the shock.

I thought of divorcing him, but our children were small, he was ill, and I don’t think I would be able to forgive such a thing if I were his mother – I’ve pulled myself together somehow.

When I demanded answers from him ten years ago, he flatly told me “There was a time in my youth when I did such things, but I’m not like that anymore.”

However, it seems once a homosexual goes down that path, he cannot break from it so easily.

To this day, some number, no, some dozens of men have surely passed through my husband’s life. I knew all about it, but since it was rare for them to visit our home or call him on the phone, I turned a blind eye to them.

But lately, he seems to have changed. He goes off to answer the phone when we’re having family time. He sends letters.

Now I’m stuck between a rock and a hard place. Do I tell my children everything and divorce him, or do I do as I have been and keep feigning ignorance?

Will these sleepless nights continue?

My husband was late again tonight. Perhaps gay husbands have
so-called beautiful love affairs, but that’s nothing but a pipe dream. I think they cast part of their lives away to take part in some impossible dream.

I wonder if I’ll ever awake from this dream.

(Housewife, 48)

(Asahi Shimbun, February 24th, 1991, “Moments” Column)

I think this submission is a straightforward expression of one of the problems that arise between homosexuals and the institution of marriage. It involves two types of problems that are easy to confuse with one another – a problem with the institution of marriage and a problem with homosexuals themselves. And, in this particular situation, the “husband” is a homosexual, which is completely different than if the “wife” were a homosexual. Being a woman myself, it’s not that there isn’t a part of me that feels sympathy for this “wife.” I cannot, however, condone the animosity towards “homosexuality” she speaks with. It’s incredibly hard for me to think about the implications of this piece.

**Why do women hesitate about divorce?**

First, there’s a side to her writing that speaks about the meaning of “marriage” to heterosexuals. Of course, you can’t read this piece expecting it to uncover all the problems “marriage” contains, but I think it certainly indicates one of the issues with marriage.

She says she could not bear it when her husband’s lovers would phone the house while she was having “family time.” Even more than the fact that her husband had a lover, man or woman, I was surprised at her usage of the term “family time.” What does she mean by “family time”? Does it merely indicate that every member of the household was in the house? I was suspicious that I may have misunderstood her.

And then, why didn’t she divorce him? According to what she says, her reasoning ten years ago was that their children were young. That isn’t the case anymore. But I’m also troubled that she wonders “do I do as I have been and keep feigning ignorance?” There is no doubt that there are many women who have felt exactly how she feels. There is no shortage of women who, after running out of patience with their husband having an extra-marital lover (man or woman), simply keep on hesitating about what to do next and whether they ought to divorce. There are many reasons for a woman to hesitate about divorce. A husband might not want to divorce for fear of losing social credibility, and for a wife to charge forward and throw away the stability of her lifestyle is no easy decision. Japanese society is still not a place where women can have a life on their own.
In today's society, whether a woman can or cannot be economically independent is a key factor for the range of choices she has in her general life. Even women who have known they were homosexual for as long as they can remember often have to at least consider the economic aspect of depending on a man through “marriage.” Because of this, whether they like it or not, they think about what it would be like to be economically and socially dependent. Furthermore, if they do get “married” and realize at some point in their life that “I’m a lesbian,” if they choose to accept that reality, even if they’re economically dependent on a man, they have no choice but to get out of that “marriage.” On the other hand, if they can’t make it on their own economically, it’s impossible for them to live outside of “marriage.”

The circumstances are a bit different for heterosexual women as the conventional function of “marriage” – sustaining wage labor and reproduction (having children) in exchange for the security of one’s livelihood being the woman’s half of the bargain – is beginning to waver due to the palpable increase in what we call “DINKS” and “common law marriages.” Nevertheless, the choice for heterosexual women to have a “marriage for life security” still remains, and we can’t say that the women who get married because of this are in the minority.

For example, let’s take a look at an NHK opinion poll to analyze how women picture their ideal marriage and compare the results of a 1973 poll to one from 1988. For the early twenties demographic, the number of women who said they’d prefer a “system of separate roles” with “the husband working and the wife keeping up with the home” was 33% in 1973, but that shrank to 25% in 1988. For the answer “I’d like my husband to mind a few things around the house, but overall, the wife should be devoted to creating a warm household environment” in a “system of shared household labor” rose precipitously from 29% to 48%. Finally, the numbers rose slightly from 18% to 25% of women who wanted a “system of independence between spouses” whereby the husband and wife have an independent and egalitarian relationship with one another.

However, the numbers change for the demographic of women in their late twenties. For the “system of separate roles,” the numbers drop from 44% (1973) to 15% (1988). For the “system of shared household labor” they rise from 20% to 54%. For the “system of independence between spouses,” 18% dropped to 11% (“Women’s Data-book” Inoue Teruko, Yuhikaku Publishing, 1991).

This survey shows a stark increase in the preference for a “system of shared household labor” as the younger demographic gets older. However, although it says “shared labor,” this only speaks for what goes on within the house, so the conventional construction of the woman being economically
dependent on the man is maintained. I was astonished at the low rate of women whose ideal situation was that the man and the woman would be independent.

However, if I’m being frank, I’m not inclined to overly-criticize women who don’t seek economic independence from a man. The state of wage labor in Japan today (as men have already verified) is mindless, and the more a person does the same work over and over for years, the harsher it becomes. If a woman considers the minimum level of income necessary to survive, there are a lot of cases where the repetition of such monotonous labor goes hand and hand with agony. Even at the best of times, for most women in today’s society, the only pursuable work is simple or expendable labor. Aside from Japan’s system of lifetime employment and promotion by seniority, as discrimination towards women is still prevalent and deep-seated in the vast majority of workplaces, I absolutely do not think it’s a mistake for most heterosexual women (and a portion of homosexual women) to decide not to renounce the option of “marriage” to secure their livelihood. Having said that, I don’t think that a life tied to the “home” is any more humane than one in which “wage laboring” and “house and child care” are shared, nor do I think that taking a hit to one’s self esteem and continuing one’s daily life is humane, as is depicted in the newspaper submission.

In terms of male attitude, according to the same text I cited before, 28% of men thought “women should diligently keep up with the home after getting married” (21% of women at the time agreed). Another 28% of men thought that “women should work as well as keep up with the home” (compared to 38% of women). As you can see, there is a substantial difference in the attitudes between men and women for either question.

Let’s return to the story again. Despite knowing that her relationship with her husband was crumbling, this woman kept on avoiding reasons for which she might leave her “marriage” and would not abandon her fantasy of a “family.” Clinging to these fantasies, she turned a blind eye to possible reasons to separate herself from her “marriage” by blaming her husband’s lover. She herself is the reason why she will never wake up from this “dream” she calls her “marriage.”

I definitely do not think all heterosexuals are like her. Even among those I know, there are plenty of heterosexuals who decide to create relationships outside of the framework of the institution of marriage. The existence of heterosexuals who try to have real relationships without relying on the institution of marriage will surely begin to have an influence on people like the woman who wrote this piece, regardless of what a homosexual person like myself might say.

**Why we should allow homosexuals to have fake marriages**
In saying all this, I don’t mean that we should discuss heterosexuals who do not get “married” as though it’s the same thing for homosexuals. This is another matter highlighted by the newspaper submission.

I do not think what her “husband” is doing is a good thing, but she puts it as though he is “casting away part of his life” and confining his everyday existence as a homosexual to a separate part of his life. I don’t think I can approve of her attitude. That she is pretending to continue with her “normal” married life is intimately complicit in the societal pressure to tidy up and store away homosexual people’s sexual “preferences and interests” and prevent homosexuals from living their daily lives as homosexuals. Because they’re viewed by society as abnormal, homosexuals understand that they have no choice but to adopt this attitude to protect themselves. However, there are growing numbers of people in the same circumstances who are trying to live as homosexuals in their daily lives. These attitudes are incompatible with one another, even if you’re the same homosexual.

Furthermore, how would this same situation described in the piece look like with the standpoints of the “woman” and “man” reversed? The homosexual here is a “man,” and because “men” have been permitted by society since day one to have mistresses outside of the home, it makes sense that his wife is bothered like she is. But if the woman in this couple were the homosexual and she began to see a “woman,” unlike the wife permitting her “husband’s” behavior, the “husband” would never permit it, even ultimately resorting to violence – tangible and intangible violence. This sort of thing does actually occur.

The societal conditions that lesbian and gay people are subjected to differ greatly depending on whether the person is a “man” or a “woman.” This implies that the “man” or the “husband” gets to rest easy because he is “supporting a wife and kids,” so the attitude that tells him his “taste” (perhaps I should write “orientation,” but I don’t actually know whether this man simply likes to have sex with the same sex or is oriented towards intimate relationships with the same sex) is justified is something I can’t condone.

On the other hand, however, regardless of the attitude I have about this “husband” as a homosexual, this piece paints a vivid picture of the degree to which heterosexuals are supposed to to despise homosexuality.

For example, what would have happened if this man were seeing a “woman”? Certainly, the wife would not have sent in such a submission to a newspaper. Even in the unlikely event that she would send the piece in, it might have been fine for a weekly gossip magazine, but there’s no reason a daily newspaper could publish it at that point. Also, if the person in charge of selecting which submission to
publish were a man, that would be all the more reason this woman’s indictment of her husband’s affair wouldn’t get published.

The reason it was published must have been that the husband in the story was seeing a “man.” This way, the husband can become the villain of the story. However, if we think about it rationally, the reason the husband is the villain is because he “had a lover outside of his marriage.” This would be the case even if the lover was a “woman.” Even so, the reason the author rebukes her husband is mainly due to the fact that her “husband is a homosexual.” This tone is there when you read the piece. First, the “husband is a homosexual,” and this homosexual “messes around with men outside of the home instead of his wife,” so we can read it as him committing two separate crimes.

I wonder if this woman received sympathy from her readers. If the husband’s lover were a “woman,” she may have become a punch line to those who would respond with “this home will live in disgrace” or “you can always depend on husbands to have an affair.”

The problems female homosexuals face and the problems male homosexuals face need to be differentiated carefully, especially those problems surrounding the heterosexual “institution of marriage.” As it stands now, not even homosexuals are free from the bonds of “marriage” and the “home.” The compulsion of “marriage” and the “home” coupled with the fateful weakness of homosexuals seeing their own “homosexuality” as taboo creates a binding force so strong it can crush the reality of the self as homosexual. At the same time, not only does the institution of marriage protect a contractual relationship between two (heterosexual) people, it maintains the “home.” When women are coerced into having children to ensure the survival of the “home,” we can’t ignore that “marriage” and the “home” make sexism compulsory within the social consciousness and power imbalance between married men and women. These factors naturally pervade homosexual relationships as well.

For example, the comparative power difference that inexorably exists between “married couples” might make a homosexual man view “marriage” as a potential camouflage. However, to a lesbian, there’s no way “marriage” could be a safe disguise for her in either the physical or the mental sense. Furthermore, a lesbian who has narrowly escaped the pressures of “marriage” that surround her can’t always acquire complete freedom. She has been carefully trapped by the “home.” Because she isn’t married and (in most cases) doesn’t have children, she appears to have “freedom” because she takes care of her parents and her blood relatives. Male homosexuals are largely unaffected by this entrapment of the “home.”
Certainly, heterosexual voices calling for the reconsideration of conventional forms of the “home” and marriage are growing louder, and the influence they are having on society is by no means insignificant. However, if we fail to consider those “homosexual relationships” (not a “preference” for homosexual sex acts) that reject the conventional form of the “home” itself, it becomes impossible to change the basis of the institution of marriage. Not even establishing a legal system that protects homosexual relationships would be possible. Creating a legal system that protects homosexual relationships is not something that could “amend” the modern institution of marriage.

The backdrop of this modern institution of marriage is the Japanese “family system” based on blood relatives and in-laws – because of this, “homosexual relationships” cannot fit into its structure. The foundation of such a system is the exclusion of “homosexual relationships” from the very beginning. Of course, it’s essential to start out by clarifying the problems with such a system. However, this is merely one of the first steps in the labor of creating a completely renewed system – a system in which heterosexual relationships and homosexual relationships can be positioned in equal relation to one another.

Is “family” really all that great?

So what comes first in this mountain of work that needs to be done? I have one looming question about this.

Will homosexual relationships eventually be integrated into the “family” with the same degree of exclusivity as heterosexuals? Is that what we want from “family”? I’m still not entirely sure what the ideology that makes the exclusive nature of “family” possible is, or whether humans have always desire those exclusive relationships that “family” tries to construct.

However, I can at least tell you this. The “married couple” that is one of the foundations of “family” in heterosexual relationships is the sole unit of people that is publicly permitted to be “sexual,” which society deems as taboo. At the same time, “sex” has been a duty performed by “married couples” under the protective veil of the dark. Furthermore, the taboo nature of “sex” that forces a sense of complicity onto “married couples” and corresponding “man/woman” relationships (not just marital relationships, but also what we call “romantic” relationships) has also protected the exclusivity of these relationships. In the context of such a history, doesn’t wanting a relationship that can be called “family” or trying to call our relationships “(new) families” assist in the societal pressure that tries to keep “sex” confined to closed off relationships?

Thus, if we continue seeing the core reason for why “sex” is seen as taboo – “family” – as special, won’t we further the aim of having human relationships stay exclusive? If we consider the
discrimination society bears towards sex and desire, it seems we must ultimately problematize the consciousness of “family” itself. In the end, “family” and “sex” are only things that exist within the narrative of heterosexuality.

Lastly – does the nature of being human fundamentally necessitate a “special relationship”? 
A Curse Called “Motherhood”

The question of lesbians being “women”

Whether one knows it or not, being a “lesbian” in Japanese society where the “institution of marriage” and its subsequent protection and reproduction of the “family system” continue to stand firm is a substantial rejection of these systems. This is because the relationships lesbians have been creating in Japanese society since the Meiji Period do not harbor the placement for a “father” to control the “home” and make the effort to perpetuate this system. Not having a “father” means that there is neither a “mother” nor “wife” concomitant to his position, so the conventional “home” (we could also substitute this word for “family”) fails to be constructed.

Obviously, most lesbians also have no children. However, lesbians not having children is not simply due to reproach against lesbian existence. There are actually many reasons (when a biological father is available) why there are very few lesbians who have and raise children. Furthermore, giving birth to a child is not always directly connected to raising a child, so there are also lesbians who raise children they did not give birth to themselves. However, this doesn’t always mean these women can escape criticism for “being lesbians.”

At first glance, what I’m saying here might not seem to have any connection to discrimination towards lesbians. I happen to know very well the risk involved in saying that these matters are directly connected to discrimination towards lesbians, especially in terms of “having children.” I’ve heard and seen many examples of Western lesbian couples having and raising children by getting pregnant through artificial insemination. To be sure, there are many problems with the practice of artificial insemination, and this method has yet to be recognized as far as Japan goes, but I can’t definitively say there are no Japanese lesbians who use it. Because the system of having a “surrogate mother” in Japan is prohibited, people such as Japanese heterosexuals who have gotten children from overseas are already informed about such things.

There are also plenty of lesbian mothers in Japan. These are people who had a child prior to meeting their female partner and have continued raising the child since. Therefore, the schema of a lesbian being a woman who isn’t a “mother,” or rather being a woman who cannot be a “mother,” is simplistic if not entirely incorrect. It’s as simplistic as assuming that a heterosexual woman is a woman who is a “mother.” I really want to make this point clear and discuss the risks involved with the images associated with terms like “mother” and “potential mother,” but I don’t want to disparage “women having children” in and of itself.
The image of “motherhood” restricts women

Both the idea that the role of a “woman” is to be a “mother” and the social pressure that attempts to latch onto women the image of “potential mother” support prejudice and discrimination towards women and the minority of women who are lesbians. Because women who don’t have children don’t make the societal contribution of perpetuating the “home” and because women who have and raise children outside of marriage do so outside of the framework of the “home,” they are inundated with criticism.

In the reality that a woman’s existence as a “mother” is only permissible if it upholds the “home” (“family”) represented by a “woman” and a “father,” having and raising kids without the existence of a “father” or a “potential father” is not consciously nor systematically recognized. This fact becomes quite clear if we look at the degree to which the system in this society discriminates against such people like women who have illegitimate children* and live in a household made up only of child and mother. As this is the case even for heterosexual women, it is especially the case for two women – rejecting the existence of a “potential father” himself – who are raising a child, as they are already facing some degree of prejudice in relation to the current images associated with “motherhood.”

A woman who has given birth to a child is that child’s “mother” in a biological sense, but beyond that, she is simply a “woman.” However, the current implications behind what society calls a “mother” are different. A woman who has given birth to a child is forced into all of the meanings implicated in being a “mother” and is coerced into being a man’s “wife,” the natural prerequisite to motherhood. Furthermore, all women are coerced into being “mothers,” or at least “potential mothers.” What I mean to say is that a woman who may or may not choose to have a child is a person intrinsically bound to the image of “potential mother.”

Because Japan’s total fertility rate (the number of children one woman will produce in her lifetime) in 1990 had declined to the lowest it had ever been at 1.57, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare made quite an uproar about the publication of its first government and financial world mass publication for the year. The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare’s population problem research lab made those numbers public on June 9th of 1990, but the June 13th 1990 publication of the Asahi Shimbun, for example, chose to report on it with the following:

“The issue of the nation’s average birth rate reaching a historical low this past year stirred controversy among the government and the Liberal Democratic Party on the 12th. At their morning Ministerial Meeting on Longevity Social Measures, the ministers unanimously stated that ‘some sort of
counter-measure is necessary’...the backdrop to the government and the Liberal Democratic Party’s flustered state is that ‘the growth of the elderly population is all we've been finding ourselves looking at, and we've noticed that the elements which sustain our aging society are diminishing – we’re quite shocked and taken aback’ (government source).”

The “sense of impending doom” that came from the so-called “1.57 shock” spread across Japan shortly after, but perhaps the problems taken up by the ministerial meeting in the very early stages of their intended “longevity social measures” merit some attention. Here, the question of who is concerned about the declining birth rate and for what reason becomes symbolically apparent.

Immediately following the announcement of this birth rate of “1.57,” the government and the Liberal Democratic Party created committee members on the issue one by one and administered several systematic reforms. Thus came slightly more accessibility for a system for childcare allowance and the legislation for a system of childcare leave, though insufficiently organized.

Are women children-bearing machines?

However, until now, the forefront of the argument that “fewer kids is a problem” surrounding the decline in birth rate has been made up of questions focused entirely on things like “why aren’t women having children anymore?” and “what should we do to make them have more children?” The most basic problem with the discussion on birth rates is, in other words, the persistent refusal to acknowledge the natural baseline that “to have or not have children is ultimately an individual woman’s decision, and neither the country nor the people around her can coerce her into one decision.”

From this perspective, the stance held by the government and the Liberal Democratic Party is quite clear. It’s the same with the previous example of the ministerial meeting, but in their next step to hastily install a committee for implementing institutional child care reform, they formed titles such as “Conference of Relevant Ministries and Agencies to Communicate on the Creation of an Environment for the Healthy Birthing and Raising of Children” and “Conference to Create an Environment for the Healthy Birthing and Raising of Children.” The latter seems to give the right to children to “be born and raised” as they themselves see fit, and in the former, the word “healthy” almost makes the target of the modifier seem nonexistent in order to dismiss the subject of the “mother” (and what exactly does a woman healthily birthing and raising a child mean?). To clarify the significance of the titles given to these conferences – they imply that the government and the Liberal Democratic Party are unconcerned with who is giving birth and who takes on the burden of the duty of raising a child, or, in other words, what women themselves think of “birthing and raising children.”
This stance also fans the flames of the mass media’s widespread fear that “declining birth rates = Japanese economic collapse.” The birthrate is ultimately nothing more than a matter of the individual choice to have children, and, moreover, most people don’t think about the sense of crisis associated with this debate on a national or mass media level.

Then, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare’s June 6th, 1991 publication of 1990’s demographic statistics further incited fear over Japan’s declining birth rate. The total birthrate drop in 1989 went down to 1.53.

In one respect, the consequences of this uproar can already be seen. Starting on January 1st of 1991, the possible time frame in which one could get an abortion was reduced by two weeks. This didn’t even reach Diet deliberations – it was announced by the vice-minister of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. This made the period of possibility to get an abortion fall from less than 24 weeks to less than 22 weeks.

This furthered time restriction is not a problem that can be straightened out by just saying “it’s only two weeks.” Many of the women who have no choice but to have an abortion at the very last minute of this time period are in their teens or twenties and living in situations of economic and social instability (although, I can’t say married women are necessarily living in economic and social stability). In addition to this age-group being more opposed to receiving a gynecological exam than any other age-group, because of their meager knowledge on how conception works, there are many cases where these women can’t even go to the hospital until well after the allotted number of weeks since conception has passed.

In response to this two week reduction, the Council on Public Health published four supplementary items with contents regarding “(beginning ommitted) spreading sufficient contraceptive information to the younger generation in particular,” but this “reduction” was actually hardly publicized at all, other than a couple newspapers picking up the story – not to mention, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare failing to enact any sort of counter-measures to this change.

Certainly, it’s true that an abortion after this time frame is not exactly a desirable thing for a woman’s body. It’s also true that, through the development of medical technology, fetuses exiting the “mother’s body” in early stages due to premature births and other such causes can survive. But even in these situations, if women remain robbed of their right to knowledge and information, there become fewer and fewer reasons to justify women having children unintentionally.

**Being unable to have kids ≠ choosing not to have kids**
A high cost of living, no place to live or a very cramped living space, and having to quit one’s job until a child is born... under these circumstances, the fact of the matter is that it’s difficult for women to make the choice to “have a child.” There is no room to challenge the idea of improving these poor conditions and making a comfortable environment for women who want to give birth and have a child. However, won’t women who choose to “not have children” conversely receive even more pressure to do so through environmental improvements implemented because of low birth rates? Won’t women who “can’t have children” receive even stronger pressure? In any case, the birthrate continues to decline, yet progress in the technology for “treating” women who are unable to physically give birth (who have been medically examined) is made every day.

Ensuring the right to choose whether to have children and ensuring an environment in which its easy for women to have children are completely different issues. Because of this, it’s clear that there are two different aspects to the declining birthrate problem. One is the nation’s encouragement (coercion) to have children that goes hand in hand with (or is excused by) the declining birthrate, and the other is an environment in which women who want to have children cannot. In reality, however, as a result of the declining birthrate, people are only now turning their gaze to women who want but cannot have children, but women have sought the improvement of an environment to be able to raise children since long before the birthrate decline. Equating the latter problem with the birthrate decline is a mistake in and of itself.

In spite of this, the mass media as well as women themselves see an environment in which one can’t give birth to or raise children as bound to the birthrate decline and seek an environment where it’s easier to give birth. I can’t help but feel that this is not a growing inclination towards “an environment in which women who want to have children are able,” but rather points to the idea that “an environment in which all women can have children = all women must have children.”

Of course, this is not the first time such a trend has emerged. In this country, even now the mindset that women have a legitimate right to the choice “not to give birth” is not firmly established. Women haven’t even been thought to have a right to the choice to “give birth.” Even now, through the “Eugenic Protection Act,” in cases when a woman or her spouse has (or has been judged to have) “psychosis” or perhaps a hereditary disease (which we can conclude to be with modern science), occasionally abortions are performed without the consent of the persons involved. Several years ago, when a woman infected with AIDS would deliver a child, the mass media was at the forefront to condemn her. Furthermore, if we look back into history, women recovered in the ports of Kyushu from
World War II immediately following Japan’s loss were checked for pregnancy, and nearly ten thousand women were forced to have abortions. The “decision to give birth” was trampled yet again.

Be that as it may, it seems the response “because we’re in circumstances that prevent us from having children, we can’t have children yet” to the birthrate decline has brought on some small increment of civil rights (although, some irresponsible advice like “if you have a child, you’ll find a way somehow!” still carries on). However, women like me who say “I will not have children” are usually met with stares that read “I just can’t believe that!” Furthermore, women like me who say “It’s because I don’t like children” are subjected to stares that imply “what a weirdo she must be to not like children” (by the way, being a lesbian and disliking children are completely unrelated matters).

Since the birthrate decline, there tends to be few voices advocating “women who aren’t even considering having children should not be forced to give birth” in the shadows of women who have been saying “I want to have children but I can’t” and “even though I can give birth, raising a child would make things too hard for me.” Furthermore, the narrow view that “giving birth is exactly what makes you a real woman” still remains deep-seated in the minds of many people today. A bold declaration that “I will not have children!” is still said to be a sort of “female egoism.” When the national policy to consider the declining birthrate as a “danger to a prosperous Japan” aligns with the desires of women who say “I want to give birth but I can’t,” I wonder how “women who do not have children” and “women who can’t have children” will begin to be viewed with such prejudices left as is.

Just because we construct an environment in which women can have children does not mean all women will begin thinking that they want children. The change in birthrate is not just a part of the environment for the bearing and raising of a child, but is also directly related to the total shift of each individual woman’s value system. Therefore, no one can coerce women into having children through such threatening rhetoric like that of the birthrate decline and the “decline of the Japanese people.” If we confuse these points with one another, even women themselves will continue utilizing the trump card of improving the system of guaranteed childcare for the birthrate decline...

Even now, we hear voices crying for “giving birth to be able to give birth.” As a result of these voices growing stronger, will “women who want to give birth” and “women who have given birth” support the wishes of “women who don’t give birth” and “women who can’t give birth”?

The glorification and coercion of “mother material”
As I mentioned before, “mother” is a title for a woman who has given birth (or sometimes a woman who has “raised” a child) used by the child to refer to her. A “mother” is nothing more than a certain child’s “mother.”

However, separate from this strict meaning of the word “mother” is another “mother” which in some cases signifies “that which gives life and raises it”; this image frequently makes itself known in daily life. Throughout the past several years in which environmental destruction has become a global problem, even environmental protection agencies set up by Japan’s government have used such expressions as “Mother Earth” and “Mother Nature,” and continue doing so to this day. Even mothers themselves will used the image of “mother” as “that which gives life and raises it” to create a bond between one another. For example, 1989’s strange best-seller “If We Still Make It In Time” (Jiyusha Publishing) by Kansha Taeko that blew up partially due to the catalyst of the anti-nuclear power movement is seen as a positive example of “seeing things from a mother’s point of view.”

“Don’t we look at everything as a matter of ‘life’? What is innate in us women, mothers in particular, is the essential and great ability we are bestowed with. Have you ever been thanked for this? I think what we mothers have is a truly amazing thing. I think it’s something no form of science or knowledge can compete with. I really, truly think the power to save the world from its chaos is locked within us mothers.”

I think the anti-nuclear power (de-escalating nuclear power) movements and consumer movements are axial to and a starting point for “mothers” to think about their children as well as their own lives, and that becoming able to make such proclamations to society is a ground-breaking thing never before seen in Japan. Thus, after 1989, when what was called the tailwind of the “opposition to consumption tax” was brewing, these various movements garnered support from many women, resulting in huge influxes of women at Diet and regional meetings. This is something that should be properly acknowledged. Furthermore, from the perspective of environmental protection agencies, thanks to catch-phrases that were ultimately nothing more than ornate words like “We Will Protect the wonderful Mother Earth,” the stance for protecting the environment has spread, albeit gradual, and that in and of itself we ought to be pleased with.

However, there is one little problem here.

The bizarre thing about such slogans as “we oppose nuclear power because we are women who produce life” and “we oppose consumption tax with our women’s kitchen intuition” is that, at this point, these just go without saying. There are also women who don’t rear life, and there are also men who certainly don’t give birth but bring up life. There may well be women who have acquired a “kitchen
“intuition” because “women” have a long history of being confined to the kitchen and having it be the only means through which they have a connection to society, and there may well be men who exist without such a “kitchen intuition” because men doing such things would only be perceived as “effeminate.” At the end of the day, these slogans are nothing more than a way for women to shut themselves away into “rearing life” and the “kitchen.”

Furthermore, the phrase “women create and raise life” continues to be used to marry women and childbirth together as inseparable, even if unintentional. Certainly, this phrasing is not enveloped by blatant contempt. The term “Mother Earth” reveals something on the contrary – this term is used to imply that “women” who “birth and raise children” ought to be worshipped. No matter the meaning, it’s difficult to object to worshipping and glorifying “women.”

Who glorifies “mothers”?

However, if you think about it, this worship and praise of the “mother” is not about each individual “woman” but rather seen as something that is naturally endowed to women and a function that they naturally exhibit despite being nothing more than a role forced upon them. Individual “women” are made to live with this function of “birthing and raising children” as a common denominator, their individuality stripped along the way. Originally, this act of worship was performed through affixing a certain image onto its target, an act that does not attempt to recognize the target’s specific individuality. It holds the prerequisite that “if you’re a woman, you will certainly bear and raise children, so this must be honored.” Because of this, realistically, “women” who do not exhibit the function of “birthing and raising children” are not objects of worship. Even in the case where a woman is worshipped as a “mother,” it is not she herself who is being worshipped and glorified, but her exhibition of the function associated with her designated role.

Above all else, calling a “woman” a “mother” and worshipping her for it is not about the “woman” herself. The worship affixed to the description of “being a mother” to the Earth is also not about women. In targeting a specific gender for this worship, “women” with the potential to be worshipped (with the potential to become a “mother”) cannot actually be worshipped with an attitude that separates their body’s functionality and their roles.

So, who is it that calls “women” “mothers” and first imposed the name of “Mother” on the Earth? American feminist thinker Andrea Dworkin has this to say on the matter:

“Men have claimed the earth, called it Her. Men ruin Her. Men have airplanes, guns, bombs, poisonous gases, weapons so perverse and deadly that they defy any authentically human imagination.

In the recorded history of “women” allowing the Earth to be claimed as their own, “women” have not just once but constantly been equated with “the Earth” and “the planet” within the male gaze. No matter how much women are likened to the Earth and worshipped through their title of “mother,” the right to decide whether or not to worship them is always left to “men.”

It is exactly for this reason that one glorifies their wife because they are a “mother” – on the other hand, the glorification of the reckless sexuality performed by “prostitutes” that from a “woman’s” point of view is nothing more than contradictory and selfish act has come to be permitted by “men.” “Mothers” and “prostitutes,” as “men” have labeled them, have been recognized since the beginning of the existence of man. Thus, the “women” who become intoxicated off this worship and glorification are limited to “mothers” being “mothers” and “prostitutes” being “prostitutes,” and all other individual “women” existing on the outside are intentionally wiped out of “men’s” consciousness.

However, at least “women” know in the end that their function to “give birth to a child” is easily influenced by instability and their environment. Furthermore, “women” know that the role imposed upon them to “raise children” is nothing more than “one of the roles assigned to women,” and they know according to the circumstances that surround them whether “raising children” would be a hardship. But the praise pushed onto “mothers” from the outside does not approve of instability or hardship because this praise comes from “men” who do not have the function of giving birth and are convinced that the role of raising children is not their own.

On top of this, believing that the only thing this “Mother Earth” can promise is fertility, and taking charge in the roles of colonizer, discover, or exploiter of resources are, of course, the tactics of “men.” Neither “women” nor the “Earth” can promise an unlimited supply of resources, and despite neither “women” nor the “Earth” nor “men” existing above all to provide fertility, “men” have come to freely create and believe the superstition of the “potential mother’s fertility” by calling them “mothers.” No matter how many of their ample resources are instantly stolen away from them, the image of “fertility” is still assigned to women, the Earth, the planet, the forests, and the universe we call “mother.”

When “mother” was used for war

I absolutely do not feel that the women who have come to participate in activities related to abandoning nuclear power generation, consumer movements and environmental protection because of
their very real feeling that they are “producers and raisers of life” ought to be criticized. More than anything else, in the reality that many married women are bound to birthing children, raising children, and keeping up with the home, it’s exactly this feeling that provides women with the power to step into the world outside of the “home.”

However, I don’t think there’s no value in keeping Japan’s former history of national policy to use this real feeling women born into bearing household responsibilities and raising children have in mind. This is because women as “mothers” and homekeepers as “housewives” have collaborated in aggressive wars. In post-war Japanese education, the history of the aggressive war that emerged from the Showa period ended up thrown out, and until I began consciously reading materials about this, I myself did not know enough to speak on the fact that Japanese “mothers” and “housewives” collaborated in war efforts.

According to the “Six Declarative Passages” in “A Decade of History of Great Japan’s Women’s Association for National Defense” (1943), the goals of the Women’s Association for National Defense consisted of the following:

“First, the ‘Globally Unmatched Values of Japanese Women’ must be sufficiently mastered – women must not be tempted in the slightest by ‘bad thinking’ like anti-war ideology, mothers must raise children to stand by the ‘orders of the Japanese Empire,’ and housewives must keep up with their lives as consumers no matter how much financial difficulty they may have. Then, they must comfort the soldiers on the front lines, eliminate any ‘anxiety about the future,’ and take care of the bereaved family of sick, wounded or killed soldiers ‘as though from the hearts of their mothers and sisters’” (“The Women’s Homefront,” Kano Mikiyo, Chikumashobo, 1987).

According to this same text, once they were mobilized by the inspiring tales of “wives who committed suicide to encourage their drafted husbands.” Great Japan’s Women’s Association for National Defense expanded and developed the spontaneous organization centered around the “Number One Housewife” of Osaka in 1932. Of course, these trends were used by military circles, but there is no misconstruing the fact that women who had been previously shut away in the home happily began participating in activities to be “the most useful woman in the world.” This text also says that “at the time of the start of the Pacific War in ‘41” the Women’s Association for National Defense’s “ranks grew to ten million women.”

Following this, the Women’s Association for National Defense began wearing “cook’s aprons” as a uniform with the spread of the slogan “national defense starts in the kitchen” and started distributing papers in cities printed with phrases like “let’s refrain from gaudy clothing” and “let’s stop perming our
hair.” While the Women’s Association for National Defense grew, a handful of wealthy folks taking the world by storm with an air of freedom in the hearts of cities and people called “mobo and moga (modern boys and modern girls)” began to disappear (referenced by the aforementioned work).

On one hand, the members of this movement took on a portion of the duties they were promoting themselves, but there were also magazines targeting “housewives.” “The 1930s According to Women’s Magazines” (compiled by the Writing Our History Association, Dōjidaisha, 1987), a publication that recorded all tables of contents included in “Women’s Public Opinion” (first published in 1916) (the 5th year of Taisei), “The Housewife’s Companion” (first published in 1917), and “Women’s Club” (first published in 1920) during the 1930s analyzes the extent to which Japan’s magazine media shaped women’s attitude towards the war effort and provides concrete explanations for these trends.

A number of this text’s pages are devoted to the roughly 600,000 copies of “The Housewife’s Companion” distributed in 1931 and the roughly 1,800,000 copies distributed in 1941. Set in a Japan that was hurdling towards war, “The Housewife’s Companion” drew the awareness of women who were unapathetic to the wartime regime in with “an argumentative and direct writing style that did not appeal to war, but demanded attention and interest to historical viewpoints and the national flag” and through “photographs, pictorials, confessionals, memoirs, roundtable discussions, interviews, and a documentarian way of writing that appealed to the hearts of readers and stimulated an enthusiasm for war.”

For example, in order to “justify” Japan’s invasion of China, “The Housewife’s Companion” introduced an informational report of what President Roosevelt told a special envoy upon meeting her for an interview (1937 December Issue~1938 March Issue). The following is a sample of her writing in the context of justifying the aggressive war in the name of “women and children”:

“Transcending the narrow issues found in politics and the economy, as the mothers of humanity, we simply cannot endure the bloodshed of our innumerable sons in battle. Both the mothers of Japan and the mothers of China have just one difficult thought. That is for Japan to put an end to this fighting quickly, no, as soon as possible, and to be able to live without any great sorrow in China and Japan.”

I don’t think it was likely that this sort of statement was established as absolutely inadmissible in the postwar Japanese societal consciousness. To say that the sense of reality a woman has by being a “mother” is the only sense of reality that any “mother” can have ignores and generalizes other people’s realities – thinking that because all “mothers” are “mothers,” they all think the same way – harbors
lingering risks even to this day. This is also the attitude that, in being a “mother,” the existence of “children” – your own “children” especially – takes precedence over all other things.

**The fiction of equality and sentimental feminism**

Furthermore, the media’s power to win women over in support of the wartime regime through magazines is a method of constantly extolling the power and wonderfulness of the “mother” while trivializing and even ignoring the discrimination between men and women and husbands and wives.

For example, the July 1937 issue of “The Housewife’s Companion” introduced a segment called “What Should Women Accomplish Once the War Ends? – An Emergency Roundtable Discussion on What Crises to Prepare for in an Explosive Situation” (a discussion among three soldiers). According to this, the magazine article included such phrases as “women are those who protect the homes from bombs and ‘strong mothers’ are the very best weapons” as well as “women’s main obligation for the war is the same as that of men – to not err in the general awareness of the war.” The author who introduces this article writes that “the phrase ‘the same as men’ is a terribly affirming usage that lingers in my heart.” Not only the repetition of “the protection of the homefront” but also the method of encouraging women that their value is now equivalent to that of men (this being the method the soldiers are using) are undoubtedly effective in sowing the seeds of ambition within women confined to the “home” to participate in the war effort through self-respect and a sense of duty.

At the same time, I think we ought to pay heed to the way this false sense of equality between men and women in those days bogged down progressive women and even progressive media. For example, “through the impetus of the ‘Bluestocking’ authors being banned,” even “Women’s Public Opinion” “drew a sharp line between other magazines that advised the practice of being a good wife and a wise mother and became a new publication for the purpose of taking up women’s issues.” In its 1938 issue, the following passage is written on the matter of “How Women Change the War”:

“(Because of the war) there is a view that concrete action and decision-making has fallen into the majority of women’s hands” and “in order to win economic victory, whether in peacetime or in wartime and regardless of being male or female, we ought to utilize all our citizens to create the maximum possible workforce. As a result, women’s education and social status will be pulled up to the same level as men’s” (Yamakawa Kikue).

After the war, Japan vowed never to repeat the mistakes of its past crimes, or so I learned in my textbook back in school. However, when I think about it, the textbook never really included what these perpetrated mistakes were, or to what degree Japan fell onto the wrong path. If we don’t know the past, we won’t be able to verify whether our present day actions are right.
Of course, we can’t think that previous women’s actions and present women’s actions overlap. It doesn’t mean the actions of women today aren’t being utilized, as they are working in the direction of gaining societal power as “women” (especially political power). However, despite this distinction, one could say that the increased citizen campaigns that arose from an emphasized “housewife’s kitchen intuition” and the point of view that “women are those who give birth to and raise life” during the time of the anti-consumption tax movement somehow resemble the context in which the Women’s Association for National Defense became so expansive. As a result of this movement, a rift between women who aren’t “housewives” and women who aren’t “mothers” has been created at the hands of women themselves.

For the “me” who is neither a “mother” nor a “woman”

We cannot deny that women are endowed with the ability to give birth to children and have a possibility of becoming a “mother” – nor should we try to deny it. However, shouldn’t we quit using “mother” as the foremost common denominator between women, even among those who have actually given birth? Perhaps we ought to because even to this day the word “mother” works to engender a deep divide between “women.”

Women neither exist “to become mothers” nor “to be prostitutes that allow men to do anything” – they are individual women. The power of worship and glorification to force an illusion is still strong, but one by one the many diverse individual “women” who make their own choices, including the matters of “sexuality” and having and raising children, are continuing to live their lives and increase in numbers. Even if you just consider the aspect of “having children,” the individual decisions made on this matter are vastly different, and the more women talk about their choices, the clearer these differences will become. The imposition of the image of “mother” erases women’s widening selection of choices and the power of understanding the differences between one another. What’s necessary for those we’ve labeled “women” is beginning to learn how each woman is different and how each woman is similar, not coercing each other into the idea that “we have to be similar.”

At the same time, what about this “Earth” that is so often called “Mother”? The number of people realizing that this planet with a finite capacity and volume does not “exist as a mother” with promises of unlimited fertility grows every year. The resources that humans have exploited and plundered are drying up so fast that we can’t help but realize this. The Earth is not a “mother” to humankind. It is just the same for “women” not necessarily being “mothers.”
“Mothers” as “child-bearing machines,” “mothers” as “perpetually working to produce resources for people”... when we examine the hidden meanings behind this word, we see that “mothers” are not just something to be used by non-mothers after all. The word “mother” is conferred with various beautiful images, and I wonder just how much these images blind us.

*An illegitimate child refers to a child born between a man and a woman who are not legally married. In such a situation, as decided by civil code, the general rule is that the child is registered in the mother’s family registry. Then, if the father acknowledges the child is his, the child can receive the father’s surname through the approval of the court. However, an acknowledged illegitimate child is permitted half of the legal inheritance that a legitimate child would receive. Furthermore, “eldest daughter,” “second son,” and so on are recorded in the family register for legitimate children as well as in the familial relationships of these children on their resident cards, while illegitimate children are distinctly recorded as “male” or “female” in the family registry, and as “child” on their resident cards.

The movement to end discrimination towards illegitimate children is also working alongside the movement for legalizing surname retention. On May 23rd of 1991, a couple consisting of a man and a woman who did not register their marriage so as to keep their individual surnames raised a lawsuit against the city of Musashino and recorded the treatment of their relationship as “discrimination that unjustly violates equality protected under the law such as in the constitution.” The Tokyo District Court dismissed the suit on their revoking of this couple’s registration, saying that “they did not have the qualification to lead a lawsuit against parents” due to the fact that “under current law, there are established differences between the rights and obligations of legitimate and illegitimate children, so printing ‘child’ under the column for familial relationships on resident cards is reasonable, and cannot be called unconstitutional nor illegal” (the same date, Asahi Shimbun).

I won’t go into the system of discrimination between legitimate and illegitimate children itself, but the court’s decision that “because there is distinction under the law, they should obviously be differentiated” shows that the judicial administration turns a blind eye to the existence of actual discrimination in the legal system.
The Reason “Lesbian” Discrimination is Invisible

Isn’t there any lesbian discrimination in Japan?

This society is exceptionally open-minded towards two women living together and behaving somewhat intimately toward one another compared to how it views men in such a situation. However, these same women are also placed under moratorium and seen as “half a person until marriage,” so it’s simply not worth any serious suspicion that they might be “lesbians.”

Due to the rigid “common knowledge” in this society that women can ultimately be changed through men, “lesbian acts” based in curiosity may exist, but there is no belief that “a form of intimate relationship between two women known as being a lesbian” exists. Because of this, even when society happens to see an intimate relationship between to women, it does not find it particularly threatening. At a glance, it seems that this society bears no discrimination towards lesbians, but there is actually a lot of people who discriminate towards them. Thus, because there is no distinctive discrimination that takes place upon seeing male homosexuals but rather a feint of ignorance at their existence (should we say they get to be ignored?), there is a deep-seated misconception that lesbians who actually go about their lives as such live in total comfort.

However, let’s say for argument’s sake that society gives into the fact that lesbians (meaning lesbians get to be ignored like gay men) – this would be seen as having a positive effect on lesbians themselves. It would not be necessary to explicitly advocate that “lesbians exist in this society,” and if they just hid themselves away quietly they could live together as couples or in a lesbian community without a single peep from anyone else. If this were the case, couldn’t you say that lesbians living hidden away from society don’t really face any problems?

I don’t think we can say this at all. “Feigning ignorance” ends up driving lesbians into a psychological corner, and the weight of “hiding away” would certainly cast a shadow over their state of mind and daily lives. At the very least, this has been my experience.

Where the heavy pressure of “hiding away” shows itself

I think that where tacit “lesbian discrimination and hatred” exerts its influence most is actually within the hearts of lesbians themselves. The form of lesbian discrimination that isn’t ostensibly visible in society is actually the first form that takes clear shape in the hearts of lesbians who are in a position to experience this and manifests its influence in lesbians’ everyday lives and behavior. Thus, lesbians who are on the verge of lesbian territory, or in other words, lesbians who are trying to create intimate interpersonal relationships with other women take a great blow. However, because the area that is
affected by this is ultimately a private area in people’s lives, it’s difficult to argue that this comes from the influence of societal lesbian discrimination and lesbian hatred. These are said to be a matter of problems within individual relationships or even problems with one’s personality, in no way related to the environment surrounding a relationship – for these reasons it is extremely likely for people to claim there is no lesbian hatred or discrimination in this society.

However, societal lesbian discrimination and hatred has a daily influence on the way individual lesbians think, behave, and construct their relationships. In other words, discrimination and hatred towards lesbians does exist in this society. In this environment, neither “lesbian” existence or lesbians themselves can be affirmed. While lesbians in their “present form” remain unable to be affirmed without reservation, they still have to live their lives and maintain relationships with other people.

JoAnn Loulan, a therapist who has published several works on the issues surrounding lesbian sexuality, says:

“In the hearts of all of us (lesbians) is a uniform part that believes ‘lesbians have an inferior existence.’ No matter how enjoyable a life we lead, how highly we think of ourselves, who we love or who we are loved by, every last one of us carries an inner homophobia (hatred for homosexuals) that envelops our being.

Supposing that we do not talk about the homophobia that lives within us, we will act as though all of these problems exist beyond ourselves. We talk about how “if only everyone in the world would behave alike, we would all find happiness.” However, there is honestly a way to find more happiness even now, in this place. We can find it by taking a better look at who we are grappling with in our hearts” (“Lesbian Passion”, spinsters/aunt lute, 1987).

I wonder what sort of pain lesbians have suffered in living so many years having “it’d be in your best interest to hide yourself away” whispered to them. At the same time, I wonder what kind of influence the discrimination and hatred towards lesbians that have been sowed in the hearts of lesbians for years has had on them. I get the feeling that if we don’t make this clear, even lesbian relationships will not be able to be freed from the influence of ignorance and hatred towards homosexuals sustained in this social environment. Of course, because there is a direct link between the hatred for lesbians we carry within ourselves and the hatred for lesbians in society, this is by no means a problem that can be resolved by changing one person.

What significance does hiding away from society have for lesbians?

Lying to others and lying to ourselves
The first and foremost is that hiding away from society perpetuates the deception of those around us. Continuing to refer to those we’d like to call “lovers” as “just a friend” and keeping our manners of speech and attitudes reserved in the public eye means continuing to behave as though we don’t participate in any relationships. Sometimes we refer to people who are women with the pronoun “he” to fit into the conversation with surrounding heterosexuals. Creating a completely isolated relationship with just two people in a place detached from surrounding relationships is a form of hiding as well.

For better or for worse, there is a (heterosexual) custom in Japanese society to separate one’s relationships with friends and one’s relationship with a lover (of the opposite sex) or one’s married partner. People don’t bring their “lover” along when they go out with friends, nor do they have friends tag along when they do something with their “lover.” Because being “boyfriend and girlfriend” is an exclusive relationship, it’s always seen as a matter of being one-on-one (there are times when someone might have multiple “lovers” with whom they go out with, but this is a denomination of being “boyfriend and girlfriend”). Because of this, if a lesbian refers to her “lover” with the pronoun “he” to fit into the conversation, it’s not so hard to keep this ruse up. If she’s lucky, “he” (her undercover woman) won’t accidentally run into her friends, but even if they do meet, this woman won’t be understood as the “he” starring in her stories. She could also use the method of mixing this woman’s identity up as one of her “lover’s” friends.

However, it’s not as though consciously keeping up with a huge lie and hiding a big part of yourself from all the people around you, including your blood relatives, won’t have any effect on your mind. Consciously deceiving those around you, not to mention consciously lying to yourself, is a heavy burden. Nevertheless, we hide and lie because only we lesbians know that being on the receiving end of gossip from people who know you’re a lesbian, losing faith in the people around you, and the possibility of being disowned will bring on nothing but negative outcomes, especially as “women.” It’s not because someone explained this to us, but rather that we came to this conclusion ourselves and conduct ourselves accordingly as it becomes a huge pressure on our lives.

This society has a semblance of open-mindedness towards lesbians, but lesbians themselves know that on the flip side is a hatred towards them. Therefore, they can’t help but try and avoid confronting this hatred. Whether it’s absolutely necessary for lesbians to hide away because they’re lesbians is a matter of discrimination, and no matter how strongly we believe that this isn’t our fault, realistically, if we don’t hide away, we’ll be exposed to the scrutiny of prejudice, discrimination and
curiosity. We are accustomed to understanding that this is the sort of treatment “lesbian” existence receives. Thus, we hide.

In doing so, we are tormented by a dilemma – we hide away without being able to tell anyone because of our guilty conscience or perhaps because we think that no matter how seriously we explain ourselves, we will not be understood (so we decide to say nothing), but in the end, isn’t this why no one understands us? Despite that the power to make lesbians think this way exists outside of lesbians, because of its invisibility, lesbians find this reasoning in their own hearts. In doing so, a lesbian who has been tainted with the repugnant effects of internalizing this societal discrimination and hatred towards lesbians ends up with a psychological influence from said hatred. Moreover, it casts its influence on the relationships this individual makes. This is one form taken on by the subtle hatred for homosexuality that surrounds homosexuals.

While this influence lives on in the minds of individual lesbians, society’s direct involvement is not visible, so people who aren’t lesbians usually don’t understand that hatred towards lesbians exists in this society. It is frequently said that this society is open-minded towards lesbians and that lesbians feel guilty (about being a lesbian) entirely of their own accord, as though they put themselves into these circumstances of not being able to tell other people. However, that’s simply impossible.

**That which creates isolation and enclosure**

Secondly, hiding oneself away means that one must solve all the problems that come up between two people on their own. This means two things – one, it’s relationships themselves that are blocked off, and two, lesbian problems are created from inner lesbian hatred sewn by societal lesbian hatred, but even between lesbians, these problems are furtively switched out for individual personality problems, and we fail to disentangle the two.

If you are a lesbian, you can’t just have a conversation with anyone about anything. Even if someone lets a lesbian vent about her frustrations over the lack of understanding about homosexuals the people around her have, whether this same woman can discuss these problems with her own partner is difficult to say. Even if this lesbian can keep up with the appearance of having such a conversation, it might be similar to heterosexuuals in that she may not have a conversation partner with whom she can talk about serious matters, but in her case, even if she considers her options of who she might talk to, her scope of choices is extremely limited. Even if she belongs to the lesbian community, it’s by no means a large-scale group, so she always runs the risk of her story being leaked to everyone in
the community. If she is not part of such a community and everyone she knows besides she and her partner are heterosexual, it’s just hopeless.

Heterosexuals live in a state of constantly going back and forth between communities. Friends from high school, friends from university, friends from work... because these communities don’t often come into contact with one another, it’s very easy to talk about what happened in one community to another. If you talk to someone who isn’t related to the community you live in, someone with no concern about whether the conversation will be leaked into their present community, it becomes possible to hear the opinion of someone that differs completely from your own.

However, because they have to hide from society, this sort of decision is difficult for lesbians. Even if a heterosexual is ostensibly affiliated with a number of communities, they can’t have conversations about “homosexual” problems within them. Having said that, within the lesbian community, the scope of serious discussions is far too narrow. There’s no guarantee that your two-person relationship won’t fall into a suffocating, occluded state.

However, Japanese society is characteristic of having no shortage of occluded relationships, even between heterosexuals. As opposed to two lesbians having very little possibility of being understood as “lovers” even within a women’s group, if a heterosexual man and woman are together, even if they don’t see themselves this was, the people around them will view them as “lovers.” Thus, since these two are really “lovers” or something, “not bothering the two” becomes the code of conduct for the people around them to follow. It’s the same as with the heterosexual “husband and wife” – because society in Japan is based on same sex groups, a man and woman duo are separated from same sex groupings. Rooted in this attitude, sex – something assumed to necessarily take place between one man and one woman – is naturally taboo and discriminated against.

Is a “couple’s world” really a happy one?

Moreover, it’s common in Japanese society for the people surrounding an intimate relationship not to have a serious attitude towards problems that arise within that relationship. Sayings such as “even a dog wouldn’t involve itself with a lover’s quarrel” and “fighting is just a testament to how close you are” symbolize this attitude. This consciousness that exists throughout the whole of society causes not only the people outside of the relationship in which problems are occurring but even the people within that relationship to leave their problems up in the air – even in heterosexual relationships. As for homosexuals, just because they are homosexuals does not necessarily mean they flee from this custom. Even homosexuals are convinced that shutting oneself up in a two-person relationship is the height of happiness.
However, detaching yourself from everything outside of a two-person relationship by hiding yourself behind closed doors will have more than a few consequences on the relationship itself. I’m talking about blindly depending on your partner with an unquestioning faith in your relationship. In the circumstances where what ought to be a mirror (the relationships that other people have) that objectively reflects our own relationships is completely invisible, we become victim to the illusion that our relationships don’t need to be examined with rational eyes and won’t be broken up even if we don’t put any effort into them. Without this illusion, we would be too scared to continue being in a relationship.

The fact that problems that occur because of being a lesbian or the problems that are caused by “being in an intimate relationship with a woman” can only be grappled with inside a closed-off two-person relationship ends up warping lesbian relationships. When two same-sex “women” think they might like to have an intimate relationship with one another, they start having to carry the many problems forced onto women into the relationship. They’re “lovers” at the same time as they are “good friends,” as well as “friends who openly express to one another their frustrations with surrounding prejudice towards lesbians” and “counsellors to solve the psychological distress that comes from being a lesbian” – even though it’s unreasonable to want just one person for all of this, lesbians live in a situation where they can’t help but do this.

In this way, although I said before that they are similarly closed-off, the nature of the occlusion among heterosexual “lovers” or “spouses” is completely different from that of lesbians. Heterosexuals have “lover” or “spousal” relationships because their daily lives are founded on their affiliation with “same-sex friend groups.” In the case of heterosexuals, it’s typical for the roles of “good friend” and “counsellor” to exist beyond the scope of a two-person relationship (conversely, there are times where this causes a loss of substance within a “lover” or “spousal” relationship).

**Is it a couple’s problem or society’s problem?**

Apart from the effects of hiding away, having to solve the issues that arise in a relationship all on one’s own creates yet another problem. Among all the issues in a two-person relationship, problems that should have clearly been caused by this society’s hatred towards lesbians and from the hatred lesbians carry within themselves become invisible. In other words, we are convinced that those problems which certainly shouldn’t be solvable by two people alone are our own internal problems that we must bear ourselves. This is the most extreme case of “the closing-off of relationships” I spoke about moments ago. If a relationship is warped by relying on its two people to take everything on themselves,
what must be fixed is the original cause, the environment itself that surrounds all the problems this
couple has to bear. Moreover, if women who are lesbians keep stockpiling negative feelings about
themselves and losing their sense of confidence by growing up in an environment where lesbian
discrimination and hatred are deep-seated, then we need to solve the issue of society itself.

However, as things are now, those who are made to bear the duty of fixing these problems are
lesbians themselves, the recipients of the damage these problems induce. The people surrounding
lesbians and society as a whole do not even realize that they have a responsibility in this. Thus, when
lesbians try to help their situation and express “I am a lesbian,” they must confront the people around
them as well as society in one way or another.

It’s not even necessary to use such abstract language as “confront.” For example, if a couple
wants to consult other people – who are not necessarily lesbians – about problems within that
relationship, the couple must clarify “we are both women.” Saying this to others will break down “the
closing-off of relationships” and the couple will acquire that mirror through which they can view their
relationship objectively. On the other hand, they’ll have to be resigned to the possibility of directly
facing discrimination or hatred.

Revealing that you are a lesbian to the people around you is no easy task. No matter how fair a
person they usually are, their feelings in regards to “homosexuality” will not necessarily follow the same
decency. Sometimes you can be betrayed by the expectation that “as long as it’s this person, everything
will be okay.” The cliché “please don’t hit on me” (perhaps the people who say this are joking), reacting
with “gross!”, eyes brimming with curiosity, behaving like they’re deliberately trying to avoid the topic,
being strangely distant, behaving anxiously… which result would get you to gather your courage and say
“I’m dating a woman”? If it’s not because you want to struggle against discrimination and prejudice, is it
just because you want to talk about your relationship with a woman and get someone else’s opinion? Is
it just because you wanted to know what that person thinks about “lesbian existence,” or because you
wanted their opinion on “what you’re distressed about”?

The attitudes of surrounding heterosexuals are often sufficient cause for lesbians to have to
choose this stance:

“Even if you tell a heterosexual, it doesn’t mean they’ll understand it at first. If that’s the case,
you may as well not tell anyone.”

Does this mean to say that only a few bad reactions will cause you despair? But to a
homosexual, even if there are only a couple of cases like this, that’s sufficient cause to worry. Even just
deciding to inform your “best friend” that you’re a homosexual, a person with whom you’ve been freely
sharing other stories, actually takes a very long time. Moreover, the person you think you “might tell” is certainly not going to be someone with no relationship to you, but rather a person you’re fairly friendly with in some other area. What if that person starts keeping you at a distance because of your “homosexuality”? In this respect, being able to live together comfortably, not thinking about things like changing the minds of the people around you, and resigning yourselves to a closed-off, two-person relationship seems pretty cushy.

The third problem with lesbians having to hide from the surface of society is when someone in a two-person relationship has decided they don’t want to be shut away anymore, which can create a psychological imbalance in the relationship. Naturally, that imbalance will shake the relationship and make it unstable.

Even if you say “I will not go on hiding,” it may not mean much – this is really a measure of the couple’s attitude toward their mutual heterosexual friends. Let’s say one of them decides to tell a friend that their relationship is more than just “friends.” If they do that, the other person can’t hide anymore, whether they like it or not. This creates an intense psychological pressure for the one who hasn’t decided to tell this friend.

The one who decided “it’s not necessary for us to hide anymore” has a feeling of dissatisfaction with the other person’s mindset that they should be hiding even when there’s nothing to worry about. Although they understand that “it’ll be okay if we tell people,” it’s only natural that they can’t take on a completely different attitude towards the people around them than the one they had yesterday. However, the person who won’t speak up even when they are able will accept the uncertainty of the person who could speak up and say “but in the end, don’t you think we have to hide?” The root of the problem is in “being convinced that we have to hide,” but even in these cases this problem is difficult to see and just seems like trouble for a relationship, even to the people involved.

Societal lesbian hatred and discrimination are constantly interfering with lesbian relationships. Since even lesbians themselves are tainted by this same hatred and discrimination towards lesbians, it’s tough to be certain how much of this is sewn by society and how much is due to individual personality. Regardless, I think that working to understand to what degree societal lesbian hatred stains us and to what degree our individual behavior and thinking affects is of critical significance.

Even if we were to decide to try and change society as a whole (and I know that’s a vague way to put it), there is no clear starting point to be found. On top of being “women,” we are also “lesbians,” and
thus we are treated as nothing more than “futile things,” or “things that shouldn’t exist.” Because of this, if we decide to tell others “I’m a lesbian” at work or school, the subsequent pain from hushed gossip and scorn we can’t fight back against hurts us even more than that found in blatant discrimination, and we the lesbians are left as the only ones feeling that we can’t remain in this place anymore.

**The significance of saying “I am a lesbian”**

What purpose lies in the act of announcing “I am a lesbian” to those around in the first place? “Lesbian” is neither a title nor an emblem of ideology. Ultimately, “lesbian” is nothing more than a vague word that summarizes women who want intimate relationships with people of their same sex and women who decide to have these relationships.

I can’t generalize everything about two “women” who are intimate with one another, nor everything these women do. I also can’t generalize what “lesbians,” as the antithesis of what is thought to be “normal,” currently think of “men and women.” Two “women” who make up a relationship are nothing more than two individual people with their own unique characteristics – therefore, their relationship has its own distinctive personality that doesn’t resemble any other. What is important to this couple – to “lesbians” who are also lumped in with being “women” – is not whether they can be verbally referred to as “lesbians,” but simply the inner workings of the relationships they have. Therefore, it’s really quite unrealistic to profess “I’m a lesbian” to everyone. In reality, the only way people profess this is by saying “the most important person to me is a woman named so and so,” “I think I want to have an intimate relationship with a woman” or “I’m attracted to women.” Despite this, however, saying “I’m a lesbian” is of crucial importance right now. It’s essential to protect our relationships from the main causes that try to warp them, namely the variety of external social matters that infiltrate a two-person relationship whether they like it or not. It’s crucial to prevent the theft of the most important right to lesbians – the right to keeping their privacy from interference.

However, this fight is by no means something to write off, assuming that the people around you are “discriminators towards homosexuals.” Professing “I’m a lesbian” is not a test of allegiance you walk around with and hand out in order to get rid of the heretics. I think not trying to change the thinking of those around you by professing yourself and not trying to change the person who is otherwise your heterosexual “best friend” is to ultimately perish within the confines of a closed-off relationship. I may be talking about myself here, but for a long time I felt prejudiced that “heterosexuals won’t understand me anyway.” I still feel this. However, I think even that prejudice is no less a product of societal hatred towards lesbians, and is nothing more than prejudice towards lesbians flipped inside out.
At times, I’m asked by homosexuals “why do you explain yourself to heterosexuals in such a kind way?” But the thing is, until I fully recognized that I was a lesbian in my twenties, I found myself telling heterosexuals whenever I was with them about “the woman I love” without knowing why. Wherever the boundary line may have been between heterosexuals and homosexuals was not that big a deal for me, and it’s still not that big a deal. What matters is the two kinds of relationships that hold great significance to me – the first being the relationship with the woman I care most for, and the second being simply how I go about having relationships with the many people who matter to me, regardless of whether they are heterosexuals or homosexuals. Of course, for that reason, I have to grapple with the hatred towards lesbians in my own heart and the hatred towards lesbians I see around me.

There is one more part in the JoAnn Loulan book that I’d like to borrow a quote from. Isn’t distrust towards other humans exactly what lesbians have to battle with as they live their lives? Even if look back at the scars from all the years the hearts of lesbians have been inundated with hatred, continuing with the refrain “the reason I became who I am is entirely society’s responsibility, so society ought to be changed” doesn’t mean that anything will actually end up changing.

“But these kind of people are among us. We say ‘I fear losing my family (because I’m a lesbian)’ and the like. But just hold on a second. You’re already losing your family. When you’re not even honest with your own family, they’ve already stopped being your family” (from the aforementioned work).

Of course, this does not mean lesbians are the only ones who should be honest.
The Possibility of “Two Women”

Between two women, you and I

Intimate relationships between lesbians are framed by society and are always being affected by the influence of lesbian hatred in that society. However, this does not automatically mean that all of them are warped by this influence. No matter how strongly lesbian hatred has taken root in our own hearts, by no means does that imply that we do not have a way to shake this hatred off. This is because “lesbian” existence does not just refer to one person living in this society.

A “relationship” is created between yourself and someone who is not you, so it simply cannot be created by you alone. The only card you play in a relationship is “yourself,” but the card you play mingles with the “other person’s” card, and ends up coming back to your hand more or less transformed. As long as you have some kind of relationship with another woman besides yourself, or you at least think you’d like to have such a relationship, anyone has the opportunity to change you – regardless of whether it’s in a good way or a bad way.

When a woman thinks she’d like to have an intimate relationship, not with a man but with a woman, she confronts discrimination and hatred. However, that same woman also reaps all the pleasures – the physical and emotional benefits – that come from a relationship with another person when she feels a desire to have an intimate relationship with a woman and not a man. The discrimination and homophobia lesbians are inundated with from the outside as well as the hatred for homosexuals that these lesbians have internalized are in constant conflict with their feelings of “desire for relationships with other people.”

Let’s say that two people have a relationship – for the sake of convenience, we’ll say this is a one-on-one relationship – consisting of “two women” instead of “a man and a woman,” and they are able to ignore the societal influence that surrounds lesbians. What significance does this relationship carry? Is it any different from that of “a man and a woman” relationship? If it differs, how so?

I can’t make suppositions for anyone else but myself in regards to this question. I can only speak to my own experience.

Vastly different from “a man” and “a woman”

First, if we take an external look at everyday life, I think that being a “two women” and being “a man and a woman” differ quite a bit. Firstly, while even everyday life is influenced by societal elements
in the end, compared to a relationship between a person raised as a “woman” in this society and a person raised as a “man,” a relationship where both parties have been raised as “women” will contain fewer differences between each woman. This is not to say that they will be more similar, but that they will have fewer differences. The way “women” are raised in this society and the way “men” are raised in this society are far too different.

Men must protect women, and women must be protected by men. Men obviously dislike housework, but women must never dislike housework. Men are the ones who fight day in and day out to acquire social status, money, honor, and “women.” Women are the ones who help out in the shadow of a strong man, satisfied with the task of guarding the home… women are feminine and men are masculine, or so most Japanese people have been taught since childhood.

For example, according to data from a survey comparing the attitudes of Japanese parents to the attitudes of parents in America, the Philippines, England, West Germany, and Sweden, the parents who think “it’s best for boys to be brought up as masculine and girls to be brought up as feminine” make up 63% of parents in Japan, whereas 31% of American parents think this way. The stats for the other countries were 28%, 20%, 20%, and 6% respectively, a great deal less than Japan. On the other hand, the answer “it’s best to raise them similarly, without discrimination” was chosen by 62% of American parents, and 67%, 76%, 75%, and 92% of parents in the other respective countries. Japan had the fewest parents opting for this answer, offering an extremely low 34% (Women’s Data-book, previously cited).

Furthermore, according to this same text, the “masculinity” and “femininity” Japanese parents strived for referred to being “docile” and “sympathetic” for girls, and being “self-responsible,” “sympathetic” and “independent enough to do things alone without asking for help from others” for boys. The number of parents who wanted their girl to be “independent enough to do things alone without asking for help from others” compared to those who wanted their boy to be that way were particularly low – about half – as were the number of parents who wanted their girl to have a “robust ability to make their own living” compared to those who wanted their boy to have that ability – about one fifth. The effect of being raised based on these parental attitudes is that there are extreme differences between the “men” and “women” that have been shaped by this society. Thus, for a man and a woman to create a relationship and overcome this mountain of roles assigned to the “man” and the “woman” seems pretty difficult, as far as the people around me go. It seems difficult to be self-aware of any underlying attribute, let alone being self-aware of the “masculinity” and “femininity” that has been planted in your head for more than twenty years. The men and women I know are firmly
conscious in their attempt to overcome the roles ingrained in their upbringing. Even so, most people struggle with this task.

As an example, let’s consider housework and managing personal care. In some heterosexual relationships, the woman does (can do) minimal housework, but if the man doesn’t do (can’t do) more than her, doing housework is either a part of her personality or the reason for her upbringing as a “woman.” That this man does less (can’t do as much) housework compared to the woman is either because of his personality or because he was taught that, as a “man,” it’s okay for him not to do housework. Because men and women aren’t raised to do (to be able to do) the bare minimum personal care in the same way, in just this one example of taking care of oneself, we can see the differences in the effects of being raised as a “man” and being raised as a “woman” in the long run. This is a massive discrepancy.

When a couple thinks they’ll overcome these differences, the woman ends up paying the price of those who raised the man failing to teach him about housework. The ability to take care of yourself is not a natural ability but rather a skill acquired in the process of growing, and that process can’t occur without being taught by others. Even if you’re a woman, if you weren’t routinely instructed by your parents to help out with housework, you will not retain these skills. Even if you’re a man, if you helped out with the housework since you were little, you will master the basics of these skills.

A place where “femininity” isn’t compulsory

Now, how about my own case? Simply being “two women” doesn’t mean you’ll be free just like that from the curse of “femininity” that has enveloped you for so many years. As long as the societal grounds on which such a couple has been raised are confined to this country’s so-called “Japanese” household, they are not particularly different from that of a “man and a woman.” Therefore, the reason that women must be feminine cannot be found in a relationship created between “two women” more than any other relationship.

This is because women are told “Be feminine!” in this society, seen as nothing more than objects to be protected by “men” and to be married to “men.” Therefore, once you’re told to “be feminine,” the implicit fear that “if I don’t act that way, no one will want to marry me” will begin to grow. However, if they don’t feel it’s necessary for men to give them sanctuary, society’s compulsory “femininity” as well as any “femininity” that is more or less conscious of the male gaze will stop having any meaning for women. Of course, there are times when you might adorn yourself with something that looks the same as “femininity” at first glance for the sake of yourself and other women (it seems even heterosexual
women do this for themselves at times). But this is different from the various displays of “femininity” used to butter up men. Inside a relationship between a “two women,” there is no need to interpret that as “femininity.” This is nothing more than “that person’s way of being herself” manifesting itself in the relationship.

The power of distancing yourself from the compulsion of “femininity” depends on the differences between individual personalities and each individual relationship between “two women.” Even if I were to make aimless comparisons between the relationships of people around me and my own, the forms of those relationships are quite diverse, and I feel that the sole commonality among “two women” relationships is that “within the relationship, the partners are barely conscious of being a woman.” If we compare this “a man and a woman,” where a partner is always conscious of the different sex to which they belong to, we can see an important distinction. As far as the interior of a relationship between “two women” goes, they almost never have to consciously confront the fact that they are both “women.” This is the basic premise of not having to be aware.

If I consider my own case as a woman and being conscious that those I desire to have intimate relationships with are women, I’m personally only occasionally exposed to the images of “lesbians” in this society and the prejudice towards them. Even those moments when I am conscious of being a “lesbian” are limited to when I’m exposed to society’s discriminatory position that seeks to differentiate homosexuals and heterosexuals. Because the word “lesbian” is something that is used by the outside looking in on me and my relationships, when I just think about myself as a woman, I don’t consciously think “I am a lesbian.” The same goes for being a “woman.”

This is the case especially for situations like that of heterosexuals and “housework” I mentioned earlier. In my own case, I’m a cleaning freak, a laundry freak, and I love to cook. Furthermore, I’m not bothered by doing these things for other people while I’m at it. But if I don’t want to do these things or I can’t do them, there’s no way I’m doing it. Maybe that’s because of how I was raised, but I dare say it’s probably my personality.

Housework could almost be categorized as a “hobby” for me and it could continue to be labeled as such in the context of a relationship with another woman. This is because I don’t get the feeling “I have to do housework because I’m a woman” when I’m with another woman. At the same time, this other woman (or these other women) does not have a deep-seated attitude of “taking for granted that someone else should be taking care of me” (although maybe a handful of elite people are actually like this). Because they are my friend and because we have an intimacy beyond that of a friend, that I should do the housework is not something they expect as a given. No one forces this. Even for me, when I don’t
feel like going about my “hobby,” there is no circuit where I get upset that the other woman doesn’t do it for me. If they did, I’d be happy, but it’s not something I’d take for granted.

Similarly, among women who were raised to believe that “housework is something women do,” whether they’re cut out for it or not, whether they like it or dislike it, and whether they’re neat or messy are matters to be evaluated through the basic differences in individual people’s personalities. They are also matters of how individual people reach agreement in these areas.

**Do lesbians do work based on gender role?**

So, if the differences between two women are visible on the surface, what happens then? For example, what if I didn’t like cleaning and laundry and cooking as much as I do, and I lived with a woman who says she won’t do them either? I think I would certainly clean, do laundry and cook to the extent that I want to. Furthermore, making one dinner for two people is more efficient, and it’s best for a person not to mind their own towel being thrown in with all the other laundry in one washer so as not to waste money on electricity. So, I would do relatively more housework than her. If this were the case, is this “two women” copying what society calls “division of labor between a man and a woman based on gender”?

I don’t think we can call it that. If we apply this society’s division of labor based on gender roles, there’s no doubt that I, the one who does the housework, would likely be called the “wife,” and the one who doesn’t would likely be called the “husband.” However, this is completely different from “division of labor between a man and a woman based on gender” because we are not a “man and a woman.” If it was bothersome or I was busy with other work, I would probably abandon the housework and be able to do so. It would not be possible for the woman I’m living with to criticize me not doing the housework by saying “but that’s your job!” because she is not a “man” who was taught growing up that “housework is a woman’s duty.” Furthermore, I don’t know whether she would do that same amount of housework I’d been doing just because I stopped, and I don’t think I would throw it back in her face that she “should do the same amount as I usually do,” even if I said, “I don’t feel well today, so I want you to cook my meals.” Again, this is does not mean I’m doing the housework with the mindset that “because I’m a woman, I always have to cook the meals.”

**Heterosexuals who can’t remove themselves from their sex**

When your relationship consists of “two women” and not “a man and a woman,” no matter what roles you assign to each other, those roles come from each other’s individual personality, which is characteristically different from that which is forced upon you because of your own “sex.” The normal
roles assigned to “men and women” in this society are based on “sex” and consistently ignore individual personality. In this way, these roles are affixed as “men’s work” and “women’s work.” Thus, even if the role assigned to you because of your sex doesn’t fit in with your personality, if you try to adapt to the system of society you can’t separate yourself from that role. In heterosexual relationships, if not just the woman but the man tries distancing himself from his assigned role within society’s system and his own relationship, he must put enormous effort into this feat.

However, if the couple consists of “two women,” it’s not nearly as difficult to remove themselves from those roles as it is for “a man and a woman,” even if they allocate their share of assigned labor based on personality just once. Their roles are not something based solely on and attached to sex because they’re simply allotted to specific individuals in a one-on-one relationship. Obviously, if you are unable to recognize that “the roles I’ve taken on don’t suit me,” you won’t be able to want to remove yourself from them, but if you set your mind to this separation, it becomes a possibility. Furthermore, whether you choose to remove yourself from these roles or not, unlike in heterosexual relationships, the power of those outside the relationship to try and assign certain roles to each person is gone from the start. The ones who decide who plays what role and assigns them are yourselves. If you like, you can even play out both your roles like the heterosexual “husband and wife,” and if you want to stop, you can always stop. Of course, you also don’t have to emulate anyone.

In my own case, I never think it’s possible to create a “perfectly egalitarian relationship” when I’m with another person, particularly in the realm of everyday life. It’s not realistic to split all the housework and the income down the middle, and I feel as though being overly aware of “equality” might create even more of a mental burden. When both people are women, since one does not depend on the other in everyday life simply because “she is a woman,” all that’s needed in the relationship is someone who can do what she can when she can. However, with a “man/woman” situation, this is something to be discussed after breaking down their “division of labor roles based on gender.” First, the woman should try and become able to support the lifestyle she wants through working, and the man should try to at least master the skills needed to take care of himself. Of course, I’m not denying that reforming their social surroundings is also necessary in order to make this a possibility...

...after writing the above sentence, I suddenly realized something. Because acquiring the economic support of a “man” necessitates some level of renunciation, lesbians are left with no choice but to acquire the income needed to live their lives. Isn’t it exactly because they aim to be economically self-sufficient that they do not depend on and aren’t made to depend on other people’s money and livelihoods? Because they don’t take any money and no one pays their cost of living for them, they don’t
owe their partner anything until they just can’t take it anymore. However, I can’t say for sure that all lesbians seek economic independence.

The fight against the “woman” complex

On one hand, even in the case of “two women,” there is still conflict within the process of how they were raised as “women” and the effects that stem from such an upbringing. Because this relationships consists of two women raised as so-called “Japanese girls” in Japan, some of the various problems that come with being a “woman” will fail to be obscured. However, “a man and a woman” likely can’t help but turn a blind eye to the differences they have based on sex (although even most of these differences are probably based on the way they were raised).

For example, I’m very assertive. I think that in and of itself is a matter of individual personality rather than being a man or a woman. However, the main source of this personality is the term “unfeminine” that others have labeled me with, particularly in elementary and middle school (this may be an exceptional case within Japanese society, but my parents pretty much never said this sort of stuff to me). When I asserted myself, what I spoke my mind about wasn’t taken seriously and I was called “unfeminine” and “sassy.” It wasn’t the content of what I was expressing, but rather being assertive itself that made others uncomfortable. Even since puberty, I’ve heard this word many a time. I’ve come to think that having this criticism of “being assertive = being unfeminine” thrown in my face everywhere I go has made me afraid to assert myself, particularly in one-on-one relationships.

Furthermore, I’m not what you’d call a “beautiful person.” Because I now understand that the standard for a “beautiful person,” such as for those who appear in “beauty pageants,” is arbitrary and one-sided, I don’t have much of a complex about. However, this didn’t used to be the case. One one hand, due to my complex about my appearance, I didn’t believe there was any other way for me to seek out self-fulfillment other than through my grades and asserting myself, but I think I always had a double complex because this method for self-fulfillment was “unfeminine.” Behaving endearingly despite not being beautiful, marrying a man and supporting him from the sidelines... these were the kinds of methods that people seriously thought were the way to “feminine” self-realization until around high school. In any case, when I was still hearing things like “you’re not being feminine” and “what’s the ugly girl saying now?” despite how good my grades were and how right I may have been in what I was saying, once I began to understand that nothing I did was going to be approved of, I headed away from the direction of what I was told was the only possibility (getting married and giving my all to my husband).
In the end, when I only focused on achieving good grades and others things that the people around me could see, I also was firmly convinced that “because I’m not feminine and I’m not beautiful, there’s no way I could ever have a relationship like they do” when it came to the relationships between my close friends, such as one-on-one intimate relationships. Then again, I also convinced myself that a “prince on a white horse” (a “princess,” perhaps?) would someday come and save me from it all.

The source of this complex about “not being feminine” was simply the work of the boys around me telling me to my face that I was unfeminine, as well as my simultaneous concern for what the boys I liked thought of me. However, a complex will warp a person’s whole character, bit by bit. My conviction that I would never be able to date boys, let alone date girls because of my unfemininity has extended itself into all my one-on-one relationships with others.

In my twenties, I finally grew able to have the sort of relationship I wanted with other women – in other words, I was able to have that kind of relationship with another person for the first time – but first I had to overcome this complex.

If the person I ended up meeting had been any different and fulfilled my fantasy of a “princess on a white horse,” I may have continued living without confronting my warped interior. Of course, this cannot be the foundation for problem-solving, but even if we each had fantasies about one another like my fantasy of “passionate love,” such a love only lasts for a set, sufficient period. However, the lucky thing for me was that the person who appeared in my life was no “princess on a white horse.” The circumstances arose where I had no choice but to confront the warping of my personality that came from the complex I fostered ever since being told I was “unfeminine.”

Being clingy towards your partner, feeling uneasy without constant validation that their feelings for you won’t change, and an indescribable dissatisfaction in desiring change for some aspect of the relationship... in a relationship where “feminine personality and behavior” bears no meaning, I sought the source of these behaviors and saw them as nothing more than faults that needed to be overcome. At the very least, the woman I was dating and I often interpreted these behaviors as “the endearing nature of women” and “the vulnerability of women,” but we didn’t approve of it. Moreover, this woman herself had more or less the same faults as a result of being raised as a “woman.” In my eyes, whether I liked it or not, my faults could only be seen as faults.

I no longer think we can call the traits I referred to as faults stemming entirely from being raised as a “woman” or originating from the complexes that came up throughout my life. I also have a personality which has become entangled with a variety of other experiences, so there’s no doubt that these problems have taken root inside of me. However, I think another side to this was that not sensing
my passivity and lack of autonomy ended up making those feelings manifest in a more exacerbated (although somewhat different) form with that woman. In this way, didn’t we grow as we were stripped of the influence being raised as “women” through the positivity and autonomy of the environment around us?

Of course, I by no means think the way men are raised today is a good thing. If you’re raised as a “man” in this society, you’re compelled to be an assertive person who has the power to protect women whether you think it’s unreasonable or not. People don’t pay attention to this in a relationship with a man who has been raised this way or in a relationship with a woman who was raised to practically kill herself for her relationships with others because the negative influences of being raised as “masculine” and “feminine” cancel each other out. This conflict won’t necessarily become a problem in a situation with “two women,” but it became one in my case.

Being a “lesbian” was certainly one of the contributing factors to my worsening complex. I don’t know what would have happened if I could have gotten a girlfriend, but while I was despairing that everyone around me was heterosexual, I could not help but be attracted to heterosexual women. Even then, a complex like the one I had towards men made its appearance. Just because men aren’t a part of the equation doesn’t that mean “beauty or lack thereof” isn’t a value that matters among women. The standard of beauty that men created permeates the basic values of women, too, and is by no means easy to escape. As long as the value of what we call “femininity” is not present in a relationship where the roles of “masculinity” and “femininity” are assigned, it won’t hold any meaning for a relationship between women, but I don’t think that has anything to do with appearance. In fact, even if you’re not a homosexual, there are many cases where “looks” are relevant, and situations where a woman’s “looks” are used to berate her are by no means uncommon.

My “relationship” changed me

These varied complexes and distortions became rapidly clear to me once in the context of a relationship (of course, I’m not the only one with such complexes). Having a good deal of common ground with me, it seemed obvious to my partner that being raised as a so-called “traditional Japanese girl” was among the roots of my problems. Clarifying this as a problem meant making the decision either to solve it or pretend it didn’t exist, but that didn’t mean I couldn’t take on a so-what attitude and say there was nothing I could do about it, as these problems were shaped by past experiences and it would be troubling for my partner not to accept that about me.
However, the problems that started with my complexes surrounding “femininity” and the distortions that came from being a “lesbian” had blown to proportions difficult for even me to deal with. At this point, I’d already decided I am who I am and had stopped considering myself deviant. Redeeming my self-esteem that had been chipped away by the basic modern values of “femininity” and “looks,” acquiring the power to trust in myself and other people (although the first person I had to start with was the woman I was seeing) ...by doing these things, the confidence that I could have relationships with other people returned, and I built the foundation for independence and autonomy. I dare say these are labors that aren’t meant for your twenties. Through this work, I finally had a do-over of my “adolescence.”

The fruits of these labors did not solve all our problems. However, I broke out of my usual state in which I kept most of my issues hidden deep inside of me where they manifested as distortions and brought them back into the light of day as “problems to solve.” If problems give themselves away to you and you understand that they’re problems, you’re just short of being able to solve them.

The reason I was able to do this work was by no means simply because I’m a woman and the person I was seeing was a woman. There were a number of basic factors permitting this, starting with our personalities. However, even though these factors were at play, I think that the person I was seeing was raised as a woman herself strongly influenced her ability to see through the baggage of my various complexes that came from being raised as a woman as well as her ability to identify those complexes as problems that needed to be addressed.

The luckiest thing that could have happened to me was not having the woman of my dreams come into my life, a “princess on a white horse” who would accept my faults and everything else about me. As I wrote earlier, this is because I now understand that the way to make a breakthrough, even amidst my variety of issues I had no clue how to tackle myself, is through relationships with other people. In these relationships, I could even change myself.

The possibility of a giving relationship

If we look at it from a psychological point of view, I think there is another way in which relationships between “two women” hold very different meaning than those between “a man and a woman” or even “two men.” In this society where women’s freedom and power is taken away relatively more often than men’s, being with a woman creates entirely different feelings and sensations for “me as a woman” than being with a man. Even when we take into account the differences between the
construction of Western European society and the construction of Japanese society, doesn’t the following statement apply to Japanese lesbians?

“In lesbian relationships, two potential ‘mothers’ and two ‘young girls’ exist in the same scenario. In each of these relationships, the two are loved by their partner, taken care of by their partner, accepted by their partner, and approved of by their partner, offering themselves to one another as the girls they yearn for... However, in lesbian relationships, there is the possibility to love one another and nurture ‘the girl inside’ of one another. If you consider how they were raised to be nurturers and become ‘mothers,’ it’s not surprising that this relationship of mutual nurturing is created” (“Understanding Women – A Feminist Psychoanalytic Approach” Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach, translated by Osata Taeko and Osata Mitsunobu, Shinsui, 1988).

Women are still criticized for experiencing recognition as “an individual woman” in this society. Partial existences like being a “mother,” “wife,” “(cute) girl” (you can be this anywhere, even in the workplace), “(unfeminine) career woman,” or “prostitute” are possible, but being one woman equipped with a variety of parts is very difficult. It’s generally unacceptable for a woman to both love and be loved, take care of and be taken care of, accept others and be accepted, recognize others and be recognized by others, and want others and be wanted by others (obviously, the same goes for men. However, it’s relatively more acceptable for men to have freedom and power than for women. I’m not trying to say either men or women have it worse in this sense).

In these circumstances, I now feel that I’m in a place where I can acquire the means to do these things. When you’re “two women,” there’s not just one possibility for you. Certainly, the experience of being raised as a “woman” casts quite a shadow on me as well as the women I’m with. The negative influence of being raised to be the lover, caretaker, accepter, and approver surely affects us by making us feel that desiring these things from others is unacceptable. Furthermore, the experience of having possibilities taken away due to “being a woman” evokes a feeling of jealousy and wanted to interfere with other women’s independence and positive growth, not matter how much you try to deny or suppress it. However, although I think there’s only one, there is a good side to being raised as a “woman.”

That is the “emotional antenna” (phrase from aforementioned work) that I and the women I know were raised to have. Because of “the necessity for mothers to intuitively understand the messages and signals from a vulnerable and helpless baby who can’t speak,” “a part of girl’s lives is making preparations to acquire this ability,” (quoted from aforementioned work) so women are pressured into living a life fenced in by an “emotional antenna.” The original purpose of this antenna was to serve as
part of the growth process for women to develop the ability to put their own needs and desires aside to focus on the needs of men and children first.

It may be obvious, but both I and the women I’m with have similar antennae. The ability to sense what our partner is feeling, needing, or trying to do is something we both have acquired. If nothing else, there is no difference in how this ability interacts with men and women. If you just try not to reading too much into your partner’s feelings or let your own wrong assumptions pass you by, both of you will be able to sense each other’s usual feeling of being required to only provide for other people. It is not impossible to keep on acknowledging your partner’s existence while having your existence acknowledged, nor is it impossible to keep on fulfilling your partner’s needs while having your needs fulfilled.

Of course, this is not an impossibility between men and women. It’s just that, as it stands now, men are not raised to live their lives fenced in by an “emotional antenna.” In the present day, women are practically the only people who are educated to be “mothers” – even when they don’t have kids, they are “mothers” towards the “men” in their lives – but it would be good for men to receive a similar education as well. With this kind of education, perhaps women wouldn’t have such a disproportionately heavy pressure placed on them to take on the role of “mother.” Men and others would then be able to have “emotional antennae” (and then, perhaps, the word “mother” itself would lose its significance). I personally don’t think there’s any problem in women having this “emotional antenna” itself. Rather, there problem lies in the inequality between men and women where women are the only ones who have this ability for the sole purpose of mothering men and children.

**Enjoying a lack of “men”**

For me, a relationship made up of “two women” is a place where I can feel incredibly safe and liberated. For example, when I tried proving that “I am a heterosexual” during my adolescence so that I could date guys, the feeling of fear I had towards the boys I dated and the fear I occasionally have towards men even now is something I never experience when I’m facing a woman.

When it comes to the guys I used to date and the existence of “men,” I always feel I’m in a position of inferior power compared to them, or sometimes that I have a total lack of power. Even now, when I’m alone with a man I don’t know in an elevator or I’m on an empty street and a guy suddenly comes walking up behind me, I’m overcome with fear. Regardless of whether this is the case for individual men or not, I’m afraid that if I assert myself, “men” with more power than me might take action against me as a “woman” with no emotional or physical power. Just by ridiculing my womanhood
with a few words like “even though she’s a woman...” or “even though she’s ugly...”, men have the power to take my dignity from me, and they have done so in the past.

I hate the men who have used this power against me with all my heart, so I even get angry towards men I don’t know but am afraid of solely because they’re “men.” But no matter how I think about it, this fear towards men is not something that I can get rid of easily.

As long as I’m in a relationship with a woman, I’m detached from this feeling of fear and powerlessness. Neither I nor the women I’m with were raised to approve of the power a person exercises on others. Of course, I can’t assert that all women are just “women.” Regardless, because the women I’m with are “women,” the things that induce these fears in me – namely, if the person in front of me is a man, this is what initially sets off a variety of signs like bodily reactions and a different attitude – are completely absent, and I can feel liberated within those relationships.

In saying this, there’s no doubt that people who think that I’m a lesbian is a negative result of my “fear towards men” will eventually make their appearance. But I don’t think all women are unintimidating, and just because I’m not scared by women doesn’t mean I started liking them for that reason. First of all, I can’t speak to ever having an experience where other women showed me that they were my allies. So, because they’re different from me as “heterosexuals,” I’ve feared the existence of women I’m attracted to and the women around me. This is the case until I’m able to establish a sturdy, trustworthy relationship with most women, including heterosexuals.

Furthermore, even if this “fear towards men” was the reason for me being a lesbian, so what? What if women who feel a profound sense of loss in being a “mother” to men and children (and who aren’t necessarily lesbians) find that they feel restored to a position that isn’t entirely based on giving to others in relationships with other women? What if women who are afraid of emotional and physical violence are able to flee their sense of powerlessness and revive their sense of dignity in a relationship with another woman?

At any rate, these women are able to find salvation for themselves in these relationships. Regardless of whether you call this a relationship based on trust or a lesbian relationship, a woman in this situation has discovered new possibilities for herself in a personal relationship where she can make decisions. She knows that a door that leads to the possibility of being in a relationship made up of “two women” has opened before her very eyes. Even with this door open, she may return once again to a relationship that instills fear in her heart. However, she has found a place where she has experienced a renewal of power and can continue to regain her power. There is a big difference between being in circumstances where you are afraid of others but know that a relationship without fear is both possible
and attainable, and being afraid of others but not having this possibility. While in the former situation, a woman can at least be aware of this fear and has the power to keep her eye on what makes her afraid. She has the power to abandon this relationship that gives her fear. If she wants to, she always has this option.

But just because this relationship allows such a woman to feel liberated rather than powerless or fearful, it doesn’t mean that it will necessarily be a deeply intimate relationship between two people. I believe this kind of relationship can exist between lesbians, a heterosexual and a lesbian woman, or even two women who recognize that they are heterosexuals.

“Two women” as a treasure-trove of possibilities

For a long time, women themselves could not even consider a relationship between “two women.” The possibility for two women to share strong, intimate feelings that could be called “love,” “friendship,” or “a trustworthy relationship” was simply not an option for many, many years. So, in this long period where these relationships were left unconsidered and neglected, there was only one possible form of relationship between “two women.”

These days when the ways men and women are shaped and raised are so different, a woman’s ability to get things out of men is very limited. Even if a woman does happen get things out of a man, there’s no need to abandon what she can get out of a woman, nor convince herself that other women have nothing to offer her. It’s been very difficult for women to talk to one another without prejudice and try to understand each other because they’re restricted in a variety of ways and always being barred from getting to know other women outside of the confines of the “home” and “men.” Even though women distrust one another and think “other women have nothing to offer me,” this is not the sort of conclusion they would come to after putting their best effort into understanding one another. This is because, for a long time, individual women were separated from other women.

Even if women only opened the door to “the possibility of a relationship” with other women the slightest bit, it would surely change their lives tremendously. If nothing else, women understand the circumstances women face better than men do and have common ground on which they can communicate and try to alter those circumstances. Furthermore, until now, women have been made to only give to men, and there are many things women have never been able to have themselves.

American psychologist Phyllis Chesler speaks to this point in her famous 1972 publication “Women and Madness” (translated by Kawanotaka Shiromi, Yakkusha,1984):
“Until this point in history, women are the only ones (perhaps because they wanted it this way) who support women’s entry and re-entry into the world of people. In order to dismantle compulsory femininity, there is no way but for many women of all ages to come together give their emotional, sexual and intellectual support to one another – just as men do.”

However, the range of what we would call a “relationship” is extremely broad. What one person might call a “friendship” could be a “passionate love affair” for another, and vice versa. Creating shared understanding for relationships between people is impossible when “a so-and-so relationship is x, and a such-and-such relationship is y.” Sexual intimacy is much more complicated than that. There’s no need to call a sexual relationship a “passionate love affair” or vice versa. Furthermore, some people might share sexually intimate relationships with many different people. Because what people look for in a relationship is different depending on the person, there’s no point in trying to draw such strict boundaries around these kinds of relationships. There’s also no point in ranking them. Just understanding what each person in a relationship wants is enough. Similarly, if a woman can acquire power and liberation in a relationship with another woman, that’s enough too.

Fear of lesbians restricts women

However, it is necessary to always be cognizant of the fear bred in women towards the strengthening of a relationship between “two women” that is arbitrarily confined to the singular domain of a “lesbian” relationship. This is because the taboo of being a lesbian rears its head even when two women are simply trying to understand one another, putting the brakes on any progression of intimacy.

In this society whose smallest acceptable unit of “family” is “man/child/woman,” “existing outside of the male gaze despite being a woman” and “refusing to have and raise children despite being a woman” are the foundations of the hatred felt towards the taboo of being a “lesbian.” Even so, as long as a woman has been a “wife” and a “mother,” she wouldn’t receive criticism in this way even if she had a relationship with another woman that was more intimate than with her male partner. This is because, in the end, she “belonged to a man” and “belonged to the home.”

However, these days, the number of women who achieve their own economic foundation (whether they’re heterosexual or homosexual) and don’t depend on men is growing, as are attacks on women achieving power and independence through relationships with other women. The disparaging term “lesbian” is hurled at lesbians, of course, but also at heterosexual women who are living without depending on a man. This is done in order to tear women apart from each other. The taboo nature of this word reminds women of their fear towards deepening relationships between “two women.”
Because of the “lesbian” taboo, women fear relationships between “two women” and try to avoid confronting the realities of relationships with women, including their fears.

We just need to be aware of this mindset’s existence. If we don’t recognize this, relationships between “two women” will never be accepted for their individuality and diversity. The label of “lesbian” will not only constrain women who are lesbians, but also women who try to have any sort of relationship with other women.

However, we are actually making progress in overcoming a great deal of apprehension. Already, women are getting the opportunity to meet other women as “an individual woman” who combines all aspects of her being instead of just being part of a person, and the women in these intimate relationships are slowly being introduced to a network of other women. The networks these women are creating are simultaneously a collective of many different relationships and a common ground on which to form and deepen relationships. They are both a place for women to receive power and liberation, and a shelter to protect themselves from emotional and physical violence and restore their sense of dignity.

This is not a “new family”

Connections between “women” that are stretched in a finely meshed pattern are constantly being ranked. This is of course true for relationships in which the parties involved are aware of being “lesbians,” but also for any relationship between “two women.” This form of relationship is completely different from the scattered, solitary islands of man/child/woman “families” that don’t contain any horizontal connections. The “man/child/woman” unit that is accepted as “family” is exclusive and its men and children form ties to the society system, particularly in recent years through women’s reproduction of labor power. The fact that “family” is nothing more than a provisional collective of people who have totally different sets of values and attitudes from one another makes it impossible to create another “family” and network of a different character. If a “family” tries to force a new “personality” on itself, somebody is suppressing someone else depending on the power relationships between its members. Actually, “family” has performed the function of suppressing women and children in this way (even if the man of a “family” is tied to the societal and economic system and is thereby suppressed, that’s not a just reason for him to suppress the woman and children inside his “family”).

However, in relationships between “two women” that the people are trying to form, even if some of them have a person with whom they share a special intimacy, that doesn’t mean they are isolating themselves, especially not from the connections found in that network of people. Even if they have a special, local intimacy, that intimate relationship does not slight or ignore intimacies with other
women. This is because “two women” do not construct their relationship based on the
“man/child/woman” family. No matter how profound relationship between the latter group is, the
relationship itself does not maintain just one personality, whereas individual women maintain their
individual personalities in their relationships.

I think that the foundation for constructing this kind of network is surely for women themselves
to be acutely aware of the long history of individual women being separated from one another. I do not
think that women have completely understand and respect each other quite yet. However, women were
made to experience more than enough jealousy, hatred and rivalries during our mothers’ generation,
and their mothers’ generation, and even long before that. There were rivalries between women who
lived without even knowing the root causes of those rivalries such as being “mother and daughter” or
having a man imposed between them. At the very least, the relationships between “two women”
around me seem to be inching towards the possibility of mutual understanding and respect, and the
reason I can be optimistic about this is because the “women” who are trying to create these
relationships share a common experience of this long history.

Reforming the circumstances in which we have been and continue to be separated by a variety
of forces is by no means an easy task. However, once we become conscious of the fact that women have
been isolated from and pressured into antagonizing one another and that we’ve had to create
relationships with other women since the very beginning, there’s no need to ever return to living this
way again. More than anything, this is because there are no shortage of women, heterosexual or
lesbian, who know through their own experience that relationships between “two women” and the
meshing of “women” are invaluable to them.
Homosexuals in the Classroom

Puberty as agony

The way someone sees or thinks about things is obviously based on their personality and the construction of their relationships, but there are times when all of this can change through the influence of an experience. When I consider this, I begin to think that the experience of the unease of wondering “am I a lesbian?” that began early on in and throughout my puberty had no small role in influencing my emotional growth and the formation of my personality. I also think that there’s no way this influence was a good thing.

If I had an ideal puberty, I think that it would involve attaining feelings of self-affirmation and “self-esteem,” which would likely be acquired by practicing the development of personal relationships. The word “self-esteem” is still pretty unfamiliar to people in Japan, but I think we could define it as being able to feel that “no matter what, I am myself, and just being myself is okay.” But as I will discuss later attaining self-esteem is no ordinary thing in this society that slights the “individual” and attaches the utmost importance to “being the same as everyone else.” This difficulty pushes society’s homosexual minority into even more painful circumstances than they’re already in.

Even so, what I needed most in my twenties was this feeling of “self-esteem,” and I needed to actually start practicing the development of those skills to create and maintain personal relationships while I was in a negative situation. The “growth” that should have originally come from puberty was deeply repressed by my worry that “I was a lesbian.” In fact, my anxiety about “whether I was a lesbian” gave rise to awkward personal relationships, self-denial, and despair, the opposite of the feelings that I should have developed in puberty.

Of course, not all people who aren’t homosexuals can have the “ideal” puberty that I’ve described, either. For example, a large component of “being a woman” is sowing these feelings of self-denial, while “being a man” conversely imposes many different attitudes on a person. Furthermore, whether you’re a man or a woman, each sex will experience certain influences on the development of personal relationships. So, regardless of which category you belong to, it’s clear that Japanese society harbors the attitude that it should prevent every person’s self-affirmation of their “individuality.”

In regards to puberty, a member of a homosexual group will say “A homosexual experiences a postponed puberty because of being a homosexual. So, we go through puberty again when we’re in our twenties.” I think this statement is generally true. Because we live in modern Japanese society, most of us became more or less aware about our own homosexuality during puberty and we’re made to go
through many years of our lives dragging ourselves along with a pronounced psychological lack. We live our lives isolating ourselves among heterosexuals, and until we stop isolating ourselves, we will continue to be surrounded by quotidian school life governed by the heterosexual example, forced into “being unheard, unseen, and voiceless.”

The fear of being different from everyone else

The central message of this section is the issue of “homosexual postponed puberty.” However, before addressing it, I would like to discuss a bit about the attitude that makes it difficult for every person born and raised in this society to achieve self-affirmation. In uncovering the roots of my anxiety about the question “am I a lesbian?” that delayed my puberty, the awareness of the worries “am I a lesbian?” and “am I abnormal?” are consistently apparent. Not only did the anxiety stemming from the thought “am I a lesbian?” call the taboo images associated with “lesbians” to my mind, it bred in me a terrible fear that “I’m the only one who’s different from everyone else.” First, consider the following consciousness of being “different from everyone else”:

“Mama, please don’t fret, Papa, please get along with Mama,
If you fret, Mama, my hormones won’t come out,
Even when I’m born, I’ll be delicate and I won’t grow any facial hair,
I’ll have no interest in girls, and be like a fag
Even though I have a wee-wee, I’m not quite a boy
If you want me to be a big, strong boy,
Mama, please don’t fret, Papa, please get along with Mama,
If Papa and Mama are happy, then we will be good boys!”

(abbreviated version)

The theater company “Alarm Clock” sung this song, “The Fetus Sings its Message,” in their 1989 performance of the musical “About the Parent’s Responsibility to the Fetus – A Baby’s Message.” This musical, which was drafted by Sony’s honorary chairman Ibuka Masaru to preach that we need education for gifted children starting in the womb, later on underwent a name change for some reason to “BABY BABY.” The word “fag” was also taken out in the revised edition of this song, which continued to be performed. This is the revised edition:

If you fret, Mama, my hormones won’t come out,
Even when I’m born, I’ll be delicate and I won’t grow any facial hair,
Something I need to become a boy will be lost
Even though I have a wee-wee,
In my brain, I am a girl

(abbreviated version)

This verse clearly shows Japanese society’s value system towards “children” – or, in other worlds, all people. It bluntly indicates what virtues are to be respected, and which “abnormalities” are to be viewed as faults.

I can’t figure out whether this was a conscious or unconscious choice, but the one addressing the mother in the song is a boy, not a girl. Another woman who hopes terribly that “this time, I’ll have a boy!” after giving birth to a girl also makes an appearance in this musical. She does not wish “this time, I’ll have a girl!” after giving birth to a boy. I wonder if it seems that I’m going too far in saying that this is an indication of the discrimination towards baby girls in our Japanese society where there continues to be a burning desire to give birth to baby boys that will “carry on the family.”

Then there’s the image of the “strong boy” in the song. In the rephrased part of the revised edition “Even though I have a wee-wee, in my brain, I am a girl,” the word “fag” is removed, but the hatred for “boys being girlish” is all the more emphasized. In the unrevised version, there’s a blunt attitude of discrimination towards homosexuals. There’s also a clear pressure on two parents to be peaceful for the sake of the unborn child. Under no circumstances should the mother be a lesbian or a woman with an “illegitimate child” growing inside her.

I think that the value system surrounding children and how they grow became rapidly constricted after World War II. The development of perinatal care and technology for protection against infectious diseases, the spread of contraceptive methods along with lower birth and premature death rates, and a sudden price jump in the funds necessary for raising children – these all permeated the country during the post-war period. I think we should not only be happy that the number of women who have to experience the emotional and physical burden of childbirth is decreasing, but also rejoice in the fact that the number of women who have no choice but to be saddled with all responsibilities associated with raising children is decreasing. However, overstressing the importance of academic and occupational background has started extending to infants, and in the past several years we’ve reached a method of screening fetuses themselves through utilizing knowledge about fetal growth and cutting edge medical technology that has even fueled the public clamoring about the conception and delivery of
the Emperor’s second son’s wife. We are now able to sift through “normal/abnormal” people starting in
the womb.

But what’s “normal” in the first place? And what is “abnormal”?

**People’s attitudes create disability**

For example, “disability” is one of the words used to label someone as “abnormal.” To whom
does this word refer to, and for what reason?

In my view, this label is affixed to people who can’t overcome arbitrary hurdles set up in this
country’s society. Some examples of these hurdles are “every day, one must wake up and go to
kindergarten/school/work at a certain time” and “living a certain way so as not to be a nuisance to
others.” Depending on the situation, you may simply be unable to overcome such hurdles as “getting
legally married in your twenties and giving birth to children a few years later” or “finishing high school in
the proper way,” but you may still be affixed with the label of “abnormal.” Even the labels like
“unmanly,” “only giving birth to girls,” “homo,” and “divorcee” that appear in the songs in that musical
are components of being treated coldly, if not “abnormal” (perhaps people labeled with “homo” are
treated as abnormal).

But if all buildings were furnished with ramps and elevators and there were no level differences
in walkways, “not being able to walk on one’s own” would not be a “disability.” If no one minded sparing
just a little time for others who couldn’t can’t hear, see, or speak “normally,” it wouldn’t be a
“disability.” It’s natural for individuals to be different from other people, and if everyone thought this
should be called “individuality” and respected, they likely wouldn’t scorn those who they call “unmanly,”
“unfeminine,” or “homo” even if they felt that their own set of values was different.

Countries that are trying to create this kind of society actually do exist. Scandinavian countries,
Denmark, the Netherlands, England... even America put forth the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act)
in late July, 1990, the essential features of which included “1) Prohibiting employment discrimination, 2)
Ensuring access to the services of public institutions, 2) Ensuring access to the services run by private
management, and 4) making it obligatory for phone companies to provide relay services for the deaf” in
an effort to bring institutions up to speed to reduce hurdles for those with “disabilities.”

For example, one section of the American law that ensures access to the services of public
institutions states that “all services by public institutions must be provided to disabled persons” and
“within five years, all trains must create one train car that disabled persons in wheelchairs can use.”
There is a big difference between this and what we see in Japan where there are almost no stations that
allow for such people to get onto the platform without assistance. Furthermore, regulations to ensure access to services from private management are being sought to restructure facilities based on a fixed standard of building regulations and mandate that those businesses which violate this standard are fined. Of course, I don’t think just because these laws are in place means everything will improve immediately, but there isn’t any momentum seeking the establishment of these laws in Japan.

Efforts to accommodate those who can’t overcome society’s hurdles are progressing even in Europe. The Asahi Shimbun’s “The Countries With and Without ‘Bedridden Senior Citizens’” (Budōsha, 1990), written by editorial writer Ookuma Yukiko, goes into a great deal of detail on circumstances for senior citizens within all the countries that focus attention on the elderly. These efforts seem to typically be referred to with the word “normalization,” but to borrow Ookuma’s translation, this term appears to mean “adjusting their environment to allow them to lead normal lives.” These countries do not isolate the elderly by calling them “disabled,” leaving them “bed-ridden,” nor forcing them to do what they can’t – they do the perfectly obvious and adjust their environments so that they can lead normal lives. We can interpret from the West’s example that this kind of work is actually possible and that the compartmentalization of others, including the discrimination towards “disabled persons,” is not a natural occurrence in and of itself but rather something society dictates.

Two societies that fear “difference”

The society that took a stance completely oppositional to these societies was Nazi Germany. Jewish people were not the only ones for whom Nazism designated the hurdle of “inferiority.” Not only did Nazis also send German disabled persons and homosexuals to concentration camps through the label of “inferiority,” but Nazism consistently encouraged eugenic marriages and childbirths to increase the ranks of the “pure-blooded.” In June of 1935, they permitted abortions to get rid of people with hereditary diseases, and in July of the same year judicial police put forth an order to create sterilization facilities after reviewing whether to commit feticide on women who were impregnated with a child that had a chance of carrying a hereditary disease. Nazism eventually banned any people with diseases from marrying, regardless of whether their illness was “hereditary” (“Women Under Nazism” edited by C. Schuddekopf, translated by Kakawa Mayumi, Miraisha, 1987).

I wonder which society Japan is closer to. At least we don’t have public organizing and killing of grown “disabled persons” and homosexuals. However, the development of technology for fetal diagnoses continues the gradual progression towards screening for “disability” or “homosexuality” in the fetal stage. Furthermore, the “Eugenic Protection Act” that followed in the wake of Nazi Germany’s “Sterilization Law” remains as unchanged. The very first provision of this law states that it “aims to
prevent the birth of defective children from the perspective of eugenics as well as ensure the healthy life of the mother,” and it also legalizes abortion for the purpose of reducing births of “disabled children.”

From an everyday standpoint, “disabled persons” are also forced into docility so as not to be an inconvenience to other people. In a country where everyone devotes themselves to “being the same as everyone else no matter what” and bullies exclude those who are different from themselves (or different from everyone else), being a “disabled person” is practically like being killed at society’s hands. Furthermore, people like the Ainu, Okinawans (Uchinanchu) and Zainichi Koreans are forced into assimilation without hesitation while those who do not assimilate face discrimination in tangible and intangible ways. As there is no end in sight to these imposed hurdles of “abnormality,” I think we might just be closer to Nazism.

Under these circumstances, the birthing and raising of children is on a steady track towards “perfectionism.” This includes overstressing the importance of academic background (to say nothing of the heated entrance exams for kindergarten and elementary schools to “avoid” this) and the screening of a woman’s body performed once a fetus is inside of her. Then there’s the encouragement for women who haven’t gotten pregnant after a certain grace period has elapsed once they’re married to undergo infertility treatments like artificial insemination or in vitro fertilization. They say “It’s a shame not to be able to give birth to children” and “you should try this technology so you’ll be able to give birth”... in the end, a woman’s status is based on giving birth to children – children with “no physical defects.”

I do not have the right to tell women who want to have a child with their own body not to use the technologies we have today. Furthermore, none of this means I’m displeased that the number of children escaping death before and right after delivery is growing as a result of being able to treat illness discovered through numerous fetal screenings (though I can’t rid myself of my antipathy to the women’s bodies this technology is used on being seen as machines for conception and childbirth). However, the fact of the matter is that the “perfectionism” surrounding children is accelerating more than ever through the existence of such technologies. The hurdle that must be cleared to create a “perfect baby” is growing steadily higher.

There are limits to any technology, however. There is still plenty of possibility to give birth to what is called a “disabled child” in this society or not to be able to get pregnant no matter what you do. As long as we do not lower the hurdles of “disability” and “abnormality” established by today’s Japanese society, it will produce “disabled persons” and “weirdos” and knock them down. So who is supposed to
take the blame? Isn’t it always women who are criticized for the “disability” of “infertility” and condemned for giving birth to a “disabled person”?

This attitude in which the demarcation of the “abnormal” and the feeling of hatred toward “abnormal things” is based on “being different from everyone else” buries its roots in the minds of Japanese people during puberty when they are the most concerned with what other people think of them. This pressure comes through the media as well as by friends.

**Pursuing the “perfect woman”**

I used to feel very strongly about helpline counselors for teenage girls who listened to their hang-ups about their bodies back when they were commonly used. These girls would say things like “I might be pregnant” or “my period isn’t regular,” but they didn’t only discuss the worries that many adults might imagine they would. The concerns that took up the most occupancy in these girls’ minds were vague but ultimately serious questions like “is this part of my body different from everyone else’s?” or “am I the only weird one?”

From head to toe, there was literally no end to their constant sources of anxiety. If one child worried she was too tall, another child worried she was too short. Being fat, being skinny, being pale, being too dark, having too thick hair, having too thin hair... these were all cause for concern and become the ingredients for wondering “am I different from everyone else?”

Such worries have been around since the old days. That may be too obvious for me to point out, but when I was the same age as these girls about a decade ago, the unmistakable difference was the spread of advice that “this concern should and can be treated.”

For example, the ideal figure that the girls who worried about being “fat” were seeing belonged to the bodies of women in their twenties who had long stopped growing (and many of these bodies fell into the skinny category of models and stars). There was no shortage on information like “in order to have an ideal body like that, you should do this,” even including suspicious advertisements in articles everywhere with pictures and comments from doctors. There was also information on permanent hair removal tools and aesthetics for those who worried about having “too much hair,” information on makeup for those who worried about “being too dark,” information on medical facilities for those who worried about body odor, and information on plastic surgery for those who worried that their labia were too large – the accessibility of this information was flourishing. So, regardless of whether things that were seen as “abnormal” or “weird” could actually be “fixed,” it was possible to try them “if you just put up the cash.”
But if you think about it, words like “medical treatment,” “to cure,” and “return to normal” being placed alongside adjectives like “abnormal” and “weird” is an ultimately dubious thing. Is it “normal” not to grow any body hair? What color does “being too dark” refer to? (I once read a newspaper article on children’s astonished reactions after learning that there’s no color for “flesh-tone” in America). What is the basis on which labia are determined to be too big? Girls’ anxiety about their bodies depends on their subjectivity, but it also depends on the information spread by the media about whether something is decidedly “normal” or “weird.” The former used to possess more hold on the matter, but isn’t the latter carrying more weight these days? When girls are pushed into worrying “am I different from everyone else?” (everyone else meaning the “everyone” spread by the media without any actual criteria), it seems to me that they are pushed into thinking “I have to get this fixed through medical treatment to be normal.”

This seems especially true for the “Morning Shampoo” that was popular for a while. No one can say that girls’ (now boys’, too) obsessive attitude that “if your hair doesn’t smell like shampoo in the morning, you’ll seem ‘dirty’” was spontaneously created and spread by the hands of girls themselves. Until just a few years ago, there were hardly and middle and high schoolers who washed their hair in the morning. I’m not sure whether a group of girls, magazines, or companies sparked it all, but the ones who purposefully made the slogan “It’s common sense to wash your hair in the morning!” out to be common knowledge and spread it throughout Japan were clearly those companies trying to sell “Morning Shampoo” related products and the media that capitalized on it.

This trend is also spreading among boys. They know that if they just put up the cash, they can acquire whatever “cool” facial features and hairless “clean-cut” legs they want. Girls know, too, that if they just put up the cash, they can have “ample” breasts, “beautiful” facial features and “shapely” figures. The only ones who “win” are the ones who have acquired all of this. Regardless of whether these technologies have a real effect, the ones who can use these technologies, or rather the ones who have the kind of money to use them, are the winners. Inevitably, a schema of a handful of winners and a mass of losers is created, with the losers only envying the winners. Thus, everyone continues to be spurred on in the competition to strive for the same “beauty.”

Do people try technologies because they’re there, or does technology progress because people demand it to? Do things that were never deemed as “abnormal” become “abnormal” because methods to “medically treat them” are made apparent? This is always a “chicken or the egg” matter. So, even if we try to argue about it, we’ll never find a conclusion. However, it keeps going round and round like a snake biting its tail, its speed growing by the day, and as a result the hurdles called “abnormality”
Japanese society has been charmed by grow steadily taller. Don’t we need to think about what this means for all of us?

On the other end of the phone, girls always said:

“Am I different from everyone else?”

“I want to know because everyone says I’m weird.”

You’ll also often hear these responses from people on the street being given the mic for TV interviews:

“Isn’t everyone like that?”

“I think everyone thinks like that.”

Who does this “everyone” refer to?

And how are homosexuals effected as they are placed into boxes of “abnormal” or “different from the norm” within this demarcated framework of “normal/abnormal”?

**Heterosexuals don’t worry about “heterosexuality”**

“Heterosexuals” do not feel anxious or have any mental strife “because they are heterosexual.” This is because society sees heterosexuality as “normal,” so there is no need to worry about that in and of itself. In fact, *because* homosexuality is a primary cause of the mental turmoil experienced by homosexuals while heterosexuals do not feel any strife from their heterosexuality, there is an ever-present straw man argument that homosexuality is abnormal and an illness.

Homosexuals do not have unhealthy minds because “homosexuality” is a sickness. They cannot help but have mental problems when they’re told that “homosexuality is abnormal” and they grow to believe this lie. So, if a homosexual goes to the hospital for their mental problems, the doctor will not recognize the patient’s explanations as anxiety or mental turmoil, but rather the “illness” of “homosexuality” and will subsequently seek out the cause of the “homosexuality” and try to “cure” it. But because there is no way to “cure” something that isn’t even a disease like “homosexuality,” the patient’s strife simply worsens.

Of course, not all homosexuals have anxiety or mental problems. Because it’s a matter that depends on individual people’s personalities or environments, it’s not so simple to say every homosexual develops anxiety or mental problems. However, the fact that homosexuals are seen as an “abnormal” part of the makeup of society has a large influence on people’s psychology.
So, even if mental strife doesn’t cause any sort of disease, being a “homosexual” in this society seems to have some sort of profound psychological effect on most people in this society. Such is the problem of “delayed puberty.”

Before children can even understand things in this society, they are led towards the presupposition that “sex and love exist between a man and a woman” through their education at home and at school. The basic premise of education includes the attitude that men and women exist as “opposites” and that everyone will someday love someone of the opposite sex, marry them, have sex, and create and raise children. There is nothing but “friendship” among those of the same sex, and taking “friendship” too far is impermissible. If “illicit sexual relationships” are “sexual misconduct” in the realm of education, then homosexuality being “sexual misconduct” naturally follows.

Even so, there are some constrictions for “heterosexuality” as these children take in a lot of different information and come to accept that offspring naturally follow “dating the opposite sex and having sex.” When adults are pressured, it’s so that they have a further interest in children. However, there isn’t a single shred of positive information for “homosexuality,” only the prejudice and ridicule that comes from the mass media. Girls’ schools and boys’ schools may be a somewhat uninhibited environment to talk about this, but even there “heterosexuality” is assumed and “homosexuality” exists nowhere beyond the underground. This book is no textbook on adolescent psychology, but even those going through puberty see constant concern with the same sex and not having any interest in the opposite sex as “immaturity.” Thus, pressure from friends and rumors about who has a lover and who has kissed or had sex with who are exactly what have the power to make people face heterosexuality head-on in their home and school education. There is nothing that will pressure children quite like the simple phrase “so-and-so is falling behind.”

**Homosexuals going through an empty puberty**

Children in this environment who already understand that they are interested in the same sex devote themselves to nothing more than “remaining invisible, unheard and saying nothing.” These boys and girls have to build an emotional wall in order to protect themselves during the years of puberty. If “puberty,” as the textbooks explain it, is a “period where one begins to develop an interest in the opposite sex,” then these years are empty for homosexuals. And, if we widen the definition of “puberty” to a period where one learns how to create relationships with other people – regardless of whether puberty actually ends up playing this role in a heterosexual person’s life – homosexuals have no choice but to experience puberty in their twenties, long after the period has ended for heterosexuals.
You could say that it’s not actually possible for homosexuals to be raised in a “society” where homosexuality isn’t repudiated. Although they can get information from zines and other publications and know there are places and opportunities to meet other homosexuals once they become adults (and even this isn’t large enough to call it a “society”), this is not possible for kids going through puberty and especially impossible for people who live far away from big cities. Instead, they have the “heterosexual” norm and “heterosexual” common knowledge (which is the standard). Even figuring out the distance between you and those with a basic handle on personal relationships is a natural foundation on which heterosexuality is created, but it is either meaningless or harmful for homosexuals when left with that as their only option. This is because this norm is ultimately meant for one man and one woman. Yet, there exists no standard guideline in “society” (at least not in Japan) for homosexuals to learn how to keep distance from other people.

Even if we limit our considerations to intimate relationship building, it’s easy for homosexuals to become isolated. Firstly, even if you like someone special who you’re close with, you can’t even definitively call them a friend if there’s no proof that this person is a homosexual. If discrimination towards homosexuals disappeared and the superstition that only relationships between the opposite sex were natural crumbled away, it wouldn’t be a big deal whether the person you liked was of the same or opposite sex. But since we don’t currently live in these circumstances, homosexuals have to keep in mind that they can only try to create a relationship with someone they’re interested in if there’s proof that this person is a homosexual in order to protect themselves. However, homosexuals are rarely able to meet other homosexuals, and even if they meet do another one, this is still an extremely unlikely situation.

On one hand, there are many people of the same sex around you – people you wouldn’t care about even if they did come to your attention. However, you have to try not to notice them anyway because you know that 99% of them are heterosexuals and would turn you away at the door. I myself am the type to be shut out by heterosexuals before I can even imagine meeting other homosexuals, but to these women, no matter what kind of person they think I am, above all I’m the same sex as them, which means whatever involvement they have with me implies that “they will become lesbians” – this fact is no doubt a hard pill for homosexuals to swallow.

In these circumstances where there is a definitive distance between heterosexuals and homosexuals and transgressing this border is seen as “becoming abnormal,” homosexuals have an extremely limited chance of “meeting other people in order to develop intimate connections.” They have to ignore many opportunities simply because the other person is a heterosexual.
In order to live with the least amount of pain, you have to ignore your feelings for the same sex, cover your ears from your own voice and discuss this part of yourself with no one. Otherwise, you have to ignore heterosexuals, stop listening to the voice that says “homosexuality is abnormal,” and give up talking to heterosexuals altogether to protect yourself. Whether or not you deny the fact that “I’m a homosexual,” through “remaining invisible, unheard and saying nothing,” puberty is a waste of time and emotion for homosexuals, leaving them with pain and despair carved so deeply into their hearts they can’t ignore it. At times, this even becomes the source of the baggage in their irreparable personal relationships.

Compensating for puberty

In my case, the thought that “I’m the only one who’s different from normal people” coupled with the fear that simply telling other people of the same sex that I was interested in them could possibly result in the repudiation of my whole existence followed me around for ten years or so. It seemed to me that “being a homosexual” was something so hated that I didn’t want to discuss it with other people, particularly when I knew that I was one, and I didn’t think there could be people who would positively accept me for who I am. So, no matter the person, I couldn’t do it.

But that doesn’t mean I stopped being interested in women just because of this. At that time, I was good at “dating men” even though I may have been interested in someone else (a person of the same sex). As long as I could date men, I could convince myself that I wasn’t a homosexual. Although I say “date,” since the only important thing to me was having the alibi that “I’m dating a man,” the lack of substance these relationships had goes without saying.

I was obviously unable to create any sort of intimate relationships with girls I grew to like. Simply because I was afraid of being hated, I fawned over my partner so as not to fall out of favor with him. With the attitude that I shouldn’t be attracted to the people I casually hung out with, I didn’t even try to pursue friendships. Remembering who I was at that time brings me nothing but pain. But back then, I pinned the reason I didn’t like myself onto “societal hatred towards homosexuality,” convincing myself that “because I’m abnormal, I’m just happy to be able to talk to others without being hated.”

I met the worst years of being in the middle of this vicious cycle in my early twenties. How many people would I have to hurt, how much would I have to lose in order to understand that as long as this behavioral pattern of despair, self-hatred, and a contrasting egoism – being convinced that someone would surely come save me eventually – remained unchanged, nothing else would change either?
Of course, I can’t say that all of this was definitively caused by “homosexuality.” However, I also can’t say that none of it was a result of “homosexuality.” Because I can’t reach a conclusion on this for myself, there’s no way I could make this conclusion for other people. In any case, in the decade that started with puberty, the only two things that occupied my mind were that “I like women” and that society would never approve of that.

Suppose that I hadn’t met any other homosexuals shortly after graduating from college. Let’s also suppose that I hadn’t come across any other people my age facing the fact that they were “homosexuals” in this society head-on – I would never have worried about why or how I had been fleeing from “homosexuality.” And what if I remained saddle with my two realities of being a “homosexual,” which brought me nothing but pain, and being a “woman,” never meeting any of the people (most of whom being heterosexual women) who could just keep up with the appearances of being a “person” and didn’t have to hide behind a mask? I would never have realized that even though the source of my problems lay in the society around me, the issues I had myself could not be solved by other people and had to be changed by myself, even including these external sources of these problems.

Had I never realized any of this, who would I have become?

Perhaps someone would have extended their hand to me, making me dependent on them. Or, maybe my mental discord would have remained as it was and I would have come to some sort of terms with my surroundings by saying that this was just my personality. Maybe that strife would have led me to some fateful peril. Regardless of what would have happened, I can only imagine it would be a situation much worse than the one I’m presently in. There’s no way I wouldn’t have ended up labeled as “mentally ill.”

A cycle still recurring throughout Japan

The influence “delayed puberty” has on homosexuals likely varies from person to person. For one individual, it may manifest itself as difficulty in having personal relationships, and for another it might be a general feeling of pessimism. It could also manifest as self-hatred, distrust, dependence on others, or emotional instability. You can’t divide these up based on which have their roots in “homosexuality.” Because all of these negative factors come from “being a women” and are ingrained in people, it’s especially hard for lesbians to say what is emerging from what source.

However, this doesn’t mean we can deny the fact that puberty is delayed through homosexuality or say that homosexuals don’t face emotional and psychological distress during puberty because of their homosexuality. The number of homosexuals able to publicly discuss how they fared
during puberty is gradually rising and we are beginning to see a trending point in common among them – something that consistently rises from the roots of societal attitudes that surround homosexuals during puberty. This common trait at the base of all their experiences indicates that something about these individual experiences is not unique. Another homosexual’s experience is partially my own, and yet another homosexual somewhere out there right now is having a taste of my experience.

Actually, even now there are a vast number of homosexuals in Japan pretending to have an interest in the opposite sex in classrooms where only “heterosexuality” is discussed, while their heads are really brimming with the word “homosexuality.” There are many homosexuals who, by talking about celebrities of the opposite sex and dating members of the opposite sex whom they have no interest in, are not only wasting their puberty, but also being inflicted with mental pain.

As an example, take the results of the following survey. Administered in Tokyo elementary, middle, and high schools in 1987 to investigate student awareness of sex and sexual behavior, this survey included questions on “what you would like to know about sex” and “anxieties and concerns about sex.” There were various entries that said had an option for “homosexuality” in the “what you would like to know about sex” portion administered to high schoolers and the “anxieties and concerns about sex” portion administered to middle schoolers and high schoolers.

What we can tell from the aggregate results is that middle schoolers who answered “homosexuality” for “anxieties and concerns about sex” included 3.3% of first year girls, 1.6% of second year girls, 1.9% of third year girls, 3.1% of first year boys, 2.5% of second year boys, and 3.4% of third year boys. For high schoolers, it was 1.2% of first year girls, 0.5% of second year girls, 0.9% of third year girls, 1.5% of first year boys, 1.8% of second year boys, and 2.1% of third year boys. High schoolers who answered “homosexuality” for “what you would like to know about sex” included 3.4% of first year girls, 2.6% of second year girls, 2.4% of third year girls, 2.3% of first year boys, 3.5% of second year boys, and 3.4% of third year boys (for middle school, the survey takers included 667 first year girls, 828 second year girls, 532 third year girls, 743 first year boys, 947 second year boys, and 610 third year boys. For high schoolers, the survey takers included 644 first year girls, 743 second year girls, 591 third year girls, 528 first year boys, 688 second year boys, and 496 third year boys) (“Shinjidō: Sex and Students – Changes of a Decade – Survey Report on Tokyo Elementary/Middle/High Schoolers’ Awareness of Sex and Sexual Behavior” Gakko Tosho, 1987).

Of course, these numbers do not instantly indicate the number of homosexuals. But the number of homosexuals there are is not the problem. Regardless of the small number of respondents answering that they have anxieties and concerns about “homosexuality” in this small-scale survey, the problem is
not simply parents and teachers failing to offer us information and knowledge about homosexuality, but also their feigning ignorance of our own homosexuality. While there are explicit answers about “homosexuality” to these questions, in the total breakdown of the survey, there is no mention of “homosexuality.” Are they trying to say that there’s no reason to mention it if the numbers are low?

Children going through puberty who need information and knowledge not only out of interest but to dispel anxieties and concerns have existed in the past and continue to exist today. These boys and girls also need affirmative and correct information to dispel their anxieties and concerns. But as things stand today, these children are unable to rid themselves of such anxieties and concerns. They have no choice but to become adults while hanging onto these problems and amplifying them.

What is necessary for a homosexual going through puberty?

Above all, I think that most of the education on puberty mandated by school education in Japan has got to change for the sake of children who are growing conscious of their anxieties and concerns towards “homosexuality.” Not only do we have to directly respond to these children’s questions, but also make sure that other children aren’t amplifying the anxieties and concerns of these children.

Although I say this, I understand that this expectation is an impossibility for the “schools” that we have now. “Schools” are a function of a system that takes away all rights, awareness of those rights, feelings of self-affirmation and self-esteem, a problem I went on about before when I discussed homosexual self-affirmation. But this doesn’t mean there’s nothing we need to say about education in schools, because in an educational system predicated on “heterosexuality,” homosexuals actually experience physical and psychological harm. Even if we were to give up on seeking out assistance for the work to create an attitude of self-affirmation for homosexuals in school education, there would still be a dire need to seek out a way for homosexual self-affirmation to remain unobstructed.

**Education robs homosexuals of their self-esteem**

However, as things stand now, most parents and teachers adopt a negative stance towards homosexuality from an educational standpoint. Even now, among those teachers who genuinely try to tackle sexual education, there are very few who make efforts to try and re-position homosexuality in a positive light – in other words, those who are of the mindset that “sexual” education should be fundamentally changed. However, the average person who grapples with sexual education is either indifferent or ignorant to homosexuality. This fact is clear if you make a thorough search for texts related to sexual education in a library or a bookstore. The overwhelming majority either omit the word “homosexuality” altogether or write negatively on the subject.
I’ll quote some information from what I thought was the most negative text. This is likely the approximate attitude of teachers and parents who are either ignorant or simply unsympathetic to homosexuality. The following is a continuation from a previously cited excerpt by Kurokawa Yoshikazu where he states his belief on the best route for guidance on homosexuality:

“If it’s a purely transient homosexuality, as previously stated, there’s no real necessity for intervention. But, if you fear it may move towards genuine homosexuality, make the child think about what sort of influence it will have on their life through individualized instruction.

From the standpoint of being men and women, humans participate in the status of getting married and being husband and wife and the status of having a baby and being mother and father. Through these kinds of human relationships, a happy life can be created, as we see in the phrase ‘being together as a family.’ Homosexuals don’t have these male/female and parent/child relationships, and it’s difficult for them to construct a home. Therefore, they have the possibility of leading an extremely lonely life. Because of this, homosexuals tend to constantly change their partners, which is said to result in the terrifying AIDS infection.”

Kurokawa immediately goes on to discuss the necessity to collectively provide guidance on homosexuality:

“Because trouble can arise when friendships get mixed up with sexual feelings, the desire to monopolize a friend becomes strong and one-sided feelings develop for this friend. So, it is essential to give tutorship in a group on the aforementioned problems with homosexuality in advance.”

Up to this point, we see the attitude that we should discourage a child from homosexuality through intimidation by their teachers and the children around them. Kurokawa says children should be told that you end up being very lonely in a homosexual relationship because it cannot provide the “happy life” of being “husband and wife” or “parent and child,” and is a lonely life the life you want to lead? He claims that there are absolutely no homosexuals that aren’t dissatisfied and believes you can “save” a child with this sort of guidance.

Incidentally, on the other hand, Kurokawa also says that the child should be made to understand that “because boys and girls share the same sex in the early stages of fetal development, mistakes may occur in the process of sexual development, so the viewpoint that homosexuals are abnormal people whose behavior has caused them to stray from the path of humanity is prejudiced and in no way scientific.” In other words, we shouldn’t discriminate against homosexuals because they are people who can’t help but lead “lonely lives,” as he puts it, because they were born that way.
There is another part where he minutely explains that homosexuals having to live lonely lives is completely prejudiced. There are actually many homosexuals who lead happy lives. Still, anyone can be more or less restricted through Kurokawa’s process of learning how to live. They become convinced that “homosexuals can only live lonely lives.” In fact, there are also people who are robbed of their desire to live positively because of being kept under this kind of control. However, if homosexuals are made to internalize this negative viewpoint, they should be able to begin directing their efforts towards leading a happy life at an earlier age. Much of the strength homosexuals have is used only to rid themselves of these negative mantras that have filled their heads.

**Education that doesn’t teach compulsory heterosexuality**

So how should “homosexuality” be handled from a place of education? At the very least, “homosexuality” should not be denied, and if it's impossible for “homosexuality” to be portrayed as a positive thing in all senses of the word, then we should stop enforcing “heterosexuality” as the norm and glorifying it.

First of all, even if we merely said “in our society, there are also people who like people of the same sex instead of the opposite sex. Calling them pejoratives like ‘fag’ is discrimination, and we mustn’t do that,” it wouldn’t mean anything. Saying “there are also people who…” makes it seem as though such people exist far-removed from ourselves. If this is all that's said on the matter, we can’t create an environment where a child who worries that they might be a homosexual is able to express “that’s how I am” in a classroom. When I was a child, the influence of the mass media that ridicules homosexuality had an immeasurable impact on me, and it continues to even now. To oppose this and ensure that minorities in the classroom can grow up without self-denial, we must change all phrasing used in the place of education as well as non-homosexual teachers’ attitudes that “heterosexuality” can be assumed and dismantle the superstition that having an interest in the same sex is just part of a temporary period during psychological development in puberty.

At the same time, there is also a need to change the conventional family values of parents and teachers. For example, there are many lesbian mothers in Japan. The younger the child, the more natural it is for them to accept that “there are two mothers who love each other in this house.” If this is taught to children in the early years of elementary school before they’re instilled with the value system of the mass media, children who aren’t embarrassed about or think heterosexual sex is weird would think about it in just the same light. This is because two women wouldn’t hide their love for each other from their children. However, it’s not easy to dismantle a child’s reception of this in our modern
environment. Children hear what their parents say, just as they hear what adults at school say. A child might inadvertently talk about the two women in their home. If that happens, what kind of response will the child get? All this may seem perfectly natural to the child, but it’s not hard to imagine the child suddenly taken by the thought that “my mothers are weird.” This is where the roots of distrust in their mothers and a hatred for lesbians begin to grow.

This can become an everyday occurrence. The lack of assured stability in a lesbian led household is not because these women are homosexuals, but because the environment surrounding homosexuals is full of prejudice. Until young children still far from puberty are kept away from prejudice towards new lifestyles that contradict the traditional, not only in a place of sexual education but in every facet of education and their home life, a “happy life” in a family with homosexuals will continue to be shaken into instability.

I want to try and discuss this point more concretely.

First, we have to try and keep “sexual education” from being “human education.” “Human education” sounds fine and well, but the “human” we discuss in this education does not include homosexuals as of now. Even if we don’t directly discriminate against “homosexuality,” if we advocate for the values of “family” and “husband and wife” in the classroom, it becomes a pronouncement to the homosexual in the room that “you must live with no connection to these values.” Because of this, “sexual education” should be exclusively devoted to offering accurate information on “bodily education” and “contraception,” excluding any mention of values. In Japan’s case, however, so that “bodily education” and “contraception” do not bother teachers as taboos, “sexual education” get swapped out with “human education” or “moral education.”

Second, we have to remove ourselves in all places of education from the perception that constructions of “family” or “husband and wife” through “man/child/woman” or “man/woman” units are special. Of course, the contents of such teaching also include the risk of raising children to adopt the attitude that “husband and wife being men and women’s division of labor” is completely natural. But the problem that exists even before this is inserting the idea into education that systems of “family” and “husband and wife” that exclude “homosexuality” are the only forms of human relationships with any value. After all, “family” and “husband and wife” are only frameworks of human relationships. Rather than preaching how wonderful these “frameworks” are, we ought to convey that they are forms of communication meant to properly create personal relationships with others. While we fail to do this, homosexuals will be inflicted with despair over and over again, and heterosexuals will only find themselves able to create the empty “cages” of “family” and “husband and wife.”
Opening the doors to possible relationships

On one hand, however, children who fear “am I a homosexual?” during puberty cannot assume that they will continue to be a homosexual in the future. Because of this, we must not carry on doing things like “hunting for homosexuals” and “isolating homosexuals” in the classroom. Conversely, there is no way for us to know who will realize “I am a homosexual,” to what extent, and when. There’s no shortage of people who realize this in their twenties, thirties, and beyond. However, just like those who realize it during puberty, these people are constricted in that moment by the influence of the heterosexual-based education they have received.

As far as “not discriminating against homosexuals” goes, it is necessary to understand that there is no ultimate, intrinsic rift between “heterosexuality” and “homosexuality.” Not discriminating against homosexuals means dismantling the “common knowledge” that the only natural relationships are those created between the opposite sex. Of course, this is not to tell all heterosexuals that they should assent to the possibility of a “homosexual” experience. However, because everything about the way relationships are constructed is left to individuals, raising a person while treating “heterosexuality and homosexuality” as things that are inherently distinctive may create a person who rejects half of all possible relationships right before your eyes. Simultaneously, you may begin to be prejudiced about these possibilities for your own potential future relationships.

In any case, even if a person is to decide whether to have an intimate relationship with another person after the framework of “heterosexuality and homosexuality” has crumbled, I don't think an age where the negative binding force of sexual discrimination will cease to have its hold will emerge just like that. So, until that possibility is visible, not only homosexuals but heterosexuals must clearly recognize that discrimination towards homosexuals exists as an impediment to privacy. Not to mention discrimination, ignorance and prejudice towards the private domain of “homosexuality” certainly exist, and there are many people who suffer because of this. If we don’t begin to recognize this fact, we will never understand why there is a rift between “heterosexuality and homosexuality,” nor how we should begin to bridge it.
Not Just Looking For One “Pleasure”

The boundary between heterosexual women and lesbians

Combing her hair, putting her hair up, holding hands, dressing her up, putting her makeup on... between two close women, there is no need to consciously perform these meaningful acts, as touching each other’s bodies is an everyday, perfectly natural behavior – especially between girls before they hit puberty. At this age, there is nothing that gets in the way of the simple, good feeling of putting an arm around her, caressing her, and pressing against each other, skin to skin. In other words, you can exist without attaching any particular meaning to the positive feelings that come from being intricately intertwined in a relationship, the intimate feelings found for one another indivisibly united by “touching.”

Even so, there is a point when girls encounter a power that tries to take them away from this place of good feeling. The “heterosexuality” that they take on later in their development is presented before their eyes as an extravagant, “wonderful thing” that goes far beyond the good feelings they shared in intimacy and touching with other girls. At some point, all the touching of each other’s bodies with no particular meaning attached that simply brought on sensations begins to bear various meanings under the standards of “sex between the opposite sex” and “passionate love between the opposite sex.”

This is prohibited between girls as “something that occurs between the opposite sex” and is decided to be of no value when illuminated by this society’s absolute norm of the “profundity of touch between the sexes.” “Passionate love between opposite sex” make girls think the intimacy they had between one another was inconsequential, and “sex between the opposite sex” makes girls think that their touching was child’s play. But those of which these good feelings of intimacy and touching carried on regardless of “heterosexuality” being presented before them become tainted – purposefully tainted – by being pinned with the label of “lesbian” and a message that “you must not do such things.” Or, they may be told directly that such touching is not allowed.

At some point during puberty, girls are forced to abandon the good feelings brought on by intimacy and touching between other girls that always seemed so natural. But what if these girls all at once stopped being forced into being conscious of “heterosexuality” during puberty? What if they were not affixed with the label of “lesbian” because of the good feelings they found in intimacy and touching with other girls, and were not restricted by hatred because of it?
Furthermore, would we have a rigid distinction between the “pleasures” that adult women still feel in the “intimacy and touching” with other women as they did in puberty and the “pleasures” between women we call “lesbians”?

Intimacy and touching are shared even between heterosexual women who have finished puberty. Although what they call “love” as heterosexuals is reserved especially for men, at times women have even more intimate relationships with their female “friends” than their “male lovers.” How does this look when viewing such intimacy from my vantage point, from what we would call a “lesbian” point of view? Are they breaking down the intimacy created in what we would call “lesbian” relationships?

The way I see it, there aren’t clear boundaries between these two kinds of people. Outside of my vantage point, it does seem that there are intentional boundary lines drawn out that heterosexual women can clearly see – boundaries that say “this is heterosexuality (normal), but beyond this is being a lesbian (abnormal)” – but I still see them as aligned. Heterosexual women will often say “being a lesbian is different, I’m not like that,” but from my point of view, I don’t understand how it’s “different” or how these women “aren’t like that.” The intimacy and touching during girlhood before puberty, the intimacy and touching between heterosexual women, the intimacy and touching between the people we call “lesbians” – to me, they all seem to overlap like gently sloping plains.

Above all, do women have a need to intentionally demarcate the boundaries to signify which kind of touching and intimacy between women is heterosexual or homosexual? Does the need to draw a line between women who express resistance to the myth of growing up and deny and negate the intimacy and touching of any outliers come from women themselves? Because the question which is normally important to individual women is “what do I want/desire” instead of “what do all women/women in general want/desire,” there is no need for women to force themselves into one standard framework.

So, who feels the necessity to do this? Even if women don’t feel this necessity, who came up with this myth that “once you hit puberty, you will naturally develop an interest in the opposite sex”? When I look around me, there are many women who feel that this myth is about as unnatural as it can be.

But if you think about it, it really is easy to see that the ones who purported this tale about the “growth” of women (or the ones who explained the course of women’s “growth”) were not women, but men. Until very recently, the ones who held the rights and means to analyzing people’s minds and their
development – what we usually call “psychology” or “psychoanalysis” – were male scholars. Male scholars set the tone for much of psychology as we know it today.

If nothing else, individuals know what the experience of “men” is. When we’re children, we learn what being a man is like, and what it means for men to “become an adult” (or what we are supposed to know about it). But men do not know what being a woman is like. Because men are not women, they only understand fragments of how women think, feel, and what they’re like as girls. They can’t even begin to imagine what being a woman is like. In fact, they are made to not be able to understand. They explain “all women” through their fragmented observations of women, creating (what they see as) the general representation of “what we call women.”

**Freud’s crimes as a man**

Although this section is focused on Sigmund Freud, the man who began modern psychology as we know it, it’s also representative of many of the criticisms that come from a feminist standpoint. For example, Tokyo Feminist Therapy Center Representative Clinical Psychologist Hirakawa Aiko follows the changes throughout Freud’s description of the “Hysterical Woman” and explains its problematic points (“On Being a Woman” Feminist Therapy, Kawano Kiyomi, Hirakawa Aiko, Oyanagi Shigeko, and Yamasaki Reiko, Kakiuchi Shuppan, 1986).

According to this text, in Freud’s 1898 work “Aetiology of Hysteria,” a woman’s hysteria is a fear of assault and rape wherein she experiences psychological trauma through sexual congress with close adults, love relationships or interfraternal sexual relationships. Although Freud stated that “we must turn our eyes towards the cause of this traumatic experience and set out to grasp what it is and why it causes such trauma,” once he understood what hysteria was, he did not do as he called for. Instead, when women told him about their experiences with rape, he “changed his interpretation of their experiences as lies or psychological fabrications.” Then, in his 1905 work “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality,” his claim that the cause of hysteria was the experience of psychological trauma during infancy vanished, and instead “Freud came to believe that hysteria was ‘excessive sexual desire and maintaining an exaggerated opposition to sex, an enigma full of contradictions’.”

Freud explained that women who suffered from compulsive behavior and experienced psychological trauma had these conditions because of their husband’s impotence and were behaviors to cover up for their “husbands’ impotence,” describing this conduct as “wanting to place their beloved husband on a pedestal” and “kindly motives.” Hirakawa goes on to say that “Freud suppressed women and ultimately ignored them, drawing male values into his way of analysis.” According to Freud, “the
reason why women can’t help but be repressed by traumatic experience is beyond the scope of the problem.”

Unsurprisingly, he also behaved this way towards lesbians. For example, French philosopher Luce Irigaray has written on the topic of Freud’s confusion about lesbian women (“Commodities Among Themselves” This Sex Which Is Not One, Keiso Shobo, 1987).

In Freud’s “Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman,” he makes an example of a homosexual woman, but claims in his analysis that there is no existence of any form of homosexuality in this woman beyond behaving like a “man” towards other women, which has evidently perpetuated falsehoods about lesbians to this day. In Irigaray’s words, Freud’s attitude was that “female homosexuals become the way they are through none other than a ‘masculinity complex.’ This complex is ‘a direct extension from infantile masculinity’ that ‘regresses into an earlier masculinity complex,’ making it so a female homosexual envisions men among other women. Thus, she can only desire another woman as though she were a man.”

Because Freud was a man and could only view women from the standpoint of a man, when there were relationships between women where they could not fantasize about men (or did not need to fantasize about men), he could not truly consider the women who created the relationship. In other words, in being a man, Freud did not have a basis through which he could understand the problems of women. However, Freud did not cry “I just don’t understand!” and abandon his research. Instead, he did exactly what he shouldn’t have done and proceeded to fabricate a story about those women (female homosexuals) that was easy for men to understand and accept – that lesbians are women who love other women as though they are men.

“Because homosexual women appeared too unidentifiable a phenomena for his ‘theory’ and the borders of his (cultural) imagination, he had no choice but to ‘shirk his psychoanalytical explanations’ on the matter.

Thus, all that was left for him to do was source this troublesome problem back to menstruation and anatomy in order not to induce too much of a disturbance in existing scholarship.” (from the aforementioned work).

Through his tale of searching for characteristics of so-called “masculinity” in this woman’s body and personality, Freud ultimately came up with a comfortable conclusion (for him more so than anyone else) and abandoned any thought of “medical treatment” for the woman.
Most of the stories that are told about women are nothing more than something men imagined, were able to imagine, or wanted to imagine for their convenience. They are nothing but explanations in the context of men’s imaginations. Because of this, it becomes so easy to say that “when girls hit puberty, they naturally begin to have interest in the opposite sex” and convince women that there are no exceptions to the matter. Thus, through this natural “growth” and single form of being, the entrapment by that “story of growth” I mentioned before carries on. Marriage, child-birth, raising children... these fundamentals of heterosexuality become natural, and the story that “family” is a natural and wonderful, valuable thing sews its seeds together with the “naturalness” of “liking the opposite sex.” However, the fact that “women” and “women’s lifestyles” are so easily lumped together in sweeping generalizations shows how lightly women’s psychology is taken, if not ignored entirely.

**Viewing “women” from a woman’s perspective**

So, if you just alter your perspective a little bit, it’s definitely possible to see women’s psychology through the mentality of the power of women’s minds and imaginations. After the opening of London’s “Women’s Psychological Treatment Center” during the 1970s, feminist therapy activists Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach pointed out the following tendencies of male psychologists after Freud:

> “Of these analysts, hardly any of them ever discuss the implications of girls experiencing their lives through the positive power of having a mother’s body, and very few touch upon men’s envy of women’s bodies – the envy of those bodies from which they were born” (“Feminist Therapy – Understanding Women,” previously cited).

The affirmative meaning felt in a growing child about the existence of mothers’ and women’s bodies is completely ignored in those fixed ideas inherited from Freud’s theories, who “viewed female genitalia and femininity as both incomplete and inescapable” (from the aforementioned work). Thus, women’s developmental psychology began to be relayed within male constructed images of the importance of the “penis” – women were people who lacked penises and tried to compensate for that missing part – and complexes such as the “castration complex” and the “Oedipus complex.” No one ever recognized these theories as biased or tried to see them from the other side – that is, until feminism garnered its power.

**Why have lesbians been ignored?**

These biases also come up when homosexuality is discussed as a “deviation” within the field of psychology. Besides that of Freud under the influence of traditional psychology, there have seldom been other examples of female homosexuality treated with such importance. Even if there have been, we
could mention the ones that have been treated with normal practice in a single sentence. This is either because female homosexuality is not something men can imagine might possibly exist, there are too few female homosexuals for it to be deemed as important, or they simply do not want to bother with it.

Even so, this isn’t the case for some men, as male homosexuality is a problem that exists within the framework of men. Regardless of whether they ultimately treat this exception positively or negatively, (male) psychologists and (male) counselors who cannot ignore the fact that there are many people who don’t “naturally have an interest in the opposite sex” (“natural” people who happen to fall away from what is “natural”) must make the effort to situate these exceptional men among all men.

Thus, women were imagined as men wanted to imagine them. The extent of the effect that being raised in an environment where women were made to dress like a “woman,” speak like a “woman,” get disciplined like a “woman,” be provided for like a “woman”, not to mention get married to men and birth and raise kids like a “woman” has had on women’s growth and personality development was ignored completely until women began to speak out about it themselves. At the very least, men would never expect being raised in such an environment would force a girl to accept the fact that “someday I will marry a man” whether she wants to or not. They would never expect that the myth of “naturally being interested in the opposite sex,” the glorification of the complementary relationships of “marriage” and “family,” nor the endless imprinting of the common knowledge that the “ideal situation for a woman” being within a “family” would create “women.” No matter what, the effects of being raised as a “woman” the moment you’re born are not something we should refer to as “natural.”

However, whether or not the “common knowledge” that “as she grows up, a woman will naturally begin to have an interest in the opposite sex” and that “being a lesbian means you identify with men” is incorrect, this isn’t the main problem here. The problem is that this so-called “common knowledge about women” is not being expressed or thought by women themselves. In fact, once women began talking about themselves, this common knowledge soon ceased to be “common knowledge.” Even in Japan, the spreading movement of women trying to access psychology and therapy with roots in feminism has begun repudiating the existence of this “common knowledge” perpetuated by men and, most importantly, explaining that each individual woman is different.

In order to deconstruct “women”

When women begin to discuss themselves, the fact that age-old definitions for what a “woman” or a “lesbian” is cannot be forcibly applied to all women and lesbians is instantly revealed. Myths surrounding “growing up” and lies that “lesbians = women who have become men” (although they may apply to some individual people) cannot be used when speaking on the subject of all “women” and
“lesbians.” Furthermore, the subjects of “woman” and “lesbian” themselves are ineffective for a woman’s inner self. From the standpoint of people who aren’t women, it’s incredibly easy and effective to use these subjects.

As far as Japan goes, women speaking to one another about “sex” has been prohibited until very recently, and the words themselves used to discuss this topic have been monopolized by men.* Because of this, women have had to keep all of their different problems in this area to themselves. Regardless of how dissatisfied a woman was with her situation, she could not tell other women and talk about her situation or work on learning about it – for this reason, she couldn’t even perceive her feeling as one of “dissatisfaction.”

However, the situation around “heterosexual” sex at least has started to change greatly. The result of women becoming able to share information with one another about their individual situations has been the ability to perceive dissatisfaction for what it is and work towards resolving that dissatisfaction. At the same time, although I say “heterosexual women,” people are finally beginning to recognize that these women are vastly different individuals. Even lumping “heterosexual women” together is a foolish thing. It’s still a shame, though, that while this is going on, lesbians are still being seen as nothing more than the “generalized lesbian,” even among women.

The myths and taboos that seal off “my desires”

Regardless of whether they’re heterosexual or homosexual, women by nature know what gives them pleasure and what form of intimacy and touching they desire. However, due to a variety of taboos and superstitions, it’s difficult for women to look inside themselves to recognize and access these feelings directly – even today.

Furthermore, even if women could recognize and access these desires, they would have to deal with a number of obstacles. For example, the experience of being taught that “sex is embarrassing,” “women’s desire is something to be exploited by men’s desire,” and “women having a certain desire for something during sex is embarrassing.” Without these myths, women would be able to communicate with their partners about their own pleasures and discomforts without such hesitation. Furthermore, women wouldn’t have to completely surrender their right to decide what they find “pleasurable” to men, nor even give up their judgments on whether something is “pleasurable” or “uncomfortable” – in terms of “sex,” the phrase “a wife’s duty” is representative of this resignation. What’s more, if the superstition that “inserting a penis into her vagina is woman’s greatest pleasure” wasn’t so firmly
believed, there would be no need for unnecessary worry about whether one is sexually frigid. The list goes on and on.

Similarly, being repeatedly told that “feeling a desire to be intimate with the opposite sex is natural” and pushed into viewing touching between women as taboo robs women of the power to recognize what’s pleasurable to them. So, when women are all re-aligned towards “heterosexuality” around the time of puberty, they quickly become imprinted with the idea that “any pleasure stemming from two women is abnormal/inferior to heterosexuality” when evaluating what they find “pleasurable.”

By saying this, I don’t mean to express that there exist no women in this society who naturally want to have an intimate relationship with the opposite sex, nor that all women are forced into being heterosexual through societal pressure. What I want to express is that we need to be suspicious of this myth of “natural growth” when women who don’t naturally want to be intimate with the opposite sex are pressured into it, sometimes even experiencing psychological and physical damage because of it. There are some heterosexual women who don’t lose their “ability to recognize what they find ‘pleasurable’” (although they live without losing it because their heterosexuality is societally recognized). On the other hand, there are many women for whom being pushed into heterosexuality has sealed away this power.

What would happen if this myth of “natural growth” didn’t exist? In all likelihood, women would be able to live without feeling the need to put the brakes on their conscious and unconscious intimacy with and touching of other women. This intimacy could go as far as a woman wanted. If she didn’t desire it, it could stop. If “heterosexuality” was not compulsory under the pretext of being “natural,” regardless of whether a woman became intimate with a member of the same sex or the opposite sex, the sex her partner belonged to would not weigh heavily on her mind. There would also be no need for cognizance of the boundaries between what is “homosexual” and what is “heterosexual.” I can’t even imagine how heterosexual relationships and heterosexual men and women would change if the myth of “natural growth” disappeared, but I dare say these changes would happen to women who remained in relationships with other women.

Furthermore, in our circumstances where heterosexual relationships are valued more than any other kind, the standards for “pleasures” discussed within the context of heterosexuality end up infiltrating the standards of “pleasures” within relationships between women. The value system that is so overly suspicious of kissing instead of holding hands, having “sex” instead of kissing, touching someone without clothes on instead of with clothes on, of any behavior that implies an intimate
relationship, also surrounds relationships between women (of course, it restricts heterosexuals, too). Whether they abide by these values or consciously oppose them, women have already been invaded by the “myth of growing up” that tries to make them naturally transition towards heterosexuality in this way. However, if intimacy and touching between women were not forcibly re-aligned to match the standard procedures for heterosexual “sex” and heterosexuality did not insert relationships between women into the framework of “lesbians,” wouldn’t women be able to share whatever intimacy and touching they individually desire? This would go beyond the framework of “homosexuality/heterosexuality” itself.

However, at the same time, this general notion of “pleasure” that I’ve been speaking about should ultimately be reduced to individualistic sensations. There are also “pleasures” generally referred to as sadism, masochism, and fetishism, which are “pleasures” completely unrelated to relationships with other people. These “pleasures” do not belong to the majority (although there are stories of them existing) and are entirely up to the individual.

But when women try to recognize “pleasures” as individualistic or their own, they do so with quite a bit of bias. The ultimate goal of heterosexuality and its “myth of growing up” is to create the “lesbian” taboo and plug up the possible circuit of recognizing “pleasure” between women by enforcing it. Furthermore, outliers of the influence of being forced to have “sex” that align with male physiology and (what we consider to be) male desire limits women’s (not only heterosexual women’s, but lesbian women’s) possibility of finding “pleasure.” If none of this is the case, then how come there were so many voices of heterosexual women at the start of the “More Report” who expressed that “sex is unpleasurable,” “I pretend like I’m feeling something when I have sex,” and “I want something more than just being penetrated by a penis”?

The new fascism of “the correct pleasure”

A new, similar kind of bias is now being added to the mix from the perspective of those who criticize heterosexual “sex,” a form of “sex” entirely constructed around the insertion of the penis. These protests against heterosexual “sex” positing that it was originally constructed in accordance with the physiology and desires of men for the purpose of procreating come from feminists and those who seek “more humane sex.” The diversification of that value system may hold some positive meaning, but it also seems to be tinged with the danger of creating the enforcement of a new value system.

For example, in her study of “sadism/masochism” between lesbians, translator Azuma Reiko posits that the stance lesbian feminists take towards lesbians with masochistic desires is one of a certain
pity that says “it’s a result of being pushed into subordination to men during the process of growing up, which has a possibility of being corrected someday.” On the topic of lesbians with sadistic desires, they declare “that’s being a man!” with more than a hint of condemnation.

Then she cites some of the things she heard at a feminist meeting at an American university she visited in 1986. “There was an all-out attack on S&M among lesbians that day.” One member of the audience posed this question to the panelists and received the following answer:

“Isn’t the importance of free will towards sex exactly what lies at the heart of feminism?”

“ Once you realize that heterosexuality is the original source of the subjugation of women, you ought to be able to understand that you’re barking up the wrong tree in mentioning free will here. When you see the gravity of the problematic nature implicated in sex, you won’t be so caught up in the idea of individual freedom?” (“Standing on the Ground of Contaminated Lesbianism – From Lesbian Feminism to Lesbian S&M” imago, August 1991 Issue, Special Issue on “Lesbians”, Seidosha).

Lesbian “desires” are “dirtied” by heterosexuality, but they’re also “dirtied” by feminism. Feminism has come to have the power to change the circumstances surrounding lesbians even in Japan, but it’s just not possible to say that the value system among lesbians has progressed in an articulate manner – particularly when it comes to “sex.” Feminism speaks shyly of “sex” when it has good things to say, and still treats it as taboo when speaking ill of it. It remains this way for heterosexuality, and even more so when it comes to lesbian “sex.” So, even when lesbians themselves try to be positive about lesbians, the topic of desire cannot be center stage. This may seem obvious when you think about the fact that the many lesbians who have recently been speaking out on such matters call themselves “lesbian feminists” and only perceive of “lesbian” existence in the context of feminism. These lesbians and feminists are determined to glorify the existence of “lesbians.” Take the following, for example:

“In this overwhelming woman-hating world, we see women who put themselves at stake in order to love other women in totality and set them free – aren’t these lesbians the pioneers of this great adventure, proving the existence of the human race’s astonishing potential for intelligence and ability?” (“Woman Loving – Toward Constructing the Lesbian Argument” cited from Osawa Mari’s afterword. Translated by Watanabe Mieko, Gendai Shokan, 1990).

**Without denying the diversity of “desire”**

That I am a lesbian means I have the desire to create relationships with women I am interested in and I desire those women who touch my heart. It may be best to say there’s nothing more to it than that. It doesn’t mean that I love all “women” in general or that I love women in “totality” (but it also doesn’t mean I look down on the women I’m not attracted to). There’s no problem with feminist theory.
stating that there are people for whom being a lesbian is a means of support, and it’s likely that this
type can provide a basis for the desire of other women because all humans experience some type of
desire.

However, by no means are all “lesbians” like this. It’s dangerous to put down an individual
lesbian’s “desires” and compare which desires are better than others. It’s the diversity of those desires
themsevles – diversity caused by being attracted to women – that in turn ensure the diversity of
lesbians.

The circumstances women are placed in when they are robbed of their recognition of “pleasure”
through a variety of taboos, forces and myths make it nearly impossible to assert one’s natural desires
and pleasures. Assuming it’s possible, shouldn’t we at least try to figure out what’s constricting us?

I only know what kind of desire I feel towards certain women. So, at the very least, I don’t want
the existence of these desires to be denied by anyone else, and I have no intent to resign myself to
pressure or suppression from others because of those desires. I started expressing to others that “I’m a
lesbian” for that sole purpose.

I don’t know why I like women and I don’t know if there was some catalyst in my past that made
me acquire these feelings. It’s just the same as how heterosexuals don’t know why they like the
opposite sex and don’t know if there was some catalyst in their past that made them acquire those
feelings.

Does “sexual love” have absolute value?

I also don’t know whether there is a clear difference between homosexuality and
heterosexuality. The societal fact that heterosexuality bears no fault and homosexuality undergoes all
sorts of hardships has a deep influence on the construction and quality of every relationship, so it’s easy
to imagine the differences that may arise in both kinds of relationship. Furthermore, if we consider how
the “sexual love” implied when we talk about hetero“sexuality” and homo“sexuality” has already
become standardized through a heterosexual norm and how the highest measure of intimacy between
people is based on physical contact, the first step we take in trying to probe the differences between
heterosexuality and homosexuality has already been clouded by our own biases. Perhaps the act of
trying to remember my earliest memory of touching a girl before puberty itself is meant to bog down my
thought process on assessing “touching” as a measure of intimacy.

However, even if this were the case, I’ve never once been in a situation where my desire
towards girls was “not denied in any way.” My desire has always been exposed to repudiation from
society as well as myself and I have no idea how it would present itself in a situation where it faced no denial whatsoever. If I could try to put myself in such circumstances, it would no doubt hold some value for me.

When I first began to notice that I was attracted to women, I could only analyze this attraction within the context of heterosexuality and being attracted to men. This is because I had no other method through which I could situate my feelings. It took a long time for me to be able to break that spell, allow myself a certain degree of affirmation towards being a “woman,” and feel desire for women in a form outside of the context of “men.” I’ve finally reached that point, but I still don’t really understand what women desire. I’m totally confined to knowledge of people’s desires only as they show them – desires that I can make a decision about. For example, I, too, naturally feel the illusory yet salient value that “touching each other without clothes on” is something that happens in a relationship between two people. I even get the feeling that “touching each other without clothes on” is an act that has been repeated for the sole purpose of making people hold the conviction that it “signifies a special kind of relationship” without actually thinking about whether that’s something they truly want.

When I finally found a vent for my ever-prohibited “desire to have an intimate relationship with a woman” and “desire towards women,” the only thing that stuck with me from before was the conviction “not to ruin this relationship.” The fear that I wouldn’t have a second chance at another relationship were this one to fail robbed me of the composure necessary to question the content of the relationship. For a very long time, I didn’t even have the capacity to reflect on what I desired.

In spite of this, that relationship stuck with me in some way and provided me with the basis for affirmatively accepting and taking responsibility for “being a woman,” “being a person who is attracted to women,” and “my desires.” At the very least, the sense of relief that I wouldn’t be threatened within that relationship allowed me the capacity to clearly ask myself what I desired without clinging to my fear of loss and compulsive behavior to “touch each other without clothes on” beyond what I desired. This relationship became a place to express desire and simultaneously confirm and correct those desires as needed. Of course, I can’t say that all my desires were verified and returned to their “original form.”

Where are “my desires”?

What is “desire” to a “woman”? And what is “pleasure”? Without reconsidering these questions, we cannot question whether there are fundamental differences between lesbians and heterosexual women.
In terms of societal situation, we have to emphasize the countless differences between being a lesbian and being a heterosexual over and over again. Other than that area, whether lesbians and heterosexual women are different or similar is not an important question. Perhaps the desires and ways to experience feelings for lesbians and heterosexual women are dissimilar enough to call lesbians and heterosexual women different, but perhaps the desires and ways to experience feelings for lesbians and heterosexual women are similar enough to call lesbians and heterosexual women the same. But in the end, I get the feeling that arguing whether heterosexuality and homosexuality are similar or different already falls into some sort of trap. This is because if you try to talk about “homosexuality” now, it’s necessarily limited by being discussed in the realm of “sexual love” that the system of “heterosexuality” places absolute value on. As of now, “homosexuality” only exists within the scope of the system of “heterosexuality,” so it cannot truly be discussed.

Outside of “sexual love” ensuring the exclusivity of a relationship, what does it provide for lesbians? Due to the taboo nature of “sexual love” rooted in Japanese society, the value of “sexual love,” whether it’s between homosexuals or heterosexuals, is growing day by day. The taboo that it can only be shared among a “husband and wife” or “lovers of the opposite sex” gives it a further special significance. In the case of “homosexuality,” the taboo that “homosexuality” confers delivers a special value for “sex” is rooted in an attitude of joint offense. However, if we were to clear away this attitude of joint offense in the transgression of such taboos, could what we call “sexual love” continue to have such significance in our relationships as it does now? The implications of exclusivity and specialness that “sexual love” confers on relationships are even ensured in lesbian relationships, but above all, these implications also approve of the predominance of the system tied to preserving the seeds of heterosexual “family.” Discussing “sexual love” only as it is now permits the standardized form of “heterosexuality” to be absolute – “heterosexuality” based on (what we assume to be) male desires and the denial of female desires.

In the modern “heterosexual” system, women are perhaps only allowed to say “this is not what I’m looking for, and neither is that.” We’re led to believe that our desires are “there,” “not there,” “normal,” “abnormal”… we might only be able to start by trying to say that they’re all different.

Before words were chosen and conferred with meaning and value, women infallibly had something during their childhoods, and they infallibly had something before being realigned with “natural heterosexuality.” And, for all I can see, women still have it today. If we try to discuss it with words based in “heterosexuality,” it falls away and we eventually lose sight of it. No matter how taboo we continue to see this something as, it’s there because of the existence of “lesbians.”
“And if I have so often insisted on negatives: not, nor, without . . . it has been to remind you, to remind us, that we only touch each other naked. And that, to find ourselves once again in that state, we have a lot to take off. So many representations, so many appearances separate us from each other. They have wrapped us for so long in their desires, we have adorned ourselves so often to please them, that we have come to forget the feel of our own skin. Removed from our skin, we remain distant. You and I, apart (“When Our Lips Speak Together” This Sex Which is Not One, Luce Irigaray, previously cited).

Far before “sexual love,” the feelings that women shared were different from the general idea of “desire” possessed by “heterosexuality” and “men.” I am seeking something that belongs to women. But what in the world is it that I’m looking for in women? What am I looking for that belongs to women?

*Women’s attempt to break down the conventional images that cling to “sex” are progressing, though incrementally. For example, the Japanese edition of “The New Our Bodies, Ourselves” published by the Boston Women’s Health Book Collective (edited by Fujieda Mieko, revised by Kouno Miyoko and Ogino Miho, Junkudo, 1988) replaces a number of conventionally used words with new ones. The following is written in the foreword on the matter:

“In Japanese, unavoidable kanji like ‘in’ (private parts) and ‘chi’ (shame) are used to describe genitals, which foster a negative image of embarrassment and dirtiness when discussing sex and genitals — we feel this is often unsatisfactory. In light of this, we dared to take the approach of changing kanji for ‘in’ in ‘labia’ to ‘sei’ (sex), the kanji for ‘in’ in ‘vulva’ to ‘seigi’ (genital), the kanji for ‘chi’ in ‘pubic hair’, ‘pubic bone’ and ‘mons pubis’ to ‘sei’ (sex), and put the conventional terms into parentheses (however, because we couldn’t find a better expression for ‘ein’ (perineum), we left it as is for this edition). We do not necessarily think these are the absolute best expressions to use, but we hope that in trying this, women themselves can think about what genital terms they prefer and find easy to use, as well as create a springboard for further discussion.”

Even if the general values associated with “yin and yang” were not originally meant to confer positive images on one and negative images on the other, the fact remains that modern women develop a negative attitude towards their own bodies through the words with the kanji ‘in’ and ‘chi.’ Simply re-wording this handful of terms would not solve all our problems, but it should be more widely practiced so its implications can be a first step to inciting an attitude of reform.
Coming Out – Towards Unity

Reasons to “come out”

Why do I have to deliberately state that “I am a lesbian”? Why is it that, regardless of the possibility that a single misstep could not only bring me pain but potentially damage my relationships with the people who are most important to me, I must go into very personal details about “the people I like” to total strangers? If I was just living properly as a person, I probably wouldn’t express anything of the sort to anyone...

There are people who ask me these things with the utmost sympathy for me. Regardless of what people tell me, I always feel a certain conflict on the matter. Trying to convey to other people my circumstances “as a homosexual” is not telling some unspecified mass of people about an “ideology” or a “principle.” It’s nothing but discussing my private life – being a homosexual.

However, this society is rife with discrimination rooted in ignorance and prejudice on this particular “very personal matter.” So, until I begin speaking out on the subject, most people in this society will remain unaware of this very ignorance and prejudice.

In the past several years, a great number of people have told me that I was “the first lesbian they had ever met,” unaware of how much this hurt me. Even though they’re actually very close with many lesbians and there’s a good possibility that the women they connect with as “friends” every day are lesbians, none of them ever try to imagine this being the case. They don’t know how this lack of imagination hurts the lesbians that are close to them, nor how it robs them of their power to express “I’m a lesbian.” Every time I hear “you’re the first lesbian I’ve met” (and often this admission is full of good will and admiration), it resurrects the exact pain I once felt at the hands of these same people in being a regularly ignored woman locked into the framework of “heterosexuality.”

More than anything else, homosexuals must live their lives hiding their homosexuality because failing to do so would lead to many different kinds of pain – if this isn’t discrimination, then what is? I would like for the heterosexuals who tell us “Why don’t you just come out of hiding and tell people? You’re overthinking things, it’s really not that big of a deal. I wouldn’t discriminate against you,” to go out tomorrow and try telling the people around them “I’m a homosexual.” Then they would really know whether it’s “not that big of a deal.” Actually, a women’s studies course at an American university tried an exercise to see the reactions of people when a woman told them “I’m a lesbian.” A female student studying abroad at NYU in the early 80s said this about the course:
“In my ‘Introduction to Women’s Studies’ course, we once had homework called ‘Being a Lesbian for Three Days’ where we behaved like lesbians so others would view us as such and we could observe and analyze their reactions. I was completely shocked when my two young white female roommates in the co-ed dorms with whom I had overcome age and cultural differences with and was co-existing peacefully with had such an incredibly negative reaction towards lesbians. It was more than anything I would have ever anticipated” (Enomoto Aiko, pamphlet on the American documentary “Harvey Milk”, 1988).

Be that as it may, I certainly don’t feel that I’m saying to homosexuals who think that there is no need to come out about their “homosexuality” because it’s a personal matter that they “should do the same as me.” This is because everything about my coming out is for my own purposes, not anyone else’s.

To rid yourself of this “fabricated world”

Voicing “I’m a lesbian” is the next step in the process of accepting that “I’m a lesbian.” It’s the process of using your own will to change this world which has made clear to you that you can’t be appropriately situated in the scheme of things by taking on the label of “lesbian.”

When you can’t express “I’m a lesbian” to those around you, it lets people live in a “fabricated” world. You end up having to create a “fabricated” world for the people around you as you go to work, go out with friends and spend time with your relatives. I don’t know why, but questions like “So, getting married anytime soon?” or “Do you have a lover?” seem so inexcusable that I laugh them off, as I’ve never gone between set places and set people. Just dealing with the strange looks from people around me when a supervisor comes by with stories of a potential marriage arrangement meeting causes me a great deal of stress. Being forced to put up with speaking on matters at one’s workplace that aren’t related to work ought to normally be considered some sort of violation of privacy or sexual harassment.

So, this makes talking friends and relatives all the more complicated. If you’re set on keeping your mouth shut, you put up with being called “eccentric,” or you deceive people with lies about a lover (stories about a man, obviously). Whichever path you choose, you can’t expect it to be very effective, and you have no choice but to deal with questions of “marriage” as they come up. Until they give up on their questions, you have no choice but to endure the pressure.

As long as you do not announce yourself to others, you’ll live in a world with a constant feeling of distortion and lacking. Because you’re hiding one thing, countless other things start to become
warped and become hidden as well. Because things become warped at the very beginning, you’ll never see any undistorted places when you look around. There is no place in this world to be “yourself” – not at work, with friends or with relatives. This world seems gentle and quiet on the surface, but there remains a great nothingness at its core, only existing to preserve a dangerous equilibrium.

I think that telling the people around you “I’m a lesbian” – in other words, coming out – includes revealing the “important matters” you’ve been hiding all this time as well as rebuilding your world – that which has been constructed through relationships with other people – from the bottom up. This is the very first step to turning the “fabricated world” you’ve been living in into a “real world.” “Coming out” comes from the expression “coming out of the closet.” The Japanese way of saying closet is “‘oshi-ire’ kara deteiku koto,” coming out of a stifling situation. I, for one, did not want to live alone in suffocation until I die.

I would not be able to endure seeing just one person and living my life locked up within a “two-person world” somewhere with no contact with the outside world. I also would not want to sever myself from all parts of daily life outside of this “two-person world.” I would never be able to stand the emotional anguish brought on by having to hide away, cooped up in a single room with “my most successful and meaningful relationship.” Some people make the effort to have fabulous jobs recognized by society, garnering popularity and profound sympathy from everyone they come into contact with. Their homosexual habits would never in a million years be overlooked with a hushed “that person sure has some odd habits” as a reward for such excellence in being a person (and, perhaps I’m being redundant, but no one would ever call this excellence in being a woman).

I do not have inordinate ambitions. If we could just embed the premise that it doesn’t mean anything whether the most important person to an individual is of the same or opposite sex into society, that would be enough for me. In other words, this would mean my privacy would not be put under duress or invaded. But even that is a difficult thing to ask for. Even in America, where activism among homosexuals in their twenties to achieve civil rights is progressing, homosexuals still suffer from prejudice, so they’re definitely still facing prejudice in Japan. Even now, every time I say “I’m a homosexual,” I feel like my heart is constricting, even though I know that doing so is accomplishing something.

Because the number of people who make attempts at understanding what I’m trying to express has been increasing, for the first time, the fear I feel when I say “I’m a lesbian” is beginning to subside, little by little. I’m afraid this is the only reason it’s subsiding. It’s a fear that I will be denied, rejected, and
lose everything I have. This fear lives on without any loss of acceptance or affirmative feelings – if anything, as long as the feeling that I can achieve different things by coming out continues to grow without change, this fear will not disappear.

**Two positions on which gay and lesbian people differ**

Actually, women are exposed to the fear of losing many things by coming out and announcing “I’m a lesbian.” I would go so far as to say that they stand to lose more than male homosexuals. This is because they are “women” first, then “lesbians.” Before discrimination envelops a lesbian for being a “lesbian,” she experiences discrimination for being a “woman.” Much of this discrimination deprives lesbians of their power to come out in a physical way. Even if a lesbian has never experienced direct discrimination against her sexuality before, the ample discrimination she experiences for being a “woman” makes it difficult to live her life as a lesbian.

In the past year or two, male homosexuals within the movement for civil rights have been coming out one by one and starting conflicts with the administration to acquire rights, even in the courtroom. However, the situation surrounding lesbians has not changed to this extent. Is this because there’s no need for lesbians to acquire rights? Is it because they don’t want to come out? Of course, these are not the answers. Women simply have more to lose than men.

For example, if I’m being frank, women filled with nothing but motivation who have been working for years are not recognized for the opportunity to get a promotion. Men, of course, are. According to the analysis of Inoue Teruko and Ehara Yumiko, the proportion of female management in small to medium companies and the service industry is high, but in comparing men and women on the whole, men make up 97.5% of management positions, whereas women make up only 2.5%. Furthermore, “the majority of women in leadership positions are chief clerks, whereas hardly any are section managers or department heads, and the growth rate in this area is still incredibly low” (“Women’s Data-book” previously cited). On top of this, 40% of companies don’t offer any opportunities for promotions for women, their reason being “the years of continuous service from women are 40% less than men’s, and 70% more for auxiliary work” (aforementioned work).

At the same time, women are still unavoidably working for lower wages than men. According to analysis in the aforementioned work, the reason women don’t provide companies with as much continued service is because remuneration based on seniority is not applied to them. Because of this, the discrepancy between men and women’s pay rates rises with age, and when men hit the latter half of their thirties, a women’s wage is about half of theirs. This disparity continues to exist with authority today and has nothing to do with the type of industry or rules of the company.
These circumstances alone create a large gap in attitude between male homosexuals and lesbians. Of course, men also run the risk of being discharged from the company if they profess that they’re homosexual at work. However, a male work force is given a certain degree of value by a company. In other words, if you’re discharged from work on the basis of “being a homosexual,” the discharged party comes under pressure to illuminate just how much of an inconvenience they were to the company. In fact, a great number of courtroom battles surrounding this problem have already occurred in the West.

But what would happen in present day Japan if a lesbian did the same thing? If a lesbian in a management position tried to do so, it might be different. But the fact of the matter is that there are so few women in these positions in Japan that it’s almost unbelievable. So, what would happen if a woman outside of a management position tried this? Most of the time, if you expressed “I’m a lesbian” in the workplace, you wouldn’t get fired for it. But this isn’t because your existence is being approved of – quite the opposite. If you consider it on the company’s end, a woman’s labor power is not of interest to the company enough for there to be the necessity to make a fuss over it by “discharging” her.

**Discrimination towards lesbians as sexual violence**

But if this is the case, can we really say that if a woman were to come out in the workplace, it she could successfully continue to work as she had been until then? I don’t think so. Before even expressing that she is a lesbian, she has faced sexual violence – or perhaps we can be more flexible and call it sexual harassment (sexual pestering and threats) – day in and day out because she’s a woman. Being pressured into marriage (retirement), having her private life pried into, having her appearance and gender mocked behind her back, receiving threats of psychological and physical violence... “Lesbians” have to face these hardships for being a “woman” just the same as heterosexual women, except that these hardships become even more exacerbated. Perhaps there’s a possibility for a certain degree of joint struggle as “women” towards sexual violence, but if a woman announces that she is a “lesbian,” there’s also a possibility that even the women she was able to join hands before with would alienate her. Expressing “I’m a lesbian” also has the possibility of sowing the seeds of potential sexual violence from other women, because most of the women in this society carry a certain image in their heads about “lesbians,” an image which inspires fear within them.

Of course, what I’m describing is the worst-case scenario, but we can’t say this never happens. This risk is all the reason lesbians need to choose not to come out in their current situation. If a woman incurs the alienation of other women at her workplace, she can no longer continue to work there. Even if she sees a positive reaction from all of the women around her, the additional psychological violence
from men is enough cause to make her quit her job herself. If nothing else, the hushed ridicule she may happen to hear in passing would hurt her deeply. There is some sort of action you can take about blatant discrimination, but there’s no recourse for getting riled up about hushed gossip and ridicule. Furthermore, even if a woman doesn’t tell anyone she’s a lesbian, her daily existence of psychological and physical violence in the workplace is enough to force her into “voluntarily” retiring from her job.

The low wages and lack of incentive to stay on for a promotion make it difficult for women to give up many years of their lives to provide continuous service to the same workplace. But, as long as you’re living as a lesbian, you have no choice but to keep on working. The choices lesbians can actually make are extremely limited.

**Erasure of lesbians**

The constant intimidation of “lesbian” existence and how difficult it is for lesbians to come out is not simply due to the abundance of things they could lose as “women.” In Japanese society, no one can believe that there is even a possibility for two women to be able to have a continuous, intimate relationship in the first place. The term “lesbian” is at best a sexual preference, indicating an option for having “sex” – it’s never considered as a word that might indicate a relationship between two people. Lesbians are largely dependent on being “women” in this way as well.

One of the reasons for this is because society holds the conviction that women’s physical existence is destined for reproduction. I have a good example to illuminate this point.

It is said that six million people were killed en masse in the concentration camps of Nazi Germany. However, it’s not known exactly how many of those people were homosexuals. According to one theory, during 1933 and 34, somewhere between fifty thousand and sixty thousand homosexual men were captured and most of them were killed. Six lesbians were also captured (Kanda Masanori, “The Western Gay Movement” Impaction, Volume 71, Special “Gay Liberation” Issue, Impact Publishing 1991).

But why on Earth was there such a disparity between men and women? This disparity actually sheds light on a vast difference in societal thinking about men and women.

Nazism, which viewed homosexuals as “seeds for the degeneration of humanity,” condemned homosexuality through passing Clause 175 of their penal code in Prussia in 1871, stating that sex acts between males were criminal acts (this clause has been amended but still exists). Legal spearheads for Nazism had this to say at the time:
“We ought to pay special attention to homosexuality, as it is a clear expression of an inclination towards opposing the normal people’s community. The behavior of homosexuals is a denial of how the world should be – a people’s community – in order to ward off racial obliteration. Because of this, we must never allow homosexual behavior” (“The Pure Empire of Nazi Germany” H.P. Bleuel, translated by Oshima Kaori, Jimbun Shoin, 1983).

Because even at the best of times there were so few men around from being recruited for the war effort, the Nazis who touted the slogan “beget and multiply,” could not permit any sexual behavior from men that did not lead to reproduction. However, on the other hand, lesbians didn’t receive this sort of criminalization. The author of the aforementioned work also goes into the reasoning for this:

“According to the narrow thinking of overly reactionary sexual theorists, women, who were subordinate to men, could never completely deny the existence of their responsibility to preserve the species. Through this true essence of womanhood, they could be made to become mothers and give birth according to the wishes of their husbands, even if they were lesbians – in fact, they must give birth. Because of this, they saw no apparent difficulty – or at least not that much of a problem – for large scale reproduction in the case of women.”

Although Japan does not carry the same degree of intolerance that Nazi Germany did, this country is similar in that its women have always appeared to be something men have the ultimate power to change. This notion is particularly strong in the sexual sense. According to the prejudices disseminated by this society, “women (and their sex) are something to be educated and exploited by men,” making impossible any desires that men don’t deem necessary. Even masturbation and homosexuality become non-existent. Naturally, this is nothing more than a superstition spread to support the attitude of superiority that men hold over women.

No matter how you put it, women still exist as “half-men” in this society. They are treated as such even in the workplace (only being given work suited to “half-men” from the very start, yet strangely being told “women can only do this amount of work”), and even in sexual harassment or rape trials, the opinions of the woman who is supposed to be the victim are ignored (as you see with set phrases like “a woman’s persecution complex” or “she was asking for it”). Women are seen as being unable to live on their own (while women remain under the thumb of the men in this country who try to only allow them social security and low wages) and are said to have no decision-making ability because they’re too emotional (if by any chance this phenomenon is true, it’s not women who rob themselves of the chance to make decisions by not allowing themselves an outlet for anything except “becoming emotional”). Women who are “half-men” are thought to be unable to find sufficient satisfaction in
personal relationships without men, and for all I know, most women probably find it unbelievable that they would be able to carry on stable relationships in a place where no men existed in the first place.

The biggest problem for lesbians is this powerful conviction that “lesbians” should not exist and should not be able to exist in this society. In these circumstances, when a woman tries saying “I’m a lesbian” in the workplace, she won’t even face outright discrimination. Whether it’s from men or women, the responses are “you must have just been dating bad guys this whole time,” “if you dated me, that’d be fixed right up (being a lesbian),” “I’ll introduce you to a good guy,” “do you hate men?” “how can you say such a thing if you’ve never properly dated a man?” – I’ve heard them all so many times, my ears ache. They’re simply convinced that women “who are attracted to women” do not exist, and even if they do accept it, you still can’t evade being stuck with the label of “man-hater.” Heterosexuals don’t expect a reason why people are attracted to the opposite sex, but they want to exhaust the topic to understand every possible reason a person is attracted to the same sex. But it’s not possible to give a reason why, and there’s no need to do so.

**Unity with a “different existence”**

At first glance, coming out under these conditions and expressing “I’m a lesbian” to the people around you is a visionary act. However, to other people, this is an act that says “I’m a different person than you.” In Japanese society, where everyone is wordlessly treated as though they are the same, it’s an act that indicates there really do exist people who are plainly different from others.

In this society where homogeneity is prized, it’s not easy to get others to understand that “people exist who aren’t like that.” Just expressing “I’m a lesbian” doesn’t mean that the next day no one will be forced into marriage and everyone will stop telling “his” story. Getting people who live in a society where there is only one kind of relationship to understand that being a “lesbian” isn’t just a preference is going to take a lot more time. But we have to begin by saying “I’m different” in order to indicate to others that heterogeneity does exist in this society, and that existence must be respected. If we don’t say anything, we’ll be seen as “the same as everyone else,” and being viewed in this way is already hurting the privacy of lesbians. Their privacy is infringed upon when people treat their visible identity as being naturally “heterosexual,” and their unseen side, their “homosexuality,” is obstructed from being a part of their daily lives.

Hiding away in this society that tries to pass off homogeneity as natural, in other words, makes this new existence of “lesbians” forever “un-discovered” within society and within lesbians themselves.
As long as they don’t come out, lesbians remain invisible people, no matter how many of them there are. Even lesbians themselves can’t see that the person right next to them is a lesbian.

Of course, coming out is not the same thing as disclosing everything about your private life. Quite the contrary – coming out is a way to acquire routes to protecting your privacy. As long as we continue saying things like “I have a very intimate relationship with this woman, but we’re not lesbians,” the people around you aren’t confronted with anything. They can’t face the possibility that the society we’ve formed might somehow be negatively influencing this two-person relationship. Furthermore, as long as we continue hiding everything about our relationships from other people, no one around us is able to realize that they’re violating our right to privacy in our relationship. They can’t even begin to imagine this might be the case.

Acquiring the ability to say “I’m a lesbian” forces the people around you to “discover” the “different existence” of lesbians in this society and seek out an appropriate way to cope with this “different existence.” This is the first step to letting others know that ignorance is already a great crime and the right to privacy must be protected. And, for lesbians, it’s the spark they need to abandon the “fabricated world” they’ve built by pretending they’re the same as others.

Not “approval” but “acceptance”

“I’m a lesbian. I’ve been a lesbian for as long as I can remember. Please believe me when I tell you that I’m not trying to hurt or anger any of you in saying this. I’m also not saying that I want any of you to approve of my lifestyle. All I want is for you to believe that I’m still the same sister you’ve always known and I’ll still love you like I always have. I just want you to accept the fact that I’m a homosexual” (“Like Coming Home: Coming-Out Letters” edited by Meg Umans, Banned Books, 1988).

This letter (the above quote is just an excerpt) is from a book that contains a collection letters from 36 different people between the ages of 15 and 64 coming out to those close to them. It’s addressed “From Ilene, age 28” to “my beloved family.” She clearly writes what it is she wants from her family – not approval, but acceptance.

This is the only thing that coming out forces people to deal with. They simply need to let her live her life as a lesbian without threatening to invade her privacy and accept the fact that she lives a life that’s different from theirs. Despite the phrase “I’m a lesbian” really meaning “I live a different life than you do and I refuse to be discriminated against or have my privacy invaded because of it,” coming out is fraught with the danger of having your privacy invaded even further. The sensibilities of Japanese people in particular who live as though homogeneity is only natural lead them in some way to trying to drag “that which is different from them” into their terrain. They try to understand everything from their
own ultimately small scale of measurement without recognizing, let alone accepting, the fact that there exist things in this world that they don’t understand.

**Heterosexuals do not “understand” lesbians**

When you say “I’m a lesbian,” there are a lot of people who respond with “I don’t understand.” Sometimes, there are people who say “I want to understand.” But can people who aren’t lesbians “understand” lesbians? Conversely, can lesbians “understand” heterosexuals? (And can one lesbian really fully understand another lesbian?) Can a heterosexual understand why a woman would be attracted to another woman and the emotions and relationship that develop between two women? It’s not that lesbians are asserting that they can’t be understood or it’s best if people don’t, but “understanding” is not what lesbians are looking for. I’m not coming out because I want why and to what degree I’m attracted to women to be understood by others. Of course, I also don’t need to be “approved of.” The only reason I’m coming out is to protect my privacy and refuse to let it be interpreted in the “normal” heterosexual context of this society or forced into abiding by its standards.

A while ago, many of us homosexuals had to face women who said things like “because there’s men and women in this society, I think it’s normal for them to stick together. It’s just that you people have never come to like anyone, right? I don’t approve of your kind of existence.” I don’t care about what these women think is normal or what they think about me (whether she thinks I’m gross, pitiful or that I’ve never actually liked anyone), but no one has the right to “disapprove” of my existence. Nevertheless, her declaration made it clear that the only reason she doesn’t “approve of me” is because she doesn’t understand my reality. This is arrogance, pure and simple.

**Understanding realities you don’t “know”**

Lesbians are thought not to exist. So, as long as they do not emerge into the forefront of society, they do not face any outward discrimination, and at first glance it seems as though there isn’t any discrimination towards lesbians at all. However, if a decent number of lesbians came out, this discrimination would inevitably rise to the surface. Our society thoroughly resents “different things” and is not even close to trying to understand us.

Nevertheless, it’s clear that homosexuals don’t have to wait for their problems to come to the surface for them to reach their limits living in “Japanese” society as it is. In the end, this society must come to understand that they cannot measure us, know us, or understand us by utilizing the conventional scope of their narrow world, even when we’re in their immediate surroundings. This
relates to everything about us. They must also come to understand that it is simply impossible to justify feelings of “I just don't get it” because of societal discrimination.

There’s a certain scene in the movie “The Times of Harvey Milk” where “Proposition 6,” a proposition which would eliminate legal safeguards for homosexual public school teachers to teach in schools, was to be voted on in California in November of 1978. Harvey Milk, the first openly gay person to be elected to public office in California (to San Francisco’s Board of Supervisors), and his homosexual group unfurled a large scale reactionary movement to vote down this proposition.

In the film, there’s a scene recorded where some of Milk’s constituents stop an elderly married American couple of Asian heritage on the street and have the following exchange:

“What do you think about Proposition 6?”
“I don’t have much of an opinion. No comment.”
“Would you mind reading my pamphlet?”
“Of course... isn’t this an individual problem?”
“You think so? I’m very worried about it, some of my friends will lose their jobs over this.”
“That’s a shame.”
“A lot of people are going to suffer because of this. If we allow discrimination once, the same thing will happen over and over again. Please give it some thought.”

At first, public opinion polls showed overwhelming support for Proposition 6, but right before the vote, the numbers showed a close contest. Through this activism, many people began to see Proposition 6 as a human rights violation. In the end, it was rejected by a landslide, making Milk’s work a huge success (Milk himself was actually assassinated by a conservative member of the Board of Supervisors twenty days after the vote).

I think that the degree to which the elderly couple seemed to care shows the minimum sufficient amount – giving their attention to the discrimination and situations people are facing, giving the voice explaining all of this a chance. Homosexuals are neither looking for understanding nor hospitality, but simply a society where they can live without discrimination.
On Being a Lesbian Today

On the great change that has come into my life

In the many months that have elapsed since I wrote the first sentence of this book – “Who are ‘lesbians’?” – and prior to writing the rest of it, I was not in a situation where I could say “I think that I’m a lesbian.” Furthermore, the questions “who are lesbians?” and “am I a lesbian?” became of little concern to me.

In this time, the statement “I hardly ever find myself saying ‘I’m a lesbian’” that had previously been true changed completely. This is because everything I did in this past year like continuing to say “I’m a lesbian” and continuing to tell the stories of the situations I had been in and was currently living through was in order to change the external circumstances that made me how I “used to be” when I was asked “who are lesbians?” Through speaking and writing, the reason why I was made to think “I’m not a lesbian or anything like that” that I had been previously unsure of became clear as day to me – definitively clear.

Through everything I’ve written about, it has finally become clear to me how to stop asking “who are lesbians?” and arrive at saying “being a lesbian is part of my reality.” To put it another way, as a result of writing various things over the course of this year, I finally stopped asking “who are lesbians?”, realized “being a lesbian is part of my reality,” and acquired the means to declare that to others. Although many things have occurred over the years which have slowly changed my attitude and thought process, all of these cues seemed unreliable and hazy until I began to write that first sentence. But as I wrote about these matters, it all began to take shape. From the start, my hatred and fear towards “lesbians” which I could only write about abstractly or in parts came to the surface as “something that had been constricting me for a long time.” Then, I was struck by an answer to the question “who are lesbians?”

The reason I had been driven by this question for nearly a decade, the reason I had such difficulty coming up with an answer for it – in the end, it was nothing more than the difficulty I had, and that therefore other women have had, with accepting the fact that “I’m a lesbian.”

My own hatred towards lesbians

First of all, why did I think “I’m not a lesbian, or anything like one?” To put it simply, my reluctance to call myself a “lesbian” came from the various negatives images surrounding the term and the “taboo” feeling that emerged from those images. On one hand, I held the firm conviction that
relationships between “men” were only natural, not to mention normal, from the very beginning. Before denying that there was any connection between myself and being a “lesbian,” I was able to think “I’m normal. Therefore, (even though I’m attracted to the same sex) I’m not a lesbian” without feeling any contradictions.

For example, when I first began puberty, I felt that images of “marriage” were my greatest “ideal” for the future. My adolescent-self thought the tale of the “androgynous” that went “long ago, humans existed as hermaphrodites. But, at some point, the gods cleaved every person in two, and every man and woman was left looking for their other half” was a charming fable (this story appeared in Plato’s “Symposium”, but I had no idea where it was from at the time). Of course, I never thought about the societal significance that “marriage” had or what it would be like to have kids, because I was just an adolescent (to pubescent girls, such “common” matters were nothing but a nuisance). The “marriage” I pictured at the time certainly had nothing to do with “marriage registration.” I was simply convinced that the way to bind “fated lovers” was through “marriage.”

However, I also knew at that time that the only person I could get “married” to would be a “man.” Therefore, the partner in my idealized “marriage” was naturally a “man.” At the time, because marriage was so glorified, I thought the typical girlish attitude that “it’s normal to be the bride of the one you love and bear his children” was worldly. In the end, though, I was just as steeped in the attitude that “marriage naturally occurred between a man and a woman” than others, if not more.

I was already attracted to women at that time, but to allow and prioritize those feelings meant letting go of “marriage,” which I was convinced was “the way to achieve the highest of loves.” Homosexuality was not particularly taboo to me at the time, nor did I ever really think “being attracted to the same sex might be weird,” but before it became taboo to me, I felt I had no connection with it because I believed that “relationships with men were only natural.” It never even occurred to me that these feelings might become a catalyst for developing relationships with another woman (or women). So, I had no connection to the terms “lesbian” or “homosexual,” and I didn’t try to make a connection with them.

However, even though I never even considered the word “lesbian” to be worth thinking about, my attraction to the same sex only grew stronger over the years. As a natural result of thinking about my idealized “relationship with a man” as a model, the existence of “sexual relationships” inevitably inched their way into my mind. Because I was growing convinced that “the ultimate expression of love in a relationship with a man is ‘sex’,” I wondered if the same applied to being attracted to the same sex.
There was one other resistance that led me to convince myself that “I’m not a lesbian.” The same reasons and attitudes that pervaded society and caused it to see “lesbians” as “taboo” and “abnormal” had clearly been working their way into my own head. “Men” and “sex” were in the same set as “marriage,” and the story behind how that came to be seemed natural and beautiful – however, if “women” and “sex” did not reach my highest, idealized pedestal of “marriage,” neither could getting pregnant, and “sexual desire” just for the sake of it (or so I thought about it) it was impermissible. I was determined that this was how things were.

On the other end of these feelings existed a certain prudishness that “I don’t want my feelings towards the same sex to be seen in the same light as what adults call ‘sexual desire,'” a prudishness that’s no doubt unique to puberty (oddly enough, I did not feel any resistance towards the connection between “men” and “sex” and men’s sexual desire). This was because I was not pressed by my attraction towards women at that point, and I didn’t try to fix that. Instead, I repressed and ignored the sexual feelings I had towards women, conveniently explaining to myself that “the best thing to do is have emotional self-devotion” so I could continue justifying my other feelings towards women. I continued to tell myself that “I don’t have ‘sexual desire’ for women – therefore, I’m not a lesbian” well into my twenties. This excuse was sufficient enough for me.

I had a terribly painful experience in the middle of puberty.

I told a very important friend of mine that “I like women.” After that, she would not speak to me or even come near me until we finally met up again just over a year later. I had an experience like that one later in life, too, but at that time, I had to continue on with my daily life for months while seeing what I had lost and why with my own eyes.

Until I graduated college, I did not once meet a girl who was like me – someone who shared the experience of being attracted to women like I did. There were likely some girls like that, but I certainly pretended they were not there, and even if I knew they were there, I avoided them like I was unaware of them. If I had met a girl like me, it would have given me the means to look at myself objectively and I would have had no choice but to face my reality (in the end, delaying this work until deep into my twenties was not a good thing).

In any case, I always thought “I’m the only one who is different from normal people,” As a result of the experience I had, I understood that being attracted to women was enough reason for my existence to be denied. I continued to think “I’m not a lesbian or a homosexual” as I had before, but the more I thought about it after that incident, the stronger my suspicion that “am I really a lesbian?” grew.
I didn’t think “being attracted to the same sex” was such a big deal that “‘being attracted to the same sex’ – in other words, being a lesbian – ought to be hated so much that it makes people not want to discuss it with me or even come near me,” but I did think it was a serious taboo – therefore, I was probably taboo, too, as were “homosexuals.”

Because of this, from high school to college, I read every single book I could find that touched on or had any relation whatsoever to “homosexuality.” At first, I started with a collection of works by Freud, and then books on psychology and psychopathology I could find at the libraries or bookstores, then novels, manga, and magazines… even now, there’s very little information available, but back then, there were practically zero descriptions of “lesbians.” In psychology and psychopathology texts, there was either nothing on the subject or the topic was only dealt with in terms of “deviants” – in men and women’s magazines, if it was written about at all, it was either gossip columns discussing “suspicions” that some famous person was a “lesbian” or a pornographic story.

I read all the psychology and psychopathology books I could get my hands on because I wanted to know why I had feelings for the same sex and whether it was natural for a person to feel this way. If liking the same sex was such a repudiated thing, then I wanted to know whether I could “cure” myself if I really was “abnormal.” Other than “Collected Works of Sigmund Freud,” I don’t recall the other books I read at that time, and I hardly remember what was written in them, either. At the very least, I can guarantee that almost all of these texts on “homosexuality” were negative, just like the quotes I previously cited describing “homosexuality.” All that came from reading these books was more confusion and a turbulent inner conflict where I felt that “I might be a lesbian” while wanting to deny that suspicion.

Becoming acquainted with “myself”

The turning point for all of this came from a very unexpected source. In 1998, men from a homosexual group who opposed a bill called the “AIDS Prevention Law Proposal” (now “AIDS Prevention Law”) that had been introduced to the Diet the year before began to explain why they were opposed to the bill from a homosexual standpoint to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. During the so-called “AIDS panic,” the warped view that “AIDS is a gay man’s disease” was terribly prevalent. Under these conditions, I expected that my involvement as a woman in these proposals would bear some significance despite the existence of such views about gay men and the commonly held attitude that “women have nothing to do with AIDS.” I was still unclear on whether I was a lesbian myself, but I was
not worried about being asked “Are you a lesbian?” at a press conference or anything. I was acting as a “member of a homosexual group.”

Around this time, I felt that I finally wanted to put an end to my hazy inner conflict where I continued asking myself “who am I?” After compiling all the things that the people around me and society had to say and write about “lesbians,” I did not know the answers to “Who am I?” or “Am I a lesbian or not?” and it didn’t seem like I ever would. The more I thought about it, the more unbearable my confusion became. This confusion even began negatively influencing that which had spurred all these questions – the fact that I was attracted to women. The anxiety I felt about myself and the self-hatred and self-denial that went with it began to seriously damage my relationships with other people. I wanted to change my situation.

The press conference was broadcasted that night on the news, and afterwards, those men received countless letters professing things like “I was so glad to see people living their lives and openly declaring themselves homosexuals.” This stirred something of a snap decision that it would be a matter of course for me to not relay my confusion to anyone who witnessed me. Without a doubt, for me to come out and say “I am a lesbian” would bear meaning. From then on, I began announcing to the people around me that “I’m a lesbian.” I stopped saying things like “I like so-and-so, but I’m not a lesbian or anything.” It was a faint feeling, but I began sensing that I finally understood myself.

**Diminishing self-hatred**

Declaring that “I am a lesbian” first helped me dismantle a good portion of the dissatisfaction I had felt for so long. For example, I used to be terribly uncomfortable when some group of people I didn’t know were ridiculing and making remarks about “homosexuality” or when people I wasn’t particularly close with were mindlessly discussing “marriage” and “lovers” with “heterosexuality” as the sole premise of the conversation. I would always think “I’m not okay with this...but I guess it’s fine,’” and let it slide because I worried that if I said something, the other people would figure out that “I’m a lesbian.”

However, through conveying that “I’m a lesbian” to others and that their words and the atmosphere of the situation made me uncomfortable – although it was difficult to articulate and I often missed my chance to bring it up in a conversation – I was able to get rid of most of my discomfort. In other words, I gained the ability to ask myself “Why did I pretend I’m interested in men?” or “Why didn’t I say that their remarks hurt me?” and live without the self-hatred associated with most of this discomfort.
Of course, since explaining these things only once or twice to others couldn’t possibly convey everything they needed to understand, I did still feel some dissatisfaction and discomfort. But I was able to eradicate my feelings of self-hatred for lying to myself and stop covering up my reality. With this, my feeling that “being a lesbian is unacceptable and should be reviled” began to fade away, little by little (this is by no means unusual, considering that continuing to think “I have to hide” and “I can’t say anything about this” creates an internal bias that “I can’t talk about any of this with other people”).

Then, whether it was a snap decision or not, beginning to express “I am a lesbian” also had a profound change on my way of thinking.

I had always thought I wanted to know “what kind of woman the word lesbian refers to,” and I thought if I compared that to myself, it would clarify whether I was a lesbian. I couldn’t help but feel anxious when I wasn’t doing this, so when I read psychology books, I worried “am I abnormal?” and when I came across representations imitating lesbians in pornography, I thought “I don’t want to be seen as the same as that.” The people around me who could not have had any inkling about my anxieties were manipulated by that which they wrote and said.

**Affirming the life “I” am living**

But, through expressing “I am a lesbian,” this thinking of mine began to change. Saying “I am a lesbian” created an attitude that “living as a ‘lesbian’ is one part of my own reality,” which allowed me to face the reality I had been avoiding eye contact with for a decade. The real visage of “lesbians” was not to be found in either books or the words people used to talk about them. But, I thought, am I not clearly living? Am I not real enough?

I wanted to live my life affirming my womanhood and creating intimate relationships with other women with all my heart. I still want to. In the end, this was the only thing I desired, and if I could just manage that, then I wouldn’t concern myself with what other people had to say about who I was (whether they called me a “lesbian” or a “homosexual” or something else). But this society prevents the fulfillment of this desire. The arbitrary, hazy, and fragmented images of “lesbians” that people who aren’t lesbians write and talk about are what prevents us from performing the labor of self-affirmation. Therefore, no matter how much I might insist that “I’m not a lesbian,” as long as I lived with the fact that “I’m a woman and the people I want to create intimate relationships with are also women,” the people who knew that would label me a “lesbian” and would explain me as they liked with no regard to my reality. Nothing would change about my situation. In other words, what I wanted to change could not be changed.
If that’s how it’s going to be, I thought, then why not call my reality “lesbian” and accept the label that “I am a lesbian” in order to deny people their ability to view me (under the influence of society’s images of “lesbians”) and interpret me as they please?

Some station’s cameraman saw me at the press conference I mentioned before, and the group I was with and I heard him say “damn that no good ugly lesbian.” Hearing this after the press conference ended somehow pulled a trigger in my mind. Nobody has the right to renounce my reality and existence. But the need to openly defend “being a lesbian” is fact. Regardless of whether they’re based in psychology or whatnot, if I don’t speak out against the images that others insert into my existence – and I’m convinced that the value judgment of “ugly” that man had was thanks to pornography – and say that the act of denying my existence through those images is wrong, then nothing will change. As long as I refrain from telling them “I am a lesbian, and I am living my life. No matter what images you associate with lesbians, you must prioritize us real people before those images,” I’ll never in my life find the power to affirm myself, nor the relationships I have.

That was the main reason I took on the label of “lesbian.”

**Why do we label ourselves?**

However, the decision to “accept” this label was my own decision – it was not something someone else forced me to do, nor something someone else could have forced me to do.

I don’t think that “being a lesbian” itself has any social connotations. It’s not an ideology, nor is it a philosophy or a principle. It’s a desire that is characteristic to an “individual” – for example, “me.” Affirming that “I’m a lesbian” is something that can only be done through the labor of becoming self-aware of exactly where your desires lie, not through insisting “I’m a lesbian.”

However, regarding “being a lesbian” in your head as positive – regarding your attraction to women as positive – does hold social meaning. This is troublesome to society. If women having desire for other women had never been seen as a social taboo, I likely wouldn’t have ever had to worry about “whether I’m a lesbian or not.” What’s more, I have no doubt in my mind that the word “lesbian” would never have even existed. Had society not determined that it was taboo, all desire would have been viewed as a particular orientation of desire and regarded as a part of each person’s “individuality.” Desire is an entirely individual matter, and by nature cannot simply be categorized via the objects of one’s desire. Not only does dividing it into “homosexuality/heterosexuality” make people believe that there are only two sexual orientations in this world – it even makes it seem as though there exists no diversity among those two categories.
As I mentioned before, if I can just come to accept myself and my desire towards women, that’s good enough for me. Simply inserting myself into the dichotomy of “heterosexuality/homosexuality” is by no means something that would make me happy. But, as long as I refrain from doing so, I’ll never be able to dislodge the taboo affixed to the latter category — and not being able to dislodge that taboo means never being freed from the dichotomy.

There is one specific example I can offer from the results of the American homosexual movement that illuminates this point. On June 28th, 1969, American homosexuals began taking action to secure societal power, sparked by the first resistance against incessant police repression at a gay bar in New York called the “Stonewall Inn.” After a series of movements, homosexuals even managed to get the American Psychiatric Association to stop defining homosexuality as a “mental illness.”

Until the American Psychiatric Association published the “Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders” (DSM), homosexuality was defined as a “personality disorder.” When “DSM – I” was published in 1952, it was similarly listed as “personality disorder – psychotic personality accompanied by unfit lust.” In the 1968 publication of “DSM – II,” personality disorder faded from the definition and was replaced by “sexual deviancy.” Then, in 1973, the American Psychiatric Association removed the term “illness” from the definition of “homosexuality” and changed it to “sexual orientation.”

There was a great deal of progress after this revision. In the “DSM – III,” published in 1980, only “ego-dystonic homosexuality – experiencing distress with one’s homosexual interests and has trouble maintaining heterosexual relationships” was included as a psychological illness, but homosexuality itself was not. Then, in 1987, the “DSM – III – Revised” came out, removing homosexuality itself as an object of psychiatry (translations of these definitions quoted from Seikyokyo’s pamphlet “A New Scenery – Homosexuality and Sexual Education” from their “Humans and Sexuality” project).

These changes allowed homosexuals themselves to clarify that any psychological instability they may have had was induced by societal homophobia and actual discrimination because “homosexuality” was something “seen as abnormal” rather than “abnormal in and of itself.” Of course, the collaborative efforts of many shrinks and therapists coming out themselves were likely behind some of this, as well as the fact that there were many (homosexual and heterosexual) counselors and therapists in America who could appropriately treat homosexuals experiencing mental anguish and an inability to feel positively about themselves (since discrimination against them was not entirely eliminated, these homosexuals did not disappear, either). Perhaps this is also a possibility for Japan in the near future.

In any case, “homosexuality” being eliminated as an object of psychiatry carries great significance on its own. I’m nearly certain that any person who worries “I might be a homosexual” is
going to take a look at some books on the topic. At the very least, I myself got a hold of such books in search of *scientific reasons* when I used to think “I might be abnormal.” I figured this sort of thing would be written in books in categories like “psychology” and “psychiatric medicine.” That the definition “homosexuality = abnormal” was erased from these scientific texts (which are so often trusted without a second thought) means that of all the reasons a homosexual might be anxious about their homosexuality, one of the biggest ones can be eliminated. Of course, this transition no doubt has a powerful effect on the minds of heterosexual people, too. Not only does the authority of “science” have the ability to create taboos, but also the influential power of ridding ourselves of taboos.

American homosexuals have succeeded in eliminating one of the negative value judgments in the “homosexual/heterosexual” dichotomy – the evaluation that homosexuality is abnormal from a scientific standpoint. This first became possible through homosexuals themselves clearly expressing “I am a homosexual” or “we are homosexuals” (coming out). Homosexuals are different depending on the individual, and “homosexuality” can be completely different for every individual. But people existing on the outside of “homosexuality” do not understand this. Thus, treating it from the outside as a taboo is the very thing that makes it such a large category (although it’s unclear whether it’s possible to even classify it as such).

**To protect the intimacy between you and I**

As I mentioned before, the main reasons accepting the fact that “I’m a lesbian” was so difficult for me were that I had been seeing “marriage” and the “relationship with a man” that comes with it as perfectly natural, and later on, that I was constrained by the idea I had gleaned from observation that “homosexuality is abnormal.” These reasons had already mixed themselves into my question “Who are ‘lesbians’?” I accepted the reasoning that “I don’t have ‘sexual desire’ towards women, so I must not be a lesbian” for a long time, and I was able to believe that “because I can date men (realistically, this meant having “sex” with men), I must not be a lesbian.”

I certainly can’t deny that not wanting to accept the fact that “I’m a lesbian” still lingered in the background when I wrote “‘Who are ‘lesbians’ and ‘being a lesbian’ does not mean continuing to be a lesbian.” Those feelings hadn’t fully gone away at the time. However, I think the conclusion I drew then is the same as the one I hold now, and by laying it down in that way, I created circumstances in which accepting “being a lesbian” allowed me to better gather the facts of my past and future.

For example, I didn’t even want to comment on my past relationships with men. It wasn’t out of the question to simply leave it as “an experience of society’s compulsory heterosexuality,” adjusting it in
accordance with my current reality. However, doing so would confer too much social meaning on my labor to accept the fact that “I’m a lesbian.” “Being a lesbian” in and of itself would be inconsistent with my intent to disallow it from carrying any social meaning and arbitrarily warp my previous truths and intentions. My current will – the will to accept that “I’m a lesbian” in order to affirm and accept the “present” – will have an influence on my future. However, my current will cannot govern my past, nor do I think it should. Of course, the past does have an influence on the “present.”

I think that conferring too much significance on the past is connected to the root of the attitude of contempt and ignorance most women in this society have towards the possibility of intimacy with other women in fearing the taboo of being a “lesbian.” Allowing the truth that “I’m a lesbian” too much significance will grant the relationships you create too much social significance. For example, if we fall under the illusion that our relationships are far better than heterosexual ones because they’re made up of “two women,” we may go as far as to depend on this illusion in the absence of substance within the relationship. This is one and the same with the limitations of a relationship you’re ready to flee from the very beginning that exist based on the premise that “someday I will marry a man.” When you don’t put yourself in these circumstances, or, in other words, if you live without placing too much social meaning on “being a lesbian,” there’s no need to be prepared to flee or take on the label of “lesbian” – you will simply grow able to affirm the feelings you have as a woman, like the feeling that “right now, I want to have an intimate relationship with so-and-so, who is a woman.”

Of course, realistically, it’s difficult to alter your circumstances and get to this point. While the “lesbian” taboo continues to exist, it’s not easy for women to accept their feelings that “right now, I want to have an intimate relationship with so-and-so, who is a woman.” Because there are a lot of cases where it’s not possible to accept those feelings, the rift between “homosexuality/heterosexuality” becomes that much deeper and the taboo feeling that women have towards “lesbians” becomes that much stronger. If the taboos supported by the images associated with the term “lesbian” did not exist, women would not even be conscious of the intimacy between them and other women. It would simply be “intimacy.” But this is not the case. Women are under pressure to constantly be careful that the “lesbian” taboo isn’t placed on their intimacies with other women. Through this awareness, they become all the more convinced that there is some sort of difference between “them” and “us.”

At the same time, because there is some degree of fixed imagery associated with “lesbians,” it’s difficult for women to create relationships with other women based on their own desire. Even lesbian desire is fraught with the danger of converging with the stereotypes of heterosexual forms of desire. Whether or not to have “sex” (its meaning in accordance with heterosexual definitions), whether or not
to have a relationship of “two,” whether or not to live together, whether to call yourselves lovers or friends... at first glance, it seems that there are a lot options, but having to choose between “this or that” creates limits for intimacy between women. Whether or not these choices are actually there is a part of the questionable framework “heterosexuality” creates.

Having sex, having a relationship of “two,” living together, calling each other lovers – these are all examples of normal forms of intimacy for the majority of heterosexuality, and to choose outside of those options leaves one on the periphery of the major realm of “heterosexuality.” Similarly, most lesbian relationship formations include having “sex,” having a relationship of “two,” living together and calling each other lovers. Of course, there are people who make choices that differ from what the majority does – but heterosexuality based on the form of the majority seems to be like this, and even among lesbians, there are women who are convinced that being a lesbian is to base intimacy on the form of the majority. Therefore, when a woman first begins to feel that she wants to be intimate with another woman, she is required to switch from being in the middle of the “heterosexual” circle (which society deems as “normal”) to the middle of the “lesbian” circle in a single bound – she does not get to create intimacy through the gradual self-awareness of the changes in her heart.

Thus, women themselves enforce this rift, fostering it with prejudice and preconceived notions (both from heterosexuals and lesbians) towards lesbians, which end up doing nothing but deepening the rift between “heterosexuality/homosexuality” even more. It’s a never-ending cycle.

However, there are certainly many methods we can take to break this endless cycle. I’m currently doing just one of them. I decided to do what I must in order to justly situate my “present” reality and my “present” desires in my heart and in society. In my case, all of this could only begin with the fact that I wanted to create an intimate relationship with a certain woman. If my relationship with her had become closer in compliance with my desires, I would have had no choice but to take a look at the close link that relationship had with society. Furthermore, if it had become closer, we would have come to understand the extent of the negative influence our surrounding environment would impose on our relationship and consciousness (such an influence cannot be ignored).

My response to these thoughts was to accept the fact that “I am a lesbian” so that I could create a place where our relationship can exist without meddling from society.

**On being a “lesbian” myself**

To be a “lesbian” myself and to come out and convey that to society...
At the end of the day, I’m not trying to understand what kind of person a “lesbian” is. I’ve repeated “create a place where our relationship can exist without meddling from society” plenty of times, but that isn’t the same as creating a liberated area for “lesbians.” It is not my aim to make others approve of the creation of a place somewhere in society where we would be safe.

That every freedom, right, and way of life is (perhaps with criticism and antipathy, but ultimately) afforded to people other than me is a total guarantee that I can have option in this society to have my own freedoms, rights, and way of life. I firmly believe that. I can’t expect people who do not approve of other people’s freedoms, rights, and choice to lead their way of life to approve of my own (of course, these freedoms and rights do not include “posing a threat to other people without their consent”).

More than anything else, in coming out as a lesbian, I’m trying to urge other people to take me into consideration. Whether others approve of it or not, the most important thing to me right now is having the freedom and right to live my life without psychological and physical threats for being lesbian – it doesn’t matter who or where they’re coming from. At the very least, if everyone in society approved of our freedoms and rights (as well as those of anyone connected to lesbians), there would be no need for us to say “I am a lesbian.”

But we just don’t live in these circumstances. Of course, we’re not being imprisoned or executed like lesbians in some other countries (this occurs mostly for religious reasons). Even so, I experience psychological threats and suffering because of the attitude of hatred and ignorance held by this society. For example, before coming out, the pain I experienced was mainly because my love for women was not being recognized (not even by myself). Now, I fear that by expressing that “I’m a lesbian,” the hatred and animosity towards lesbians that this society has been hiding might come to the surface and do me psychological and physical violence (the fear that I might be raped for this clings to my thoughts every day). It can’t be said that we have rights and freedoms just because we aren’t being imprisoned and executed.

Many people in many places experience a variety of oppressions in accordance with their own circumstances. It’s the same for Japan. There is discrimination from “men” towards “women,” from “Japanese people” towards “foreign people,” particularly from the “racially homogenous” towards those of a variety of races and ethnicities, from the “healthy” to the “disabled,” and from the “normal” to the “abnormal.” Then there’s a variety of discriminations that come from milieu like family lineage and pedigree. In the end, all of these are institutionally formed attitudes, developed by different groups that do not recognize the right to life of those belonging to an outside group.
Failing to guarantee other people’s rights and freedoms and failing to understand what they do and how they think are completely different matters. Even if you can’t understand the people themselves, it’s still possible to try and protect their rights and freedoms. Thus, people end up strangling one another when you won’t even recognize the freedom and right of others to an attempt at acceptance. Of course, it’s certainly possible to solve the feeling that “understanding this is over my head” within individual relationships if you want to. This is why people have “words.” But you will not be able to understand every person living as a “lesbian” in this society, nor would I even be able to feel that “I want to understand everyone.” Therefore, most of the time the closest “lesbians,” including myself, and people who aren’t lesbians can get to this is coexisting without understanding – living as people with completely different culture and customs.

However, even in this situation, whether there is “understanding” between individual people or not, it’s enough for people to “understand” the situation each other is living in without posing a threat to them. To put it plainly – a lesbian and a person who is not a lesbian cannot understand each other in the realm of “sexuality” to the degree that two lesbians would be able to, and they cannot empathize with one another (however, this is not because heterosexuals and homosexuals are different. It’s because the circumstances that male homosexuals, female homosexuals, male heterosexuals, and female heterosexuals face are all different). Compared to this, understanding the circumstances each other faces is not nearly as difficult. Nonetheless, it’s still not easy to imagine (even with some basic knowledge) the feelings people endure under their different circumstances with accuracy in order to try not to hurt or threaten them.

Trying to understand the circumstances each of us must endure is ultimately the basis for trying to truly eliminate prejudice and discrimination for each other’s differences. In the end, what I seek is to get people to start saying things like “Heterosexuals and homosexuals are both the same in that they’re human, so why should it matter who they like?” However, I don’t think there’s much of a point in solely advocating for this right now. Certainly, heterosexuals and homosexuals are both “the same in that they’re human,” but the lives those “humans” lead are completely different because of the circumstances they’re put into. As it is now, it’s impossible for homosexuals to make their relatives and the people around them accept their relationship by saying “But we’re all the same in that we’re human, so why does it matter who I like?” As it is now, it’s impossible to get the government to legally create a system that recognizes homosexual contractual relationships by saying “but we’re all the same in that
we’re human.” And, as it is now, it’s especially impossible to change the circumstances male and female homosexuals are placed into by saying “but we’re all the same in that we’re human.”

However, until the label for the lives of male homosexuals, female homosexuals, male heterosexuals and female heterosexuals is actually “fellow humans” and until our legal system, social system, and people’s relationships and attitudes are changed, we must explicitly repeat again and again that we all live in different situations. Trying to recognize those differences and be cognizant of the fact that “so-and-so and I live under different circumstances” is the driving force behind changing our circumstances. Of course, we probably have to simultaneously shed light on the differences within the categories of “heterosexual” and “homosexual.” As long as each group fails to progress together, we will not be able to free ourselves from the categories of “homosexual/heterosexual” and “man/woman” – in other words, individuals will not be able to live simply as “I.”

The reason I began expressing “I am a lesbian” is because I wanted to create circumstances where I can just be “me” and not a “woman” or a “lesbian” – conversely, I want to create circumstances where I can be “me” with my different characteristics like being a “woman” and a “lesbian.” Originally, my end goal was to live in circumstances without having to (being forced to) self-identify with only one of my affiliations of “woman” or “lesbian.” This wouldn’t be a problem if people just placed less value on miscellaneous categories like “lesbian,” “heterosexual,” “man” and “woman.” As it stands now, however, we have to continue clarifying how the circumstances surrounding people who aren’t “lesbians” or “women” differ from ours. This is because our society places so much value on being a “heterosexual,” especially for “men,” and conversely places powerful negative connotations on being a “homosexual” or a “woman.”

Expressing to others that “I am a lesbian” demands them to exercise their capacity to explicitly imagine the rights, freedom and possibilities for ways of life that I seek. I’m demanding them to exercise their capacity to imagine the pain I’m feeling when I say “you’re stepping all over me!” After they can imagine all this, I want them to make the effort to quit being complicit in pressuring me into living in ways other than the rights, freedom and life that I seek. Once they realize that they’re trampling over my existence, they must retract their feet.

In other words, the power of others to imagine my freedom and rights is also their sensitivity towards my freedom and rights. The effort not to oppress others is also the effort to keep oneself from being oppressed. To exert one’s imagination to comprehend expanding the the freedom of others is also to exert one’s imagination to comprehend expanding one’s own freedom. It is to wonder “are they
liberated?” after someone says “I’m not comfortable.” I’m determined to make this effort towards others for the ultimate sake of my own freedom and rights. For the sake of my way of life remaining unwarped, and to expand my freedom day by day.

Being a lesbian in this society has taught me the most important facts about life – the ones about freedom and rights.
Afterword

Thank you.

My gratitude is the one thing I want to express, from the bottom of my heart.

I was able to complete this book through the support of many people. Before anything else, I’d like to express my thanks.

Kitamura Toshiko, thank you for teaching me the importance of speaking with the word “I.” Irokawa Nao and Tatsusaki Chieko, thank you for putting up with me forcing you to read my manuscripts and demanding your opinions. Fushimi Noriaki, Private Gay Life took the pressure off coming out to the mass media. Thank you to all the friends who stuck with me despite my complaining.

I have more gratitude than words can express for Higuchi Yoshizumi at Kawade Publishing. She taught me the pleasure and difficulty in putting forth my words.

Of course, thank you to those who read this book.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

Sometime during middle school, I noticed that I would always watch one classmate of mine. I remember my confusion at that time even to this day. I was puzzled at how much I wanted to talk to her, draw near her, and be together.

I can’t remember the faces or names of any of the men I dated, but I can remember every girl I had unrequited feelings for as clear as day. Every time I think about them – their faces, names, voices, way of speaking... it makes me feel so happy that my heart pounds.

But something was missing. Something was pinning my heart down. Visualizing kissing that beloved classmate of mine made me feel so happy it was like my body was floating in air, but it also made me feel fear. My mind became filled with delusions that began to torment me.

– There was no need for me to feel any fear or anxiety. –

Over the last couple of years, I continued to say this to my past self as I spun my words for this book.

– There’s nothing abnormal about being attracted to women. To me, it’s perfectly natural. –

I wrote this book to heal my wounds. To heal my past and to begin to like myself as I am now. I’m finally beginning to like myself, little by little.
That’s how I’ve been changing.
I’m finally able to see myself as not the only one.

This first happened when I met women (who were not lesbians) who told me not to treat “homosexuality” as abnormal. “You just happen to be interested in women is all!” they would explain as they patiently listened to my experiences. Because of them, I was able to face myself as someone who likes “people who happen to be women.” That was how I learned that in this society, there are a lot of women who will not deny my homosexuality or hurt me. I was not alone.

Then, I met women who were lesbians. Women who shared my feeling of being attracted to “women” long before it was to “people who happen to be women.” Because of them, I was able to like myself as a person who was attracted to those molded into being “women” (of course, the women I’m attracted to have a certain special “something”). I was definitely not alone.

A lot happened over the course of writing this book. These events, as well as finishing the book, changed me a great deal. The many people I’ve encountered are already helping me overcome the things written in this book. They will also help me move onto the next place.

Obviously, there are a lot of matters I left out of this book. I’m a “Japanese” person in this country, I’m still young, I’m not “married,” I won’t necessarily have children... these circumstances that I’m in constrain my way of thinking and likely explain a lack of consideration for situations it’s hard for me to imagine – lesbians living in this country who aren’t “Japanese,” elderly lesbians, lesbians married to men, and lesbian mothers. However, the ones most suited to talk about these situations are the ones living them. From here on out, the number of people expressing themselves through lesbian activity and coming out as lesbians will increase, and with this, the diversity of the lesbians living in this country will become apparent.

Of course, there were also things I wanted to write about but could not. Most of all, I regret not being able to fully discuss that which emerges from being a woman myself and the people I’m attracted to being women. I did not write about the richness and warmth of being two women together, the strength, but also the pain, sadness and weakness. Even though I touched on this a bit, it’s simply not enough, and that is a deep regret of mine. This may be the next topic I’ll write about.

I wish with all my heart that the day when the word “lesbian” means nothing to me might someday arrive – the day where people won’t be lumped into and tied down to categories of “heterosexual” and “homosexual,” the day where individual people can link themselves to relationships with the people they desire.
Naturally, “that day” won’t come so easily. It will surely only be a reality when heterosexual women, heterosexual men, homosexual women and homosexual men distanced from one another by a great rift do the difficult and ever-lasting labor of examining their own “sex” and “relationships” and questioning them. However, I believe “that day” will surely come eventually. I believe that there must be lesbians who can lead us to that day.

Because, no matter how much we are oppressed and discriminated against, no matter if some of us are even murdered, there exist women all throughout the world in every country who are attracted to and love other women, and they will not give up. They have never once given up.

Works Cited


